

Grace Before Law

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[0 : 00] Good evening church. How are we doing? Good.! Grace before law. It was actually grace before sermon. Thank you again to grace.

! Speaking to us. Let me introduce the latest technology here.

So I've got a USB drive that's being turned into a clicker. Check this out. Boom! There you go. See? Isn't it amazing? Yeah? Alright. So let's get started, shall we? Now, what's this grace before law is all about? Is... Yeah, let's turn to the next slide.

Yep. I guess many of us have traveled, right? Some of us actually migrated here to New Zealand.

[1 : 00] Yeah? So just before you land back home in New Zealand, right? The flight attendants would give you like a arrival card. Yeah?

And you know the one, you know, packed with, you know, all this. You declare this, declare that. You can't bring this. You can't bring that. No soil. No fresh fruit. No meat. And some people take a look and will be like, whoa! This country is so fussy.

Right? Why bother? So why do those rules exist? Because the government treasures this land.

They want to protect the ecosystem so that everyone, you, me, our kids, can enjoy this beautiful place.

Now, this is not to make your life difficult. It's all about protecting something precious. Now, when we just read the Ten Commandments, our reaction would probably be, you know, something on the same line.

We're like, oh, another list of do's and don'ts. Boring. But if we, if all we see is the list, we would have missed the person, the God, speaking behind it.

[2 : 15] And we would have missed why He's speaking. Now, today we are in Deuteronomy chapter 5, and I want to show us one thing. The Ten Commandments are not the ticket that gets you into God's family.

They are the blueprint for life for those who have already received His grace. Now, you get into God's family through Jesus Christ.

But once you're inside the house, you've got to respect some house rules, right? So, thank you, Eva, for introducing us to house rules. Now, remember this. Grace comes first, and then the commandments.

Click. Now, we're going to look at the passage like a sandwich today. We'll start off with the altar of bread, which is the opening and the closing of the passage today.

And then we'll bite into the filling, right? The juicy part, which is the commandments themselves.

Click. Now, we have arrived at Moses' second sermon, right?

[3 : 30] We've been spending our weeks before, you know, mulling over the first speech. Now, the second sermon runs from the end of chapter 4 all the way to chapter 26.

It is a massive section, you know, covering all the decrees, statutes, and laws as said in verse 45. And right at the front of this huge sermon sits the Ten Commandments.

Now, before Moses restates the Ten Commandments, he tells us exactly where and when this is happening. So, would you like to, you know, open your Bible, open your Bible app, have a look at what happens before chapter 5.

That would be great. Now, it says, East of Jordan, opposite Beth Peor in the land they took after defeating King Sihon of the Amorites.

What's it all about? It's like signing a contract. A date and a location that tells you this thing is serious. So, in the contract, the next thing, he will be asking, what is the two parties making the contract?

[4 : 47] So, who is God making this covenant with? Look at chapter 5, verse 3. Sorry. Yep. Let's click again. Yes. So, he says, it was not with our ancestors that the Lord made the covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today.

Who is standing here today? Mostly the new generation. The previous generation has almost passed away in the wilderness. Only Moses, Joshua, Caleb remain.

And I would say possibly some of the older women, we don't know. Or some other people. The Ten Commandments were given 40 years earlier. So, the generation that just passed, they were the original covenant partners.

And this covenant basically spans two or three generations. So now, who are the ancestors? We are talking about generations further back.

God's covenant with Abraham, that was a different one. The promises made to Jacob, that was also different. The text is very clear.

[6 : 01] The people God is making this covenant with today are you and us. Now, some might think, so the Ten Commandments are for them, you know, the ancient Israelites.

But for us Christians today, absolutely not. Jesus said, do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have not come to abolish them, but to fulfill them.

That's from Matthew chapter 5. Now, because Jesus came to fulfill the law, the principles behind the Ten Commandments, loving God, loving your neighbor as yourself, are exactly what we are called to live out.

So, why are the Ten Commandments such a big deal? Look at verse 22, which is the high point of this section.

These are the commandments the Lord proclaimed in a loud voice to your whole assembly there on the mountain. And he added nothing more. Then he wrote them on two stone tablets and gave them to me.

