

## The Law of God, Part 2: The One and Only God

**Exodus 20:1 ESV (Pg. 35)** And God spoke all these words, saying, **2** “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. **3** You shall have no other gods before me.

- I. Last week, we began talking about the Law of God, and how believers should approach it. Over the next several weeks, we are going to be building on that foundation by taking a look at the 10 Commandments, and what they mean in light of the gospel.
  - A. The 10 Commandments have enjoyed a prominent place in American history as the foundation for a legal system based on a Judeo-Christian ethic. Because of this, many state houses and court houses across our country have had monuments listing these 10 divine laws, to recognize our law’s divine origin.
    1. But as our nation has become more secularized, many of these granite reminders have been removed as many have tried to push God out.
    2. What should we do when society rejects our Christian symbols and artifacts? We make sure that God’s holy laws are chiseled in our hearts where they can never be removed, no matter what the culture does.
  - B. After Israel was freed by God from their slavery in Egypt, they were led by God to a Mountain called Sinai in the Arabian desert. **Exodus 19:9 ESV** And the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever.”
    1. The people were told that God would be arriving on the mountain in 3 days and that they would hear his voice. In the meantime, they were to consecrate themselves (set themselves apart) by washing their clothes and abstaining from sexual intercourse.
    2. They were also told to stay completely away from the mountain. They were not to try and climb it or even touch its outer edges. They were to resist the temptation to break through and try to get a glimpse of Gods face.
      - a) The penalty for doing so would be death. But the mountain would be so holy by virtue of God’s presence, that the offender was not to be apprehended, but shot through with arrows, or stoned from a distance. This would apply to any human and animal who dared to come near.
      - b) This was to impress upon the people that God was not One to be trifled with. He was unspeakably holy, and would not allow his glory to be in any way diminished or defiled. When the people heard a heavenly trumpet blast on the third day, then they could gather at the foot of the mountain.
  - C. When the 3rd day arrived, the Bible describes what surely was an Awesome display. **Exodus 19:16 ESV** On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. **17** Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. **18** Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. **19** And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. **20** The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the Lord

called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. It was in this kind of other-worldly, unnerving, spiritually-charged atmosphere that the 10 Commandments were handed down to the people.

- II. **Exodus 20:1 ESV** And God spoke all these words, saying, **2** “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” Before God tells the children of Israel what they must **do**, he reminds them of what he **has done**. He has delivered them out of bondage into freedom. The way they will enjoy that freedom, and not return to bondage, is by living according to his commands.
  - A. Here is a picture of God’s amazing grace toward frail humanity. This is the same with us. God always takes a step of grace and love towards us before we are ever able to respond to him. “We love because he first loved us.”<sup>1</sup> It is his redeeming love for us that is motivating and enabling our love and obedience.
    1. Also, the laws, statutes and precepts of God are not to burden us, but to liberate us. Every command that will follow is in no way meant to suppress human expression, but rather to maximize human flourishing.
    2. **1 John 5:3 ESV** For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments. And **his commandments are not burdensome**.
    3. Our irreparably damaged hearts always deceive us into thinking that our way is superior, and that our obedience will deprive us of some joy or benefit. But God always seeks to bless those he loves. **Psalm 119:1 ESV Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the Lord!**
  - B. For God to say that he is the God brought Israel “out of the house of slavery” infers a couple of important things the we must understand.
    1. First, that God is a **rescuer**. There is no power that is so great that God cannot deliver his people from it. This was true when Israel was in Egypt. It is true while Israel marches through the desert. It will be true when Israel occupies the land that has been promised to them.
      - a) It is true for you in Christ as well. God has rescued us from the sins of our dark past. His grace is sufficient for us today. His mercy will one day carry us home to our “promised land” to be with him forever!
      - b) Those who have been thus rescued by God must not voluntarily go back to the humiliation of slavery and bondage that we experienced in our sin; rather we must live according to the liberating precepts of our Savior.
    2. Next, this statement also infers that God is a **redeemer**. In essence, he is Israel’s owner. By the Lord’s power, they have been purchased from their slavery in Egypt, so that they may now be servants of the Most High God.
      - a) The New Testament says you and I have been **purchased** by the blood of Christ. We (like Israel) belong to God and not to ourselves.
      - b) This means that we have an obligation to live now as God requires. **Ephesians 5:8 ESV** for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. **Walk as children of light 9** (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), **10** and **try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord**.
- III. With a proper understanding of what God has done for them, and how it obligates them to live for them, God delivers the commandments to the Israelites. They are

divided into 2 general categories (which we discussed last week), consisting of 4 that deal with proper human relationship to God, and 6 that deal with proper human relationship to others. The first is “**You shall have no other gods before me**”.

