

Exodus 20:1-11

How to Relate to God

Our culture has a love/hate relationship with the 10 commandments. Look at these representations from Washington, DC:

1. *Door of Supreme Court*
2. *Facade of Supreme Court*
3. *Floor of National Archives*
4. *Inside Supreme Court*
5. *Library of Congress*
6. *Ronald Regan Building*
7. *US District Court*
8. *Washington Monument*

It's absolutely clear that our founding fathers, and those who came after them, recognized the commandments as a basis for our system of law.

On the other hand you have organizations like the ACLU bringing law suits to try to wipe out any reference to the commandments at all. Even from a purely secular, historical perspective that's absurd.

But there's another danger that's a lot more subtle. That's the trivializing of the commandments. To me trivializing godly words, concepts, and ideas is far more hazardous than most of us realize.

Let me show you what I mean. The biblical concept of hell and damnation is frightening. Jesus said this:

"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched--"

How about this one? (Rev 20) *The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

Hell is serious business. It's never ending. Damnation is serious business. in fact, you can't get any more serious than hell and damnation.

Now let me ask you something. How many times in the past week have you heard those words used outside of church? People telling each other to go to hell and asking God to damn others?

Those words roll off people's tongues like cheeseburgers off MacDonald's grills. People don't give a second thought to saying them.

I've had people say to me "What's the big deal, they're just words?" No their not. If they were just words people would say, "Go to Albuquerque" or something.

They aren't just words. They're words that express deep spiritual truths. But because the culture spits these words out left and right they've lost their meaning.

There's a similar situation going on with the 10 commandments.

If you Google the phrase "10 commandments" you'll get 805,000 hits.

The Ten Commandments for C Programmers
Ten Commandments of Good Historical Writing
The Ten Commandments of Computer Ethics
Ten Commandments of Baseball
The Ten Commandments of HTML
The 10 Commandments of Client Presentations
Ten Commandments of Etiquette for Communicating with People with Disabilities
The Ten Commandments of Internet Searching
Ten Commandments for Math Teachers
And on it goes...

I'm not slamming all those, it's just that we've so trivializing the 10 commandments of God that they just blend in with all the rest of the "10 commandments."

What I've really been fascinated by is how many people tell me they're sure they're going to heaven because they keep the 10 commandments. When people tell me that I always ask them to name them.

Do you know, out of all the people who have ever told me they were going to heaven because they keep the 10 commandments, I've never met one who could

name them. I don't know that I've ever had anyone who could name 5.

On the one hand we say the 10 commandments are important, but we live like they're not really important to us at all.

Just, what is the deal about the 10 commandments, anyway? Why should we care about a bunch of ancient rules?

Open Your Bibles to Ex 20 pg 68

Our study of the second book of Moses has taken us on a journey of freedom. The Hebrew people were enslaved in Egypt and God used Moses to lead them out to liberty.

These are people who experienced first hand the miracles of God. From the plagues in Egypt, to the red sea, to bread from heaven, the Israelites have seen and heard some amazing things.

In our last study, in Exodus 19, we saw how God told the people to prepare to meet Him.

They had to be spiritually prepared. They had to get physically prepared. But most significantly of all, they had to be prepared to submit their wills to God.

God laid out some heavy rules for this occasion. God would give the commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai but the people had to keep their distance.

There was smoke and lightening. Fire and the sound of a trumpet. All of that was designed to show God as holy.

Moses went up on the Mountain alone. in Chapter 20, we begin in verse 1...

Read verse 1-2

People can debate all they want about the origin of the Law of Moses. The Bible gives it to us straight on. God spoke all these words. This wasn't taken from the code of Hammurabi or some other ancient set of laws. This was directly from God.

Not only that but the theme of Exodus hasn't changed. The theme is freedom. To a

lot of people “freedom” and “law” aren’t synonyms, they’re antonyms; opposites.

