

LIVING WITHIN GOD'S BOUNDARIES

Exodus 20:21-24:14

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Exodus 20:21 through 24:14 might be called the book of the covenant because we find a summary statement. It's a series of instructions, which God is giving to His people. It is a follow-up on the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments, which we looked at last week, are simple, comprehensive, and they deal with moral and spiritual principles. We find, however, that human life is sometimes exceedingly—complex, that there is an ethical and moral dilemma to life. For example, when we look at the commandment “Thou shalt not kill,” immediately we have raised for us the human complexity of life and we ask the question, “Is all killing murder?” This is the task of the book of the covenant, to try to amplify and apply what the Ten Commandments are saying to human life. Thus this book of the covenant is bridging a gulf between the simple absolutes contained in the Ten Commandments and the complexity of everyday life, which we see reflected in the book of the covenant. As we go through these various laws today—and we'll do it sort of in summary and in rapid fashion—we will be continuing to extract those principles which apply to us today.

I wrestled with the sermon this morning in terms of approach. I thought maybe a more simplistic way would be to simply extract the principles, which are reflected in these four chapters, and not go through the paragraph-by-paragraph examination of them. But it's the old question—what comes first, the chicken or the egg? Can you really get at the principles if you haven't gone through the material? And if you haven't gone through the material can you really get through the principles?

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I invite you to think along with me and pray along with me as we look at the various laws in what is called the book of the covenant.

I. First of all, we have laws concerning the altar, chapter 20:21–26.

The altar, as it is spoken of in the Old Testament, refers not to a wooden bench or a kneeling rail, which we have in churches today. It was rather used as a place of sacrifice. It could be constructed simply of earth or of stones. But it was a place where man made peace with God and where the conditions of sin were dealt with through the sacrifice of a substitute.

In regard to the law of the altar, the Lord is giving specific directions, reinforcing what He has taught in the First and Second Commandments. “Thou shalt not have any other gods before me” and “Thou shalt not make any graven images.” So when Israel came to its places of worship, its altars, it was to remember the enforcement of these commandments. It was forbidden, for example, to bring to the altar an adornment which had been man-made which reflected in the adornment or image of the true God or an image of other gods. God would not allow images to be associated with the worship of Himself. “God is Spirit,” Jesus would later say, “and those who worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4).

What God is attempting to say in this particular restriction is that if we are to worship God we must do it His way. We must lay aside the things which we might be tempted to bring to worship and offer on our own. God, when we come to the place of worship, is going to insist that we come in His way, and that we're not going to be successful in worship if we bring things on our own which are not right. A marvelous opportunity was provided for the ancient Israelite, an opportunity still available today, to take what is wrong in your life, what is preventing you from a true worship of God, and bring it and say to God, “I get rid of it so that I might worship You as You have designated.”

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In fact it is true that in this law of the altar that the people of Israel were to worship God only in the designated places which He had designed and they were not to take their hand to the altar to carve up stones so that the stones of the altar look pretty. Rather they were to take the raw materials as God provided them. Again, a prohibition was being given that we make no improvements, no human improvements which we know aren't really improvements at all, upon the worship which God has made for us.

Also, God in talking about the altar prohibited the priests from having any steps to climb lest in their dress (in those days garments were different than us), lest in climbing the steps there be an indecency of worship. The Lord is prohibiting exhibitionism at His place of worship. If it is true in the Old Testament it is certainly true in regard to the New Testament that when we come to worship God does not at all look lightly upon spiritual exhibitionism where the center of worship is in some trick or feat that the person who occupies the center role is doing. Rather, as I have seen on many pulpits, "Sir, we would see Jesus only." The object is not the glorification of man. But it is the glorification of God. These are simple laws regarding the altar.

