

Commandments for Worship

Exodus 20:1-11

One of the ways the LORD Jesus consistently displays His glory in the gospels is by answering questions.

No matter how hard the question Jesus always shows Himself to be infinitely wise.

The bible tells us that on one occasion a man who is “an expert in the law” asks the LORD a question about God’s law.

He asks Jesus, “Which is the greatest command?”

Jesus has an answer right away.

He answers based on **Deuteronomy 6:4-5**, he says, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’

But Jesus doesn’t leave it there, He also gives the expert the second most important command saying, “Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

[I have entitled our journey through the book of Exodus, “Yahweh Is Mighty to Save and Worthy of Worship.” Leading up to chapter 19 the focus is clearly on God’s saving works, but now we are seeing a shift toward worship. The people are standing at Mt. Sinai which is being set ablaze by God’s glory and the people are hearing God speak to Moses as He begins to give them His laws for life. He gives Ten Laws/Commandments/Words here in chapter twenty. These Ten Commandments are the bedrock of morality for God’s people and we would do well to put them firmly upon our hearts and minds. Because Jesus divides the law into two major categories of loving God and loving our neighbor, it seems right to do the same with these commands. Commands 1-4 give us instructions about relating to God and 5-10 give commands about relating to other people. This morning we are going to look at commandments 1-4. Listen, there is no subject more important for your life than the worship of the LORD. This morning we will see an important lesson from each of the first four commands. One clear truth revealed in the first commandment is this...]

Point #1 – Worship of the LORD must be exclusive.

Because it is impossible to compare the true God of the universe to anything else, we must not put anything else alongside of Him.

Verses one and two give us the reason why God gives these ten commands to His people.

He says, “I AM THE LORD”.

He also reminds them of what He has done to save the people from slavery.

How He rescues them is important.

He could have saved them in what would seem like ordinary ways, but instead He saves them by displaying His power over all of creation which shows that He has no equal and that is the basis for the commands that follow.

Command number one, Verse 3.

There is no one like the One True God, therefore, true worship belongs to Him alone.

If we give first place in our lives to anyone else we are spitting in God's face saying He is not worthy of our highest honour.

The truth is though that God alone is most worthy of all glory, honour, and praise and so it is both right and necessary that He commands us to have no other gods.

[Jeremiah illustrates this with containers used for storing water (**Jer 2:11-13**). We live in a place where water is readily available, but imagine living in a place where there was only one source of clean drinking water. Imagine it was unlimited and as many people could come as they wanted, but instead most people were trying to get water to drink from a mud pit. That is what worshipping false gods is like! It is like ignoring fresh clean water and trying to drink mud instead. It is saying that mud is better than water.]

God is never going to say mud is as good as living water, He is always going to say stop going after dirty water and come to the true source of life. Have no other gods.

To have no other gods means that the LORD must hold the highest affections of our hearts, He must hold first place in our minds, we must use our bodies for His honour, and commit our eternal souls to Him alone.

While believers are not perfect in keeping this command, we have been given a new heart through the work of the Spirit and therefore we have been given the capacity to obey this command and as the Spirit continues His work in us we are increasingly inclined to have the LORD first in our affections.

This is the power that breaks the chains of every sin!

It is holding the LORD as most precious above all else.

[True worship of God must be exclusive. He has no equal and if we are to make any progress at becoming like Christ we must constantly plead with the Spirit to give the LORD first place in our hearts and minds. That leads us to the second command which is strongly tied to the first. From it we learn that...]

Point #2 – Worship must never attempt to reduce God's glory.

While humans have a built in need to worship, we also default to making the objects of our worship something that our minds can understand which always makes God out to be less than He is.

The first two commands are closely related and are most often violated together.

That is when a person worships false gods they often create images of the gods they are worshipping.

What God says here in verses 4-6 certainly apply to false gods, listen (**Verses 4-6**).

Just a brief comment about God punishing children for the sins of their 'fathers', what that means is that children follow their parents into sin.

An important warning on this father's day. Those of us who are fathers need to know that our children will follow us into sin.

Love Christ brothers! Seek to lead your children to the cross rather than into hell.

Be men who worship with sincere and glad hearts and never make God small in the eyes of your children!

That is the heart of this second command.

Time and again we find in the Bible, we will see it in the book of Exodus when we get to chapter 32, that people make images and refer to them by God's name in worship.

Why do people do that? Because the human mind seems to react against an incomprehensible infinite Being.

People want to reduce God into something they can fix in their mind, into something they can understand.

But the moment we try to do that we immediately see Him as less than He is.

[Have you seen an average 3 year old draw a picture of their family? If you're a parent you think those drawings are wonderful, but if you took the drawing and put it next to a hundred pictures of different families what are the odds the stranger is going to be able to assign the drawing to the right family? I'd say about 100 to 1 because everyone would just be guessing.]

When we consider that Almighty God is infinite in all His perfections we will quickly realize that the 3 year old's drawing of his family is far closer to his family than any image a human mind can assign to the LORD.

Someone is probably thinking, "What a minute making idols is something that happened in ancient history!"

I'm afraid not. It's alive and well! Many people all over the world exchange God's glory for statues and carvings.

