

Sunday, June 12, 2022 | Ten

### Exodus 20:1-3 | "Our God and No Other"

Today, we'll be kicking off a new 11-week series called "Ten," in which we'll be exploring the first set of commandments given to the Jews in Exodus and how they can still help guide the Christian today. Using parallel passages, we'll discover that the principles God tried to instill in Israel in the Old Testament find fulfillment through Jesus in the New Testament. And how, while the believer is no longer bound to the Law for salvation (i.e., justification), we can still use it to become more like Christ (i.e., sanctification).

Last week, rather than dive headlong into the ten commandments, we studied what Christ had to say about all the commandments. In Matthew 22, we learned that Jesus summed up the duty of man into two sentences: love God with everything and love others as yourself. On these two things, Jesus says, hang all the law and the prophets. Those two commands give context to everything else in the Bible and life. So much so that **a love for God and neighbor brings certainty in a world of uncertainty**. Even with no explicit command, we can still make good decisions in uncertain situations. The Scriptures can still speak into a 22<sup>nd</sup> context because its' principles are sufficiently broad enough to encompass all human experience. It is hard to go wrong when you are consumed with love for God and others.

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**EXAMPLE:** Objective vs. Subjective truth - England's 2016 research vessel, the Attenborough, was almost named **Boaty McBoatface**.<sup>1</sup>

The Ten Commandments were not created by a committee. They were, quite literally, given to us by the voice of God. They are not the sloppy byproduct of some internet poll but are timeless concepts forged within a divine mind. Therefore, since these ideas come from outside human reasoning, the Decalogue (i.e., the "Ten Words") and all other truths within Scripture embody objective truth. Who better to teach us how we ought to live than a being whose judgment is not clouded by shifting opinions, influenced by fluctuating emotions, or pressured by changing circumstances? And the first word upon which all the other divine words stand is this: Have no other gods but God.

And why does God begin his commandments this way? Because human beings love to have anything and everything for a god **except** God. For instance, most polytheistic religions base

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<sup>1</sup> Rogers, Katie, "Boaty McBoatface: What You Get When You Let the Internet Decide," March 21, 2016, *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/22/world/europe/boaty-mcboatface-what-you-get-when-you-let-the-internet-decide.html>, [accessed, June 10, 2022].

many of their deities on something in nature. In Norse mythology, Thor was the god of thunder. The Egyptians had Ra as their god for the sun. And the Babylonians said that a goddess named "Tiamat" controlled the sea. Powers like an angry storm, the hot sun, and the vast sea were so impressive that primitive cultures thought they must be divine.

Now, if we're not careful, we might think that this was a problem for our unenlightened ancestors and that this is no longer relevant in the modern age. But that is wrong. Like those who came before us, we have multiple gods vying for our allegiance today.

Atheists, for instance, claim to stand on the hallowed grounds of science while bemoaning any and all expressions of religion. They seem not to realize that they are every bit the religious fanatics they so readily mock. The scientific method might as well be called an apostolic creed, for it has converted many. And what a shame since it was first pioneered by men of faith who sought to better understand their Creator rather than disprove him.<sup>2</sup>

Or take, for example, those who bend the knee to philosophy. Both ancient and modern Philosophers propose the pathway to objective truth is forged within the crucible of logic. Truth, they claim, is not given but reasoned. And only through careful argumentation can one's mind be genuinely free. But in their pursuit of a world dictated by thought, these deep-thinkers have inadvertently made thought itself their god.

You see, gods come in all different shapes and sizes, each with its own unique name. They can be anthropomorphic like Thor, Ra, and Tiamat, or they can be physical like science or even metaphysical like philosophy. Whether it's this god here or that god there, all human beings serve some sort of deity. Call it what you will; everyone is religious. And remarkably, in this cacophony of noisy gods, a solitary Being says without apology, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex. 20:3). This is not only the first commandment, it is the first thought of Scripture (cf. Gen 1:1), and it is also the one principle we seem hellbent on disavowing (cf. Gen 3:5). But however much we try to have other gods, the one true God will not relinquish his title.

Yahweh brooks no rival.

