

Commandments, Covenants & Christ

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, this evening, with the Lord's help and the Lord's guidance, if we could turn to the book of Exodus in chapter 20. Exodus chapter 20, and we're just reading the first two verses. And God spoke all these words, saying, I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. What kind of person are you? What kind of person are you? Are you the kind of person who, when you get something new, like a TV or a computer or an iPad or an iPhone or some flat pack furniture, are you the kind of person who will open the box and only take out the instruction manual and make sure that you read the manual from cover to cover and know exactly what to do before you proceed to put your new item together? Or are you the kind of person like me who just dives straight in, pulls everything apart, and then tries to put it all together without the help of the instructions? And only consult the instructions if something goes wrong. If you get into some bother, it's then that you start looking at the manual. What kind of person are you? Do you follow instructions or do you try to do it your own way first? But what if I was to speak to you about God's instruction manual, the Bible? What kind of person are you? Do you follow instructions or do you try to do it your own way first? And I'm sure that all of us will admit that we often try to do it our own way first. We do our own thing. We live our life our own way. We try to build our life upon our knowledge and our own understanding without the help of God's instruction manual. But when we make a mess of things or something goes wrong, it's then that we realise that we should have consulted the instruction manual first. And I'm sure that you're aware that when you buy a product like an iPhone or an iPad or a new TV, when you're setting it up, one of the options in the settings menu is reset to manufacturer settings. Reset to manufacturer settings. But the problem with us, as those who have been given God's instruction manual, is that we can't be reset to manufacturer settings. We can't be reset to what we were like when we were first made, because we don't have that option. As we know, and as we've seen over the past few weeks, that when God created Adam, he issued him an instruction manual. God had, you could say, manufactured Adam from the dust of the ground, making him in his image and in his likeness. And when God manufactured Adam, he issued him with an internal instruction manual, the moral law, which was inscribed upon his heart. And Adam was also issued with an external instruction manual, which was a step-by-step guide explaining to him why he was created, that he

was created for God's glory. It explained to him what he was to do. He was to work and keep the garden he was to name all the animals and look after them. He was to love his wife and go forth and multiply.

But also his external manual, it also told him what he could do and what he couldn't do. You may eat of every three in the garden, but of the three of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it. For in the day that you eat thereof, you shall surely die.

But in the event that either Adam's internal or his external instruction manual might be ignored or undermined, Adam was also issued, as we said last week, with a sensor, like the smoke alarm sensor.

And the sensor would indicate that there's a problem. He was issued with a moral conscience, a conscience that would highlight to Adam the difference between right and wrong.

[4 : 59] And so when God manufactured Adam, he was created with the manufacturer's settings, perfect knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. And Adam was issued with a perfect internal and a perfect external manual, which it demanded from him to be upheld and read perfectly. And upon his duty and perfect obedience to God's instruction manual, Adam was given the promise that he would inherit eternal life. But as you know, because of the kind of man Adam was, he didn't follow instructions.

And he tried to do his own thing, his own way first. And the result was that he destroyed everything. He destroyed all that the manufacturer had created by failing to read and to obey the instructions.

But Adam not only destroyed his perfect relationship with God, he destroyed the perfect creation in which everything was infected and affected by sin. And he also destroyed himself. He destroyed the apex of God's creation himself. And he destroyed all his posterity after him because he left mankind under the sentence of condemnation and death. And because of Adam's disobedience to his manufacturer, and his instruction manual, the catechism says, all mankind lost communion with God.

They are now under his wrath and curse. They are liable to encounter all the miseries of this life, including death itself and the pains of hell forever. My friend, by doing his own thing, Adam left us in an awful mess. But when we come to this section in the Bible, we are reminded that the God we worship this evening does not deal with us as we deserve. Because he deals with us according to his grace and according to his mercy, by reissuing to us his instruction manual. Not that by keeping it perfectly we will inherit eternal life because we can't. But so that we will know how far short we have fallen. And so that we will know who this God is and to what extent he has gone to provide for our salvation. And that's what we see here as we come to this verse at the beginning of the Ten

Commandments. The Lord says, or God spoke to all to the people, all these words, I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. And I want to suggest that there are three things which God reminds us of in this verse. Because he reminds us that he is our creator king. He reminds us that he is our covenant king. And he also reminds us that he is our Christ and king.

