

The Ten Commandments:

A Gospel View

Scripture: *Luke 18:18-30.*

Summary of Teaching: A gospel view of the Ten Commandments teaches us that our relationship with God depends not on our religious **performance** and **piety** of keeping the Ten Commandments, but instead, from our response to the **person** of Jesus Christ and the good news of His gospel of the Kingdom.

Introduction

After three years of teaching, preaching, and healing mostly in Galilee in the northern part of Israel, Christ Jesus, in **Luke 9:51**, resolutely set out for Jerusalem in the south, where He knew that, upon His arrival, He would eventually be arrested, tried, and crucified.

Christ does not arrive in Jerusalem till **Luke 19:45**. On His long journey from Galilee to Jerusalem, Christ continued to teach and preach His gospel of the Kingdom of God. In these chapters of his Gospel, Luke narrates the various ways in which people responded to their encounter with Christ and His teaching and preaching about the gospel of the Kingdom.

One of the more notable of these encounters is in **Luke 18:18-29** where Christ interacts with a rich young ruler. This encounter gives us a gospel view of the Ten Commandments. It teaches us that our relationship with God does not depend on our religious **performance** nor on our religious **piety** in keeping or trying to keep the Ten Commandments, but rather on our response to the **person** of Jesus Christ and the good news of His gospel of the Kingdom.

So, in this passage, these **3P's** give us a gospel view of the Ten Commandments; **Performance**, **Piety**, and the **Person** of Christ.

I. Our Performance

- 1) In **verses 18 to 25** the rich young ruler came to ask Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life. Or, as Jesus puts it in **verse 25**, what he must do to enter the Kingdom of God.

This rich young man's title of *ruler* refers to his position as a ruler of the synagogue. The rulers of the synagogue were synagogue officials elected by the elders of the congregation. Their duties included looking after the synagogue building and the synagogue property as well as providing general oversight of the public worship in the synagogue.

To be chosen to this position one had to be a very religious Law-keeping person of very high standing in the community. The fact that our young rich man in this passage had been elected as a ruler of the synagogue meant that he strictly observed the Law and the Ten Commandments.

- 2) The origins and the purpose of the Law and the Ten Commandments are described in different places in the OT.

In **Exodus 19:1-2**, exactly three months after God had delivered the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt through Moses, the Lord met with them at Sinai to enact a covenant with them which Bible scholars refer to as the Sinai Covenant or the Old Covenant.

The terms and conditions of the Sinai Covenant are found in various passages between **Exodus 24** and **Exodus 34**. These terms and conditions comprised of 621 rules and regulations the Israelites were to follow.

These rules and regulations revealed God's character to the Israelites as well as God's expectations of His people. They related vertically to their relationship with God Himself, and horizontally to their relationships with one another.

The obedience of the Israelites to these God-given rules and regulations would enable their lives and their community to demonstrate to the pagan nations around them what the character of the true God looked like, and what it looked like to be in a covenant relationship with the living God (**Deut. 4:6-8**).

These rules and regulations also included the Ten Commandments that God had given to the Israelites earlier in **Ex. 20**. Throughout the Bible, these rules and regulations are referred to as *The Law*.

Deut. 5:1-22 and **Deut. 28** spell out both the blessings and the curses that the children of Israel would experience if they obeyed or disobeyed the Law.

Because God knew that the Israelites would not be able to fully obey the Law, He also gave them, also in the Law, various animal sacrifices as their way of atoning for their sins and their unavoidable breaking of the Law.

- 3) It is important to note that, first, purely by His grace, God redeemed the Israelites from bondage in Egypt and, second, He then gave them the Law. Their redemption, like ours today, was by grace, not because the Israelites deserved it (**Deut. 7:7-8**).

The obedience to the Law by the Israelites was meant to be their expression of faith in God, their obedience to Him, and their response of gratitude for God's grace in accepting them to be His people. It was never meant to be the means by which God would redeem or accept them, since He had already redeemed them from Egypt and accepted them, by His grace.

By the time of Christ, this response of faith in God, gratitude to God, and obedience to God, by the Israelites, for His covenant grace, had been lost, and they had come to see their strict obedience to the Law as a means of earning or meriting God's acceptance, salvation, and eternal life.

- 4) So, in this **Luke 18** passage, the rich young ruler came to ask Christ Jesus how he could inherit eternal life because he was seeking an assurance that his religious performance in keeping the Law indeed qualified him for eternal life.

Knowing this, Christ deliberately answered the rich young ruler in **verse 20** by quoting to him five of the Ten Commandments. The first four of the Ten Commandments tell us how God expects us to vertically relate to Him and the next six tell us how God expects us to horizontally relate to one another.