II. Then here are laws regarding the slave, Exodus 21:1-11.

What we have represented in the description of slavery here is not the kind of slavery which the Children of Israel had had in Egypt. In fact, we must think of slavery in terms of a different definition even than what we think of it today. In the Old Testament, for the Children of Israel, there was no such thing as permanent slavery except by voluntary choice. When therefore we read the word "slave" in chapter 21 we are really talking about a maximum six-year employment period. In the seventh year of one's service he was set free. We must remember as well that the occupational abilities or choices, ranges of choice which were before the individual in the Old Testament were far more limited than now. Given a culture where you have thousands of

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occupational choices you don't have slavery. But given a culture where at most you have a couple dozen occupational choices, those that worked the fields and do that kind of menial labor fell into the category called slavery. There were rights for people in this position. And by the way a Hebrew became a slave through financial need. It was because he himself found that he could not sustain an elementary living level that he needed to put himself under the disposal of someone else so that his food and clothing and shelter could be taken care of. If he became a slave through financial need, when he was through with his slavery the owner had an obligation toward him to send him out from his midst liberally with goods from his flock, his threshing floor, and also a good quantity from his wine press. This is spoken of in Deuteronomy 15:12–15. Every seventh year of servitude the slave, upon reaching the seventh year, was to be set free with this liberal send-off from the owner. Sometimes the Year of Jubilee came along (and the Year of Jubilee was each fifty years in Israel's history) and this was handled differently. God's design was that on the Year of Jubilee anything that was enslaved should be set free unless one had made a voluntary choice for life to be a slave. So, for example, if one became a slave in the forty sixth year of the calendar he would normally have been set free on the fifty third year. But since the Year of Jubilee was the fiftieth year, his servitude would have been cut short by whatever distance separated the Year of Jubilee from the normal year he would have been set free.

All of these are legislative rights pertaining to the productivity of the individual and the welfare of the society. In Exodus 21:3 we see that if the slave had become such while he was married, he was allowed to take his family with him when he was through with his six-year term of employment. If, however, he had come in single and he had voluntarily taken a wife offered him by the owner, then he had the choice when his slavery was ended of going out by himself or becoming permanently a member of that owner's family. If he were to become a permanent

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member, then he was taken to the doorpost, his ear was put next to the doorpost and it was pierced. This is not such a horrible thing, as ladies know. It sounds awful but it was evidently not as gruesome as we like to think it was. It meant that that person loved his master, loved his wife, loved his child and if he had married during the course of that servanthood it meant that his marriage could be no more than six-years. He had the choice. If he chose to go free, then he could work and seek to gain enough money to redeem, to buy that person whom he had married, and those children.

God is not saying this is the ideal social order for all time. But this is the way that God accommodated His Law to the stresses and needs of that particular society.

By the way, Jesus, when He came, came also as a slave. He chose not to go out free. He chose to have a family. A family of sons and daughters, a family of which we are called His Bride, and therefore He allowed Himself not simply to be bored with an awl through His ear. But He allowed His hands and feet to be bored through with a nail and His side with a spear. He would take us as His trophy from slavery. He loved us with an everlasting love. I think we can see a beautiful picture of Christ in this segment.

There were laws also pertaining to the daughter as slave. The daughter was seen as property. That is something which in our society is reprehensible. But on the other hand, in defense of the Old Testament, at least the Hebrews thought of their daughters as assets. Would that each person think of his child as an asset. There are some parents I know who think of their child as a liability. The daughter was seen as an asset rather than a liability.

Furthermore, the father had the responsibility to see that the daughter got the right man. Thus verses 7–11 are really in regard to the dowry paid to the father for the daughter. Again, I'm not advocating a system where parents pick the choices for their children. But parents by and large

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do have more wisdom and I would certainly like a hand helping my daughter make sure she gets the right man.

The man, by the way, that got the daughter had to pay for her. I realize I paid a lump sum of money for my wife as well. It was just more sophisticated. I went to a jewelry store and put down about three hundred dollars, and that was the payment needed to show my wife I was serious about what I had in mind for her. If we laugh at some of the ancient customs they might well laugh at some of our customs as well.

If a person received the daughter of another man, then he had certain responsibilities toward her to assure that her rights were protected. If he did not marry her, then he had to let her be redeemed by someone else. We see this later in the Book of Ruth. He could not sell her to a non-Hebrew person. If a father, for example, had purchased her for his son, then the daughter (who now became the daughter-in-law) had to be treated in the family as a daughter and not as a household servant. If she was not married by the person who had purchased her, and not redeemed, then the person who had purchased the daughter still had responsibility for providing food, clothing, and maintaining her marital rights.

