

EXODUS

תּוֹמֵשׁ דָּסִס

40

The Second Commandment

Exodus 20:4-6

Jealous God

We are in Exodus 20 today. We've been working through Exodus since fall and we are now in the part of the story where God gives the ten commandments to his newly liberated people.

Sometimes we will say that Christianity, knowing God, is about relationship, not rules. Which is true - Christianity is primarily about Jesus, not rule following. We don't become Christians by keeping rules.

But all relationships do bring parameters. Marriage, the deepest of all human relationships, also has rules that go with it: we're in this for better or for worse (which can be confining), we are forsaking all others (which is limiting), we're in this in sickness and in health (which could be burdensome at times.) But we believe that it is worth it. A society with permanent marriages, kids who have parents in exclusive marriages, and the depth and the warmth that is built over time and through struggle is so worth it.

The rules don't make the marriage worse, they make it better.

Every relationship has some rules that go with it. A friendship comes with the expectation that we'll stay in touch and be there at key moments like weddings and funerals. A dating relationship comes with the expectation that we're not going on dates with other people right now. Even a facebook

friendship has rules: I will see your cat pictures and read your political posts.

And likewise in a relationship with God, there are parameters. God does give commands to His people. But he does that for our good and for the deepening of the relationship.

So while we might think that giving the ten commandments is “anti-relationship,” it is actually a kindness and a mercy of God that He gives his commands to us, His people.

We said last time that this storyline is important. God rescues His people. And then He commands them, it is not the commands that get us to Him. He frees them from slavery by His grace through no work of their own, and then, like God does with all redeemed people, He defines the relationship with some commandments.

Exodus 20:1 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. 4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them,...

God wants his people to recognize the distinction between a god that we make and god who made us. If we can make a god, it isn't god, and shouldn't be worshipped.

We're not supposed to bow down before statues and paintings and icons.

This doesn't mean we shouldn't make Christian-themed art, but we aren't supposed to bow down before it and use it as an object of worship. God

isn't made by hands, he is not like the stuff we can make, and we have to make sure we're worshipping Creator, not creation.

So the second commandment is that we shouldn't make idols or any other physical thing that we worship. We don't worship gods that we make, and we don't worship God via images - we don't say, "Let's bow before this statue of Jesus, let's look at this painting of God while we pray," God does not want to be worshipped in images.

His design is that He is perceived through His word until we see Him.

But He knows we are physical beings and need something tangible to experience Him with, so He has given us baptism and the Lord's Supper as the tangible things for us to see and taste and touch while we wait for that day that we see Him.

God gets to decide how He's worshipped. And He has said He isn't worshipped as an object or through an object.

Obedience to this is at least manageable to us. We're not bowing before religious statues. Check. Second commandment nailed.

But in the New Testament, the definition of idols is expanded:

Colossians 3:5-6 "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. [6](#)On account of these the wrath of God is coming"

So he says that covetousness is idolatry. We'll talk more about that in a couple of months, but covetousness is over-desiring something. It is desiring something more than God.

When we put anything before God in our priorities, that thing is our idol.

Idols are God-replacements.

And they're easily identified with our emotions: what are the things that make me the most happy? The most angry? The most fearful: if I ever lost this, or if I never attained this thing I don't know if I could handle it.

And idols are not necessarily bad things: sometimes they are just sinful pleasures and comforts. But often they are good things that we desire too much. Good things that become god things. Money is good, but the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. Sex is good, but sex outside of marriage is evil and damaging. But when we'll do sinful things to attain good things, those good things are idols to us.

They have replaced God.

And so God says that one of the terms of the relationship is that we place no other gods before Him, and another is that we don't make any idols that we worship. Those are the first two parameters in this relationship with God.

Which makes perfect sense: if God is in a relationship to us, if He is like a husband to us, than "not having another husband" is a really good rule.

That is a rule that Debbie has to obey in our marriage. She can't have another husband. And that's reasonable.

And we know God is thinking in terms of His relationship with his people with these commands, because of the reason He gives for them:

Exodus 20:5b for I the LORD your God am a jealous God,

He says don't worship other gods or make other gods, not just because there's a rule against that, not just because they're not true gods, not just because he's testing us, but because, he says, **"I'm jealous."**

Jealous.