[7 : 11] Now, notice three things. First, God spoke directly to the whole assembly. His voice becomes audible to everyone's ears.

Second, God himself wrote on the stone tablets. And the only time the entire Bible, God personally writes with his own hand.

And third, he adds nothing more. Which means this is a complete document with the highest authority, the Ten Commandments. Now, in our age of, you know, texting, emailing, a handwritten letter feels completely different, doesn't it?

I remember, you know, when I was in hospital, Pastor William and your family was kind enough to handwritten a card, you know, using Psalm 33 as a prayer, you know, for our family and for Xavier. That was really, really, really heartwarming. So, yeah, thank you again. It really means a lot, you know, when someone, you know, handwritten, handwritten something to you.

[8 : 22] And look, God here, God himself wrote these Ten Commandments down. So, here's my invitation. This week, spend five minutes a day reading a portion of the Ten Commandments and ask, Lord, what are you saying to me here?

And if you've got family, you've got kids at home, read it together as a family, too. Click. Let's jump to the end of chapter 5 now, right?

Remember the sandwich? So, verses 32 and 33 says, So, be careful to do what the Lord your God has commanded you. Do not turn aside to the right or to the left.

Walk in obedience to all that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess.

Do not turn aside to the right or to the left. This phrase came up multiple times in Deuteronomy. So, Moses pictures God's commandments, his laws, as like a road.

[9 : 32] Obedience isn't just sitting around with your arms folded. It's about standing up and walking forward. But, make sure we're on the right track. It's like a marathon.

So, runners stay on a certain marked course. You know, they sprint as fast as they can. But, if you go off course, things won't count.

The road God marks out leads to a flourishing life. Now, notice verse 33. It says, there are three verbs there, right? Live, prosper, prolong your days.

These aren't rewards for ticking the law keeping boxes. They are the natural results of walking on the road God designed for life.

It's like when a GPS is set to the right route, you would naturally arrive at your destination. Now, today, have we drifted on somewhere?

[10:33] Maybe it's not some massive sin. Maybe you have slowly drifted away from God, from church, from a life of prayer.

This week, why don't we get back on track? Restart your devotions. Show up to your small groups. Because, if you don't, you might end up drifting.

And, you probably won't even realize it. Now, we come to part 2. 10 commandments, the God dimension, the vertical part.

So, now, talking about the 10 commandments, they are also called the 10 words. There is a term called the Decalogue. Literally means, 10 sayings.

They first appear in Exodus 20, which is 40 years before our story in Deuteronomy. So, what we're reading here is Moses restating them.

[11:38] Now, different traditions number the 10 commandments slightly differently. I'm following the Reformed tradition. And, you know the Baptist heritage came from that.

So, verse 6 here. It says, I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. So, this is sort of like the preamble of the 10 commandments.

So, this one line is the foundation of everything that follows. God reminds us, He is the Redeemer. And, only then we can do the you shall not.

The order is theologically important. Grace comes before the law. Redemption comes before commandments. Now, think about a typical workplace.

You got to perform first. Or in schools, right? You perform first, and then you get recognized. In school, you have to hit your grades, right?

[12:42] Then you get certain awards. In work, you have to hit certain KPIs. Then, your boss approves you. So, a lot of us drag that same logic into the relationship with God.

I've got to keep the rules first. Then God, maybe, will be pleased with me. But, Deuteronomy is the opposite. God loves us first.

He is pleased with us first because of Jesus. God redeems you first. Then, He calls you to respond. So, think about this.

When we show up on a worship, you know, a Saturday worship. When we give our tithes, when we serve in our roles, are we doing it because we are scared that God won't be happy otherwise?

Or because God loved us first, and we are responding out of gratitude? Now, from the outside, the two responses may look exactly the same, right?

[13:45] People are still serving, but on the inside, they are world apart. Now, another thought. Could it be that you come to the church because of people other than God?

If this is the case, the fear of people has grown bigger in your heart than your reverence for God. And without realizing it, that already bumps up against the first commandment.

So, let's dive into the first commandment. You shall have no other gods before me. So, in our modern life, in an urban environment, no other gods, probably aren't idols living in the temple.

