

Reformation Fellowship Notes • March 5, 2017

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Handout #22

Exodus 20:18-26

I. Introduction

- A. What we covered last week
 - 1. Context of the giving of the law
 - 2. Survey of the ten commandments
- B. What we will do this week
 - 1. Answer some questions from last week
 - 2. Finish chapter 20
 - 3. Nature of the Law

II. Questions from last week

- A. Isn't fifth word interpersonal rather than dealing with our relationship with God?
 - 1. I suggested that the ten commandments could be divided into commandments dealing with our relationship to God and commandments dealing with our relationship to other men.
 - a) I categorized number five as dealing with our relationship to God.
 - 2. There would be grounds to seeing commandment five as interpersonal.
 - a) How we relate to our parents is interpersonal.
 - b) There is no reason to insist that the 10 commands divide evenly into 5 and 5 instead of 4 and 6.
 - 3. My thinking was that this commandment is more about our authority in general.
 - a) Our response to authority is related to our response to God.
 - (1) When the Israelites rebelled against Moses, God said they were rebelling against him.
 - (2) Rebelliousness against legitimate authority is rebelliousness against God.
 - b) However, in this sense, disobedience with respect to any of these commandments is rebelliousness against God.
 - (1) So, if we are going to make the distinction between commandments regarding our relationship with God and commandments regarding our relationship with other people, we must stick with the act itself.
 - 4. So, the fifth word should probably go with the commandments dealing with our relationship with other people.

B. Could the third word be about taking the name of God like a woman takes the name of husband?

1. The most basic sense of this commandment is “Don’t misuse the name of God.”
 - a) But what is this?
2. Common answers
 - a) It is commonplace to take this commandment to mean “don’t curse with the name of God” (say “Gosh” instead).
 - b) Religious Jews avoid using God’s name at all in order to be sure not to “misuse the name of God.”
3. My answer
 - a) The most likely meaning is the use of God’s name in an oath.

“The primary meaning of ‘misuse the name of the LORD’ would appear to be invoking his name as guarantor of one’s words.” (Stuart, p. 455)

- b) In that culture, the most common use and misuse of the name of God was in promises.
 - (1) To swear, “May God punish me if I don’t do X, and then not do X” without any contrition is to:
 - (a) Use God;
 - (b) Not take him seriously.
 - (2) Notice that with respect to this command, God said, “The Lord will not leave him unpunished.”
 - (3) So, this appears to be the concrete situation in view.
- c) I think the principle behind this command is to not take God lightly.
 - (1) Note that neither avoiding cursing nor avoiding using God’s name will necessarily keep one from violating this principle.

C. Isn’t the commandment against coveting too much to ask?

1. Further development of the question:
 - a) Isn’t covetousness our automatic response?
 - (1) We covet automatically all the time.
 - (2) We lust without even thinking about it.
 - (3) We have zero control over it.
 - (4) It is a hormonal response.
 - (5) It is a culturally dictated response.
 - b) So, a prohibition of what can’t be avoided can’t be what is intended.
2. Can it be avoided?
 - a) Covetousness and lust **are** largely automatic.
 - (1) That’s what we do.
 - b) But covetousness and lust are habits that can be fostered or resisted.
 - (1) They are not entirely out of our control.
 - c) And while we may not be able to change our automatic response, we have more control over what happens after that.
 - (1) Why ought I not covet and lust?
 - (2) Repent

3. Would God prohibit us from doing something that we can't help but do?
 - a) Yes.
 - b) The life of a believer is becoming increasingly desirous of being righteous and still failing no matter how hard we try.
 - (1) Repentance as a lifestyle
 - c) Fighting against deeply entrenched behaviors and attitudes is the only way to see how much a part of us they are.
 - (1) The addict who gives in to his addiction will never really know the depths of his addiction.
- D. Obeying the ten commandments is a societal project.
 1. Sabbath is hard to do when you are the only one.
 2. Other commandments are also more difficult to obey where they aren't valued.
 - a) A society that values good tends to encourage good.
 - (1) We all have an impact on each other.
 - (a) For better or for worse
 - b) Taboos are stronger than laws.
 - (1) Adultery is illegal everywhere, but is committed all the time.
 - (a) In Greek culture, it was winked at.
 - (2) Incest is not illegal anywhere, but it isn't done.
 - (a) In Greek culture, it was taboo.
 - c) Taboos are hard to create, but they are easy to break down.
 - (1) But they very effectively control behavior.
 - (2) But taboos don't create righteousness.
- E. Some additional comments about ten commandments
 1. There is not a set presentation of the ten commandments.
 - a) Exodus 20:1-17 is slightly different from Deuteronomy 5:4-21.
 - b) There is disagreement as to how to number the commandments.
 2. The commandments appear to start with the most grievous and move to less grievous.
 - a) Note that if this is true, not honoring parents is more grievous than murder.

