

10 Commandments E14: Weightier Matters Beneath the 10 Commandments

Speakers

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Jon: We've come to the final episode in our series on The Ten Commandments, or as the Bible calls them, the 10 Words. Now, all along, we've kept referring to this idea that the 10 Words are not simply rules or commands to check off a list. These 10 Words orient us to true reality.

Tim: They are creating a moral imagination and a moral universe—a set of claims about what is really true about the world we inhabit.

Jon: All of God's commands work this way. Every rule and regulation in the Bible is an opportunity for us to look underneath and find God's wisdom.

Tim: The most common word, other than, like, command or statute or rule or regulation, that's used to describe how God is trying to get his people to live, is the word wisdom. The 10 Words are aimed at instilling wisdom in God's covenant partner.

Jon: Now, we may think of wisdom as just advice. You can take it or leave it. But in the Bible, wisdom is essential.

Tim: To live with wisdom is to live in a way that leads to life. You're living in tune with reality. So it's the difference between "I'm doing it because God commanded me" and "I'm doing it because God loves me and is showing me the way to life."

Jon: All of the commands in the Bible—they're pointing to weightier matters of life, matters that Jesus teaches us to keep front and center.

Tim: In Jesus' mind, justice, mercy, and faithfulness are the values of the moral universe. And the commands are, like, surface manifestations of all these different ways you could apply the heavier values. But this isn't Jesus innovating. He's just carrying forward this tradition of seeing all the commands as facets of a diamond pointing to a— a common core.

Jon: Today, Tim Mackie and I wrap up this series on The Ten Commandments by reflecting on God's commands as wisdom that leads to life. And of course, as wisdom that leads us to Jesus himself.

Tim: He is the model and example of, like, the true human fulfilling all the wisdom of God. And we actually will find true life and wisdom by joining our lives to his.

Jon: Thanks for joining us. Here we go.

[Musical break (2:10—2:12)]

Jon: Hey, Tim.

Tim: Hello, Jon Collins.

Jon: Hello.

Tim: Hello.

Jon: We're going to wrap up our conversations on the 10 Words.

Tim: Mhm. Yes, we are. Yeah. It's been such a great set of conversations.

Jon: You were kind of surprised—

Tim: I was.

Jon: —at how much you enjoyed it.

Tim: You know, yeah. I always, of course, like talking with you through the Bible—it's one of my favorite parts of this whole project. So that's always fun. But I think coming in, I just didn't know, quite, if we would have enough to talk about for The Ten Commandments.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: But I was surprised about where the conversation went and really enjoyed it.

Jon: Yeah. Me too.

Tim: Like my own appreciation of The Ten Commandments deepened in the process of talking through them with you.

Jon: Yeah, absolutely.

Tim: So we're trying to practice the communal value of meditating. So remember our conversation about how, within the Torah, these 10 things are never referred to as the 10 Commands.

Jon: When they're introduced as a unique set, they're not called commands.

Tim: When God's speech, in Exodus 20, verses one to 17, is referred to as, like, a speech, it's called the 10 Words.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: The *devarim*.

Tim: The *devarim*. Yes, exactly. So we spent a while pondering that fact.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: One puzzle, if you go through the speech, is that there aren't 10 commands. There's actually a lot more if you're just looking at sentences that have commands.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So "There will not be for you other 'elohim." There's number one.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "You will not make an idol. You will not worship them." That's the third—

Jon: The idol.

Tim: —command.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: "You will not serve them." That's the fourth.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: "You will not carry the name." That's the fifth. "Remember." That's the sixth.

Jon: "Remember the Sabbath"?

Tim: Yeah. "Six days, labor and do your work. The seventh is the Sabbath. Don't do any work."

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So already we're up to what is traditionally command number four, but we technically already have, like—

Jon: It's stated in eight different commands so far.

Tim: Exactly. So you go through—there's more than 10 sentences that have a command.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So that's kind of the puzzle here.

Jon: Right. Okay, so the words aren't the commands.

Tim: Yeah. So the words are not identical to command. So what—words is more general. Ten matters.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Well, what are the 10 matters? Because there's a bunch of words in here that are not strictly commands.

Jon: And we didn't limit ourselves to a list of rules.

Tim: Right.

Jon: We thought about them in terms of—

Tim: Yes.

Jon: —a way to think about ourselves and the whole world.

Tim: That's right. Exactly.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: They are creating a moral imagination and a moral universe within which we live. And the first thing is, who or what is the ultimate reality? The first words really are "I am Yahweh your Elohim, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt—"

Jon: That's a matter.

Tim: "—out of the house of slavery."

Jon: "I am Yahweh Elohim."

Tim: "And I—I am." I think that's—that's the takeaway, that these 10 matters are a way of world-building.

Jon: So what was surprising to me was that the world-building exercise felt so compelling to me.

Tim: Hmm.

Jon: Right? Like, “Do not steal” feels pretty drab.

Tim: Oh.

Jon: You know?

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: A kindergarten rule.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: But the world-building we did around helping our communities steward what God’s given to each of us in, like, a communal way felt so rich and big and beautiful.

Tim: That’s right. Yeah—

Jon: And that was pretty good.

Tim: “Don’t commit adultery.” And then we flipped it over: “Contribute to creating a culture that supports and encourages lifelong covenant commitments, so that families can flourish.” So you flip it over.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah. Yeah. That’s right.

Jon: You did mention to me, just recently, that Genesis 1 —

Tim: Oh, thank you. Thanks.

Jon: —has 10 words.

Tim: That’s right.

Jon: And I wanted to ask you a little bit more about that.

