

<b>Series:</b> Ten	<b>Reference:</b> Ex 20:1-3; Mk 12:28-31	<b>Title:</b> The First	<b>Date:</b> 06.19.2022
<p><b>Website Writeup:</b></p> <p>This ten-week series looks at the Ten Commandments God's given to all who love Him. As we look each week at a different commandment, we see how there's a corresponding passage in the New Testament; reminding us, God's way of living for us is still valid &amp; relevant today. The Ten Commandments have not changed, and they still remain in place for us today, to follow God well, and live our best life possible.</p>			

### COLOR CHANGES IN TEXT INDICATE SLIDE CHANGES

This ten-week series looks at the Ten Commandments God's given to all who love Him. As we look each week at a different commandment, we see how there's a corresponding passage in the New Testament; reminding us, God's way of living is still valid & relevant today. The Ten Commandments haven't changed, and remain in place today, to follow & glorify God well, living our best life possible as a result.

Let's do a little quiz...firstly, without looking at your phone or Bible, who can tell me where to find the Ten Commandments in the Bible? *(The two complete sets are found in Exodus 20:2-17 & Deut. 5:6-21; Leviticus 19 contains a partial set of the Ten Commandments [see verses 3-4, 11-13, 15-16, 30, 32], and Exodus 34:10-26 is sometimes considered a ritual decalogue.)*

Now, let's see how many of the Ten Commandments can we name without looking at our phones or Bibles? (Let people shout them out.)

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
2. You shall not make idols.
3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day & keep it holy.
5. Honor your father & mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet.

Look with me at Exodus 20:1-3 on p52 of your pew Bibles where it says...*And God spoke all these words: 2"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 3"You shall have no other gods before me.* This basically tells us to love God more than anything else. To place Him first before anything or anyone else.

Imagine you're there sitting, listening to Jesus teach & answer questions. He's accessible. You can ask Jesus any question you want...what do you ask? Would you ask is it right to eat the middle out of an Oreo first? Why women speak on average 40k more words a day than men? Or what He scribbled in the sand when those men were going to stone that woman? What's the secret ingredient in *Chick-fil-a* sauce? Who killed Jimmy Hoffa?

Well...whatever you'd ask, one man had that chance in Mark 12:28-31 asking Jesus a specific question in a moment of accessibility with Him. The question was, "*Which commandment is the most important of all?*" (v. 28). Jesus answered clearly telling him to love God & to love others, that there's no other commandment greater than these. Interestingly, Jesus's answer summarizes the Ten Commandments!

Turn to p693 of your pew Bibles to Mark 12:28-31 as I read...*One of the teachers of the law came & heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"* <sup>29</sup>*"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30Love the Lord your God with all your heart & with all your soul & with all your mind & with all your strength.' 31The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."*

He first quotes the Shema of Deuteronomy 6, which is synonymous with the first commandment in Exodus 20. Then quotes Leviticus 19:18, love your neighbor as yourself. But why would we say this is a summary of the Ten Commandments?

Well...the Heidelberg Catechism succinctly shows us how the structure of the Ten Commandments follows Jesus's answer in Mark 12. It asks a question, then answers it...

**Question:** How are these commandments divided? **Answer:** Into two tables. The first has four commandments, teaching us how we ought to live in relation to God. The second has six commandments, teaching us what we owe our neighbor.<sup>1</sup> Jesus' two statements embody these two tables.

The first four commandments teach us how we ought to live in relation to God: as Jesus said, we should love God with all our heart, mind, soul & strength (see Mark 12:29-30). We do so by putting Him first, which is what the first commandment teaches..."*You shall have no other gods before me*" (Exodus 20:3) as God phrased it to Moses. We also notice - in breaking any other commandment, we automatically break the first - since, if I break another, I show contempt for God's desires in His commandments by putting my desires before His. In essence putting myself in the place of God. So, the answer really is that all the commandments are equally important since Jesus' answer embodies both tables! So...it goes to say...follow the 1st, automatically follow the rest.

And God's gracious, understanding it's not simply enough to tell us to do something. We can't just will our way into putting God first. We need His help & He's provided it in a powerfully motivating way: by rescuing us.

