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## **Introduction:**

The Scriptures are full of promises, commands, and words from God to mankind. We find in Genesis God's created order. In the Proverbs we find wisdom for life. In Revelation we find God's ultimate victory. Yet one of the most well known and controversial commands from God comes in the book of Exodus when God gives the Ten Commandments to Israel.

Israel had spent years in Egyptian captivity when we open the book of Exodus. After heading to Egypt for safety and protection from famine, the place once intended to be a safe haven for descendants of Abraham quickly became a prison holding them captive under the authoritarian ruler of the Pharaohs. The people of God had been enslaved, forced to work for the Egyptian people in inhumane conditions. They were treated like cattle as generation after generation passed away awaiting God's deliverance.

Finally, in the leadership of Moses, we see God stand up before Pharaoh for his people. "Let me people go" is a cry heard time and time again during God's all out war with the Egyptians' hardened hearts. Plague after plague came upon the people. Finally, after the death of the firstborns within all the Egyptian households, Pharaoh agreed to let God's people leave and they were sent into the wilderness. It is there that we see God part the waters of the Red Sea and allow his people to walk through on dry land. It is in this time we see God provide food and nourishment for his people as daily bread is provided for them. It is here we see God's hand at work defending the people from adversaries that would wish them dead. After years in captivity the people saw first hand the power and providence of God.

In Exodus chapter 19 God finally calls his people before Him and His presence. The nation of Israel gathers around a mountain and as fire breaks loose, smoke fills the air, and God's presence comes over the mountain, Moses and Aaron approach the top to meet with God. It is here that God gives Moses the ten commands or ten words for his people. These are the rules, values, and basic moral standards for the people to cherish and live under as they seek to be a people pleasing to God.

Over the next ten weeks here at the OC we'll be looking at these ten commandments. We'll look at what they mean, how they applied to the nation of Israel, and what value they have for those of us today in the church. We'll dig deeper into this by looking at not only the letter of the law, but the heart of God's command as well. We'll talk about changing our perspective from "what is wrong?" towards "what is right?"

So join us through this study as we look into related texts, talk about important topics connected to these commands, and truly try to discern what it means for us to keep the commands of God.



## The Law of God

There are a lot of questions and confusion about the Old Testament and how we, as believers in the church, should adhere to its commands. There are some things in the Torah (the first 5 books of the Bible) that make complete sense and no one would really argue their merit. The command not to murder is one that spreads broad and wide across almost every civilized culture. The command not to steal is widely accepted as well. While criminals may find ways around these laws through loopholes in the justice system and shady dealings under the table, the agreed upon consensus within most culture is you should not take things that are not yours.

Yet when we begin to look into the books of the law, we also find some things that seem to be less acceptable. We find rules and laws that might not make any sense at all. There are rules about property, about vengeance, and dietary restrictions, and about agricultural practices. And so while at some points we agree with the Old Testament and its laws we also see a variety of things in there that just do not fit what we do today and how we live. Where is the believer left with all of this confusion? What are we to do while navigating some laws that make complete sense and others that seem dated if not outright contradictory to other parts of scripture?

The answer to all of this comes from our understanding of the Old Testament law and its application to the audience. The way we view the law and how it applies to us today will determine a great deal in how we handle the rest of God's word and how we apply it to our own lives.

### Is it all the same?

The Old Testament is filled with laws, but the first understanding we have to come to is the divisions of law within the Torah. There are three main types of laws present and the way we handle each of them is different. There are religious laws, cultural laws, and moral laws.

### Religious Laws

Within the context of the Old Testament there are chapters written about the means and ways in which God commanded worship for himself. There are rules about the tabernacle, rules about our position to God, rules about what sacrifices we make and how often we ought to make them. There are rules about ark transportation and rules about building materials and even more rules about how we adhere to the rules previously laid out. These are the religious rules of the Old Testament.

Every piece of scripture is valuable to the believer. We see this in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 when Paul encourages Timothy that ALL scripture is profitable for reproof and for edification and this even rings true in the old testament religious law. There is edifying and sanctifying truth to be found in the standards of God for the nation of Israel. Yet just because these things are profitable and able to teach us, this does not mean that we are held under them as commands for us today.

In the book of Acts we see the early church struggling with this debate about gentiles in the church and their adherence to the religious and cultural laws of the Jewish people. After Christ's



death and resurrection, believers brought in under the new covenant were no longer held to the standards and restrictions that were present in the old covenant. This is not because the old commands were abolished, but as Christ promised they were fulfilled. In Matthew 5:17 as Jesus addresses the crowds concerning the law and the writings of the prophets that he did not come to "abolish them but to fulfill them." New Testament believers, saved by the grace and mercy of God are no longer bound to the religious (ceremonial) laws of the Old Testament because these laws have been fulfilled by the ultimate sacrifice and the ultimate atonement made on our behalf by Jesus' sinless life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection.

### **Cultural Laws**

Within the Old Testament a second type of law we see are cultural laws. These are laws that are not necessarily about exact morality, but how moral values should be expressed and lived out in different circumstances and cultural norms of the day. These would include things such as slavery mentioned within Israel, debt collecting, rules concerning feasts, and rules about purification.

