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God is Number One
Exodus 20:1-3

Read Columbian article “Original Ten Commandments in need of a fix” by John Leo, editor for US New and World Report.

Indeed these could well be called dark days for the ten commandments. They could also become the very best of days as the dust is blown off the tablets and they are rediscovered anew and applied to our lives. The 10 commandments may be 3700 year old, there may be some in our society who think we have hopelessly outgrown them and are no longer needed or even wanted. The truth is that we have not matured or grown past them. We haven't even begun to enjoy the depth of freedom, protection and provision they have to offer us when we discover God truth of right and wrong. They are not obsolete. The ten commandments are absolute truth given by a very loving and caring God to the people He has created. They are a demonstration of God's love for us. Love comes wrapped up in different kinds of packages doesn't it. Love comes to us in ways that if we don't have our eyes open and looking for it, we may well miss it. Love comes in the form of discipline; father to a son. Love comes in the form of a silent friend who is simply there with us in the midst of our pain. Love can be a truthful but painful kick in the backseat. It can be a quiet hug, a knowing look. Love can at times be dressed up and pretty and at other times look raw and tattered like a blood soaked man hanging on the cross on a dark Friday afternoon. Sometimes love is even written in stone.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the book of Exodus chapter 20. As you read through the ten commandments found here and also in Deuteronomy 5, we see there are two main sections. The first section give guidance as to the way we relate to God, the way we are to make him

priority in our lives, the way we are to worship and honor and respect Him. #1 God is to be number priority. #2 Don't worship anything else as God #3 Honor Gods day. #4 Don't use Gods name in a loose and easy way.

The second section deal with how we ought to treating each other. How we are to love each other well. Law #5 Honor your father and mother #6 Human life is precious #7 Sexual purity is vital to living well #8 Observe the property rights of others #9 Don't slander others. #10 Desiring to possess what does not belong to us is wrong.

The first section directs us vertically in love toward God, the second section directs us horizontally in love toward each other. Jesus highlighted this in Matthew 22:37 when He was asked by a lawyer which is the greatest commandment in the Law. Jesus replied. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind. And a second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole law. Jesus point was that foremost is our need to love God above all the other loves in our life. Our priority for God must be number one. If we don't love God well, it will be impossible for us to love others well. Also, if we do not love each other well, no care, no concern, no respect for others, then we cannot love God. The vertical love and respect for God must be strong so that our love for each other flows out of our love relationship with God. "We love because He first loved us." "God is love whoever does not know God does not love, for God is love." By this shall all men know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another." The next time you see a cross, the vertical and horizontal cross beams intersecting each other I want that to remind us that we need to pursue a love for God and a love for each other in practicing a love for God and a love for people.

Why did God give these ten commandments? It wasn't because He wanted to steal all our fun and rob us of satisfaction and joy and purpose and rest and peace. Certainly he gave them because He loved

and cared for us and wanted to provide that rested satisfaction. A good father gives good gifts.

In Exodus 20:20 when God shows up in thunder and lightning flashes it frightened the people. They feared the awesome power of God. In v.20:20 Moses said, “ Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, an din order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin.” Given for a test. A test provides accountability. Test are given so that we don't get lazy in our learning. Tests are given to challenge growth, to strengthen. These commands were designed to give us a measure to challenge us to grow so that we may know the holy fear of God and have it stick within us. The laws were given so that we may not sin and do things that make God sad.

In this day we are no longer under the Law because we are in Christ, but that doesn't cancel out the Law to be a guide for us. The Law is like an owners manual from the one who designed and created us. The Law opened our eyes to our sin need. If there was never any command posted on the side of the road; thou shalt not exceed the speed limit of 50 mph while driving on the river road, then we would never know that it was wrong. The Law laid down clearly Gods standard for right and wrong and so then exposed our sin need. That was then specially designed by God to point us to Christ. Galatians 3:24 says that “the Law was a tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we then may be justified by faith.” So the Law exposed our sin and our need for a Savior. Does that make the law sin? Not at all. Or as Romans 7:7 says “may it never be. I would never have come to know sin except through the law.”

The law proved that there was not any way possible to become righteous on our own. We will never make it to heaven on the performance plan. All of us have broken the Law. When God looks at us and evaluates our performance. Do you know what He says? Romans 3:23 describes God's evaluation of our performance, “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.” The Law shows us we can't make it to

God on our own. We can't have a relationship restored on our own. The Law shows us that we can never make it on the performance plan. The law points us to God solution which is Jesus Christ. When Jesus came He released us from the bondage of the Law. Matthew 5;17 Jesus says " I did not come to destroy the Law, I came to fulfill it." Galatians 4:4-5 says that Jesus came at just the right time, at the fullness of time. We needed first to understand our need before we would be ready to receive God's solution. Isn't that the way God works. He exposes our need and then comes along side and says, 'Come unto me. I want to restore the broken and hurting. I want to bring you rest."

