

I am the LORD your God
Exodus 20:1-2
Tampa Covenant Church
31 May 2026

Proposition: Because the LORD is our God, and Redeemer, we are free to joyfully keep all his commandments in the context of a covenant relationship.

FCF: Misunderstanding the nature of grace and law our covenant relationship with God.

RHF: Through the person and work of Christ, God has redeemed his people and brought them into a covenant relationship with himself.

(#1) Introduction:

Today marks the beginning of our OT summer series entitled *The Ten Commandments and the Gospel of Grace*. It's been about eleven years since we preached on the Ten Commandments; so we thank the Lord for our return. Now, it's not uncommon to hear the phrase "Ten Commandments" and instinctively think: "*Oh boy... here come the rules.*" We live in an individualistic culture that pushes back against external rules in favor of ruling self; answering to no one and doing whatever seems right in one's own eyes. So when we hear words like law and commandments, something inside us naturally bristles a bit.

But the title of this series serves as that gentle push back because we can't truly desire to live out these Commandments without embracing the gracious work of God in our lives. Which means living with the understanding that we've been rescued from the enslaving power of sin and now we're free to live joyfully according to God's design. And that relationship is not contractual in nature...as though God has done his part and now we simply do ours. No, it's a covenant relationship where God graciously binds himself to his people and within that relationship we render grateful obedience to all that he commands of us. And that's what we want to discover in today's text. God's people are gathered at the foot of Mt. Sinai and before he gives a single commandment, he reminds them of who he is and what he's done for them. And this will establish the fact that their obedience and ours isn't based on merit, fear or duty, but on gratitude for his grace toward us.

The God Who Speaks (v.1): *Our utmost privilege as God's people*

(#2) I don't know about you but when I think of my interactions with Ex. 20 over the years, I usually rush past the verses in today's text in making a bee line to "*thou shalls and shall nots.*" Eugene Peterson once wrote that when we read Scripture we do so, "*slowly, imaginatively, prayerfully and obediently.*" So we would do well to heed that advice as we embark on our study of Exodus 20. Especially, these opening verses because they're foundational to everything that follows. If we overlook them; it will throw off our perspective on who God is, the purpose of his law and why we should obey.

(#3) So, we look at v.1 and it says, "*And God spoke all these words saying,*" Spending time with this verse may seem like I'm up here trying make a dollar out of fifteen cents but when we slow down, re-read it, and let it filter into our hearts, we encounter one of the great realities running throughout all of Scripture; a God who speaks. An infinite and transcendent God who graciously condescends to reveal himself to human beings in a manner they can truly understand. And we don't want to miss this because serving a speaking God stands at the very heart of our faith. What we know to be true and believe about him is all based on what he's revealed to us.¹

(#4) On page one of our bibles, we repeatedly encounter the phrase, “*And God said,*” as he speaks all of creation into existence. Even after our first parents rebelled against him, he continued to speak in confronting their sin. He pronounced upon the serpent, and in the midst of judgment, promised that the seed of the woman would one day crush the serpent’s head. And as we continue turning the pages of Scripture, we discover a God who continually pursues and initiates relationships with those he calling to himself. (#5) And now here in Ex. 20, God is speaking “*all these words*” to Israel. These words are known as the “The Ten Words”; and they represent the heart of God’s expectations for his people: The first four concern our relationship with him and the remaining six our relationships with each other. Now, these ten words don’t cover every imaginable situation or scenario. Rather, they provide the foundational moral principles that govern the whole of our Christian lives. So, all who hear God’s Word are called to respond with faith and obedience, because to doubt or reject his Word is to ultimately doubt or reject God himself.²

(#6 Blank) So we should pause for moment and reflect on the profound privilege we have as recipients of the very Word of God. Because the same infinite and transcendent God still speaks to us today; revealing himself in a manner we can truly understand. For the last few weeks, I’ve been amazed in listening to Aliesky’s exhortations in prayer meetings and last week his prayer for the needs of our community. He and I meet regularly and without our translator programs, we can barely hold a conversation. But here’s the beauty of it all; the same God that speaks to him in a language he can understand is the same God who speaks to me in like manner. But more than that, this same God has actually given both to Aliesky and me the exact same moral framework to live by. Because these “Ten Words” transcend our cultural, ethnic and language barriers in binding us together as brothers under the Covenant of Grace. And not just us, but every single type of person in this world whom God has called to himself; what a blessing, what an honor; what a privilege. Church, if v.1 teaches us that we serve a God who speaks, v.2 teaches us the kind of God who is speaking.

