



First Commandment

November 16, 2025

Exodus 20:1-3

Clint Pressley

20 *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.*

(Pastor Prays)

Thirty years ago, a researcher and American legal scholar by the name of Robert Bork, wrote a scathing book as a critique of American society. The name of that book is *Slouching Toward Gomorrah*. You can probably still find it. Thirty years ago, what he was doing was he was trying to sound an alarm about the decline and the imminent collapse of what we know as Western society, from politics to pulpits. In fact, as Christians, we actually have no real right to be angry if a government does not honor God when so many churches in Charlotte, North Carolina, don't even believe his word. And the most fundamental display of what God demands and requires and expects of his people can be found right here in Exodus chapter 20. We know them as the Ten Commandments. Some have actually wondered out loud, do these even apply today? And what do Christians like me and you, what do we actually do with the Ten Commandments? I mean we are New Testament believers under the covenant of grace in Christ. Now, if you're new to church, when I say covenant of grace in Christ, what I mean is God has given us Christ, the second Adam. The first Adam fell in the garden and took us all into sin so that we're all born with that sinful nature. But the second Adam, Jesus came, the God-man, and he lived perfectly, and it's his righteousness that is ours. And at the cross, the reason we as Christians love the

cross so much, is because it was at the cross where Jesus died in the place of sinners. So everybody here is a sinner. Jesus died in your place. Then God raised him from the dead. Jesus took the wrath of God away. If you trust Jesus, this is the gospel, if you will trust that Christ did that for you, you will be saved. Any one of you here, that's the covenant of grace that we live under. So what do we, that live under the covenant of grace, what do we do within this sort of rubric of the Ten Commandments? How do we use them?

The old Puritans used to say, when I quote the Puritans, if you think theology, think of theology like a forest. Someone has said, if theology is a forest, then the Puritans are the redwoods in the forest. And the Puritans said, there are three ways that you can use the law if you are a Christian. One use is that the law teaches us how to live. When you look at the Ten Commandments, that's a pretty good way to live right there. It teaches us how to live. The second use of the Ten Commandments, which I agree with, this is why I think everybody should have the Ten Commandments, whether you're a Christian or not, the second use is that the Ten Commandments, the law of God, restrain sin in a society. It's why they're good for everybody. And then the third use of the law is the Ten Commandments show us our need for a Savior.

Did you know that nine out of the Ten Commandments are seen in the New Testament? I said that at the 8 o'clock service and afterwards, a man came up to me and said, which one is left out of the New Testament? And everybody's standing in line and I had vapor lock. I was like, you know what? I don't know. So I did research since then, and now I'm here to tell you that the one that's left out is remember the Sabbath and keep it holy. So, nine of the Ten Commandments are in the New Testament. Why are they there? Paul tells us at the end of Romans that whatever was written in the Old Testament is there for our instruction. Or in Galatians, Paul says that the law is given as a guardian to get us to Christ so that we might be saved by faith.

What do the Ten Commandments in context teach us? Well, I always want to do everything in context here at Hickory Grove and study the Bible. I want it in its context. What's going on in the context? Well, let's catch you up real quick. The God of Israel is a holy, loving, grace-filled God. He has saved his people out of slavery in Egypt. He's brought them forward through the Red Sea, now into the wilderness, and up to the mountain of Sinai. And this gracious, holy, loving God, he requires ultimate allegiance and exclusive worship. He's brought his people to a

place called Mount Sinai. In chapter 19, there is a legitimate fireworks display. I mean, there is fire and thunder and lightning. There's smoke. You can go read it if you want to. It's so loud that the mountain quakes. There's an earthquake. There's a furnace burning. And in the midst of that, we get to chapter 20, and now the people can't come close to the mountain. They can't touch the mountain. And Moses is called up into the mountain. He goes into the thick, black, dark, thunderous clouds, where God is, and that's where God gives him the law. And God gives him the law to teach us something. So if you like to write things down, this is the theme of the sermon. What does God teach us? We learn that...