III. The third section of laws related to personal injury, 21:12–36.

First of all are described acts of homicide, 21:12–14. Here there is an amplification of the commandment “Thou shalt not kill.” Fundamentally underlying the principle of life in the Old Testament and in the New Testament as well is the fact that human life is the property of God. Human life is simply loaned or leased to an individual for the duration of that person’s lifetime, however long it may be. It is strictly in His hands to give. Therefore, it is strictly in His hands to take away. It is He that initiates the lease of life, which is His property. And it is He that

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terminates the lease. When a person comes along and breaks another person's lease on life, then it is that his own lease on life is broken.

Thus we see in Genesis 9 the institution of capital punishment. However in Exodus 21:12–14 we see the Old Testament law, the book of the covenant, making a distinction between premeditated and accidental killing. In the event of a death which had occurred because of a striking which had not been premeditated, or what we might call second-degree murder or manslaughter, the person had the opportunity to flee to a place of refuge, and there have safety.

There were other personal injury instances which related to the various afflictions of personal injury. Violence to parents is treated in verses 15 and 17, either violence which involves a beating of one's parents or a cursing of one's parents, both punishable by death. There was capital punishment for kidnapping in verse 16. There were also laws regarding to quarrels which led to injuries. If, for example, two persons were fighting and one of them hurt the other individual, even though both parties might have been responsible for the fight, the individual that injured someone else was then liable for the injured person's lost time and also he was responsible for his hospitalization. Thus verse 19 says, "He must...see that he is completely healed" (NIV). This was not only a good stricture in regard to arguments and injuries in the Old Testament but I think there is a fascinating thing happening on the psychological level. If it is the case that two people are quarreling and so at odds with one another, ultimately from that fracture of relationship there is going to come hurting. Someone is going to be hurt when two people are involved in a quarrel. Maybe both people will be hurt. What a tremendous thing if a person hurts another individual then assumes responsibility for helping to heal that persons of their injuries—psychologically and mentally and spiritually. Indeed this might prevent us from getting involved in some of the kinds of battles that really seriously injure other people in the emotional realm.

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Injuries to servants were spoken of in 21:20–21 and 26–27. It was, of course, not God's will that people mistreat their servants or their slaves, even as it was not God's will for persons to steal or to murder. Yet God recognized that such actions did take place and certain penalties and prohibitions must be laid down. Thus if a man struck his slave and that striking resulted in death, then there was punishment that was to be meted out. This evidently would be regarded as a capital crime. However, if the slave were struck and he survived for a day or two then there was no punishment, inasmuch as evidently the assumption was that it had not been the owner's intention to kill him. Rather, the owner was to suffer simply the loss of his asset which to him was money. If a slave lost an eye or a tooth because of an owner's beating, he was to be set free.

When we look at this prohibition on servants, we might say God could have taken strict measures to insure a more adequate system of justice, a more adequate system in our mind. We must remember, however, that God accommodates himself somewhat to a given cultural situation. If God moves severely against all human injustice, and if we wanted God to move with immediate judgment and recompense toward all human injustice, then we must be willing for Him to move in a very striking and punitive way against all injustice even in our own life. We owe our own standing to God by grace. So it is that sometimes in culture, a culture may not be doing something that is right but God nevertheless lets it continue from the standpoint of grace. There are physical injuries related to pregnant women, particularly here is reference to a pregnant woman who attempts to interfere with a fight between two men. The loss of the fetus is compensated for financially. Of course, there are those on both sides of the abortion issue that try to make something from this. So there is an overarching principle regarding abortion which is "Thou shalt not kill." One would, I think, be well to take the position of Scripture that life begins at conception. There is compensation given to the person who is injured if they try to break up a

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quarrel or if they are hurt in a quarrel. So according to Exodus 21:23–25, it's life for life, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound and stripe for stripe.

There's nothing left out.

