

Theological and Ethical Principles in Exodus 20 and Matthew 5

Exodus 20 and Matthew 5 offer a wealth of theological and ethical teachings. The Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 are the foundation of Judeo-Christian ethics and Jesus' teachings on fulfilling the law, as found in Matthew 5. Using support from the texts, this study will isolate and evaluate the most essential theological and ethical issues in both works.

Monotheism

Exodus 20 and Matthew 5 emphasize the importance of believing in one God. The first commandment in Exodus 20 states, "You shall have no other gods before me,"¹ The uniqueness of God's authority is emphasized here, as is the significance of worshipping the one true God. The language of the commandment suggests that there may be other gods, but they are not to be honored or given any type of priority over the one true God. The rest of the Ten

¹ Exodus 20:3.

Commandments build on this premise of monotheism. To further emphasize God's exclusive sovereignty, the second commandment forbids the worship of any graven image or idol. Honoring parents, not lying, and not coveting other people's possessions are only a few ethical concepts and actions that stem from a belief in, and devotion to the one true God enumerated in the other commandments. The Ten Commandments generally provide a framework for worshiping and serving the one true God and highlight the need for monotheism as a foundational concept for ethical and moral behavior.

Jesus restates the notion of monotheism in Matthew 5 where he instructs his followers to put their faith in God alone and not in earthly riches or political authority. The monotheistic teachings of Jesus are found in Matthew 5 where he emphasizes the need to have a singular focus on love and devotion. Jesus states in verse 24, "Anyone trying to please both parties is bound to fail. You can either dislike one and cherish the other or be committed to one and resent the other. It is impossible to be holy and wealthy."² The uniqueness of God's sovereignty and the significance of making God

² Matthew 5:24.

one's priority are emphasized here. Furthermore, Jesus calls his followers to renounce worldly power and wealth and seek the kingdom of God first, all to underscore the significance of loving and serving the one true God. He attacks the religious leaders of his day for their duplicity and lack of devotion to God. The central teaching of Matthew 5 agrees with the monotheistic notion stated in Exodus 20. Both books stress the need for undivided loyalty to the One True God and shun any substitute deities.

Both Jews and Christians believe in a single, all-powerful God and that is central to their faiths' foundational tenets. When one rejects all other gods and idols in favor of the One True God, they have a moral compass to guide their actions by the monotheistic tenets. The Christian faith centers on the God of the Bible, whom adherents hold to be the Creator and Sustainer of all things.

Christians learn more about God's nature, character, and qualities when they embrace monotheism. Moreover, they benefit from monotheism since it helps them avoid idolatry. By embracing monotheism, Christians can better direct their worship and devotion toward the one true God rather than being tempted by false gods.

Additionally, Christian morality and ethics have a firm foundation in monotheism. Christians' knowledge of right and wrong and how to behave according to God's will is grounded in their belief in the one true God who has revealed himself through the Bible. For example, the Ten Commandments are a set of rules for moral behavior derived from the concept of one God. It exhorts Believers to get closer to God via worship, prayer, and the study of Scripture. A Christian's pursuit of a greater relationship with God and a better knowledge of God's will and purpose for their lives is inspired by the realization of God's absolute sovereignty and the necessity of placing God at the center of their lives.

Justice

The values of justice and righteousness are emphasized throughout both passages. Many of the Ten Commandments listed in Exodus 20 deal with issues of fairness, including the prohibitions against stealing, lying in court, and coveting another's property. Four commandments pertain to man's relationship with God, and six pertain to man's connection with his fellow man. Some of the Ten Commandments reflect the value of justice, including the

commandment, "You shall not murder"³ which embodies the value of fairness by forbidding the unjust termination of human life. The tenth commandment, "You shalt not steal" (Exodus 20:15), reflects the importance of the principles of justice and fairness because it forbids taking someone else's possessions without a valid reason. The principle of justice is reflected in the Ten Commandments, specifically in Exodus 20:16, which states, "You shalt not give false witness against your brother." ⁴Giving false testimony in a court environment might result in an unfair judgment. Exodus 20:17 states, "You shall not covet... anything that belongs to your brother," ⁵This commandment represents the principle of justice by forbidding the desire to take anything that does not rightfully belong to oneself.