[7 : 54] So our creator king. So we look firstly at our creator king. Our creator king. I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. This verse was referred to by the Westminster Assembly of Ministers who compiled the shorter catechism. They referred to it as the preface to the Ten Commandments. And as you know, the preface of a book is just the introduction to a book. It's not part of the main body of material in the book, but it's key to understanding the book. Because the preface, it sets the scene. It sets the scene and puts the whole book into its context. But more than that, the preface or the introduction, it contains something which the author wishes the reader to know before he or she commences reading the book. And so as we look this evening at the preface to God's instruction manual, the Ten Commandments, we can see that God sets the scene. And he puts everything into its context by revealing to us who he is and what he has done.

I am the Lord, your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. And so the first thing we're reminded of is that God is our creator king. He is, as the Bible describes, Elohim. He is the God of creation. And that's the name which God uses to describe himself as our creator king. He reveals himself as God. God the creator. But when he reveals himself as our covenant king, as we'll see shortly, he uses the name Lord. And the title and the name which God uses is important because it reveals his character and his personality and the way in which he is acting towards his people or towards his creation. As I said, we'll see it more closely in a moment. But when God reveals himself as God our creator king, he's reminding us that we were made in his image and in his likeness.

We were created with the same purpose as Adam, to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. And we're to do that by worshipping God, by reflecting God's glory back to him, and by living in obedience to his word.

And like Adam, we were created with an internal instruction manual. We have the manufacturer's instructions written upon our heart. We have the moral law inscribed upon our heart. And because it has been written upon our hearts and upon the hearts of every human being made in the image and likeness of the creator king, it means that this law, this instruction manual on how to live in obedience to the creator, it doesn't change. It's an unchanging law. It's a permanent law. And it's a law which is binding upon all mankind. My friend, the law of God still remains in force. It hasn't been revoked. It hasn't been withdrawn.

And it hasn't been invalidated. It's still active today as when it was first written on Adam's heart. And it's binding upon all mankind who has been created in the image and likeness of the creator king.

[11 : 35] Of course, there are some people and there are some Christians who think that some of the 10 commandments are no longer relevant or important or binding upon us. Especially the fourth commandment, to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Some people think that that commandment is only relevant to the Israelites and to the period of the Old Testament.

But when God reminds us here of who he is as our creator king, he asserts that all of the commandments are binding upon us because we were created with them, written on our hearts.

We were inbuilt with these. These commandments were inbuilt in us. We were created with God's instruction manual. But as we said last week, the only reason some people choose to ignore certain commandments or lay emphasis upon other commandments or just do things their own way, live their life the way they please, the reason they do it is because our moral conscience is flawed and dysfunctional.

And because our moral conscience is flawed and dysfunctional, we are able to suppress it and to deny the truth. Where we can ignore God's word. We can twist God's word to suit ourselves, to please our own conscience.

But in order to combat our distorted view of God's word that has been written upon our hearts and to combat against suppressing our moral conscience, and so that we're not left to our own devices and our own initiative to do what pleases us and live the way we want, God provided a written copy of the instruction manual on how we are meant to live and worship.

[13 : 24] And he wrote it with his own finger. And he wrote it in stone. It's permanent. He has provided for us a written copy of the moral law, which is his word.

It's God's perfect and unchangeable spoken word written. And that's what we're told in verse 1. God spoke all these words. Our creator king, who is the lawgiver, he spoke these words which were written.

And what God spoke are the ten commandments. And we'll be studying them over the next few months. The ten commandments are the ten words. Which is often why it's referred to as the decalogue, which means ten words.

And the ten commandments, they teach us how we ought to think and act towards God and towards our fellow man. And the first four commandments, they refer to our relationship with God, our vertical relationship.

