

## Plan and Purpose Bible Lesson #III-15--Commandments

In our introduction to Bible Law in our last lesson, we discussed the four basic categories of God's Law that I believe it is divided into: Commandments, Statutes, Judgments, and Ordinances. I want to discuss these categories in some detail as I believe this will give us a good understanding of the principles involved, which is what we really need to understand to understand God's Law. In doing this, we will be looking at many of same the laws given in the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy several times, but we will be looking at them from a different perspective each time. Hopefully, this will first familiarize us quite thoroughly with the law itself, and secondly we want to broaden our look so that not only will it be easier to make obedient application of these laws to our lives, but to our families, churches, communities, states and nation as well. Also, if we can thoroughly understand the principles involved, it will greatly enhance our ability to understand Scripture as the prophets, Jesus Christ, and the apostles all teach from the assumption that we understand God's Law. We need to have these laws written on our heart.

I would like to start with the Commandments. We have already discussed that these are laws that the individual is primarily the one responsible to. Basically, each individual has three areas of responsibility; self, other people, and God. The commandments God gave to man deal with all three of these areas of responsibility.

I want to re-emphasize that we need to learn the principle of the law. Times and customs change so that the particular letter, or specifics of a law may not appear applicable, but the principle is still applicable. So as we begin this look at the commandments, let us do so from the standpoint that we are dealing with our individual responsibilities and that we want to understand the principle of each of the laws. Also, while we are looking at a law that deals with our responsibility to God, we are not excluding the possibility that the same principle might apply to our responsibilities to others, or even to ourselves, even though we may not list them as such. This may be left to the study and reason of each of us as students.

The most important commandment detailing our responsibility to God is Deut. 6:4-5 since Jesus called it the first and great commandment. (Read) As we look at this commandment, we need to do so in light of Deut. 11:1 (read). We are all more familiar with the parent-child relationship. The best way a child can signify his or her love for their parents is unquestioned obedience. It is the same with us toward God. As we have already said in our last lesson, the first four of the Ten Commandments would logically be an expansion of this commandment. (Read Ex. 20:2-11)

While the Law was given to Israel at a time when they were to go into a new land already inhabited by a people very deeply involved in idolatry, we can still glean much from the more specific instructions of law they were given to teach them to deal with this idolatrous people and land. For example, Ex. 23:24-25 and Deut. 7:25-26 instructed them to destroy the altars, break up their images and cut down their groves. God makes it clear, in this commandment, that they cannot co-exist with these man-made gods without being tempted to worship them themselves. This principle is still valid, thus making it necessary to destroy the false gods around us. It is not unusual for people today to be wearing a likeness of a man-made god in their jewelry or have it in some of the decorative items in their home for example. I have talked to people who have traveled abroad and brought back replicas of the gods of other nations only to realize that putting them on display in their homes brought in a spiritual

darkness to their home, that they could not explain, until they removed and disposed of these replicas. I found it necessary to dispose of a Navajo Indian blanket I had on display when I learned that some of the symbols woven into the blanket had to do with worshipping some of their gods. Ex. 20:23 and Lev. 26:1 makes it very clear Israel is not to make gods of silver, gold, or stone. Deut. 4:15-24 reminds Israel that God has not provided any likeness to them of Him to make an image of, and warns against making any likeness of anything on the earth, or worshipping any of the stars, the sun, or the moon. Ex. 23:24-25; Lev. 19:4 and Deut. 6:13-15 makes it equally clear we are not to bow down to other gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works. He promises prosperity and good health when we worship Him only.

There are a number of do's and don'ts that God commanded that we might always honor Him. Among the don'ts, Ex. 22:29-30 says not to delay the offering of the first fruits and the first born of sons and animals. We also find among the do's the command to do these things in Ex. 34:19-20; Num. 18:15; and Deut. 15:19-23. We might note that the first born of unclean animals and of man were to be redeemed. The high priest and his family received the first born and the price of redemption of that which had to be redeemed. (Num. 18:15-16)

Continuing with the don'ts, Lev. 18:21 forbids letting our seed, or children, pass through the fire to Molech, a common practice among those practicing idolatry. The same verse, along with Lev. 19:12 warns against profaning (polluting or making common) God's name. A law, in this same vein, in Deut. 23:18 says not to bring the hire of a whore or the price of a dog into the house of the LORD for a vow.