We tend to see any rule or law as a restriction. In a debate at the University of California, Irvine, Gordon Stein, Vice president of Atheists United said (and I quote), “Evil is by definition in an atheist’s universe, that which decreases the happiness of people. That thing is evil, which causes more people to be unhappy. How do we know this? We’ll we don’t *know* it. It’s a consensus, just like morality in general is a consensus.”

People say the stupidest things, don’t they? “Morality is just a consensus. Right and wrong are determined by majority opinion.” That would make Nazi Germany correct.

That would mean that ethically there’s no difference between helping a sick child and murdering a sick child. It just depends on what your culture values.

“Evil is what makes us unhappy.” So child molesters aren’t evil if what they do makes them happy. See the absurdity?

The fact is that no one would want to live in a society where there were no laws.

The only real question is, whose laws are we going to live by?

If God is our Creator then obviously it’s God who makes the rules. And God’s rules will be the best.

People don’t really want a society without rules. What they want is a society without rules for their own personal lives. But they don’t want a lawless society.

What we have in Exodus chapter 20 is the basic rules of life from the giver of life. These are the laws for living from the ultimate law giver.

You can divide these up into 2 sections. The first is rules for relating to God and the second is rules for relating to other people.

Chuck Coleson has written a book called “Loving God.” In it he gives the results of an ad hoc survey he took of various people who claimed to be believers in Jesus Christ. This is what he wrote:

The greatest commandment of all, Jesus said, is "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." I'd memorized those words but had never really thought about what they meant in practical terms; that is, how to fulfill that command. I wondered if others felt the same way. So I asked a number of more experienced Christians how they loved God.

... The cumulative effect of my survey convinced me that most of us, as professing Christians, do not really know how to love God. Not only have we not given thought to what the greatest commandment means in our day-to-day existence, we have not obeyed it.

If loving God is the summit of all commands, the distillation of all scripture, if all the law and the Prophets hang on the command to love God, how do we do it? What does it look like in absolute, concrete terms to love God? I believe God sums it up in the first 4 commandments.

So let's look at them with that in mind.

Commandment number 1 is foundational. **Read verse 3**

The First Commandment Clarifies The Object Of Our Worship

Usually when we think of the 10 commandments we think of the "Thou shalt not..." we think of them as negatives.

When Jesus said, *"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."* & *"You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."* He was really putting a positive spin on the commandments, wasn't He?

The essence of the commandments is love. Love God, and love others. If you love God and love others then there's certain things you won't do, which is what several of the commandments are about.

But, if you love God, then no one, or nothing will come before Him.

The Israelites lived in a world of lots of choices. They just spent the last 400 years in Egypt with the whole variety of Egyptian gods. They needed this reinforced to them. It's God and God alone.

We don't have any shortage of choices ourselves, do we? I mean you think about all the places we could give our attention. All the things that call for us to pay them allegiance.

We want to make ourselves god. We want to make our possessions god. Or our job, or our family, or our home, or sports. The list goes on, and on, and on.

Why are we here? What's it all about? Why do we take up space on the planet?

The atheist says, we're here as total accidents, we make our own meaning by what we do, then we die and dissolve.

Peter Atkins, an outspoken atheist and lecturer in physical chemistry at Oxford wrote in the London Daily Telegraph, "mankind is just a bit of slime on a planet."

That really makes you feel significant, doesn't it? Talk about self-image!

God says we're here as His creations, to do His will, and to bring Him glory. We don't let anything stand between us and our God.

You shall have no other gods before me.

The first commandment deals with the object of our worship. The Second Commandment Defines Who We Worship

Read verse 4-6

That commandment has been interpreted in various ways. The Amish use it to say you shouldn't take a photograph. Others have said it's wrong to make any kind of statue, or art work.

God told the Jews to carve items to use in the temple so obviously it doesn't mean no art work.

I believe the key is in the phrase: *...you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.*

Imagine trying to capture the totality of all of who God is using wood, metal and stone – things that He has created – and then trying to confine Him to an image of something that is a part of this universe.