And just in case you think he misspoke or Moses wrote down the wrong word or something, later on, in Exodus 34, God actually says that his name is jealous. He's so jealous you can call him "jealous."

Jealous God?

Now that's not a word most people would associate with God. Loving God, sure, Holy God, sure, kind God, definitely, powerful God, of course, but jealous?

In fact that's a pretty big turn-off for people.

Oprah Winfrey described a time when she was in a baptist church, and heard the preacher talking about God's omniscience and omnipresence and that was OK, but then (here's here quote)

"Then he said, "The Lord thy God is a jealous God," I was caught up in the rapture of that moment until he said, "jealous." And something struck me. I was 27 or 28, and I was thinking God is all, God is omnipresent, God is . . . also jealous? A jealous God is jealous of me? And something about that didn't feel right in my spirit because I believe that God is love, and that God is in all things."

So a God who is jealous is not a God people are inclined to worship.

And that's understandable. Because, even in the Bible, most of the time, jealousy is called a sin. In 1 Corinthians 3 Paul told the Corinthians he knows they're still worldly because they're jealous.

And if a wife says, "My husband is really jealous," what comes to mind?

An insecure, possessive, stifling, suspicious, hostile guy. The guy who is scared if you talk to another guy in any setting. And we wouldn't want to be a church that had husbands like that, let alone a church that worships a god like that.

But we have to realize there are different forms of jealousy. There's the insecure psycho form. But there is a righteous jealousy, particularly for a spouse.

A good husband has a righteous kind of jealousy. Good husbands are not OK with it if their wives have a boyfriend. They're not OK with it if he comes over and hangs out with her. They're not OK with it if their wives go for long walks together holding hands with some other guy. That is supposed to kindle a righteous jealousy that is meant to protect the sacredness of the marriage.

If there was a woman whose husband kept running off with other women, we wouldn't say she was wrong for feeling some anger. We wouldn't say she was wrong for saying, "You've betrayed me - we gave ourselves to each other exclusively, we made vows, we said we'd forsake all others, and yet there you go. I'm jealous of your affections." Because those affections are rightly hers.

Husbands and wives have a right to lay that claim on one another. They belong to each other. They agreed to "forsake all others be faithful to you until death do us part." And it is right to experience jealousy when those vows are legitimately broken.

So what God is saying to His people, what he says to us, is “I am your God. And that is more than just a religion and a church you go to. I have a covenant relationship with you like a marriage. Don’t run off with other gods, don’t break my commandments, not just because you’re breaking the rules, because I’m jealous like a husband whose wife is committing adultery when you do.” And because God has rescued us and established that marriage-type relationship with us, He has a right to lay that claim on us.

And when he gives these ten commandments, he is not telling us not to break them just because we’re breaking the rules, he is telling us not to break them because we’re breaking our VOWS and breaking his HEART.

When you get baptized, when you announce that you’re a Christian, it is a lot like a marriage ceremony. In a wedding they exchange rings as a sign of their covenant, and Christians are baptized as a sign of the covenant with God.

And when a spouse cheats, the other spouse feels a deep pain, not just because there’s a rule against that in some book somewhere, but because it is a deep betrayal of trust, of a vow, and of a covenant.

And when we break God’s commands, putting something else before Him, that’s what He feels. We’re not just breaking the code, but cheating on him with another lover.

Sometimes when we talk about God being a God who commands, we think of Him like He is an overzealous hall monitor at school - always looking to ticket us, write us up, get us in trouble. But the image painted here is of a loving, perfect spouse, who gives everything to see His spouse thrive and live, and who feels betrayal when we say He isn’t enough and run off to another, and who knows what we are doing will destroy us.

He's not the prudish schoolmaster, He's the faithful, passionate lover and spouse.

Which starts to make sense of his wrath and anger when we betray Him by breaking His commands.

I've talked to too many people right when they've found out their spouses have committed adultery, and I have never seen such a combination of white hot rage and the deepest possible pain. Tears and anger and jealousy - all totally justified - all rolled up into one moment. The wrath and rage and jealousy that are all ascribed to God in the Bible make sense in that light.

And to put something before God is to make Him feel all of that and more.

When we rely more on the wisdom of an internet meme than the wisdom of His word, He's jealous and brokenhearted.

When our desires are more important to us than God's desires, there's jealousy.

When our list of priorities includes Him somewhere on there but not in slot#1, we've made an idol and He's jealous.