Lev. 19:26 warns against using enchantments or observing times, while Lev. 19:31 and Lev. 20:6 forbids having anything to do with wizards or those having familiar spirits, the psychics of our day. Lev. 19:27-28 and Deut. 14:1-2 forbids rounding the corners of the head (hair), marring the corner of the beard, or cutting ones flesh for the dead, or printing any marks on the body.

Deut. 16:21-22 forbids planting a grove of trees near an altar unto God, as groves played a big part in idolatrous worship. It also forbids setting up any graven image.

Sacrificing any animal that was blemished or ill favored was forbidden. (Deut. 17:1) Neither were Israelites to eat any flesh that is torn of beast in the field. (Ex. 22:31) Israel was to set themselves apart (be holy men) from other men.

Deut. 4:2 commands that nothing was to be added to the word of His Law, nor was anything to be taken from it.

We are not to tempt God (Deut. 6:16-19). Reference is made to Israel tempting God at Massah. This was where the people murmured against Moses because they were short on water, very shortly after witnessing all the wonders of God's power in Egypt and the Red Sea and just after He had provided them manna to eat. (Ex. 17)

In Deut. 12:29-32, God forbids letting the people of Canaan snare them into serving the gods of the land and turning from the true God. Deut. 13:1-4 warns against following a prophet or a dreamer of dreams into serving other gods, even if the prophet gives a sign or a wonder that comes to pass. Even if it be a brother, son, daughter, wife, or friend that attempts to entice us to serve other gods, we are not to consent, nor are we to conceal or attempt to protect such a person from judgment. (Deut. 13:6-8)

Israelites are commanded not to abhor the Edomite or the Egyptian, but in fact were to allow them into the congregation in their third generation. (Deut. 23:7-8)

When one makes a vow unto God, he is not to be slack to pay it. It is no sin to forbear to vow, but once a vow is made, God will hold the one making the vow to it. (Deut. 23:21-23)

There are several do's as well. Moses is told in Lev. 19:2 to speak to Israel and tell them, **"Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy."** Holy simply means "set apart." God expected Israel to set themselves apart from the rest of the world, to not want to be the same with the same gods, religions and practices.

They were to honor not only their parents, but the elders of the land as well. (Lev. 19: 32)

As we have mentioned, God was careful to not provide any likeness for Israel to worship as He wanted them to worship Him only. However, He did require them to keep Sabbath days and He gave them a sanctuary that He commanded to be revered. (Ex. 20:8-11; Lev. 19:30; Lev. 23:2-3) Also, He set aside certain days and seasons for Israel to rest from their labors and honor Him. He commanded them to keep the Passover. This was an eight day celebration at the time of the barley harvest and was to begin on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month, Abib, in which they were to commemorate God passing over Israel instead of inflicting upon them the final plague God brought in Egypt, the death of all the firstborn of man and animals. (Ex. 23:14-19; Lev. 23:4-8; Deut. 16:1-8)

Fifty days from the day after the Sabbath of the Passover week, the men of Israel were commanded to keep the Feast of Weeks, later to be known as Pentecost, a one day holy convocation celebrating wheat harvest. (Ex. 34:22-26; Lev. 23:15-21; Deut. 16:9-12)

A third feast that all the men of Israel were commanded to attend was the Feast of Tabernacles, or Feast of Ingathering to be held for eight days in the fall, starting with the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month. (Ex. 34:22-26; Lev. 23:34-36; Deut. 16:13-15)

When God gave Israel the Law at Mt. Sinai, He gave them another category of law called Ordinances, that we will discuss later, that among other things, established a priesthood for Israel. He gave a couple of commandments concerning priests that we should include in our study of commandments. Lev. 21:7-8 tells us the priests were not to take a wife that was a whore, or profane, or divorced because the priest was holy unto God. God expected the priest to adhere to a higher standard than the rest of the men because His name was at stake with them, and they were to be an example to all of Israel. Lev. 21:13-15 tells us the priest was to take a wife in her virginity from among his own people.