And then the final six commandments, they refer to our relationship with our fellow human beings, our horizontal relationship. And as we saw last week, the ten commandments can be summed up in the words, Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, with all your mind.

[14 : 49] The vertical relationship. And your neighbour as yourself, the horizontal. But it's because of who God is that we are required to keep his commandments.

And God is revealed to us in the passage we read in chapter 19. He's revealed to us as a God who is holy. He's a God who is holy.

Because when God, our creator king, issued his moral law to the people of Israel, he commanded Moses to consecrate the people and to wash their garments.

They were commanded not to touch Mount Sinai when the Lord descends upon it, or they will be put to death. And so in order to protect the people, there was this perimeter put around the mountain to keep the people back.

And it was done because of the seriousness of God's law and God's holiness. And you know, it's something that I think that we've lost sight of in our day and generation.

[15 : 53] The holiness of God. That God is set apart. God is so unlike us. Because, as the Bible says, he is of purer eye than to behold iniquity.

And he cannot look upon sin. That's how holy he is. And yet, in our day of equality and fairness and equal rights and equal opportunities, everyone is to be on the same level.

Every God is to be on the same level. No one is to be higher than anyone else. So, God is brought down. We want to bring God down to our level. But the reality is, God is not the creation.

He is the creator. He is not under the law. He is the lawgiver. God says, God says, be holy for I am holy.

That's the command. Be holy for I am holy. And that statement is repeated again and again throughout scripture. Because that's what's required of us. Holiness. Without holiness, says the Bible, no one shall see the Lord.

[17 : 11] And so our creator king commands and demands that we as his creation be holy and keep his law. But the truth is we fail. Because the law not only reveals to us how holy God is.

It also reveals that and convinces us of our inability to be holy and to keep God's law ourselves because of our sin. And we don't love God the way we ought to.

In our hearts, our hearts are deceitful. Our minds are corrupted. Our soul is idolatrous. Our strength is, well, it's used for things that are not holy. And we don't love our neighbor as we ought to.

And so what does God do with his creation? What does God do with a sinful creation? Does he abandon it? Does he leave us to our own ruin? Because he's not obligated in any way whatsoever to help us.

He doesn't owe us anything. We don't deserve his help. We don't deserve salvation or to be saved. And yet out of his love and out of his own good pleasure, our creator king, he enters into a covenant with us.

[18 : 20] By which he becomes our covenant king. And that's what I'd like us to consider secondly. Our covenant king. Our covenant king.

Because he reveals himself. He says, I am the Lord your God. Who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Out of the house of slavery. And so as we said, these words from there.

The preface of God's instruction manual. The moral law. And in the preface, God is setting the scene. He puts everything into its context. And he's revealing who he is and what he's done.

And the first thing he says is that he is God our creator king. He's God. He's the Elohim. But when he reveals himself as our covenant king, he uses the name Lord.

The Lord in capital letters. I am the Lord your God. And this title, it refers to a specific title relating to God. In which the creator God has revealed himself to his people by entering into a covenant with them.

[19 : 28] Now when we speak about a covenant or covenant theology, what do we mean? We mean that God in his love and out of his own good pleasure.

He didn't have to do it. But he chose to do it. He chose to make a covenant with mankind. Which is a binding and a perpetual promise.

And when a covenant was made, it was a legally binding contract. Between two parties. A covenant king and his covenant people.

And so when God entered into that covenant, the first covenant God made was with man. And it was with Adam. And that covenant, the first covenant, it's often what we refer to as the covenant of works.

And as the covenant king, the Lord set out the contract for the covenant. All the stipulations of the covenant. The rules and the regulations of what he expected from Adam.

[20 : 29] And what God expected from Adam was a mirror image of his image and his likeness. He wanted to see his own perfection in Adam. God required that his covenant contract be kept.

And his creation reflect his glory in all their conduct. Adam and all creation was created and commanded to reflect the beauty of God.

