

Exodus 20 – 1st 2nd and 3rd Commandments.

1. Prayer
2. Joke and/or Review
 - a. Quotation: *“Instead of me fitting a religion, I found a religion that will fit me.”* (Unitarian Universalist church advertisement).
 - i. 2 Timothy 4:3 *You're going to find that there will be times when people will have no stomach for solid teaching, but will fill up on spiritual junk food--catchy opinions that tickle their fancy.* (The Message)
 - ii. We live in a day when everyone wants to do as they see fit, as they want or desire. They want no moral absolutes.
 1. And the Ten Commandments stand in stark contrast to this belief system.
 2. The Ten Commandments are banned, not because they are offensive to a few irreligious people, but because they are offensive to all.
 3. They dictate that there is not only One who is higher than all, but to whom we all will have to give an account for our lives.
 4. They declare that there is such a thing as sin, as right and wrong, and that man's heart is incapable of doing what is right.
 5. The Ten Commandments will not make you right with God, but rather will show you that you *aren't* right with God.
 6. And for that, we need a Savior! And for that reason, we celebrate Christmas.
3. Passage:
 - a. 3 *"You shall have no other gods before me.*
 - b. 4 *"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand {generations} of those who love me and keep my commandments.*
 - c. 7 *"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name*
4. The first 3 commandments seem a little outdated to a lot of people.
 - a. You might even think that idolatry and worshipping a bunch of hand-made gods would be a thing of the ancient past and not apply to us.
 - i. You might even say I am not a polytheist, nor am I an atheist. This doesn't apply to our culture any more.
 - ii. But I want to warn you, it is more relevant today than at any other point in human history!
 - b. When we read the Old Testament, we find out that the Jews had always struggled with idolatry.
 - i. Abraham, the father of Israel was born in an idolatrous nation in an idolatrous culture, in an idolatrous society, in an idolatrous family. Abraham's father was an idolater.
 1. We have every reason to believe that Abraham himself, in his younger days before the encounter with the one true and living God, was an idolater.
 2. We certainly know that his descendants continued to struggle with it,. In Genesis 31, we find that when Jacob and Rachel are fleeing her father Laban, that Rachel brings with her the household gods. It almost gets her in really big trouble.
 - ii. Moses, of course, has already struggled with Israel's allegiance to the gods of Egypt, and that will continue to be a struggle with the incident with the golden calf after the Ten Commandments are given.

5. **COMMANDMENT ONE:** *"You shall have no other gods before me.*
- a. Lets do some definitions:
 - i. **Idolatry is worshipping other gods or their images** other than the Lord God who delivered you out of the land of slavery.
 - ii. **Worshipping means to give something the place of ultimate priority in your life.**
 - iii. *Idolatry is worshipping anything that ought to be used, or using anything that ought to be worshipped.* - Augustine
 - b. What does this mean?
 - i. When God says, you shall have no other gods before, He doesn't just mean, 'I have got to be first on the pecking order.
 1. He doesn't say "You can have 26 gods as long as I'm at the top of the list.."
 2. He's not saying "when you come into church, you can only worship Me, but out there in your daily life, you can have as many other gods as you want."
 3. When He says, '*you shall have no other god before Me,*' He is not only saying that you have to keep him at the top of your list, but that you may not have other gods instead of Him. along side of Him, or in addition to Him.
 - ii. The Message says, "*No other gods, only me.*"
 - iii. In other words, **In the first Commandment, God is saying, "I will tolerate no rival in your life!"**
 - c. **Polytheism**
 - i. The world of the Israelites was steeped in polytheism. Most civilizations had many gods, like Egypt and they worshipped any number of them. Most were represented visually.
 - ii. I have heard it said that truth can be stranger than fiction.
 1. There is an incredible resurgence in Polytheism in our society today.
 2. You may not realize it, but it is the result of NewAge thinking and Wiccan Paganism.
 3. There are tens of millions of people in the industrialized nations of Europe and the USA who worship polytheistically...that is, they worship the gods of ancient civilizations.
 - iii. The Unitarian Universalist church has adopted the name of Unitarian Universalist Pagans and teaches their devotees that belief in a Monotheistic god is wrong.
 1. This is a little odd for them, because they believe that all beliefs are right and to criticize anyone else's belief is the only real sin that exists.
 2. But monotheism, according to their beliefs, is an attack on all religions because monotheism by its nature implies that only ONE GOD exists (to the exclusion of all others).
 3. **In the book "Drawing Down the Moon" Margot Adler has an extended discussion about the importance of Polytheism as necessary for a Neo-Pagan worldview and how it is utterly a *different* and *healthier* way of thinking of and relating to the Divine than the Judeo-Christian idea of "Monotheism". "Monotheism" implies it is a "true" religion and all others are false."**
 - iv. It is in this culture that we exist, where suddenly, educated, intelligent; some church-raised folks are embracing the worship of the gods of ancient Egypt, Babylon, Rome, Norway and Greece.
 1. They worship at their statues, burn incense to them and perform elaborate rituals to become "one" with their deity.
 2. In this environment of polytheism, Christ is an undistinguished god, just one of many, and Christmas is a holiday expressing intolerance toward non-believers.
 - v. The early Christians judged polytheism as idolatry, as the service of demonic powers.