Understanding the relevance of cultural law is important because taken out of context, parts of scripture can be easily abused and manipulated to support views that are incongruent and sometimes an absolute affront to the morals and values found in scripture. During the civil war and American slavery, passages from the Old Testament were missused and misinterpreted to condone and even support the heinous acts perpetrated against slaves by their owners. These types of acts are clearly spoken out against all through scripture when God calls his people to unity, when he speaks of breaking down racial divisions, and calls all believers to serve rather than be served. Yet when passages of cultural law were taken out of context they were presented to be in favor of things completely contrary to the message of scripture and the heart of God. Context is always king when it comes to understanding the Bible and this is especially important when we begin looking at passages that contain cultural laws.

### **Moral Law**

The last type of law we find in the Old Testament is the moral law. These laws are about values that transcend a particular circumstance or situation. They speak into things that reflect the very heart and nature of God. These laws are the ones included when Jesus said that we would fulfill all of God's requirements if we would simply love God and love our neighbors. The moral law in the Old Testament is not limited to a season, but as prevalent to the New Testament believers and the church as they were to those living under the Mosaic law, making sacrifices in Solomon's temple.

Some examples of moral law that we find in the old testament are the laws to do with murder, justice, peace, and idolatry. These are the laws that are confined to the old testament but are implied, stated, and expanded upon by Jesus in his teachings.

In the Ten Commandments we find examples of moral law that are to be applied and lived out in the life of every believer, as these commands reflect the heart of God for those who follow him.



## How to use this Study Guide

Understanding and apply scripture is so much more than a sermon. Every week our team works tirelessly to make sure the sermon, music, and service are on point but this is only the beginning of the conversation. Sunday morning is not meant to be the complete conversation, but instead a springboard into a deeper conversation between you, other believers, and God. As we work to understand and apply the truth of scripture to our hearts, an hour a week is just not enough time to truly allow God to work out sin, create healing, and point us in the direction of life.

The study guide to follow is the way we at origins attempt to partner with you in taking our Sunday morning conversations to a deeper level. The different components making up each week's devotion are included to help us understand better, apply wider, and live more completely in the life God has for us. For each of the chapters to come you will find the following study resources to assist you.

### **Sermon Summaries**

It's hard to remember what we talked about on Sunday morning when you finally get back into things later in the week. You may remember the topic or even a few insightful points, but rarely do we remember everything that was said about a particular topic. Every week you'll receive a summary of that week's sermon to help refresh with the content, remind yourself of some of the main points, and if you missed that week catch up on where we're headed with the series as a whole. This area can be used to add your own notes, jot down any questions that may come up as you listen along in Sunday morning service, and even add your own thoughts to the conversation to explore during the week.

### **Study Questions**

It's one thing to read a passage and memorize it. It's an entirely different thing to engage with the content, dig in deeper, and ask questions about it. In the study questions area of each week you'll find thought provoking questions for you to work through that help us take the truth we've learned and apply it to different areas of our life. These questions can be done by yourself in your quiet time or they can be done in a group setting. The goal here is to take time and wrestle with the ways the scriptures can affect our day to day life.

### **Memory Verse**

Every week we'll look at one verse that hopefully sums up the idea for that week. These verses are promises, warnings, and truth from God's word that if we take time to commit to memorization and store them in our hearts will help us as we work to live out the things we're learning.

### **Application Section**

As a church community we want to begin working towards being the people God has called us to be. So every week there will be a section that pushes us towards action. The specifics of these actions are up to you to work out, but we'll provide a template and guidance for figuring



out something we can do practically that week to begin living out the truth we're learning together.

### **Devotionals / Articles**

So many gifted and intelligent people have already written so much about understanding God's word and the specifically the ten commandments. Every week we'll try to bring you a devotional thought or an article from another source that related to the larger subject we're talking about in hopes of capturing multiple voices in the conversation about the Ten Commandments.

### **Related Scripture**

At the end of every week we'll include a section that contains other passages in scripture that might inform or influence the way we look at these specific topics. Some may be a few verses while others may be entire chapters. These verses are to help us ensure we're taking a look at scripture as a whole and letting the whole of God's word instruct us.



## Command One: No Other Gods

### Exodus 20:1-3

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.

### Sermon Summary

The first commandment is oftentimes the easiest for us to ignore. At its face value, we'd love to say we have no other gods before us if we're following Jesus. We believe in God alone and thus, we're easily going to mark off the list our obedience to the command, no other gods. However, the command to have no other God's seems to be one of the hardest for us to follow when we truly understand its implications and the way our sinful hearts find to break it. Dwight L. Moody once said "You don't have to go to heathen lands today to find false gods. America is full of them. Whatever you love more than God is your idol."

We may not claim false gods, or check a box for an exotic pagan religion, but the condition and throne of our hearts often show the things we make into a god instead of the God we claim. That is why the first commandment is so important. Just like ancient Israel was drawn to the worship of the false gods they'd encounter in Egypt and in the Land of Canaan, so too are believers today drawn to love and worship the things we see in the world around us.

The first commandment causes us to, before anything else, make sure God is God in our lives and nothing else.

### The Only Commandment with qualifications

God starts this commandment with a reminder about his miraculous works before Israel in their rescue and redemption from the captivity of Egypt. God, though he never needed to qualify himself, reminds Israel of his exclusive place in existence as the Lord. Not only if he Lord, he was their Lord, and he was their Lord who saved them from egypt. God and God alone was in the place to be Lord over Israel, so there would be no other Gods.

### There are no other gods, but still we worship them.

If it is true that God alone is worthy to be Lord, it should be easy enough to assume then that he is the only one worshiped as Lord. Yet, what we see in the story of Israel is that despite God being the only one worthy of worship Israel still found themselves falling to the temptation to worship false gods.