Exodus 20:2 states..."*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*" The Ten Commandments begin with an important reminder of what God's done & what God continually does! God rescues. Exodus 20:2 is a precursor to the Gospel! A physical illustration of spiritual reality in Christ. Remember

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<sup>1</sup> Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 93, <https://www.rca.org/resources/heidelberg-catechism-ten-commandments>

the lintel & doorpost painted with the blood of the lamb during the last plague brought upon Pharaoh to release the Israelites (and it's interesting there are 10 plagues as well). The firstborn of every household would die when the angel of death passed through Egypt. But the Israelites, were instructed to paint the blood of a sacrificial lamb on their doorposts & lintels. As a result, the angel 'passed over' their homes & their firstborn did not die as a result! Hence, Passover, a foreshadow of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

The Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, worked to death, controlled & oppressed. We may not have been physically enslaved by another, but we were enslaved to sin manifesting itself in the form of internal passion & desire, or to certain external powers over us. And nothing, not even God's Law, could save us. That's why we categorize sin as slavery - because we literally have no choice in being controlled by it without Christ. We were controlled, enslaved & oppressed by our own passions & desires; our sinful nature. Nothing could set us free. However, we must remember we are culpable in that sin, we've chosen it. Chosen to rely on ourselves, and not on God. Paul states in Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death." Wages are what we earn, God pays out to us what we earn by way of our choices. Sin is our responsibility, requiring repentance.

But God, rich in mercy, enters our world in the person of Jesus, takes on our burden & sets us free - if we will repent & trust in Him. As Paul states writing to Christians in Ephesians 2 who've experienced this...*"As for you, you were dead in your transgressions & sins, <sup>2</sup>in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world & of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup>All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh & following its desires & thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. <sup>4</sup>But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, <sup>5</sup>made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions - it is by grace you have been saved."*

Once & for all. Once saved, always saved! Past, present & future sin. If we look at sin as being in debt to the bank, it's not as if we were overdrawn & Jesus just zero'd it out, and now I have to work to keep it in positive numbers. He goes further, adopting me into His family as a child, flooding my account with the unlimited funds of the Father. I'll never be in spiritual debt again! Since I'm covered by the perfect record of Jesus!

It would be like I'm a billionaire with more money than I could ever spend. I couldn't even spend the interest it's so great. And I adopt my foster sons who formerly lived a different life which brought them into poverty by their choices. But they come & say, "I want to turn away from this past life, and live under your roof & rule now as your child." I receive them & they open a bank account linked directly to mine. Now every time they overdraw their account the bank just automatically dips into mine, no charges, no penalties. What's mine is theirs, they did nothing to earn, or maintain it other than turn from their former life & trust me as father.

He rescued us from the slavery of sin, once & for all time, just as He rescued the Jews from their slavery in Egypt, a precursor to the Gospel. In Christ, we're saved by grace

through faith, this not of ourselves, rather a work of Jesus' atoning sacrifice. And He's saying, "I've done this for you, so here is what I want in return: don't put any other gods before me. Let me be first in your life. I've set you free, so don't enslave yourself to something or someone else. Just follow Me. Your account's linked to mine, if you try & pull it, going off on your own like the Prodigal Son did, the bank will overtake you. But I'm always here to receive you back, throwing you a party you don't deserve!"

God says the same to us in Galatians 5:1...*"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery."* Sin enslaves, but Christ's righteousness frees us to live a life of holiness. Paul was writing in Greek to Gentiles living in Galatia. The word he uses, *eleutheria*, means liberty or freedom. It comes from the Greek word *eleutheros* meaning free, not a slave, not under restraint.

The word yoke in Greek is *zugos*, used to describe the means by which oxen were bound together & forced to carry heavy loads. Farmers put a curved wooden stock over the necks of two work animals, fashioning them into one unit to pull loads efficiently. It keeps their heads down, tied to a plow, enabling the farmer to guide & direct them at will; a picture of sin in our lives. But in Leviticus 26:13 God says to Israel...*"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke & enabled you to walk with heads held high."*

All this a foreshadowing of Christ...Jesus stood in our place, paying our sin debt. His final words on the cross, *"It is finished"* (John 19:30), cement this. Everyone there that day would know, those were words uttered when a debt was paid in full, precisely what Jesus was saying just before His last breath on the cross. He bought us back from the oppressor as 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 says...*"You are not your own; <sup>20</sup>you were bought at a price."* And the freedom we experience is not freedom to just do as we please because, like the Prodigal Son teaches, that would be inviting slavery once more. Romans 6:15-16 asks...*"Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? By no means! <sup>16</sup>Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey - whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?"*<sup>2</sup>

Ownership's transferred to Jesus, we become slaves to righteousness! Christ, benevolent God, not harsh taskmaster. Putting Him first isn't burdensome, it's true freedom! For many, freedom's synonymous with personal independence; the ability to make our own decisions, choose our own path, to do whatever we want, whenever we want. That's not true freedom, and not the freedom into which Christ calls us. It's a misunderstanding of freedom - freedom's found in obeying the Law, not in disregarding it. Obedience to healthy life-giving standards.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/bible/how-has-the-freedom-in-christ-set-us-free.html>