When we break his commands, we are turning from the perfect spouse that God is, and running to other lovers. We see the love of God who died for us to give us life, we say that it's not enough, and we go elsewhere for our pleasure. We are turning from his love, protection, and even his self-sacrifice for us and saying, "I need more."

And we commit this spiritual adultery in God's bed. We use the air he gave us to worship other gods, we use the strength he gave us to serve other

priorities, we use the eyes he gave us to see something as more beautiful than Him, we use the money he gave us to purchase comforts that mean more to us than Him.

We can break the first and second commandments by putting bad things above God - sinful pleasures that we live for. Or we can break them by putting good things above God. It doesn't matter much whether we live for bad stuff or live for good stuff - if we're not living for God first we provoke His anger.

If a man commits adultery, the wife is going to be angry if it was with her enemy, and she'll be angry if it was with her friend. The point is that it wasn't her.

If you take a good woman, or a bad woman, and put her in the place of your wife, you have committed adultery.

And if we take a good thing or a bad thing and put it in the place of God, we are sinning, and we have created for ourselves an idol, and it arouses God's jealousy.

So don't make light of sin - God does feel it.

There should be a grace-driven effort to fight it. A constant reminding of ourselves that God is a good spouse and that all other lovers are lovers less wild than Christ.

And when we've committed to a course against His commandments, that weight in our spirit is his discipline in your life that says, "I'm jealous of your affections!"

If I'm half an hour late getting home, Debbie is going to call me. If I'm a couple hours late, she'll call my friends. If I don't come home at night,

she'll call the police. She's going to step up the efforts to find me and get me home. You're supposed to be home.

Now it's not a perfect analogy because God knows all things, He hasn't lost you, He doesn't worry. But nonetheless, you're supposed to be home.

And by His Spirit He will remind you of His word. Maybe it's the word that you've already decided you don't believe, that you learned as a child. But you can't get away from the weight of it or the truth of it.

Or the Christian friend or pastor who you've known to be reliable is telling you you're wrong. And you get mad, you call them legalistic, you come up with every reason not to believe them, but in the quiet you can't get away from it.

He's calling you home.

And God promises other discipline, increasingly more significant and severe, because if you are God's child at all, He will bring you home.

Deuteronomy 8:5-6 "Know then in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, the LORD your God disciplines you. 6 So you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him."

Maybe you can say, "I'm doing fine. I'm not walking in obedience to God, but it's going fine for me."

There are a couple of things that could be.

- 1) You are numbing yourself to His Spirit's work in calling you to Himself.

2) You are suppressing that voice. This will drive you totally crazy.

3) This is the most terrifying - you're not His.

If somebody doesn't go home and never gets even a text message asking where they are, it is because they aren't married.

God is a jealous God, who is calling us to not make any other gods.

And there's an incredibly positive application this as well.

This jealousy of God is a comfort.

God is with us and protects us and loves us with the love of a good and strong husband. He is jealous, not just when we are sinning, but is fundamentally jealous in a good way like a good spouse that loves and protects.

We have to remember that God is good and is a good protector of his people. So He is not going to allow anything to happen to us that can wreck the most important thing, our relationship with Him:

Romans 8 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.31 What then shall we say to these

things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? 33 Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died--more than that, who was raised--who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? 36 As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." 37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

These sound a little bit like wedding vows, don't they? For richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, through death or life or height or depth, I will be faithful to you and nothing will separate you from my love.

God will not allow anything to separate us from what is most important: from Him.

So when we believe that, we're a whole lot less anxious. We're not walking through life with a nervous, uncommitted boyfriend who is texting other girls the whole time, but an all powerful and all loving, completely committed God that is in a covenant relationship with us.

He is good and kind and will go to all lengths to rescue us.

Isn't that what He did at the cross?

So God is a jealous God. Praise God!

But He goes on in Exodus 20 to say something else that's tough to understand:

(5b) visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,

That sounds terrible!

God visits iniquity of the fathers on children. Does that mean that God punishes children for the sins of their parents? That sounds horribly unjust. And there are passages like this where if we read them one way God sounds like a monster, but if we read them another way he doesn't.

And as Christians, we should give God the benefit of the doubt.

Remember what we just read in **Romans 8:32** **"32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"** A God who would give us so much must be incredibly good.