In the plagues of Egypt, ten in total, God showed his supremacy over Pharaoh, Egypt, and all of their numerous false gods they worshiped by using each plague to offend and show the vanity in their religion. The false egyptian god Hapi was considered to be the ruler of the Nile River. As the waters turned to blood this false god was shown worthless. Khepri was the Egyptian god of the sun and this false god was also rendered useless when God controlled the sun and brought



about darkness. Each of the ten plagues was a testament to not only the Egyptians about the vanity in their false worship, but also to the people of Israel.

Yet after all of this we see the people demand from Aaron that he make them an image to worship. Despite all God's redemptive work on their behalf, their hearts still sought something other than God to worship.

### **Every Other Command Hinges Upon the First.**

It is impossible to fulfill any of the other commandments if we cannot fulfill the first. If we fail to worship God and God alone, it doesn't matter if we successfully follow all the other commands. Our failure to worship God as God invalidates all our other work because when we do the "right thing" for the wrong reasons, it's not right at all.

In Israel's history we see this work itself out over and over again. As the people found themselves wandering from God in their hearts to chase other false gods, they would continue to practice their rituals and sacrifices, despite also worshipping at pagan temples. God constantly confronts Israel about the emptiness in their work and worship when they have not made Him God in their hearts alone.

Probably the boldest example of this comes in Jeremiah 2:20 when God says "For long ago I broke your yoke and burst your bonds; but you said "I will not serve. Yes, on every hill and under every green tree you bowed down like a whore." The people made their sacrifices, they continued with the religious and ceremonial laws, but they missed the heart of God's law by not making him their one true God. So they kept in practice, all the while going to pagan places of worship in mountain temples and altars under lush trees.

The first thing for us to understand in following God is that all other commands stand or fall based on our ability to put God where he rightly belongs. God is God and nothing else.

**May you put away the fake gods and love the ONE TRUE GOD**





## Study Questions:

The Ten Commandments are often viewed as a list of things we must do to enter into heaven. However, the gospel teaches us that following Jesus as our Savior is the only way. If the Ten Commandments were not given to save us, then why do you think God gave them to us?

Read Psalm 1:2. This passage tells us that the righteous person should delight in God's law. How can we find delight in the law of God? More specifically, how can our adherence and understanding of God's first commandment help us delight in his law?

God sets himself apart from any other pagan god Israel may have wanted to worship. He does so in his miraculous act of redemption from the bondage of Israel. Has there been a time in your life when you experienced God do something miraculous to help build up your confidence in his authority and supremacy?

We may not worship pagan deities on hills and under trees, but we are all still guilty of worshiping things other than God. What types of things do we tend to worship today instead of worshiping God?

Having love or affection for things is not wrong. God places desires and passions in our hearts. How then, can we distinguish between something that we appreciate and love and something that has become an idol in our life?

Israel often continued their religious devotion to rituals and practices in vain. Their hearts were not in them as they continued to sacrifice at altars and shrines of pagan gods. Are their times in your faith that you feel like you're just going through the motions? What can we do to repent and check our hearts when we feel this way?



## Memory Verse

Psalm 86:10

"For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God."

## Application

What are some of the things that tend to pull at your heart besides God? Take some time to write down in the space below that those things are and why you think they have that type of power over you. You can write down as many or as few as you feel.

After writing down the things that tempt you to take God's place, try to think about what fears, doubts, or misguided desires might cause those things to do this. For example, we may put our finances in a place of love and authority in our life. This could be because we value the things it can buy us but it may also be because of the false sense of security it can bring us. What might cause your heart to harbor the idols it does?

After you've identified some of your idols and the reasons you might struggle with these, let's take some time to confront this with God's truth. Search what the Bible has to say and what God's word promises about these things to help find comfort and security in his promises. If you struggle finding passages of scripture regarding these things you can reach out to a small group leader, a pastor here at the OC, or even another believer you have a good friendship with.



## 5 Idols Revealed Through Suffering

By Mark Vroegop

### What Suffering Shows Us

Suffering is revealing.

It's one thing to sing about God's goodness, say "Amen" to biblical truths, underline promises in our Bibles, and pray confident prayers when the sun is shining and life is good.

While there's nothing wrong with rejoicing in God's blessing, the true test happens when the looming clouds of hardship roll in. That's when our theology, our faith, and our perseverance matter.

If dark clouds linger, the testing not only intensifies, but it can also reveal some latent idols: the things in which we placed too much emotional trust.

Yet the unearthing of idols is part of God's plan in suffering.

The book of Lamentations laments a long season of suffering. We love the hope of chapter three—"the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His mercies never come to an end" ([Lam. 3:22](#)). But chapter 4 is still dark.

In fact, it mourns over the lingering effects of the nation's idols. Soong-Chan Rah, in his book *Prophetic Lament*, suggests that this chapter highlights the way "symbols of success and power are deconstructed."<sup>1</sup>

In other words, it mourns the idols upon which we place too much hope. In this way, lament not only expresses sorrow over a loss; it also mourns misplaced trust. When your culture or city or life falls apart, it can be revealing.

As we think about the hardship of COVID-19 and the tensions of a national election, consider the following idols from [Lamentations 4](#).