The Law is like a mirror. When you wake up in the morning you don't take the mirror off the wall and begin trying to shave with it or try to comb our hair with it. No, the mirror shows us what we need to do, it doesn't do it for us. You may have these commands memorized but that doesn't necessarily mean you are going to obey them. Only until we are saved by gods grace can God begin to show us in His mirror where we need shaving and combing in our life.

We need to know and live God's ten commandments because they are an expression of love written in stone to provide and protect a people He is crazy in love with. So read with me the first three verses of Exodus 20. (READ)

Deuteronomy 5:4 lends an additional nuance, "God spoke face to face to you. Moses was standing between the people and the Lord." These were commands given to the people but only after he reminds them. I'm giving these commands, but remind them how much I love them. Remind them how much I care for them. V.2 remind them that I am the one who delivered them out of slavery in Egypt. I am the One who brings freedom. Remind them I am a personal God, indeed I am the Lord "your" God. And I brought them, I didn't push them or shove them or drag them or point them...I brought them. I was always with them having their best interests in my mind.

v. 3 “You shall have no other gods before me. Why so exclusive? Did the competition threaten God? Was God getting nervous about all the other options for worship in Canaan? No. God was not commanding belief. If God wasn’t God, He wouldn’t have any ability or authority to command anything. Here in Exodus He is simply laying down the authority He has...not commanding belief. God is saying here He simply wants to be our God. What I read here is a challenge to take our relationship with Him seriously. What I read here is a loving God who knows that the very best thing for us is that we place Him as the highest priority in our lives. He is challenging us to exclusively worship the One true God and Him alone because He knows the benefit it will do us. He is God. He is not needing to flex His muscles and preen and do dance in the end-zone to get His glory fix. He desires us to give honor and glory to Him exclusively because He knows that our doing that will bring us the greatest good.

What does it mean to have no other gods before God? When this was writing in Moses day, the “other god’s” meant Baal, Molech, Chemosh and others. People would sacrifice and worship these gods. Often they would create idols that represented these gods, made of wood or stone. They worshipped these gods in the hope that they would provide crops, fertility, children health security and safety in war. People would go to great length to demonstrate their loyalty and commitment. Some would even sacrifice their children to these gods. They would give huge payments and dance and cut themselves with knives to prove their sincerity. Worship was sensual, physical. It was intended arm twisting. But who was really calling the shots and in charge? Was it the capricious gods who acted on a whim or not? Or was it the people who had build and created these gods that controlled them or thought they could by the intensity of their sacrifice? The point I’m making is that the “other gods” are self-created and self-serving god. Who is really in charge? Self.

When God Almighty tells us to have no other gods before Him, He is really saying that we are not to allow any rivals onto the field. He is really saying that we are to place Him as first priority in our life. Our love for Him is to be supreme and incomparable to all the other loves in our life. so. What are some of those other idols? What are some of those things that compete for god's supremacy in our life? It's important to identify, to flush out those idols that we have set up in place of God.

The god of self seems to float to the top of most lists. God of self is always asking "What's in it for me?" What makes me look good. When we consult our own desires and interests and pleasures first we are setting the idol of self as our god. Are you asking first what would please God or what would be most pleasing to me?

We also tend to put the god of the next high as an idol on our shelf. I'm not specifically talking about those who abuse drugs or alcohol, but it may have become an idol driving you to arrange your entire life around how and when you can get the next escape and feel good again in a world of pain. Those of us who place the god of the next high above the One true God may be obsessed with pursuit of pleasure. We may be longing for the next fishing or hunting trip or longing for the next shopping trip to the mall, longing for the next novel to escape into a reality different than our own. It may be we have so jammed our life full of activities that we are addicted to a go-go-go life. Have we as a family so crushed in ourselves with activity that our children have no idea what down time is and get very uncomfortable and restless when they have "nothing fun" to do. Do they become easily bored when the TV is off and the computer is shut down and there is no entertainment to keep them pleased? I would hate to have our teens burned out in bowing down to the god of activity before they have even graduated from high school. There is nothing wrong with pleasure. God created us to enjoy. Nothing wrong with recreation and novels and fishing and shopping. They only become a problem when they capture more of our attention and priority

then God has captured? Has recreation become a god to you? Is my need to recreate, escape, buy, anesthetize, hunt, driving more of my life decisions then it is my desire to please God?