Some of the requirements of God's Law don't hold the same significance for us that they did for Israel then and we sometimes either have difficulty understanding their significance or their reason. One of these has to do with the requirement that their garments were to have fringes on the borders. (Num. 15:38-41; Deut. 22:12) We are told the reason was so that when they saw the fringes they would remember God's Law and seek to follow it and not their own ways.

Another commandment that applied specifically to that time period, although there are some principles we can still glean from it today, is Deut. 7:2-6. Specifically, Israelites were commanded to smite and utterly destroy the Canaanites when God was to deliver them before the Israelites. They were to make no covenants with them, nor show any mercy toward them nor make marriages with them. They were to destroy their altars, images and groves. This commandment was to individuals, but it applied to the nation also, thus it could be considered a combination commandment and statute.

We hear a great deal about the commandment to tithe. Deut. 14:22-27, however, is the only direct commandment to tithe that I find in the four books we are studying, except where the Levites, who are to receive the major part of the tithe, are commanded to give a tithe of the tithe to Aaron, or the high priest in Num. 18:26-30. There are different theories that promote the idea of two tithes, the

first being an unwritten commandment and Deut. 14:22 being the second. Some add a third referring to Deut 14:28-29 and Deut. 26:12-15. I believe there is just one tithe which is to be taken to the place the LORD chose each year for two years and then the third year it is to be distributed locally among not only the Levites, but the stranger, the fatherless and the widow. However, once the distribution is made this third year, each man is to acknowledge to God that he has complied with the requirements of the law. The word tithe means to give a tenth; so there is no specific percentage otherwise given as to the amount of the tithe.

There were other things owed to God as well as the tithe. We have already touched on the first-fruits and the first born. (Ex. 34:19-20; Num. 18:15-16; and Deut. 15:19-23) There was also a custom of making a vow (apparently to do something for God or to sacrifice something to God) and putting one's self, or one's house, or animals up as a surety that the vow would be carried out. It was not a sin to make a vow or not make a vow, but if it was made, God took it very seriously and the one making the vow would have to forfeit what he put up as surety if he failed to carry out the vow. Lev. 27 discusses this law giving guidelines as to the value of man, presumably for the price of redemption, should that be necessary, also the valuation of one's house or field. Lev. 27:26-34 point out that nothing that is already devoted to God can be used as this surety.

A Nazarite was one who separated him or herself from the rest of the population to devote oneself to God. Apparently this could be for a given period of time or for life. Numbers 6:2-21 gives the rules that were to be observed by one taking such a vow.

We are in contact daily with each other as family, friends, in business, or in recreation. The 5<sup>th</sup> through the 9<sup>th</sup> of the Ten Commandments deal directly with this relationship. (Read Ex. 20:12-16; Deut. 5:16-20) Lev. 19:18 pretty well covers all of these commandments and was noted by Jesus as the second greatest commandment of all. **"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."** He rightly told us that if we keep this commandment we have kept the rest already!

To help us understand the full scope of the principle of this second greatest commandment and the commandments of the Ten Commandments we mentioned, God made a number of other commandments, some dealing with family, some with business, and several in dealing with each other in general. For most of us, family carries the greatest importance in our minds, so let us look at these commandments first.

Commanding responsibility of child to parent and parent to child is probably our more important commandments. Honoring our father and mother is covered in the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment. (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16)

Probably the most important parent to child commandment we find is in Deut. 6:6-9. Here we are commanded to teach the law to our children, to talk about the law when we are sitting with them, walking with them, or even when we go to bed and when we get up. The point is forcefully made that the law is to always be in front of them.