1. Polytheism was felt to be a direct attack on the divinity of the divine, as an attempt to elevate finite realities to superiority over the infinite Lord God of the bible..

d. **Christian application of “no other God’s before Me”:**

- i. The greatest struggle of Christians in the church today is that of divided loyalties.
 1. We want to be Christians, and at the same time, walk in comfort and agreement with the unbelieving world and culture around us.
 2. We want to simultaneously say we are on the Lord’s side and we are on the world’s side.
- ii. Folks, that is idolatry. That is breaking the 1st commandment.
 1. There can be One and only One God in our lives.
 2. Anything else is a living contradiction.
- iii. **Believers are called, in both LIFE and in WORSHIP, to live in complete loyalty to the One True God.**
- iv. Romans 12:1-2 *“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”*
 1. Did you notice it didn’t talk about living one way on Sunday and differently on the rest of the week? Our bodies, our very lives, are to be offered to God for Him to use. 24/7.
 2. Conformity to the world is a contradiction of what God desires to do in your life.
 3. God wants to produce in you something marvelous, He wants to transform your life into a glorious life that has eternal significance and meaning.
 4. But when we allow anything other than Him to consume our lives, we short circuit His plan and go down a dead –end street.
- v. What other gods could we have besides the Lord?
 1. Plenty.
 - a. Pleasure, Possessions, and Position, whose worship is described as “The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life” (1 John 2:16).
 - b. Football, the Firm, and Family are also gods for some.
- vi.
 1. Look at your life this week and ask yourself, what lies is the world telling me? Have I believed them? Have I given other things besides God a priority in my life?

6. **COMMANDMENT TWO:** *4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand {generations} of those who love me and keep my commandments*

- a. Most of us would say, I don’t have any “graven images” that I worship.
 - i. I don’t have a Buddha statue that I bow down before when I enter my house or light incense to.
 - ii. But that is only a small part of what this commandment is addressing.
 - iii. The very character of God is being addressed, as you might notice in verse 5, *“I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God...”*
 1. God is saying, “When you worship me in accordance with your own desires and not according to My word, I am jealous, like a husband married to his wife whose wife has gone after another man,”.

- iv. Look at His words, "I visit the iniquities of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me."
 - 1. Again, your mind starts wondering and you think, that doesn't sound fair.
 - 2. He goes on to say, "but showing loving kindness to thousands who love Me and keep My commands."
 - 3. He is saying that the 3rd and 4th generations will inexplicably be affected by your sin and its consequences. Your choices don't just affect you! Your sin has effects that last for years, especially on your children and your children's children!

