

THE TEN PLEASURES

EXODUS 19:3-6

THE PATH TO PLEASURE



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

We live in a desperately unhappy world that is desperately seeking happiness. Despite the passion and pursuit of pleasures, our culture is becoming more negative, pessimistic, and hopeless. Optimistic America is a distant memory as a large majority of people now say that the country is on the wrong track. For the first time ever, American parents do not believe that their children will be better off than themselves. The American Dream is fading fast.

How do we recover the American Dream? How do we change our culture? Or, at the very least, **how can Christians be counter-cultural in their optimism, hope, and happiness?**

The Ten Commandments.

"What? That's the cause of all our problems," we're told. "If only we could shake off these ten pleasure-killers, we'd all be much happier," politicians and pundits tell us. Even some Christians think it's time to dispense with the Ten Commandments and either make up some new modern ones, or else, just trash the whole idea of objective divine laws and be loving instead.

They are all so wrong. They could not be more wrong. That's why we're starting a series of sermons on The Ten Commandments called The Ten Pleasures. I want to persuade you from the Bible that God's Law is not only still relevant, practical, and applicable but also an essential component of a happy life.

BACKGROUND

The Ten Commandments are widely viewed as pleasure killers. Therefore, before we look at each of the Ten Commandments as the Ten Pleasures, we need God's Word to help us with this re-framing of them as the Ten Pleasures. That's why we're going to spend four introductory sermons that will give us the biblical warrant for calling the Ten Commandments the Ten Pleasures:

- The Path to Pleasure
- The Person who is our Pleasure
- The Power of Pleasure
- The Problems of Pleasure

Although God's Law is announced in Exodus 20, the introduction begins in Exodus 19. Israel had left Egypt three months before and had now arrived at Mt Sinai.



1. PLEASURE STARTS WITH REDEMPTION (4)

"You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings..." (4)

"I did." God's Law is introduced with God's deeds. God's doing comes before Israel's doing. God did and Israel simply watched as God defeated the Egyptians and carried Israel out of Egypt like an eagle carries her young up and out of danger on her wings

God's sovereign initiative came before the human response. He plagued the Egyptians while protecting the Israelites. He killed Egypt's firstborn and provided a lamb to protect Israel's firstborn. God's lamb (Ex. 12) came before God's Law (Ex. 20). God's provision came before God's precepts. What God has done comes before what Israel should do.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Our pleasure begins with God's redemption. God's redemption is the essential foundation for our pleasure. Personal pleasure with God's Lamb is the first step towards personal pleasure in our lives.

That's why our pleasure begins with Christ's cross, with seeing what God did to our greatest enemies through Jesus the Lamb of God and how he transported us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of his dear son (Col. 1:3). We sell ourselves to sin for nothing, but God buys us back from sin with everything.

All true pleasure begins with God's salvation. We will be coming back to this again and again because we forget it again and again. We will never change our story of pleasure unless the first chapter becomes redemption through Christ. We will never find any pleasure in God's Law until we find our greatest pleasure in God's Lamb. We will never do anything that makes us happy unless we start with what God has done to make us happy. God makes us most happy with what makes him most happy, his work of salvation through his Son.

OUR GREATEST PLEASURE
IS GOD'S GREATEST PLEASURE



So, do we get to our doing now?
Not so fast.



2. PLEASURE IS A RELATIONSHIP (4)

"...how I bore you on eagles' wings **and brought you to myself.**" (4)

The ultimate aim of the Egyptian defeat and the Israelites deliverance was to bring Israel to himself. It was not to bring them to Sinai, but to bring them to God. The redemption was not just an act of great power but an act of great love. God's redemption brought them into a relationship with God. Rules do not come first or even second. Redemption is first, relationship is second, and only then, as we'll see, do rules enter the picture.