A considerable amount of space is given in the law to forbid sexual relations with members of one's family. Lev. 18:6-17; Lev. 20:19 and Deut. 22:30 all forbid sexual relations with family members. I am using the term "sexual relations" to refer to the same act or acts that we find referred to in these passages as "uncovering another's nakedness" or "discovering one's father's skirts," in an effort to make sure we all understand in modern-day terminology what these Old Testament terms mean. To understand that these passages are not in reference to homosexuality, we need to read Lev. 18:8, **"The**

**nakedness of thy father's wife shalt thou not uncover: it is thy father's nakedness."** This should help us understand better Lev. 18:7 as well as Deut. 22:30. While these could be an adulterous situation, they also may not be, but such relations with one's mother, father's wife, sister or half-sister, niece, aunt, daughter-in-law, brother's wife, or one's wife's daughter or granddaughter are all forbidden as well. Also, one is not to uncover the nakedness of one's wife's sister while the first wife is yet living. (Lev. 18:18)

Lev. 19:29 warns against prostituting one's daughter. Many of these things happen more than we realize I'm sure, but how often usually depends on the mood of society. Unfortunately, we are witnessing an all-out effort to change the mood of our society to make these types or relationships acceptable. We must remember that with God, it is still wrong.

There is considerable argument today as to whether God forbids inter-racial marriage. I would like to insert a side note that I wrote in a book on the law several years ago:

*It could be argued that the law does not specifically prohibit inter-racial marriage. This is at least partially true. However, the Bible deals almost exclusively with one race, the Caucasoid. The other two major races, the Negroid and the Mongoloid, while certainly being God's creation and part of His overall plan, are really not mentioned. It must be understood that the Bible is the outline of God's plan and purpose on the earth. Because God's servant people, Israel, come of the Caucasoid race, and it is their job to carry out God's plan and purpose, this is the race of the Bible. However, anyone harboring feelings of superiority for themselves, or hatred of the other two races, based on this fact, need to study God's Word more thoroughly.*

*With this fact in mind, Gen. 1:11, 12, 21, 24, and 25 all tell us it is God's plan (thus His law) that all things are to reproduce after their own kind, kind after kind.*

*All of the people in the Bible descended from the three sons of Noah. These families are often referred to as races, as well. For example, the Egyptians, the Canaanites and the Babylonians were all descended from Ham. The majority of people living today in Russia are descended from Japheth. But, most of the Bible people descended from the family or race of Shem.*

*The only specific commandment in the law (Ex. 34:11-16); Deut. 7:1-6) forbidding intermarriage, forbids Israelites from marrying Canaanites. However, Deut. 23:3-6 forbids the Moabite and the Ammonite (descendants of the sons of Lot, nephew of Abraham) from entering the congregation of Israel for ever. If we look at Ezra 10 and Nehemiah 13, we see that Israelites returning from the Babylonian captivity did marry both descendants of Ham and of Moab and Ammon. When accused of wrong doing, they acknowledged they had sinned (transgressed the law) in doing so and put away their "strange" wives.*

*So while we don't find a specific law forbidding inter-racial marriage, I think we can see that there is sufficient evidence to say that God forbids such marriages. God set Israel apart (made the holy) for His purpose. This includes who we marry.*

We need to remember that the primary reason for this is so that Israel would not be tempted to worship other gods. An exception to this rule (though there were several nations that there were not exceptions) is found in Deut. 21:10-14. This concerned a woman taken captive in war against Israel's enemies. This passage details the procedure an Israelite man was to follow in taking her to wife.

I am convinced there are no grounds for a marriage failure so long as both husband and wife follow God's Law. But, God knew that not everyone would do so, so He provided a divorce procedure. Marriage is really a conditional agreement or contract. If one or both husband and wife break this contract and can not reconcile their differences, Deut. 24:1-4 outlines a divorce procedure men were required to follow. Divorce is a two-part procedure, first the giving to the wife a written bill of

divorcement, or disownership, and second, a total separation, putting her out of his house. It is important that we understand this two part procedure.

