

## GRACE DEMANDS MORE

When you hear the word “**LAW**” or “**COMMANDMENT**” what is the first thing that comes to your mind? If we are honest, for most of us it usually isn’t positive is it? I tend to think of those words as being restrictive or concepts that are designed to restrain or hinder my ability to truly live. But what if our concept of the LAW (speaking specifically about GOD’s LAW and His COMMANDMENTS) had more to do with a standard for living that would actually improve our lives by helping us to maintain fellowship with God and with others. In fact, what if we started seeing the LAW as that which God has given to help us get more out of life and actually help us live in greater FREEDOM and expressions of LOVE toward God and MAN?

Welcome to week 3 of “**PROMISED LAND**” as we continue to follow the unfolding story of how God is preparing the way for Israel to return back to the Land He promised to them. When we last left Moses and the children of Israel God was planning to bring judgment upon Egypt where all the firstborn in the land would die as result of Pharaoh’s refusal to let Israel leave. As a way to escape this coming judgment God commanded the people to sacrifice a LAMB and to take some of the blood and place it on the doorway of their homes. By doing this when the death angel visited each home and saw the blood applied to the door he would passover that home and the first born would be spared. Of course this 10th and final plague was for the purpose of breaking Pharaoh’s will so that he would release Israel and drive them out of the land. And just like God had said to Moses, that was exactly what happened.

**Exodus 12:29-31 (NIV) 29** At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. **30** Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead. **31** During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord as you have requested.

And so Israel began their journey back to the Promised Land. Of course, Pharaoh later regrets having let them go and he hardens his heart even further against God by deciding to pursue Israel into the wilderness. In **Exodus 14** Pharaoh and his army catch up with the children of Israel at the Red Sea where it looks as if God had brought them all out into the wilderness only to be slaughtered by the Egyptians. But as God had promised Abraham back in Genesis 12 he curses those who curse Israel.

**Exodus 14:23-31 (NIV) 23** The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. **24** During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. **25** He jammed the wheels of their chariots so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, “Let’s get away from the Israelites! The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt.”

**26** Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen.” **27** Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the Lord swept them into the sea. **28** The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen—the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived.

**29** But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. **30** That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. **31** And when the Israelites saw the mighty hand of the Lord displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.

The victory over Pharaoh was finally complete! Egypt had been soundly defeated and they were no longer a threat to Israel. It is now time for Israel to complete their journey and place their trust fully in God and Moses, their leader by making their way to the Promised Land. But before they get there God has some important business to conduct with Moses and Israel that will be vital to their well being and life in this new land. So in **Exodus 19** God meets with Moses on Mt Sinai to give him a set of LAWS that will help govern the people when they take their place in the land.

As we take a look at these COMMANDS my hope is that we will leave here today with a different perspective regarding God’s LAW. Rather than seeing it as **Restrictive** or **Punitive** keeping us from being able to truly live life, I really hope that we will begin to see it as vital guard rails that God has given us that will lead us to experience a fuller life! So if you will find **Exodus 20** I am going to **PRAY** for us and then we are going to dive in.

If you have been following along with us since Week 1 of “In The Beginning”, you have seen the result of what happens when our relationship with God is impacted by sin. It creates all kinds of difficulties that rob us of life. Everything from murder and violence, to lying schemes and manipulation, to relational disharmony and family dysfunction. These are all the results of mankind trying to live his or her own way without guardrails or boundaries that govern our lives. God, understanding this reality, sees it as necessary to give His chosen people ISRAEL some foundational guardrails by which to govern their lives and to help them as a nation to achieve all that God desires them to be but that the human heart has a tendency to try and sabotage. So with our time remaining I want us to see **WHY the LAW is necessary** and **HOW it really is more about expressions of love than it is restrictions of your happiness.**

First of all, **WHY is the LAW even necessary?**

**Reason #1 - The LAW is necessary in order to establish that God is distinct and holy apart from all others.**

One of the things that is very apparent as we have been reading through Genesis and Exodus is that the Children of Israel, while they were chosen by God to be His representatives in this world and they were the nation by which the Messiah Jesus would come, they really are no

different from all the other nations regarding the nature of their heart. If they are left to themselves or if they are allowed to be influenced by those around them, they really are no different than all the other tribes of the world. But, if they are to be a distinct people that are to truly reflect the God they serve, then there needs to be some boundaries that will help them achieve that as a nation.