- b. This commandment also might sound like God is telling Israel that no one can engage in artwork of any kind.
 - i. That might sound like you can't draw anything. You can't paint anything. You can't do woodcuts. You can't do any sort of media. You can't engage in art.
 - ii. That's clearly not what this command means though.
 - 1. First of all, remember in this very book, God will command Israelites to do certain pieces of artwork in the tabernacle for His worship. They are going to do pomegranates, they are going to do all sorts of other designs. In fact, on the mercy seat that symbolizes His covenant presence with His people, there are going to be winged cherubim.
 - 2. So, this is not a command that you cannot do artwork.
 - iii. The command is explained in Deuteronomy.
 - 1. Dt. 4:15 *"So watch yourselves carefully, Since you did not see any form on the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire so that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourself in the form of any figure."*
 - 2. You didn't see God at Mt. Sinai, Mt. Horeb, therefore you don't make an image of Him
 - 3. **God is saying that His people are not to make images of Him.**
 - 4. **They are not only prohibited of making images of false gods, but they are not to make images of the Lord either.**
 - iv. What it is, is a command that God is not to be pictured or visually represented and then worshipped.
 - 1. Remember the golden calf that the Israelites made while Moses was up on the mountain?
 - a. This wasn't a foreign god that was being introduced.
 - b. Aaron wasn't making a replica of one of the gods of Egypt.
 - c. Exodus 32:2-5 (DON'T DISPLAY, BUT REFER TO ON SUNDAY EVENING) *So Aaron said, "Tell your wives and sons and daughters to take off their gold earrings, and then bring them to me." 3 All the people obeyed Aaron and brought him their gold earrings. 4 Then Aaron took the gold, melted it down, and molded and tooled it into the shape of a calf. The people exclaimed, "O Israel, these are the gods who brought you out of Egypt!" 5 When Aaron saw how excited the people were about it, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD!"*
 - d. Aaron was trying to make a visual representation of the God of Israel.
 - i. The people wanted a god who was like the nations around them.
 - ii. The people wanted a god they could touch.
 - iii. The people wanted a god they could see.
 - iv. And as such, they wanted a god they could have control over.

- c. What is so wrong about doing that? Of trying to visually represent God?
 - i. Think about it. Has anyone seen God?
 - 1. No, at least not apart from Jesus, the exact representation of Him.
 - ii. To make a visual representation of God, one needs a certain amount of information.
 - 1. What does God look like? Hmm. That's a tough one!
 - a. Does He have a big nose? Blue eyes or brown? Is He smiling or angry?
 - 2. Let me take this idea one step further.
 - a. If you could "imagine" God based on your experiences of Him and based on what others have told you about Him, or even what you want from Him, you create an "image" (root word of imagine) in your mind.
 - 3. If you can think about God anyway that you want to think, if you can picture God, in accordance with your own imagination then you are sovereign. That is, you are in control of Him.
 - a. In other words, you can "create" god.
 - b. And if the God of Heaven and Earth is only as good and as your opinion or experiences or what you want, then you got a pretty small god!
 - iii. One of the unique characteristics we learn about God in the bible is that He is the One who self-reveals. That is, He makes Himself known.
 - 1. By God saying that He not be pictured, that He not be visually represented, it requires you to conceive of Him only as He describes Himself in His Word.
 - 2. Revelation of God's characteristics – found in our handout on Wednesday night prayer meeting. Scripture after scripture helps us get a vision of who God is and not what we want Him to be. It is there that we meet Him.
 - 3. God says to us, "Look don't come to Me with your preconceived notions, because I'm going to tell you what I'm like.
 - 4. Anything less than that or more than that is idolatry!
- d. The world in which the Israelites existed worshiped gods that were very much a part of creation. They worshipped "immanent" gods, which were part of creation...ie. the sun, moon, stars, earth, wind, rain, lightning, etc.
 - i. The words, "*in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below*" is saying that you are not to worship the creation!
 - ii. What the Lord God is telling the Israelites is a radical departure from almost all religious thought of the time.
 - 1. God is saying that He cannot be represented by anything.
 - 2. He is completely different from creation.
 - 3. Creation is His product, it is not Him and it cannot represent Him.
 - 4. It can only proclaim Him.
 - iii. In other words, **The true and living God is totally TRANSCENDENT.**
 - 1. In fact, the prime characteristic of God is "holiness" which is a word that describes utter transcendence.
 - 2. It means like nothing else that is.
 - 3. He is completely perfect, different, unique and above and beyond all else.
- e. **There is a tendency today to seek to serve the god we want, not the God who is.**
 - i. We are all guilty of this at one time or another.
 - ii. We want a god who won't hold us accountable.
 - iii. We want a god who will make our lives easier, who will serve us, who will answer our prayers and give us what we want.
 - iv. We want a god who is controlled by us.

- v. We want a god who we can rub his bottle just the right way with the right words and get what we want. .
- vi. But when we worship and serve the God we want than rather than the God who is, we are not worshipping the true God.
- vii. We are back on that dead end street.

