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Title: God and God Alone (10 Commandments Series)

Text: Exodus 20:1-3

Exodus 20:1-3 - *“And God spoke all these words: ‘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.’”*

How many of you like it when someone tells you what to do? I didn't think so. That's good because for the next number of weeks I plan to tell you what NOT to do. Know that I am not coming to you in my perfection. James 2:10 tells us... *“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”* In light of that verse, I must be guilty of them ALL! So, I'll do my best not to look down my nose at you, if you'll work equally hard not to look down your nose at me.

In the space of one chapter – Exodus 20 – God gives us some very clear directions that are meant to affect our behavior, AND when we take them to heart, it helps us discern what is God's very best for us. He does NOT give us these rules to keep us from fun or having a good time. Rather He gives them to us so that we can live without regret and walk in His favor. They are also given to protect from much heartache. I hold that the Ten Commandments are as timely today as ever. I see them as TIMELESS. A wise man will study them in detail, in that, they touch the problems we face.

Let me warn you up front. I may not do these in sequence. I may not do a sermon on each commandment separately, and there will likely be some interruptions, BUT we do plan to cover them. Perhaps some in more detail than others.

Here's the background. The children of Israel had gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai. Moses had gone up into the presence of God, and it was there that the Lord God Jehovah gave Moses the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments have been described in a variety of ways by different writers. They have been referred to as “God's Blueprints for Living.” Someone else called them “God's Laws for Today's Godless World.” However you describe the Commandments, we would do well to agree that they are extremely important. We preachers are known to preach that Israel was under the law and New Testament believers are NOT under the law, we are under GRACE. I need to make it clear that when we say we are not under the law, that does NOT mean there are no rules. This is not to suggest that because we live under grace that it's anything goes. Far from that. We couldn't have a universe if there were not certain rules – certain fixed standards. There could be no mathematics if there were no laws of mathematics. There could be no physics if there were no laws of physics. I trust that we all understand the importance and the necessity of rules. ILLUSTRATION: Just suppose that this fall you go to the WVU/Maryland football game. You walk in and there are 60,000 (record attendance was 70,222) people there. The first thing you notice is that there are no boundary lines. You look to your right in the stands, and there is a WVU player in his uniform, and you ask him, “Who are you?” He replies, “I'm a wide receiver for the WV Mountaineers.” “What are you doing up here?” “I thought they would have a hard time getting me up here, so I'm here ready to catch a pass.” Then you look down the field, and two Maryland Terrapins players have another WVU player down, and they are beating the tar out of him. You yell, “What in the world are you doing?” They come back with, “This is the quarterback. We're whipping up on him so he won't be able to throw a pass.” Then the whistle blows, the game starts. People are running in all directions. Some players are kicking field goals, and others are throwing passes. You are going to have an interesting, but confusing, afternoon. I'm dealing with absurdity, because you realize you cannot have a football game without rules. You can't have ANY game without rules. Rules are absolutely essential. So, the Ten Commandments are God's divine principles which underlie a moral society.

The question before us is: Are these Ten Commandments out of date? Have we gone past THESE Ten Commandments? There are those who have indicated that these OLD rules ARE out of date; that they are no longer pertinent. Nearly 20 years ago (1990), Ted Turner, who owns several cable television networks, was speaking to a group of broadcasters. In his speech, he stated that the Ten Commandments were overdue for an update. Then he modestly offered to replace the Ten Commandments with his own version, which he called the “Ten Voluntary Initiatives.” The first: I love and respect planet Earth and all living things thereon, especially my fellow species – mankind. The second: I promise to treat all persons everywhere with dignity, respect, and friendliness. That was the same speech, by the way, where he bashed Christians and called them “losers.” It was the same speech where he said, “I don't want anybody to die for me.” It's the same speech where he called Christians “bozos.” Later, he apologized for his remarks about Christians. Yet I don't know that he apologized to God for trying to undo His Ten Commandments. Ted Turner is representative of the society in which

we live – those who claim that the Ten Commandments given to Moses on Mount Sinai are out of date, we've gone past them in our day, and they are no longer necessary. The truth of the matter is we have NOT gone past the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments were not only given by God on tablets of stone, but the Bible (New Testament at that) teaches they have been engraved somewhere else. In Romans 2:15, we read that the law of God has been written on the heart – the human conscience; *“since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.”* Down inside, mankind has an understanding that the Ten Commandments are not obsolete, but rather they are ABSOLUTE. The Lord God does not change His rules just because one of His creatures thinks they are out of date. Anyone who really loves the Lord and His Word would find that the Ten Commandments are ESSENTIAL for a person to have a healthy, happy, and holy life. These are the standards – more than guidelines.