- A. This is a powerful departure from what the Israelites had observed in Egypt. There were carved deities on every corner. There were legends of the god’s dealings with man. There were elaborate ceremonies describing how to appease these gods in order to obtain a harvest or bear children, etc.
1. But now these people are being told that Yahweh, their God, is not part of a pantheon of greater, lesser, or even equal gods, each vying for a portion of their adoration. Their worship is to be exclusive to him alone.
    - a) They will not have a variety of different gods, each having different domains like the weather, or fertility, or war; instead, Yahweh will be their one and only provider, defender **and** the recipient of all their worship.
    - b) The Egyptian gods must be understood and appeased by ceremonies and trial and error. But Israel’s God would be known and related to in a relationship of faith, dependence, obedience and mutual love.
  2. The demand for exclusive worship also taught the people a very important lesson: God could require their singular allegiance because he was the **only God**. All of the other idols they had known were no God at all, mere counterfeits. **Isaiah 45:5a ESV I am the Lord, and there is no other, besides me there is no God.**
  3. This is not a popular truth today! We are told that every religion is just as valid as the next, but I think we should let God speak for himself. Don’t you?
- B. It’s probably safe to assume that no one here is making sacrifices to carved figures in pagan temples. If you and your spouse are trying to have a baby, you probably haven’t called out to the fertility gods of Egypt, Assyria, or Babylon. If your lawn is turning yellow, you probably haven’t done a rain dance to satisfy the rain gods. So if that is true, why does this commandment even matter to us?
1. It’s because for us, a god is not defined by **outward** religious ceremonies and observances, but by **inward** dependence and evidences of allegiance.
  2. It is important to ask ourselves all the time, **not** “To whom have I publicly pledged my allegiance?”, but “In whom (or what) do I inwardly trust?”
- C. We are often guilty of not pondering the answer to this question because we have all of our confidence in a declaration we may have made years ago, even though everything in our lives may contradict that declaration daily. Let me help you to consider your inward trust. Answer as honestly as you can:
1. If you lost your job, or your status, or your wealth (all of it!) tonight, how would your world be impacted? What would your attitude be? Would you be bitter? Depressed? Angry? Determined to win it all back no matter what?
  2. If your most valued relationship; your spouse, boyfriend, girlfriend, child, or friend were suddenly gone through death, abandonment, or other circumstance, how would you cope? Can you imagine life without them?
  3. What if you find out tomorrow that your body is riddled with cancer and you have 6 months to live? What if you’re a teenager or college student and you find this out? What will you say that you have lost as a result?

- D. I admit that those are ultimate, tragic questions that all involve loss to help us define who or what our God really is; so let me take a different approach. Think about your life last week. What was required to make you happy? Secure? Thankful? What shook your world? Why? What does it take for you to be satisfied? Who said something that made you feel affirmed? Rejected?
1. All of these questions help us to know where our dependence really lies. All of us fight for the exclusivity of God on all fronts every day.
  2. Christians don't reach some state of Nirvana, in which we declaratively stand with God once, never needing to return to him again. He must occupy the only throne in our hearts with every choice, every decision, every love.
- E. This is not about "works" salvation. We are not saved by holding on to Jesus, but because Jesus is holding on to us. What I'm talking about is **Lordship**; defined as God's supreme power and rule, and our living in submission to, and dependence upon it. This is something believers in Christ fight for everyday.
1. The gospel cannot be separated from it. While we affirm that a person is saved by the grace of Jesus working in us, evidence of a life transformed by the gospel is found in increasing recognition of and submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, having no other gods (or types of gods) before him.
  2. **Luke 6:46 ESV** "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?"
- IV. But genuine faith in Christ not only allows us to grow in our determination and ability to **exclusively** surrender to Christ's lordship, it opens our eyes to see the beauty of that Lordship. When I place my trust in Jesus, I can see clearly what an amazing blessing it is to have only **one** God who has clearly communicated in his Word what he desires. I don't have to find one god among many who will listen to me or take care of me. On the contrary, the one and only God has found me!
- A. There are 2 ways to look at the words "You shall have no other Gods before me." Most of us take that to mean, "You, who are my people, are prohibited from worshipping any other so-called gods." Without a doubt that would be a proper interpretation of the meaning of the text.
1. But try to read it provisionally as well. "**You shall have no other gods...**" Could God also be saying to us, "No intermediary god has been provided for you, because none exists, and you don't need one. You belong to me, and none shall stand between us. I have delegated no one to act on my behalf."?
  2. Last week we read Jeremiah 31:33. Let's read it again, paying close attention to the final words: **Jeremiah 31:33 ESV** For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And **I will be their God, and they shall be my people.**
- B. "I will be their God and they will be my people" shouts a personal interest and a desire for deep relationship on the part of God. He bars us from pursuing satisfaction in, or help from other gods not because he is needy or insecure, but because he greatly loves us and wants the best for us, his people, his children.

