

OpenTheo

Exodus 20:1 - 20:12 (Commandments 1-4)



Exodus - Steve Gregg

In Steve Gregg's commentary on Exodus 20:1-12, he highlights the first four commandments as focusing on loving God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength. The concepts of morality and love are intertwined, and the moral laws reflect God's character. The third commandment warns against taking God's name in vain, and the fourth commandment instructs to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy, although it is a ceremonial law rather than a moral one.

Transcript

Let's return to our examination of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. At the end of our last session, we read through the commandments, and I only made some broad observations, observations that probably many of you would have already made without my pointing them out, especially the main one, and that is that the first four commandments are related to the way a person relates to God, whereas the last six commandments discuss the way a person relates to their fellow man. And it can hardly be neglected to point out that when Jesus was asked what the great commandment is, he could not limit it to one single commandment, but he made it two, which are like each other, he said.

He said the great commandment is, hear O Israel, Yahweh our Lord is one God, one Lord. Therefore you shall love Yahweh your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength and all your mind. He said, and there's another that is like it, which is you shall love your neighbor as you love yourself.

And clearly, I mean, Jesus said upon these two hang all the law and all the prophets. And you can certainly see that that is true of the Ten Commandments, that you have the first four commandments are about how to love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength. You not only love him supremely, but exclusively.

That's what the first commandment requires. And then the latter commandments are you shall love your neighbors yourself. But of course, it points out something very important that we might otherwise fail to see, and that is loving your neighbor as

yourself means not killing him, not committing adultery with his wife, not stealing, not bearing false witness.

And that is loving has to do with the way you treat somebody, not the way you feel about them. Now, the way you feel about them may be implied and you don't covet what is his, which is the Ten Commandments. And therefore, loving also is to extend toward the way you think and feel about your neighbor.

Do you wish you had his wife instead of him having his wife? You covet his house? Well, then you don't love him. You love you more than you love him because you think that's a nice house or a nice wife or a nice donkey and you wish you had it instead of him. So actually, love is also a matter of the heart, clearly.

And and yet love is not necessarily directly related to the subject of affection. No doubt, affection is a very desirable part of love, but it's not what love consists in. You may have a lot of affection for somebody and really love yourself more than you love them.

You may be very attracted to somebody and love yourself more than you love them, but loving your neighbors, you love yourself means that you do the right thing to them as you would have someone do the right thing to you. And the same thing is true of loving God. Of course, it's desirable to have a passionate affection for God.

But love of God is measured much more in your loyalty and your submission happily to God. It says over in first John, chapter five and verse one, or at least verse one, it says, whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God and everyone who loves him who begot also loves him who has begotten of him. By this, we know that we love the children of God when we love God and keep his commandments, for this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not burdensome.

Now, the Pharisees kept the commandments of God, but Jesus said they had no love of God in them. But John says this is the love of God that we keep his commandments, but not just that we keep his commandments, but that we keep his commandments and his commandments are not burdensome to us. It's never burdensome to obey somebody that you love.

It's never burdensome to to put somebody else's wishes ahead of your own if you love them. This is how we know if we love God, if we keep his commandments and do not find his commandments burdensome to us. Many people keep his commandments out of necessity and find them burdensome because they don't love God.

And love is what transforms obedience into something different. I think it was Hannah Whitehall Smith in her book, *The Christian Speaker of a Happy Life*, gave the example of a woman who's a hired maid and a hired nanny in the home of a perhaps a rich widower. And she gets paid to scrub his bathroom and take care of his kids and feed them and

cook and clean and do all those things.

And sometimes she wishes she didn't have to do it, but she has to make a living. But then she falls in love with the man himself and he with her and they decide to get married. And now they're in love and they're married and she does all those same things, but she doesn't happily because she loves him.

She has all the same activities, but it's an entirely different experience for her because now she's doing it out of love for somebody instead of out of obligation. It's not just a job. And the Pharisees obeyed the commands of God, but they did it without love.

And therefore, it was burdensome to them. But when you love God, you keep his commandments and you don't find it burdensome. John says, that's how you know if you love God or not.

Do you find it burdensome to obey God? Then you don't love him. And so love for God is measured in conduct. But of course, your attitude toward the conduct is important as well.

Likewise, love for your fellow man is. Is manifested in conduct, as these laws point out, but also your attitude toward him is important, as the last commandment points out. You don't commit adultery, but do you wish you could? Do you wish you had his wife? You don't steal from him, but do you wish you had his cow, his donkey? You know what you're thinking, what you're wanting toward him? Do you want the best for him or do you want the best for you at his expense? That's the question of whether you love or not.

The laws of God, the moral laws, at least certainly all come down to this. It's a matter of love because God is love. Remember, I said the moral laws are reflections of God's own character.

What is his character? God is love. So morality is love. But that doesn't mean that we can say love is morality, because unfortunately, when we do it that way, we bring our preconceived notion of what we call love.

And then we interpret morality in terms of what we have already decided love is. Rather, morality is love. Doing the moral and right and good thing toward God and toward men is what love is.

But see, if we turn around when we say, well, love is God. The problem is we're starting with assumptions about what love is and defining God that way. And our assumptions about what love is are probably based on our culture or our sentiments.

And it's much better to judge our sentiments about love from the standards of what God says love looks like rather than say, well, it's OK to do whatever we do because we love each other. That's not always a good guide, because what we're calling love may be very

selfish. And I'm loving.