You say, "How cruel! If somebody hits me, I hit him back. If he burns me, I burn him in the same place." Here we must take in mind several things. First of all, this law of retaliation is really the first act which is given by God to limit vengeance. Therefore, it is an act of mercy. If someone hits you, you do not have the right to cut off his hand. If someone injures you, you do not have the right to kill him; so that this prescription is really God's protection against vengeance.

Another thing which is involved certainly is this: In this society, in the culture of Israel, they did not have prisons. Therefore, if a person had done something wrong, there were only three ways he could be punished. He could be punished through loss of life. He could be punished through personal injury, an injury inflicted upon him in kind as he had inflicted upon someone else. Or thirdly, he might have to pay a fine. Indeed, later in the Old Testament, this wound-for-wound and burn-for-burn and stripe-for-stripe became compensated for in financial terms. Again, when you look at the subject of justice, I'm not sure even in our modern society we have adequately handled the whole issue of crime and punishment. Our prisons are not the exact models for rehabilitating people. While I'm not advocating that we go back to wound-for-wound and stripe-for-stripe, I'm not so sure that our system is any better than the Hebrew system for dealing with crime and preventing it. At least the punishment was known in advance. At least also it was quick. And at least also it was fair. And it was to be given impartially. The person was then free to not have to go through a period of incarceration as we have in our society today.

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We then have a series of laws in personal injury regarding injuries caused by animals or caused by negligence. An ox is used for illustration since it was one of the more dangerous domesticated animals. “If an ox kills a man it shall be stoned and its flesh not eaten.” But if however an ox killed a man and that ox had been known to be a dangerous ox and had not been penned up then not only was the ox killed but the owner of the ox was killed as well.

How does this relate? Let me translate “ox” and substitute a modern word for it—“auto.” If an auto kills a man and it has truly been an accident then the auto shall be junked and the owner shall be left as not being liable. But if, on the other hand, the auto was known to have bad brakes, it was known to have been driven dangerously on many occasions and recklessly in school zones and other kinds of places, or driven under the state of intoxication, and that auto is responsible for the death of someone, then not only shall that auto be junked but that owner shall be dealt with. Here we see a lesson for good driving out of the whole subject of an ox goring someone.

An ox which gored a slave necessitated the owner of the ox recompensing the owner of the slave. By the way, a negligent person who left an open pit would compensate for the loss someone else suffered through his negligence. Thus if he digs something—a well or the like—and an animal that belonged to someone else came and fell in it (he hadn’t covered it) then it was his responsibility. He assumed the liability. This was part of applying the commandment “Thou shalt not steal.” It was a protection of one’s property rights.

We might translate the open pit as if anyone leaves in a vacant lot or in the back of a house an open refrigerator he shall be liable for the damage that could accrue to children because of his negligence. The principle is still valid, even though the culture may change the application with which we use of the principle.

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If an ox gored to death another ox, then both owners would share the revenue of both oxen—the dead ox and the live ox. But if an ox had been known to gore before and it killed someone else's ox, then the guy whose ox is dead gets it replaced.

Or if a car accidentally destroys another car, then both the owners shall split what is left of the two cars. Both of us shouldn't suffer. We ought to split whatever we have.

IV. Another category of loss, loss concerning theft, is spoken of in chapter 22:1–4.

Restitution was required of a thief. If, for example, he stole some things and then was caught and the things were still in his possession, he was required to restore not only what was stolen but he was required to pay back double what he had stolen. If, however, he had stolen something and then he had disposed of the assets, he was required to pay back either fivefold or fourfold.

Remember in Luke 19 Zacchaeus the tax collector who meets the Lord. What does he do? He says, "Those whom I have defrauded I will restore fourfold." He was a crooked tax collector, but he knew the Scripture and when the Holy Spirit convicted him, when he met Jesus he said, "Now I've got to get my life in order and I will do exactly what the Old Testament requires of me to do."

