

February 23, 2020

Freedom's Formula - If/Then

Sermon Text: Exodus 19:1-8, 20:1-17 Memory Verses Exodus 20:1-3, Galatians 5:14

Sermon Summary

This message looks at two major components of finding spiritual freedom. The first is based on what is known as the covenant formula and is found in Exodus 19:1-8. Before the formula is discussed, it is pointed out that God has always taken the initiative in pursuing a relationship with humankind! The formula is: if/then. God tells Moses if the people do certain things, then He will respond accordingly! Under the Old Covenant this required keeping the law, which the people had promised to do. However, they were unable to do this faithfully and continually were in breach of the covenant. God knew we needed help and would later send His Son Jesus to do just that! A part of this section talks about the New Testament version of the covenant formula, which of course is based on Grace rather than the law, though we still have a responsibility to respond. The second component of the message showcases why the principles of the Ten Commandments are still relevant as guardrails and guides for our lives. The message ends with two Scriptures written by Paul which bridge the if/then, covenant, formula between the Old and New Testaments.

Full Sermon Notes

Intro

God has called you out of darkness! How will you respond? Will you let His voice to silence the lies? Will you allow the precious blood of Jesus cover your sins and allow Him to adopt you into the family and give you His name? If you desire real freedom, then answer to those questions must be in the affirmative! Today we're going to talk about Freedom's Formula. It's found over and over in the Bible, in some way or fashion. It's the If/Then formula, the covenant formula. Today we're going to look at that formula and see what it looked like in the Old Testament and what it now looks like in since the New Testament. Let's pray!

Before we get started with our message this week, I just want to clarify something with you all. Some folks have wondered why we allowed the parades to disembark in our parking lot. The city, along with the Police Department, asked us if they could do this for safety reasons. They've had difficulty finding a good place to end the parades. We are not endorsing or sponsoring, we are simply trying to be helpful to our city leaders and those responsible for public safety! We will be debriefing with city officials to address some of our concerns moving forward. It is my hope some of the folks getting off the floats looked up at the sign on the building and, said, "I didn't know there was a church back here! I'll have to come check it out!" Who knows, maybe someone will find Jesus through it all!

Okay, a lot has happened since the plagues of last week! And by the way, I don't believe gnats turn into flies! When I was briefly mentioning the plagues, flies follow the gnats

and so, “the gnats grew up” was just my attempt to crack a joke. I guess I should stick to preaching and leave the jokes to the comedians. There was another really big thing that happened as the Israelites were fleeing Egypt. God once again hardens Pharaoh’s heart, and he and his whole army pursue the Israelites. I want to reiterate, I don’t fully understand what it means when it says “And God hardened Pharaoh’s heart,” but I know early on in the process, it says Pharaoh hardened his own heart, indicating Pharaoh did have a choice, but later Scripture plainly says God hardened Pharaoh’s heart and used the resulting poor decisions of Pharaoh for His purposes. This will have application as we look at our passages today.

God had led Moses to take a route that seemed like a dead end, Pharaoh’s army on one side and the Red Sea on the other. Of course after seeing all the miracles God had worked through the plagues, the Israelites weren’t in the least bit worried, right? Wrong! Check this out...

Exo 14:10 As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD.

Exo 14:11 They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt?"

Exo 14:12 Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!"

Exo 14:13 Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again.

Exo 14:14 The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."

If you are reading through the plan, you know what happened next. The LORD did fight for the Hebrews and divided the sea. They went through on dry ground, and when Pharaoh and his army pursued, the walls of water on the left and right gave way and Pharaoh and his army perished! The next stage of the Israelites journey on their way to the promised land is where we find extremely important foundational principles for our faith. These God given principles are designed to give us real freedom, spiritual freedom. But as we will discover in the coming weeks, just because the Hebrew people were no longer enslaved by the Egyptian Pharaoh, they were still struggling to find real freedom. Let’s pick up our history lesson from here and we’ll discover...

1. FREEDOM’S FORMULA

Exo 19:1 In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt--on the very day--they came to the Desert of Sinai.

Exo 19:2 After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain.

Exo 19:3 Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel:

Exo 19:4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Exo 19:5 Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine,

Exo 19:6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

Exo 19:7 So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak.

Exo 19:8 The people all responded together, "We will do everything the LORD has said." So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD.

We see in verse 4...