Now, let's look at these commands one by one. First of all, God states in verse two what he has done for Israel. And this is the way that a suzerain would begin his treaty by saying, you owe me because I'm so benevolent towards you.

I've done all these things for you. And therefore, we have a relationship that indebts you to me. And he says, I'm the Lord God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

That should count for something. You've been slaves all your lives. Now you're free.

It's only right that you should please me and serve me now because I'm your liberator. And so here's what I want you to do. You shall have no other gods before me.

And that command, as I said in the end of last session, that term before me means in my presence. And it's a given that Israel is living their lives in the presence of God. They're living their lives before him.

And in that life that they were living before God, they must not have any other gods. You shall have not any other gods in my presence. Now, what is a God? Well, in one sense, we could say a God is an object of worship.

But since worship is a little hard to define. I mean, after all, we don't as a culture, we don't see people bowing down their knees or lying prostrate before idols or false gods. But that doesn't mean that we don't have gods that are truly gods in our society.

We have, for example, people that we almost deify movie stars, sports stars, rock stars, maybe political figures that we consider that they are almost superhuman, that they are somehow more important than other people. They are, in some cases, more important in terms of the impact they have. Their decisions impact more than the average person's do.

But in terms of their innate values as humans, they're not really better than anyone else, unless they are better than anyone else. See, people should be evaluated by their virtues, not by their status. But many times in our society, we will deify persons because they have a certain status or they have something else that isn't quite worthy of being deified for, like they're great looking or they've got tremendous talent or something like that.

We also might tend to, as Americans, be in danger of deifying certain ideals, like liberty. I love liberty. I give up almost everything before I give up my liberty, although I wouldn't give up God first, because liberty is not a god to me.

Many Christians in America act as if the Constitution is itself almost a divinely inspired

document and the liberties that we acquired for it are something that stands as the chief value of their lives. If you would raise the question as to whether the American Revolution was biblically correct or not, since the Bible says that people ought to submit to their king, and since America was started by a revolution against their king, most Christians will justify the revolution and say, well, the king was a tyrant. You know, people deserve to have some liberty.

Now, it seems to me that I don't really know all the issues involved in the American Revolution, and I don't know if I had been around at the time if I would have seen it as biblically justifiable or not. I frankly think I might not have at the time. Nonetheless, we can all rejoice in the benefits we've had as a result.

It's just like I wouldn't have approved of the crucifixion of Jesus either, but I rejoice in the benefits I now enjoy because of the crucifixion of Jesus. There are things that are not really the right thing to do, but God uses them and brings benefit out of them, and I don't know that the American Revolution was the right thing to do before God. But we all enjoy the benefits of it, and if we were pragmatists, then we'd have to say it was the right thing because we got good results that we liked out of it.

But if we're purists and saying, well, what about is this really right in the sight of God, then we have to say, well, was it done in obedience to the commands of God or disobedience to the commands of God? Now, if disobedience and people say, well, yeah, we didn't exactly do what the Bible says we should do, but we obtained our liberty and that makes it the right thing to do. It seems almost like it's the American ideal is that liberty is like sacred. And there is a sense in which liberty is a God-given gift, liberty of conscience, but that doesn't mean that political liberty is.

Christians throughout most of history, including in the time of Jesus and the apostles, did not know anything like the political liberty that we take for granted. They lived under a tyrant. They could be killed just for having the wrong religious views.

They didn't know anything of the liberty we have, and yet they didn't ever suggest that they needed to. They had liberty of conscience. No one could make them deny Christ.

They might die. They might lose their political freedom. But the gospel is not bound, Paul said.

Paul was in prison. He said, but the gospel is not bound. They didn't consider that political liberty was the most important thing.

The most important thing was that no one could take away their liberty in Christ. But, of course, it's a lot nicer to have political liberty. And I think that we should be in favor of it, but I think that an ideal like that in a culture can actually become an idol itself, can become another God.

Something that we put the interests of that ideal ahead of absolute obedience to God. Certainly, we know that money or love of money can be a God. And it is to many people.

We know that Paul said in Ephesians 5.5 that a covetous man is an idolater. Covetous means one who loves money. Jesus, you know, warned about that.

About you can't serve God in mammon. And Paul said that the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And the love of money is something of an idol.

And so there are gods that are not carved images. There are gods that don't have names. We don't call them Zeus or Apollos or Diana.

But we worship them anyway. Or at least we defer to them. If we defer to them in the sense that they dictate our behavior in the same sense that God does, there's a sense in which we kind of do have another God in his presence.

And our loyalty to God himself has got to be jealously guarded over by us. Because the second commandment, which obviously is similar, it forbids the making of graven images. And God in that connection says he's very jealous.

In the second commandment where it says you shall not make for yourself any carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them for I, the Lord, your God, am jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, but showing mercy to thousands. To those who love me and keep my commandments.

This commandment is against making carved images. And apparently it's not just a redundancy of the first commandment, but it's rather now that you know you're not supposed to worship any other God but me, I want to tell you how you're not supposed to worship me. Don't worship me by representing me by an image and then bowing down to it.

And this is something that in the ancient world was a hard thing to shake. To represent God as a visual image was extremely tempting to people. People who are not spiritual have a hard time worshipping a spiritual God that they cannot see.

Physical, fleshly beings are accustomed to considering tangible, invisible realities as real and everything else is somewhat unreal. And therefore, it's so tempting to make an image of God. I remember when I was a kid in the Baptist church, listening to the preacher preach, thinking, you know, Jesus didn't really seem that real to me at that stage of my life as a youth.