Tim: Oh, great.

Jon: So there’s 7 days in Genesis 1.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Six days where he creates, where God creates.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And in that whole poetic narrative, there's 10 separate times where—what happens?

Tim: 10 moments in the story where the phrase “And God said—”

Jon: “And God said.”

Tim: And then there's a quotation of something God says.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Yeah. So God speaks a total of—yeah— 10 times.

Jon: So God speaks 10 times.

Tim: Ten words. Yeah. Totally. Exactly. Yes. So if the 10 Words in Exodus are world-building a

moral universe, then in the seven-day creation story, that is another world-building story.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's building the cosmos.

Jon: It's very literally world-building.

Tim: It's literally a world-building story about Yahweh building the world, yeah.

Jon: Okay, so the 10—the 10 Words to Moses are a world-building of your moral framework.

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: And the 10 words in Genesis are God creating—

Tim: Yeah, creating the—

Jon: —just, the fabric.

Tim: —the cosmic framework—

Jon: The cosmic framework.

Tim: —framework for everything.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah, that's right.

Jon: Okay, wow.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Interesting.

Tim: And the 10 words that build the moral cosmos that are given to Moses are built on—or they're filling out—the implications of the 10 words that created the cosmos, as it were.

Jon: Okay. What does that mean?

Tim: Yes. Yeah. Maybe—I think it was a bit of what I was trying to say a couple of minutes ago, but probably in clunky language, that the first word is “I am Yahweh your Elohim.”

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So your view of ultimate reality, actually, is what determines, I think, almost all of our conscious choices and behavior, whether we know—or unconscious choices and behavior.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: I think that's pretty—that might be too general about a statement of human psychology, but for the most part, we go about our days making decisions based on what we think is the case—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —about reality.

Jon: There's so much information coming into our bodies.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: We have to interpret it through a framework.

Tim: Mhm. Yes, that's right.

Jon: And so you are always kind of interpreting through what you expect.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Like, you kind of have to.

Tim: Mhm. Mhm. Yeah. We all are actually making decisions every day based on what we think is really true.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And what we think is really true might not be what we think we think is true. What we think we think is true—

[Laughter]

Jon: Right.

Tim: —is what we tell ourselves, but our behavior is—

Jon: Communicates what we really believe is true.

Tim: What we really believe. And so The Ten Commandments are—and the seven-day creation narrative—are creating a set of claims about what is really true about the world we inhabit. And then, saying these behaviors will actually—are, like, the logical—if you really believe another human is a sacred image of God of transcendent value, not only not taking their stuff is a natural consequence of that, but then helping them care for the gifts God has given them will also follow.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: I think that's more what I'm going for. When you said earlier—a few minutes ago—as we talked through them, they became compelling to you.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: The Ten Commandments in a new way. Is that what you're referring to? Like, when you think through the value set underneath them, the moral universe they create, is what you were saying earlier that you found that compelling?

Jon: Yes. It was—I—I found it shifting the way I viewed reality, yeah.

Tim: Mhm. Mhm.

Jon: Like, tinkering with my framework in small and large ways.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: So that, now, the way I kind of exist in the world felt different.

Tim: That's right.

Jon: Felt like, “Oh, I'm thinking about things differently.” I don't know if I mentioned this, but you—when we were talk—in the “Do not steal” conversation, you—you described that moment you're on Mount Tabor running, and you saw the Patagonia.

Tim: Oh, yeah.

[Laughter]

Jon: So you kind of, you told that whole story, and then the whole little like—

Tim: The jacket, yeah.

Jon: Yeah, the jacket.

Tim: Yeah.

[Laughter]

Tim: That somebody left on the bench.

Jon: Yeah. And “Should that be mine?” and that whole conversation in your mind.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: It was maybe just a week after that or two, I’m running through my park.

Tim: Oh, near your house.

Jon: Near my house.

Tim: Yeah, yeah.

Jon: And there was a five-dollar bill on the trail.

[Laughter]

Jon: And because we had just had that conversation, I just kind of stopped, and I kind of took it, and I folded it nicely, and I just put it in the crook of a tree.

Tim: No way!

Jon: And I was like, “If someone comes back to find it, they’ll find it right here.”

Tim: They’ll be so stoked.

Jon: Yeah. And it—it just felt like the most natural, right thing to do.

Tim: I see. You didn’t have to convince yourself.

Jon: I didn't have to conv—I didn't have to have the mo—

Tim: See, I had to conv—I had to convince myself not to pick up the jacket.

[Laughter]

Jon: Well, we just had the conversation and it—uh.

[Laughter]

Tim: That's funny.

Jon: I was living in this—

Tim: You were living in it.

Jon: —moral universe in a new way through the 10 Words.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: And it didn't feel like a rule. It didn't feel like, "Oh, cool. Now God's pleased with me," or "I checked that off the list."

Tim: Mmm.

Jon: It just felt like, "Cool. I get to participate in something more significant—"

Tim: That's great. That's great, Jon.

Jon: "—than the way I might otherwise live in the world."

Tim: Yeah. That's great. That's excellent. Yeah. You're describing what I have experienced and what I think the 10 Words are supposed to do.