### 1. Fixating on Financial Security

[Lamentations 4](#) begins by lamenting the loss of the security and glory of Jerusalem's wealth:

How the gold has grown dim,  
how the pure gold is changed! (v. 1)

The city of Jerusalem was the economic and spiritual center of Israel. The temple rose over the



horizon with its grand architecture and gleaming jewels. The ark of the covenant, the walls of the sanctuary, the vessels and utensils, and even the shields were made from precious metals (1 Kings 6:20–22). Gold was everywhere.

This wealth made a statement, because gold is connected to glory. But now the gold is dim.

The city has lost its luster. The temple has been destroyed. Cherished symbols lie in a dust-covered heap of ruins. Any trust in what the temple and its gold represented has vanished.

I trust you know that money has power. It provides security. It creates identity. It gives options. If we are not careful, money can fuel self-sufficiency. That's why a recession, the loss of a job, the failure of a business, or a city with shuttered factories is an opportunity to reflect on our misplaced trust in our paper-thin financial security. When a 401(k) loses its value, or a downsizing announcement arrives in your inbox, lamenting the loss can awaken your soul to the foolishness of trusting in financial security. The security of money or the fear of financial loss can easily become a functional god in our lives. Hardship or financial stress can reveal an idolatrous fixation with the security that money provides.

Money can be a common idol beneath the surface of our lives. Do you know its subtle captivity? For you it could be the image of success, the temporary satisfaction of something new, the assurance of providing for your family, or the security of your future. Regardless of the expression, it is easy for money to become an object of trust. When loss or uncertainty enter the equation, it's remarkable how quickly this idol rears its ugly head. Lament penetrates the vault of our self-sufficiency and shows us the spiritual bankruptcy of trusting in financial security.

## 2. Treating People like Saviors

Suffering can also reveal a second object of misplaced trust: people. We can come face-to-face with how much we believe people can fix the problems around us. Whether it's politics, business, or religion, we can easily pin our hopes on others. That is part of the reason we are so enamored with fame and power. We live vicariously through those who lead us. We believe life will be better if "our people" are in control.

Lying in the rubble of Jerusalem was not only the gold but also any hope that a leader could fix the mess of the people's lives. The culture of the nation was broken like "earthen pots" (Lam. 4:2), and there was no one to stop the destruction. The wealthy were rummaging through the ash heaps (Lam. 4:5). Princes, known for beauty and fame, were now deformed and unrecognizable (Lam. 4:8–9). Even the king was captured. Jeremiah 39:1–10 records the tragic events surrounding King Zedekiah's arrest as he fled the city. His children were slaughtered, his eyes were gouged out, and he was deported to Babylon. Lamentations 4:20 helps us to feel the symbolic value of this disheartening moment:

The breath of our nostrils, the Lord's anointed, was captured in their pits, of whom we said, "Under his shadow we shall live among the nations."



This lament reminds us that there are limitations to human leadership. The power of man-made government, the theories of economics, and the security of national defense are not ultimate. These systems and those who lead through them are frail.

Lament reminds us about the danger of putting too much hope in human leaders. The book of Lamentations warns us that our deliverer does not occupy a seat on the Supreme Court, reside at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, sit in the boardroom of a company, or stand behind a pulpit in our church. Seasons of uncertainty and loss reveal the vanity of putting our ultimate hope in anyone but God.

### **3. Craving Cultural Comfort**

The dark clouds of desperation over Jerusalem changed the way people treated one another. And it wasn't for the better. There was an erosion of social values. The people were cruel, neglecting even compassion that animals give their offspring ([Lam. 4:3](#)). Helpless nursing children were starving. When they begged for food, "no one [gave it] to them" ([Lam. 4:4](#)). Hopelessness settled in the city, and the people wished for death ([Lam. 4:9](#)).

The point of this dark material is to show the complete unraveling of the social fabric in Jerusalem. Cultural norms collapsed as the city and nation crumbled. Basic relationships were dysfunctional. Compassion was gone.

Jeremiah uses lament to shine a bright light on this degradation. He mourns the loss as a warning of how broken our society can become.

Our love of peace and safety can create a heartless disregard for the problems under the surface or just a few miles away. It can be easy to insulate ourselves from cultural problems by retreating to the manicured lawns and gated communities of the suburbs.

Prayers of lament can give us new eyes to see the true condition of our society. Rather than holding the groan of our culture at a distance or ignoring it altogether, lament has the potential to open our hearts to enter into the pain. It can topple the idol of wanting to live in Mayberry, an idealistic world insulated from the problems around us.

Lament calls us not to ignore the cries of our culture.

### **4. Idolizing Spiritual Leaders**

A cultural crisis directly affects relationships with spiritual leaders. In Lamentations, moral authority vanished, and the text mourns the loss of credibility among those who were supposed to be righteous. The spiritual leaders were complicit in the decay of the nation ([Lam. 4:13](#)), and they reaped the tragic consequences. Jeremiah describes these leaders as wandering, blind, isolated, and defiled ([Lam. 4:14](#)). The people call them "unclean!" ([Lam. 4:15](#)), an ironic charge,



given the position of purity spiritual leaders were to maintain. Their honor vanished ([Lam. 4:16](#)). In short, the religious leaders lost their credibility and influence. They became fugitives in their own broken culture.

[Lamentations 4](#) shows us how far spiritual leaders can fall. A lament like this should be a somber warning for those in spiritual leadership. Spiritual apathy from religious leaders was one reason why Israel lost its way. The lament of chapter 4 shows us the connection between a vacuum of spiritual leadership and divine discipline.