In regard to theft, also a mention was made of self-defense, so that if a thief came through in the middle of the night and the owner of the property killed the thief he was not liable for that killing. But if the thief came in the daytime to steal and he were killed by the owner then the owner of the property was liable for murder. Why? The assumption behind it is that if a person intrudes at night one does not know his purpose, as to whether his purpose is stealing or whether it's some form of death or mayhem. The owner cannot possibly know his motivations. But if the thief is stealing in the middle of the day one can see what he's up to. Therefore one does not have the right to kill him. We have laws with this same principle embodied in our society. If an

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unarmed person holds you up you do not have legal right to whip out a gun and shoot him. But if he comes in armed and it's a question of saving your life our society (I'm not commenting on the rightness or wrongness of this) our judicial system allows one the prerogative of self-defense.

V. In 22:5–6 there are laws concerning trespass.

If you take your herd and graze on someone else's property and destroy their vines and the things they have been growing, then you are liable for the things destroyed. If you try to clear your field through fire and the fire jumped over your field to someone else's and burns up their good crop then you are liable for the things which have been destroyed.

VI. There were laws regarding deposits and borrowing, verses 7–15.

Again, you have a society where there were no banks. If you were going to deposit something it was with an individual. In verses 7–13 we see there was a responsibility of the trustee of property, so that, for example, if you deposited something with someone and it was stolen and trustee said before God, "I did not have anything to do with it," then he was not liable. But, on the other hand, if you deposited something alive with him like livestock and it had wandered away by itself he's not liable for it. But if someone else had stolen it he is liable for it. It's being assumed that if you gave it to him he should have had the common and good sense to provide protection against thieves. If a trust is breached there is also to be recompense for it, verse 9.

There were even laws regarding borrowing, verse 14. That if a person borrowed anything of his neighbors and it gets hurt or dies then he must restore that to the owner. But if the owner comes with it and anything happens to it then the person is not liable for the owner had control of his assets. Thus if you borrow your neighbor's lawnmower and you fail to put oil in it and burn it up you should make recompense to your neighbor. But if you have invited him over as a neighborly

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gesture to himself mow your lawn, then if his lawnmower doesn't have oil it, it is his responsibility and not yours.

VII. Then there were laws regarding moral and spiritual obligations, 22:16–23:9.

There were laws regarding fornication. When there was loss of virginity it was not regarded as something casual. The society did not treat it as something casual. There was a sanctity to the sexual relationship as being seen as part of marriage. There were laws against sorcery, verse 18.

God's will was not to be found out through taking out the intestines of animals and trying to discern what decision should be done. God's will was not to be found through reading the stars or engaging in contact with evil spirits. God would make His will known through His word and through the prophets. Therefore sorcery was forbidden. Bestiality was forbidden, verse 19.

Idolatry and sacrifice was forbidden, verse 20. There was to be real care for the oppressed, verses 21–27. God is especially wanting Israel to be alert to the stranger in its midst even as we ought to be aware of the stranger in our midst or neighborhood or the person who is not being accorded a welcome as others. We are to be sensitive to those who are strangers in our midst and in our company. There was to be special care for the widow and for the orphan. God would take up the cause of the widow and the orphan in the event they were mistreated. There was to be care for the poor. The poor was not to be charged interest, nor was security to be taken from the poor if that security involved taking clothing off his back. Indeed there is a great deal of usury in our society, which really steals from the poor. This is a valid law, not only for the prevention of usury. It's something which we still see strongly needed today.

Reviling was prohibited, verse 28. Either the reviling of God or of leadership. This meant that the people were not to run down their leaders. Nor were they to complain against God. There were laws regarding offerings in verses 29–30. The continuing theme of the law of offerings was

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that the first is to be brought to God. One is not to bring to God the worst or the second best, but the very best and first of what comes along.

There were even laws regarding eating, verse 31. Things which had been killed by animals were not to be eaten. I think there was a good health reason for that. There would have been great danger of infection or the transmission of disease. In 23:1–8 are laws regarding the integrity of judges. An individual was not to side with a wicked man in a lawsuit. He was not to take the side of a multitude if he knew the cause of the multitude was wrong. What a tremendous lesson that we're not to side with the majority if we clearly know that the majority is not in the right. We're not to stampede with the herd. Also, in verses 1–3, we're not to side in judgment with the poor if the poor is wrong. The poor are given no special rights if they are in error. There is also integrity in regard to finding lost or distressed animals. If a person found something that was lost he was to return it. If he even found his neighbor's donkey bowed beneath a burden, he was not to pass by and say, "My neighbor who I don't like! Look at his suffering beast. Serves him good. He's not going to get his load of wood or whatever." For the sake of mercy towards that animal he is to help that animal with his load.

