Stone with roman numerals

Description automatically generated

**Session 4**

***God of Freedom,* Week 3a**

**Exodus 20:1-12**

**2-3 October 2023**

**Turning “Don’t’s” into “Do’s” –** In this week’s homework, we were asked to rewrite the first five commandments in our own words, by writing each one in a positive sense. When Jesus told His disciples that the entire Law can be summed up in two positive statements—love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength AND love our neighbors as ourselves—He implied that God is looking for an *expansive* obedience from His people, not a bare minimum obedience. For example, it is not enough that we are not murderers: we should be life givers.

**Legalist Vs. Lawful –** Notice that God did not give the Law to the Israelites until they had been freed from their bondage in Egypt. They would not have been free to obey it back in Egypt; now they are. Similarly, God does not expect us to obey His word until we have been freed from our sin through faith in Christ. Now right *motives* can be joined to right *actions*, so that we do the right thing for the right reason. A *legalist* obeys the Law externally, but for the wrong motive, i.e. to earn favor with God. *The lawful children of God* obey because they already have God’s favor; they are grateful and want to please Him by walking in a manner that reveals that they are like the One who gave the Law. God, as a good parent, gives the infant nation of Israel good rules that will show them how to live at peace with Him and with those around them.

**Relating to Authority –** There are different ways of dividing the commandments into groups for study. We will look at the first five together, because these five commandments all relate in some way to how we should relate to authority. The last five tell us how we should relate to one another. In fact, every “one another” statement in the New Testament is an expression of one of these commandments!

**The First Commandment –** The idea that there is only one God seems simplistic to us, but remember that the Israelites had lived their entire lives in Egypt, where there were many, many gods and goddesses to appease. This statement is what defines Yahweh: He’s it! He is “I am”, the all-sufficient ONE…the Creator of everything else. He is the one true God.

**“You Shall Have No Other Gods Before Me” –** This statement is an invitation to the Israelites—and to us—into reality itself. “You shall have no other gods before Me” because there aren’t any! In fact, the purpose of the 10 Egyptian plagues was to systematically topple their false gods, one by one. Another way this first commandment can be translated is, “You shall have no other gods *before My face*” or “…in My presence.” We are to pledge allegiance to God alone. This statement also implies *kingship*. Kings demand undivided allegiance.

**What’s the Big Deal? –** The problem with the Israelites failing to obey the first commandment was not that they ceased to worship God *entirely*, but that they often did not worship God *alone*. They moved toward wanting to worship the Baals *and* God. They would try to incorporate the religions of Canaan

alongside of God. They were saying, in effect, “I need Yahweh AND \_\_\_\_.” And this precisely the way that we today are tempted to break this first commandment. We don’t see God as all sufficient and tell ourselves, “I need God AND I need financial security.” Or “I need God AND I need for my children to be successful.” “I need God AND I need my marriage to be perfect.” We crave things such as comfort, security, and attention and tell ourselves that we need God AND \_\_\_\_ …and that is when we move from reality to absolute fantasy.

**The Second Commandment –** The first and second commands seem very similar, but they are somewhat different. The first command forbids the worship of things that are other than God. The second command forbids that we make an image of something that presents as though it *is* God. It tells us not to make an image that represents the invisible God and then bow down to it, i.e. to worship something that is created as though it were the uncreated, invisible God.

**What’s the Problem with That? –** Anything that is created is subject to a set of limits. A created statue of any kind diminishes our understanding of Yahweh. He is limitless and infinite. His wisdom is limitless, His power is limitless, His knowledge limitless, and He is sovereign over all things. **Any physical representation of the invisible God can only give us a diminished version of who He is,** and in most cases, a misrepresentation of who He is.

**Note the Progression –** We are told that we are not to bow down nor to serve such images. So we first *make* the image, then *bow down* to it, and then *serve* it. In other words, we *conceive* of it, then we take a *posture* toward it, and then our *actions* are determined by it. Not only this, but **idolatry is contagious**, going down from generation to generation. More is caught than taught. And note that we don’t have to literally carve an image to whittle God down to the size we want Him to be. For example, the “prosperity gospel” whittles God down to where He works for you instead of you working for Him. “If I do x, y, and z, then God is obligated to do what I want Him to do.” **One of the most common ways we break the second commandment is when we choose something that is *true* about God and elevate it above other things that are true about God, in a way that is not balanced the way it should be.** Sometimes something about God makes us uncomfortable, so we just cut it out of the picture. “I don’t want to talk about a God of justice. That makes me uncomfortable.” We can even take our Bibles and “carve them up” by self-selecting passages that we want to pay attention to and ignoring passages that we don’t understand or that make us uncomfortable. What *should* we do? We should worship God in spirit and in truth. **Another way we try to make the invisible God visible is to ask for signs when we want guidance.** John’s gospel tells us, “Blessed are those who have *not* seen and yet believe.”

**Jesus Christ Is the Image of God –** We are told that Jesus Christ is the express, perfect image of God. In fact, the creation account in Genesis tells that God created mankind in His own image. He formed US to reflect what He is like to the world around us. If you want a “whittling project”, look in the mirror of the Word and let it carve you more and more into the image of God!

***Parallels to 1 Peter***

The desire to carve images of God probably reflects a desire to be able to SEE Him. And notice that God didn’t say that that desire is wrong: He just said that we were not to ***make*** an image of God for *ourselves*. God knew that His people didn’t have to create an image of God because He would do so for us: **we already have the perfect image of God** in Jesus Christ! 1 Peter 1:6-8 says, *“So be truly glad. There is wonderful joy ahead, even though you have to endure many trials for a little while…when your faith remains strong through many trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day* ***when Jesus Christ is revealed*** *to the whole world. You love Him even though you have never seen Him.* ***Though you do not see Him now, you trust Him;*** *and you rejoice with a glorious, inexpressible joy.”* New Living Translation

Marking Assignment:

1. Circle the phrases “the revelation of Jesus Christ” and “Though you do not now see him, you believe in him” found in verses 7 and 8 of chapter one on your printout of 1 Peter.

2. In the space between the two parts of verse 8 write, “Jesus is the only true image of God!”