In Ecclesiastes 12:13, when Solomon comes to the conclusion of that magnificent book, he says, *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.”* In the King James Version, the word *duty* is in italics, which means it was added by the translators. If you take it away you would better understand the scripture: *“Fear God, keep his commandments for this is the whole of man.”* In other words, this is the kind of life that is lived if a person is whole. This is what it means to be whole. James 2:10 talks about the whole law – *“For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”* Ecclesiastes 12:13 speaks of the whole man. Here is God's prescription for a life that is holy, happy, and healthy.

When you look at these Ten Commandments, you will immediately notice that they are grouped into two major divisions. The first four are GODWARD. They have to do with our relationship with God. The next six are MANWARD. They have to do with our relationship to one another. When Jesus was asked what was the greatest commandment of all, He stated, *“That the greatest commandment is this: ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. The second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself’”* (Matthew 22:37, 39). Jesus grouped the Ten Commandments into two main sections. Number one – love God with everything you have – Godward commandments. Number two – love your neighbor as yourself – manward commandments. Again, the first four have to do with our relationship to God: 1. *“no other gods before me.”* 2. Do not *“make unto thee any graven images.”* 3. Do not take My *“name...in vain.”* 4. *“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.”*

First, we will focus our attention upon God. I find it rather interesting that in the Ten Commandments, God's guidelines for living, that we BEGIN WITH GOD? That's where we should ALWAYS begin. The Bible opens that way. *“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth”* (Genesis 1:1). Good way to start a world – Good way to start a life – *“In the beginning God...”* Put God first in your life. The Ten Commandments open with a statement of the importance of God being NUMBER ONE. I want us to look at this first Commandment – *“no other gods before me.”* In this Commandment, there is an ASSERTION, a PROHIBITION, and an INVITATION.

1. ASSERTION. God ASSERTS here His reality. Verse 2 – *“I am the Lord thy God.”* The statement assumes the existence and reality of God. Philosophers through the ages have sought to prove the existence of God, BUT the Bible doesn't try to prove such. His being and existence are taken for granted. Psalm 14:1 and 53:1 both say... *“The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.”* A FOOL is a person who denies a plain fact. So, a person must be the SUPREME fool who denies the SUPREME fact. Atheism is not a problem of the HEAD – it's a problem of the HEART. *“The fool hath said in his HEART, there is no God.”* His HEAD knows better. This is another verse where some words are in italics. When you take those words out it says... *“The fool hath said no God.”* That fool was basically saying that it is not that God does not exist, but that *“I'm not INTERESTED in God.”* That's like you are sitting at a meal and they pass the peanut butter pie. You say, *“no pie.”* That does NOT mean the pie does not exist. It means that you do not want any pie at that particular time. There are many people who may not intellectually deny the existence of God, but practically deny His existence because they say, *“No God for me. I'm not interested in God. I do not want God intruding into my life.”* But this very statement assumes WHAT? The existence of God. The late R.G. Lee, stated that belief in God is the fundamental postulate of all rational thinking. I agree. You can't even think straight if you do not believe in the existence of God. It is not the existence of God that is in discussion here. He is saying, *“I AM the Lord thy God...no other gods before Me.”* He is asserting the fact that God is one God. Deuteronomy 6:4 says, *“The Lord our God is one Lord.”* Israel had just exited the land of Egypt. They had seen the Lord God demolish the false gods of Egypt. God asserts His sole existence. God is NOT plural. God is ONE. *“The Lord our God is ONE Lord.”* God was teaching that He is not the chairman of the board of gods. He is the ONLY GOD THERE IS! There is ONE God. What kind of God is this ONE God? He tells us in Exodus 20:2 that He is the God of creation. *“I am the Lord thy God.”* The word *“Lord”* there is the word *“Jehovah.”* *Jehovah* is God's specific name. It points to His works.

It reminds us that He is the God who was, the God who is, the God who ever shall be. He is Jehovah God. Moses was on the same mountain in those wilderness years. When God revealed Himself to Moses out of the burning bush and Moses asked who to tell the people had sent him, God said to tell them *"I AM hath sent [thee]"* (Exodus 3:14). Jehovah hath sent thee – the God who was, the God who is, and the God who ever shall be. In the New Testament understanding of that, Jehovah God has revealed Himself in the person of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:15 says that Jesus Christ *"is the image of the invisible God."* Hebrews 1:3 says He is the *"express image of his person."* John 1:18 says that *"No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him."* When the Old Testament asserts the reality of God – I am Jehovah – you and I as New Testament believers realize that we are referring to none other than our Savior, Jesus Christ. In John's Gospel, He took that same "I AM" title and applied it to Himself. *"Before Abraham was, I AM"* (8:58). *"I AM the way, the truth, and the life"* (14:6). *"I AM the bread of life"* (6:35). *"I AM the light of the world"* (8:12). *"I AM the resurrection, and the life"* (11:25). And in Revelation 1:8, 21:16, and 22:13... *"I AM Alpha and Omega."* That's the God we are talking about. He is the God who is Jehovah, AND He is also Elohim, which refers specifically to His CREATIVE ACTIVITY. He is Elohim, the God who brought this universe into existence. Here is a statement that God is the God who created everything there is. I think about the VASTNESS of His creation. The Bible tells us that the Lord God made it ALL! I think about the MINUTENESS of His creation. Looking into a microscope you see smaller and smaller worlds unfold before you. He is the Lord God of creation. Not only is He the Lord of creation, He's the Lord of REDEMPTION. He says, *"I have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."* The children of Israel had crossed over the Red Sea. They had been redeemed by the blood of a substitutionary lamb. They had been led by miraculous power through the Red Sea on dry ground. God said, *"Don't ever forget I am the God of redemption."* In New Testament terminology, Jesus Christ is our Redeemer. John 8:36 says, *"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."* Isn't it spectacular to know that we are redeemed in the Lord Jesus Christ? The living God is Creator; He is the loving God, and He is the Savior. He is Jesus Christ, our Lord. So, this Commandment sets before us the REALITY of God. There is an ASSERTION – *"I AM the Lord thy God."*

2. PROHIBITION (DO NOT!). In this First Commandment, we also see the rivals to God. In verse 3 He says, *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me."* It is NOT atheism which is in question, but POLYTHEISM. He is not battling atheism that says, *"There is no God;"* the question raised in this Commandment is, *"How many gods are there?"* God says, *"I am the Lord thy God...NO OTHER GODS before me."* He is simply saying, *"I will have NO RIVAL. I am the only God there is – there REALLY is."* Just think about this statement for a moment. *"No other gods before me."* Think, first of all, about the unimaginable possibility that people would place OTHER gods before the ONLY God who is REAL. Is that possible? I guess so. Israel had just come out of polytheistic Egypt, and they were on their way into polytheistic Canaan when God said to them, *"Thou shalt have no other gods before me."* God had scarcely spoken the Commandment when the children of Israel VIOLATED it. HOW? They made a GOLDEN CALF and said, *"These be thy gods [plural], O Israel, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt"* (Exodus 32:4). This may be the original "Dumb & Dumber": people would worship FALSE gods – SUBSTITUTE gods – in the place of the REAL God, the Lord God Jehovah. That's what you read all through much of the Old Testament. You will find that the children of Israel seemed to be addicted to polytheism. They worshipped the gods of the people around them. There was Baal-Peor, the god of corruption. There was Baal-Zebub, lord of the flies. There was Molech, the fire god. The Israelites even stooped to offering their own sons and daughters in the flames of Molech. How pagan, you say, how uncivilized that people would be guilty of polytheism! Yet, old gods never die. They simply come back in new clothing. We are living in an America where people are still worshipping other gods beside the Lord God. The Bible cautions us to beware of *"COVETOUSNESS which is idolatry."* The Bible warns of people who become covetous for material things, who become money-conscious, and put money before the worship of God. There are many people who bow the knee before the *"almighty dollar."* The eagle on a dollar bill can be a vulture that will eat the heart out of some precious soul. When people put money first, they make a god out of it. An idol is ANYTHING you put before God. The Bible tells us that people can make a god out of PLEASURE. 2 Timothy 3:4 says that people become *"lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God."* Who comes first in your time? Do you think in America we have become so sports-mad and so amusement-crazed that we put these kinds of things before the worship of the Lord God? Pleasure is like a drug. It often requires more to get the same effect. Of course, SEX has been made a god. You can hardly pick up a modern novel without finding a preoccupation with sex. You can barely turn on the television without seeing the preoccupation with sex by means of advertisements and movies. Hollywood has become the prophet of the goddess of sex in America. Many American people have become "Peeping Toms" in their own dens because of television and the internet. Do you think we have made a god out of EDUCATION? It's wonderful to get an education, BUT education is a means to an end; it is not an end unto itself. Romans 1:25... *"They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen."* People put other gods before the TRUE God. Not only is there