Rather than trying to leverage the church's political capital to win the culture wars, we ought to take a close look in the mirror. Spiritual leaders should walk alongside their people and model self-examination and repentance. Exile provides an opportunity for God's people to lament spiritual drift, not only of a culture but also of the church. We could echo the lament of Daniel who prayed:

O Lord, the great and awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, we have sinned and done wrong and acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and rules. We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land. To you, O Lord, belongs righteousness, but to us open shame, as at this day, to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. To us, O Lord, belongs open shame, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against you. ([Dan. 9:4–8](#))

The lost ground of spiritual authority might be regained if we were more careful to not idolize those in spiritual leadership and if spiritual leaders lead in lament.

## **5. Presuming Divine Favor**

The final potential idol relates to the assumption of the blessing of God. No nation would have greater reason to claim a most-favored status than Israel. They were God's chosen people. The Old Testament affirmed this. But divine favor does not give people permission to proudly ignore God's warnings. "Prior to Jerusalem's fall," says Soong-Chan Rah, "the Israelites had come to see themselves as a special people who had deserved and earned their great city, rather than recognize that everything they had accomplished was by the grace of God."<sup>2</sup>

Lamentations makes it clear that the nation was under the discipline of the Lord. Jeremiah uses shocking language. He describes their chastisement as greater than Sodom ([Lam. 4:6](#)). In verse 11, we read, "The Lord gave full vent to his wrath." There was a foreboding sense that their days were numbered and that the end was drawing near ([Lam. 4:18](#)). The blessing of God was covered with a cloud.

The culture of the United States is enamored with optimism. The "American Spirit" is the deeply



rooted belief that life will get better, recessions will end, opportunities will abound, and “the sun will come up tomorrow.” While I appreciate this optimism at one level, I wonder how many American Christians make cultural optimism an idol. Or how many directly connect this optimism to the belief that we are “blessed by God.” Perhaps this is partly why some Christians react negatively to the effects of our exile status. It seems that we are unfamiliar with spiritual survival in a culture where a recession doesn’t end and where the social structures continue to work against a bright future.

I fear that too many of us, including myself, are so emotionally and spiritually tied to this optimism that we don’t know how to live in a culture reaping what it has sown. Throughout the centuries, Christians have found a way forward while their culture was hostile or falling apart.

By reading books like Lamentations, we are reminded that divine blessing does not guarantee a pain-free life or a receptive culture. Lament helps us to see the way believers persevered while living in a society rampant with idols. But it also allows us to search our own hearts for the ways those idols have invaded our lives as well.

Lament is the song you sing when divine blessing seems far away. [Lamentations 4](#) helps us see the subtle idols that lie under the surface. Financial security, people, cultural comfort, spiritual leaders, or divine favor are just a few of the mini-gods that can capture our hearts. Losing them, in part or whole, presents an opportunity to be reminded where our affections should lie. Lamenting the toppling of our cultural idols can reorient Christian exiles as to what King and what kingdom we were supposed to long for.

### **Not without Hope**

The unearthing of idols is part of God’s plan.

When pain topples our idols, lament invites self-examination. We can see more clearly the misplaced objects of trust that surface when the layers are peeled back. Pain helps us to see who we are and what we love.

As you walk through various moments of loss, don’t miss the life-changing lessons that are part of the process. Emotional healing, while a good and right goal, should not be your only focus. This valley can be one of the most important learning opportunities of your life. Pain is an uncomfortable but helpful teacher. Rather than resisting the exposure of your misplaced trust, embrace the journey. Talk to God about what you are learning. Seek his forgiveness. Ask him to help you change.



## **Related Scriptures**

Isaiah 44:6 -

Mark 12:29 -

John 17:3 -

Deuteronomy 4:39 -

1 Corinthians 8:6 -

1 Timothy 2:5 -

Isaiah 45:18 -





## Command 2: No Images

### Exodus 20:4-6

**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, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, **6** but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments

### Sermon Summary

There is something special about having your picture taken. It makes us feel important to have a clean, professional image that reflects our best self. We take portraits for work profile pictures, we take family photos in matching outfits, we even sometimes take pictures of ourselves because we're "feeling" the way we look that day. We like these pictures because they capture a portion of who we feel we are and we want proof, validation, evidence, that this exists. Capture the peak moments to remember they are there. Get a glimpse of the greatest to remind you when you're at your worst.

Yet with God, he clearly asks us to make images of Him. He tells us we should not carve idols, images, or anything else that we can use as a symbol to worship. This is why some church denominations won't put up crucifixions. One main reason for the "Great Schism" in 1054 AD was because one portion of the church wanted to put up statues and pictures while the other saw this as a violation of the second commandment.

So if we don't make images of God and paint pictures of him are we okay then? Or is there more to this commandment that we, as believers and followers of Jesus, must understand?

### **We must Worship God as He calls us to worship.**

There is a trend in "spirituality" that has crept in with the movements of modernism and moral relativism that claims we are free to worship any way that we want. In our country this is especially true. We have the freedom of worship and within some legal confines we are free to express and live our our worship in any way we would like. We are very blessed and fortunate to live in a country where the government is not supposed to step in and interfere with the manner and mode of worship. But just because we have the civil freedom to worship how we like, this does not mean we as believers have the freedom to worship God in any way we wish.