[Musical break (11:28—11:30)]

Tim: Okay, so if the 10 Words in the seven-day creation narrative, and what God first says to the people of Moses at Mount Sinai. If they're world-building, that means they're also—they're aimed at shaping a people to live in a certain way, which is what's happening at Mount Sinai. When God speaks the 10 Words to Israel, he's—what do you say?—enlisting them as his partners and representatives to the nations, to be right, to be the kingdom of priests. And the most common word other than, like, command or statute or rule or regulation that's used to describe how God is trying to get his people to live—like, we might think of common Bible words that describe a right way to live, righteous or holy, but like, right up there, high on the list of words that describe how the laws are aimed to get people to live is the word wisdom. And for me, this is the second insight I've come to appreciate more about the 10 Words: they really are a key—what do you say?—a watershed moment in the developing theme of how all of God's commands are aimed at instilling wisdom in God's covenant partners. Moses straight-up says it in Deuteronomy chapter four. And I don't think we looked at this in our little overview back at the beginning. I think we ended at Mount Sinai.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. So after Mount Sinai, and after the journey through the wilderness that went terribly—the 40 years—Moses, right before the Israelites are about to go into the promised land, gives a set of speeches that we call the book of Deuteronomy. And he reflects back on what happened at Mount Sinai and the covenant and what God said. And the way he describes that moment in Deuteronomy 4 is so interesting. He's, like, he's retelling this past event. He describes it this way. He says, "Look, now"—that is to you all in this moment—"I am teaching you all statutes and just rules." So statutes is our word *khuqqim*, which means inscribed, like etched in stone.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Just like the 10 Words were written on the stone tablets.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And then "just rules" is the Hebrew word *mishpatim*.

Jon: Oh, from *mishpat*.

Tim: From *mishpat*, which means—uh—action you undertake with a public, kind of, consequence.

Jon: Public good.

Tim: Public good, yeah. To bend a certain situation in my community towards righteousness, towards right relationships between people.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So *mishpat* is the action you take to create a situation of righteousness.

Jon: Hmm. That made that way more clear than that's ever been in my mind.

Tim: Oh, really?

Jon: Yeah, that's great.

Tim: Oh, yeah, *mishpat* and—

Jon: Because we've talked about *mishpat* versus *tsedaqah*, and—

Tim: Yeah. Justice and righteousness.

Jon: Yeah. Justice and righteousness.

Tim: Yeah. Righteousness is, like, the standard. Justice is the thing that you do to get a situation up to the standard.

Jon: Cool.

Tim: Yeah. Okay, so, "I'm teaching you statutes and just rules, just as Yahweh my God commanded me." So you can—

Jon: Referring to the 10?

Tim: Referring to ...

Jon: And—or all the commandments?

Tim: Referring to everything God said—

Jon: Yeah, the 10, the 42, the 600—

Tim: —at Mount—at Mount Sinai. And all the others, yeah. Exactly. "So you can observe them"—or follow them—"in the middle of the land where you're going, as you take possession of it. You must observe these diligently. For this is your wisdom. This is your discernment before the eyes of all of the people who are going to hear these statutes. So they can say, 'Whoa, this great nation is so wise. They are so discerning.'"

Jon: Hmm. What's the word for discerning there?

Tim: It's the word *binah*. You love this word.

Jon: I do.

Tim: You've come to love this word.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: *Binah*.

Tim: Discernment.

Jon: Understanding, it's often—

Tim: Yeah, understanding.

Jon: —translated.

Tim: It's *bin*, which was related to the Hebrew preposition *ben*, which is “between.”

Jon: Yeah. To between.

Tim: To be able to tell between good and bad.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah. So discernment—

Jon: Discernment.

Tim: —is a good—actually a good English word for it.

Jon: Okay, okay.

Tim: How do you know one thing from another thing? You have to discern.

Jon: How do you “between”?

Tim: How do you “between” it? So Moses explicitly says the laws are wisdom.

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: And they're aimed at teaching you how to tell between good and ... he doesn't say between good and bad, but that's what discernment means.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Mhm. And then, also, that Israel is to become this wise people as a model of a new way of being a group of humans together before other people groups. So he just says it straight-up. Wisdom. So wisdom isn't just about good advice.

[Laughter]

Tim: I think sometimes we can use the word wisdom in English to mean, like, advice.

Jon: Interesting.

Tim: Like, eh, it's probably good. It's good advice. You can take it or leave it. But to not follow wisdom is to be a fool and to choose death and destruction.

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah. The fight against the cosmos.

Tim: Exactly. Yes.

Jon: Yes.

Tim: To live with wisdom is to live in a way that leads to life. Wisdom is life, which is what he goes on to say at another point in Deuteronomy. At the end of Deuteronomy, when he's trying to convince this generation to be faithful to Yahweh in the land. In Deuteronomy chapter 30, he has a great—another way he talks about the commands. This is Deuteronomy 30, verse 15. He says, "Moses says, 'Look, I'm setting before you today life and good, death and bad.'"

[Laughter]

Tim: These are the exact terms from the garden of Eden story: life and death, good and bad.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: You have the tree of knowing good and bad, and then the tree of life. And then, if you eat from the tree of knowing good and bad—

Jon: It's death.

Tim: —it will lead to your death.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Yeah. So "I'm setting before you life and good, death and bad."

Jon: Okay. Hold on.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Whoa, something just clicked for me.

Tim: Whoa. Oh, great.

Jon: The tree of life is also about knowing good and bad, but in a way that leads to life.

Tim: Oh, yeah, that's right.

Jon: And the tree of—

Tim: Oh, right!

Jon: —knowing good and bad could have been called the tree of death.

Tim: Yeah, totally. Yeah. So both are trees of knowing good and bad.

Jon: Right.

Tim: And both are trees of life or death.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So it's really a tree of life and a tree of death.

Jon: Right. But they're not called that. And it's almost an invitation into that little riddle.

Tim: Yeah. That's good. That's great. Yeah. That's right.

Jon: Okay, so, sorry.

