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Searching for Salvation

introduction

As we continue our *Searching for Salvation* series through Exodus, we turn to one of the most familiar passages in the Bible: the Ten Commandments. Having rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, God now gives them commandments for how they are to live as his people. But why does God give his people laws after setting them free? And what do these commandments reveal about the kind of life he desires for them? This week, we'll explore how God's law relates to freedom, love, and the transformation of the human heart.



What's a rule or restriction you initially disliked but later came to appreciate? What changed your perspective?

read Exodus 20:1-17 (NIV)

[1] And God spoke all these words:

[2] "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

[3] "You shall have no other gods before me.

[4] "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. [5] You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, [6] but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

[7] "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

[8] "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. [9] Six days you shall labor and do all your work, [10] but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. [11] For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the

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earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

12 “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

13 “You shall not murder.

14 “You shall not commit adultery.

15 “You shall not steal.

16 “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

17 “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

Take a few moments to reflect on the Scripture. Share some insights, questions, or points that strike you. Then read what follows.

context

In our previous discussions, we saw how God delivered Israelites from slavery in Egypt and brought them safely through the Red Sea. But their rescue was only the beginning of their journey. God was leading them into a new life as his people, and that meant learning what it would look like to live in relationship with him.

After leaving Egypt, the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai, where God called them into a covenant relationship with himself (Exodus 19:1–6). He reminded them of what he had already done for them and called them to be his treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. Now, in Exodus 20, God speaks directly to the people and gives them the Ten Commandments, establishing the foundation for how they are to live in relationship with him and one another.

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the law of freedom

Before God gives Israel a single commandment, he reminds them who he is and what he has done: “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery” (v. 2). The order here is significant. God doesn’t give Israel a set of rules to follow in the hope that they might eventually earn their freedom. He has already rescued them. God’s saving grace precedes his commands. The commandments are given to a people who already belong to him, as they begin learning how to live in the freedom they have received.

This raises an interesting question about the nature of freedom itself. We often think of freedom as the ability to make our own choices without interference or restriction. From that perspective, being freed from slavery only to receive a new set of commands might seem contradictory. Yet we also recognize that not every restriction diminishes freedom. For example, a musician must submit to the discipline of practice in order to play freely. Likewise, healthy relationships require commitments that place limits on individual choice. The question, then, isn’t simply whether we have restrictions, but what kinds of restrictions enable us to live well.

discuss

1. **Before giving the Ten Commandments, God reminds Israel that he has already delivered them from slavery. Why do you think he begins this way? How could that shape the way the Israelites hear what follows?**
2. **Our culture often associates freedom with having as few restrictions as possible. To what extent do you agree with that understanding? Can you think of examples where boundaries or commitments actually make greater freedom possible? Where has this been true in your own life?**
3. **What difference could it make to understand God’s commandments not as conditions for earning his acceptance, but as guidance for living in the freedom he has already given?**

no other gods

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For Israel, the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me," for Israel meant, turning away from the gods worshiped in Egypt and the surrounding nations, and instead giving their exclusive loyalty to the God who had delivered them. The commandment wasn't simply about acknowledging that God exists; it concerned the place he would occupy in their lives. Wholehearted allegiance to God lies at the foundation of Israel's covenant relationship with him. Everything else follows from this first requirement.[1]

One way to understand a person's "god" is whatever they look to for their greatest good and turn to for refuge in times of trouble.[2] In other words, whatever holds the place of ultimate importance in their life. Understood this way, the first commandment goes beyond the worship of mere religious idols. It raises questions about what people ultimately depend upon for security, meaning, comfort, and happiness. Things that are good in themselves (e.g., relationships, success, financial stability, the approval of others, etc.) can begin to occupy a central, even ultimate, place in someone's life that they were never meant to hold. And because what we ultimately trust and value shapes how we live, the first commandment provides a foundation for understanding all the others.

discuss

4. **What does the first commandment require of Israel beyond simply believing that God exists? Why is exclusive loyalty to God an important part of the relationship he is establishing with his people?**

5. **If a person's "god" is whatever they ultimately look to for security, comfort, or happiness, what are some things that might function as gods in our lives today? How can we recognize when something good has become an ultimate source of fulfillment?**

6. **Think about a situation where you might be tempted to compromise your values to protect something important to you — whether that's a**

[1] Alexander, T Desmond, *New Bible Commentary*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994.
[2] Martin Luther, in his *Larger Catechism,* gave an extended treatment to the first of the Ten Commandments. Here, he offers a helpful way of understanding what it means to have a "god."