I remember thinking it'd be neat if there was kind of behind the preacher a big, you know, mural of Christ himself. I thought that'd be so much easier as the preacher started

by Jesus for me to be able to picture Jesus that way. And in fact, as an adult, I've been in churches where they actually had that.

You go to a, you know, you sit in the church and you look at a big picture of Jesus up behind the preacher. Now, I don't know whether I can say that's right or wrong, but I came to think later, once I was filled with the Spirit and actually had more of a spiritual kind of a relationship with God, I kind of think, well, that was wrong-headed of me when I was a kid. Because I was actually hoping to put an image of Jesus up so that he'd be more real to me.

In other words, it would be a substitute for a relationship with the real Jesus. I'll just have this kind of admiration for this imaginary image of Jesus who doesn't, you know, he doesn't really even look like that. Now, the apostles might have had a different situation because they actually did see the real Jesus and they did worship him.

He was the image of the invisible God. But in a sense, when we make pictures of Jesus, if we imagine that he looks like that, we may have an imaginary Jesus. A.W. Tozer even thought it was a mistake when you're praying to set a chair or imagine God sitting in the room with you.

I don't know if he goes a little far that way. I don't know if it's even possible to consistently pray and not have some kind of mental picture that intrudes in your mind of you and God. I mean, perhaps.

But I think it's a very natural thing to have images of a father or of a king or something like that come to your mind when you're praying. It's hard to focus on anything without having some kind of mental picture intrude. And I don't think it's necessarily wrong to even have pictures of Jesus.

Some people do. I don't think it's wrong to depict Jesus in art or even have in your own mind some picture of what you think he might have looked like. The main thing is that you don't really think that that's Jesus, that you don't really think that that is a true representation, that you don't really bow down to that image and think in some sense that image becomes the thing that you're really admiring and worshipping instead of the real Jesus.

And talking about images of Jesus is actually a little different than images of God himself. Because there is such a thing as the real Jesus. He really did look a certain way.

But God doesn't have an image like that. And when people would make a bull or a man statue or a fish, because he said even things under the sea. The Philistines worshipped a God that was depicted as a fish, a statue of a fish, Dagon.

And, of course, the worshippers of Molech depicted him as a goat. And this is what God was forbidding. You don't depict me as these things.

Why? Well, because that's not what I'm like. You're going to be substituting in your mind a concept of me that isn't real. I want you to know me, the real me.

Now, no doubt when the Israelites made an image of a bull or the golden calf, they might have been thinking of that as representing the strength of Yahweh or something like that. I mean, every image, no doubt, is supposed to depict some aspect of God in people's minds. But he is not that aspect.

He has, perhaps, some of the traits. But it's a mistake to narrow your view of God to something that is as limited as a created being. And so he doesn't want that to happen.

And he says, you should not bow down and serve them. And I believe that latter part, you should not bow down and serve them, belongs to the first part. It's part of the same command.

Some people say it's wrong to have pictures of Jesus. Well, it is if you're going to bow down and worship them. Now, what if you're not going to? Is it wrong then? Well, what would make it wrong? Well, it says you should not make any carved image or likeness of anything.

Well, it doesn't say of God. It says of anything in heaven or earth or under the earth, it'd be wrong to have pictures of mountains. It'd be wrong to have pictures of trees, pictures of animals, pictures of anything.

Because what's forbidden is to make images of anything. But, of course, that would eliminate all legitimacy of art. And then what do you do with the commands given shortly later about making these cherubim to stand on the mercy seat and the embroidered cherubim on the curtains of the tabernacle? Those are images of things in heaven.

You see, the command is not against making the images. The command is against making those images and associating them with God and worshiping them. There's nothing wrong with art.

It's part of the image of God in us. God's creative. God's artistic.

He made us artistic. There's nothing wrong with being artistic. Making images of things is not what is forbidden here.

It's making images to become objects to represent God and you bow down and worship them as God. That's what is forbidden. But what is meant by this latter part of verse 5 where it says, For I'm a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me.

Now, first of all, the jealousy of God. Is jealousy a good thing or a bad thing? Well, there

are passages in the Bible that definitely say that we should put away jealousy and envy and all that kind of stuff from us. But the same passages say we should put away all anger and wrath.

But there is some anger and some wrath that is legitimate, but you need to not let the sun go down on your wrath. You need to not, you need to be angry but don't sin. Certainly, you need to put away wrath and anger at a certain point.

But it's not wrong in itself to feel it over certain things. In fact, it would seem wrong not to feel angry about certain things. If you can hear of great injustices and not be angry, then you're not very much like God because God's angry at those things.

If you don't feel outraged at things that, at the exploitation of victims by powerful oppressors. If that doesn't make you feel outraged, then you don't have the right emotions. Because God has those emotions.

And we're supposed to be like Him. But we're not supposed to allow our anger to reach the point of being sinful. Be angry but do not sin.

Do not let the sun go down on your wrath. Don't let yourself become consumed with anger. The angry reaction to certain news, to certain stimuli, is the correct reaction.

But then you need to put it away so that you're not an angry person. So that you're not full of rage. You have to put it in its proper perspective.

You need to cool down. You need to put it away before you go to bed. Don't let the sun go down on it.

So there is such thing as anger that isn't sin but you need to put it aside. Same thing is true in the sense of jealousy. Jealousy is something that needs to be kept in its right place.

But is there really a right place for jealousy? Well, there's certainly a wrong place for it. Like if one of your friends decides that they like somebody else more than you and they hang out with them more than they hang out with you and you get jealous, that's wrong. Why? Well, first of all, you've got no claim on them.