Interestingly, while we call them the "Ten Commandments," in reality, the Bible never actually calls them that. Instead, it would be more accurate to say they are the "Ten Words" since that is what they're literally called whenever they are actually named (cf. Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13;

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<sup>2</sup> General Editor, "Francis Bacon: Philosopher of science," Christianity Today, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/history/people/scholarsandscientists/francis-bacon.html>, [accessed June 10, 2022].

10:4).<sup>3</sup> This is why some prefer to call these rules the “Decalogue” instead of the “Ten Commandments” because Decalogue is a combination of the Greek words *déka*- (“ten”) and -*logos* (“words”) and better explains what these things are.

This is not to say that the Decalogue does not imply command. They do. But I only bring this up because, strictly speaking, the "commandments" aren't so much a set of rules as they are a collection of principles or what we might call *words* of wisdom. Even the term translated as “commandment” or “law” in your bibles is best thought of as “teaching” in the context of how a parent might instruct a child.<sup>4</sup> Good parents do not make rules to restrict their child's fun; they make rules to preserve and improve a child's life (i.e., "look both ways before crossing the street," "stranger danger," "be kind," etc.).

Thus, right up front, I want you to be careful not to think of these principles as only being a set of rules. They are that, but they are also so much more. They are teachings that help guide us on how to live. They do not restrict. They liberate.

**READ: Exodus 20:1-21 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying, <sup>2</sup> “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. <sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me.”

The Lord established the Decalogue on **two** principles:

**i. Who he is: A personal God.**

**READ: Exodus 20:1-3 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying, <sup>2</sup> “I am the Lord your God,

Imagine that you’re an Israelite. Place yourself in an age where there was no technology. There is no such thing as electricity except what might be glimpsed in a storm. You and your father and father's father and your father's father's father have all been enslaved for centuries in a place where the prevailing religion was polytheistic. Egyptians worshipped upwards of 1,400 different gods.

Growing up in a culture like that, an Israelite might be tempted to think that the universe is inhabited by multiple gods who are all competing for humanity's adoration and worship. But then, all of a sudden, a guy named Moses comes in as the messenger of only one God named

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<sup>3</sup> DeYoung, Kevin, *The 10 Commandments*, (Wheaton, IL; Crossway, 2018), p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Motyer, J.A., *The Message of Exodus*, The Bible Speaks Today Series, (Downers Grove, ILL; InterVarsity Press, 2005), p. 213.

Yahweh. He tells everyone that this one deity is going to set all of Israel free. What a joke this must've seemed. One God against 1,400 gods! Those are some long odds. But, a marvel of marvels, this one God succeeds over and against the many supposed "gods."

Then after being delivered, the first thing you're told is that this God is your God. Not the Egyptian's god. But your God. Let the Egyptians be known for their 1,400 different gods. Israel would be known for its worship of only one God. The whole point of the Decalogue and, by extension, the entire book of Exodus is for God to show his people that he is a God who makes himself known to them.<sup>5</sup> The Lord does not leave it up to us to figure out who he is. He tells us plainly within the pages of the Scriptures. The Decalogue gives us a glimpse into who God is and what he values (cf. sermon series, '*The Immutable Characteristics of God*').

Hearing God say, "I am your God," complements what he said in Exodus 19.

**READ:** Exodus 19:4-6 (ESV)

<sup>4</sup> 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. <sup>5</sup> Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; <sup>6</sup> and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

The Lord was Israel's God, and Israel was God's people.

## **ii. Who they are: A delivered people.**

**READ:** Exodus 20:1-3 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> And God spoke all these words, saying, <sup>2</sup> "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

But not only is God asserting to the Israelites that he is their God, He is also the God who delivered them from slavery. The Decalogue is rooted, first and foremost, in the narrative of Exodus. This does mean that the Ten Commandments do not have sway over other cultures. God's principles transcend all ethnic barriers and apply equally everywhere. However, the best way for the Israelites and us to understand the requirements that God lays down is to understand them within the context of Exodus. Before God ever expected the Israelites to obey, he delivered them from oppression.

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<sup>5</sup> Blackburn, W. Ross, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, The New Studies in Biblical Theology, (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press, 2012), p. 103.

