

Exodus 20:4-6
1 John 5:20-21

Do Not Make Idols!

July 3rd, 2011
(Independence Day)

**“You shall not make for yourself an idol...for I the LORD your God am a jealous God”
(Exod. 20:4)**

What are the Ten Commandments? A child answered, “God’s rule” last Sunday. Throughout this past week, I’ve been thinking to myself: Why did God give His rule to the people of Israel – the Ten Commandments? Any organization or society to which we belong has its own rules or regulations, and it requires its members to follow those rules. Two options follow in terms of whether they gladly obey or not. Why did God give us His rule? It is not because God wants to judge us or punish us; rather, it is because God wants to bless us so that we might live our lives full and abundant, filled with God’s everlasting love and sustaining grace through Jesus Christ.

We humans are created by God in His image, and we are God’s children. God desires for us to keep His rules so that we might be blessed by the Lord. God concerns about our well-being so He teaches us His rules to keep the spirit of harmony and unity at home and in the communities where we live.

No Idols In Any Forms

Following the first rule that “You shall have no other gods before me,” the second rule is, “You shall not *make* for yourself an idol...for I the Lord you God am a jealous God”: “Do not make idols to worship” (children version).

When the people of Israel entered the Promised Land, the Canaanite had been living there, worshiping many kinds of idols – wood, trees, stone etc.; one of major idolatry was Baal, which was influential and popular. When you remember the story of Elijah – the fierce battle against Baal prophets at Mount Carmel, you might understand the powerfully influential Baal upon the people of Israel (1 King 18). God knew that His people would follow the pagan gods and the idolatry so He gave His covenant people this second rule: “You shall not make for yourself an idol.”

Unfortunately while Moses stays in the mountain of Sinai and receives the Ten Commandments –two tablets of stone, the people of Israel were making their own idols - golden calf. When Moses comes down the mountain, proudly carrying in his arms the two stone tables engraved with the Ten Commandments, he discovers the implausible. While Moses was on the mountain with God, his brother, Aaron, has collected all the gold the people brought with them in their escape from Egypt, melted it down, and created an idol, a golden calf. As Moses stands back and watches, the people, in a frenzy of revelry, dance and party around the golden calf, worshiping the idol as if it were a god. Beside himself and in a fit of rage, Moses takes the tablets on which God has etched the commandments and slams them to the ground, shattering them into a thousand pieces (Exod. 32).

Scripture says, “I the Lord you God am a jealous God.” God does not like His people worshiping other gods made by human hands. God wants His people to worship Him alone

because God redeemed the Israelites from out of slavery from Egypt; God also wants us to worship Him alone because He gave us the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ.

When a man is released from prison, he is not free to do anything he feels like doing, but he is free to obey the law. In the same way, when we are freed from sin by trusting in Christ, we are not given a license to sin, but rather are set free to obey him. As we celebrate the Independence Day, we are reminded of liberty and freedom that the forefathers of this country paid for when they founded this country.

Put God First!

The principal rules when the forefathers founded this country were the spirit of liberty, freedom, equality, and independence. Freedom is not free, but priceless; they sacrificed their lives to get liberty and freedom. History says:

“The result was, a resolution passed unanimously on the 2nd of July - "that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States." It bore the portentous text from Scripture: "Proclaim Liberty throughout all the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof."

Proclaim liberty! The people of Israel were granted by God for their liberty out of slavery in Egypt. The oppression was gone! They were free! We Christians are also redeemed by God through the precious blood of Jesus Christ. We are liberated from the power of Satan; we are free! When we are lived out with the Holy Spirit daily, we are no longer from the oppression of satanic power.

“Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take, but as for me, *give me liberty, or give me death!*” –Patrick Henry. How precious liberty is that we enjoy in our lives!

Through the Word

Commanding His people not to make idols, God gave the Word –The Ten Commandments. The Bible says that The Word became flesh, who is Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the divine revelation and appearance through the Word: the revelation and presence of God in Jesus Christ.

Through the Word, we are called to serve God alone who is true, living, eternal. By serving and worshiping God alone, our relationship with God can be deepened and grown. Growing relationship with God through Jesus Christ is the most blessed life promised by God: “I the Lord your God ...show steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments” (Exod. 20:6).

The odd thing about these Ten Commandments is they are conditional; you can take them seriously or you can choose to ignore them. The first words out of God’s mouth to Moses that day at Sinai were not “You shall have no others gods before me, etc.etc., etc.,” but “Now therefore, *if you obey my voice and keep my covenant*” (Ex. 19:5). The Ten

Commandments are given to only for those who want to live having right relationship with God. Be blessed by God's Word today! Amen.