They're not doing anything wrong to you. You're just being selfish. You just want them for yourself when you don't have any claim on them more than the other person does.

You want them for yourself and you don't want that other person to have them instead. That kind of thing is a sinful kind of jealousy. It's not loving.

But there is a jealousy that is godly jealousy. Paul said that he was jealous over the church with a godly jealousy in 2 Corinthians 11. God said he was a jealous God.

In the 6th chapter of Proverbs it says, Jealousy is the rage of a husband in a context where his wife is committing adultery. It says jealousy is the rage of a husband. Now it doesn't say that's right or wrong, it just says that's the way it is.

A man should be jealous if his wife is committing adultery. Is that right or wrong? Well, God's jealous when his wife commits adultery. It must not be wrong.

There is a sense in which jealousy, well, like so many other emotions, jealousy may be a selfish thing or it may be a loving thing. Because you love your wife, it makes you dissatisfied and jealous if she starts to love somebody else than you. And you have every right to be jealous over your husband or your wife because they do belong to you.

There's a covenant there. God had a covenant with Israel and they belonged to him. And he had every right to be jealous if those who belonged to him acted as if they belonged to somebody else.

And so marriage would be one of those areas where it seems to me like jealousy is God-like. Now it's a shame if marriage is very much characterized by jealousy because that means that something's not right. If a man's always jealous, he's either suspicious of his wife, which isn't a very good way for a marriage to be, or she's really given him reasons to be jealous, which isn't good either.

But to say that someone is jealous over their spouse or God was jealous over Israel or Paul was jealous over the church, jealous for Christ's sake, for the church, would suggest there is a kind of jealousy that isn't really sinful but is really the right reaction. Just like anger is the right reaction to certain things, there is a jealousy that's the right thing. If a man can watch his wife, can walk in on his wife and she's sleeping with another guy, and he says, oh well, and walks out and doesn't care, what kind of husband is he? He doesn't value his marriage.

He doesn't love his wife. He's already apparently become apathetic in the marriage. Jealousy is the appropriate reaction for certain things.

But of course there is a sinful jealousy, that which is selfish and so forth. But it's not selfish for a husband or a wife to require the faithfulness of their spouse. And it's not therefore wrong for God, the husband of Israel, to require the faithfulness of his covenant partner Israel.

It's not sinful, it's God-like. And he says he's a jealous God who visits the iniquity. By the way, jealousy is considered uncool these days.

I just want to say that. In our culture, jealousy is more uncool today than it's been in previous generations. You're supposed to be cool about that stuff.

You're supposed to play it cool. If you hear your wife's commitment to adultery, you're

supposed to just be cool about it. It's uncool to be jealous.

But it may be uncool. God apparently is uncool because his rage is hot when Israel worships other gods. And he says, I am a jealous God visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me.

What does that mean? That or a very similar statement is repeated a few times in the Pentateuch. This is a verse that many people have used to suggest a concept of what they call a generational sin. Generational sin is, as I understand the way people talk about it, the idea that there's something rather mystical about certain sins that passes through the genes down to family members for several generations.

And it's often associated with such sins as, let's say, witchcraft or maybe things like addiction or maybe domestic violence. So that the way it's taught, at least as I think I've heard it taught, it's not exactly a biblical concept, but I've heard it. So I think I understand what people are saying.

I think they're saying that if a man, let's say, is a wife beater, that's a sin that may be passed down to generations so that his son becomes a wife beater, his grandson a wife beater and so forth. And some people will say that the sins in your life, they're generational sins that have been passed down from your ancestors and you're never going to get over them until you break that generational curse. And there's some kind of special prayers or some kind of special warfare that is recommended to break that curse.

And there are books about this. It's a very common thing for certain ministers to talk about as if it's a biblical concept. And where do you get that concept? Well, they usually quote these verses, that God visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation.

But see, those who use this verse are not understanding the Jewish idiom. To say that God visits the iniquity doesn't mean He imposes the same behavior of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation. But rather, when God visits iniquity, it means He judges it.

It doesn't mean He perpetuates it to the third and fourth generation so that the same sin the father committed is then going to be committed by the son and the grandson and the great-grandson. That's almost how I think people have understood this. That God visits the iniquity generationally.

They think it means that God kind of imposes or perpetuates the same behavior generation after generation until this curse is broken. That's missing the point. In the Old Testament, the idea of God visiting iniquity is a matter of Him judging iniquity.

He's saying that those who worship idols and who show their hatred for Me that way are going to be judged. And I'm jealous enough just to judge them in a manner that's going

to carry on for several generations for their sins. Now, is there an example of this in the Bible? There is.

In fact, I think that example is probably what God is Himself alluding to here. And that is that Israel in their later history did become addicted to idolatry. They would very seldom repent of it.

And when they did, their repentance was only brief and they'd return to idolatry. And they enraged God and He sent them into Babylon. And there they were for 70 years.

And in 70 years' time, there were three or four generations impacted by their exile. It was a judgment on the idolatry of the fathers and that judgment was visited upon them and on their children for three or four generations. That is, their children suffered consequences.

It doesn't mean that their children continued to worship idols because that's what their fathers did. You see, generational sin is not what's talked about here. Now, is there such a thing as generational sin? Well, there probably is, but I don't know that there's anything mystical about it.