It could be the fear of people, or maybe the house prices, housing market, trying to get onto the property ladder.

Maybe it's our school achievements, your kids' school achievements, being top of the class, being into the best schools. Or it could be our careers, your identity wrapped up in your job title.

[15:02] Or it could be your social media, the likes literally define your self-worth. Now, look, these aren't necessarily bad.

But the moment they took up God's place, they become other gods. Second commandment. You shall not make for yourself an idol, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.

The Hebrew word there is alkanah, which means jealous. But this jealousy isn't toxic or possessive. It's the rightful demand for faithfulness inside a covenant relationship.

It's like marriage. Your spouse expects faithfulness, right? And that's actually a healthy response. It's actually love.

Now, here comes the tricky bit. Punishing the children for the sin of the parents of the third and fourth generation of those who hate me. And a lot of people would think, that's not fair.

[16:11] But what scholars say, third and fourth generation is actually horizontal rather than vertical. So, in ancient world, extended families lived together under the elders.

Well, like those old Chinese dramas with big family living under a big house. So, the action of the elders affected everyone under that roof.

Now, notice the flip side. God's love to the faithful goes to a thousand generations. That's not even comparable.

Right? God could have said, you know what? If you follow me, I'll bless you to the third and fourth generation. Right? God could have said that, but God didn't.

God is so generous and so loving. A thousand generations, I'll bless you. God's grace overwhelmingly outweighs His judgment.

[17:11] Our God isn't tit for tat. He's overflowing with grace and mercy. Click. Now, let's move on to Commandment 3.

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God. And the Hebrew word translated misuse literally means to carry or to bear.

Now, in the ancient world, slaves were branded with their master's name. Sometimes, you know, even being sealed on their forehead.

So, bearing the name of the God means publicly claiming Him as the master. And misusing it isn't just saying it, you know, carelessly.

You know, like people, like non-believers, right? When they stub their toe, they will say, you know, the name of God. You know what I mean? Yeah.

[18:10] It also includes, so not just that. It also includes claiming to follow God while your life looks nothing like His life. Maybe you have one face at the church and another face at home.

You know how celebrities became brand ambassadors, right? Like they're getting sponsorship deals sometimes, like that worth millions of dollars.

Sometimes one slip up, one scandal, and those millions evaporate overnight. A classic example. About a decade ago, click, click, this guy.

Okay. A famous football star called Ronaldinho, two-time FIFA World Player of the Year, was sponsored by Coca-Cola, right?

Have a closer look at what he's drinking. So, at a press conference, he just casually reached out and, you know, took a sip of Pepsi. Boom.

[19:18] Overnight, Coca-Cola ended his sponsorship, his contract on the spot. He didn't just fail to carry Coca-Cola's name.

He's basically advertising the enemy. Would that be us sometimes? Are we really advertising for God? Or is our behavior more like the enemy's?

We're Christians. We carry the name of our Lord. So, we are his brand ambassadors. We've got to think twice whether our words and actions reflect his name.

And parents, does the way you behave at home match the way you present at church? I'm speaking to myself.

Kids, see straight through what we call performance Christianity. And to, you know, our other brothers and sisters, you know, carrying God's name doesn't mean loudly preaching the gospel, right?

[20:24] It could mean a simple act of kindness. You know, a, just being loving to your neighbors.

That can be the most powerful witness there is. Click. Click. So, we come to the fourth commandment, the Sabbath. Now, Deuteronomy has one key difference from Exodus.

Exodus grounds the Sabbath on the story of creation. Deuteronomy grounds it in the redemption of Exodus. So, Moses emphasizes that your male and your female servants may rest as you do.

So, the Sabbath is also a humane protection for the weak and vulnerable. Now, if you ever, I mean, Auckland work life can be quite busy as well.

But if you ever worked in countries like Hong Kong, Japan, China, you know, some of the longest working hours in the world there is. And life is all about like work, sleep, work.

[21:29] On loop. And even on weekends, you'll be answering messages. And some see being busy as a badge of honor.

And stopping equals failing. So, the Sabbath commandments is a direct challenge to that. God is commanding us to stop.