Implied in God's point is not only a motivation for obedience it is a reminder of what happens to those who disobey.<sup>6</sup> Israel obeyed God to leave Egypt. But the Egyptians, via Pharaoh, disobeyed God and refused to let Israel go and so paid a heavy price for their disobedience.

### **So, what's the takeaway?**

If there is no other god but God, then we should have no other god but Yahweh. Who else is **worthy** of our worship?

**READ:** Exodus 20:1-3 (ESV)

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To say that we are to have no other gods before God implies that it is possible to have a god that is not THE God. Now, before you all lose it, let me quickly say that, no, there is not a pantheon of gods from which we can choose from. There are no other divine beings in the universe but Yahweh (cf. 1 Cor. 8:4-6). But this does not mean there aren't powerful spiritual beings who have no control or sway in this world. Sadly, there are such things as demons with the Devil himself as their leader.

However, while, yes, there are beings in this world who want us to consider them as gods, they are not equal to God in any way. Satan would have you believe that he is on par with God, but he is not. Just like every other created thing, he is subject to the power and authority of God. Yes, there are things in this world that are stronger than us, but no one is stronger than our God. He alone is God. And this is precisely the point of the first commandment. Of all the so-called "gods," only one is *deserving* of our worship, and that is our God (cf. Ex. 22:20; 23:13; 34:14).

Beings, both physical and non-physical, will try to tell us that they are the ones in charge; but they are not. God is. As we just mentioned, demonic forces will assert such things, but they are not alone in this. Political leaders will likewise assert themselves in your life to rule you as if they were God telling us right from wrong. And, generally speaking, most politicians on both sides of the aisle mean well. And, yes, generally speaking, we are to abide by the laws of the land. But even so, we would do well to remember that they are still deeply flawed human beings who have no right to tell us what is morally right and ethically wrong. They are not gods. God alone is the one true God.

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<sup>6</sup> Blackburn (2012), p. 105.

**Example:** Every good and healthy marriage is a union between one man and one woman. Pastor T. DeWitt Talmage once wrote, "A church within a church, a republic within a republic, a world within a world, is spelled by four letters: h-o-m-e. If things go right there, they go right everywhere; if things go wrong there, they go wrong everywhere." To mess with this tried-and-true principle that the family stands on the shoulders of a mom and dad destabilizes the home, community, and country. How healthy would a marriage be if the wife in that marriage were to have two husbands or if the man were to have a mistress alongside his wife?

The union of marriage is an excellent metaphor for this first commandment.<sup>7</sup> "At Sinai only God and Israel existed in the world. HE took Israel to His heart—you are mine and belong to no one else! This expression evokes the picture of marriage; the wife could belong to only one husband while every other man...continued to exist, but were not available to her."<sup>8</sup> The point of the first commandment is wholehearted adoration and loyalty to a God who has already shown adoration and loyalty towards us. And this is echoed in the N.T.

**READ:** John 3:16; 14:15 (ESV)

<sup>3:16</sup> For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.... <sup>14:15</sup> If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

**READ:** Romans 5:8 (ESV)

<sup>6</sup>For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup>For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— <sup>8</sup>but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

**READ:** 1 John 4:19 (ESV)

We love because he first loved us.

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If there is no other god but God, then we should have no other god but Yahweh. Who else is worthy of our worship?

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<sup>7</sup> DeYoung (2018), p. 33.

<sup>8</sup> Blackburn (2012), p. 107, quoting from Jacobs, Benno, *The Second Book of the Bible: Exodus*, (Hoboken, NJ; KTAV, 1992), p. 546.

Just as a good Israelite could not have more than one God, the Christian cannot have more than one Jesus. There is no such thing as partial credit in the Christian walk. Jesus either gets all of our attention or none of our attention. And for those who truly understand what it is that Jesus did for us on Calvary, then our wholehearted obedience and allegiance will not be an issue. After all, **if there is no other god but Yahweh, then we should have no other god but God.** Why would we give anything or anyone who is not a god that sort of devotion that only God deserves? What a waste of worship that would be. And is not Jesus worthy of all of our worship?

## Video Description

Ten | Week 2 | "Our God and No Other"

TEXT: Exodus 20:1-3

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Pastor's manuscript can be found here: