

Title: God Alone
Text: Exodus 20.3
Theme: God alone is God
Series: Exodus #25
Prop Stmtnt The people of God are those who follow God alone.

This message, I trust, will be an equal opportunity offender. In other words, if I don't step on your toes, be patient. I have not intentionally left you out.

Read Text:

This week I received a postcard in the mail promising me 2 nights stay for free at a Holiday Inn Express and \$250 in gas, in exchange for participating in a 2-minute survey. I knew better, than to call, but I just couldn't pass it up, so sure enough I called, and of course it was not 2-minutes, and there was another offer that was made but I had to make a decision right then! How many times have we said, "If I had only known." You may say that about a job, about an investment decision, about a car, about a relationship, but the truth is, we don't know about those things. And yet, what do you have in your hands? You have God's full disclosure given to you.

God tells you ahead of time all that you need to know. This is what God is doing in this text with His people. God is revealing to them the terms (called the covenant) so they can experience the blessings of God. Keep this in mind. The covenant that God established with his people was designed to bless them. God receives glory when His children are blessed. There are times when after observing the sheer joy, delight and security of a little child, I will say to the child's parents, it is so evident that that child is deeply loved. A contented and secure child reflects well upon a parent. When the people of God live with joy, then the reputation of God is enhanced. God reveals His commands for the benefit and joy of His people. The 10 plagues and the crossing of the Red Sea are colossal events in the book of Exodus, but these events were preparation for what happens here in chapter 20. In the previous chapter God had told the children of Israel that they were His treasured possession and "although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." But notice how 19.5 begins: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then..." If, then. Now God is revealing what He demands from His people. He has told them in general terms what He will do for them and He has already given ample evidence to support that. So, what we have beginning in chapter 20 is a foundational piece of revelation from God that tells us what He expects from His people.

We call them the 10 commandments. Literally they are called the ten words – Ex. 34.28. There is one for each digit on your hands. They are easy to remember, simple in their wording, but amazingly profound in their depth and wide in their reach. The 10 commandments are really not the covenant, but they introduce it. They are a preview of all of the areas that the covenant will deal with. Now, in our study of Exodus, we will only go into a partial study of the OT law before the attention shifts to the construction of the tabernacle. But reading chapters 21-23 will still give you a little taste of how invasive

God is in every aspect of the life of his people. We need to blow up a major myth and reject a cultural lie. The lie that we must reject is this: Religion is a private matter. It's just between me and God. There are two very prominent reasons why this is not true. 1) God is not private. God is very, very public. 2) The followers of God are publicly called to publicly identify themselves with the people of God whose lives and relationships are a public display of the character of God to the nations. It is true that your relationship with God is personal. That is, it deals with your entire person, but it is not a hidden, private, compartmentalized, closeted slice of your life that has no bearing on anything else. That is why several times I will point out that the first four of the ten commandments deal with our relationship to God, while the last six deal with our relationships with each other. You cannot get the horizontal right unless you get the vertical established correctly. And one of the evidences of whether or not your relationship to God is moving in the right direction will be seen in the way you respond to each other. (explain) application to parenting, etc.

A quick survey also reveals that there are more negative commands than positive ones, but it really does not matter since every command has two sides. There is something not to do so that you can do something else. We reject sin in order to embrace righteousness. We reject a culture of death (do not kill) in order to embrace and promote a culture of life. (affirmations and denials)

It is kind of God to be up front with His people and tell them what He demands. He has already demonstrated how He uses His power for great acts of mercy and for acts of judgment. His act of redemption gave Him the right to set the terms of their freedom. Here are the terms and you can bank your soul on the fact that the terms are good. The reason that it sounds like I keep hitting the same nail with the same hammer is because of what I am about to say. This text makes it very clear that God is Intolerant. "You shall have no other gods before me." Is it okay to have other gods, as long as you put God first? No! The phrase "before me" does not mean that you can have other gods as long as you prefer God to the rest. Literally the wording means, "in my presence" or "beside me" or "around me." It means, none, ever.

Years ago when I was in India, I was in some taxis in which the driver had a crucifix, the Hindu goddess and the Islamic crescent all mounted next to each other on the dashboard. At first I thought that maybe he was just trying to have his bases covered. But when I asked him about it, I found out that it was more of a customer relations move. Whatever religion you were, then he had a place for that in his taxi. Today, we call that a comparative religion class. Aren't they all equally valid? That would sort of be like saying, "Honey, out of all my wives, today, I like you the most." Now that's a comforting thought isn't it? It makes as much sense as saying that you can have other wives as long as you are faithful to wife #1. Hold the phone, what does faithful mean? Some things are not meant to be shared. God will not share His God-ness with any others because they are not. The gods of the Gentiles are non-gods. The implication of this first commandment is this. God is saying that you may not associate with other gods. You may not have anything to do with them – ever. For, whenever or if ever you turn to another god, I am already there!

1. **God will not accept the illusion of other gods.**

Therefore, God commands us not to participate in a lie. No other gods! Give them no quarter. Give them no respect. Give them no place. There is a sense in which other gods are total nonsense and should not evoke from us any respect or fear.

A sad example from the book of Judges illustrates this. About 300 years after the law was given at Mt. Sinai, and the children of Israel were in their land, a man by the name of Joash, from the Israelite tribe of Manasseh, built an altar to Baal. His own son, Gideon destroyed it one night. Judges 6 says that Gideon took 10 men with him to tear it down, so this altar appears to have been a rather large and impressive shrine. The next day, the men of the town demanded that Gideon be killed for this. Fact is, according to the Covenant Law with Israel, Joash should have been killed for his idolatry. But the scene tells you how upside down and inside out things had become. So, when the men demanded Gideon's death, Joash seems to have had some change of heart and he said to the men. "If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself." Did Joash begin to wonder why he was worshipping a god who could not defend himself? The same sort of thing happens almost 300 years after that with the prophet Elijah who challenges the prophets of Baal to a public duel. Which God will show up? The each built an altar and called upon their God to respond. Of course Baal did not respond, because he does not exist. These stories are in part why studying the history of the children of Israel is so maddening! They keep being drawn back to idolatry. Even though they threw away the Egyptian gods with their hands, idolatry never seemed to get out of their hearts. Baal worship was an enormous problem for Israel. Idolatry was the issue that ultimately led to the northern kingdom being destroyed. This was the issue that led the Southern Kingdom into a 70 year deportation. I need to point this out. After the Jews (southern kingdom) returned to their land from Babylon, it seems that they were finally cured of Baal worship.

But the question must be asked. If these other gods do not exist, then why are they such an enormous problem? Do you remember how the issue of idolatry had impacted the church at Corinth? What did Paul tell them in 8.4? "We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one." He goes on to say in v.7, "But not everyone knows this." Do you see the point? Idolatry starts in the mind. False gods and false worship is built upon a lie and lies are powerful. Why are lies so powerful when they are lies? Lies are powerful because the power behind a lie is Satan, the Father of lies. Lies are appealing because our hearts have a natural bent toward not believing God and instead believing our own version of reality. That is why this command is such a gracious gift from God to us. It protects us from the foolishness of our own hearts. Therefore, in this sense God is intolerant. God is intolerant of other gods because God is intolerant of lies. It used to be that the physical presence of other gods was something that missionaries had to deal with. Our country and culture is changing so quickly, that we are rapidly getting a taste of what the world was like for the NT church.

2. **God will not share His glory.**

Nor will God accept any competition. God will not share his glory nor even recognize a rival because they do not exist and what they are credited with doing is not true. The Egyptian world out of which Israel came had specific gods with specific job descriptions. Many of these idols and the beliefs and myths that surrounded them were targeted by the plagues. God used the plagues, in part to blow up the Egyptian world of religion and expose it for what it was – nothing! What is the purpose of a god (little “g”)? A god is given credit for doing something or ruling over something. There are no other gods! Other gods have no power or authority. They cannot do a thing. To pretend that they can do something is infinitely offensive to God because you are taking what belongs to Him and attributing that to something else. You are taking glory that is His and you are ascribing that to a piece of wood, or stone, or anything else that you believe gives you what you want or need. All other gods are a thinly disguised attempt to worship ourselves. That is why...

3. **True Worship is all or nothing.**

Throw away gods (Josh 24.14b-15a). If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him (1 Kings 18.21b). God will not share you. God will not allow Himself to be shared by you. In the world of idols life is compartmentalized. You have a god for weather, a god for crops, a god for fertility, a god for money, a god for pleasure, a god for the ocean, a god for the sun, a god for the moon, etc. Each nation has their own god(s). There are so many gods, that you really cannot keep track of them. Everyone not only makes up their own rules, they also make up their own systems. So, each god not only has rules and demands, but the gods don't get along well with each other. If you do something to curry the favor of the ocean god, you risk getting the land god angry. Not only is that maddening, but you end up with all of these compartments in life. Your entire life becomes fragmented and broken.

Christianity is built upon monotheism (one-God) because that is what God revealed about Himself. True worship is the worship of the true God. True worship of the true God means that you do not worship any other God. And this brings me to a point that I want to burn into your minds. God's glory and your good are inseparable from each other. God made you as one person. He designed you to be whole. He is the key to your wholeness. This command to NOT have any other gods is a gracious command to protect you from a fragmented, broken and disjointed life. This command to NOT have any other gods is to protect you from bondage. You become like that which you worship. That which you set your affection upon, that which you praise, that which you idolize is what will form you. So, for God to command you to worship Him alone is a good command because He is commanding you to do what is the very best for you.

When asked, which commandment in the Law was the greatest? Jesus replied, “Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” (Matt 22.37). The greatest commandment is to love God. God commands us to love Him and worship Him because He is the supreme object of love and the highest and greatest object of worship. If you had another god, you would not be loving Him as you

should. If you had a secret worship, then your heart would be disaffected from Him. In order to help you love Him as you should, He commands us to have no other lovers, no other gods, because there is no One like Him.

4. No one keeps this command.

In this command we see a mirror. This command is a reality check that reveals the incredible distance that naturally exists between us and God. The sad truth is, we are all tempted to put our affection into other gods. These other gods may not have the same names as the Egyptian deities that had a hold on the hearts of the children of Israel, but they are no less toxic. In fact, many of the gods that we are tempted to worship are good, but when we put them in place of God, then we are violating this first commandment. It is easy to make gods out of jobs, houses, cabins, hobbies, football, facebook and _____. And it doesn't stop there does it? What are the "other gods" whose lies you are tempted to believe? What do you turn to when you are under pressure, or you feel stressed out and just want to chill? Fill in the blank. "I've just got to have _____." It is not too difficult to point out the dangers of turning to drugs and liquor because of the obvious long term consequences, but what about TV? Is entertainment your Savior? Is food your Jesus? I was talking with a gal one day who really wanted to quit smoking. I suggested to her that she make a little altar in her home, put her cigarettes on it and whenever she was felt like she needed one, to first bow down and pray, "O mighty cigarette, you who gives me life and health and peace, and joy, I give my very body to you so that you can fill me with all of your goodness." You know when you have made something a god, when you sin in order to get it, or you sin if you don't get it.

For example, money is an enormous temptation. How do you respond when you are charged too much for something? Is your joy tied to the performance of your stocks? (hope not) Do you give to the Lord what He is due, or do you wait to see what is left-over?

Pleasure/Vacation – what happens when your plans are changed?

Food – how do you respond when your food is not prepared the way you like, or you have to wait a little longer than you had expected?

Sex – Are you willing to sin in order to get this? Do you give your heart and imagination to lust and pornography?

“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.” Colossians 3.5

Power – How do you handle it when you are not in control?

Image – Is your joy linked to what every body thinks about you?

Health – Is the most important thing in life – your health? Does a doctor's report or a test, or a procedure rule your life?

Children – Some of you have made the success of your children, or "having the perfect childhood" your god. I recently heard that 95% of all parents believe their child is above average. When you make a god out of your child, you are not only committing idolatry,

but you are putting a weight on your kid that he/she cannot handle. Your child cannot save you. Your child does not hold the key to your happiness and security.

What makes you the most upset? What keeps you awake at night? What drives you crazy? What do you love? What do you treasure? What do you praise? What do you celebrate in your life and home? Parents what do you praise with your kids? What is more important? Grades or godliness? A winning record or a humble heart? Physical strength or a meek spirit? Accomplishments or humility? The truth is all of us struggle with having other gods. This command shows us that we need a mediator.

5. **We need a Savior.**

This is what the law was intended to do. God revealed these commands, knowing that no person could keep them perfectly. The law reveals to me how empty I am of any personal righteousness. I need a Savior. Without the law, we would all make our own laws that would make ourselves look good in comparison to others. But the law of God reveals that we are all in deep weeds. We all need a Savior.

This is why, as part of the covenant, God established a sacrificial system so that there was a temporary provision made for the sins of the people. That OT sacrificial system all pointed to Christ. Christ is our Savior. Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sinful attempts of finding our satisfaction in money, pleasure, food, sex, power, image, health, children, relationships or anything else. Money did not die on the cross for you. Pleasure, vacations, sex, power, image, nor anything but Christ can save you and redeem you. Trust in Christ and Christ alone. As your Savior, Christ not only saves you from your sin, He saves you to Himself. When you come to the place where you stop trusting in your own personal righteousness, but you trust in Christ because He lived for you and died for you, then at that point, you are his. When Christ saves you, He gives you the Spirit who calls you and enables you to live for Him. Living for Christ means that you pursue no other god. That is why this command points to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Christ is God and He is the only Savior. He will not tolerate any imposters. So, make your mind – who ya gonna serve? And let's take a stand. No imposters. No apology. Christ alone!