I think it's probably learned behavior. I think that a young boy raised in the home of a man who beats his wife, that boy is learning his behavior patterns from his father's model to a very large extent. And he may fall into that behavior himself and his son may do the same for the same reason.

It's no doubt a matter of nurture rather than nature. It's influence. It's environmental influence rather than some mystical thing that God is making happen generation after generation in that family.

Some generational curse of some kind. And the reason I say so is because it's not a given that a man who beats his wife will have a son who will beat his wife. The son may see, my father was an abuser.

I'm never going to do that and that son may never do it. Or there may be two sons and one abuses his wife and one refuses to. It's clear that you are not, your behavior is not determined by your parents' behavior.

If your parents are sinners, it's a good chance that you may be inclined the same way they were because of the environment you were raised in. But it's not a given. There's not some generational curse that has to be mysteriously broken through some special warfare prank before you can be sure that you're not going to beat your wife or get drunk or be an addict or whatever.

The Bible at least doesn't teach that. The Bible does teach that all of us are sinners and have a tendency towards them because of our ancestor Adam. But as far as specific sins,

you know, being passed down in certain families through some mystical means, I really don't think you find that in the Bible.

I'm not aware of anywhere in the Bible that says it. And the fact that the people who teach it use this verse to try to prove it, invariably use this verse because it's the only one they seem to have and it doesn't mean that. It makes me think perhaps there's no biblical basis at all for this idea of generational sin, but rather that God's threatening.

If you worship idols, you will bring judgment upon you. I will visit your iniquity upon you. And that judgment I bring will extend for generations of your offspring.

You'll go into Babylon and you'll have several generations of reborn in that bondage in Babylon. And therefore, he's warning that just because you practice idolatry and you may wish to risk the consequences that come of it, you need to realize it's not just you. It could be your children for many generations that will suffer consequences.

Now, I want to make this clear. The fact that children may suffer the consequences for their parents' sins does not mean that those children are themselves on bad terms with God because our outward circumstances are not always directly related to the terms with God that we are upon. Job certainly points that out.

Job's circumstances were horrible but he was on good terms with God. His friends were in good circumstances but were not on such good terms with God. The fact that someone's born as a slave doesn't mean that God is holding anything against them.

It's more that God's holding that against their fathers who brought about that condition perhaps. But each person of every generation has his own individual responsibility to maintain a relationship with God and even if a Jew was born in Babylon under the consequences of their father's sins that Jew could be on perfectly good terms with God. After all, Daniel and Ezekiel and Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego they went into captivity because of their father's sins.

But they were themselves on good terms with God. God didn't hold it against them in the ultimate sense of accountability but He did, of course let them live with the consequences of their father's sins that they were exiled from their homeland. So it may be that a woman who's a crack cocaine user and gets pregnant her baby may be born addicted to crack cocaine.

That baby suffers the consequences of her mother's sins but does not have responsibility before God for those sins. The mother does. The mother has to answer for those sins.

The consequences on the child are not laid to the account of the child. But the mother who would consider using crack cocaine should consider that she's not only damaging herself but possibly her child. And the idolater should consider I'm not only risking the judgment of God on myself but maybe on my children and grandchildren for many years

to come.

That's of course the temporal judgment not the ultimate eternal judgment on them. And that's what he's talking about when he says I visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me. Now the third commandment is you shall not take the name of Yahweh your God in vain.

For Yahweh will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. Now this law is generally in our popular mind applied to this matter of maybe using God's name as an expletive or as a curse word. And at least I was raised with that.

I think most people think that if someone says Jesus Christ in the wrong setting with the wrong tone of voice that that is said to be taking the Lord's name in vain or if they say the word God in a similar way as an expletive that's taking the name of the Lord in vain they say. Now I'm not really sure that that is primarily what this is about. I would say that using God's name as an expletive is wrong for reasons that I'll be glad to tell you but I don't know that it's specifically what this commandment is talking about.

This doesn't say you shall not verbalize the name of God in vain. It says you shall not take the name of God in vain. Now in vain means empty in an empty way.

What does it mean to take the name of the Lord? Well Israel on this occasion was taking on herself the identity of being Yahweh Yahweh's people. Just as when a woman marries a man she takes his name. She becomes Mrs. whatever her husband's name is.

She takes his name. Now Israel was taking the name of Yahweh on themselves by entering into covenant. They were becoming the people of Yahweh.

God's reputation would rest on them because they wore his name like a badge. Remember God said in Isaiah to them my name is black because of you. Why? Because the heathen know that the Israelites are the people of Yahweh.

And if the people of Yahweh don't act in a way that is glorifying to Yahweh then his name is misrepresented. His character is misrepresented because the people who bear his name are believed to represent his interests. And we see Paul making this comment about the Jews in Romans chapter 2. In Romans chapter 2 he says in verse 17-24 Romans 2 17-24 Paul says Indeed you are called a Jew.

You rest on the law and make your boast in God. And you know his will and approve of things that are excellent being instructed out of the law and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind a light to those who are in darkness an instructor of the foolish a teacher of babes having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. Now this is the way Paul knew the Jews thought about Gentiles.

The Gentiles were like the foolish, the babes. The Jews were the wise and the light and

the instructors. Though they did very little instruction of the Gentiles.

But he says in verse 21 You therefore who teach another do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal. Do you steal? You who say do not commit adultery. Do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols.

Do you rob temples? Now this last statement Do you rob temples? might seem a strange thing to ask because it seems like the average Jew could say Nope, never done that. Because how many Jews did rob temples? As far as we know it wasn't a practice of Jews or for that matter of many Gentiles either to go rob temples. But Paul is referring to something they knew about.