Tim: Yeah, that's right. Because the tree of life—you will learn the difference between good and

bad by doing what God says.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Actually, so in a way, that's—you just summarized what Moses is about to say.

[Laughter]

Tim: So I'll restate the first sentence: "I'm setting before you today life and good, and death and bad. What I'm commanding you"—there's the reference to all of the now 600-plus commands in the Torah, starting with the 10 Words. "What I'm commanding you

today is to love Yahweh your God by walking in his ways, by keeping his commands, his statutes, and his regulations, then you will have life. And you'll become numerous." There's Eden language again: "Be fruitful and multiply. Yahweh will bless you"—there's seven-day creation language—"in the land you're going." A few sentences later: "I invoke as witnesses against you today, the skies and the land." There's Genesis 1 language. Oh, the cosmos itself—

Jon: Bears witness.

Tim: —bears witness to the truth.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: That's interesting.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's sort of like, if you choose not to follow these commands, you're living out of sync with reality.

Jon: The cosmos has the right framework.

[Laughter]

Tim: Cosmos is the framework.

[Laughter]

Tim: Yeah, that's right. "So the skies in the land are watching you to rem—to—as witnesses to the truth that I have set before you life and death, and blessing and curse. So choose life that you may live, you and your offspring, by loving Yahweh. And how do you love Yahweh? Listen to his voice and cling to him, for he is your life." So love and listening, life and good, and blessing and listening to the voice. Those are all different ways of talking about living by the commands of God.

Jon: Hmm. If I just think about the whole set of conversations we had, I felt like we were trying to practice that. We were listening in a new way. We were trying to see how it points to life and how it leads to blessing. And so is that what we mean by keeping the commands?

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. Remember—so the conversation we had about honoring your parents, which has the little addition to it.

Jon: The “so that.”

Tim: “So that you can live long days in the land.”

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: “In the land Yahweh your God is giving you.” So it’s not just that honor your parents, and then Yahweh will hook you up—do something good for you. Again, it’s an invitation to actually live in reality.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And when you live in reality, things are likely to go better. Like, actually just of their own cause-and-effect sequence that unfolds from that. And that is part of the language of goodness and blessing in the Bible—or wisdom. You’re living in tune with reality. So it’s the difference between “I’m doing it because God commanded me” and “I’m doing it because God loves me and is showing me the way to life, and I ignore his command at my own peril.”

Jon: We’re talking about—it’s like, having good, meaningful relationships.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: Living in communities that are good and vibrant and beautiful.

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: Finding meaning and purpose and joy in your own life in the midst of all of the craziness. Like, we’re talking about that kind of life.

Tim: Yeah. Man, you know, after our conversation about bearing false witness—word number nine—I still remember the lunch conversation that we had afterwards.

Jon: Oh, really?

Tim: And we don’t have to bring up the particular example that you did, but you brought up an example happening, like, that week in current events.

Jon: Uh-huh.

Tim: And it was an example about a group of people in American culture who were being brought up in a very public way and spoken about in a way that wasn’t—

Jon: Wasn’t true.

Tim: —truthful. And it was—

Jon: And they were being scapegoated.

Tim: —very obvious—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —that this group of people was being misrepresented in a, you know, political-discourse type situation. And it wasn't even that hard to find out what was being claimed about this subcultural group wasn't true.

Jon: Right. Yeah.

Tim: But it really negatively affected them. And it's—it's a sad moment in American history, I think.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So it's not just that God's command was dishonored.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's that it had a very public impact on a group of people that, according to the Torah, ought to be cared for, you know, or ought to be especially cared for in the society that lives by God's wisdom.

Jon: So that's life, finding life.

Tim: Yeah, finding life, yeah.

[Musical break (23:12—23:14)]

Tim: Another part of this second insight about appreciating the laws as wisdom for life is something we've talked about many times over the years, especially in our "How to Read the Bible" series. And we did a section on the laws, or how to read the laws in the Torah. But I just want to bring it up again, because it connects to what we're talking about, that the laws in the Bible are much more like parables or case studies. Whether they actually came from law codes—

Jon: Like, actual legal code.

Tim: —that were consulted by judges and so on, we actually don't know.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And I'll just remind myself and you of this fact that we both found interesting years ago when we had that conversation.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: Which is the one time, or the first time, that figures called "judges" are brought up among the people of Israel. It's a story where Moses is just working overtime, trying to help people discern between good and bad.

Jon: Oh, right. Uh-huh.

Tim: And he's exhausted.

Jon: Is this in Numbers?

Tim: It's—ah—it's in Exodus and Deuteronomy.

Jon: It's in Exodus. Okay.

Tim: Is referred back to.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: But especially, it's right as they get to Mount Sinai.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: And Moses' father-in-law comes up to him and is like, "Dude."

Jon: "You need some help?"

Tim: "You got lines of people waiting to hear what you think about, like, whether somebody stole someone's donkey or didn't or what they owe somebody." And he just says, "You've got to get the help here." So what Moses' father-in-law tells him is, "Select from the people a group of men who have standing in the community. They fear God. They're men of truth, and they hate dishonest gain."

[Laughter]

Tim: So he doesn't say, like, they've gone to law school or—

[Laughter]

Tim: They're not scribes, experts in, like, the law codes.

Jon: Right.

Tim: He's talking about their character.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then he says, "Appoint them, and let them do justice to the people. And then if they have things they can't solve, they can bring that to you." When Moses, later in Deuteronomy, looks back on that event, what he summarizes is, yeah, "My father-in-law told me, 'Choose wise and discerning and experienced men from among your tribes.'" So his summary is essentially that people who have wisdom and discernment are what he said all the laws are designed to do for all the people.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: So we're back to the laws are to teach wisdom, which means that they are not comprehensive as a law code, but they do have an internal, self-hyperlinking system of taking a core value that's stated in the 10 and then unfolding it in a set of case studies that begin to teach you the values underneath the law.