So when we don't understand Him, when He doesn't seem good, we start with the cross. There He showed us that He is good and loving and kind. So this way of His that I don't understand must be good and loving and kind somehow. And maybe I'll never understand it in this life, but the God who died for me always gets the benefit of the doubt.

And in another passage, when God is describing what human justice should look like, he says:

Ezekiel 18:20 **20 The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the**

son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself.

So what does this mean in Exodus?

It says God visits the iniquity of fathers on their children. And that work iniquity means “crookedness”. The crookedness of a father does affect future generations. In a couple of ways.

One is the natural consequence of a dad’s sin. Our whole region is littered with the evidence that the sin of a dad affects his kids. When a father abandons his family, that’s his sin, but nothing hurts and changes a kid quite like the absence of a father at home. The child will be different because of fatherlessness, and not for the better.

Violent crime in our region is mostly carried out by fatherless men. That affects the ways kids think.

There was a study last year that determined that even if a child doesn’t have a father in his home, the presence of more fathers in the neighborhood will positively affect his success in life.¹

The crookedness of a father affects everything. And most of the social problems we’d love to see fixed in our communities stem from fathers somewhere.

And if we fix fathers, we solve a number of problems. We’ve eliminated most of the poverty (at least in developed nations). We’ve gone a long way toward fixing broken neighborhoods. We’ve built a structure for the nurturing and teaching of children. We’ve eliminated violent crime. We’ve reduced government spending on welfare. God shows again how wise He

¹ <https://ifstudies.org/blog/for-black-boys-family-structure-still-matters>

is in pointing out that the crookedness of a father will be felt for generations.

But this passage says more than that. It doesn't just say there are natural consequences for generations if you disobey God. It says God visits the iniquities on the next generation - God actively punishes.

“visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,”

God is actively bringing consequences for a dad's sins on his kids.

But what is not in view here is innocent children being punished by God. Its parents who rebel against God, things grow crookedly, and the kids grow up to rebel against God themselves, and then are also punished. They were punished for their own guilt, but that guilt grew out of the fertile soil of the guilt of their fathers.

Now this isn't supposed to be read as an indictment on a parent whose kids stray. It doesn't say that if kids are guilty the parents must be. [Ezekiel 18:20](#) again **“Ezekiel 18:20 20 The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son.”**

God put Adam and Eve in paradise with a perfect Father. Nothing else could have been done for them. God did not fail as their Father. But still they rebelled.

There are things we can do as parents to make our kids rebel and run from God. And we can tilt the odds in their favor for godliness and success by wise and godly parenting and instruction and prayer for them.

But even the perfect parent has no absolute guarantee, so let's not be judgmental when we see a parent with a rebellious 17 year old. We're going to love and assume the best.

But we can, with our crookedness, produce crookedness in future generations.

But this passage in Exodus doesn't end there.

Exodus 20:6 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

In case you think you're stuck with the crookedness, God says that if you love him and keep his commandments, he'll show you his love. You're not stuck. These commandments are not pronouncing some unbreakable generational curse, but offering something better than a curse: it's an offer of blessings.

There are positive effects of love for God and keeping His commandments, for thousands of generations. When we love God and keep His command, our childrens' childrens' children will somehow be blessed through that.

He's the kind of God who would allow the tiny seed of faith we planted in our kids when they were 5 lie dormant, but then bloom when they're 50. Or who would take the pattern of faithfulness, bringing our kids to church every week, bear fruit only when they follow that pattern and bring their kids for 10 years, and then their kids and they believe.

God is a God who loves to reverse and overwhelm a curse.

Yes, our crookedness and putting other gods before gods will affect those who come after us. But times 1000, faithfulness will affect them.

Remember the first use of these commands. It is to send us running to Christ.

We've fashioned our idols, we've put other gods before Him.

Galatians 3:10-14 “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, n“Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” 11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” 12 But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— 14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Notes

Exodus 20:4-6

Jealous God

- I. Idols Forbidden (verse 4)
- II. A Jealous Husband (verse 5)
- III. Generational Effects (verse 5-6)

For Discussion in Small Groups:

1. How does viewing God as “jealous” affect your daily life?
2. What are the idols you tend to worship?
3. Idols can sometimes be classified under “comfort, control, approval, and power.” Where do yours fall?
4. How is God’s generational faithfulness an encouragement?