1. Two of Goudzwaard's three basic Biblical rules:

- a. Every person is serving god(s) in his life.*
- b. Every person is transformed into an image of his god.*
- c. What is your "god" turning you into?*

- f. Are you struggling with the God who is as opposed to the god you want?
 - i. Do you find that living according to His ways make life uncomfortable and sometimes difficult?
 - ii. Jesus called many, yet only a few followed. Some didn't want to give up their lifestyle, others had other pressing matters they thought more important than God's kingdom.
 - iii. But eternity is forever. That's a long, long time.

7. COMMANDMENT THREE: "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."

- a. I grew up thinking that this commandment is primarily like one's grandmother's saying, "Son, don't cuss."
 - i. Most of us have been taught that commandment is telling us that we ought not to use profanity in our speech.
 - ii. But it has a broader application than just what we might call gutter language.
 - iii. It has an application to all of our speech including oath taking and making vows.
- b. Let's look at what we mean by someone's name. What is in a name?
 - i. You might think not very much, not very much. It's just a name.
 - ii. Listen to the following names as I read them. Consider each one. Each one will have a certain affect on you as you hear the name.
 - 1. Winston Churchill, Adolph Hitler, Michael Jordan, O.J. Simpson, Nancy Kerrigan, Tonya Harding, Superman, Homer Simpson.
 - 2. See with just these few examples when a name is said it really has a lot of meaning.
- c. What's in a name?
 - i. Everything is in a name.
 - 1. It summarizes a person. It summarizes their character. It summarizes their history.
 - 2. It summarizes their contributions and with every mention a name evokes an image.
 - 3. Consider for instance if I were to say, Joe called. You can't hear the words "Joe called" and not think of Joe and who Joe is and get a picture of Joe or whatever name I might use of someone that you know well
- d. **The third commandment prohibits the misuse of God's name.**
 - i. The third commandment means that our conduct and our words must honor God's name and reputation.
 - ii. When we who bear His name, live in contradiction to His will and His commands, we call into question His character, and we defame Him before the world.
- e. **God's name stands for His reputation and character,**
 - i. God doesn't need us to defend His reputation, because His name already does so.
 - ii. If we take up His name, but we do not take up the reality of it; if we profess His name, but we do not live in accordance with that profession; if we say that we have tasted grace, but we have not tasted grace; then we take His name in vain.

- f. **When we call upon His name, we call upon all He is.**
- i. Look at two verses:
 1. *Philippians 2:8 God raised him up to the heights of heaven and gave him a name that is above every other name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*
 - a.
 2. *Acts 3:6 Peter said, "I don't have any money for you. But I'll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!"*
 - a.
 3. *Acts 4:12 Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name (Jesus) under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."*
 - ii. People don't mind talking about "God" (generic) but bring up Jesus and watch how fast you can clear a room!
 - iii. There are those who wish to prohibit praying "in the name of Jesus" in any place where public prayer is offered, because it is offensive.
 1. May I dare to say, that to NOT use the Name of Jesus, the Name above every name, and the only name by which anyone may be saved would be to be offensive to God Himself. I would rather offend 1000 men than offend the living God who gave His only Son for me.
 - iv. When you finish your prayer "in the name of Jesus" you are calling upon the power and might of God evidenced in your Savior. To not do so would be to "profane" the name of God.
 1. **Profane means to use as if it were nothing special.**
8. Is God special to you? Or have you made Him in your own likeness, in your own image have you created Him? Have you insisted upon making God obey you instead of the other way around?
- a. *Some years ago Donald Grey Barnhouse was counseling a young woman on the sidewalk in front of Tenth Presbyterian Church following an evening service. She said she was a Christian and that she wanted to follow Christ. But she wanted to be famous too. She wanted to pursue a stage career in New York. "After I have made it in the theater, I'll follow Christ completely," she said. Barnhouse took a key out of his pocket and scratched a mark on a postal box standing on the corner. "That is what God will let you do," he said. "God will let you scratch the surface of success. He will let you get close enough to the top to know what it is, but He will never let you have it, because He will never let one of His children have anything rather than Himself."*
 - b. This morning, God is calling your name. Will you answer Him? Or will you pursue that which will never satisfy, that which you only scratch the surface of and never attain?
 - c. God wants to make your life special. He knows your true fulfillment and happiness and joy will only be found in Him.
 - i. But He is a gentleman. He does not force His way into your life. He stands at the door and knocks.
 - ii. How long has he been knocking at your door? At the entrance of your life?
 - iii. How long will you keep Him out, keep Him from making your life into something so meaningful that it will last forever?
 - iv. Will you let Him in today?
 - v. Lets pray!