In regard to justice and judgment by judges there was to be total justice toward the poor. There was to be an abstention from considering any false charges against an individual. There was in 23:7 to be equitable judgment. "Do not put an innocent or honest person to death" (NIV). This I think pertains to a judge because he's been sloppy in his investigation, "I don't know who's right. I'll give you both a fine!" There was not to be that kind of thing in judgment. And certainly there was not to be corruption. He who, for a bribe, blinds officials. We know this from our own modern political history in this county. There was a law regarding the stranger, verse 9.

VIII. There is another category of laws regarding religious observances.

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There is to be the keeping of the sabbatical year, verses 10–11. Every seven years there is to be a feast of the people and of land. One year's vacation out of every seven. God wants you to have rest as well. The whole principle of the sabbatical year is rest. Israel, by the way, never kept any of its sabbatical years. They were too greedy. Like some of us, drive ourselves night and day because we're so greedy to milk everything out of life that we never relax and rest. The Lord later in 2 Chronicles 36:17–21 says, in effect, "You're going to go into captivity for seventy years that in those seventy years you might keep every one of the years you missed. In the four hundred ninety years you've been a nation you should have had seventy Sabbath years. You've missed every one of them, so now take them all in one lump sum." The person who drives himself mercilessly and never takes vacation or a day off might himself or herself wind up taking it all in one lump sum—on a hospital bed. A day off out of every seven.

Here are three feasts a year when all of the males of Israel were to be present together: The Feast of Unleavened Bread. The Feast of Weeks or harvest which is called Pentecost. And the Feast of Tabernacles. These feasts were important to a nation because it meant that as a people they were gathering together in social and national and spiritual unity before God.

There was to be abstinence in regard to religious observances from eating things leavened or keeping the fat. The eating of things unleavened meant that symbolically we are to put away sin. The abstinence from eating fat is due to a command in Leviticus that the fat belongs to the Lord. The fat in that society was regarded as prime, the best. Therefore in keeping with the principle, the best belongs to the Lord, the fat is the Lord's. Firstfruits were the Lord's, Exodus 23:19. And also there was an abstinence from heathen practice, "Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk" (NIV). This is a rather obscure verse. We know from secular texts outside the Old

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Testament that this was a practice of Canaanite religion and worship, the boiling of a kid in its mother's milk. This was reprehensible to God and forbidden to His people.

IX. There were laws relating to conquest in chapter 23.

God was indicating to Israel, "Keep away from certain practices and I will give you the land little by little. And I will bless you. You're to be a separate people."

X. Then in 24:1–14 there is a ratification of the covenant of the people with God.

God is seen as being at a distance. The elders were bidden to come near to God and a revelation was made by God of Himself to Him. When God ratifies His covenant it's ratified with blood. Blood sprinkled upon the book of the covenant and upon the people. As Hebrews 9 very clearly says, the will does not take effect unless there has been a death. The covenant is His will. It cannot take effect unless there is death. So in this case, there was death of an animal. In the New Testament, God makes a new covenant with us in Jesus Christ. It is ratified by His blood. It is ratified by death. While the elders of Israel gather together in the presence of God, so it is in Jesus Christ we ourselves gather and we behold God. There is communion with God. Then Moses is called up to the mountain to receive additional instructions from God.