Jon: You said something provocative, though. You—these laws are case studies, and then you called them ...

Tim: Parables.

Jon: Parables.

Tim: Yeah, like, yeah, like, little—little narratives that imagine something happening, and then teaching you moral wisdom from it. And we can see that process at work, and we traced it in some of our examples. So, "Do not kill."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: One of the 10 Words. Well, gosh, there's killing, and there's killing.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Right?

Jon: Right.

Tim: I mean, there's so many different ways that one human can be involved in the death of another human. And those two words in Hebrew—lo' tirtsakh—don't provide any of that nuance. But you turn to the next body of commands in the ... Exodus 21 to

23, and there's a whole set of case laws about, "Well, let's say, like, two guys are out chopping wood, and let's say one of them has a stick in their hand, or let's say he waited in a bush hiding for him, let's say he accidentally struck him." So it begins to unfold it. Like, you can see that the later cases within the Torah are spelling out the core value underneath just "Don't kill." But then there are later moments in the Torah where God will actually say to put someone to death. And on the surface, you could say, "Well, is that a contradiction? Didn't God say, 'Don't kill?'" But if "Don't kill" is wisdom, then what it's teaching you is a value. And there might be times, and this is actually leading up to the third insight that I came to appreciate. There might be times when different commands come into conflict with each other.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And what are you supposed to do, then? And you could just say, "Well, contradiction." Like, God said this in one place, God said that in another place, and they're the opposite. The Bible is incoherent. Or it could be that the Bible is wisdom literature. And if you learn the values underneath, you actually will begin to learn how to create a system of weights and measures for which values are relevant in which type of circumstance. Which again, which is why Moses says, "Choose people who are wise," as opposed to "Choose people who have memorized the code."

Jon: The story that keeps going through my mind as we talk is Jesus with the woman accused of adultery.

Tim: Oh, sure. Sure. Yes. Yeah.

Jon: Where there is a command, if you're caught in adultery, to be killed, right? There's a law in the Torah.

Tim: Yes. Yup. Both the man and the woman are subject to capital punishment. That's in Leviticus.

Jon: And so in this story, this woman is caught.

Tim: Mhm. The man's, conveniently, nowhere to be found.

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Like, that's predictable, right?

Jon: Right.

Tim: In—uh—that kind of cultural setting.

Jon: And so there's this little, kind of, moment of, "What are we going to do?"

Tim: Mhm.

Jon: And people saying, "Well, we need—she needs to be put to death."

Tim: Right.

Jon: And then Jesus, like, finds a way through it that's different.

Tim: Yeah. Well, what he says is "Let the person who's never committed sin throw the first stone." So it's like a riddle.

[Laughter]

Tim: But the riddle saves the woman's life. So he actually knows this woman committed adultery because what he says afterwards is—

Jon: And he knows—and he knows the law in the Torah.

Tim: That's right. He says to the woman, "Don't do that anymore."

[Laughter]

Tim: But he—and he knows the law in the Torah. So what's the value, the greater value? And the greater value is actually creating a community of mercy ... in that moment, which is that this woman made a mistake. And should every human be killed for every mistake that they make?

Jon: Right.

Tim: And Jesus doesn't think so.

Jon: Hmm. And Jesus is the one who thinks he came to fulfill the Torah.

Tim: Mhm. That's right. Yeah. Yeah.

Jon: And so ...

Tim: Now, I'm so glad you brought this up.

Jon: Really?

Tim: I actually—I have another example.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: That is got—act. So here, we're now moving into the third thing that I wanted to bring up, which is viewing the laws as wisdom, I think, can help us have a deeper appreciation for moments when different laws in the Torah come into conflict with each other. And if you kind of view the Bible as a moral rule book, you'll see that as a contradiction.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: If you view—

Jon: A problem.

Tim: —the Bible as wisdom, you'll see this as a moment that's true to life, which is—there are moments in life where my values come into conflict with each other. And how do I sort out the difference between the two? So here's another example. It's a little more ... well, I don't know what ... I'll just read it.

Jon: It's a little more in the weeds?

Tim: More in the weeds, but it's a great example.

Jon: In the—in the grain?

Tim: In the—in the—oh, in the grain! In the grain. Matthew chapter 12: Jesus, on the Sabbath, was going through some grain fields. He's walking from one place to another, and his disciples are with him. And this is key: They were hungry. And so, this is two chapters after Jesus' speech to his disciples, saying, "Let's go out. I'm going to share my vocation with you of announcing the arrival of Kingdom of God. Don't take food. Don't take extra money."

Jon: Mmm.

Tim: "Don't take extra clothes. When you arrive into town, people that are receptive will take us in, and they'll feed us."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Which means that they were hungry a lot.

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So they're going from—

Jon: If you're not going packing a lunch—

Tim: No!

Jon: —you're going to be hungry a lot. Yeah, interesting.

Tim: They're going from one town to another, and they're hungry, just like Jesus was in the wilderness.

Jon: Mmm. Yeah, this felt very—this feels very wilderness. This feels—

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: Give—give me today my daily bread.

Tim: Yup. Yeah. So they're going by a grain field, and this would not occur to me as a way to feed myself. But it was a different time and culture. And they're like, "Dude, there's a bunch of ripe grain right there on the edge of the road."

Jon: Yeah, I guess you can nibble on it.