the unimaginable possibility, but look at the unnatural infidelity of it. God says, "Don't have any other gods before Me." Loyalty to a false god, a substitute god, involves disloyalty to the true God. You can't be loyal to BOTH at the same time. Jesus made it plain, "*No man can serve TWO masters.*" It is like going east or going west. You cannot go west while you are going east. You cannot travel east while you are going west. You are either going east or west – you can't go both ways at the same time. The same is true about God. You CANNOT be faithful to the true God and be faithful to a false god at the same time. Unnatural infidelity. For people to try to hold onto the true God, and be loyal to Him, yet be faithful to their own false god at the same time, is like a man who has a lover that he brings into his own house to live with his wife and children. How unnatural. How unfaithful. Any spouse okay with that? Yet, that's what people do when they worship another god. Now, see the unquestionable futility of it. "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*" We could translate that "Thou shalt have no other gods *'in the place of Me.'*" That would mean a substitute god. It could mean "alongside Me" – an additional god. The Lord affirms that when you put any other god between you and Him, it will usher futility into your life. There is a statement in the Psalms which contends that you become like the god you worship. That is TRUE. Your morals will reflect the kind of god you worship. You look at the gods America is worshipping, and you find that our people are becoming exactly like the gods they are worshipping. If you are polytheistic in your worship, you will be polytheistic in your personality. The Bible calls it idolatry. Psychology calls it neurosis. When people begin to worship many gods, and have many loyalties in their lives instead of that one, central loyalty to the true God, it causes disintegration of human personality. So there is a PROHIBITION here against the rivals of God – "No Gods before Me."

3. INVITATION. There is also an INVITATION here – the reverence for God. "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*" It is certainly implied in this Commandment that if you are willing to have NO OTHER GODS, you CAN HAVE GOD. If you will put other gods out of your life, God says, "I'll show up." The tremendous invitation in this command of God is to give reverence to Him, to give reverence to the God who is REAL – the God who has NO rivals. This statement means that you and I can know God personally. That's one of the most astounding concepts ever to grip the human heart – that we can know God personally. Think of it – the great God of creation condescends to reveal Himself to you and to me. Job inquired, "*Canst thou by searching find out God?*" (Job 11:7). The answer is "NO!" Jesus said in Mathew 11:25, "*I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.*" You cannot find God by your own intellect, by your own reasoning processes, but if you want to know God, you can know God personally. He will reveal Himself personally to you. In John 17:3, Jesus makes it clear, "*And this is life eternal, that they may know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.*" Paul spoke to a group on one of his missionary journeys in Acts 14:15 "*to turn from these vanities unto the living God.*" He said to the believers in Thessalonica "*how ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and the true God*" (1 Thessalonians 1:9). If you want to know God, you can meet Him intimately. You can know Him INITIALLY in the salvation experience. You can know Him INCREASINGLY as you grow in grace and the knowledge of the Lord. You can know Him INFINITELY. You can enjoy the presence and knowledge of God throughout eternity. When Jesus was being tested of the devil, who tempted Jesus to fall down and worship him, Jesus replied, "*Get thee hence Satan: for it is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve'*" (Matthew 4:10). You can love God SUPREME – God and God alone. Make Him absolutely NUMBER ONE. Make Him FIRST in your life. You can worship Him HUMBLY. There is no greater privilege given to a human being than that of bowing before the great God of this universe and REMOVING from one's heart and life any other competing IDOL, and RIVAL GODS, and worship God and GOD ALONE. Look at verse 2 – the Lord says, "*I am the Lord THY God.*" He is simply saying, "I can be real personally to you." It's not enough to affirm there is a God. It's not enough for you to say, "He is the God." You need to be able to say, "He is MY God. "*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want*" (Psalm 23:1). Can you say that? Can you say "Jesus is my Savior? He is MY Lord. He is MY God." I think about Thomas. There is so much of Thomas in all of us. After the Lord Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, Thomas said, "*I won't believe it until I put my hand in the nail prints, until I thrust my hand into his side.*" So, the Lord Jesus Christ revealed Himself in His resurrection glory to the disciples on that Sunday night. He challenged, "Okay, Thomas, put your finger in the nail prints. Put your hand in My side." (John 21:26-27). Thomas stood before the living Lord Jesus and then fell down, crying, "*My Lord and MY God*" (vs. 28). Can you say that? You cannot call on someone to save you in whom you have not believed. You can't believe in someone of whom you have not heard. You can't unless God sends a preacher. The tenth chapter in the Book of Romans explains what God is doing. Romans 10:14 – "*How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?*" God has sent the preacher. The preacher has preached God's Word. You have heard God's Word. Will you believe it?" Will you believe that this God is knowable, lovable, and worthy of our worship? "*Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved*" (vs. 10). Romans 10:10 – "*For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.*"