We must realize, or recognize that in God's economic system, there is a place for the bond servant. Israelite men could sell themselves for debt or they could forcibly be sold for their debt. However, God provided a way to redeem the man or for a periodic release of all Israelite bond servants that wanted to be released. All bond servants, even if they were sold to a non-Israelite, were to be released in the year of the Jubilee, regardless of when they were purchased or the amount paid for them. Lev. 25:47-55 spells out how the price of redemption was to be determined based on the time until the Jubilee and also commands that a bond servant is to be treated well. If an Israelite bond servant was sold to an Israelite, he was to serve six years and then be released in the seventh year. As I understand this, if the bond servant had more than the six years to serve, he would be released the seventh year and then would come back in the eighth year to continue his servitude, i.e. he would get every seventh year off until he fulfilled his time or the Jubilee occurred, whichever ever occurred first.

An Israelite bond servant could voluntarily elect to stay with his master for life. Should he do this the master was to put a hole in the servant's ear and then the servant would remain with him for life.

Lev. 25:39-46 tells us that if thy brother (meaning Israelite brother) that dwelleth by thee be waxen poor and be sold to you, you are not to compel him to serve as a bond servant. Rather, he is to be treated as a hired servant. He is to serve until the Jubilee and then he and his family are to return to his own family and land. True bond servants were to be of strangers sojourning in the land or of the nations round about Israel. These bond servants were to be possessions for life and inherited as a possession by the Israelite heirs.

Continuing, concerning servants, Deut. 24:14-15 says that the hired servant is not to be oppressed, whether he be an Israelite or of the strangers that are in the land. He is to be paid each day at the end of the day. Lev. 19:13 verifies this commandment.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment (Ex. 20:15; Deut. 5:19) tells us not to steal while the 9<sup>th</sup> (Ex 20:16; Deut. 5:20) tells us not to bear false witness. These are two major laws dealing with doing business God's way. Lev. 19:11 tells us, **"Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another."** Several commandments support this law.

Ex. 22:25-27 commands us not to lend money to fellow Israelites at usury, or interest, nor are we to take a pledge or collateral from them and keep it past sundown, if he is poor. Deut. 25:19-20 tells us we can charge usury to a stranger (non-Israelite), but not to thy brother (Israelite). This does not mean we are not to lend to our brethren. Lev. 25:35-38 and Deut. 15:7-11 says that if our brother is poor and in need of help, we are to lend him sufficient for his need in that which he wanteth, but again we are warned not to take usury from him. Taking usury is considered theft by God.

The principle of Deut 24:6 is anything a man used with which to make his living, such as the millstone, could not be taken as collateral for a loan. Also Deut. 24:10-13 forbids going into a man's house to take a pledge or collateral for a loan. The one to whom the loan is made is to bring it out, but if he is poor, the collateral cannot be kept overnight.

Deut. 15:1-6 commands a year of release at the end of every seventh year. This meant that every creditor that loaned something to his neighbor was to cancel the debt. He could exact it again of a foreigner, but not of an Israelite. Back to Deut. 15:7 for a moment, a warning is issued, if our poor

neighbor is needing a loan, we are not to consider how long it is until the year of release when we loan to him. We are only to consider his need.

The land could never be sold, only the use of it, since the land belongs to God. (Lev. 25:23-24) When selling the use of the land, the price was to be based on the length of time until the Jubilee since the land reverted back to the family who inherited it originally at the Jubilee. Lev. 25:14-17 warns both buyer and seller not to oppress one another, but to fairly price and pay, based on the time left until the Jubilee.

Lev. 25:25-28 tells us that if a man sold the use of a piece of land, his kin had the right to redeem it or the man himself had the redemption right. In redeeming it, again the redemption price was based on the time left until the Jubilee. If not redeemed, it was to return to the possession of the one who sold it at the Jubilee.

There were some exceptions to this law so far as city houses were concerned. Lev. 25:29-31 tells us the seller of a house in a walled city had redemption rights for a year after the sale. However, if it was not redeemed during this year, it did not revert back to the original owner at the Jubilee, but remained a possession of the buyer throughout his generations. Houses outside the walls were treated the same as a field so far as redemption and the Jubilee were concerned.

However, if it was a house belonging to a Levite in one of the cities of the Levites, and the Levite sold it, he always had the right of redemption, but if not redeemed, it returned to the possession of the original owner at the Jubilee. (Lev. 25:32-34)

We will continue with more commandments dealing with business and commandments dealing with our relationship to each other in our next lesson. JRL