



2026 Weekly Devotions

Week of: April 20th - 26th

Sermon: April 19th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community ◦ equipping believers ◦ serving Jesus

April 20

Genesis 3:24

Exodus 26 is loaded with detailed instructions regarding the composition and construction of the Tabernacle. Frankly, these kinds of chapters can be easily glossed over as the nuance and particulars are not necessarily readily applicable to our lives in the 21st Century. My goal for this devotion is to demonstrate that the details do have meaning. While today's devotion is not groundbreaking, nor does it constitute the kind of conclusion that radically alters our view of God, it does show us that God's story is far more cohesive than some might initially believe.

Verse 1 of Exodus 26 commands the people of Israel to make the ten curtains which comprised the external barrier of the tabernacle. Within this instruction comes this little detail, "you shall make them (the curtains) with cherubim. Cherubim are simply angelic beings. They appear in many places throughout the Scriptures, and they often accompany the palpable and awesome presence of the Lord.

To prove my assertion, I would point to Genesis 3:24 which tells us that God kicked Adam and Eve out of the garden and then protected the garden (the place where His presence and life-giving tree was located) with cherubim. The point here is simple, the presence of the cherubim are intended to signify holy ground because they call the attention of the worshipper and the subsequent reader to the presence of our Almighty God.

When we comprehend this fact, we can easily understand why these cherubim were to be depicted on the curtains of the tabernacle. God's goal in this design was to visibly display the significance of this structure to the people by placing the sign of the cherubim on the exterior of the structure.

The point is that the tabernacle was not the kind of place that should be entered into flippantly. The cherubim alerted the people to the reality that God was present and, therefore, their picture signified the gravity of the place. The people would not enter this tabernacle dismissively, instead by God's design they would enter with fear and trembling and proper respect.

As I consider the implications for us today, I can't help but praise Jesus for what He has done. I can now "boldly approach the throne... with confidence" according to the Scripture. The veil that was present in the tabernacle has been torn, the wall of separation that was erected due to my sin has been torn down and, therefore, there is no need for cherubim to prevent my access to the Father in Christ. The Lord is good but, let us reflect upon the truth today that He is also holy and that is the reason why the cherubim are mentioned in this precious passage of Scripture.

April 21

Exodus 19:8

The level of detail in Exodus 26 is remarkable. For instance, God commands the people to make fifty loops on the edge of the outer curtain of the tabernacle (v. 5). Further along in the chapter, we are given the exact length of the curtain (v. 8). Additionally, there is undeniable specificity regarding the materials used, the design of the structure and the measurements of many of the constituent parts.

I bring this up because of a feeling that I sometimes have when I read chapters like Exodus 26. If you are like me, you may be tempted to wonder, why does it matter? Sometimes we are told about the motivation or reason behind the command and other times we are left with no explanation and simple, clear instruction.

The simple truth is that we don't always know why the Lord commands what He does, and that may be part of the point! Recall that Exodus 19 records the words of the Lord's people as they pledge to do "all that the Lord commands". This is a universal commitment! As such, it includes the "big commands" (think, don't murder, steal, commit adultery, etc.) but the term "all" includes the more minute or tedious instructions as well.

Exodus 26 is a marvelous study when we consider the faithfulness of God's people to obey every solitary instruction. God's people were not to evaluate His design; they were to carry out His stated wishes. In the same way, you and I have a responsibility to simply do what God requires of us. It strikes me that some among us (me included) are reticent to do anything until we see the point. That is not necessarily a bad trait to possess when dealing with fallen, finite men but it is more certainly evil in relationship to a Sovereign, omniscient God.

I wonder how the Israelites responded when they were given these commands. I bet there was a contractor in the group who was thinking that there was a more "cost efficient" way. I would wager to bet that there was a designer in the group who wondered if the colors would clash and I'd guess there was a priest who might want to have further dialogue about the layout of the tabernacle for utility's sake! Nevertheless, their job was not to critique or edit, they were to be faithful.

I pray we can see ourselves in this light as well. Folks, you don't need to know why God commands you to do something, you need to know what He commands! Sometimes the point is not the deed as much as it is the heart. The real measure of our faithfulness is often proven in the moments where we don't understand exactly why God instructs us as He does.

April 22

Hebrews 10:24-26

Considering yesterday's devotion, I want to spend the next several days exploring some of the commands that God gives to us. To be clear, none of these are difficult to explain, but they are some of the exhortations that seem to be neglected and/or explained away by many Christians (at least in my personal experience). If our goal is to be obedient to our Lord (a title that screams of God's authority), then we need to make sure we are in compliance with His teaching, even if we don't understand why or think we may have a better method.

