

Exodus pt. 35
The Ten Commandments pt. 3
Worship In the Right Way
Exodus 20:4 - 7

I. Introduction

- A. As we continue our study of the Exodus we are at the foot of Mount Sinai. God has entered into a sacred covenant with the Hebrew people and now He is giving them His divine Law. Last week we looked at the first of the Ten Commandments: “You shall have no other gods before Me.” This is the bedrock commandment that the entire Law hinges upon. The First Commandment essentially tells us that we must worship the right God, the only God, the God of the Bible, Yahweh. We are not to have any other gods in His presence.
- B. Today we will look at the the second and third commandments.
- C. “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven abler or on the earth beneath or the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.” (Exodus 20:3 - 7)

II. What Do These Commandments Teach us About God?

- A. Before I answer that question specifically we need to understand the commandments themselves. At this point though we can say that no only does God want us to worship Him and Him alone but He wants us to worship Him in the right way. He could have stopped after the first commandment but He doesn't. He gives three additional commandments that govern our worship and six more commandments that direct our treatment to others. We must worship the right God in the right ways.
- B. The Second Commandment
 - 1. “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God...
 - 2. The Premise
 - a) In the First Commandment, God declared that He alone should be worshiped by His people. Now in the Second, He commands that they shouldn't make for themselves idols. Why does He need two commandments to say essentially the same thing? I think these commands actually serve as two sides of the same coin.
 - (1) The First Commandment teaches that we must worship the right God.
 - (2) The Second and the Third (as we will see) teach that we must worship Him in the right way.
 - (3) “Whereas the first commandment forbids us to worship false gods, the second commandment forbids us to worship the true God falsely. How we worship matters nearly as much to God as whom we worship. We may not worship him any way we like, but only the way that he has commanded.” (*Preaching the Word: Exodus*, pg. 528)

- (4) Consider that though the Second Commandment definitely stands against worshipping any false god through an idol, it also prohibits worshipping an earthly image of God, Himself. God does not want us to try to contain His glorious splendor into an image of our own design. To do so would be to reduce God to a something unworthy of His glory, incapable of describing His nature, and infinitely inferior to who He is and what He has done.
- b) God is not like anything on earth
- (1) “Nothing in the sky, nothing on the ground, and nothing in the sea! [...] That pretty much covers it.” (*Preaching the Word: Exodus*, pg. 529)
 - (2) Again we must remember the historical context of the Bible. The book of Exodus records God’s miraculous deliverance of the Hebrews from their bondage in Egypt. Remember that the Egyptians worshiped more than 80 pagan false gods. Most of these gods were depicted through some kind of animal avatar. These Hebrews have only ever known how to worship silent, deaf, and lifeless gods through idols. Now God is saying, “I’m not like them. I Am. I Am alive, powerful, good, gracious, and real. And there is no image on earth that will capture my glory.”
- c) The Reason
- (1) “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God...” (Exodus 20:5a - b)
 - (2) Notice that God connects worship with service. True worship always involves more than just prayers and songs. It includes our whole lives.
 - (3) Again we see that God tells the Hebrews that He is “a jealous God.” We explored this last week so I’ll review this quickly today.
 - (a) The word jealous has a negative connotation, in our culture, but it comes from the same word as “zealous.” That is to be passionate, fervent, and intentional about something.
 - (b) “The burning passion of his love.” (*Preaching the Word: Exodus*, pg. 529)
- d) “One commentator explains, ‘Godly jealousy is not the insecure, insane, and possessive human jealousy that we often interpret this word to mean. Rather, it is an intensely caring devotion to the objects of His love, like a mother’s jealous protection of her children, a father’s jealous guarding of his home.’” (Ibid)
3. The Punishment
- a) “You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” (Exodus 20:5 - 6)
- (1) God takes this commandment so seriously that He includes both a punishment for violating it and a reward for honoring it.
 - (a) For those who disobey there will be consequences handed down to their children. For those who obey it there will be blessings handed down to their children.
 - i) The sins of parents can cause consequences for their children.
 - ii) Sin tends to run in the family as children learn from their parents.