The same is true in Matthew 5 where Jesus encourages his disciples to "hunger and thirst" for righteousness by promoting forgiveness, peacemaking, and reconciliation. Jesus' teachings in the "Sermon on the Mount," found in Matthew 5 are well-known. Here, Jesus elaborates on the Ten Commandments' teachings and

³ Exodus 20:13.

⁴ Exodus 20:16.

⁵ Exodus 20:17.

stresses the value of moral living. Throughout this text, there are multiple manifestations of the importance of justice: "The ancients were warned, "You shall not murder and anyone murders will be liable to judgment," and you have likely heard this for yourself.⁶ Yet I tell you that everyone who harbors ill will toward a brother will face judgment." In Matthew 5 Jesus stresses the need to refrain from bodily injury to others and from damaging feelings and attitudes towards others, such as rage and hatred. This represents the principle of justice by acknowledging that hurt and violence can result from unjustifiable anger and hatred. From the teachings, God forbids adultery because He declared so in the Ten Commandments. "Yet, I declare to you that whoever looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart."⁷ Here, Jesus stresses the necessity of not committing adultery physically but also not harboring any ill will or lust for another person's wife. Since it acknowledges that unreasonable passion and desire can lead to destructive behavior against others, this embodies the principle of justice. "Moreover, you have heard that it was declared to them of old, you shall not swear falsely, but

⁶ Matthew 5:33-44.

⁷ Matthew 5:27-28.

shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn. But I warn you; under no circumstances should you swear.”⁸ In this passage, Jesus warns against making pledges or taking oaths that you might later have to break or use dishonestly. This embodies the principle of fairness, considering that lying and dishonesty can cause other people pain and injustice.

Christians place a premium on justice because it exemplifies Christian virtues like love, fairness, and respect for others. Justice is emphasized in several ways in both Exodus 20 and Matthew 5. Both passages stress the need to safeguard human life and esteem, whether by explicit bans on murder and adultery or through cautionary tales about the destructive effects of resentment, hostility, and dishonesty. Christians believe in the worth of every person and are obligated to protect the rights of those around them, even when doing so is inconvenient or even impossible. Equal treatment of others is emphasized, as is the prohibition of theft and coveting in both verses and the value of treating others with respect and kindness. Christians must treat others fairly because they are all made in God's image and have inherent value.

Love

Both Exodus 20 and Matthew 5 emphasize love as a major moral element. Together with God and parents, loving one's neighbor is one of the Ten Commandments listed in Exodus 20. The first four commandments represent the principle of love toward God, and the last six express love for our fellow humans. God tells the Israelis in the first commandment that they must put no other gods ahead of Him. This exemplifies the love principle by showing that genuine affection can exist only in the context of unwavering allegiance to God. Not even graven images are to be worshiped, as stated in the second commandment. Loving God means one does not equate Him with anything in the universe; this is how you show that you get it. Using the name of the Lord in vain is a sin, as stated in the third commandment. Respect for God's word and recognition of His holiness are expressions of love for God. The Jews were commanded to observe the Sabbath in the fourth commandment. Sacrificing a day to honor God via worship and rest demonstrates devotion to Him.

The last six commandments all have to do with showing kindness to other people. According to the fifth commandment, we

are to "honor our parents," demonstrating our gratitude for their caregiving. To show our respect for the sacredness of human life and the value we place on our neighbors' lives, the sixth commandment forbids murder. Love for our neighbors requires that we uphold the sacredness of marriage and the trust between spouses, which is why the seventh commandment forbids adultery. As a manifestation of our love for our neighbors, the eighth commandment forbids stealing. Keeping this commandment means showing that we care for our neighbors by prioritizing the truth and doing what we can to safeguard their good names. The tenth commandment instructs us not to covet our neighbor's possessions, teaching us that we can show our love for them by treating their staff respectfully and being happy with what we have. As a whole, Exodus 20 and the Ten Commandments teach us to love God and respect one another.

