

## Understanding God in the Old Testament Exodus 20-24

# A God of Love

When one talks about love in today's world, it can be defined in so many ways. Love can be an emotion, it can also be romance and feelings, it can also be so many different things, yet when it comes to God he defines what love is.

**Our world has so perverted love, that people don't know what it is, or what it looks like. They live their lives searching for love but in all the wrong places, yet the kind of love they are searching for is nothing more than man's definition that leads to emptiness, un-fulfillment, or a temporary satisfied lustful craving.**

God defines love for us, he even shows us what it looks like, he even laid it out for us. In **1 John 4:19** John writes:

*19 We love each other because he loved us first.*

Jesus even said himself in **John 15:13**:

*13 There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.*

Jesus lived the physical example of love for the Father and love for others. He even said in **Matthew 22:37-40**:

*37 Jesus replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind."\* 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'\* 40 The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments."*

**God shows us what true love is by laying out his law, his commandments.** He not only was the example of true love, but he wanted his people to be people of true love. He wanted people who would take on his character of love. **1 John 4:16** tells us:

*God is love, and all who live in love live in God, and God lives in them.*

When Jesus came to live in your life and to dwell in you by the power of the Holy Spirit, your lives changed because you went from being self-serving hateful people to people who had a law of love ruling in them.

As we saw last week, we saw that God wanted to be close to the children of Israel, he wanted to come and visit them, and he was asking them, "do you want to come close to me, and will you love me?" Their response was, "God we will do whatever you tell us to do." And God now comes and tells them what their relationship with him and with each other should look like. Read with me this morning **Exodus 20:1-17**:

2 *“I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. 3 **“You must not have any other god but me.** 4 **“You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea.** 5 *You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me. 6 But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those\* who love me and obey my commands. 7 **“You must not misuse the name of the Lord your God.** The Lord will not let you go unpunished if you misuse his name. 8 **“Remember to observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.** 9 *You have six days each week for your ordinary work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath day of rest dedicated to the Lord your God. On that day no one in your household may do any work. This includes you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, your livestock, and any foreigners living among you. 11 For in six days the Lord made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and set it apart as holy. 12 **“Honor your father and mother.** Then you will live a long, full life in the land the Lord your God is giving you. 13 **“You must not murder.”** 14 **“You must not commit adultery.”** 15 **“You must not steal”.** 16 **“You must not testify falsely against your neighbor.** 17 **“You must not covet your neighbor’s house. You must not covet your neighbor’s wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.”*****

If you love God and people, this is what it should look like. I want you to notice the **two types of love** here – first the **love for God seen in the first through fourth commandment.** What does loving God look like? Love for God doesn’t put their trust in another God, it doesn’t make idols, it doesn’t misuse his name, and it takes time out for God. **We serve a God who wants our attention and time.** Look at what he says in **Exodus 20:5:**

*I am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods.*

**We serve a God who will not be overlooked or cast aside.** He wants your recognition, he wants your attention, he wants your heart, and if you give it away to someone or something else, he will force you to acknowledge him because he will not be ignored.

We live in a day when people will worship creation instead of the creator, they will trust in their own efforts instead of the one who orchestrates history, they spend all of their time on things that have no eternal value instead of spending time with the one who has given time to them for the purpose of finding love and acceptance through Jesus Christ. If you love God then you will acknowledge him, respect him, trust him, and spend time with him.

But come one, let's be realistic. We have all violated love for God haven't we? We all have fallen into the trap of trust other things, we all have fallen into the trap of showing disrespect to him, we have all neglected the time we should have spent with him, haven't we? **Romans 3:23** tells us:

*23 For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard.*

We have all violated the law. We have all violated our love for God. **The second part** of the 10 commandments is **the love for people**. The fifth through the tenth commandment have to do with loving each other. What does loving people look like? It honors the parents who have raised us, it doesn't go around and take peoples lives, it doesn't sleep with someone else's wife, it doesn't steal from others, it doesn't lie about others, and it doesn't lust after the things that other people have.

**Love puts value on people – their up-bringing, their physical health, their relationships, their possessions, and their reputation.** Yet, here again, how many of us have violated our love for other people by breaking one of these laws of love? We all have. We have messed up in our relationships with people. We don't always get this right either.

No matter how good you are, you have violated your love for God and people. You are not perfect, in fact, you will probably violate this law of love for God and people in the future as well. It is because you are a human being who still has a part of sinful humanity within each of us. But thank God, that his plan of love didn't end here. The scriptures tell us in **Romans 3:24**:

*24 Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins.*

I was trying to think of a good analogy in regards to keeping the law yet finding freedom from the penalty of the law. The scriptures tell us that the penalty of sin was death – whether it the death of an animal or even the one responsible.

