



17. Ten Words Take Two Exodus 20:1-17

Last week we looked at the way in which God gave the 10 Commandments or the Ten Words, not as a means by which they could find salvation and favour from Him, but as a product of His grace. He had made promises to their forefathers, He had rescued them from Egypt, He had poured out His favour on them. They were entering into covenant with Him and in doing so, they were agreeing to follow Him and organise their society according to His ways. And the 10 words are the basic moral code on which their society was founded and as we saw, it is the same moral code which underlies our society.

That being said, are the Ten Words for the church. We saw by definition the answer must be no, but in reality, Jesus quotes the Shema, the so called Two Words which sum up all moral direction in the OT. The rule of agape is to honour God and put Him first and put the needs of others before your needs. The good thing about that above a set of rules like we have in Exodus 20 is that we can apply that principle to anything in life. Sadly for many Jews and for Christians today, they see the Bible as law – and amplify those rules and use the NT to amplify those rules – but that’s not what the NT is about, just as it wasn’t what the OT was about.

This evening we are going to look more closely at the Ten Words. The most obvious thing about seven of them is that they are one short phrase long and sort of explain themselves

7 “Do not use my name for evil purposes, for I, the Lord your God, will punish anyone who misuses my name.

12 “Respect your father and your mother, so that you may live a long time in the land that I am giving you.

13 “Do not commit murder.

14 “Do not commit adultery.

15 “Do not steal.

16 “Do not accuse anyone falsely.

17 “Do not desire another man’s house; do not desire his wife, his slaves, his cattle, his donkeys, or anything else that he owns.”

I’m not going to really explore these at this point. There is one sense in which they are obvious. But we know from the NT and for what we saw last week that “do not’s” have deeper meanings that go deeper into our thoughts and our motives – it’s not just what we do that’s wrong, it’s the very thoughts that give birth ultimately to these that are also rebellion against God. In a sense, each is worth a sermon – or more – in itself and so I am going to stick to my remit of going through Exodus rather than labouring these. As for verse 7 about the Lord’s name; that’s another one for another day. Why we don’t take God’s name in vain isn’t just a mark of disrespect, but that the name of God and the name of Jesus have power in the spiritual realm – but that’s for another day.

What I’d like to do is look at the others, because we see Yahweh giving much closer attention to them. They aren’t brief – they’re laboured.

2 “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves.

3 “Worship no god but me.

4 “Do not make for yourselves images of anything in heaven or on earth or in the water under the earth.

5 Do not bow down to any idol or worship it, because I am the Lord your God and I tolerate no rivals. I bring punishment on those who hate me and on their descendants down to the third and fourth generation.

6 But I show my love to thousands of generations of those who love me and obey my laws.

Down to verse 8

8 “Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy.

9 You have six days in which to do your work,

10 but the seventh day is a day of rest dedicated to me. On that day no one is to work — neither you, your children, your slaves, your animals, nor the foreigners who live in your country. 11 In six days I, the Lord, made the earth, the sky, the sea, and everything in them, but on the seventh day I rested. That is why I, the Lord, blessed the Sabbath and made it holy.

2 “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves. We did this last week – it’s the grace that brings forth the following words which are all commands.

As I said last week, the Jews combine which have been for the church numbers one and two. It makes sense to combine them as you’ll see when I read them together because they’re all one theme and say the same thing

3 “Worship no god but me. 4 “Do not make for yourselves images of anything in heaven or on earth or in the water under the earth. 5 Do not bow down to any idol or worship it, because I am the Lord your God and I tolerate no rivals. I bring punishment on those who hate me and on their descendants down to the third and fourth generation. 6 But I show my love to thousands of generations of those who love me and obey my laws.

It’s as simple as this. God is a jealous God. Not jealous in the human sense which is actually coveting another person for self-gratification or one’s own security. That’s not what God’s jealousy is about. God is jealous because He will not share His affection with lumps of wood. It’s an insult to compare a lump of wood we call god or another human being or for that matter satan or the demonic to the only true and living God! That’s why God is a jealous God because He’s a right by His very existence to be worshipped alone by those He has created, given life and given a superb world to live in.

Listen carefully – God tolerates no rivals because it’s a travesty, an insult, rebellion and worse sin. And because that is so obvious, God makes the penalty for it most grave in a temporal sense. When you know God, to worship something else is just a vile thing to do to Him. The Israelites had a history of it. For whatever reason they hedged their bets – they followed another religion as well as worshipping Yahweh. And despite judgement, they never learned.

But look at the sanctions of disobedience: ***I tolerate no rivals. I bring punishment on those who hate me and on their descendants down to the third and fourth generation.***
6 But I show my love to thousands of generations of those who love me and obey my laws.

I’ve no time to deal with generational issues here but what we understand is that God brings judgement down on those who worship other things. It’s His judgement and it has consequences generationally. But obedience has consequences generationally – and the benefits outweigh the punishments – here’s God’s grace in action again! Grace poured out greatly outweighs the punishment.

Can we do that today? Yes. Just by making someone or something more important than God. By dabbling with things we know are not of God. Or making objects or things associated with God more important than Him. Some would point to images of Jesus or God immediately and say – that’s what God is talking about. Yes and no. There have been some great films and bad films on the life of Jesus. Some use actors, some use cartoons. What did Jesus look like? We don’t know but we know it wasn’t like that – they are actors, representations. And they can help people understand the story.

I don’t think that is what God is referring to. It’s when the representation becomes revered in its own right. It can be a place, a statue, a holy relic, a garment, a book. So before we pick up stones against those who have a religion of bells and smells, let’s look at our own protestant simplicity.

How many people have we come across who worship the church, worship the building, worship the Bible, worship the Authorised Version, worship organs music, worship contemporary music, worship the Pastor (well, at least that doesn’t happen here!) and perish the thought worship being Baptists.

And if we are clear about that, then who is it we run to for help first when we get into all the thrills and spills of life? Jesus? Or our husband or wife, our family, our friends, a professional or maybe just our own resources? Who's Lord in our lives? Jesus? Someone or something else? Or just ourselves?

And before we point our fingers – we've probably all lost our perspective at some time in our lives and God hasn't been first. And perhaps He isn't first right now.

As we come around the Lord's table this evening, let's ask His forgiveness for those areas in our lives He hasn't been first and commit ourselves to putting Him first in it.

Let's pray

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