- iii) “God never condemns the innocent but only the guilty. Here it is important to notice something in the second commandment that is offend overlooked - namely, how the threat ends. God says that he will punish three or four generations ‘of those who hate me.’ It is not only their fathers who hate God but also their children. People who struggle with the fairness of this commandment usually assume that although the father is guilty, his children are innocent. But the children hate God as much as their father did.” (*Preaching the Word: Exodus*, pg. 531)
 - b) Some take these numbers to be very specific and perhaps that is the way God intends us to take it. However, it seems to me that God is simply saying that His blessings go farther than the consequences of our sin. Our disobedience may hinder a few generations but the blessings of obedience blesses thousands of generations. The blessings of God go on forever.
 - c) So what does this commandment teach us about God?
 - (1) God is a jealous God. He desires our worship be exclusive to Him.
 - (2) God is a transcendent God. No earthly image is worthy of Him.
 - (3) God is a just God. He disciplines disobedience and blesses obedience.
- C. The Third Commandment
1. “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.” (Exodus 20:7)
 2. The Premise
 - a) This is perhaps the most misunderstood of the Ten Commandments. Often this is understood as merely a prohibition against using God’s name as a vulgarity, curse word, or in an irreverent manner. While we should not do those things that is not the focus of this Commandment.
 - (1) The confusion stems from the usage of the word ‘take.’ What does it mean to ‘take the Lord’s name in vain?’ We have almost exclusively made that about words. However, the imagery in the original Hebrews is much more vivid than that. The word depicts to “carry” or “handle.”
 - b) Imagine carrying the flag of our nation. I was raised in a military family and respect for the flag was ingrained in my mind. If the flag is drug through the mud the appropriate response is to burn it. This is the picture of ‘taking the Lord’s name in vain.’ It depicts dragging God’s flag, His name, His character through the mud. Taking the Lord’s name in vain has much more to do with how we live while professing to be God’s people than merely not using His Name as a curse word.
 3. The Punishment
 - a) No specific punishment is listed here, simply that God will not leave unpunished those who take His name in vain.
 - b) So what does this commandment teach us about God?
 - (1) God cares about His name, His glory, His reputation, His honor.
 - (2) How God’s children live matters to Him.

III. How Do These Commandments Point us To Christ?

A. The Second Commandment

1. God commands us not to to make any graven image of Him. What image could contain the glory of the infinite Godhead? How does this commandment point us to the Christ? Because Jesus is the image of God.

- a) He is the image of the invisible God... (Colossians 1:15a)
- b) And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature... (Hebrews 1:3a)
- c) "He who has seen Me has seen the Father;" (John 14:9b)
- 2. We need not make any graven image of God because Jesus is already the perfect image of God. We do not need statues, pictures, shrines, or jewelry to depict God to us. We simply need Jesus. When we see Him we see the heart and majesty of the Father.
- B. The Third Commandment
 - 1. As "Christians" we literally carry the name of Jesus Christ on our lives. The way we live either honors Christ or dishonors Him.
- C. The one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. (1 John 2:6)

IV. How Do These Commandments Point us to the Gospel?

- A. The Second Commandment
 - 1. As we just saw, Jesus is the perfect image of the Father. How does this reality connect to the gospel itself?
 - 2. God also made mankind in His image. However, through our sin we are a marred picture of God. So Jesus came, fully God-fully Man, lived the life we could not, died the death we deserve, and rose again. Those who place their faith in Jesus are transformed, made into new creations, and conformed to the image of Jesus.
 - 3. "How can we worship God the right way? What can save us from our own private idolatries? The answer is very simple: Rather than remaking God into our image, we need to be remade into His image. God does this by bringing us into a personal, saving relationship with his Son Jesus Christ. [...] in order to come to God in true worship, we don't need to make some kind of idol; all we need to do is come to him through Jesus Christ. And when we come to Christ, then God lives in us by his Holy Spirit. He works in us to repair his image [in us], so that we can live for his glory." (*Preaching the Word: Exodus*, pg. 536)
- B. The Third Commandment
 - 1. How can we carry the name of Christ well? How can we live lives that honor and please Him? It is only because of the gospel. It is only through Christ living in and through us.
 - 2. "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." (Galatians 2:20)

V. How Should New Testament Believers Apply These Commandments?

- A. The Second Commandment
 - 1. We must not attempt to fit God into our boxes.
 - a) There is always a temptation in us to worship a god of our own imagination. A god who though we think of the God of the Bible is actually one that fits within our tradition, opinions, and comfort zones.
 - (1) Does God always agree with you?
 - (2) Does the Word of God ever confront and challenge your theology, opinions, and worldview?

- (3) Does God's nature spur your heart to worship especially when He is beyond your understanding?
 2. We must not allow our hearts to worship other things.
 - a) "The profound wisdom of [the] second commandment is that anything in the world can be hammered into an idol, and therefore can be a false god." (*Gods at War*, pg. 25)
 3. We should be careful with religious imagery and icons.
 - a) In church history there have been theologians who rejected any depiction of not only the Father, but Jesus the Son. The term for this is an "iconoclast." Iconoclasts believe that since Jesus is God, it is a violation of the Second Commandment to depict Jesus in any way. To do so, in their view, is to create a graven image.
 - b) I would not say that I'm fully an iconoclast but I lean that way. We should be very careful with regard to crucifixes, religious artwork, and other depictions of the Lord Jesus. If for no other reason, those images affect our reading of Scripture and our thoughts of Jesus.
- B. The Third Commandment
1. First, we must ask ourselves do we have the name of Christ on our lives? Are we Christians in the first place? To say it another way, have you placed your faith in Christ, received grace through Christ, and been saved by Christ?
 2. If you have received Christ, then the next question is does your life reflect His glory? We often focus on the many blessings of being a Christian. Grace, mercy, strength, wisdom, purpose, value, etc. However, to carry the name of the Lord Jesus is also a somber and significant responsibility. To drag the Lord Jesus' name through the mud is not something that God will leave unpunished.

VI. Conclusion and Application