

## Loving God

Exodus 20:3-7

Last week we studied the preface to the 10 commandments, with the emphasis that these commandments were given to God's redeemed people, after they had been established as the people of God. The law, even when it was given at Mt. Sinai, was not the means by which the people of Israel became the people of God. Rather, it was the revealed will of God given to those whom he had already delivered.

v.2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

So that law was given to a people already redeemed, it was given to the people of God as the people of God, not as a means of their salvation but as the way in which they would love and honor the Lord God of their salvation. That understanding has to be clearly established in your mind if you are going to rightly apply the law of God to your lives.

And you need to understand that these commandments were not a bunch of individual laws that bore no connection to the others. Nor were these commandments merely to be seen as an external standard to which we must conform. Certainly then, most clearly, they were not given in order for us to gain a sense of confidence that we can achieve some measurable standard by which we would become acceptable to God. We are not saved by the law, and that was true in the Old Testament even when the law was first given.

Still, Jesus has some startling things to say about the law, and as he gained in popularity as a teacher, the Jewish leaders, the teachers of the law, grew suspicious about his increasing popularity. So they posed a question to him, expecting that they

could trap him into giving an answer that would surely cause a controversy. It was a trick question, asked of him by a lawyer.

Mat. 22:34 "But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. 35 Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?"

They, of course, had a pre-approved list of laws, put in order of importance. Kind of like the college football top 25 list every week. Jewish tradition identifies 613 different laws. 248 positive and 365 negative. I don't think they went down that whole list and ranked all 613, but let's assume they had a top 25. And just like college football fans might well argue about whether Georgia should be #1 or some other team, the Jewish scribes enjoyed that very sport themselves. And they thought surely they could get Jesus in trouble by making him weigh in on this poll of the most important of God's laws.

This was his answer,

Mat. 22:37 Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and great commandment. 39 And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets."

Do you see what he did? Instead of argument about the ranking or position of each individual law, he summarized them all. And it was a comprehensive summary. They are all covered, in just two laws. Both those laws have reference to love. The first commandment, which Jesus quotes right out of Deuteronomy 6, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."

So what is the most important commandment? Actually, that

is an easy question to answer. Love God. And that's the command which we will study this afternoon in Exodus 20, as we look at the first, second and third of those ten commandments. We studied these ten commandments in detail, one by one, in our study of Deuteronomy two years ago, so I'm not going to repeat those sermons with detail about each individual commandment. Rather our focus here will be on the commandment to love God, which is the summary of the first four commandments. And then the commandment to love one another, which summarizes the 5th through the 10th commandment.

So this afternoon, our focus will be the first three commandments, taken together in terms of one sermon, with three specific focal points, all in the context of this is how we love God. Loving God is a choice. It is a commitment. It is a determination of the will and it is the motivation of the heart. And it begins rather simply with the challenge to each of us to exercise,

### **I. A DEVOTION TO GOD ALONE.**

Many of you witnessed the wedding vows Hannah Childs took yesterday, she and her new husband. And you who are married remember those vows yourself. In some form or another, you pledge your devotion to one person alone above all others. For better for worse, in sickness and in health. And then also the phrase, "forsaking all others," which is a promise of faithfulness. That's the key, the key to marriage, and the key to our relationship with God. Forsaking all others.

Marriage establishes a unique relationship, an exclusive relationship. By definition. By God's definition. And a marriage without that is really no marriage at all. So it is with our relationship with God. Forsaking all others, we offer to God a devotion that is reserved for him alone. In other words,

v.3

The focus there is, indeed, to identify the object of our worship. And what this law requires, what it commands, is that God, the one true and only God, be,

### **A. The singular object of our worship.**

That means there must be no other gods! And that means that there is, actually, only one God. We live in a day and age in which that statement itself might be considered by some to be hate speech. Because it excludes some people. It makes a claim of exclusiveness. And so it does! There is only one God.

1 Tim. 2:5 "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time."

When it comes to the issue of whether or not a Christian could eat meat that had previously been offered to idols, the Apostle Paul gives this very plain explanation,

1 Cor. 8:4 "Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. 5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live."

An idol is nothing. Because there is only one God. All the other so-called gods are imitations, they are fake, untrue. God had made that known so very clearly to his people Israel right from the beginning. Remember the great declaration of,

Deut.4:35 "To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD Himself is God; there is none other besides Him."

Deut. 6:4 “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! 5 You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

There, of course, is the main idea I am seeking to stress this afternoon. It is not simply the bare fact of the reality that there is but one God, but what that means for you and mean. In terms of marriage, the point is not simply that a man is to have only one wife. The point is that he is to love her and her alone, to the exclusion of all others. The point of this first commandment is a matter of love and devotion. There can be only one such object.

So it is with God. And this command is so necessary for us because of,

### **B. The attractive danger of idols.**

Calvin once wrote so insightfully that our hearts are idol factories! We manufacture idols in our own hearts, we imagine idols in our own minds. And chiefly, broadly, those idols have their identity in created things, so Paul describes mankind in general as those...

Rom. 1:25 “...who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever.”

So that’s idolatry, loving the things which God has created instead of loving the God who created all things! And Jesus says with such practical wisdom, you really can’t love both! You simply are not capable of it.

Mat. 6:24 “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

James is even more straightforward,

James 4:4 “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

But oh so easily we are attracted. How easily the lure of the world and the things of the world entices us. How attractive are those dangers! So we need to hear John’s pastoral warning,

1 John 2:15 “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world.”

The issue is a matter of worship, a matter of devotion. A mere intellectual or even theological commitment to one God is enough. This first commandment is a matter of your heart, a matter of the object of your devotion, with the willingness to resist the temptations of your heart to worship something, someone other than the one true and living God who made the heaven and the earth. To know God is to worship God. To worship God is to love God.