Because about seven years before Paul wrote this letter there was a notorious case known in Rome of some charlatans Jewish men who had come from Israel to Rome and they were selling their services as teachers of proselytes. That is Romans who wanted to become Jews and wanted to learn to be Jews. These men kind of represented themselves as instructors of babes of the foolish of the Gentiles.

And so these two guys had a student a proselyte who was the wife of one of the Roman Senators and she wanted to be a Jew so they were teaching her the law. And at one point they persuaded her to give a very large donation to the temple in Jerusalem. And they absconded with the money.

And because the woman was a Senator's wife it became very publicized in Rome. It's recorded in some of the Roman historians about this event. I'm pretty sure that Josephus records it.

And so this had happened just shortly before a few years before Paul wrote Romans. And he's saying you Jews you're critical of the Gentiles because you have the law. You say that men ought not to you say you abhor idols but do you Jews rob temples? And this would rather sting at that particular time to the Roman Jews because they knew that there had been a couple of their number who had notoriously robbed the temple.

Had taken donations intended for the temple and had absconded with the money. And that's almost certainly what Paul's referring to. Because Paul is not trying to say here that all Jews committed adultery or all Jews robbed or that all Jews robbed temples.

What he's saying is you think you're better because you're Jewish. But are all Jews better people than all Gentiles? Are there not Jews who rob? Are there not Jews who commit adultery? Are there not Jews who have robbed temples? He's pointing out to them not that each of them is individually guilty of these things but that they should not be able to think that Jews as a class are automatically better than Gentiles as a class. Because there are Jews who do these same wrong things.

And then he quotes Isaiah in verse 23. He says, You who make your boast in the law do

you dishonor God through breaking the law? Then he quotes Isaiah 52.5 For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you as it is written. Now if the name of God is blasphemed because of you because you are representatives of God.

You make your boast in God and His law. You let people know your God is Yahweh and you're the people of Yahweh. But do you dishonor God by your moral breaches? Do you bring blasphemy upon God because of your behavior? Have you taken on yourself the name of God and yet you've done so in vain.

You don't live like people of God. And therefore His name is blasphemed. His name is dishonored.

You've dragged His name through the mud. A wife can do this for her husband. Her children can do this for their parents.

The children bear the name of their parents. A wife bears the name of her husband. And if they go out and do scandalous things it reflects badly on the family name.

And to take the name of Yahweh and to do so in vain means that you let it be known that you are one of Yahweh's people. But the way you live gives a lie to that profession. And Christians can do the same thing because the very word Christian means belonging to Christ.

And it's very possible to take the name of Christ in vain by saying I'm a Christian and then everything you do people can see it misrepresents Christ. It brings reproach on Christ. It gives people the impression that Christians are hypocrites and Christ is not genuinely life-changing and real.

He's not a true Lord. In other words, to take on yourself the name of God verbally or to join yourself to God's name or reputation and then to destroy that reputation by your behavior that, I believe, is what taking the name of the Lord in vain is referring to. Now, there's a particular action that probably most of the Jews thought of in terms of taking the name of the Lord in vain and that was that in those days people would protest that they are honest in situations where their honesty might be questioned.

They would invoke an oath. They would swear. And they would swear in the name of something above themselves.

It says in Hebrews chapter 6 that men always swear by something greater than themselves. Why? Because we don't have this in our culture. I mean, we still have the skeletal remains of it.

For example, in a court of law where people put their hand on a Bible and they swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth. But in ancient times virtually all legal transactions all purchasing transactions anything where you needed to trust somebody it

involved some kind of an oath. And it was simply this idea that I don't know you.

I don't know if you have virtue or if you're a dishonest person. But if you swear by something greater than yourself what you're doing is invoking the virtue of that greater thing. And you're basically saying if I lie it's not just my reputation but the reputation of that greater thing I'm swearing by that is besmirched.

And the assumption is if you swear by something that's great enough your conscience would not allow you to endanger the reputation of that thing. If you swear by the king if you swear by Jerusalem the city of the great king if you swear by the heavens or the earth. Of course Jesus talked about taking oaths and basically said don't take oaths just tell the truth.

But it was very common for people to swear by Yahweh and that was not wrong. In fact, elsewhere in the law God said in the name of Yahweh you shall take your oaths. And in other words don't swear by other gods.

The most convincing oath a person would take is if they swore by God. I swear by God that I'm telling the truth. What that means is if you don't know me well enough to know if I'm trustworthy just know this that I am now endangering the reputation of God himself with this oath.

If I'm lying to you then may God's name be besmirched. And so that's what oaths meant. You swear by something great so that people believe that you're invoking some higher reputation than your own behind your credibility.

That was a very common practice in business and other means. And so Jews would typically swear by Yahweh. But if you swore by Yahweh and then in fact were lying then you had taken his name in an oath in vain.

Emptily. You had used his name as if it guaranteed your credibility when in fact it didn't guarantee any such thing. And you'd used his name wrongfully.

And you then of course given people cause to think that the name of Yahweh isn't that great a thing. Not in your eyes anyway. And so the word name of course to the Hebrews had more to do with reputation and character than it had to do with the sound of the word that people called you by.

If people called you John or Richard or something like that it wasn't so much a matter of the sound of the word or the meaning of the word as it was the person that that label connected to and his reputation in general. We still speak about somebody's good name today when we mean their good reputation. And so to take God's reputation by invoking his name on you and to destroy his reputation is I think what is here suggested.

