

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Exodus: Set Free, Live Free

TITLE: Rules for the Heart

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 21-23

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We are in a series on the Book of Exodus from the Old Testament. Why study this book? Exodus is the Old Testament story of the salvation of God's people that points forward to the great salvation that comes to us by faith in Jesus.

Lead in — I believe one of the biggest reasons that unchurched people today reject Christianity is that they see Christians as rule-keepers rather than lovers. ...Many unchurched people "prone to thinking of religion in general, and Christianity in particular, as a set of rules to be followed. Although authentic Christianity is just the opposite—it is about *being* rather than *doing*, and freedom more than rules—the perceptions, observations, and experience of the unchurched do not align with this understanding of the faith." ... Some Christians today *rightly* say we are "no longer under law but under grace" and they take that to mean that the 613 "laws" in the OT no longer have any significance for our lives today. ...Others say, yes, we are under grace, but we are still bound to live by God's law—but with these folks—it's like a cafeteria style kind of obedience—choosing of this law, this law, and this law, but not that law. *So, how are Christians today supposed to understand and apply God's law to our lives?* That's a question we are continuing to answer as we have the last several weeks, and I promise you, today we will go straight to the heart of that question.

Passage Summary — So far, we've looked at the *what* and *why* of the 10 Commandments followed by a specific focus on the Sabbath command and how it applies to our lives today. Then, we looked at the 52 more detailed laws given in chps 21-24—many of which are specific applications of the 10 Commandments. And last week, Jim helped us see that, in a very real sense, the Sinai Covenant, is very much like a marriage covenant. Today, we will look into these chapters again with a specific focus on how, as bizarre as this sounds, God gave us rules to shape our hearts. But first, here are some ...

Tips for Reading Old Testament Laws (from "Deuteronomy" video, The Bible Project)

1. These laws are the terms of the Sinai Covenant given to ancient Israel, not to all people for all time.
2. Don't compare these laws with modern laws, but with the laws of Israel's neighbors.
3. Discern the core principles of wisdom underlying a particular law.

Example: Look how the apostle Paul applied Deuteronomy 25:4 in 1 Corinthians 9:1-14 and 1 Timothy 5:17-18. (see also Luke 10:17)

POINT: Old Testament laws were not written TO us, but they were written FOR us.

BIG IDEA — God gave specific laws to Israel and for us to shape our hearts to be like his. God gave us rules to shape our hearts, not just dictate our behavior.

- Matthew 22:37-39 ...Jesus boils all 613 laws in the Torah down to two. Love God supremely and love other selflessly.
- When we see people falling short of God's law, we tend to think first about the rules they are breaking rather than the love they are missing.
- God's wants our hearts to be like his, but what does that look like? God tells us exactly what his heart is like in Exodus 33:18-34:8.

What characterizes God's heart? Mercy/compassion, Grace, Patience/slow to anger, Loyal love, Faithfulness, Longsuffering, Forgiveness, Justice

Again, God wants to shape our hearts to be like his. These eight heart qualities can be boiled down to two—justice and mercy—**Micah 6:8**—

Many of the laws in Exodus 21-23 show us mercy or justice or both lived out in the happening of daily life in Israel's day. These laws are far superior and more humane than any laws practiced by Israel's neighbors.

Exodus 21:22-27; 33-36; 22:5-7; 22:21-27; 23:1-19 ...

Now let's add one more qualifier to our BIG IDEA: God gave specific laws to Israel and for us to shape our hearts to be like his—**outward-focused rather than inward-focused**.

THINK—mercy, compassion, grace, patience, love, faithfulness, longsuffering, forgiveness, justice—all these heart qualities don't a thing unless they're focused outward—unless someone outside of you is the recipient of them. You cannot be a person known for mercy and justice unless you are merciful and just toward another person. ...The church or any organized ministry cannot be known for its mercy and justice unless it *does* justice and *loves* mercy and does so in humble ways so that other people experience them.

- The problem is, there's a natural gravity in this world that constantly pulls us back into an inward mindset.
- The primary gravitational pull has to do with how we see other people—especially people who do not believe like we do or people who do not behave like we do.
- What happens is we see people as objects rather than people.

The laws and commands and rules in the Bible are not hammers and chisels that we use to chip away at people outside the faith. No, they are hammers and chisels that God uses to chip away at our hard hearts so that our hearts look like his.

For Discussion —

1. Read through the tips for understanding Old Testament laws and ask for people in the group to give a short explanation of each one.
2. Have someone read Deuteronomy 25:4, another person read 1Corinthians 9:1-14; and another read 1Timothy 5:17-18. What is the underlying wisdom principle found in the Deuteronomy law that the apostle Paul applies to Christian ministry? ...What other ways might the wisdom of Deuteronomy 25:4 be applied today?

3. Talk about how "God's rules are supposed to shape our hearts? In what way are they supposed to shape our hearts? ...What works against that understanding of God's laws?