There is No God But God and He Alone Must Be Worshipped

What is this about? Chapter 20:1-3 says, there is no God but God, and he alone must be worshipped. And this first commandment protects us by revealing several things about God to us. What do we learn about God? I'm going to give you several things we learned about God from this passage. Let's go through it. Verse one. Here's the first one, number one.

God speaks

What do you learn? We learn that God speaks, that God is not silent, that he actually speaks. You can know what God wishes for his people. Like this is called in the Greek, the decalogue, 10 words, deca is 10. Logos is the Greek word for the 10 words. They're words that God has spoken. And even right now, you can make the decision. You make the decision right this moment, that either God speaks or he doesn't. He is either good and real or doesn't exist. He's either involved, or this baby dedication is for nothing. And this first commandment is here to remind us that our God, the God of the Bible, is not silent. Look around you here. How does God speak? God speaks in several ways. God speaks in creation. Isn't it good to live in this part of the world? Here it is on November 16th, and it's going to be 75 degrees today. Of course, it might snow tomorrow. We have this picture of God's creation; he is in control. Or what are we doing here close to Charlotte, North Carolina, and how is it that it's come all the way down the continent and you could see the northern lights? You can see God's good creation. What does Paul do in Romans chapter 1? He says, creation has shown us that there is a God, that he has created us in his image. You cannot deny that there is a creation. So God has spoken to us in creation.

God has also spoken to us very specifically in his Word, the Bible. That's why we read it every Sunday morning, starting off our time of worship with the Bible. This is where God has revealed himself to his people. Not only that, it's even more specific that God has revealed himself and the gospel. There is a real clear revelation of who God is. He's shown himself as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. He has shown us that God is a good and holy Creator, and he created you in his image. That image of God in you has been disfigured by your sin so that you, although created in the image of God, are alienated from God. That's not where it stops. The gospel tells us that God has loved the world to the degree he gives his Son, Jesus, who is fully God, and fully man, he lived perfectly in a way Adam didn't and we can't. He lived in perfect fellowship with God the Father. And at the cross, there he dies and the wrath of God is poured out on Jesus. And there Jesus dies in the place of sinners. So if you're a sinner, this morning, you came to church and you are a sinner, let me just put a parentheses here, you actually are a sinner. If you are a sinner and you realize that and you feel like you don't have hope, Jesus died so that you don't have to pay for your sins. He paid for them. Christianity is this, not you trying to do right and be better. Christianity is you trusting that Christ has done that for you. God has revealed himself like that in creation. God has revealed himself specifically in his word.

God has revealed himself in the gospel. God has revealed himself clearly. Like we don't have to wonder about things like sexuality, who a man or a woman is. That's not a political thing for us. That's a biblical thing. We cling to what God has revealed to us. We cling to what God has revealed to us authoritatively. God has revealed to us that he is indeed God. That's where we get the term monotheism, God. We believe in one God. That there is objective truth. That's why we trust law and order. God has revealed that we are responsible. That you are responsible before God and the people around you for how you live your life. God has revealed to us where our affections should be placed. In the Bible, God has revealed to us that we can have hope. I just heard this week, I'm thinking of several people within our church, one dear brother has lost his wife. They were married for over 50 years, and she just died, and it's just heartbreaking. And the peace he gets is from what he reads in the Bible. God has revealed that heaven is good and there is great comfort there. God gives you great peace of mind. God gives you strength to endure. We are reminded that we can actually know him in Christ. Why? Because God speaks. I think that's something you learn right here. God speaks. What else did we learn about God? Let me give you a second thing that we learned, number two.

God rules

Not only does God speak, but God rules. Or you might want to say God is in control. Or maybe you like the term sovereign. You say, God is sovereign. All of those things are true. You find them right there in verse 2. What does the text say? The Lord speaks and says, I am the Lord your God. Or I might even want to cut that down. I am the Lord. The eternal, self-existent, ever-living, covenant-keeping God. The one who is and was and is to come. I am the Lord. You have the compound name, Yahweh. By the way, Yahweh is a name that shows up throughout the Old Testament. It's where Joshua gets His name. Yahweh saves. Joshua is the name Yeshua. It points us right to the Savior that Jesus saves, that Jesus came to save his people from their sins. What is it we believe about Jesus? That he died on the cross to save us from our sins. Not just that he was a good example, and he was a good example. Not just that. We should live our lives like him. But before you get to that, you've got to trust that Jesus died in your place. That's conversion right there, that you believe God has sent Jesus to die for you. This text right here tells us that this name, I am the Lord, the eternal self-existent, ever-living, covenant-keeping God, the one who is and was and is to come, the provider and protector and creator. This phrase, I am, is from Exodus 3.