**Exodus 19:3-8 (NIV) 3** Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, “This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: **4** ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. **5** Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. In other words, you will be distinct from all other nations if you choose to identify yourself by the way you live in accordance with what I have commanded you so that people will know that you belong to and have a relationship with ME. But notice this doesn’t happen without some defined boundaries for how to live life that are in accordance with the character and nature of God.

Although the whole earth is mine, **6** you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ Why? Because you choose to live the way I intended all mankind to live from the beginning before sin jacked everything up and I want you to be my example of the better way of living that can be declared to the whole world.

**These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites.**” Israel is no different than any other nation that has been impacted by sin. And as a result, they have to be shown by God that He is distinct and holy apart from all others.

**7** So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. **8** The people all responded together, “We will do everything the Lord has said.” So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord. **Reason #1 - The LAW is necessary in order to establish that God is distinct and holy apart from all others.**

**Reason #2 - The LAW is necessary in order to define boundaries and standards for holy and acceptable living.**

Without defined boundaries and standards our hearts would have no concept of what is holy and acceptable to God. Remember, our hearts have become darkened by SIN. Left unto ourselves we will do naturally that which is displeasing to God and will create only more difficulties for ourselves in life.

**Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)** The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

**Romans 3:9-12 (ESV) 9** What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, **10** as it is written: “None is

righteous, no, not one; **11** no one understands; no one seeks for God. **12** All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

We see the reality of these two verses right after the fall of man in the Garden.

a) We see it from Cain and Abel

**Genesis 4:4-7 (NIV)** **4** And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, **5** but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast. **6** Then the Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast? **7** If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.” As a result, Cain kills his brother and separates himself from his family and chooses to live apart from God the rest of his life.

b) We see it in the darkened hearts of men in the days of Noah

**Genesis 6:5-6 (NIV)** **5** The Lord saw how great the wickedness of the human race had become on the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of the human heart was only evil all the time. **6** The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. As a result, the earth had become extremely wicked and God flooded the earth to purge the wickedness.

c) We see it from the residence of Sodom and Gomorrah.

**Genesis 18:20-21 (NIV)** **20** Then the Lord said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous **21** that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.” As a result, Sodom had become a violently wicked city and not very hospitable and so God destroyed it.

So God in His ultimate wisdom saw it necessary to give His people a code of conduct for how to live and conduct themselves in the PROMISED LAND that would not only reflect the nature of who He is but also to set some boundaries and standards that would make the Promised Land a great place to live. So God gives them what we refer to as the 10 commandments to serve as the foundation for life in the land

**Exodus 20:1-21 (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.

**Commandment #1** **3** “You shall have no other gods before me.

**Commandment #2 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.

**Commandment #3 7** “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

**Commandment #4 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 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. God knows our tendency to be workaholics. The sabbath isn't meant to restrict it is meant to give you life. To rest your body, mind, and soul from the busy pace of life. This is good and should give you life!

**Commandment #5 12** “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. Notice what happens if we do? We will have a long and prosperous life! Hey teenagers! God gave you parents to protect you and teach you about life. Even bad parents are showing you something about life -they are showing you what not to do!!

**Commandment #6 13** “You shall not murder.

**Commandment #7 14** “You shall not commit adultery.

**Commandment #8 15** “You shall not steal.

**Commandment #9 16** “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

**Commandment #10 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.”

Btw, what's so bad about these commands that we feel like they are restricting our freedom and keeping us from being able to truly live life? Do we understand that it is because of these basic principles that our lives are truly better today! We don't have to build walls around our cities anymore like they had to do many years ago before the 10 commandments set the tone for western civilization! We see the results and feel the impacts on our society when these foundational commands are not lived out. Violence runs rampant. Families are torn apart. No respect for people's lives or their property. Without these commands as a foundation for life society becomes filled with fear and anxiety.