Pause. Pause. Not because you're not important, but because you're not God. And you need rest. And your family needs your presence.

So, is our Sunday, our Saturday a real Sabbath for us? Or just another busy day? And for the carers, for those who are caring for elderly, parents, children with special needs, are you also giving yourself some, you know, permission to rest?

And sometimes asking help isn't a weakness. And God's design is for us to carry each other. When we create space, we come before God, we settle our hearts, we put down our phones.

[22 : 37] And that, itself, can be an act of worship. Click. Commandment number five. Honor your parents.

Now, this is the only commandments that comes with a promise attached. Honor your father and your mother so that you may live long and that it may go well with you. Now, however, we live in a broken world.

While some parents are loving and self-sacrificing, and honoring them becomes very natural. But some parents would hurt their children, control them, manipulate them, and never show remorse. And what would honor mean in those cases? Now, the Hebrew word for honor literally means to give weight to, to treat with proper dignity.

It means refusing to be contemptuous, refuse to take revenge, because God will take care of that. And the Apostle Peter said, we must obey God rather than human beings.

[23 : 46] So, it doesn't mean that we need to, you know, be lenient towards sin. We need to put up with abuse. Not like that.

That's not biblical. And sometimes, you know, Christians, you know, turn the fifth commandment into a weapon against victims. You must forgive, you know, your abusing parents immediately because of this commandment.

And this is a lopsided reading of scripture. A Christian can honestly say, you know, what my parents did was sinful, and I need to put up boundaries. And still be obedient to the fifth commandment.

Now, it takes time for this kind of situation for the, you know, parents and children to reconcile and to rebuild the sense of trust. So, for parents who continue to cause harm, you cannot use honour your parents to demand instant intimacy.

And interestingly, Jesus said, whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and my mother. So, for believers from painful family backgrounds, the church is often the first place they've ever felt what home feels like.

[25 : 08] Maybe in those very tough situations, we need to fix our eyes on Jesus and be honest and set our boundaries, but without hatred. So, in other words, we can pray something like, well, before God, you know, I can forgive you, but I'm not yet in a place that I can safely trust you.

And that's okay. So, in the broken world, both forgiveness and setting boundaries can be acts of obedience to God. Let's look at the last five commandments.

So, all these five can be understood as one collection. Each one is about protecting somebody else's rights. So, well, someone put it this way.

The Ten Commandments aren't a list of my rights to protect myself. It is a list of my responsibilities to protect others. Do not murder.

Do not commit adultery. Do not steal. Do not give false testimony. And every single one here safeguards the dignity and wholeness of other people and their families.

[26 : 18] Now, since we don't have much time, it will be just a quick flyover. To be honest, each of the commandments here deserve a sermon, at least, on its own.

Commandment 6. Do not murder. That's specifically about the deliberate killing of innocent people. The principle for us is that people are made in God's image.

So, we respect and protect every human life. Commandment 7. Do not commit adultery. We protect the wholeness of every family.

The very design of family flows from the sacred relationship between one man and one woman.

Commandment 8. Do not steal. Protect every family's property.

And just at my dinner, before I came here, I was reminded by a family member that, Hey, Dad, this spoon here doesn't look like yours.

[27 : 28] Doesn't look like ours. Hmm. And I was like, Oh yeah. I must have taken it from the school. Now. Yep.

See, pastors need to repent as well. Commandment 9. Do not give false testimony. Everybody has a responsibility to uphold justice and fairness.

Which is the foundation of a rule of law society. We live in a democratic society. We reap so much benefits because of this.

And the final one. You shall not covet. And then a list of things. This is the hardest, eh? Because it deals with the motives of the heart. In the age of social media, it hits very close to home.

You scroll through Instagram and see someone else's perfect life. Beautiful house. Amazing career. And that little voice of yours goes, How come they have it and I don't?

[28 : 36] That's not just envy. It could become a quiet distrust of the unique gifts God has given you. Now, how do we deal with that? How do we not covet?

Gratitude. Contentment. Which is a great spiritual discipline that we can practice anywhere, anytime. We keep thanking God. We keep praising God for what we have.