When Christ quoted these five commandments to the young man, the young man replied by saying in **verse 21**: *All these I have kept since I was a boy!*

Christ then asked the young man to go and sell everything he had, to give the money to the poor, and then come to follow Him. In **verse 22** Jesus began His response to the rich young ruler by saying, *one thing you lack*.

That one thing that the rich young ruler proved that he lacked was obedience to the first two and most fundamental of the Ten Commandments. The first commandment says: *Do not have any other gods before me*. The second commandment says: *You shall not make for yourself an idol*.

- 5) By walking away from the Lord upon hearing Jesus' instructions to go and sell everything he had and give the money away to the poor, the young man betrayed his greater allegiance to his idol, which was his wealth. He thus demonstrated that he lived in perpetual disobedience to the first two and most fundamental of the Ten Commandments.
- 6) Both **Leviticus 18:5** and **Deut. 4:1** imply that anyone who obeys all of God's law perfectly all the time shall inherit eternal life. However, **James 2:10** and **Gal. 3:10** explain clearly to us that breaking a single law means one has broken all of them. So, this rich young ruler, although, he said he had obeyed the Law since he was a boy, was in reality, in perpetual breach of the whole Law.

In other words, the Lord made it very clear to the rich young ruler that his religious performance would not qualify him to gain eternal life as he hoped, nor would it qualify him to enter the Kingdom of God, nor enable him to follow Jesus.

This is as true of us today as it was then for the rich young ruler. This is what the Apostle Paul was referring to in **Gal. 2:16** where he declares that no one can be justified by the works of the Law.

- 7) So, we can summarize **our first P** by saying that it is not our religious **performance** of obeying or seeking to obey the Ten Commandments or the Law in general, or from performing any other religious activities, that makes us acceptable to God.

II. Our Piety

- 1) In **verse 23**, when the young man heard Christ's instructions to sell everything and give the money to the poor, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy.
- 2) In **verse 24**, as the young man turned sadly to walk away, Christ said: *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.*
- 3) Jesus uses the word *rich* here with a double meaning to refer to both the *material wealth* of the young man as well as the young man's sense of *spiritual wealth* and piety that he derived from thinking of himself as one who obeyed the Law and therefore qualified for eternal life.
- 4) In **Matthew 5:3**, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus had said: *Blessed are the **poor in spirit** for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.* By the expression *poor in spirit* Jesus was referring to our humble admission to God of our spiritual poverty and sinfulness and our inability to save ourselves through our own pious efforts.
- 5) This "rich" young ruler, so sure of himself and his Law-abiding life, was anything but *poor in spirit*.
- 6) As the rich young ruler walked away, the disciples and the other people who heard Christ's response to the young man were shocked because they knew the piety and the great wealth of the rich young ruler. In that culture, at that time, they believed that wealth was a sign of God's blessing. This is why they said, in **verse 26**: *Who then can be saved?*
- 7) So, we can summarize our **second P** by saying that it is not our perceived **piety** or our self-righteousness from trying to obey the Ten Commandments like the rich young ruler that qualifies us for God's salvation.

III. The Person of Christ

- 1) In **verse 27** Jesus gave the disciples and the other observers of this encounter a response to the question of who then can be saved, by saying: *What is impossible with man is possible with God.*

Jesus was clearly saying that it is impossible for sinful human beings to save themselves through their ultimately futile effort to obey the Ten Commandments. He is the only person who perfectly obeyed the Law.

- 2) In Mark's version of this story in **Mark 10:21**, as the young man turned to sadly walk away from the Lord, Mark tells us that Christ looked at the young man and He loved him.
- 3) This is because Christ could identify with this young man in more ways than one. First, Christ must have been the same age as this young man, and second, this young man, who did not want to lose his family's wealth reminded Christ of exactly what He had done Himself.
- 4) As God the Son, Christ had given up all His divine and infinite wealth and glory in heaven and, at this great cost to Himself, He came to die on the cross to save us who are spiritually poor and lost in our sins and trespasses.

In **2 Cor. 8:9**, this is how Paul put it: *For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you, through his poverty, might become rich.* Paul is referring here to the spiritual wealth of salvation, not material wealth as some prosperity teachers mistakenly interpret this passage.

- 5) This is why at the beginning of this passage, in **verses 18 and 19**, when the rich young ruler referred to Christ as, *Good teacher*, Jesus said to him, *Why do you call me good? No one is good, except God alone.* Although they missed it, Christ was pointing to His hearers that He was God in human form.

So, when Christ asked the rich young ruler to go and sell everything He has and to give this to the poor, Christ was asking the young man to do exactly what He, Jesus Christ, as God the Son, would do for poor sinners like us, to win our salvation.

So, when Christ said: *What is impossible with man is possible with God.* He was teaching them, and us, that it is only by our faith in Him, God the Son, and what He would accomplish for us on the cross, that we enter the kingdom of God and we are saved, and we gain God's eternal life.