If you're going to be my people if you're going to say you're Yahweh's people then you'd

better act like Yahweh's people. Otherwise you're taking my name and my reputation and destroying it. Dishonoring it.

Bringing causing people to blaspheme my name because of you. That's what I think taking the name of Yahweh or taking the name of Christ in vain would mean. Now I said I'd make a comment about people who use the name of God or Christ as an expletive.

There are Christians who do this in fact. It makes me a little uncomfortable when they do. I was always raised to think you don't say God as an expletive.

And certainly not Jesus Christ as an expletive. And the reason we've said it was wrong is because that's taking the name of the Lord in vain. I'm not sure it's technically that but it is certainly the wrong thing to do and I'll tell you why.

Because it is cheapening the name. It's using the name of God when you're not really making a serious reference to God. It's making a reference to Jesus Christ when you're not really referring to Jesus Christ.

You're just using His name as a common word which cheapens it. Now we are told when we pray to pray Our Father in Heaven hallowed be Your name. Hallowed means revered.

May Your name be revered. May it be held in its proper respect and its proper reverence. That the name of God because it is His name and His reputation is something that we want to protect and that we want to uphold.

At all costs. And when you cheapen it when you use it simply as an ordinary word without really without it really referring to God and when people say God or even when they say God damn they're not really thinking of the meaning of the word God or the word damn. They're just using it as an expletive and it's not really you know it's not really God they're talking about at all they're not even thinking about God.

His name just is a syllable that comes out of their mouth in situations unrelated to any thoughts of Him at all. And that's almost always the case when people use the name Jesus Christ as an expletive. They're not really thinking about Jesus it's just some words that have come into their vocabulary as something they say when they're shocked or angry or something like that.

It's not really it's His name but it's used like it isn't His name. It's totally the words of God's name totally divorced from any concept of His character or who He is or anything like that. And it's a cheapening of His name and it's not a hallowing of His name.

The name of God the name of Christ should be hallowed. We pray for it to be hallowed we ought to practice it as a hallowed thing. When we speak of Christ it should be with reverence.

When we speak of God it should be with reverence. But I'm not sure that that that specific kind of cheapening is itself a primary meaning of taking the name of the Lord in vain though it may well be one aspect of it. And then let me just take this fourth commandment then we'll take a break.

Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Now there's this whole long explanation about how God worked for six days in creating the world and rested on the seventh day and therefore He wants Israel to work six days and rest the seventh day and not only them but their servants their family members even their livestock. It is not to work on the seventh day.

And so it says that God has made the seventh day hallowed or holy. Holy means set apart from other days. It's not an ordinary day.

Israel was being told to treat the Sabbath, the seventh day differently than an ordinary day. The word holy is the opposite of ordinary. Holy means set apart for special that is for divine status.

All other days were common days. Ordinary days. And so to the Jew under this covenant they were to have one day set apart different from the rest.

Now there would be other days they would also set apart different not on a weekly basis the new moons at the beginning of each month and there were annual festivals that were set apart too. But the Sabbath was the weekly day that was set apart. And as I pointed out on previous occasions in chapter 31 of Exodus God frequently reemphasizes this Sabbath obligation when He's giving the law.

And in chapter 31 He says that the keeping of the Sabbath is a sign between God and Israel. A sign of this covenant that He's making it not Sinaitic. He says it in Exodus 31, 13 Speak also the children of Israel saying, Surely my Sabbath you shall keep for it is a sign between me and you throughout your generations that you may know that I am the Lord who sanctifies you.

And then in verse 16 Therefore the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath to observe the Sabbath throughout their generations as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign between me and the children of Israel forever. And then He gives the rationale again because of making the earth in six days.

So Israel was told to keep this Sabbath. Other regulations about it were given later on. The main command here is that they should do no ordinary work on the Sabbath.

Now I have said that the Sabbath is a ceremonial not a moral law. And I think that that's easily argued from Scripture and simply from clear thinking. Because if a moral law is something that God could never have made different without violating His character then the command to observe the seventh day as a day without work is not a moral law.

Because God could have without any violation of His character said you shall work three days and rest four. Or you shall work five days and rest two. Or we're going to have a nine day week.

And you work eight days and rest on the ninth day. Now that would seem really strange but it wouldn't violate anything in God's nature if He'd wish to do that instead. The fact that He said work six days and rest the seventh is of course connected to His creation activity.

Just like all the ceremonial laws are connected to some activity of God. Offering the animal sacrifices is connected to the activity of God sacrificing Christ for our sins. I'm not saying the ceremonial laws are not connected to anything outside themselves.

They are. They function as a reminder or a fore view of something else more important than their own selves. But they are not the reflection of something innate and unchangeable in God's own character.

Because Paul in Romans 14.5 said that in the church in Rome there were Christians with different convictions about such things as this. In Romans 14.5 he said one man esteems one day above another. Another man esteems every day alike.

These were Christians. And no doubt they would have liked Paul to give a ruling. Who's right about this? Some Christians do esteem one day above the others.

Others don't. They esteem every day alike. There's no holy day for them.

Every day is alike to them. And Paul is no doubt expected to give his opinion. Okay, who's right? He says let everyone be fully persuaded in his own mind.

That Paul could say that means he did not consider there was any moral obligation in this respect. Therefore the Sabbath was not a moral issue. If it had been a moral issue that they disagreed about, Paul would certainly have given a ruling.

