

It's Personal

On several occasions, I have made the statement that Christianity is personal. The fact that Jesus died on the cross has personal meaning to me as it should to every Christian. Even our avenue of communication with God through prayer is personal. I am talking to God, not because He does not know my situation but because He cares for me. We could spend all morning elaborating on the ways our relationship with God is personal. However, I will focus on how we draw nearer to God in our relationship.

We could spend time developing the theme that God has reached out to us and has initiated this personal relationship. What is our part? As we begin to focus on our part, we certainly need to understand that what we do is not earning our salvation. Rather, we, like God, are reaching out. We are reaching out to God because we see what He has done for us. We see the liberation found in God's salvation. We may not see everything but we see enough to cause us to want this relationship.

In any relationship, there is an element of commonality. Some relationships are not personal. We may live in the same community as others. We share a common location. We may share other interest like yardwork, biking, or grilling out. However, when we share the house with our spouse, the relationship become personal.

As a Christian, we have that close family like relationship. We are children of God by adoption. We are added to the church by God when we are saved. The church is the bride of Christ. Within any family, there are certain behaviors that are expected. There are certain standards that exist around which the family will coalesce.

Today, we will take some time to look at the Ten Commandments and how they relate to our close personal relationship with God and with fellow Christians. We will spend some time reading in Exodus as God unfolds those Ten Commandment to the children of Israel. Let's open our Bibles to Exodus the 20th chapter and begin.

Three months after they had been led out of Egypt the children of Israel had arrived near the mountain of Sinai. Moses gives them specific instruction on preparations for God to come down onto the mountain. Moses goes to the top of the mountain to visit with God. (Exodus 19:1-20) It is here, on the mountain top of Sinai, that God begins to speak to Moses.

Then God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. "You shall have no other gods before Me. "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. (Exodus 20:1-4 NASB)

Most modern readers see the word "idol" and conjure up images of carved wooden creatures that are part human and part animal. We may see a mental image of a totem pole. According to *Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, the most prevalent form of idolatry in biblical times was the worship of images or idols that represented or were thought to embody various pagan deities.

The practice of worshipping idols goes back before the call to Abraham. In Joshua 24:2, we are told that Terah, the father of Abraham **served other gods**. The children of Israel had been in Egypt for many years and were accustomed to worshipping other gods. As they were preparing to leave Egypt, they saw God overwhelm the Egyptian gods through the series of plagues. From this proclamation on Mount Sinai and continuing throughout the Bible, God has forbidden anything or anyone taking priority over Jehovah God.

The testimony of Scripture is that God alone is worthy of worship. Active acknowledgment of idols by prostration, sacrifice, or other means of exaltation is not only a misdirection of allegiance; it robs God of the glory and honor that is rightfully his (Isaiah 42:8).God even placed limits of philosophical inquiry upon his people, indicating that they were not to seek the method of pagan worship because of associated evil practices (Deuteronomy 12:30-31).The sense of Scripture was to destroy idolatry or be destroyed by it. (*Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology.*)

Continuing on in Exodus, we see the warning of long-range repercussions due to worshipping idols.

You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. (Exodus 20:5-6 NABS)

We see the word worship used here. In some translations, the term is bow down. The Hebrew word used in the scripture is שָׁחַ (sahah) pronounced shaw-khaw which means to worship, prostrate oneself. Bow down. The act of bowing down in homage is generally done before a superior or ruler. (Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary)

The underlining principle here is that God must be treated as the superior being. There are times when many of us forget and elevate our jobs, our family, our friends, our pleasures, or other earthly things above God. If you notice the list we just made, there is nothing inherently bad about any of the items listed. However, they must be secondary to God in order for us to have the relationship with God as He designed and intends.

Within this passage, the warning about worshipping lesser things is clear. It is also clear that our honoring God has the benefit of God's love and mercy.

Our reverence to God extends beyond our objects of worship to include our conversation. In the seventh verse, we have the prohibition of misusing God's name.

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain. (Exodus 20:7 NASB)

I have heard many arguments about the meaning of “using God's name in vain.” For me, (yes this is my opinion) it involves the use of God's name in a manner that cheapens God before others. Yes, the current craze of using OMG on sounding it out in O, my God grate on my nerves. Those who are using the phrase have never been taught to revere or respect God. That problem lies exclusively with us for failing to hold God in His natural place of respect and reverence.

These first few commandments deal with how we personally respect God and allow Him to be first in our life. Our inability to accept God as superior to all else sets up a barrier that will forever prevent us from having a personal relationship with God.

The next section of the ten commandments truly are not given as punishment for following God. They are there because God loves us and wants only the best for us. The transition between the “God” part of the commandments and the “neighbor” part looks at what is best for us.

“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath of the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant or your cattle or your sojourner who stays with you. For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore, the LORD blessed the sabbath day and made it holy. (Exodus 20:8-11 NASB)

The Hebrew word sabbath literally means intermission. It is a pause or a break from normal activity. Here we are told specifically the purpose for this pause is for rest. Our society has seized every moment as an opportunity to “make money.” We are so driven by our materialistic motivations that we have grabbed every minute and every day for work. We no longer have time for rest and recuperation or restoration.

Some of the modern conveniences were designed to give us more free time have enslaved us so that we are never allowed to be separated from our working life. We are killing ourselves because we have failed to incorporate putting God first and then finding the time for our sabbath. In seminary, one of the lessons we were taught is that pastoral care must include caring for the pastor. If the pastor fails to care for himself, he will not be there to care for anyone else. This principle applies to the rest of us. Husbands who are so focused on career building they fail to take care of themselves will end up losing their family, their health, and or their sanity. All of us must find that regular time for rest. This commandment is one that shows God’s love for us. He wants only the best for us and that requires a time of rest.

The balance of the Ten Commandments deal with how we treat those around us. Even in this list, we see that the first one deal with our respect for our parents. God views the relationship between us and Him the family setting. In normal situations, our failure to honor our parents, points to our inability respect authority. I did say in normal situations. I am fully aware that there are situations where the parents may not behave as loving caring individuals. We are speaking here of families that follow the pattern which God ordained.

Following the commandment about honoring our parents, we move to the commandments that deal with our treatment of those around us.

“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

“You shall not murder.

“You shall not commit adultery.

“You shall not steal.

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.” (Exodus 20:12-17 NASB)

These commandments are not a set of religious tenets. They are a revelation from God. God made us and these are the basic rules for us to live the life which He designed for us. We are designed to follow these rules. They are the rules that we should adopt as our personal guide and standard.

The overarching principles of these commandments may be distilled down to two simple commandments. Jesus tells us how He defines them. When He was asked about the greatest commandment, His answer we find in Matthew 22:37-40.

And He said to him, “‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40 NASB)

Jesus did not come to establish a religion. He came so that we could know how to live the life that God designed for each of us. It is not about religion; it’s about living our life with a personal

commitment to serve God and to live the life He has designed us to live. Indeed, these rules are personal.

Let us pray.

If you need to commit your life to God, we invite you to come and make it known this morning as we have our hymn of invitation.