Now, we come to the final section. Now, when God gave the Ten Commandments, the people didn't just hear a thunderous voice.

They also saw fire. They felt threatened. It was actually dangerous. They can feel the heat right next to them. The Bible says God is a consuming fire.

And that literally means that. So, let's not casually think, you know, God, I want to see your face. I want to see you.

[29 : 41] God hides himself for good purpose. Otherwise, we would feel very threatened if he, you know, shows his true, you know, manifest his, you know, awesome being in front of us.

So, the Israelites said to Moses, But now, why shall we die? This great fire will consume us and we will die if we hear the voice of the Lord any longer.

They were terrified. Click. So, they asked Moses to be their mediator. Go near and listen to all that the Lord your God says.

Then tell us whatever the Lord our God tells you, and we will listen and obey. And God actually agrees. Verse 28. I have heard what these people said to you. Everything they said was good.

When sinful human beings have to face a holy God, we genuinely need a mediator. And Moses was that mediator.

[30 : 50] But Moses was incomplete, imperfect. He is a sinner himself. And in the end, he couldn't even get into the promised land. Now, picture a bridge.

Moses is the bridge connecting God and the people. But this bridge is temporary. It's incomplete. What about us today?

The New Testament declares, for there is one God and one mediator between God and humankind. The man, Jesus Christ.

Jesus doesn't just deliver God's word. He is the word of God. The Lord God. He doesn't just stand between God and humans. He is fully God and fully human.

And on the cross, he took on no human good. The demands of God's holiness. So we can come directly into God's presence. This bridge now is eternal.

[31 : 50] Now, maybe someone here today hasn't truly put their faith in Jesus. The faith in Jesus. Maybe you feel, I'm not good enough.

I don't deserve to come to God. That's exactly what the Israelites felt at Mount Sinai. But God doesn't say, yeah, you're not holy enough, so you stand back.

He says, come. Come. I've already sent my son Jesus to become your mediator. You can now come boldly to me through him. So the heart of our faith, of Christian faith, isn't a list of rules.

It's about the mediator. And if you'd like to know him, talk to us. Talk to Pastor William, talk to me afterwards. Click.

The theologian Augustine opens his, one of his most famous work ever written called, The Confessions, with this line, right? With this.

[32 : 59] You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you. And before his conversion, Augustine tried everything. Philosophy, pleasure, every kind of other gods.

But the emptiness stayed. It wasn't until he met the God who speaks from the fire that he finally understood. His lifelong search was actually a search for him. And perhaps more accurately, God has been searching actively for Augustine himself.

Deuteronomy 5, 20, 9 says, Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always. Now, that's the cry of the Father's heart.

He's not a cold lawgiver, but a God longing to be his people, to be with his people. And today, this God is still speaking, still longing, and he longs for your heart.

So, the Ten Commandments are not a set of, you can't bring this, you can't bring that to this land, a rifle card. They are the voice of a God who deeply loves you.

[34 : 19] A God who first rescues you from slavery of sin, and then says, This is the road I have designed for your life. Walk on this road, and you will live, you will prosper, your days will be long.

God's heart is this, grace first, then commandments. And he longs for us to live our life to the fullest. And brothers and sisters, this week, let's read the Ten Commandments again and again, slowly. And let's hear what God has to speak to us, shall we? Let's pray together. Dear Heavenly Father, you are holy and awesome.

Thank you for speaking to us today through your word. Thank you for rescuing us from the sin we could never rescue ourselves from. And for giving us Jesus as our mediator, so we can come boldly into your presence.

We are not trying to earn your love by keeping the rules. We love you, and we love others because you already loved us first. And Lord, may you help us to recognize the other gods hiding in the dark corners of our hearts.

[35 : 47] Lord, may you shine your light and help us to turn around, to stop chasing those things that look good, but pull us away from you. Help us use your love to protect the dignity of every person around us, and to honor those you shall not boundaries.

And to the friends here today who are still searching, Lord, let them feel your love and your longing for them. Let them find Christ and discover the freedom and joy that real faith brings.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you. Thank you, Pastor Barry. What a great reminder that all these house rules came from God's relationship of grace to us.

And this relationship...