If he had said some of you think that it's alright to curse your parents. Others think it's not okay to curse your parents. Well, let everyone do what his own conscience dictates in this matter.

No, he couldn't do that because cursing your parents is a moral infraction. It's a violation of a moral law. Paul was not at liberty to change morality.

But he was there to declare what changes had come in the ceremonial issues of the law. And he treated Sabbath as if it was one. Likewise, in the passage I mentioned earlier, Colossians 2, 16 and 17.

Where Paul said let no one judge you concerning food or drink or festivals or new moons or Sabbath days. Which he says, this was a shadow for the time present, but the body is

of Christ. Notice he mentions Sabbath days along with new moons, festivals, and food restrictions.

These are all ceremonial things. And Paul lumps the Sabbath with the ceremonial things. So did Jesus.

When Jesus' disciples actually broke the Sabbath by rubbing grain in their hands. In Matthew chapter 12. And they were criticized for that.

And Jesus said, Have you not read what David did? How that on the Sabbath that he ate the showbread. There's another thing he said about the Sabbath. That he said about David, he ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat.

David broke the law and he says that's parallel to my disciples. They apparently have breaking the law of the Sabbath. David broke a law about the showbread.

And he was guiltless. And by implication my disciples are guiltless too. Why? Can people go around breaking laws? No.

But there are times when ceremonial laws at least like the showbread law, which was certainly a ceremonial law, can be sacrificed for the needs of a hungry person. The needs of man are more important than the ceremonies of the law. Now, not more than the morality of the law.

If the disciples had broken into somebody's house and stolen bread and broken a moral command, thou shalt not steal, and were criticized, Jesus wouldn't say, Hey, leave these guys alone. Didn't you hear what David did? Because Jesus would never defend his disciples for burglary, even if they were hungry. But for breaking the Sabbath when they're hungry, he didn't consider that to be anything different than David eating showbread.

What was that? A violation of ceremonial law. And then Jesus gives a second illustration there in Matthew 12. He says, And have you not read that on the Sabbath the priests profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? What do you mean to profane it? The word profane is an old English word that means to treat it like a common thing.

You either hallow it or you profane it. A thing is either holy or it's profane. Profane just means common.

We think of profane as something more evil than that, but profane is just a word that means common. He said the priests profane the Sabbath. They treat the Sabbath like any other day, like a common day.

Why? Because they do the same work on the Sabbath they do on other days. The priests offer their sacrifices seven days a week. And Jesus says, And they profane the Sabbath

and they're guiltless, but is that a moral issue or a ceremonial issue? Offering sacrifices? That's a ceremonial issue.

Jesus is saying that Sabbath observance is a ceremonial issue, like eating showbread or like offering sacrifices. These are not moral questions. Both Jesus and Paul treat the Sabbath as a ceremonial issue.

And it is a ceremonial issue that was a sign between Israel and God just like circumcision was. There are two things that God said were to be a sign of the covenant between Israel and God. One was their Sabbath keeping, the other was circumcision.

Both of which were ceremonial. And of the two, by the way, circumcision trumped Sabbath. Jesus pointed this out.

I think it's in the seventh chapter of John, if I'm not mistaken, where he says it says let me see if I can find it real quickly here because the wording usually if I can start the verse, I can say the rest of it. But I can't remember exactly how it starts. It's a little harder.

It's in chapter seven, I believe here. Yeah. Verse 22.

John 7, 22 and 23. Jesus said, Moses therefore gave you circumcision. Not that it was from Moses, but actually from the patriarchs.

And you circumcised a man on the Sabbath. And if a man received circumcision on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses should not be broken, are you angry with me because I made a man completely well on the Sabbath? Now Jesus is defending his right to work on the Sabbath, to do the works of God on the Sabbath. Why? He says you Jews do the same thing, don't you? The law says a child has to be circumcised on the eighth day.

Well, what if the eighth day of his life happens to be a Saturday? Lots of babies will have the Saturday be the eighth day of their lives. Approximately one baby in seven will have the eighth day of his life fall on the Sabbath. What do you do then? The priest isn't supposed to work, is he, on the Sabbath.

Circumcising a baby is the priest's work. So now you've got a conflict between the obligation to circumcise on the eighth day and the obligation to not work on the Sabbath. He says, well, they'll go with circumcision so that they don't break the law.

You see, even in the Old Testament where both circumcision and Sabbath keeping were mandatory, circumcision trumped Sabbath keeping. If it comes to a conflict, you keep the circumcision law and go ahead and break the Sabbath for that purpose. Now, in the Christian faith, we know that circumcision, which Jesus treated and the Jews treated, is the more important of the two.

Even circumcision is no longer. Because these signs that God gave to be the special ceremonial signs of the covenant between himself and Israel at Mount Sinai, well, there's a different covenant now. And the Old Covenant has become obsolete because of the new covenant that has replaced it.

So, although the Ten Commandments include the Sabbath command, the Ten Commandments were given as a body of legislation to Israel and never to anyone else. True, most of the commands are moral in nature. But to the Jew, to whom these were given, obeying these ceremonies was a moral issue too.

Not because the command had a moral basis, but because obedience to God is a moral obligation. So, even if he tells you to stand on your head and stack BBs, there's no moral basis for that except that God said to do it. And it becomes a moral issue for you.

For Israel, it was a moral issue that they obeyed the ceremonies. The question is whether those ceremonies had to be perpetuated in all future covenants. And apparently, the answer from the Bible seems to be not.

Let's take a break here and we'll take the other six of the commandments when we come back.