The God who appears to be far off has an intimate awareness of our lives. The people are a way off while God is revealing His presence to Moses on the top of the mountain. Doesn't it strike you that the God who is so "far off" has an intimate awareness of human life? He knows what's going on. He sees the man who would be tempted to dig a pit and not cover it. When you use that phrase "God far off," it really is in a sense misleading because God, in terms of his awareness of human life, is very up-to-the-minute, very knowledgeable of all that is transpiring. If in the Old Testament God can be described for the people as being far off, yet have such an intimate awareness of their lives, how much more in the New Testament where we have the presence of

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Jesus Christ brought near, do we understand that God has an intimate awareness of every detail of our life. There is nothing before Him which is hidden. He realizes the kinds of dilemmas we get ourselves into in our life. He realizes today where every one of us is coming from, what is on our heart, our needs, what kinds of struggles we are wrestling with, whether financial or health-wise or anger-wise, God knows. God is therefore in a very real sense not far off at all. He is very near.

XI. We also see as we look at these various principles that we have a need to separate absolute principles from their application to a particular culture.

The Children of Israel lived in a particular day and time. We err if we look at the Old Testament laws and not disassociate the principle from the application. It would have made no sense to the culture of Israel to have had a statement like this, "You shall not drive over 55 miles an hour." Nobody could have gone that fast. But the principle underlying that is the conservation of resources and also as a secondary privilege the saving of life and injury. There is an underlying eternal principle that leads behind the specific application of a given rule. This is what we need to continue to look at in regard to Israel. For example, "You shall not boil a kid in its mother's milk," I don't think any of you have been tempted to do that recently. But the principle that lies behind that is simply this. You shall not be a member of a cult. You shall not worship as a member of a cult. You shall not worship as a member of a false religion. Worship the Lord God only.

A third thing we may say is God has a great concern for is the preservation of human rights. We may sometimes impair these human rights through deliberate action or negligence. I realize in a Christian context we do well to think of ourselves of having responsibilities rather than rights. But if we look at the oppression of people today we feel because of the freedom that God has

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brought in our heart that we should be concerned about the protection of fundamental rights of life and property which God has given and allowed human beings.

If we are to be truly God's people, the fact that we are God's people will express itself in the way we live. God is not content in the Old Testament with simply a mystical relationship or a mystical experience. That experience which the people have with Him is to be fed and formed by concrete ways of responding to God and their fellow man. So it is when we walk with God He has ways He wants to form our life.

Finally, the whole essence of the Law is to enable us to love God better and our fellow man better. It directs us on the pathway of love. The laws pertaining to the latter, to the Sabbath year, are designed to help us insure that our love for God is pure and right and wholesome. There are so many laws here pertaining to love of neighbor that guarantee that we have consideration for someone else, consideration for the poor, consideration for the orphan, for the widow, consideration for someone whose property has been taken away unjustly. Concern that there be a righteous consideration in response to suits of justice. So it is that the Law is designed that we might love our neighbor. The beautiful thing, of course, about being a Christian is that we do not keep the Law in order to be saved. But now that we are saved, we want as a thanksgiving to God to render unto Him obedience in those principles of life that He has taught us. Therefore the Law is not a dead issue for believers. It is only a dead issue in terms of salvation. It will not save us. But it is a very alive issue when we want to look at how our lives may be pleasing to God and how we may in response to God's act of grace respond with thanksgiving and right relationship in love to God and others.

Closing Prayer

LIVING WITHIN GOD'S BOUNDARIES

Exodus 20:21-24:14

We gain Lord, through this lesson today, a fresh understanding in how much You are aware of the things we might think You weren't aware of. How intimately involved You are with our lives. We praise You that You are intimately involved. There may be some things we wish You weren't involved in. That's our reaction when we're guilty and we know we've violated what is right. But on deeper consideration we become glad that You are involved. It is You who have the power to forgive us, to restore us, to grant us healing in our inner man, to restore to us those things which we have lost, whether that is innocence or security or property or goals. You are able to put a right and clean spirit within us and make us whole. We thank Thee that Thou who did give the Law also gave grace, so that in loving response we may set out to please You knowing that already we are accepted fully in thy presence. Create in us a sharp conscience of what is right and what is wrong. But a conscience full of love, more grieved over our own failures than angered over someone else's. Create in us, Lord, that spirit that is always right and proper toward Thee. We thank Thee for the revelation of thyself to us through Jesus our Lord. Amen.