Today's is basic, go to church... often. There is very little ambiguity in our passage for today. Believers are to attend the gathering of the local body for worship. The term translated "meet" in the ESV literally means to assemble. In its context, the command is clear in its expectation that believers would come together for the purpose of worship, specifically on the Lord's Day.

The exhortation is clear, we need to be a part of a local body of believers, and we need to be active in our worship attendance. The problem is not with the intelligibility of the command, instead it seems that many have fallen victim to the trap of attempting to rationalize and reason their way out of obedience. These explanations take many forms. Some have told me that they "don't get anything out of it". Others say that they can "worship from anywhere". Others tell me that the church is global, not local and, therefore, the assembly is not a physical meeting of believers in a particular geographic spot, it is a spiritual gathering of all the saints when we unite in praise. Others say that they are simply too busy doing other things that God commends (working to provide for their family, sharing the Gospel in their neighborhood, etc.).

In every respect, these people are confessing the opposite of what God's people committed to in Exodus 19:8. The Jews said, "we will do everything the Lord commands", many modern-day people say, "we will do everything that seems right to me." The reality of the circumstance is that there is one God and He is more than qualified to give us His directives. You don't have to see the benefit of the gathering of the saints to know that you are commanded to go. More to the point, you more than likely won't see the blessing UNTIL you are obedient to the command. God's graces flow to those who humbly walk in His ways, and this means that obedience precedes fruit.

Perhaps you are reading this and you have wandered a bit from the assembly. Maybe you have bought the lie of the culture that "family time" is more important than worship. Maybe your job has taken over your life to the point that other priorities are neglected. Maybe you've been hurt by the church. In all these instances, the right response is to return and trust the Lord to bless and honor your decision of obedience.

April 23

1 Timothy 4:13

Years ago, I had someone who no longer attends our church offer some kind but clear criticism. We were speaking about the Lord's grace in blessing our time of worship together and this gentleman said, "I have one critique. You guys preach too much! It seems like every time we get started with worship, you all stand up to speak." To be clear, this man's heart seemed genuine and kind. He wasn't a jerk and didn't intend to discourage but his message was clear... worship is sometimes obstructed by preaching!

Perhaps you have thought that before. I know that many think that reading God's Word (in long sections) and preaching about the truths that God reveals can be a hindrance to church growth. That being the case, why do we do it? The simple answer is we read the Word and preach the Word because God commands it!

Today's text is a favorite of mine because of one particular word. Paul is writing to his protégé Timothy, providing some instructions for the new pastor as he seeks to honor God amongst the Ephesians. When we get to chapter 4, Paul says that Timothy should "devote" himself to the public reading and preaching of the Word of God. That term "devote" means to apply oneself fully. It denotes dogged commitment to the task at hand.

The responsibility of ministry, according to Paul, is "public" reading and preaching. This means that the gathering of the saints should include an intentional and pronounced period of instruction in sound doctrine. Folks, preaching is not subsidiary to the gathering of the saints. Instead, preaching and teaching the Word of God is central to our time of worship. Stated differently, preaching is not something that "gets in the way" of worship, preaching is the very centerpiece and pinnacle of worship.

I have found that this does not always make sense to people. Some of you have grown up in traditions whereby the pastor almost apologizes for preaching! I have heard many preachers stand up and say things like, "bear with me, this will only take a minute" or, "I know you all want to get to the fellowship meal, but let's take just a quick glance at the Bible." These things betray a lack of conviction and a willingness to disobey all that God has commanded. Remember dear friends, God has promised to build His church and because the Lord is the One who builds it, we don't need to worry about construction ourselves! Our job is to be faithful to what He commands, His job is to take our meager efforts and use them however He pleases.

April 24

Matthew 5:43-44

Years ago, someone told me that fallen men want grace for themselves and justice for their enemies. That sounds about right, but I think it might actually give fallen men too much credit! We certainly want grace for ourselves but, I would argue, most sinful men want revenge for their enemies.

We live in a world awash with spite. It is not hard to find an enemy! Most of our social media conversations and news programming are engineered to elicit a visceral reaction. It is so easy to hate and, frankly, it is just as easy to find a good reason to justify our hatred.

I have met many people who hate people from terrorist organizations in the name of patriotism. There are numerous people who hate their former spouses. There are individuals who hate their parents due to abuse. Transparently, we could spend the rest of the devotion listing all kinds of circumstances that stir up hatred in the hearts of sinful people.