If you've been coming to church for a little while. You know that when we got to Exodus 3, there was the burning bush, and God revealed himself to Moses as the great I AM. And when it came time for Jesus to reveal himself and show the world who he is, Jesus reached over into the book of Exodus, and pulled out this name and said, this is me. I AM. Man, especially when you read the Gospel of John, what did Jesus say in John 6? I AM the bread of life. Brothers, you're so hungry. You feel famished. You feel like you're dying on the vine. Turn to Jesus. He is the bread of life. What did Jesus say in John 8? I am the light of the world. You feel like you're living in darkness. Maybe there's darkness in your soul. This morning, hear the gospel. Jesus will save you. Turn to the light of the world. In John 10, Jesus said, I AM the door. And if you want to get into heaven, there's one way to go. It is the door to walk through, I AM that door. Jesus said in John 10, I AM the good shepherd and the good shepherd will lead you by the still waters. In John 14, Jesus said, I AM the way. We know that as the way and the truth, and the life, and no man comes to the Father except through Him. Jesus said in John 15, I AM the true vine. That if you would have a vibrancy to your life, if you would live with hope, you would be attached and abide in the vine.

When you get to the back of the book, Revelation, there we find Jesus saying, I AM the first and the last, the alpha and the omega, and he must rule. Brothers and sisters, before you get to the commandment, see it here. I AM the Lord. And for you to know this God, he rules in your heart. What you desire, what you love, what you want, you need Christ ruling in your heart.

Or maybe a tangible display is what you do with your money. Like, you have a job, that job is demanding on you, you are paid for that job, which takes up most of your life, and that money given is a display of how you've spent your time. What do you do with the money you've been given that you worked to get? Does he rule? What about your future as you think about what you're going to do with your life or who you're going to spend your time with? One of the great things that I take comfort in is thinking about God's rule, that he rules over my enemies.

God rules over your lifespan. There's a lot of discussion among Christians right now about health and about eating right and exercising and being a good steward and that's going to lengthen your life. Now, if God rules over lifespan, I'm not sure how it works. you might get on a diet and do all those things and start working out and get in really good shape and it might extend your life. Or it might be that you die in just a really good-looking corpse. I'm not sure, except to say that God rules, you see. And if that is so, what does Paul say in Colossians 3:15? ¹⁵*And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful.* Let the peace of Christ rule here.

If that's going to happen, what do you need to do? Okay, here's what I think you need to do. You need to stop complaining. If you complain about what you're in, then you are saying God doesn't know what he's doing. Stop complaining. Any way you dress it up, stop complaining. It is you saying God has made a mistake in some kind of way. Let me go to the other side. You need to stop coasting. Some of you need to stop coasting and just sort of wandering through life. God has clearly given us what his purpose is, where he wants you to go, what is honoring to him. Look, if you've been dating a girl for years, and you haven't asked her to marry you, you need to do something, son. You're wandering, you're coasting. That's coasting. We need to be in a hurry. I say that for all the single girls in the world, for all y'all. Because the complaint I get is the guys are not taking action. Now, don't be a stalker, that didn't help us at all, okay?

Or maybe stop obsessing. Sometimes you have something in your mind, this is what I'm going to hold on to, you need to stop obsessing over that. Or stop worrying. For those of you that are

anxious and stay anxious, come here to the Bible. And this is hard to do, but you need to stop worrying. You're stealing joy from tomorrow and paying for it today. What does the Bible say? If then you're in Christ and you've died with Christ, seek the things above where Christ is. Put your mind on things above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on things are below. For your life is hidden with Christ. You've died. Your life is hidden with Christ. What did we learn here? We learned that God speaks. We've got that. And God rules. That's two things. I'm going to give you a third, number three.