1. No parent here would ignore the fact that their child was going to try meth, or play Russian Roulette with their buddies! They would quickly and decisively intervene in order to protect their child's well-being.
  2. If God turned a blind eye to all the false deities of materialism and pride that constantly try to seduce us, what kind of Father would he be? There is no benefit to be had in the pursuit or worship of such things. There is only a promise of certain disappointment and, ignored long enough, destruction.
- V. But we must also consider the words **"You shall have no other gods *before me*."**
- A. "Before me" doesn't just mean "in preference to me"; "before me" can also be understood to mean "in my presence" or "in my view".
    1. It is hard to come up with an analogy for this, but imagine a husband who has been good to his wife. Imagine he has always spoken kind and encouraging words, that he has provided for her and always been faithful.
    2. Now imagine if he were to find his wife to be sleeping with another, not in some seedy motel, but in their own house, their own bed.
  - B. This comes close to what it means to have other gods "before" the one true God. They may be desires, attitudes, habits, possessions, relationships... anything! But never be so arrogant as to imagine that your devotion to such things is hidden from the Lord, or that he overlooks it, or doesn't care.
    1. God describes himself several times in the Bible as a jealous God, who will not tolerate divided hearts. That is not to say that anyone's heart is entirely and at all times devoted to God, but it does mean that my priority is to constantly press past the voices and impulses that would pull me away.
    2. This is important, because most of us have a tendency to categorize our lives. We have categories for what we think is "God stuff" (like devotions, church, prayer, etc.); and one for "non-God stuff" (like work, school, hobbies, etc.) But this is not how the Bible teaches us to view our relationship to God.
  - C. **Colossians 3:23 ESV *Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.***
    1. How are you serving Christ? With "whatever you do"! Work, school, family, church, hobbies, your speech, your thoughts, everything is an offering!
    2. Approaching life this way radically shifts us from self-centered, self-serving, and self-saving into people constantly growing towards unfiltered worship.
- VI. Today as we come to the Lord's table, ask the Lord if there are other gods who have tried to take a place on the throne of your heart, which is reserved for the one and only God. As he points things out to you that may need your attention, remember that we are people of grace, not law. Any obedience we offer comes from love and not fear. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you the power and beauty of rejecting every pretender to the throne of your heart.
- A. As you partake of the elements, remember that you and I are just like ancient Israel. We have been rescued from the "Egypt" of sin at the cross. We are no longer slaving under a law we can't keep, but have been given rest in Jesus.
  - B. But also remember that you have also been redeemed by the broken body and the spilled blood of the Lord Jesus. We are no longer our own. We have been purchased by Christ.

1. **1 Corinthians 6:20 ESV** for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.
  2. Because we have been bought, we surrender our bodies (minds, souls, spirits) in worship to the One true God.
- C. The demand that we will have no other Gods before him is his right, but it is also our great benefit! Who would want a counterfeit if you have the real deal? He has redeemed us for himself, and we couldn't be better off!
- D. Come to the table. Return to the Lord. Repent of lesser allegiances. Confess before him that he is your God and there is no room for any other.
- VII. **1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

1 1 John 4:19