Hatred is natural, it is common and it is hard to deny. Nevertheless, our Lord's commands are clear. Notice the unconditional nature of this command. We are to "love your enemies" and "pray for those who persecute you". Now, to be clear, love does not dictate foolish exposure! We can love those who hate us without being needlessly naïve in regard to their schemes. However, we cannot love people and act in vengeful ways towards them!

When Jesus commands us to love our enemies... He means it! He means that we must love the neighbor who takes advantage of our kindness and damages our property. He means we must love a boss who has made our jobs miserable. He means that we must love the political opponents who are proposing legislation that would destroy our very civilization.

What does love look like? Well, one answer is prayer! I have found that it is very hard to hate someone I am actively praying for. There is a softening effect within the hearts of those who pray. Let us remember that our duty, before God, is not to administer justice as private citizens. Our duty is to proclaim the truth, walk in righteousness and lift up our enemies in prayer, earnestly desiring their good in the process.

April 25

Matthew 5:37

I have developed an uncanny ability to justify myself over the years and I don't believe I am alone! It seems that our fallen world has justified much as it relates to transgressing biblical, moral standards. We have accepted some things as fact that are simply not defensible from a biblical perspective and one of those categories is that of lying.

Let me provide two examples. First, we justify politicians who are constantly dishonest. It seems as if it is just accepted fact that those who run for office must campaign on lies and "half-truths" (which is one of those justifications for what my mother called a LIE!). Second, we have entire industries that are predicated on the fact that people lie to you. For years I have been warned that contractors often don't call you back or show up when they say they will. What is most troublesome is that many will still recommend these folks because they "do good work". Essentially, we have established an entire industry that tells us it is ok to lie.

To bring this home a bit further, let me address another form of lying which we call exaggeration. I was raised in a story-telling family. We love to tell stories, but what I have learned is that those stories tend to grow over time! It was assumed that our stories were exaggerated for dramatic or comedic effect, but this is really just plain old lying.

Why do I bring this up? Because God's Word speaks, with clarity and boldness, on the topic. The world might tell us it is ok to lie but the Lord says that dishonesty is a sin. We must choose whether we will do "all that the Lord says..." (Exodus 19:8) or only part of what He says. The measure of our faith shines through when we knowingly violate His commands, regardless of the justification we might offer.

Are you following Christ in this respect? Your words must reflect your conviction that there is such a thing as truth, and it is precious. Are you the type of man or woman who can be trusted? Does it wreck you when the Lord calls your attention to the fact that you have been dishonest? Remember, we must follow the Lord in all things, not just the commands we understand or can easily obey.

April 26

Matthew 6:1

Well, we have reached the final entry in this little exploration of some of the commands that God has given which we are to be careful to obey. Our last one is perhaps the most “subtle”. I say this not because the standard of sin is hard to define but because we must discern our own hearts and know our intentions in order to really grasp our level of guilt in following this commandment.

Jesus’ admonition here is clear, we are to follow God in righteousness without making a show of our progress. Stated differently, there is a way to project a holy lifestyle while transgressing God’s law. It is relatively easy to look holy. We all realize that public environments don’t constitute the entirety of our lives. We have all met people, and frankly most of us have been the type of people who have a public facing persona that does not match their private character.

In this instance, Jesus speaks to His followers and warns them not to project holiness to gain the blessing of our peers. While it is true that following Christ includes fidelity to His commands in public, it is also true that we can be tempted to drum up attention as we seek to make a name for ourselves through our supposedly holy efforts. The purpose of the Christian life is to bring God glory by loving Him and our neighbors. This means that our goal should not be our renown nor recognition but the wellbeing of those around us and the growth of the Kingdom of God through our faithful living. When we truly grasp this reality, the implications of our actions and the audience that may or may not witness them is inconsequential.

Unfortunately, many people have lived as if their goal is to please the men around them instead of their Father in Heaven and it is often hard to discern the difference. As I said above, this one can be subtle. It is hard for me to discern my own heart and, often, I am left to conclude that my motivations are a mixed bag. Stated differently, I don’t always do what I do for exclusively sinful reasons but there are often sinful motives mixed into my righteous deeds.

Our focus should be on God’s glory, and this means that we must be careful to routinely ask whether we are working on His behalf or our own. If we are constantly worried about who sees us as we serve the Lord or whether we receive recognition for our service, we can be assured that our motivation is showing! Our job is to follow the Lord, do what He commands and trust that He sees all that we have done. This is not a suggestion, it is a command and, therefore, it must be heeded!