The God Who Redeems (v.2): *The beauty of God’s redeeming grace*

(#7) The Lord now says to his people, *I am the LORD³ your God*, these words function as the prologue to the Ten Commandments. A prologue is somewhat like a movie trailer, it introduces the main character, gives insight into the storyline, and prepares you for everything that follows. This prologue is doing two things: First, it reveals the identity of the one speaking these commandments. Second, it establishes a covenant relationship as the context in which the Commandments are to be lived out.⁴ So, before Israel hears “*You shall or You shall not,*” they first hear, “*I am the LORD your God.*”

The importance of that name cannot be overstated. We go back to Ex. 3 where Moses is tending his father-in-law’s flock and he encounters a bush that’s burning but not consumed. From that bush, God tells Moses he’s sending him to Pharoah to bring his people out of slavery in Egypt. Moses responded, “*If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me what is his name? What shall I say to them?’*” (#8) God said to Moses, “*I AM WHO I AM.*” Say this to the people of Israel, *I AM has sent me to you.*” Church, God’s name reveals he’s not like us. We’re dependent creatures but he’s self-existent and self-sustaining; he is because he is.⁵ No one gives him life, sustains his power or establishes his authority. And under Moses, the people experienced the full significance of that name through God’s mighty act of redemption. Because by his name, he bound himself the people as their Covenant LORD and gracious redeemer.⁶ (#9) And that redemption is emphasized in the very next

phrase: “*who brought you⁷ out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*” Thus, Israel’s relationship with God didn’t begin with a set of rules but through redemption from slavery. And again, before one commandment is uttered, Israel is not only reminded of God’s powerful name but also of his redeeming grace in bringing them to himself. And it’s within the context of this covenant relationship; Israel is now free to joyfully obey him out of a heart of gratitude. Because the grace that saves always precedes the law that demands. In other words, grace and law belong together, for saving love leads to and excites grateful love expressed in obedience.⁸

(#10 Blank) Yet we sometimes get tripped up on how this works in our lives. One Christian says, “*I can live how I want to because God understands and anyways, he’ll forgive me.*” Another says, “*If I mess things up I can’t imagine how God could ever forgive me?*” Both of these errors flow from a distorted view of God. One disregards his law while the other minimizes his grace. Whenever we place ourselves in either camp we do what D.A. Carson once said, we “de-god God” by creating a god who suits our thinking, personality and disposition rather than beholding the living and true God who has revealed himself to us in his Word. The God we serve is not a laissez-faire deity who grants us a license to do what we want; nor is he some tyrannical ruler waiting behind every corner to catch us in wrongdoing. The right view for us to hold in our hearts is that we serve a God who is both loving and just; he abounds in steadfast love and faithfulness but will by no means clear the guilty. His grace never nullifies his law and his law never diminishes his grace.

And this was precisely the lesson Israel needed to learn. The God who redeemed them out of sheer grace is the same God who throughout the course of redemptive history disciplined them in his justice for their covenant unfaithfulness, in leading to exile. See, Israel didn’t just need to be delivered from Pharaoh; ultimately they needed a Savior who could do perfectly for them what they could never do for themselves; live in perfect obedience to God’s commands. And church, the same is true for us. Because our greatest problem is not ultimately an external foe but an internal one; the corruption of sin that lurks within our hearts; always seeking to disrupt our fellowship with God. But the good news of the gospel is that God has not left us to ourselves. The God who speaks and the God who redeems, is also the God who remained faithful to his covenant promises by sending us a Savior. **(#11) And this** brings us to our final consideration:

The faithfulness of God in Christ: *Obedience marked by gratitude*

So, we turn from Exodus to John’s gospel and we’re greeted by **(#12) another prologue!** And it’s the most important prologue we’ll ever read. John tells us, “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*” Thus, the one who spoke at Sinai is none other than the eternal Son of God. The Word through whom all things were made. The Word in whom there is life and his life is the light that gives life to all mankind. In order for us to experience new life in him, the Word had to become that which he was not in order for us to become that which we were not.

