

**DOWN THE UP STAIRCASE:**  
Rightly Relating to the Law of God  
(Exodus 20:1-21)

**I. PRELIMINARIES**

A. Welcome

B. Pastoral Prayer

C. Today's Text:

Then God spoke all these words, saying, <sup>2</sup>“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. <sup>3</sup>“You shall have no other gods before Me. <sup>4</sup>“You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, <sup>6</sup> but showing loving kindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. <sup>7</sup>“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain. <sup>8</sup>“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup> Six days you shall labor and do all your work, <sup>10</sup> but the seventh day is a Sabbath of the LORD your God; *in it* you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. <sup>11</sup> For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. <sup>12</sup>“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you. <sup>13</sup>“You shall not murder. <sup>14</sup>“You shall not commit adultery. <sup>15</sup>“You shall not steal. <sup>16</sup>“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. <sup>17</sup>“You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” // <sup>18</sup> All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw *it*, they trembled and stood at a distance. <sup>19</sup> Then they said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.” <sup>20</sup> Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin.” <sup>21</sup> So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God *was*.

D. Prayer over the ministry of the Word

**II. INTRODUCTION**

A. Ebenezer Erskine's Life Verse

- His first encounter, at 10 years old: (Westminster Shorter Catechism)

**Q. 43. What is the preface to the Ten Commandments?**

A. The preface to the ten commandments is in these words, *I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*

It sounds like a claim, but he does not understand or yield. Nevertheless, he enters the ministry as an unregenerate man. Terribly unsuccessful, yet loved and prayed for by his believing wife.

- At 28, his second encounter, at his conversion:

“Some few weeks after my wife’s illness and blessed recovery, she and I were sitting together in my study, and while we were conversing about the things of God, the Lord was pleased to rend the veil and to give me a glimmering view of salvation which made my soul acquiesce in Christ as the new and living way to glory.’ The old text comes back to him: “I am the Lord thy God!” Once more it sounds like a claim. But this time he yields. He makes his vow in writing. ‘I offer myself up, soul and body, unto God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. I flee for shelter to the blood of Jesus. I will live to Him; I will die to Him. I take heaven and earth to witness that all I am and all I have are His.’

- At 38, his third encounter, and the best sermon he ever preached: *A Treasure of Gospel Grace Digged out of Mt. Sinai*
- Question: Why did the text haunt him? Why did it mean so much to him? What had he seen in it that brought him so much wisdom and joy? In today’s message, I will try to tell you.

B. Today’s Big Idea: If you try to reach God and heaven by going up the down staircase of God’s Law, the Ten Commandments will become your mortal enemy, and you will wind up in fear and trembling like the Israelites at Mt. Sinai. But if you go down the up staircase of God’s Law, starting with a revelation of His covenant love and grace given to us in Christ, the Ten Commandments will become your lifelong friend, lifting you up daily into a richer and richer relationship with your Heavenly Father, your Savior, and the Spirit of the Triune God (Slide)

### **III. WRONGLY RELATING TO THE LAW OF GOD: Up the Down Staircase**

- A. What we sinners know in our knower
- B. What we foolishly try to do
- C. What we inevitably wind up experiencing
- D. Let’s start at the bottom of the staircase:

<sup>17</sup>“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

- Example #1: The rich young ruler (covetousness): He went away sorrowing (Mark 10:17-31)
- Example #2: The rich young Pharisee (more covetousness): He went away slain! (Rom. 7:7-12)
- MP: It's always like this: You wind up like the Israelites, in fear and trembling, crying out for a mediator!

#### **IV. RIGHTLY RELATING TO THE LAW OF GOD: Down the Up Staircase, and Back Up Again!**

A. Instead of starting at the bottom, now let's start at the top.

B. A Personal Relationship:

Then God spoke all these words, saying, <sup>2</sup>“I am the LORD your God . . .

C. A Privileged Pedigree:

I am the LORD your God *who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*

- Chosen by the Father
- Redeemed by the Son
- Called and Rescued by the Spirit (to the Good News of salvation by grace through faith in Christ)
- And securely on the way to glory and the Promised Land!

But now, thus says the Lord, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! – Isaiah 43:1f

D. A Top Priority:

<sup>4</sup>“You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup>You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, <sup>6</sup>but showing loving kindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

E. A Pathway to Purity, Pleasure, and (eventual) Perfection: Precepts and Prohibitions

V. CONCLUSION

A. Up the Down Staircase: The Laborious Work of a Lifetime!

B. Down the Up Staircase: The Master Key to a Journey of Joy!

<sup>18</sup>For you have not come to *a mountain* that can be touched, or to a consuming fire, or to blackness and gloom and tempest, <sup>19</sup>or to the blast of a trumpet, or to *the* sound<sup>10</sup> of words such that those who heard *it* begged that no further word should be spoken to them. <sup>20</sup>For they could not endure what was commanded: "If even a wild animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned." <sup>21</sup>Indeed, so terrifying was the sight *that even* Moses said, "I am filled with fear and trembling." <sup>22</sup>But you have come to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God: the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in festal gathering, <sup>23</sup>and to the assembly of the firstborn *whose names are* recorded in heaven. You have come to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect. <sup>24</sup>And you have come to Jesus, the Mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks *a better word than the blood of Abel*. – Heb. 12

C. Ebenezer Erskine at the End of His Journey

- At 73, and a year prior to his death:

When Ebenezer Erskine lay on his deathbed, one of his elders said to him, "Sir, you have given us many good advices; may I ask what you are now doing with your own soul?"

"I am just doing with it," he replied, "what I did forty years ago: I am resting on that word--'I am the Lord thy God.'"

- At 74, and the day of his death:

His last illness continued for twelve months. It was in its earlier stages that the old elder asked his question and received his minister's testimony concerning the text. A year later Mr. Erskine referred to the words again. On the morning of the first of June, he awoke from a brief sleep, and, seeing his daughter, Mrs. Fisher, sitting reading by his bedside, he asked her the name of the book. 'I am reading one of your own sermons, father!' 'Which one?' 'The one on "I am the Lord thy God!"' 'Ah, lass,' he exclaimed, his face lighting up, as a wave of sacred memories swept over him, 'that is the best sermon I ever preached!' A few minutes later he closed his eyes, slipped his hand under his cheek, composed himself on his pillow, and ceased to breathe. The noble spirit of Ebenezer Erskine was with God.