And the covenant contract agreement with Adam, it was set out in all the manufacturer's instructions. The manufacturer's instructions of God's law that were written internally on his heart and externally by God's word to Adam.

And like all covenants, there were terms and conditions. Obedience to the covenant would bring blessing. Disobedience would bring cursing. And that's what Adam was promised in the covenant of works.

That upon his duty and perfect obedience to God's instruction manual, Adam was given the promise of blessing that he would inherit eternal life. But as you know and as we said, Adam experienced the promise of the curse.

[21 : 37] Because the kind of man Adam was, he didn't follow instructions. He tried to do things his own way. And as a result, Adam failed to keep his side of the contract. And he broke the covenant of works.

And because he was disobedient, disobedience brought cursing. He was cursed with death. Eve was cursed with the pain of childbearing.

The earth was cursed and it brought forth weeds and thorns. So that was the covenant of works. But when the moral law was then reissued, as it is here on Mount Sinai, reissued to the children of Israel, God was issuing to his people the covenant contract.

But the covenant wasn't a covenant of works like it was with Adam. Because you couldn't keep it. You couldn't keep the law. Adam had already broken the covenant of works.

And because he broke the covenant of works, no one could keep the law and obtain eternal life. No one could inherit eternal life by being a good person and a good neighbour and keeping God's commandments.

[22 : 50] And so what does God do? He can't renew the covenant of works. Because the heart of man is now sinful. We're all under the curse. We're completely unable to keep our side of the contract.

So what does God do? What does God do? Out of his love and his own good pleasure, the Lord graciously provides a second covenant.

He enters into a covenant of grace. A covenant of grace. It's undeserving.

It's unmerited. It's not. They cannot demand it whatsoever. And yet, the marvel of the covenant of grace is that the Lord sought to do something in order that there was nothing that could break this covenant.

He had to do something in order that he could redeem a people to himself regardless of how wayward they could be. And he would redeem them out of love. And the wonder of it all is that God bound himself to the covenant.

[24 : 00] He bound himself to his people claiming to his people I will be your God and you shall be my people. And he revealed himself as the Lord the covenant king.

And that's what's so wonderful about the name Lord. Because it means the one who keeps covenant. That's what the name the Lord means. The one who keeps covenant.

And this is the beauty of the covenant of grace that upholding it didn't depend upon the faithfulness of the children of Israel or the covenant people. It all depended upon the faithfulness of the Lord.

And the Lord would be faithful to his covenant because he is the one who keeps covenant. He keeps his promises. And that's why we are able to trust his word. Every word that is written for us we are able to trust it because he is the one who keeps covenant.

He keeps his word. He knows what's best for us. That's why we should live in obedience to his commandments. Because the commandments they weren't given so that by observing them we will inherit eternal life.

[25 : 09] They were given so that we could enjoy a covenant relationship with the Lord by faith. That's the wonder of it.

And because of our faith in the Lord and our love for the Lord in bringing about salvation the commandments were given as this guidance to know how to conduct ourselves and to continue to enjoy the benefits of a covenant relationship.

And that's what the children of Israel were reminded in chapter 19. They had experienced salvation. They had been brought from slavery and bondage in Egypt and they were being commanded to enjoy the benefits.

Enjoy the benefits of salvation that come out of the covenant of grace by faith and obedience. That's what he says to them in verse 5 of chapter 19. Now therefore if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples for all the earth is mine and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel. The children of Israel they were commanded to enjoy all the benefits of the covenant of grace by faith and obedience to the moral law.

[26 : 31] And that's what every Christian is commanded to do too. And every human being. Do you remember what Peter said in his letter? You are a chosen generation.

Repeating exactly what's given here. A chosen generation. A royal priesthood. A holy nation. A peculiar people. Why? That you might show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

How do you do that? By obedience to the law. And that's what the Lord was doing when he issued the moral law. He was communicating to his people what sort of conduct was expected from them.

Of course they couldn't keep it perfectly but it was to be their standard. They were to seek to uphold it as best as they could. But if the children of Israel were to turn away from the covenant and openly and willfully do what they wanted to do then the Lord was within his right to bring judgment.