Tim: Yeah. So they started plucking stalks of grain to eat. So what's funny is, I—it was a number of years ago that I did this for the first time in my life.

Jon: You mentioned this to me.

Tim: Partially inspired by this story.

Jon: Okay.

Tim: Because I was like, "How much can you actually feed yourself?"

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's slow work.

Jon: Is it?

Tim: They're really buried in there—

Jon: Ooh.

Tim: —but they're fat. And they're fat, like—

Jon: Little kernels in—in there?

Tim: Yeah. And they actually—they taste good.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I was like, “This is cool. This is, I—this makes sense.”

Jon: That’s a great little road snack.

Tim: Yeah. Totally. It’s—uh—like the ancient version of a trail bar.

[Laughter]

Jon: It’s kind of like a sunflower seed, yeah.

Tim: Wheat—wheat seeds. Anyhow, the Pharisees see this, and they say, “Your disciples are doing what is not authorized on the Sabbath.”

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So first of all, you can pluck and eat grain from a stranger’s field in the laws of Torah. There are laws about that.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: You can’t get out a sickle.

Jon: Can’t start harvesting it.

Tim: Harvesting it. No, but you can—

Jon: You can nibble.

Tim: Because the assumption is you’re not going to take that much.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: But that’s not what the Pharisees are concerned about. They’re concerned about doing a kind of work on the Sabbath.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So this is a perfect example of, according to one law, “If you’re hungry, walking by your neighbor’s farm, pick some grapes, pick some grain, do it. It’s cool.” And then there’s another law that says, “Don’t work on the Sabbath.” In fact, that’s one of the 10 Words.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So here we are. Two commands in the Torah in conflict with each other.

Jon: Are they working on the Sabbath by plucking grain?

Tim: Mhm. Yeah.

Jon: Are they breaking that command?

Tim: Yeah, are they breaking the Sabbath command by feeding themselves when they're hungry?

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: That requires some effort.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: That's the issue. The Pharisees think, "Man, you've gone too far. You should just be hungry." And Jesus disagrees. And he gives three reasons why. He looked at them and he says, "You know, haven't you guys ever read the Bible?"

[Laughter]

Tim: Which is kind of a dig, of course. And he quotes a story that comes from what we call the scroll of 1 Samuel, chapter 21. And it's a moment when David was fleeing from Saul with a crew of people, and they were all hungry. It's very similar. And they go into the tabernacle, the house of God, and they ate the sacred bread of the presence, which they were not authorized to eat, except for the priests alone.

Jon: Yeah. That's off-limits for sure.

[Laughter]

Tim: Totally. Now, this is really interesting, because if you go read the story, David goes to the priest, and the priest is like, "Well, we just replaced the bread—"

Jon: Mmm. So it's like the leftovers.

Tim: —today. Yeah.

Jon: It's day old.

Tim: It's the seven-day old bread.

Jon: It's the seven-day old bread.

Tim: The bread gets replaced every seventh day.

Jon: Oh, okay.

Tim: So the very fact that David gets some of this bread means that it is the Sabbath day, because that's the day you change out the bread.

Jon: Ooh.

Tim: So it's pretty subtle what Jesus is doing here. But what he's saying is David went in, and he had this bread that wasn't technically allowed to him, on the Sabbath.

[Laughter]

Tim: And it was cool. The priest gave it to him. It was cool. Because, and you notice, they were hungry.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So not only is it bread given on the Sabbath, but it's priestly bread.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: And so what he's saying is, "Here's a biblical story where hunger and need gained precedence. Meeting someone's hunger is actually on equal value as resting on the Sabbath day."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: That's what Jesus—that's the move he's making here.

Jon: Hmm. Okay.

Tim: Then he goes on to say, "And you know, speaking of priests and the Sabbath, haven't you ever read in the Torah—do you know the priests are working every Sabbath?"

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: I mean, they're offering sacrifices and—

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: —cleaning up. They're—they're working hard.

Jon: They're switching out the bread.

Tim: Yeah. And he's like, "What? So is, like, God contradicting God by telling the priest to work on the Sabbath?" And then, the last example is, "If you had known what this means"—and he quotes from the prophet Hosea, chapter six—"I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' If you really had internalized what Hosea meant right there," Jesus says, "then you would not condemn the innocent."

[Laughter]

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: So now he's hyperlinking to Hosea 6. That's a whole rabbit hole. It's super cool. But the word mercy there in Hebrew is *khesed*, loyal love.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And it gets translated in the Septuagint as *eleos*, or mercy, which is a major theme in the Gospel of Matthew, that Jesus is constantly talking about God's mercy, "how good is life for the merciful, for they will be shown mercy."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: That's in the Beatitudes. Mercy is a huge theme in Matthew. And at the conclusion of Matthew, when he really lays into the Pharisees, what he says is, "Man, you guys are so good at tithing and giving a tenth of all your crops—even your tiny little herb bushes you give a tenth of—but you have abandoned the heavier matters of the Torah: justice, mercy, and faithfulness."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So in Jesus' view, the commands are, like, surface manifestations of all these different ways you could apply—

Jon: Hmm. They're ways in.

Tim: —the heavier matters, the heavier values.

Jon: Hmm. And in Jesus' mind, justice, mercy, and faithfulness are the—the values of the moral universe of—

Jon: That's the wisdom that you gain.

Tim: —of the Tor—of, yes. Justice—

Jon: Justice.

Tim: —mercy, and faithfulness.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And then in another place, he'll just say, "Love. Love God, love your neighbor."

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: When someone says, "What's the greatest command?"