Imagine trying to put God in a box.

That is the essence of the 2nd commandment. Don't make an idol and worship it.

You say, "Hey, no problem. This isn't India, or the jungles of Africa or South America. We don't have little carved images of stone and wood in our homes that we bow down to every night."

We can handle this one, right. It's in the other ones we need lots of help with – the ones that talk about not lying, and not committing adultery, and not wanting what my neighbor has. Those are the the really tough ones. Those are the ones that I need help with. I can always handle this one.

Can you? Think about this. You know what the first commandment is the Jewish people break after God gives them the 10? It's this one.

Before Moses ever came down from the mountain with the stone tablets, the Israelites had already made themselves an idol. If it wasn't so easy a command for them to keep, could it be that we need to watch out too?

We're probably not going to make a little golden idol but we are quick to design our own god. When the Hebrews made a golden calf and said "this is our god," they were projecting their idea of God into that idol.

Our obedience to God is going to be fabricated or shaped, by our view of God. If we have an idolatrous heart that wants to come up with a "custom designed" god, we're never going to obey God in truth.

The Bible says that God made man in His own image. This history of religion has been just the opposite. Man trying to make God in his own image.

Be careful of trying to put God in your little box. Remember this guy?

(Taco Bell Commercial)

You'll never have a big enough box when it comes to God.

It's up to us to let God reveal Himself to us. The more we know about Him the more we'll love Him and worship Him.

As kind of a side note the Roman Catholic Church took a novel approach to this

commandment. I have here a current Catechism of the Catholic Church and in it they list the 10 commandments.

Since the Catholic Church believes that statues and images are part of worship they skip the second commandment, "You shall not make for yourself an idol..."

It's not even in the list. You say, "Well then, how do they come up with 10 commandments?"

10 Commandment.jpg

Here's their solution: They split the 10th commandment, "You shall not covet" and make it into 2 separate commands. Number 9 is "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife," and number 10 is "You shall not covet your neighbor's goods."

I hate to say it, but that is really disingenuous. It's obvious that the command on coveting is one command. It's also obvious that God wants us to avoid anything that might lead to idolatry.

The first command says when we worship; God must be our number one priority. The second command says this is how we worship; we come to God in truth, and worship him on his terms. The Third Commandment Outlines How We Worship; we need to be genuine, authentic, and sincere in our relationship with the Lord.

Reads verse 7

As we saw when we studied Moses and the burning bush, the Jews really ran with this one. In their zeal to keep the commandments they decided that God's name was to be revered to the point where they wouldn't even say it.

This was their thinking: We don't ever want to use God's name in vain so we won't use God's name at all. That'll keep us out of trouble. So they wouldn't pronounce YHVH or Jehovah, the covenant name of God.

They were well intentioned but I think they missed the point.

Using God's name in vain isn't just about swearing, although that's part of it.

The Hebrew word translated "vain" is the word *shav'*. It has to do with lying and falsehood.

Remember that names were a big deal in the Bible. A name was practically the same thing as a person's identity. Today, when you and I choose names for our children, we often pick names that sound nice, or that have some link to a favorite relative. But in the eastern culture of the Bible, giving a child a name was almost the same as giving him or her a destiny and an identity.

I believe this commandment is saying, Only use God's name in truth. Only speak of God in a way that's true to His character.

From a biblical perspective, referring to the name of God was referring to the identity of God. And to slander God's name, or to use it irreverently, or to associate it with vulgarity, or to sling it around without any meaning at all, was the same as blasphemy.

Anyone can talk about God. You can come here this morning and sing along with the worship. When someone sneezes, you can say, "God bless you." But faith isn't just talking about God. Christianity isn't about words, or rituals, or even religion; it's about a personal relationship with God through His Son Jesus Christ.

This third commandment is calling us to authentic faith.

God doesn't want you to merely say that He's all important; He actually wants to be all important. He doesn't want us to merely sing about lifting His name on high unless we're really going to do it. Words don't matter unless there is reality behind them.