God loves

There's a picture right there in verse 2. For those of you not familiar with the understanding of God, who have not been to church very much, let me just show you how God loves. Right here, he says to his people, I AM the Lord, your God. I mean, there is a real personal element in this passage. I am the Lord, your God. This is not an amorphous, ambiguous God out there. He reveals his personal name, I AM. He's saying to his people, you will be mine. There's a personal possession. Here is the picture of a God who stoops down in order to love and save. A God that says to you, everything you face, I will carry you through it. As a Christian, if you're a Christian here today, it's good for you to remember the love that God has for you in Christ. And one of the ways to think about that is God the Father loves God the Son eternally and forever and perfectly. When you put your faith in Jesus, you didn't just say, I want Jesus to be my example. You said, my life is dead. I've died and I'm hidden with Christ in God. And so if God the Father loves God the Son and you are in Christ, he loves you to the degree that he loves his son, Jesus. So if Jesus is the friend of sinners, and again, remember, we're all sinners, if Jesus is the friend of sinners and has come to save sinners, that's good news for all sinners. So that Christ becomes your hope and your strength, the Savior, your forgiver. I mean, love does things.

Let's bring down to a lower level, the human level. If you love somebody, you do things. You don't just think, it's not just an emotion, it's not just a feeling that you have, it's not just a sentiment. That love needs to turn into action. We do something. If you love a woman and you are trying to convince her to marry you, you actually need to do some things. Do something. So if that's true on a low level, what about on a higher level? If God loves us, he's done something. You see, God's love has done something for us. That love has given us the gospel, Jesus. His love

was so much, the Bible says that God has so loved the world that he gave his son, Jesus, that whoever believes in him will not perish. This is love. You have everlasting life.

Now, bring that to the human level again, someone loves you, say you're married, your husband loves you, that gives you confidence. If he's a good guy, you feel valued. So that on a lower level, take him on a higher level. If God has loved you in Christ, today you can live with confidence. You have been valued in Christ. God loves you to that degree, it gives you great security, great protection. wonderful forgiveness. You are forgiven in Christ. Put your faith in what Christ has done. You are forgiven. The lover, the one that loves, seeks the betterment and the flourishing of the loved. If you are loved by God, the one who loves, who is God, he seeks the flourishing of your soul. And that happens in Christ. So we're thinking about this commandment. There's no God but God and he must be worshipped. There are three things that we've learned so far. God speaks, God rules, and God loves. Let me give you the fourth one, number four.

God saves

You look at verse 2 and you'll find out that God saves. God saves. This is Christianity, right? You have right here at the end of verse 2, the gospel. Here's the gospel. right here in the Ten Commandments. As the Ten Commandments are being given, we're going to get to them in just a second, I promise. You have the gospel beforehand. So this is something to remember.

If you're new to Christianity or thinking about it, you've heard the Ten Commandments before. The Ten Commandments are not there saying, okay, if you can do these, you can climb this ladder, then you can get to the top. You can get into heaven. You just get these commandments, you'll get there. That is not how Christianity works. It's not scales. If you'll just do enough, you can weigh all the bad stuff you've done and it is so heavy, it's dragging you down into hell right now. You've got no hope. So forget trying to get into heaven. Then if that's not going to work, we need to go to grace. How do we get there? Well, it's right here in this text. This God is worthy of worship because he delivers. What does he say in verse 2? I am the Lord your God, and I brought you out of the land of Egypt. I brought you out of the house of slavery. Now, when you read the Bible, you find that there is a picture of God as creator. The Catechism will tell you, God should be worshiped because he is the creator. That's true. But if he is creator and redeemer, then he should especially be worshiped. Look how the text reads,