For example, let's say tomorrow a church of gluttony starts down the street from you. They have crosses on the buildings, claim to be christians, and their worship service is all about eating as much as you can. "Stuff yourself and enjoy the blessings of God" can be heard chanted from their sanctuaries and especially their cafeterias. They grow obese, they waste food, they never open the Bible, they simply worship at the golden corral style buffets they've set up in their sanctuaries to accommodate their "freedom of worship." Now this may be perfectly "legal" from a civil disposition, but from a Biblical one this is blasphemy. We'd all agree this is not what we see in scripture and it's not how we've been called to worship God.

This is an exaggerated example, but we see this type of thinking play out in believers all the time. We see it clearly in those who claim they do not need to go to church to follow Jesus. Yet scripture is clear about our necessary involvement in the local church. We see this in those who



wish to separate worship from lifestyle. We see it in those who selectively decide which passages of scripture to adhere to and which to ignore. We live in a church culture constantly telling God how they intend to worship him, but there is a God who calls us to worship in a certain way and we must follow it to truly worship.

It's not just about worshiping the true God, it's worshiping the way he has called us to worship.

### **Our Images make God Lesser**

I went to the beach for the first time with my church camp in high school. My parents had never seen the Ocean and I had never seen the ocean so when we made our way to Florida and arrived I was blown away. At this time, digital cameras were for those with deep pockets and the rest of us used disposable cameras to capture our memories and moments. I remember standing in awe of the water when I saw it. The expanse, the depth, the weight of what I was looking at was just more than I could take at the time. When the sunset finally came and I was able to watch the red and orange colors ripple across the horizon as far as I could see I easily emptied and entire camera on just that one view.

A few weeks later when we had returned from camp, the cameras were developed and the pictures were picked up. I was so excited to show my family what I had seen. As we flipped through picture after picture of the sun, the waves, the water, and the view, I found myself less than thrilled with their response. They were seeing what I saw, but not really. The image, though accurate, was incomplete. It could tell a story, it could get across the general idea, but it was found lacking. Those small pictures could never really encompass everything I had experienced at the beach. It was less than the real thing.

When we make an image of God we're taking away from who He is. Our attempts to capture his glory, majesty, beauty, and holiness are only fragments of what he truly radiates when he is experienced in person. When we create images of God to worship, whether it be a crucifixion, a statue, a picture, or painting, we're taking the uncontainable, unimaginable, and undeniable God and confining him to what WE can express.

Is it wrong then, to paint a picture of Jesus? Are we sinning when we put up a nativity scene at Christmas? The simple answer is no. God made us with a creative spirit and we express that at times by drawing our experiences and sharing them. The danger is when we begin to worship an image of who God is instead of who he truly is.

The place we do this most often is less in physical images and more in philosophical ones. So many people worship a Jesus who the Jesus of the Bible would have harsh things to say. As believers then we must be constant, consistent, and diligent in making sure we're worshiping the God of scripture, the way he calls us to worship, and not our own smaller images of who God should be.

### **God Made Mankind His Image in Creation**

While the second commandment does prohibit us from worshiping and creating images of God, God has already created an image bearer for himself in creation. In Genesis 1:26 we see that when God created man, he did something completely different from all the rest of creation. He created mankind in his own image. "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness."

God may have prohibited mankind from creating images of God, but in a truly amazing fashion



God has created us to be an image of Him in the world. We're created and called to represent God in the world. As created beings we represent him in our creativity, our authority, and our relational nature. As believers we represent him to the world around us who is still lost by the way we show love, grace, compassion, and mercy. We are not to create images of God because we're called to be the image of God. We are not to be worshiped, but we are to point others to worship God whose image he has placed in us. We are ambassadors to the lost and dying world (2 Cor 5:20 / Eph 5:1 / 1 Pt 2:9).

**May you be an image of God to the world around you.**



## Study Questions

Why do you think that it is so important that we worship the true God and worship him in the ways he calls us do this?

How do you think an image of God could take away from people truly seeing who God is?

What are some different "versions" of Jesus that people worship instead of the one we see in scripture?

When we think of Idolatry, we often picture carved images and statues. Yet idolatry also comes in when we entertain untrue thoughts about God and who He is. In light of this, how does the second commandment challenge us to evaluate the way we view God and how we worship him?

Read Genesis 1:26. If God created mankind in His image, what attributes of mankind do you think make us unique as image bearers? What differences do we see between ourselves and other parts of creation like plants and animals?

How, as followers of Jesus, are we to be representatives or image bearers for God? How can we, in our brokenness, still show God to the world around us?

Read 1 Peter 2:9. How are we to proclaim God's excellencies as we draw people out of darkness and into Marvelous light?



## Memory Verse

1 John 5:21

“Little Children, keep yourselves from Idols.”

## Application

Our view of God is so often informed by things other than God's word. We hear about God from preachers, pop culture, and we end up shaping an image around God that might look very little like the God we see in scripture. We lean God into our politics as if he would vote the way we do. We make an image of him that we worship that's more focused on a God we can work with rather than the God of scripture that calls to repentance.

During your studies this week take some time to read about Jesus and his life. Read one of the gospels this week, in a few settings, but look at the things Jesus says and does. Check his teachings and values against your own. What you may find is that the image of God you're worshiping is just that, a partial image.

As you study, write in the space below passages, statements, or things Jesus does that might be harder for you to accept or live out in your own life. Could you be as patient? Would you speak so harshly to religious bullies? Would you make such a great sacrifice as the cross? Take time to see and experience Jesus and take note of where your picture might be falling short.