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relationship, reputation, financial security, or success. What might that reveal about the connection between our deepest loyalties and our everyday choices?

the law of love

The remaining commandments address a wide range of human concerns, from worship and rest to family relationships, human life, marriage, possessions, and truthfulness. At first glance, they may seem like a collection of unrelated rules. But when Jesus is asked which commandment is greatest, he summarizes the law in two commands: love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself (cf. Matthew 22:37–40). These two dimensions of love help us understand the commandments as more than a list of prohibited behaviors. They describe the kinds of relationships God desires for his people and the ways in which love should shape how they live.

The final commandment, "You shall not covet," is particularly revealing because it addresses something that cannot be measured simply by outward behavior. A person might refrain from stealing what belongs to someone else while still being consumed by envy or resentment. The law is concerned not only with what people do, but also with the desires that shape their actions. This challenges the notion that living a good life is simply a matter of following the rules. It invites us to consider not only whether our actions are right, but also what is happening in our hearts.

discuss

7. **Look over the commandments in vv. 4–17. What do they suggest about the things God values and wants to protect? How do you think these commandments reflect love for God and love for others?**

8. **Rules are sometimes experienced as expressions of care, but at other times as burdensome or controlling. What makes the difference? How might understanding God's commandments in the context of his love and deliverance change the way someone relates to them?**

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9. **The commandments address not only outward behavior but also inward desires, particularly in v. 17. Why do you think God is concerned with both? What does this suggest about the limitations of simply trying to be a good or moral person?**

group reflection + prayer

The **Heidelberg Catechism** describes the new life of a Christian as:

> *"***Wholehearted joy** in God through Christ and **a love and delight** to live according to the will of God by doing every kind of good work."[3]

Reflect together.

1. What is the difference between obeying God out of obligation and obeying him out of love and delight? What makes that shift difficult?
2. Christians believe that the Holy Spirit renews their hearts, gradually transforming not only their actions but also their desires. Where might you need this kind of inward transformation? For Christians in the group, where have you experienced God changing not just what you do, but what you want?

Pray together.

Pray for hearts to be increasingly shaped by God's love and grace, and for the Holy Spirit to deepen our desire to know, love, and obey him.

[3] *Heidelberg Catechism*, Lord's Day 33, Q&A 90. The Heidelberg Catechism is a historic Protestant teaching document from the Reformed tradition, organized as a series of Q&A about the Christian faith.

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upcoming

- Thursday, November 12 | **The Lost Art of Dying, 7-8:30 pm**
  This installment of the Faith & Culture Forums will feature Dr. Lydia Dugdale (Columbia University Medical Center), a leader in clinical ethics, who will be sharing her reflections on modern culture's push to evade death and a historical and scriptural counternarrative.
  redeemerws.com/faithandculture

- Saturday, November 14 | **RWS Dashers Second Saturday, 8:30-9:30 am**
  The RWS Running Club is offering a special series to invite and encourage more people to give running a try. Second Saturdays will offer a run/walk pace group that's great for newbies and those who would like gentle slope to getting back in shape!
  redeemerws.com/run

- Thursday, November 19 | **Redeemer Network Prayer & Praise Night, 7-9 pm**
  Consider attending this Redeemer Network gathering as a CG! Join in with congregants from the five other Redeemers to worship in songs and spirit and seek God in prayer for the renewal of our city. Time for mingling and refreshments to follow.
  redeemerws.com/prayerandpraise

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