It also goes deeper than just literal statues.

We live in a land of Happy Meal religion where people deny Who God has revealed Himself to be simply because they don't like it or can't understand it.

[God hates that kind of worship, He must hate it because He can never be less than He is. To what in all creation can we compare the LORD? Nothing and the moment we try we commit a great sin. That brings us to the third commandment. The lesson we learn from the third commandment is this...]

Point #3 – Worship must honour the LORD.

No one is more worthy of our respect than God.

This is the third commandment given to us in verse 7.

Clearly God is placing a high level of importance on His name.

Why is that?

Well when we go back to Exodus chapter three we learn that God's Being is represented by His Name.

Yahweh/Jehovah literally translates as "I AM".

What does it mean to be the God Who is?

It means that He is both eternal and self-existent.

Nothing in all creation is like that which means that everything in all creation ultimately depends upon the LORD and to misuse His name shows absolute contempt for the One WHO makes everything in creation possible.

God's name is NOT to be used as a curse word!

Jesus' name is derived for God's proper name and how often is His name used in our world as a curse word?

How can a person have any esteem for the LORD at all and show so much disrespect for Him?

God's name is also misused in flippant oaths.

When most people say, "I swear to God!" they have no idea how serious that phrase is.

The LORD always does everything He commits to and when someone invokes Him in a promise they are supposed to reflect His faithfulness.

Breaking such a promise or simply saying it out of habit while not being a person who follows through on commitments is the height of foolishness because the all-knowing present everywhere God of the universe is passionate about His Name being honoured.

It goes deeper than just what comes out of our mouths though.

The word that is translated "misuse" can also be translated as 'bear' or 'carry'.

It is an inescapable fact that if we say we are worshippers of the Yahweh then people are going to form opinions about God based on what they see in us.

[Have you ever had any work done at your house by a company that sends out employees in a uniform? If you have, then you know that almost every company uniform has the name of the company on it. How that employee does his/her job is going to be a reflection on the company

right? So what does the company want from the employee? It wants the employee act in a way that conveys the company's desired image.]

That is the idea of this command. God wants His people to act in a way that points people to Who He is.

Now I am very thankful that God is sovereign as is able to overcome the sins of His people and still draw people to Himself, but nevertheless He deeply desires for us to honour Him with all that we say and do.

How is that going? Do you think the LORD is pleased with the way you are carrying around the name Christian?

Are we people of truth and love?

Are we people of integrity and grace?

Are we people of forgiveness and righteousness?

[Some people do a great job of appearing like they love Jesus in church and show contempt for His name in their homes and in the world. God is neither fooled nor will He be continually mocked in that way. We must repent of such things brothers and sisters and seek to honour the LORD. Lastly, this morning we come to the fourth commandment for worship. This commandment shows us that...]

Point #4 – Worship is an expression of dependence and delight.

As God's people we need a regular rhythm of resting, trusting, and celebrating all that He does for us.

God knows how easy it is for people to start living as though He doesn't matter and so He gives this command to His people (Verses 8-11).

Work is good for us. It is part of God's command to Adam before sin entered the world.

God put Him in the garden and told him to take care of it.

Of course after Adam and Eve disobeyed God work became much more difficult under the curse of creation, but the goodness of it still remains.

It can also become a great source of evil in our hearts.

Work can be a source of pride. "Look what I accomplished!"

Through work we can deceive ourselves into thinking we are responsible for meeting all of our needs.

For some work can become an addiction to the achievement of more.

People endlessly striving for a bigger house, a better promotion, a higher end car, etc...

This command is to serve as a regular remedy to such things.

Remember the Sabbath, work for six days and rest for one.

I love how this command is a gift for everyone. Both the masters, slaves, and strangers are all to rest.

No one can work indefinitely, we get tired, and we need to take a break.

It is one of many regular reminders that we are dependent creatures.

But there is more here than simply rest. God ties the Sabbath command to His work in creation.

When God rests from creation it does not mean He stops doing everything altogether for He continues to sustain all that He has made from moment to moment.

After God finished all that He made to you remember what the bible says? It says, "It was VERY GOOD!"

When the LORD rested from creating He delighted in all the He made!

I believe that is the pattern God is commanding His people to follow here.

Take a day and stop working, rest in God. Trust Him to provide for your needs.

In addition to resting, delight in all that God has done for you.

Why do we have jobs? Why do we have the necessary health to go to work?

Why do we have the skills and abilities that we do? Why do we have air to breathe?

Who makes the Sun to shine and the rain to fall?

In addition to all of these things as Christians we of all people should have a great desire to praise the LORD for He has saved us from Hell and given us the gift of eternal life through Jesus' death and resurrection.

That is our greatest need (the first four commandments make that very clear) and a reason for our greatest delight.

Pausing from work to worship God, especially with His people, is not just a command it is also a gift and I pray we would treat it as such.

The Lord is most worthy of our worship and that is why He commands it!

He commands us to worship Him exclusively! You shall have no other gods.

He commands that worship never attempt to reduce His glory. You shall not make for yourself an idol.

He commands that worship be honouring to Him. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD.

And He commands that worship express our dependence and delight. Remember the Sabbath day.