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: So this was very common in Jesus' culture. And Jesus is engaged in this process of reading the laws as wisdom, pointing to a deeper set of values that he can say were three—justice, mercy, faithfulness—or even as one: love. But it's built into the commands. This isn't Jesus innovating. He's just carrying forward this tradition of seeing all the commands as—uh—facets of a diamond pointing to a—a common core. And The Ten Commandments—excuse me, the 10 Words—

[Laughter]

Tim: —which are full of many commandments, are like a 101 in teaching wisdom, creating a moral universe of what it means to be an image of God. And Jesus drew great wisdom and built off of it.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And you can see that in his teachings, especially the Gospel of Matthew, which is really focused in on how Jesus' teachings develop the wisdom of the laws of the Torah. We haven't even brought up, in this conversation, the Sermon on the Mount and the case studies of "Don't murder" and "Don't commit adultery." But you can see Jesus doing it right there—the same exact thing we've been talking about.

Jon: Yeah.

[Musical break (39:34—39:37)]

Jon: When we do theme studies, we often get to this point where Jesus becomes the climax of the theme in an embodied way.

Tim: Hmm.

Jon: So if we think about this theme of the commands of God for life, is there anything you can leave us with? I mean, doesn't the Apostle Paul call Jesus the wisdom of God, or—?

Tim: He does. He does. Yes. Yeah. In—uhm—1—1 Corinthians.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: Mhm. And the context is so cool. We don't have time to talk about it. But what he says is, "The Messiah Jesus became for us wisdom from God and righteousness and holiness and redemption."

[Laughter]

Tim: It's his four—four character traits of God as wise, righteous, holy, and redeemer.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: That he says the Messiah Jesus is the embodiment of all those.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: And they kind of go together, in a way. So wisdom is about discernment between good and bad. So you can choose the way into life. Righteousness is right relationships.

Jon: Yeah. The fruit of it.

Tim: The fruit of it. Holiness is about a life so dedicated to being in union with God's own life and power that you, like, radiate with God's own ... uniqueness. And then redemption is about transferring someone out of a state of slavery and whatever bad—badness and transferring them back into God's family and possession and goodness.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: So in a way, the laws are designed to do that. And here, Paul's just saying, "Jesus is that. He's all those things as—in human form." And I guess the way the apostles did it, the way the apostle Paul said, was that the pinnacle moment of all those values coming into one event is when Jesus surrenders his life over to death. And when he's hanging on the cross, issuing God's forgiveness to the people killing him. Something about that moment is, like, the moment that he calls a display of God's love.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: Yeah, so Jesus said it, and Paul also said it: Love fulfills the law. So I'm not trying to be trite in just saying, "Love! It's about love." But like, the life story of Jesus and the leading up to the cross, there is something about Jesus elevating the well-being of others—not just equal to his own, but above his own well-being. There's something there that the laws themselves are all pointing us towards. Which, if we were to boil it down to one value and look to one person's life to—right?—to incarnate that value, I can't think of any better story to tell than the story of Jesus.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: I think that's what it means to be a Christian, is to see Jesus fulfilling the law in—in that way.

Jon: Yeah. And is there something about not just looking to Jesus as an example, but to truly be a wise person, it's like we need ...

Tim: Mmm.

Jon: It's great that we're doing this, and we're trying, and we're, like, wrestling with the words, and we're letting it form us. But it feels like the true power of that is when we're connecting to something.

Tim: Ah, I see.

Jon: Bey—

Tim: Or someone.

Jon: Or someone.

Tim: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. That's great.

Jon: Like beyond, more than ourselves.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: That's actually, then, helping us do that.

Tim: Sure. Yes. Yeah. So here we come into—I think the point of the gospel narratives and the claims that they make is that Jesus is the model and example of, like, the true human fulfilling all the wisdom of God. And so it was a model for us. And then he, actually, is the first one to be that and do that on our behalf. Or as Paul will say, for us. And ...

Jon: To be the person who can fulfill the law through love.

Tim: Mhm. That's right. Yeah. And I will have a complicated history of living up to that value—often compromising it, often fulfilling it—depending on the day, on the week. And what gives me hope for my own moral maturity or the world's or humanity's as a whole—and it's certainly not our track record.

[Laughter]

Tim: But yeah, I think this is also what it means to be a Christian. But to say, “There is one who was the ultimate wise, loving human who lived in union with the commands and wisdom of God. And that is God become human on our behalf. And we actually will find true life and wisdom by joining our lives to his.” And how does one do that? Well, it begins in the New Testament with baptism and entry into the body of Jesus' people. And through the Holy Spirit, a personal connection to the life of Jesus, so that it becomes hard to tell my life from his life.

Jon: Hmm.

Tim: “It's the life of the Messiah living in me,” Paul says. And then through the Lord's Supper around a table, taking the bread and the cup together, with a group of people that I'm committed to living out this wisdom with. You can make it a lot more complicated, but in the New Testament, that's kind of the core right there.

Jon: Should we add on then, though, the ... Scripture?

Tim: Oh, yes.

[Laughter]

Jon: The thing we've been doing.

Tim: Yeah. Sorry, so if I'm taking Paul as a cue, do as he tells Timothy, "Don't neglect reading Scripture out loud together, the public reading of scripture, so that you can learn God's wisdom."

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: So all those things—

Tim: Yes.

Jon: —then, help us participate in union with Jesus to figure out how to do this—this thing.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Be a wise person.

Tim: Yeah. Yeah. And The Ten Commandments are such a wonderful, short, dense summary.

Jon: Mhm.