No Idols In Any Forms

Second rule: "You shall not *make* for yourself an idol...for I the Lord you God am a jealous God": "Do not make idols to worship" (children version).

Baal Worship

Golden calf

It is the channel markers that invites me to live carefully, for life is a journey with choices to be made and values to be pursued and priorities to be set. **We humans are not God's puppets; we are God's children blessed with lives to be lived.**

Liberty without obedience is confusion, and obedience without liberty is slavery – William Penn.

The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time – Thomas Jefferson

Is life so dear, or peace so sweet, as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty, or give me death! –Patrick Henry

When a man is released from prison, he is not free to do anything he feels like doing, but he is free to obey the law. In the same way, when we are freed from sin by trusting in Christ, we are not given a license to sin, but rather are set free to obey him.

Another way to read these Ten Commandments is to see them as channel markers given to guide us in our quest for the good and holy life. Channel markers remind me that I am on a journey....It is the channel markers that invites me to live carefully, for life is a journey with choices to be made and values to be pursued and priorities to be set. **We humans are not God's puppets; we are God's children blessed with lives to be lived.**

Priorities! Put God first! Why? Because only then will you know who and whose you are. God commands and we respond because we were made to live in relationship with God. God made us to be his children. Check out all ten of those things carved in stone. They tell us that the good and holy life depends upon how we choose to relate to God and to each other (6). They remind us who and whose we are! We are individuals created in God's image, every one of us.

Priorities! Put God first! Why? Because God is jealous; He wants all of us: our hearts, our minds, our time, our jobs and our careers, our social relationships....

Priorities! Put God first! Why? Because you and I need God if we are going to live well and whole. “I the LORD your God am a jealous God ...but I show steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me.”

When Moses comes down the mountain, proudly carrying in his arms the two stone tables engraved with the Ten Commandments, he discovers the implausible. While Moses was on the mountain with God, his brother, Aaron, has collected all the gold the people brought with them in their escape from Egypt, melted it down, and created an idol, a golden calf. As Moses stands back and watches, the people, in a frenzy of revelry, dance and party around the golden calf, worshiping the idol as if it were a god. Beside himself and in a fit of rage, Moses takes the tablets on which God has etched the commandments and slams them to the ground, shattering them into a thousand pieces.

Next comes the surprises. This jealous, odd, unpredictable, wonderful, awesome God summons Moses back up the mountain, where he gifts him with a new set of stone tablets. Moses and the Hebrew people can begin again. God is a God of steadfast love. That means shocking mercy and unexpectedly new beginnings. I need God because I need mercy and love from beyond myself if I am to live well.

The odd thing about these Ten Commandments is they are conditional; you can take them seriously or you can choose to ignore them. The first words out of God’s mouth to Moses that day at Sinai were not “You shall have no others gods before me, etc.etc., etc.,” but “Now therefore, if you obey my voice” (Ex. 19:5). The Ten Commandments are not for humanity in general; they are only for those who want to partner with God and live to make a difference in this new era.

Baal Worship

The Israelites never abandoned the worship of Yahweh. They simply added the worship of Ba'al to their worship of Yahweh (called **syncretism**). They had one God for crises and another god for everyday life. The actual worship of Ba'al was carried out in terms of imitative magic whereby sexual acts by both male and female temple prostitutes were understood to arouse Ba'al who then brought rain to make Mother Earth fertile (in some forms of the myth, represented by a female consort, Asherah or Astarte).

When crops were abundant, Ba'al was praised and thanked for his abundant rain. It is in this context that drought had such impact throughout the biblical traditions. Not only was lack of rain a threat to survival, it was also a sign that the gods of the Ba'al myth were unhappy. It is this context that the "contest" between Elijah and the prophets of Ba'al carries such significance. The issue is really who controls the rain, Ba'al or Yahweh.

The Israelites struggled with Ba'al worship until the time of the exile, especially in the more agrarian areas of the northern Kingdom of Israel (also due to some degree to its official establishment as a state religion in the North for a time during the reign of Ahab and Jezebel, c. 850 BC). However, as Jeremiah makes clear, it was a recurring problem in the Southern Kingdom as well. Largely due to Jeremiah's insistence that the nation would fall because of its lack of commitment to God exemplified in its dabbling in Ba'al worship, the problem faded after the return from exile in 538. While there were traces of it later, Ba'al worship was never again the problem that it was prior to the Exile. The Judaism that emerged after the exile in the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah was passionately monotheistic, and has remained so ever since. In fact, it was partly that passion for monotheism that arose from the purge of Ba'al worship from their corporate consciousness that caused Judaism to have problems accepting Jesus as the Son of God. For many faithful Jews, that sounded too much like a return to a polytheistic syncretism. That was one lesson that they had learned well.