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

Here's a reminder that in Christianity, redemption precedes relationship. Don't get it the other way around. If I can just get to know God, then he's going to redeem me. If I can do these Ten Commandments, then God will think enough of me, he'll let me into heaven. That's not how he works. That's not Christianity. That's some sort of weird works-based religion, that's not Christianity. Christianity is that redemption precedes relationship. So, when you read the book of Exodus, you get 19 chapters into the book of Exodus, and up to this point, salvation is before you get to the law. This tells us that the Ten Commandments, the law, was never intended to save us. It's meant to be a guide to those who have been saved and to living a life that is pleasing to God. This also reminds us that even if you could keep the Ten Commandments, even if you did, like the rich young ruler said, he kept all of them since the days of my youth, and then Jesus says to him, okay, go and sell everything you have. What that means is you have an idol in your heart so you still wouldn't be saved. You see, God does the saving, then gives us the requirements. This takes us right to the gospel, right there is the gospel. It's in Old Testament words, but they have a New Testament tune. Listen to them. I brought you out of the land of Egypt. I brought you out of slavery. We even sing a song sometimes about how Jesus brought me out. Now I'm on my way. It's redemption. The language is redemption. The language is the slave market, shackled and without hope, and Jesus comes and buys us with his own blood. What does Colossians say? That He has forgiven us all of our trespasses. How? By canceling the record of death that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside and nailed it to the cross. You have been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, not by you keeping the moral law. Law comes after salvation, not before. Law doesn't lead to salvation. Salvation makes you want to keep the law. Grace points us into obedience. Obedience doesn't earn you grace. That's not the gospel. The gospel is that grace saves through faith in Christ, and then you live your life for God. So what do we have so far? Now I'm going to get to the commandment. God speaks, God rules, God loves, God saves, here's the fifth one, number five.

God expects

God expects. Look, I scratched that out, then I said, God demands. Then I scratched that out, and I said, God expects. I can't decide which one. So you choose which one you like better. God expects. Let me show you where I get that. It's the first commandment in verse 3. What does the text say?³ *"You shall have no other gods before me.* Here's the foundation of a relationship

between God and his people. The command reads, you will have no other gods before me, before my faith, before my face. You'll have no other gods beside me. You'll have no other gods in my presence. Look, this command is not a call to make sure God is first. Be careful with that language. I saw an athlete post this the other day that here are my priorities. Like a pyramid. God is first, and then my family, and then my career. It sounds good. It's not good theology. Don't have a pyramid with God at the top. God is not at the top of the pyramid. God is the pyramid then he saturates everything. This command is not here to say, okay, you make sure you got that covered, touch first base, and you can keep on running. Here is the exclusive worship of God. That he is not only primary, but he is saturating.

When Paul writes to the church in Rome, in Romans 1, he gives you a picture of our own society. But what he says that idolatry happens when you exchange the glory of the Creator for that which is created and that leads to ignorance and moral confusion.

So what does Paul say in Colossians 3? He says, put to death, therefore, what is earthly in you, sexual immorality and impurity and passion and evil desires and covetousness. This is idolatry. So, if you had to have a definition of idolatry, what would it be? I don't know where I got this, but it seemed pretty simple to me. Idolatry is putting something or someone else in the place of God. A person, a dream you're pursuing, a station in life you're trying to reach, an income level you hope to get, a house you'd like to have, a car that you really love, sports, maybe you're smart, maybe yours is grades. I never made an idol out of grades, but maybe you do. It becomes an idol.

Be careful, those of you who are such great parents, that you do everything for your children, including skipping church, your children have become an idol. Recreation, or maybe it's luxury, or reputation, or maybe yours is on the other side. Look, you just want ease in life. You do whatever you can to have that privacy and comfort. Maybe you're celebrating right now, yours is politics. Paul says covetousness is idolatry. When you want something to the point of obsession, this is what happens to addicts with drugs. And we're reminded in this passage, in the very first commandment, when God saves you, he says, I am the Lord your God. I brought you out of the house of slavery. You'll have nothing that even comes close. He is your life. You yield to his Lordship. He alone is to be worshiped. He saturates every thought, every decision, every relationship, every direction. He is not just the top. He is all. And He has done that for

you. And the way you access that is by placing your trust and your hope and your faith in the one who lived and died in your place, Jesus Christ. There you'll find your life. There you will find fulfillment in this very first commandment.

(Pastor prays)