The principle of love is central to the Christian faith, as it is emphasized throughout the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Bible. Jesus summarized the entire law and the prophets with the

commandment to love God and one's neighbor as oneself.⁹ Love is important in a Christian's life because it reflects God's character and nature. In 1 John 4:8, it says that "God is love." Christians are called to emulate God's love and to show that love to others. Jesus commanded his disciples to love one another as he loved them, and he said that the world would know they were his disciples by their love for one another. Additionally, love is important in a Christian's life because it transforms and changes us. Finally, love is important in a Christian's life because it is the greatest commandment. As mentioned, Jesus summarized the entire law and the prophets with the commandment to love God and loved one's neighbor. Christians are called to prioritize love above all else, as it is the foundation of their relationship with God and others.

From verses 21-43 of Matthew 5, Jesus expands on this idea by instructing his disciples to love their adversaries and pray for those who wrong them. Many subjects about human interaction are woven within Jesus' teachings on love. Rather than focusing just on following the letter of the law, Jesus calls for his followers to show God's love via their actions. In verses 21-26, Jesus explains that

⁹ Matthew 22:37-40.

even being angry with a brother or sister can lead to judgment, and he discusses the prohibition against murder. Instead of letting bitterness and resentment build up, he encourages his followers to make peace with one another and end problems as soon as possible. Jesus addresses the prohibition against adultery in verses 27-30, teaching that merely gazing at a woman with carnal intent is the same as committing adultery in one's heart. He stresses the significance of keeping one's mind and spirit pure and free from temptation. Jesus addresses the topic of divorce in lines 31 and 32, teaching that it is appropriate only in circumstances of sexual infidelity. He talks about how sacred marriage is and how crucial it is to keep promises. Jesus emphasizes the need to keep one's word and not make empty promises in verses 33-37. He stresses the importance of being forthright and honorable in all human interactions. In verses 38-42, Jesus teaches his disciples about the non-retaliation concept and instructs them to "turn the other cheek" when they are wronged.¹⁰ Forgiving and loving our adversaries are two themes he repeatedly returns to. Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, Jesus instructs his

¹⁰ Matthew 38-42.

followers in verse 43. Especially to those who are hard to love, he insists, we must express love. In this verse, Jesus stresses the significance of love in all our interactions with others. He teaches that it is not enough to only follow the rules; we must also model the mercy and compassion of God in our daily lives.

Holiness

Both books emphasize the necessity of becoming holy or apart from the world for God's purposes. God's people are commanded to emulate his holiness by not engaging in idolatry and keeping the Sabbath holy in Exodus 20. Exodus 20 comprises the Ten Commandments God gave Moses on Mount Sinai, which all center on holiness. In the first commandment, God tells the Jews not to worship gods other than Him. This proves that God is one-of-a-kind and worthy of our highest awe and adoration. The prohibition of worshiping images or idols is found in the second commandment, which further highlights God's holiness and sets Him apart from all other things. The third commandment emphasizes the sacredness of God's name and the necessity of treating it with utmost reverence and sanctity by commanding the Israelites never to use it profanely.

The fourth commandment emphasizes the value of devoting time to worshipping God by commanding the Jews to observe the Sabbath and keep it holy. The sanctity of parental connections and the necessity to respect those in power are reflected in the fifth commandment, which commands Israelites to honor their father and mother. The last five commandments, which include the prohibitions on murder, adultery, theft, false testimony, and coveting, are concerned with maintaining the sanctity of interpersonal relationships.

In this manner, Jesus urges his disciples to live in Matthew 5 encouraging them to choose a different and more moral way of life than that prevalent in the world.

Conclusion

The Christian ethical foundation is based on many theological and moral concepts in Exodus 20 and Matthew 5. Among the guiding concepts outlined in these books are monotheism, respect for authority figures, parental esteem, a focus on charity, and a commitment to doing what is right. These teachings have their origins in the scriptures themselves, and they serve as a guide for conducting oneself in a way contributing to the flourishing of

individuals and the community at large. Hence, the theological ideas described in Exodus 20 and Matthew 5 emphasize the significance of reflecting God's character and nature in one's relationships with God and others.

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