Because that was the contract. Obedience brought blessing. Disobedience brought cursing. And the moral law that was the contract.

[27 : 49] The two tablets of stone upon which the moral law was written that was the covenant contract. Now the reason there were two tablets of stone it wasn't because there were five commandments on one tablet and five commandments on the other.

It was because there were two copies of the ten commandments. And there were two copies because both parties in the covenant were to receive a copy of the contract.

Each party was to receive a copy of the covenantal agreement. Just like when you enter into a covenant or a contract you have to sign two copies in which you keep one copy and the person or the society that you've entered into the contract with they retain the other copy.

And they retain it as proof. Proof of the contract. And if one party fails to uphold their side of the contract the other party is within their right to remind them about their contractual agreement.

But as we said the Lord bound himself to his people. He knew they couldn't keep their side of the covenant.

[29 : 05] And he also knew that in order for his people to enjoy the full benefit of the covenant of grace which is the promise of eternal life he knew that he would have to provide a redeemer.

A redeemer who would do what Adam failed to do by upholding the law perfectly and he would have to establish the covenant of grace on behalf of his people by being condemned in their place.

And who could do that? Who could uphold the law and yet be condemned by the law? Who could do that except the perfect son of God the Lord Jesus Christ?

who could do it except him? And that brings us lastly to see that God is revealed to us as our Christ and King.

We've been reminded in the preface to the Ten Commandments that he's our creator King and he's our covenant King but lastly we see that he is our Christ and King.

[30 : 13] Our Christ and King. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt out of the house of slavery. And so as we said these words they're from the preface of God's instruction manual the moral law and God is setting the scene he's putting everything into its context by revealing who he is and what he's done and by now we know who he is he's our creator King he's Elohim he's the God of creation and he's our covenant King he is the Lord the one who keeps covenant.

But in this verse we're also reminded of what God has done and what he's what he has done through our Christ and King and we're told here that our Christ and King has demonstrated his love for his people by bringing them out of the land of Egypt and out of the house of slavery and that act of bringing the children of Israel out of Egypt it was an act of redemption an act of freedom an act of deliverance an act of salvation but the basis of that act of salvation and the reason it all took place was because of the covenant promise of a redeemer that a ransom would be paid by a redeemer in order to redeem those from slavery it looked forward to this promise of a redeemer the promise of the Messiah the promise of the Christ and that's what we were saying on Thursday evening at the Thanksgiving service that bondage in Egypt when we were looking at the verse the Lord is my strength and my song he has become my salvation we were talking about bondage in Egypt it's illustrative and descriptive of condemnation death and separation from God because of sin and that's why in the New Testament it describes the effects of our sin as being in bondage and slavery to sin that we are under the condemnation of God's law because we cannot keep it we are dead in our trespasses and sins we are separated and alienated from God but the wonder of salvation or the wonder of redemption from bondage in Egypt is that it was illustrative and descriptive of the great redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ on the cross and he is our

Christ and King as we were saying this morning he came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many this Jesus is our Christ and King who came to be the last Adam and to do what the first Adam failed to do he came to uphold the law perfectly and live in perfect obedience to the covenant and that's what Jesus claimed in his sermon on the mount I have not come to abolish the law I've come to fulfil it and he fulfilled it perfectly he upheld it perfectly he lived in perfect obedience to the law and he was obedient to the point of death even the death of the cross he humbly and willingly as we saw in the garden of Gethsemane this morning he submitted to the will of his father he submitted to the will of his father and that's what we were saying about Psalm 40 this morning the Gethsemane Psalm and it's Jesus who's speaking and saying to do thy will

I take delight O thou my God that art then what does he say yea that most holy law of thine I have within my heart my friend Jesus knew the will of God for his life because he kept the law he kept the law perfectly and this is the wonder of Calvary that our Christ and King he upheld the law on our behalf and he was condemned by the law on our behalf where he willingly and obediently became sin for us so that we could be made righteous all so that we could be made righteous so that we could stand before a holy God justified justified blameless absolutely blameless and this is what the apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 8 beautiful chapter my friend read Romans 8 when you go home tonight and you'll see what our