God did not come to Israel first as Ruler with his rules, but as a Redeemer with his redemption, and as a Father with a loving relationship. We see this also in the preface to the Ten Commandments: **And God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery"** (Ex. 20:1-2). There is redemption (I brought you out of the Land of Egypt) and relationship (I am the Lord your God), before there's a hint of law.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

The best pleasures are the best relationships. Good relationships are our greatest joys. That's the case for God too. The relationship within the Trinity is his greatest joy, but he reaches out to us with the offer of a relationship with him. He sent his Son to bring us to himself (1 Peter. 3:18). We run from God but God runs to us.

Relationship is at the heart of God's covenant relationship with his people as he makes clear in the covenant language of both the Old and New Testaments: "I will be your God and you will be my people." God wants us as his people and loves to call us his people.

Just as many in Israel who were in an external relationship with God as members of his covenant were not his spiritual children, so it is in our day. Having a formal relationship with the church is a help, but it's not the end. It's a help towards the end of a living relationship with Jesus.

Most people have no idea how much joy can be found in a living personal relationship with Jesus.

RELATION IS RECREATION
CONNECTION IS CONTENTMENT



Can we now get to the rules?
Yes, but they're not just rules now.



3. PLEASURE HAS RULES (5)

"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant..." (5)

The rules come after redemption and relationship have been established. We only hear "Now therefore... obey" after God secures the redemption of Israel and relationship with Israel. God is saying, "In the light of all I have done for you and all I am to you, here is the way you should respond."

Notice that it's not "obey to enter into my covenant," but "obey to keep [maintain] my covenant." They have entered covenant relationship already but now they are given laws to maintain that relationship and to keep it happy, healthy, and holy. It's faith then works.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

There is no happiness without rules. Rules are required for rejoicing. Perhaps there is nothing that is more difficult for people to grasp than the connection between rules and happiness. In our minds, this seems like a contradiction.

Maybe it's especially hard for Americans to get this connection between law and happiness, because of our love of freedom and independence. But, American freedom and independence are freedom and independence from oppressive and abusive government. The founders did not believe in no government or laws but limited government and for-the-people laws. Our experience of law depends on the character of the law-giver.

In every relationship there are rules, often unspoken but rules nonetheless, that help to maintain the enjoyment and happiness of the relationship. Think of your relationship with your friends, your kids, or even with your wife or husband. Rules can never form or make a relationship, but they do help relationships to flourish. A love without limits is a limited love. But these laws, these limits, these rules must always stay in third positions.

**WE OBEY TO WORSHIP OUR SAVIOR
NOT TO WORK SALVATION**



**What motive is there to keep these rules?
There's the motive of rewards.**



4. PLEASURE IS THE REWARD (5-6)

"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, **you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation'** (5-6).

Israel's gratitude for redemption and relationship is motive enough to keep the rules. But God adds three further motives to reward their obedience. Gratitude looks back and obeys because of what God has done. Reward points them forward to what God will do.

They will be God's treasured possession: This is the word used for a unique and exclusive possession by someone who owns everything. It's the crown jewel of a large collection, the masterwork.

They will be a kingdom of priests: They will be God's mediator to the nations, employed in his service to be a channel of truth from him to them.

They will be a holy nation: God redeemed them out of the nations to be separate to the nations so that they would be an exhibition to the nations. They were God's showcase to the world. The law was to make Israel visibly different.

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Jesus confirms this pattern for us. Just in case we think this is only a New Testament concept, look at Jesus's words in John 14: "**Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him...If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him**" (15, 21). There is redemption, relationship, rules, and reward. There's a reward of special relational intimacy and special missional usefulness. What pleasures await obedience!

**REWARD IS NOT THE BASIS OF SALVATION
IT'S THE BONUS AFTER SALVATION**



Hear God's Story > Change your story > Tell the story > Change others' stories



SUMMARY



PRAYER: Redeemer, give us greater pleasure through a redemptive relationship to your rewarding rules.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What do you usually think when you think of the Ten Commandments?
2. What role do the Ten Commandments have in your life?
3. How can you increase the impact of the Ten Commandments in your life?
4. Give some life examples of where rules have helped human happiness.
5. In what ways does John 14:15, 21 excite and inspire you?
6. How are the Ten Commandments helping you drawn closer to God and be a better missionary or witness to others?

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