**18** When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance **19** and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." Why did they respond this way? Because of the holy presence of God in comparison with the sinfulness of their humanity. Ultimate beauty in comparison to complete ugliness. Ultimate strength and power in comparison with the feebleness of humanity. They felt the tension of God's HOLY presence in comparison with their SINFULNESS. But notice what Moses says to the people.

**20** Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning." This is about relationship! Not religion! This is about community with GOD where true life can be found and experienced. Not about restrictions that take away our fun or are designed to keep us from being able to live. God wants us to be His children and to have unhindered fellowship with Him and experience life as it truly is meant to be lived. But sin stands in the way of that!! In fact, sin binds us up in consequences and death to all things good! Notice how the people responded.

**21** The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

This code of conduct (THE LAW), The 10 Commandments are meant to be a way of living that can help them and us to live the way God intended for us to live all along. BUT, SIN (that which we inherited from ADAM and EVE makes it impossible for us to live it out fully. The LAW isn't bad! We are! Which leads us to the third reason WHY God gave this law to His people.

**Reason #3 - The LAW is necessary in order to show us our need for JESUS** (The rescuer who was promised to ADAM & EVE and the one PROMISED to ABRAHAM, ISAAC and JACOB)

The tension we all feel and that was evident for Israel was that we, nor they, could keep the LAW even with our best efforts. Which is kind of the point. We have to be able to keep these things in order to be in the right relationship with God but since we can't, God in his infinite love sends the Rescuer JESUS who can!

**Matthew 5:17-19 (NIV) 17** "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. To do that which you and I cannot do! **18** For

truly I tell you, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. **19** Therefore anyone who sets aside one of the least of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. The commands are good and at the end of the day it is all about LOVE. Our love for GOD and our love for OTHERS. This is the point Jesus made in Matthew 22 when the lawyer (one who was supposed to be well versed in the law) was attempting to get Jesus to say something that would discredit Himself he asked Jesus, **“Which is the greatest commandment?”**

**Matthew 22:37-40 (NIV)** **37** Jesus replied: “LOVE the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ **38** This is the first and greatest commandment. **39** And the second is like it: ‘LOVE your neighbor as yourself.’ **40** All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Which means, the commandments are all about love and relationships that will help us get the most out of life! They are not to be a list of do’s and don’ts designed to take away our fun. Instead, they are parameters for HOW we express LOVE! Love to GOD and love to others! In fact, the first 4 commands deal with our relationship to God. While the last 6 deal with our relationship with others. And those without LOVE in their lives are miserable and are searching for meaning in life.

But notice, if the law is our measuring stick for being right with God we have to have a commitment to it that exceeds that of the religious leaders, the Pharisees. Not just an outward appearance that looks like we are keeping the law but it also must be measured out in our life at the heart level which addresses our motivations and exceeds what we see from the Pharisees. **Matthew 5:20** For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven. At which point everyone would be like, “Well who can be saved then?”

Which is where John 3:16 comes in. **John 3:16-18 (NIV)** **16** For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. **17** For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. **18** Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son.

**The commandments are not restrictions of your happiness, but are expressions of His love!** They show us how to love and they show us how much God loves us that even though we fall short of being able to keep these commandments God sent His son to rescue us from Sin’s control and to give us the ability to now live a totally different way through His spirit. The question is, HAVE you measured yourself against the LAW and do you see that you don’t measure up? Has that realization shown you your need for Jesus? Have you turned away from your own understanding and started to trust in Jesus?

Don't be afraid and run away from God! Run to Jesus! He loves you!

### **Worship Comes Back Up**

#### **Invitation:**

How do you view the 10 Commandments? Do you see them as restrictive to life or as a way to experience life?

Have you lived your life thinking that if you keep the commandments you are ok? Have you applied this principle at the heart level of your life?

If you fall short, don't turn away from God, turn to JESUS! At the end of the day He wants you to experience His love and He wants us to share that love with others around us!