## **Related Scripture**

Leviticus 19:4 -

1 Corinthians 10:14 -

Psalms 135:15-18 -

Isaiah 42:8 -

Deuteronomy 4:16-19 -

Colossians 3:5 -

Habakkuk 2:18 -



## Command Three: Honor God's Name

### Exodus 20:7

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

### Sermon Summary

There is something important about your name. In some cases, your name can enter a room and leave an impression on people long before you walk in yourself and engage with others. Our names and reputations are fragile things that take so much effort to build up and really only takes a few bad decisions to destroy. Our name then is very important because the way we are spoken about can have real impact on the way we are viewed.

In the same way, when we speak about God and his name, the third commandment is all about the way we represent and speak about God while using his name. We're warned by this commandment not to misuse the name of God in our words or in our actions. So this week we will dig deeper into the different ways we can misuse God's name.

### Using God's name for emphasis

The first and probably most obvious example of using God's name in vain comes from our attempts to apply his name to statements for emphasis. When we want someone to believe our statements or our stories so we swear by God's name that it's true. When we put things "on god" and we say things like "may god strike me dead if I'm not being honest." We take the name of God and apply it so that there is leverage, reliability, and dependability in what we're saying.

This shows two very flawed ideas that we carry as a culture. First, by so flagrantly using God's name this way we show no respect or reverence for him. To so quickly draw upon Him and His reliability makes God less like God and more so just like another bargaining chip in our attempts to be seen as credible. Second, while doing this is an attempt to add credibility to our statements, anyone who would respect the name of God and would find value in this should automatically be made more cautious and concerned at the flippant use of God's name in such a manner. Thus, the attempt to gain credibility by calling on the name of God actually removes more credibility to those who would find God's stamp more credible.

Instead, we ought to have such credibility and reliability in our word to those around us that when we say something happened people will believe. We ought to be trustworthy enough that when we claim something, people do not need vows and heaped on additions to believe us. This is why Jesus told his followers to let their yes be a yes and a no be a no in Matthew 5:37. We should have the integrity and track record of honesty that no one would require such an oath from you.

### Playing the God Card.

One of the sometimes overlooked ways that we take God's name and use it in vain is when we play the god card in conversations. We've all been in the situation before where someone tells you, before you've had the chance to pray about something yourself or to make a decision based on all the information that they've prayed and feel God "leading them" this way. If you've ever been around the Christian dating scene this is one of the most iconic and annoying



features of dating in the church, "I feel like God wants us to stop seeing each other." We take God and use perceived emphasis from Him as the validation and weight needed to validate our decisions.

The problem with this is twofold. First, we hide behind an invisible voice instead of sharing our true feelings and convictions. God may very well be convicting, encouraging, or discouraging you from something, but when we use that as a trump card we remove the necessity and value that comes from honest conversations.

When we use God as a moral stamp of approval on our decision we take his voice, name, and reputation and leave it tarnished for our own personal comfort and will.

### **Asking in Jesus Name**

In almost every church and every christian gathering you'll hear prayers that end in "Jesus name, amen." The same way we view please and thank you as magic words, praying in Jesus name has sometimes become a catch phrase in the church to book end a prayer and make sure it gets special attention in heaven. If we don't pray in Jesus' name it may not come true, so we've got to tag that small notion onto the end.

The intention in praying things in Jesus name was never to add a special blessing to them. Instead, it was to orient our hearts and prayers towards the things God would desire. When a letter or command was sent on behalf of a king or a general, the letter's content was considered to be as if the king or general wrote it themselves because it represented their wishes and will. When Jesus calls us to pray in his name, he isn't giving us a formula to get our way, but instead is encouraging us to align our hearts, desires, and prayers with His will. When we do this, we will see God answer our prayers.

### **Hallowed Words on Hollow Lips**

We use God's name in vain when we speak of godly things without actually meaning them. When our words and affirmations about faith, life, and God are one thing but our lives are not congruent with these statements we take his name in vain. When we claim a life style, but do not live that life style with any consistency or repentance we misuse his name.

When we say things we do not mean, when we pray things we dont care about, and when we claim truth we do not hold true we are using the name of God in vain.

**May you see God so clearly that you cannot help but honor His name.**





## Study Questions

How does understanding the significance of God's name help us to obey the third commandment?

In a culture that uses God name to flagrantly, how can believers maintain a deeper reverence for the name of God and how we represent it?

The Third commandment encourages us to not only honor God's name in our words, but in the way we live our lives. How can our lives be a means of taking God's name in vain?

What problem is there with using God's name for emphasis? How does swearing by God's name or using it to add credibility in fact hurt our credibility?

People will sometimes play the "god card" in order to avoid an uncomfortable conversation. What problems can arise when we do this? How does this misuse the name of God when we use do this?

How can selfish prayers or prayers for our own ambitions be a misuse of the name of God?



## Memory Verse

Proverbs 18:10

"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe."

## Application

Within the Old Testament we see God called by many different names. These names all refer to the same God, but they highlight one of his attributes. Below is a list of some of the Old Testament names we see for God and what they mean. Take some time to see these names, the promises and confidence we can find in them. Look at one name each day and ask God to show you how he embodies these names.

EI Shaddai - The Lord Almighty

Jehovah Raah - The Lord my Shepherd

Jehovah Jireh - The Lord God, Provider

EI Elyon - The Lord the Most High God

Jehovah Shammah - The Lord is There

Jehovah Rapha - The Lord Who Heals.