Tim: But that don't, themselves, state what are the core values. They force you to ponder and work out the values underneath them, which is the joy of meditating on them. And that's—uh, yeah—that's the journey that we started. We didn't finish it. I don't think you ever finish a journey like that, but—uh—you and I did start this. And like we said at the beginning, I think we both were surprised by what we discovered, and I'm finding it's opening up new insights as I go elsewhere in the Bible.

Jon: Okay. That was it. We just finished the 10th command, the 10th word.

Tim: Yes.

Jon: And so we're done.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: The journey has ended. [Jon laughs]

Tim: We worked through the ten words, the ten matters—

Jon: The ten matters—

[Tim laughs]

Jon: —the 10 ideas.

Tim: Yeah.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's really remarkable. I have been so surprised by these conversations because each one has opened up some of the biggest questions about life and human relationships.

Jon: Yeah. They've been sticking with me more than I anticipated.

Tim: Really?

Jon: I think about them throughout the week now a lot.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] Huh. Yeah. And even the shape of them, that the first four are all about our relationship to God, and that how we think about God, who we think God is, and what God is like really shapes our behavior, so much so that these four matters of relating to God: not thinking that the many forces of nature or the cosmos itself as God will lead me on a better way forward than a different way, not relating to God as if he's something that in reality we have made. [Tim laughs]

Jon: Mmm. Yeah. Number two.

Tim: [Jon backchanneling throughout] Representing God faithfully and also recognizing that God ultimately is pointing creation towards a fulfillment and rest. These are, like, really important matters. And then the bridge—I love how we relate to the generation before us that produced us is part of how we relate to God. There's so much wisdom there. And then how we—

Jon: And then the triad.

Tim: [Jon agreeing throughout] Yeah, the triad: how we value each other's lives, marriages, and stuff.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Our commitment to the truth, and then just how we feel internally about what our neighbor has. Like, this is the stuff, man. It's the stuff of human life. Somehow, my whole life is addressed in these 10 matters—

[Jon and Tim laugh]

Tim: —you know?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: It's hard—I mean, I've said it multiple times through. It's now hard for me to think of an area of my day-to-day life that's complex or challenging that isn't in some way addressed by the wisdom of the 10 words.

Jon: These 10 words are not—they're not a checklist to just say, "*Well, I haven't murdered someone today.*"

Tim: [Tim chuckles] Yeah.

Jon: "*I haven't lied today. I'm doing good.*" This is like a portal into a way of thinking about reality that reshapes you. It's real wisdom.

Tim: Yes. And I love flipping them over.

Jon: Flipping them over.

Tim: So instead of not misrepresenting God or thinking about incorrectly, it's: You know, this is a summons to constantly think better, truer thoughts about God and then more faithfully represent God.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: And: How do I preserve life in my community? And—

Jon: Yeah, do not murder becomes preserving life.

Tim: Yeah. How do I help create an environment where we see the things that we have as gifts from God and celebrate that and name that and honor that in each other?

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: That was such a great exercise.

Jon: So the 10 ways of being.

Tim: [excited] 10 ways of being.

Jon: The 10 ways that God gives us life, yeah.

Tim: That's it. It's now more clear to me than ever why Jesus made a number of quotes from the 10 words, like, the center of his ethical reflections in the Sermon on the Mount.

Jon: Yeah.

Tim: Like he saw a universe of wisdom in here, and I really see it too—

Jon: Mhm, yeah. Me too.

Tim: —for myself in a new way after journeying through these.

[Pause]

Jon: Well, thank you, Tim.

Tim: Mhm. Yeah, thank you. So we're done, but not really—

[Jon laughs]

Tim: —because this, like the Sermon on the Mount, is kind of something you just should have on replay in your heart and in your mind.

[Musical Break (50:59—51:03)]

Jon: Thanks for listening to BibleProject Podcast. We finished all of the main episodes in the series where Tim and I walk through the 10 Commandments. But next week, we're going to have a special hyperlink episode. We're going to listen to clips from past series that touch on and hyperlink similar themes to the 10 Commandments.

BibleProject is a crowdfunded nonprofit, and we exist to help people experience the Bible as a unified story that leads to Jesus. And everything that we create is free because it's been paid for by thousands of people just like you. Thank you so much for being a part of this with us.

Rachel: Aloha. My name is Rachel, and I'm from Hawaii.

Zach: Hey, my name is Zach, and I'm from Greensboro, North Carolina. I first heard about BibleProject from their Read Scripture videos many, many years ago.

Rachel: I use BibleProject for learning more context about Bible stories.

Zach: I used BibleProject for my own personal study as well as preparing for sermons and message prep for my church. My favorite thing about BibleProject is the simplicity in which they point people to Jesus in the story of Scripture.

Rachel: We believe the Bible is a unified story that leads to Jesus.

Zach: BibleProject is a non-profit funded by people like me.

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Zach: —and at bibleproject.com.

[Phone beep]

Camden: Hi, my name is Camden McAfee. I'm from Minneapolis, and I work on our Content Integration team here at BibleProject. We take our existing content and then look for ways that we can integrate it into other platforms and places like the YouVersion app. I first heard about the podcast when I got sick with the flu back in 2018. And I was like, "What am I going to do with my time?" And I found, like, ten episodes of the podcast and I was hooked after that. One of the things that the podcast gave me was permission to be curious and to ask those questions that I previously had in the back of my mind that I didn't think you should bring to light, and be able to hear a hard question asked about the Bible and to say, "Wow, that is a great question." There's a whole team of us that make the podcast come to life every week. For a full list of everyone involved in this episode, check out the show notes wherever you stream the podcast and on our app. See ya.