It would be like a basketball game. In the game each player is allowed 5 fouls before he is no longer allowed to play in that game. But what if when the 5 foul was committed the referee took all five fouls away and declared that the player could remain the game and keep playing.

The player could respond two different ways – first he could take advantage of the situation and see it as an opportunity to commit 5 more fouls using it as an edge to beat the other team.

Second, he could see the kindness of the referee and see it as a second chance to play better, utilizing his skill instead of taking advantage of the situation. With the second player, the kindness of the referee didn't necessarily mean that he may not foul again, but

it sure changed the way he played. He would value the kindness of the referee and do his best not to foul again.

This is how we should view the 10 commandments. They are commandments (not recommendations). **The 10 commandments require our best efforts, not for the sake of approval and acceptance of God, but for the sake of loving him and loving others.** We will break them, and their penalty is covered by the blood of Jesus Christ, but it doesn't mean that we neglect them. This is how we show God that we love him and show others that we love them. We serve a God of love who not only modeled it to us through the gift of his son, but who also expects us to live out this characteristic in our own lives as well.

God gives his laws of love and look how the people of Israel respond in **Exodus 20:18-19**:

*18 When the people heard the thunder and the loud blast of the ram's horn, and when they saw the flashes of lightning and the smoke billowing from the mountain, they stood at a distance, trembling with fear. 19 And they said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen. But don't let God speak directly to us, or we will die!"*

Again, we see this incredible picture of God with thunder, loud blasts of the rams horn, flashes of lighting and smoke. They were afraid of God saying, "don't let God speak directly to us." This is exactly what our world has to say today isn't it. They are too afraid to think about God let alone consider a relationship with him. So they avoid the situation, not realizing that they don't have to be like that because even though God is powerful and full of majesty and awe, he wants to be close with us. **1 John 4:18** puts it this way:

*18 Perfect love has no fear, because perfect love expels all fear. If we are afraid, it is for fear of punishment, and this shows that we have not fully experienced his perfect love.*

It is only when I have understood the mercy and grace of God, the acceptance and forgiveness of God, the love of God in action - that I can even begin to think about drawing close to God. **I have to trust the work of Jesus Christ in order to get past my fear of punishment.**

The world will never want to draw close to God until they have understood the love of God. They will always remain at an arms distance. But God wants to draw close to everyone here on this earth.

The way to approach the ten commandments is to see them as the standard to live our lives. They are expressions of our love for God and for each other. Love is defined for us, in fact as you read on in the book of Exodus in chapter 21-23 we find even further clarification of these standards and how they apply.

First, God speaks of worship, then He speaks about slaves and how people aren't property to possess but people valued by God, He speaks about the sanctity of life, he speaks of respecting other people's property, He speaks of taking responsibility as a human being for each other, and he speaks of justice (making the penalty fit the crime). These things fit under the law of love. After this we find the people of Israel's response in **Exodus 24:3**:

*3 Then Moses went down to the people and repeated all the instructions and regulations the Lord had given him. All the people answered with one voice, "We will do everything the Lord has commanded."*

And again in **Exodus 24:7**:

*7 Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it aloud to the people. Again they all responded, "We will do everything the Lord has commanded. We will obey."*

I pray that is all of our hearts this morning, "God will do everything you have commanded." In a world where the church is so hungry for a word from the Lord, or for the prophetic to flow forth, we often neglect the fundamental laws of love."

Let's get back to our love for God and others and live a life that is rooted in God's commands. **If we accept these laws then we will truly experience the presence of God.** When we tell God yes, he shows up. Look what happened to the Israelites after they accepted God's commands in **Exodus 24:9-11**:

*9 Then Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel climbed up the mountain again. 10 There they saw the God of Israel. **Under his feet there seemed to be a surface of brilliant sapphire, as clear as the sky itself.** 11 And though these nobles of Israel gazed upon God, **he did not destroy them.** In fact, **they ate a covenant meal, eating and drinking in his presence!***

Heaven came down and touched earth. How do we know it's heaven? Because it is same description that John describes in **Revelation 4:5-6**:

*5 From the throne came flashes of lightning and the rumble of thunder. And in front of the throne were seven torches with burning flames. This is the sevenfold Spirit\* of God. 6 In front of the throne was a shiny sea of glass, sparkling like crystal.*

When we live our lives in love for God and love for others, we welcome heaven into this earthly place. We welcome God into this world. And just as the Beatles' song states "All we need is love." We need to remember that love modeled and commanded by God is truly the only thing that will change his world. We serve a God of love this morning we tells us how to show love in actions and in deed. Let us embrace his commands so that his presence may dwell within us and spread out to those around us. Let's pray!