III. Exodus 20:18-26

- A. The scene
 1. People gathered at the bottom of Mount Sinai
 - a) Fire, thunder, earthquake
 - b) God speaking to them directly
 - (1) Delivered the ten commandments
 2. To have any kind of direct interaction with God is terrifying.
 - a) The Israelites fear for their lives.
 - b) They want Moses to serve as intermediary.
 - (1) This arrangement is at their request.
 - (2) He will speak to them for God.

3. God came for two reasons:
 - a) To test them
 - (1) To see if they would obey (15:25, Deut. 13:3-4)
 - b) To instill the fear of God
 - (1) God is not afraid to use fear as a motivation.
 - (2) The reality is that punishment awaits those who will not bow down before God.
 4. Moses went into the cloud to receive further instruction.
 - a) Cloud becomes a symbol of the place where God is.
 - b) People stayed behind.
- B. God had demonstrated his power, majesty, and holiness.
1. Unprecedented that a God would audibly speak to a people
 - a) The natural response would have been to want to relate to God the way their culture relates to gods.
 - (1) Don't do this.
 - (2) Relate to God the way God wants to be related to.
 - (a) God is the one who dictates the terms of the relationship.
 2. Things the Israelites should do in recognition of who God is:
 - a) Don't make idols.
 - (1) The natural cultural response would have been to make an idol to honor the event of God's revelation.
 - (2) You saw no form.
 - b) Make an altar to offer sacrifices on.
 - (1) This they would have expected.
 - (2) Out of stone, but no cut stone
 - (a) This is different.
 - (b) The altar is not of man's doing.
 - (3) In every place
 - (a) God is not exclusively connected to Mount Sinai or any other place.
 - (4) No steps: "That your nakedness may not be exposed on it."
 - (a) Priests in some of the surrounding cultures performed rituals naked.
 - (b) Thought to be related to Adam and Eve's sin
 - (i) When they sinned, they were driven to cover their private parts.
 - (ii) Private parts are symbolic of man's shame due to sin.
 - (c) Later Israelite priests wore underwear.
 - (i) This was unique in Ancient Near East.

IV. Nature of law

- A. What were the Israelites supposed to do with this?
 1. This is not enough information.
 - a) Too much is left unclear to be a guide for conduct in many situations.
 - (1) What is work?
 - (2) What constitutes theft?

- B. How do we make sense of the commandments in the Bible?
1. There are 613 in OT alone.
 2. My work on this
 - a) Many years ago
 - b) Typical approach
 - (1) Divide laws into religious, social, and moral
 - (a) Only moral laws need to be obeyed.
 - (2) Divide commands into “binding” and “not binding.”
 - (3) This did not seem reasonable to me.
 - c) I sought an analogous situation that is more familiar to us.
 - (1) Parent/child analogy
- C. Analogy of parents training children
1. Start with simple commands with little nuance and little explanation.
 2. As child gains experience and understanding the commands become more nuanced.
 - a) More complete explanations become possible.
 3. What does a child do with this information?
 - a) Uses commands and explanations (and other information) to create a model of the parent’s worldview.
 - b) The model of the parent’s worldview can then be used to look at any situation.
 4. When child is mature, the child is expected to have a complete and accurate model of parent’s worldview.
- D. Implications of analogy
1. Apply a worldview, not a command.
 - a) Commands have very short shelf lives.
 - (1) Situations change quickly.
 - (2) All commands are situation-based.
 - b) The worldview of the parent is what generates all commands.
 - (1) Only the worldview can be applied to every situation.
 - c) This worldview includes a comprehensive hierarchy of values.
 2. The goal of a child who wants to be obedient is to construct a model of the parent’s worldview.
 - a) Use all sources of information about parent and parent’s worldview.
 - (1) Instruction, commands, experience, experience of others, etc.
 - (a) Commands and instruction are all useful in constructing a model of the parent’s worldview.
 - (i) Even outdated commands and instruction
 - b) A loophole is a completely incompatible notion.
 - (1) But you said, “. . .”
 - (a) This can only happen in a statutory concept of law.
 3. Laws change over time.

- a) A parent may want a child to act in direct violation of a command that was given at another time.
 - (1) “Don’t cross the street without holding my hand.”
 - (a) Changes as child gets older
 - (2) “Don’t swing the bat in the house.”
 - (a) General principle that can be overridden by higher priorities
- E. How does this relate to our examination of the OT law?
- 1. God revealed his worldview over time.
 - a) He started with the most basic concepts and values.
 - b) As his people became familiar with those things, he introduced more sophisticated concepts and values.
 - 2. Our job is to figure out what must be in his worldview to make sense of all that he has said and done.
 - a) Everything is relevant.
 - b) Some things God commanded in the past no longer pertain.
 - (1) Is this open to abuse?
 - (a) Absolutely
 - (b) Integrity is the only solution.
 - 3. The analogy provides a picture of what God wants from us.
 - a) A parent wants his child to understand and embrace his worldview (to the extent that it is true).
 - b) God wants us to be so devoted to him that we crave to understand what he values and how he sees the world.
 - (1) We want to understand so that we can do what is pleasing to him.