This why in **verse 18**, the *eternal life* the rich young ruler talks about is referred to by Jesus Christ in **verse 25** as the *Kingdom of God*, and is referred to as *salvation* by the disciples in **verse 26**.

We receive God's eternal life and His salvation and we enter the Kingdom of God when we receive God's forgiveness of all our sins and all our Law-breaking by virtue of our faith in the perfect sacrifice of Christ on the cross on our behalf. (**Rom. 8:1**).

- 6) God's forgiveness of our sins, and His salvation, become a reality in our lives when we respond in obedience to God the Holy Spirit who calls us to repentance through the gospel and we put our faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross for us. (**John 16:8; Acts 16:31**).

Our repentance involves our change of heart and mind about ourselves and about our relationship with God. Paul refers to this in **II Cor. 7:10** as *godly sorrow that leads to repentance and salvation*.

This is the change of mind and heart the Lord was asking the rich young man to make in this story. He was being asked to accept himself as being poor in spirit, unable to achieve eternal life through his inadequate obedience to the Law, to repent and turn away from His money idolatry, to faith in God, and to thereby obtain salvation in the Kingdom of God.

We get the impression from this story that in the heart of the rich young ruler there was a spiritual hunger and emptiness that could not be satisfied with his great wealth, his Law-keeping performance and his self-righteous piety.

By refusing to repent, the rich young ruler, with all his well-meaning efforts to obey the Ten Commandments, sadly went away missing the eternal life that he had to come to ask Christ about.

- 7) So, we can summarize our **third P** by saying that it is only our repentance from sin, and our faith in the **person** of Christ and the good news of the gospel of the kingdom of God, that grants us the grace of God's salvation, not our feeble effort to keep the Ten Commandments like the rich young ruler.

Conclusion

So, as you can see, these **3P's** from this passage show us that our relationship with God and our salvation do not depend on our religious **performance** and religious **piety** in trying to keep the Ten Commandments, but rather on our response of repentance and faith in the **person** of Jesus Christ and the good news of His gospel of the Kingdom of God.

In **Galatians 2:20-21** the Apostle Paul explains that it is not our efforts to keep the Ten Commandments and the Law that gains us God's righteousness. Rather, when we repent of our sin and we place our faith in what Christ did for us on the cross, the Holy Spirit in-dwells us to impart into us the very life of Christ that now empowers us to obey the Ten Commandments, and to also begin to develop the very character of Christ that Paul refers to as the fruit of the Spirit in **Gal. 5:22-23**.

This is why in **Matthew 5:17** Christ said that He had not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it. Christ fulfills the Law in and through us when we personalize the gospel in our lives and the Holy Spirit transmits the life of Christ into us to empower our lives to reflect the Ten Commandments.

Hebrews 8:10 describes this as the gospel good news of the New Covenant. In the Old Covenant, God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments and the Law, but He did not empower them to obey it. The Law was *external* to them. In the New Covenant that we enter by personalizing the gospel by faith in our lives, the Law is now *internal* for us because it is now written on our hearts by God the Holy Spirit, the Law-giver Himself, who indwells us and empowers us to obey the Law and the Ten Commandments.

The Apostle Paul refers to this in **Gal. 3:24** as the Law being our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

Many Church-going people mistakenly think that, to be a good Christian, first, you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, second, you obey the Ten Commandments as best as you can, and third, you will be saved. The truth of the gospel, however, is that to become a Christian, first you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, second, at that moment, you are saved, and third, now that

you are saved, you are empowered by the indwelling HS to obey and reflect the Ten Commandments in your life.

This means that, as Christians, we no longer need to obey the Ten Commandments out of the fear and anxiety of losing our salvation, but rather out of joy and gratitude for what, Christ, in and through the gospel, has done for us.

In **verses 28-30**, the closing verses of our passage, Peter responded to Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler by saying that he and the other disciples had paid the high price of leaving their homes and their jobs to follow Jesus.

In response to Peter, Christ confirmed that following Him involves personal sacrifice. Christ also reminded Peter that following Him also has great benefits because, in addition to gaining eternal life because those who choose to follow Him will also gain the rich love and provision of the family of God that we see demonstrated in **Acts 2:45** and **Acts 4:34**.

It is my prayer that this gospel view of the Ten Commandments will cause us to celebrate with joy the gospel reality that, as Christians, we obey the Ten Commandments, not so that we can receive God's salvation through our religious **performance** and **piety**, but rather, we obey the Ten Commandments in the power of the Holy Spirit because we have received God's salvation through our faith in the finished work of the **person** of Christ Jesus on the cross for us.

This is the glorious essence of the content and implications of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.

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