

TEN COMMANDMENTS SERIES: COMMANDMENT ONE

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INTRODUCTION

1. I've spent my whole life in Cincinnati. I still don't get bored with it.
 - a. My favorite local landmark: John A. Roebling Suspension bridge
 - 1) Construction started in 1856, but it wasn't completed until after the Civil War
 - 2) When opened, longest suspension span in the world.
 - 3) Problem: this river town needed interstate commerce when water was too low
 - 3) Solution: the bridge needed to be high enough to continue river traffic
 - b. It completes an essential task (**bridging the divide**) but still provides **aesthetic beauty**
2. TRANSITION:
 - a. The bridge beautifully unites two lands that are separated.
 - b. As we enter into a Ten Commandments study, we see two separate parties.
 - 1) Exodus 19 was the uniting of these parties (God and Israel) in marriage.
 - 2) These commandments were a contract of faithfulness between parties.
3. First, a recap of what brought God's people to the Ten Commandments
 - a. **God has created a perfect world**, but humanity rebelled and brought it to the edge of destruction (Gen 1–11).
 - b. **God's response to this rebellion** was an inexplicable act of grace, selecting a couple in whom all the world would be blessed (Gen 12:1-3).
 - c. **The family makes less than admirable choices**, it's a severe famine that causes the family to abandon the "promised land" and settle in the land of Egypt (Gen 37–50).
 - d. **They became slaves** to the Pharaoh for decades, only to be delivered by a former member of Pharaoh's family (Exodus 1–15).
 - e. **They meander through the wilderness** to a sacred mountain
Here, God affirms and shapes them into HIS People (Exodus 16–19).
 - f. **While at this mountain**, he gives them this detailed guidance (Exodus 20).

*So we start with the first commandment:

A. **Exodus 20:3** "You shall have no other gods before me."

1. Pretty simple, eh?
 - a. I think most people feel as if they have this one down pat.
 - b. What does God want? I guess it's to be Christian.
 - 1) I'm mean, sure, this was written if Israelites but God transferred it to Christianity.
 - 2) Or, better yet, we should NOT NOT BE Christian.
 - 3) Islam, Buddhism, Atheism—all those are outside of his confines.
 - c. So sermon over, right? Not quite.
2. Exploring the book of Exodus, there are some themes to be highlighted.
 - a. A key theme is that it's a treatise against the pagan gods of Egypt.
 - b. The Israelites were enslaved by the most powerful country in the earth.
 - 1) In essence, they were held in submission to all the Egyptian gods.
 - 2) And yet their GOD (singular) showed his power over these gods, defeating them.
 - c. Throughout biblical history, the people of God encountered pagan gods.
 - 1) Ba'al – the master/Lord Canaanite god. God of the economy
 - 2) Asherah – Goddess of love, sex
 - 3) Molech- the God of Child Sacrifice
 - 4) Artemis- Goddess of the wilderness, beauty
3. While we might think that these are gods of the past, we are sorely mistaken
 - a. We see Ba'al in a nation obsessed with the economic climate

- b. We see Asherah in a people addicted to unhealthy sex and pornography
 - c. We see Molech in a nation that both marginalizes and worships their children
 - d. We see Artemis in a people who worship the environment/youth/beauty
4. Three thousand years later, and have we really come that far?

B. Note that this is actually a commandment with a preface.

1. Check out **Exodus 20:2** "*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*"
 - a. In the Jewish version of the Ten Commandments, verse two is actually the first one
 - 1) The declaration of who God is and what he's done is central to the story.
 - 2) The commandment to have no other gods isn't based in useless jealousy
 - b. *No other gods* is a reaction of appreciation from people who've been redeemed
 - 1) God has redeemed you from slavery.
 - 2) God brought you out of the land of your captors
 - 3) Therefore, you should worship him alone.

C. THIS IS A CALL TO WORSHIP AS A SEPARATED PEOPLE

1. Previous generations were passionate about the Ten Commandments.
 - a. They fought to have them placed as statues in public places.
 - b. But while these people were well-intentioned, they were misguided.
 - c. The commandments aren't general guidelines for all people.
 - 1) They are guidelines that God offered to a specific audience.
 - 2) The recipients were the PEOPLE OF GOD THEMSELVES.
2. God was speaking directly to them to instruct them how to worship.
 - a. In the Ancient Near East 4,000 years ago, this would have been groundbreaking.
 - 1) The religious systems of their day had persisted for thousands of years.
 - 2) They were designed to keep the people at a distance.
 - 3) In pagan cultures (even in some Christian culture through the Dark Ages), worshippers had to maintain a blind trust in the priests to accurately represent themselves before their god.
 - b. Yet here in the 1st commandment, God's people are told to exclusively worship.
 - 1) But this wasn't done to keep the people far away. It wasn't separation.
 - 2) There was incredible freedom here.
 - 3) In reality, the Lord was in the continual process of bringing his people closer.

CONCLUSION

1. As his followers, we are expected to be united with the Lord, but separate from the world.
 - a. We're called to put all other gods aside for the worship of the True God.
 - b. This is easier said than done, but it's our response to God's salvation.
 - 1) He is the one who saved us. Our obedience is a natural response.
 - 2) The world should see our separation, and that Jesus bridges the gap between us and the God who liberates.

1 Peter 1:13-21

"Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy . . .' With the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect, He was chosen before the creation of the world and was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God."