(#13) And that’s what John tells us in v.14, that “*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*” **(#14) And in vv.16-17,** “*For from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace.*” “*For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*” **(#15) John is not** pitting Moses against Jesus nor the law against grace. The law itself is a gracious gift from God to his redeemed people. Rather, John is showing us that the

grace revealed through Moses has now reached its fullness in Jesus Christ. What the law demanded, Christ fulfilled through his perfect life, sacrificial death, and glorious resurrection from the dead.⁹

(#16 Blank) So what Israel could never do for themselves, and what we can never do for ourselves, God has graciously done for us through the person and work of Jesus Christ. He is the faithful Son, the true Israel, and the obedient Savior who perfectly kept the commandments of God on our behalf. So, we don't obey the law to earn redemption; rather, we obey because redemption has already been accomplished. And that work of redemption has been applied to us through the work of the Holy Spirit. We've been justified (declared righteous) received the Spirit of adoption (brought into the family of God). We've been sanctified (cleansed from sin and growing in holiness). And we look for the day when our mortal bodies will put on immortality as we dwell in the presence of our Savior. But until then we continue our Christian journey by faith; trusting in the Lord and resting in him every step of the way. And our journey is also marked by repentance; turning from sin and turning to Christ as we endeavor after new obedience in our relationship with him.

(#17) John Stott put it this way, *Christian obedience is unlike every other kind of obedience. It is not the obedience of slaves or soldiers, but essentially the obedience of lovers who know, love and trust the person who issues the commands.*¹⁰ Stott places Christian obedience in its own category and rightly so. It's not the obedience slaves and soldiers render to their masters and superiors out of duty and fear of negative consequences. But obedience rendered by redeemed children who've drunk deeply from the well of God's amazing grace. And as we continue to grow this understanding, our hearts are increasingly transformed. Obedience ceases to be that burden we reluctantly bear but becomes a joyful response to the love of God that's ours in Christ.

Conclusion:

(#18 Blank) And that changes everything. Because in Christ we're truly free to love and serve God. In Christ, we shake off the folly of self-rule and discover/rediscover the joy of living in full dependence upon him. So, as we walk through these Commandments in the coming weeks; please know they will challenge our assumptions, show us where our priorities are misaligned and reveal the disordered desires of our hearts. Sounds heavy but praise God it's a good thing because it will confirm the truth that God isn't against us; he's for us because he loves us. And for the sake of Christ, he forgives us. So, may we not view these "Ten Words" as harsh demands coming from a distant taskmaster but as gracious instructions from our covenant keeping God who desires the good of his children. And may we receive them as gifts of grace that point us to our need for Christ as we seek to be conformed more and more to his image and likeness. All to the praise of his glorious name; now and forevermore. Amen.

¹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Language," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Daniel J. Treier and Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2017), 475.

² B. M. Fanning, "Word," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 848–850.

³ God as Lord *Jehovah* (or *Yahweh*; Hebrew *YHWH*, "self-existent") is the name of God most frequently used in the Hebrew Scriptures. Lord commonly represents it in the English translations. The Jews meticulously avoided every mention of it and substituted in its stead another word, *Adonai*. They substituted the vowels in *Adonai* for those of *Yahweh* that produced the term *Jehovah*. Dale Ellenburg, "Lord," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Chad Brand et al. (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 1046.

⁴ Patrick D. Miller, *The Ten Commandments*, ed. Patrick D. Miller, First edition, Interpretation: Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 16.

⁵ Ellenburg, , 1046.

⁶ Ibid, 1046.

⁷ Israel is represented by singular pronouns, not only because "singularity" is typical in the direct address of ancient legal material but because the entire nation is viewed as an entity, a united people responding as one to God's commands. Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 446.

⁸ Alec Motyer, *The Message of Exodus: The Days of Our Pilgrimage*, ed. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, The Bible Speaks Today (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), 213.

⁹ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, vol. 25A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 123–124.

¹⁰ John Blanchard, *The Complete Gathered Gold: A Treasury of Quotations for Christians*, (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2014), Logos Software.