In John 8:36 Jesus says...*“If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”* Luke 4:18 tells us He literally came to earth to proclaim freedom. Jesus wasn’t setting us free to do whatever we want; He frees us to do & be what we ought; liberating us to walk in relationship with God & be the people He originally created us to be.<sup>3</sup>

He said in John 8:34...*“I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.”* And the wages of sin is death as we saw in Romans 6:23 - literal & spiritual death. In Christ we believe in a spiritual rebirth, and also in the final resurrection of the dead to eternal life with God in His kingdom of peace! Putting God first means to let God be God! So many good things can become ultimate things to us. We easily subject ourselves to the slavery of our idols once more. We turn relationships, careers, pleasures, sports, or money into the ultimate thing.

Commandment #1 is about worship - the response to whatever we value most. The things, people, or concepts which occupy our thoughts receiving most of our time & attention. Money, a life-long dream, pleasure, career, social status, success, etc. What you value most is what you worship. Observe others as they watch the Super Bowl, their worship reveals what they value most. Everyone’s religious. Everyone worships. You can’t get around it. The atheist worships the human spirit, will, or mind. The Progressive worships personal choice & autonomy. The greedy worship wealth, etc., we could keep listing, ad nauseam.

As a person is woken from spiritual death to new life in Christ, being reborn by the Spirit of God as John 3 describes, *they respond like the Psalmist did in chapter 63:1...“O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry & weary land where there is no water.”*

Then he explains why this is in vv3-5...*“Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands. My soul will be satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.”* Gods love, better than life itself. In Him we find true satisfaction! When we worship, we make Christ the central focus of our affection. We sense God’s presence with us, the Spirit of God touching us, communicating the Father’s love to us.

The Bible reveals the nature of the glorious God we worship:

- We worship God as **Creator** (Gen. 1:1) - the Father, maker & sustainer of all life, who began all things, and will bring history to its consummation.
- We worship God as **King** (Ps. 103:19) - Lord & sovereign over the cosmos, the benevolent leader of His Kingdom, the One extending His rule through people who love Him & obey His word.
- We worship God as **Trinity** (Deut. 6:4) - One God expressing Himself in three Persons, dwelling in perfect harmony within the Godhead - Father, Son & Holy Spirit.
- We worship God as **Savior** (Matt. 1:21) - the rescuing God who by Jesus’ life, death on a cross, and resurrection conquers sin & death, making us new creations in Christ.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/freedom-in-christ/>

All these attributes of God & more inform our worship.<sup>4</sup>

When we put God first, we need to realize, all we're doing is saying yes to God before saying yes to anyone or anything else, including ourselves. The Heidelberg Catechism explains so well...God requires "that I rightly know the only true God, trust Him alone, and look to God for every good thing humbly & patiently, and love, fear, and honor God with all my heart. In short, that I give up anything rather than go against God's will in any way."<sup>5</sup>

The pathway to avoid putting other gods before the one true God is to love Him. As Jesus said in answer to the question He was asked in John 6:28-29...*"What must we do to do the works God requires?"* His answer was...*"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."* Belief is trust - we love what we trust. Jesus understood this, which is why He framed His answer in the way He did as to what is the greatest commandment. To love God enough to put Him first you have to truly see God for who He is & for what He's done for you.

The best way to do that is to look to our rescue of Jesus on the cross, the visible image of the invisible God as Colossians 1:15 states.

- If you wonder if God loves you, look to Jesus on the cross.
- If you wonder if God wants to be in a relationship with you, look to what Jesus went through so you can be together.
- If you wonder if you're accepted, hear the words of Jesus on the cross as found in John 19:30: *"It is finished."* Nothing more needs to be done! Our debt's paid!
- If you're wondering how you can respond, hear Jesus's words about following Him: *"If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself (repent) & take up his cross daily & follow Me (trust)"* (Luke 9:23).

When you truly see God in Christ, then you'll want to follow Him by putting Him first. Exactly what God's been saying from the start in the Garden of Eden.

Remember, God says to the Israelites, and consequently to us...*"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me."* He says the same in Christ as He rescues - buying us back from slavery. We're His, with transferred ownership from being slaves to sin to slaves of righteousness. To live as we were meant to live - in true freedom, loving God more than anything else; placing Him first before anything or anyone because it's glorifying of a gracious benevolent God, and life-giving to us!

The question before us today is, have we repented & trusted in Christ to find true freedom?

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<sup>4</sup> <https://vineyardusa.org/library/why-do-we-worship-who-do-we-worship/>

<sup>5</sup> Heidelberg Catechism, A 94, <https://www.rca.org/resources/heidelbergcatechism>