## Why it is Wrong to Take the Lord's Name in Vain

### By Philip Ryken

#### What's in a Name?

One of the first duties of parents is to name their children. This can be a difficult task. The parents make lists. They read baby name books and field suggestions from family members. They try various combinations and say them out loud to see how they sound. They consider all the possible nicknames, and then they check to see what the initials spell. Even after all this, they may still end up at the hospital not having reached agreement about what to call the child!

The one thing that is certain in all of this is that the parents will do the naming. Human beings do not name themselves. Our full names are given, not chosen, which shows that naming is an act of authority. I remember holding each of my newborn children in my arms, calling them by name, and telling them that I was their daddy. Naming a child is the first way that parents exercise their God-given authority.

By contrast, one of the remarkable things about God is that no one ever named him. Admittedly, from time to time people have come up with various false names for God. But God's true name is chosen and revealed by God himself. We do not tell God who he is; he tells us. God has his own naming rights, and this is a sign of his sovereign authority. God's name comes before all other names.

#### Much More Than a Name

In [Exodus 3](#), God calls attention to his special covenant name *Yahweh*, or Lord. This was a name God revealed long before the Israelites even reached Mount Sinai. Back at the burning bush Moses asked for God's name, and because of his great love for his people, God gave it to him:

God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations." ([Exodus 3:14, 15](#))

The name that God revealed was his personal name *Yahweh*, sometimes called the *tetragrammaton* because in Hebrew it consists of four letters: YHWH. Literally God's name means "I am who I am" or "I will be who I will be." It speaks of God's self-existence, self-sufficiency, and supreme sovereignty. As the events of the exodus unfolded, it also testified to his saving power. The Israelites learned from their deliverance that the God who revealed his name to Moses is a God who saves.

As we start unpacking the meaning of God's name, it quickly becomes obvious that *Yahweh*, or "Lord," is much more than a name. It is God's identity. This was the whole Hebrew understanding of names. For us a name is a label; it is something we have, not something we are. But for the Hebrews the name was inseparable from the person. It expressed a person's inward identity. When we use the name of God, therefore, we are referring to the essence of his divine being.



## Misusing God's Name

Like the rest of God's moral law, the third commandment is both negative and positive. In its negative form it forbids the misuse of God's name. To quote the old King James Version, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." Or to give a more literal translation, "You shall not lift up the name of the Lord your God for nothingness."

What does it mean to "lift up" God's name? This term had a fairly technical meaning. It was used in legal situations to refer to the taking of an oath. When witnesses needed to confirm their testimony, instead of swearing on a Bible, they lifted a hand and swore by God's name. However, the term was also used more broadly for other situations when people took God's name on their lips. His name was "lifted up" in worship and whenever else people talked about him.

God's people were not forbidden to use God's name. Many orthodox Jews take this commandment more strictly than God intended, refusing to use God's special divine name at all, for fear of misusing it. But God wants us to use his name! This is proven by the Old Testament, where God's sacred divine name is used all over the place—almost 7,000 occurrences in all. God gave us his name so that we would be able to address him personally. Calling him by name strengthens our love relationship with him.

What God forbids is not the use of his name, then, but its misuse. To be specific, we are not to use it in a vain or empty way. The specific misuse that God has in mind is speaking about him carelessly, thoughtlessly, or even flippantly, as if he didn't matter or really didn't exist at all. God's name has deep spiritual significance. So to treat it like something worthless is profanity in the truest sense of the word: It is to treat something holy and sacred as common and secular.

This commentary on the book of Exodus recounts the story of the Israelites' deliverance from Egypt, shedding light on who God is and the spiritual freedom he offers to all people.

## A Very Great Sin

To dishonor God's name in any way is to denigrate his holiness. It is a way of saying that God himself is worthless. Anyone who breaks the third commandment will be held accountable: "The Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain" (20:7b). The precise punishment is left unspecified. In fact, the threat seems almost understated: The lawbreaker simply is said not to be without guilt. However, this expression is what grammarians call a *meiosis*, in which less is said, but much more is intended. For example, when people in authority say, "I wouldn't do that if I were you," they are not simply offering a casual opinion but are issuing a stern warning. So when God says that he will not hold us guiltless, what he means is that he will condemn us. We will not be innocent but guilty—reckoned unrighteous by Almighty God.

The reason God will condemn us is because misusing his name is a very great sin. It is a direct attack on his honor and glory, and anyone who makes such an attack deserves to be condemned. When people break the third or any other commandment, they are guilty before God, and ultimately they will be judged for their sins.

There are many examples in the Bible. Perhaps the most shocking occurs in [Leviticus 24](#). A dispute broke out between two Israelites, one of whom was part Egyptian. As they fought, the man of mixed descent blurted out a curse against God. The Scripture says that he "blasphemed



the Name, and cursed" ([Leviticus 24:11a](#)). The bystanders were appalled at what the man said; so they seized him and brought him to stand trial before Moses. The Lord did not hold the man guiltless but said, "Bring out of the camp the one who cursed, and let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. And speak to the people of Israel, saying, Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. Whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death" ([Leviticus 24:13–16a](#)).

When God says that anyone who misuses his name will be held responsible, we should take him at his word!



## Related Scripture

Acts 4:12 -

Philippians 2:10-11 -

Psalms 61:8 -

Isaiah 42:8 -

John 14:15 -

1 Peter 1:15 -

1 Corinthians 10:31 -

Colossians 3:17 -