A. GOD TAKES THE INITIATIVE IN PURSUING A RELATIONSHIP WITH US

Exo 19:4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

We've already seen that the Hebrew people had not really pursued a relationship with God! In fact many of them didn't want to leave Egypt. They were content to live in bondage as long as they could have their their appetites fed. So many times I look at this fact and just scratch my head! I just don't understand! Really? Could people be so addicted to their fleshly appetites that they would be willing to live in the horrible and abusive conditions of slavery? The answer is yes and we're not so different today. There are many people who are enslaved to things of the flesh and even though they are living in deplorable spiritual conditions, spiritual bondage, effecting even their physical well being they are blinded to their condition even though it's destroying their very lives!

Thank God He takes the initiative and even though we may not be reaching out to Him, He's reaching out to us! I find my self praying all the time that people will have a moment of clarity to see their need for God and to see God's hand reaching out to save them.

God did amazing things to free the Hebrew people from the Egyptians and He says...

Exo 19:4 ...I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Listen to Jeremiah 31:3 ...

Jer 31:3 The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: "I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.

Jesus compared God's pursuit of us to that of a shepherd...

Mat 18:12 "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?

Mat 18:13 And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off.

Mat 18:14 In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should be lost.

But then we find this powerful passage in Isaiah which reveals what God sometimes faces in His outreach...

Isa 65:2 All day long I have held out my hands to an obstinate people, who walk in ways not good, pursuing their own imaginations--

Sometimes First Responders face a similar thing. Believe it or not, there are people who flat out refuse the help offered, and at other times they literally fight you and don't want to listen to the instructions you are giving to try and save their very life! Many of you know I believe Jesus to be the ultimate First Responder because He left the safety of His station in Heaven to come to this dangerous and inhospitable world to respond to our spiritual crisis! Listen to these chilling words, from Jesus as a first responder...

Mat 23:37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

Mat 23:38 Look, your house is left to you desolate.

We find Isaiah 65:2 quoted in Paul's writings in the book of Romans where he gives us additional insight...

Rom 10:16 But not all the Israelites accepted the good news. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed our message?"

Rom 10:17 Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.

Rom 10:18 But I ask: Did they not hear? Of course they did: "Their voice has gone out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world."

Rom 10:19 Again I ask: Did Israel not understand? First, Moses says, "I will make you envious by those who are not a nation; I will make you angry by a nation that has no understanding."

Rom 10:20 And Isaiah boldly says, "I was found by those who did not seek me; I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me."

Rom 10:21 But concerning Israel he says, "All day long I have held out my hands to a disobedient and obstinate people."

Rom 11:1 I ask then: Did God reject his people? By no means! I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin.

Rom 11:2 God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what the Scripture says in the passage about Elijah--how he appealed to God against Israel:

Rom 11:3 "Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me"?

Rom 11:4 And what was God's answer to him? "I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal."

So we see in this passage in Romans that God didn't reject His people, but many, not all, but many, chose to reject him. And that brings us to the formula for freedom which is actually the Covenant Formula found throughout the Bible, but spelled out in our text in Exodus. It's the if/then formula. God has taken the initiative but...

B. GOD HAS GIVEN HUMANKIND HUMANKIND RESPONSIBILITY TO RESPOND

Exo 19:4 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Exo 19:5 Now **if** you obey me fully and keep my covenant, **then** out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine,

Exo 19:6 you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."

This is so powerful and informative when we are attempting to understand how we find the spiritual freedom God wants us to have. He makes it so plain that He has already done the work to carry us to Himself and now He gives us the formula. If are willing to obey Him by entering into a covenant agreement with Him by receiving His offer of love, grace, forgiveness and acceptance, then He will be our God, our Savior, our Redeemer, our Rock, our everything and we will be His people!! Do you remember the covenant promise God made to Abraham?

Gen 17:7 I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.

Gen 17:9 Then God said to Abraham, "As for you, you must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you for the generations to come.

God was letting Abraham know that a covenant agreement is not a one way street! It is an agreement between two parties. It is a promise offered to us if we are willing to accept the terms. We see this if/then formula over and over again in the Old Testament.

Deu 7:12 **If** you pay attention to these laws and are careful to follow them, **then** the LORD your God will keep his covenant of love with you, as he swore to your forefathers.

And when you think about this if/then formula being not only the covenant formula, but a formula for freedom, you might realize it is also the formula for revival.

2 Chr 7:14 **if** my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, **then** will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

2 Chr 7:15 Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayers offered in this place.

C. THE IF/THEN FORMULA UNDER THE NEW COVENANT

Now what does this if/then formula look like in the New Testament, under the New Covenant? How about I just let Jesus answer that question.