Mat. 22:37 “‘You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and great commandment.”

The ten commandments progress then from identifying the object of our worship to the manner of our worship. How we worship God. How we express our love to God. And this commandment also addresses the heart, for the expression of our devotion to God cannot be limited to some external form or religious ritual. What is required, to the contrary, is,

## **II. A DEVOTION TO GOD IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH.**

Do you remember Jesus' conversation with the woman at that well in Samaria? He initiated the conversation, asking her for a drink. And he promised her "living water."

John 4:13 "Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

He certainly got her attention with those words, and then exposed the sinfulness of her life of immorality, even as he offered her that living water by which she could have life itself. She was uncomfortable with his questions and changed the subject of their conversation to worship, the external form of worship. She said,

John 4:20 "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. 22 You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. 23 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. 24 God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

Jesus was offering her life, freedom from the guilt of her sin. He was calling her to worship the one true God, to love him with all her heart, to show her devotion to him not merely in external form, but with that same heart. As Jesus puts it, to worship in spirit and in truth.

The location on the mountain didn't matter. The heart was what mattered. And God himself is a spirit, without a physical

body. He is not part of the created world but the creator himself. And so he must be worshipped, from the heart, as a spirit. The warning of this second commandment is, then,

### **A. The danger of recognizing a physical representation of God.**

We are tempted to do that because we are visual creatures. We want to see things with our own eyes. And in its worst form, this sort of idolatry requires us to see before we will believe, which becomes the very opposite of faith. Faith is the willingness to believe, without demanding the right to see it for yourselves.

Heb. 11:1 "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. 2 For by it the elders obtained a good testimony. 3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible."

Or, in the simple words of,

2 Cor. 5:7 "For we walk by faith, not by sight."

That's what this second commandment is all about.

v.4 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—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 nor serve them."

Peter gives the believers to whom he writes this great encouragement, that they...

1 Peter 1:7 "...may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls."

Remember also Jesus' words to doubting Thomas, who insisted on seeing Jesus after his resurrection before he would consent to believe.

John 20:29 Jesus said to him, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

That's the danger of recognizing a physical representation of God, that we will substitute the true God, who is spirit, unseen, for a graven image, a man-made image. And the reason that is of such importance is because of,

### **B. God's jealous desire to protect his honor.**

The second commandment makes that plain, doesn't it?

v.5-6

God is jealous, filled with a zeal to protect the honor of his name. We have a fuller commentary upon that idea in,

Ex. 34:12 "Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. 13 But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images 14 (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), 15 lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, 16 and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods. 17 "You shall make no molded gods for yourselves."

We often think of jealousy in a negative way, associating it with our own pride or insecurities, demanding something inappropriate from others because of our own fears. But deep

down, this word simply refers to the zeal to protect something that truly and rightly belongs to us, to protect it with every awareness of how important that is. So a husband and a wife protect the sanctity of their marriage relationship. No intruders are allowed to breach that relationship. We guard against that. So it is with God's zeal, his jealous desire to protect his honor in terms of our love and devotion to him. So we honor him by faith, not by sight, a faith that is informed and defined by his own self-revelation to us in his word.

And we honor him by not imagining him nor identifying him with any outward, physical form. And we do so with the deepest of honor and respect. That's the third commandment.

### **III. A DEVOTION TO GOD WITH THE DEEPEST OF RESPECT.**

Here is what we might identify as the attitude of our worship. That attitude of the heart is demonstrated by the words that come out of our mouths. And so the commandment addresses the matter of the sincerity of our words.

v.7

Vain mean empty, casually, without honor or respect. Or even just ordinary. 8And the words reflect the attitude of the heart. That's the point. So in a positive way, we read verse such as this with respect to our attitude,

Ps. 29:1 "Give unto the LORD, O you mighty ones, Give unto the LORD glory and strength. 2 Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness."

Or shifting to the vision of God's glory in the future experience of heaven itself, we read,

Rev. 4:6 "Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne,

were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. 7 The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. 8 The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!” 9 Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: 11 “You are worthy, O Lord, To receive glory and honor and power; For You created all things, And by Your will they exist and were created.”

That’s the sort of honor to which God is due, and those words demonstrate the good and right attitude of our hearts when we give honor to God in our worship. They show to us,

**A. The need for an attitude of reverence and awe.**

Words matter, so we ought not to speak to God, or of God, with careless words that don’t reflect this proper attitude of the heart. We ought not to use God’s names, or any of his attributes, in any way other than as testimony of our deepest honor being given. Reverence and awe.

And this isn’t simply an Old Testament concept. Consider, Heb. 12:28 “Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God is a consuming fire.”

Our words really do matter, as the words that come out of our mouths come from our hearts. So please, let your words always

reflect the honor you wish to give to God. Let your words express your devotion to God. So be very careful against speaking lightly or irreverently of God, using his name in vain, in an empty or meaningless way. Yet people do it all the time, including many of God’s people. Whenever you speak the name of God, let it be done with reverence and awe, not as profanity. This commandment shows to us,

**B. The need for words of sincerity.**

v.7

So what does the law of God require of you? What do these first three commandments require of you? What is your duty and obligation in terms of obedience to this law of God? What is most important when it comes to that obedience? I have a simple answer for you this afternoon. It is Jesus’ answer.

Mat. 22:37 “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and great commandment.”