Are you claiming God's name in truth, or are you using God's name in vain?

There is one final commandment in the "relating to God" column. That's the 4th commandment. The Forth Commandment Explains The Destination Of Worshipers

Read vs 8-11

I'd like you to see the basis for this commandment. It's in Gen 2, PG 4 Read 2:1-3

God had a plan and a purpose in the way He carried out creation. I've heard

people say, "How could God have created the world in 6 days?" Like that's not enough time.

My question is, "What took Him so long?" Why 6 days? If your God you could create everything instantaneously.

God had a purpose. He designed a week of creation events to correspond with our week. That's why He rested on the 7th day.

God didn't rest because He was worn out from all that creating. He rested because His creative work was finished.

When He "rested" on the 7th day, God showed that what He set out to accomplish was finished. From this point on He wouldn't bring something out of nothing. Now He would control and sustain what He'd made.

From the time of Adam until you get to Exodus 16 there's no mention of the Sabbath day. That just about covers 2400 years of human history.

Then in Exodus 16 the Hebrews are being led by Moses. They run out of food and complain to god. God supplies Mana (bread from heaven).

He tells them every day gather up what you need for that day. No hoarding. I'll take care of your daily needs. But on the 6th day gather up enough for 2 days, because I want you to rest on the 7th day.

The sabbath was designed to teach Israel to trust God.

Then we come to Exodus 20. this Sabbath command doesn't seem to fit with the others. It's not about morality or ethics. So what is it about?

Deut 5 Pg 164 Read 12-15

You guys were slaves in Egypt. God took you out and set you free. He provided for you and met your needs. God is trustworthy. Now keep the Sabbath day as a perpetual reminder of God's faithfulness.

Where do we find rest? Where do we find peace? Only in the God of peace. We trust Him. We participate in His rest. That was what the Sabbath was all about.

A couple of more important points:

1) Ex 31 says: *Speak to the children of Israel, saying: Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for it is a sign between Me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I am the LORD who sanctifies you. The children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever...*

The Sabbath was specifically given to Israel as a sign of God's covenant with them. No non-Jews were required to keep the Sabbath.

2) The Hebrew word translated *Sabbath* literally means, "to rest." The Sabbath was never commanded as a day of worship. It was a day of rest. There are people today who say that Christians have to worship on the seventh day. That's not true.

So what does this commandment have to do with us today?

When Jesus died on the cross He fulfilled every aspect of the Law of Moses. As a system of law we're not bound by the commandments. That's why we don't offer sacrifices and keep holy days.

But, as far as God's standards go 9 of the 10 commandments are repeated as admonitions in the NT. The Sabbath is the only one that's not. All the rest are timeless principles. The Sabbath is unique.

Rather than finding commands to observe the seventh day(which is Saturday) the NT says don't let anyone judge you on what day you worship.

Then, in the Book of Hebrews, it brings the whole thing down to us.

Turn Heb 4 pg 1063 Read 1-11 (Through "that rest")

Follow this now. God's 7th day rest was a prefiguring of a rest for us. From creation on God has been offering rest to mankind. The Jews in the wilderness didn't believe and they didn't enter His rest.

Joshua couldn't provide it or God wouldn't have kept on offering it.

There remains therefore a rest for the people of God. Be diligent to enter that rest.

Why didn't the Hebrews enter? *The word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.*

There's a permanent rest for us. The Sabbath day is an object lesson but the real thing never ends.

We who are sinners, can be sure of God's forgiveness, when we stop our labors and enter His rest.

How do we do that?

Believe that Jesus Christ died in our place on the cross.

On the 7th day, and through the Jewish Sabbath commands, God was picturing the rest that we can only enter by faith.

In Matthew 11 Jesus said, *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

Have you come to Jesus Christ believing that He did for your sins? Have you place your faith in Him? Have you experienced His rest? The way we relate to our Holy God is through His Son Jesus Christ.