Christ and King has done on our behalf by upholding the law and by being condemned by the law because we're told in Romans 8 that there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus Jesus has made us free from the law the moral law and how did he do it God did it says Paul by sending his own son and condemning sin in the flesh and when Paul concludes Romans 8 after speaking about the wonder of being a Christian the beauty of being in Christ he asks who is able to condemn us who is able it is Christ who died but more than that he says he is risen and he is seated at the right hand of God making intercession for us my friend our Christ and King is our

[36 : 05] Redeemer tonight because he upheld the law on our behalf and he was condemned by the law on our behalf he became sin for us he was condemned for us he paid the ransom for us and because of who he is and what he has done for us he calls us to live in obedience to his covenant by striving to keep the moral law it was the apostle John who said we love him because he first loved us but our love for God it's evidenced by our obedience to his law if we want to be like Jesus if we want to live Christ-like lives and know what God's will is for our life then we need to live in obedience to the law my friend if you want to be a Christian then you need to see that you can't uphold this law perfectly and that you need to trust fully and completely upon what

Christ has done on your behalf you need to commit yourself to loving and following Jesus Christ because he upheld the law on your behalf and he was condemned by the law on your behalf and you know on the day of judgment on that great day when we stand before God and give an account God will not ask us did you believe he will not ask us did you believe the Bible did you believe the stories of Jesus did you believe the miracles that Jesus performs he won't ask that question he will ask did you keep my law did you keep the law I wrote on your heart did you keep my law and we will stand condemned before God or free that all depends upon whether or not we have made Jesus

Christ our advocate the wonderful promise of Romans 8 is that there is therefore now no condemnation now tonight now no condemnation there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus to those who commit their life to Jesus Christ my friend what kind of person are you what kind of person are you do you follow instructions or do you try to do it your own way first well you've been reminded from

God's word this evening that Jesus Christ has upheld the law on your behalf he was condemned by the law on your behalf and you've been instructed to be obedient and come fall down before Jesus and confess that he is Lord you're being instructed to embrace the free offer of salvation and experience all the benefits the benefits of eternal life what kind of person are you what kind do you follow instruction or will you try and do it your own way first may the Lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray oh Lord our gracious

God we give thanks that God's law is perfect and that it converts the soul and sin that lies and Lord we pray that we would see that we need the law we need the law to point us to Jesus we need the law to guide us on how to live obediently to Jesus help us Lord to live under that law to know that Christ was condemned on our behalf but to live knowing that this law is the only rule to direct us on how we may glorify and enjoy thee forever bless us Lord we pray thee bless us in the week that lies ahead remember those Lord who need thee especially tonight be gracious to them undertake for them and Lord that thou wouldst keep us on the way oh help us to be on that narrow way that leads to life Lord do us good then we pray thee and go before us for Jesus sake Amen we shall conclude by singing in

[41 : 45] Psalm 25 Psalm 25 the Scottish Psalter the first version of the psalm Psalm 25 we're singing from verse 6 down to the verse marked 10 Psalm 25 from verse 6 page 231 thy tender mercies Lord I pray thee to remember and loving kindnesses for thee have been of old forever my sins and faults of youth do thou Lord forget after thy mercy think on me and for thy goodness great God good and upright is the way he'll sinners show the meek and judgment he will guide and make his path to know the whole paths of the Lord are truth and mercy sure to those that do his covenant keep and testimonies pure these verses of Psalm 25 to God's praise thy tender mercies

Lord I pray thee to remember a loving kindness is for thee a being of hope forever my sins and faults of you do thou Lord forget after thy mercy think on me and for thy goodness great God good and upright is the way he'll sinners show the meek in judgment he will guide and make his path to know the whole paths of the

Lord are truth and mercy sure to those that do his covenant keep and testimony is pure the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more Amen