

**Session 5**

***God of Freedom, Week 3b***

**Exodus 20:1-12**

**9-10 October 2023**

**The Third Commandment –** “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” **Any reference to the name of God is not just a reference to His name but to the sum total of His character.** So we shouldn’t do anything that disparages the character of the One who calls *us* by name. This command can also be translated, “You shall not lift up the name of the Lord your God to falsehood [or emptiness].” God’s name is not to be used as an ***incantation***, i.e. added to the end of our prayers thinking that doing so will force God to answer our prayers our way. When we pray, “…in Jesus’ name, amen,” what we should understand that phrase to mean is, *“…according to Your character*, Lord, so let it be done.” God’s name is also not to be used as a ***smokescreen***. Sometimes we say, “Let me pray about that and get back to you,” when we really have no intention of doing what was asked of us. We hide behind God and pretend that He is the one making the decision, when really we were just following our own inclination, i.e. assigning His name to our actions. Yet another way we violate this command is ***to preach holiness while living lives of wickedness***. There will inevitably be times when what we practice does not line up with what we have preached, but we should endeavor to make sure that that happens as infrequently as is humanly possible. We want the words of our faith to match up with the reality of who we are. So don’t use His name for our own purposes. Instead let it be said of us, “Blessed is she who comes in the name of the Lord”…who walks according to His character…whose words and deeds match one another…who seeks to bear God’s image in everything that she does.

**The Fourth Commandment –** “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” God reminds His people that the Sabbath principle is something that was put into place from the creation of the world. The Israelites are just fresh out of slavery in Egypt; they had been treated very harshly there, under extremely hard labor conditions. Under Pharaoh they had had labor *without* rest: labor, labor, ceaseless labor. But the one true God, who has delivered them from Pharaoh’s tyranny into freedom, not only believes that rest is important, He makes it a law! “You WILL rest. It’s not optional!” Why? For one thing, we can sometimes assume that we are indispensable. But when we cease from labor, we have an opportunity to see that the world continues to spin on its axis and not fall apart without us. We realize afresh that we are *not* the creator and sustainer of our own universes, God is. So God has good work for us to do and then good rest for us to participate in.

**What Is True Sabbath Rest? –** BUT having said that, we need to understand that the Sabbath concept is not just for individuals. In today’s society, taking a Sabbath rest has become almost wholly aligned with the concept of self-care. It is true that there is some element of self-care involved, but God’s design for the Sabbath is far more about self *denial* than it is about self-*care*. Notice that *my* rest should not

cause others who are under my responsibility to keep on laboring so I can just kick back and enjoy myself. When we consider the Sabbath, do we think only of things such as the Sabbath has to be a certain day of the week or should only include certain activities but not others? Is there a *principle* of Sabbath rest that is operating in your life? **True Sabbath rest is not just cessation of labor for the sake of not doing anything: it is cessation so you are finally free to worship the Lord as you were created to do.** We should consider what things hinder our personal rest, i.e. our jobs, our ministries, and our hobbies. But we should also be mindful of things that keep other people from resting because we haven’t ceased from them.

**The “Do’s” of the Sabbath –** We have been concentrating on the “don’ts” of keeping the Sabbath. Jesus modeled for us the “do’s” of the Sabbath. One example is found in Mark 3:3-5. When Jesus healed the man with a withered hand on a Sabbath, He demonstrated that whenever we relieve the labor of others, we have embodied the spirit of the Sabbath law. The *letter* of the Law is that we should rest from our labor; the *spirit* of the Law is that we would labor for the rest of others as well. Examples: if we take a meal to a new mom, we are helping her to cease from her labor and enter into rest. If we pay someone’s utility bill, we are helping to remove the burden that they carry so that they can have some measure of rest. The Sabbath principle touches on all kinds of things in Deuteronomy: rest for land, rest for animals, rest for crops, forgiveness of debts, etc. So the application of this principle goes far beyond our own personal rest.

**The Fifth Command –** “Honor your father and your mother.” We tend to think that this command is geared toward children—but when God gave this command, He was speaking to a group of *adults,* regarding their elderly adult parents. In other words, God is saying that we need to honor our aging parents into their latter years. If we fail to do so, it creates a burden on the community that is not sustainable. It is easy to think about honoring our parents when they were good at parenting—but some were not. In fact, some parents were really, really bad at it. And so this command can seem like a crushing burden. The Mother’s Day aisle can seem more like a gauntlet to be run than an opportunity to speak words of life to someone. Or maybe our parent(s) have passed away with no resolution to the hurts that were done. So what do we do?

**An Expansive View of the Fifth Command –** Looking at an expansive reading of this commandment can be helpful. The Westminster Larger Confession of 1647 says, **“By ‘father’ and ‘mother’ in the fifth command is meant, not only natural parent, but *all superiors* in age and gifts, especially such as, by God’s ordnance, are over us in place of authority, whether in family, church, or commonwealth.”** Remember when Jesus was told that His mother and brothers were waiting for Him outside the door? He asked, “Who *are* my mother and brothers?” And looking around the room, He said, in essence, “Here they are,” meaning those who were doing the will of the Father. So if you have a difficult parental relationship, there is good news for you:the family of God is the family that your earthly

family wasn’t for you. There are spiritual mothers and spiritual fathers that you can show honor to. We should be at no loss to find those to whom we can show honor, even if it isn’t a biological parent.

***Parallels to 1 Peter***

***How To Honor Our Heavenly Father***

*Question 31 in today’s homework referred to Matthew 5:16 as a way for us to bring glory (i.e. honor) to our Heavenly Father: “…let your light shine before others, so that they can see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in Heaven.” Peter says something very similar in his first letter: “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.” (1 Peter 2:12) He expands on that idea two chapters later when he says, “As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another…in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.” (1 Peter 4:10-11)*

***Themes in 1 Peter***

***Disobedience = Unbelief***

*As you can see on your printout, Peter opens his letter by saying that believers were chosen by God the Father “for* ***obedience*** *to Jesus Christ”. In the remainder of the book he repeatedly contrasts the fruit of obedience with the consequences for disobedience. I have highlighted all the instances of various forms of the word* ***obey*** *in yellow and indicated forms of* ***disobey*** *with yellow highlighting and a red circle with a slash mark.*

*Brenda Popovich pointed out in her lecture two weeks ago, however, that* ***disobedience*** *and* ***unbelief*** *are actually two sides of the same coin. In fact, in many cases the same Hebrew word is involved and was translated one way or the other, depending on the context or the translator’s preference. I found that the same thing was true in the Greek. The Greek word* “apeitheo” *(Strong’s #544) is used to indicate “willful and perverse disobedience or unbelief”. It is this word that is used in 1 Peter 3:1 (of unbelieving husbands) and 4:20 (of the wicked people in Noah’s day who refused to believe/obey God). There is another Greek word that just means obedience, with the idea of “to listen attentively and to heed”, which is used in 1 Peter 1:2 (of believers) and 4:6 (of Sarah in how she related to Abraham). It is* “hupakouo” *(Strong’s #5219).*

*So part of your homework assignment for this week is to go through your printout of 1 Peter and highlight forms of the word*  ***believe*** *in yellow AND draw a red circle around it. Do the same for the phrase* ***not believe****, and draw a red slash through it. I have listed all the verse references on your blue assignment sheet to make it easier for you to find the words and phrases.*