Mat 16:24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Mat 16:25 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.

Mat 16:26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

And talk about a perfect example...

Mat 19:16 Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

Mat 19:17 "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments."

Mat 19:18 "Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, "'Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony,

Mat 19:19 honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Mat 19:20 "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

Mat 19:21 Jesus answered, "**If** you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. **Then** come, follow me."

Mat 19:22 When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

Mat 19:23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

So notice that Jesus mentions the Ten Commandments, but not all of them. He noticeably left out the first two...

Exo 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before me.

Exo 20:4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything...

This young man's wealth was his god and his idol! He wasn't willing to enter into a covenant agreement with God if it meant giving up his idols! Jesus was not trying to tell the young man he had to be perfect in his following of the law, He was basically saying to him, "if you'll give up your idols and then come follow me, you'll find what you're looking for!"

2. FREEDOM IS PROTECTED BY GUARDRAILS

One of the most famous parts of our history lesson concerning the Hebrew people is found in the amazing rule of law God gave Moses to give to the people. Ten Commandments!

Exo 20:1 And God spoke all these words:

Exo 20:2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

Exo 20:3 "You shall have no other gods before me.

Exo 20:4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

Exo 20:5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,

Exo 20:6 but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Let me interject something here very quickly. When we think of jealousy, we think of petty human emotions. The word used here is an adjective in the Hebrew used only of the Lord and means zeal or ardor, which means enthusiasm or passion. God has a passionate enthusiasm about His relationship with His children. Remember, He gave the Israelites a choice and they made a commitment to do all that God had asked of them. They made a covenant promise! But they broke the covenant. Here's the harsh reality, many times when parents break their promises, their commitments, their covenants, the children are watching and learning and if they follow suit then they too will be subject to the consequences and the punishments. This bad example can influence many generations in a bad way. However, we know from other Scriptures, that a person who turns to God, regardless of what sins their parents committed, if they call upon the Lord, God gives grace and mercy! How do I know this? The Word of God!

Josh 24:14 "Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD."

So regardless of what their parents had done, they still had a choice.

Okay, back to our text...

Exo 20:7 "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

Exo 20:8 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Exo 20:9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work,

Exo 20:10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.

Exo 20:11 For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Exo 20:12 "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

Exo 20:13 "You shall not murder.

Exo 20:14 "You shall not commit adultery.

Exo 20:15 "You shall not steal.

Exo 20:16 "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

Exo 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

While we are no longer under some of the Levitical laws, like the dietary laws, Jesus stated very plainly that He did not come to do away with the law, but to fulfill the law....

Mat 5:17 "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.

Mat 5:18 I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.

Mat 5:19 Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Jesus fulfilled the righteous requirements of the law which we could never do, because we've all broken one or more of the Ten Commandments, if not literally, certainly we've all broken the spirit of the law at some point in our lives. So we are not saved by keeping the letter of the law, but by the Grace of Jesus, but that doesn't mean we are not to live lives guided by the principles of God's law! These principles are our guardrails for life, but Jesus is our righteousness. Before Jesus, people tried and failed to keep the purpose, the intent and the spirit of the law and were enslaved to condemnation, guilt, and a spirit of hopelessness. Therefore they would many times just abandon trying to do the right things, since they were weak and couldn't live up to the law. When people abandoned the laws of God terrible consequences ensued! Why? Because the law was designed to guide our lives and help us live in a peaceful, good relationship with God and with our fellow human beings. The first four laws govern our relationship with God and the other six govern our relationship with our neighbor! Thus the two greatest commandments according to Jesus are...

Mark 12:30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.'

Mark 12:31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

You might be thinking, "well Pastor Larry, you don't know my neighbor!" Let me say this: If you are loving God with all your heart, He'll give you the ability to love your neighbor! That's why our memory verse from Paul says this...

Gal 5:14 The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."

I'll end with this! Paul bridges the if/then formula between the Old Testament and the New Testament in a powerful way in the following verses found in Galatians and Romans...

Gal 3:21 Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.

Gal 3:22 But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, **might be given to those who believe.**

Gal 3:23 Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed.

Gal 3:24 So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith.

Gal 3:25 Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.

Gal 3:26 You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,

Gal 3:27 for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Gal 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Gal 3:29 If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Listen closely because this could set you free, if you are willing to receive what is being offered!

Rom 3:19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God.

Rom 3:20 Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.

Rom 3:21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

Rom 3:22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ **to all who believe.** There is no difference,

Rom 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

Rom 3:24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

Rom 3:25 God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood...

Let's pray!