

Lesson 6

"God the Lawgiver"

Careful scholars who have studied the Bible with a depth of insight have made a fantastic discovery. The famous Ten Commandments ("Don't do this!" or "Don't do that!"), which people have long thought spoil our fun, turn out to be ten categories of Good News if we understand why God gave them. This discovery is lifting heavy burdens from tired hearts all over the world.

For example, when the commandment reads, "You shall not steal!" what it actually says is that God will save you from ever stealing even a shoelace! You'll never have a problem, even if you're alone in the treasurer's office with a million dollars on the desk. *God will save you from stealing.*

And when it reads, "You shall not commit adultery!" what it actually says is that God will save you from ever falling into that deceptive pit, no matter how alluring a sexual temptation might be. The misery you will escape is enormous! The Ten Commandments become what most people have never dreamed of: ten messages of joyous Good News.

This discovery of unexpected Good News is talked about in some of the highest placed circles of Bible scholars. As the Internet is a discovery that has revolutionized modern communications, so this discovery of Bible truth revolutionizes the preaching of the gospel worldwide. People are waking up as from a dream; the Ten Commandments have become Good News!

Now at last we can experience the freedom that the Bible has been telling us but which seemed so difficult to understand: "Oh, how I *love* Your law! [not many of us have ever felt *that* way!] It is my meditation all the day [boring, we have thought!]. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; ... I have more understanding than all my teachers, ... I understand more than the ancients, ... How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! [this *will* be a miracle!]. Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way" (Psalm 119:97-104). Most people have never begun to discover this joy.

Even churchgoers have had a love/hate relationship with the Ten Commandments. The law has seemed like a heavy burden, ten precepts carved in cold stone, heavy prohibitions

that crush out all the joy of life. Everything that was fun seemed to be, "You shall not!" The Ten Commandments seemed like roadblocks in the highway of happiness.

Yet deep in our human hearts we have realized that it's wrong to break them; suffering must be the result either in this life or in the next. Yet we just couldn't know how to keep them, let alone *love* them. They seemed too hard.

Now comes this fantastic revelation: The Ten Commandments are actually ten assurances of victory. And what we have to do is different than the "Do this or else!" rules we have thought them to be: our job is to *believe* the Good News that God has embedded in them. Then faith will work to produce a loving obedience.

First comes an astounding disclosure: probably we have been misquoting the Ten Commandments without realizing what we've done. Whoever taught them to us since we were kids usually left out one verse that God put in at the very beginning, before any of the prohibitions. Leave it out and the ten indeed become Bad News, a "yoke of bondage." Many, even preachers and teachers, have not seen the importance of that Preamble verse. Even some who claim to specialize in preaching "the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus" have not seen it.

Here it is--the missing verses that belong at the beginning of any true version of the Ten Commandments: "*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 bondage'"* (Ex. 20:1, 2).

There are some dynamite-like truths implicit here that can shake the earth.

First, God tells us what His true name is: "The Lord." In Hebrew that is Jehovah, or Yahweh, a name that has something very special built in to it. It denotes God in His unique relation to fallen mankind. The name of Jesus in Hebrew means, "Jehovah *saves*." Thus God is telling us who He is--"the Savior of the world" (John 4:42). In other words, before we even hear the Law itself, He impresses us with gospel Good News. He is not saying, "I am your Judge; your severe taskmaster, your Lawgiver who will punish you for any infraction you commit!" A thousand times, No! He tells us, "I am your *Savior*. I am your *Friend*. I am *on your side*. Here is something *good* for you!"

Second, this neglected verse tells us that He is everybody's God, "I am the Lord your God." The "you" is *you*, right where you are. You may say, "Sorry, I have never worshipped Him. I am a pagan, or an atheist, or a bad sinner. I don't deserve Him to be the Lord *my* God, or to have Him tell *me* any Good News, any more than if He told me I have a million dollars in the bank." Well, He says to you, "I am ... *your* God. I belong to

you, even though you have never known Me, and even though you have acted as My enemy. I am 'the God of all flesh,' and when people crucified Me, I prayed, 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.'" That prayer included you. He forgave you before you even asked Him.

Before God even spoke the first commandment of His law, He preached the gospel in those Preamble words, "I brought you out of the house of bondage." When Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father which art in heaven," He meant for all of us, no matter how bad, to think of His Father as *our* Father. Here is special Good News: *Pray that prayer from your heart, and your life will be changed.*

Third, in His Preamble God tells us that we don't belong in spiritual Egypt. That's true even though we were all "born" there. The land of darkness is not our real home. He speaks in the past tense: "I *brought* you out of the land of Egypt. I have already delivered you; you are like a prisoner huddled in your jail cell not knowing the doors have been opened." The message says, "O Lord, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds" (Psalm 116:16). Know this, and believe it, before you start worrying about do's and don'ts.

Fourth, God has *already* delivered you "out of the house of bondage." Just as He chose Israel to be His "child," so in Christ He has already chosen you. (Israel never truly were "slaves" in Egypt. The Egyptians *made them think* they were slaves, and they believed it, and thus they *served* mistakenly as slaves, but all the while they were a free people waiting for Moses to tell them the truth, "Leave! Get out--to freedom in your own land").

What the world is waiting to hear is the full truth of God's past message of freedom. The Father sent His Son with an express mission: *save the world!* Just before He was crucified, He prayed to His Father, "I have finished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4). How could He say that if He had failed to save the world?

The Samaritans were the first to believe the truth, for they confessed that He is "the Savior of the world" (John 4:42). John said that His sacrifice is a propitiation for the sins of "the whole world" (1 John 2:2). Paul said He is already "the Savior of *all* men" (1 Tim. 4:10), and that He has already brought salvation "*to* all men" (Titus 2:11). He died the final death, "the second death," "for everyone" (Rev. 2:11; Heb. 2:9). All of that includes you!

Fifth, such Good News is true because the Son of God became incarnate. It's very simple. Just as our first parent, Adam, the head of the human race, brought

"condemnation" upon "all men," so now our second Adam, Christ, has brought a "judicial ... verdict of acquittal" upon all men (Rom. 5:15-18, NEB; all responsible translations say virtually the same). That doesn't mean that "all men" will automatically go to heaven; it means simply that when Christ died on His cross, He died for "all men," and unless they disbelieve and throw away the salvation God has already *given* them "in Christ," they will be saved eternally. The life we already enjoy is a gift from Him, and He has always intended that it should be the beginning also of eternal life.

When God named Adam, He gave the same name to the entire human race. Not one soul on earth was born on the planet Mars. We are all by nature "in Adam." But the Father sent His Son into the world to become our new Adam, to fire the first Adam and take his place. God cannot disown His own Son! Therefore it follows that He has adopted the entire human race "in Christ."

It's like Jesus brings us home with Him to dinner, and the Father says, "Fine, bring them all in; I adopt them all." We see this from the story of Jesus' baptism. When He was baptized in the River Jordan, a voice was heard saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). That same Voice embraced *you* at the same time! All this is included in God's Preamble to the Ten Commandments. It's past tense! I *brought* you out of the house of bondage. Perhaps you have been in "Egypt" all your life and didn't know your true freedom in Christ!

--*Robert J. Wieland*