Perhaps some of us this morning struggle with bowing down to the idol of stuff. Do you find yourself laying awake at night dreaming about how you are going to get the latest stuff? Do you put the next boat, the next house, the next car, the next outfit as a priority in your thoughts and affections? As Ed Young says “Has your desire to acquire gone haywire?” That has happened when we have convinced ourselves that things will truly satisfy us. Possessions are fine when they don’t possess us.

Idols come in many shapes and sizes today. Most are not made of wood and stone, but anything that draws our priority away from God is an idol. What idols in your life vie for your attention. The first step you need to take is to identify them. Call them out of the closet for what they are.

Any body here struggle with worry? When I have put something else on top ahead of God, I tend to worry. Worry is like that Red light indicator on your dashboard. It flashes at me informing me that I have not been putting God first. Worry means that I have taken back my life from a God who is omnipotent and care deeply for me. When I am keeping God first, my vertical focus is on God and in His presence He transforms my worry to worship. Psalm 56:3 says “In the day when I am afraid I will have confidence in Thee.” As I look to God as number one and priority my fears turn to faith.

So, How can we return God His rightful place and honor God for who He is? If I am worshipping the god of self, I need to listen to God’s heart when He says, “it is more blessed to give then to receive.” Go find someone you can help in need. If you are constantly in need of the next high or thrill or entertainment or risk...decide to be a radical and risky Christ follower. Live on the edge and open up your mouth in risky faith.

If you find yourself consumed with wanting more and more stuff. Become a giver. Ask God what He would want you to give away to someone this week. Become a radical giver.

Our number one task to make sure that nothing; no thing, no person, no task, no job, no pleasure, comes before God in our priorities, plans and affections. Proverbs 3:5 tells us to “in all our ways, acknowledge Him.” Think back to a time when you were first dating your spouse. Some of you teens might just have to dream about this in the future for a while. Work with me here. How did you girlfriend/boyfriend know that you loved them back then? Time spent together? Long phone calls? Eye contact? Smile? Communication? Things you did together? Probably some steps were taken to cut off all previous relationships? And when that started to happen, you knew that your relationship commitment was going to a deeper level. How does your husband know you love him today? Meals? Work? Time spent? Communication? Forsaking all others? Touch and closeness? Intimate times alone? If you were to go out to lunch with the Lord, He was sitting on the other side of the table. What would He say about your relationship with Him? Would the Lord ever bring up that He thinks you have been two-timing Him?

At the same lunch Jesus has been writing down on a white napkin a list. You ask, “whats that?” He replies, It’s a list of all the different ways that you show me that you love for me is number one and you have forsaken all others. You are very, very curious as to what He has written on the list. You are hoping it is a very long list. What do you see there? Whats on your list? Would Jesus write about all the time you spend with Him? Would he write about all the loving words of devotion you recently spoke to Him. On the list would it tell about the ways you have lovingly sacrificed time and resources and money on His behalf? Would Jesus list the time spent just thinking about Him, reading His love letters? Spending intimate times alone with Him? Would he say that you go out of your way to be lavish and sacrificial in showing your love for Him? We

can't just say we love Him. That is not enough. In any relationship if all you hear is words and there are no actions to back up those words, then they become empty and wasteful....even cruel words. We honor God as God by not just saying we love Him, but showing that we do love Him.

When I keep God in first place, its going to make an impact on the people around me. People can't help but sense something is different because they are going to see the way we no longer are imprisoned by worry. They are going to see that we handle stress in a whole different way because we have God as number one. They are going to see the way we view material stuff differently. They are going to see how much better an employee we are, how much better a boss we are because we have God as number one. When we put God as number one we don't get ripped off. People around us don't get shortchanged. When we love God we are able to love others well. The key is showing how much we love God by filtering all of life through Him. I relinquish the right to control what I do. He now holds that right. He holds the right to my daytimer. I holds the right to my computer. He holds the right to my checkbook. He will decide the balance of where I spend my life. It all gets filtered through His desires. So I will make sure god stays number one in my life when I am asking the question often. What would please Jesus? Expose the gods that compete for your attention and draws your affections toward Jesus. Don't ever let him accuse you of being a great date on Sunday and two timing him the rest of the week. For after all that He has done for us. For He has freed us and redeemed us and taken on all our guilt and shame. Why would we want to put anyone or anything in front of Him?