



Central Peninsula Church

...to make and mature more followers of Christ

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Deuteronomy 5:6-7
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God Only

SERIES: *The Good Life: Finding Freedom in the Ten Commandments*

This morning we're beginning a series on the Ten Commandments. These are familiar to just about everybody. Well, sort of. I heard about a class of first graders who were learning the Ten Commandments and they got to, "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Of course, the teacher was worried he would have to explain what adultery meant. But then a seven-year-old raised her hand and asked, "What does 'commit' mean?"

Sometimes we know all too well what the commandments mean. Like the little girl in a third grade Sunday School class. Her teacher was giving a lesson on the commandment, "Honor your father and mother." The teacher asked, "Now does anyone know a commandment for brothers and sisters?" One sharp little girl raised her hand and said, "Thou shalt not kill."

You may or may not know that the Ten Commandments are found in two places. Exodus 10 tells how they were originally given to Moses on Mt. Sinai. Then in Deuteronomy 5 Moses repeats them for the Israelites before they enter the Promised Land. We just finished our study of the book of Deuteronomy. Now we're going to make a U-turn and go back to ch. 5 and take a closer look at each one of these commandments.

I. The Ten Commandments aren't meant to enslave us but to enrich us.

You might wonder why we would take ten weeks for this. Most of us, if we're honest, have a rather negative reaction to these Commandments. For me, growing up, the Ten Commandments had red flashing lights all over them, warning me that if I trespassed even one I was going straight to hell.

But let me deal with that here at the outset. These commands weren't given to enslave us but to enrich us. That's why we've called this series "The Good Life." The Ten Commandments aren't a red light but a green light; a green light to freedom. Imagine being in a strange place and trying to get somewhere without any directions at all. You'd be totally lost. You'd be frustrated and miserable. You'd get nowhere. But the Ten Commandments are like having very simple, clear directions from here to there. Most of us believe in God. But what is he like? What does he want? You don't have to guess any longer.

But you say, "Well, that's great, but what if I'm one of those kinds of people who have a hard time following directions? What if all I get when I read the Ten Commandments is a massive dose of guilt? Here is where we need to understand the Ten Commandments in relation to the rest of the Bible. You see, the Ten Commandments were not given as a requirement for salvation, but rather as a response to the salvation we already have. That's why the Ten Commandments begin with these words, "**I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.**" In other words, even before I'm giving you these laws, I've delivered you and I've made you my people. I'm not giving you this law so you can earn that privilege. I'm giving it to you because I love you and I'm committed to you and I want you to live the good life. I didn't bring you out of slavery to put you under a whole new kind of slavery." The Ten Commandments always need to be laid right beside the Gospel. The Gospel tells us Jesus came to bring us out of our own Egypt; to save us from our slavery to sin. He did what we couldn't do. He lived the sinless life that we couldn't live and he died to free us. We don't earn that, we just receive it by faith.

But now, as grateful children, we don't ignore God's law, rather we gladly embrace it. We want to please the One who rescued us. But still we're like a toddler learning to walk. We stumble a lot. And at times the law does remind us of the areas in which we do fall. The law is like a mirror that shows us the dirt on our face, but when that happens we don't wallow in guilt but rather we turn back to Christ for cleansing. So The Ten Commandments both show us the way and continually point us back to Christ and our need for a Savior.

II. The first command is to worship God and God only.

This leads us into the first commandment. We all know this one, right? Just in case you forgot, here it is: "**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.**" Even though this is familiar to most of us, we often misunderstand it. Sometimes we use this commandment to point the finger at other people who worship other gods. But God isn't saying anything here about other people and their gods, rather he's speaking to

his own people about the role he plays in their lives. Nor is this saying that somehow God needs our exclusive attention. He's not like some kind of insecure prima donna who can't share the stage. He doesn't need our worship. Nor is this saying that God should be my top priority. I'm a little uncomfortable with this idea that we have this list of priorities with God on top and then family and then maybe our job. The problem is that can divide our lives into boxes. We have a God-box, a family-box and a job-box. On Sunday we open the God-box. At home we open the family-box. And at work we open the job-box. But there is no integration. And often times what happens is we live by one set of values at church, another at home and still another at work. I don't think that's what God has in mind here.

The fact is, God is saying, "I don't want to just be number one on your list. I want the One thing at the center of it all. I want to be the hub of the wheel that holds every spoke of your life together. I want to be your ultimate concern. I want to be your singular passion. I don't want anything to rival the place that I have in your life. There can be nothing in your life that compares with me."

The Protestant Reformers said this boils down to four things: adoration, trust, invocation and thanksgiving.

Adoration: God says, "I want to be the One who captures your attention; the One you cannot get enough of; the One you love to talk about."

Trust: God says, "I want to be the One you depend on for everything; the One who gives you a deep sense of security because you know you can count on me for everything from your eternal salvation to your daily bread."

Invocation: "I want to be the One you turn to in times of need; the One you run to when you're in trouble. When you need forgiveness, turn to me. When you need wisdom, turn to me. When you need encouragement, turn to me."

Thanksgiving: "I want to be the One you thank when your table is full. When your heart overflows with an abundance of hope and joy I want to be the One you turn to thank."

III. There are at least three reasons for this command.

It's worth asking the question of why. Why should God occupy this place in our life? Let me give you a few reasons.

A. He deserves it. First of all, he deserves it. Notice the first few words of v.6, "**I am the Lord...**" Don't pass over that. That's a statement about the who God is. Remember when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush and Moses asked what his name was. God answered with this statement, "I am the Lord. I am Yahweh." In other words, "I am the sovereign ruler of the universe. I made it all. I sustain it all. I control it all. I'm not limited by time. I AM."

At that time Egypt was THE world power. The Pharaoh was viewed as a god. He was seen as all-powerful. But Yahweh comes along and says, "Let me show you who is in charge." Remember the ten plagues? Remember how he opened up the Red Sea and let the Israelites pass through and then after they made it safely through all the waters came down and drowned Pharaoh and his army? What a display of power! Some scholars say it wasn't the Red Sea it was the Reed Sea which was only a few inches deep; no wonder the Israelites could make it through. That's not a miracle, they say. But I say you have a great miracle either way: Either God parted a deep body of water and allowed his children to pass through OR he wiped out the entire Egyptian army in a few inches of water! However you come at it, that's a great miracle!

But here is an even greater thing. Not only is he a sovereign God, he is also a personal God. That's why he says, "**I am the Lord YOUR GOD.**" When he says "YOUR God" he uses the singular. He's talking to individual people; to you personally. He's not a God who is so great and awesome that he exists way out there in the recesses of the universe and has no time or interest in you. He's not a distant King you can't approach. He's a personal God. He knows you and he wants to be known by you.

B. It determines everything else. The second reason God wants to occupy this place in our life is that it determines everything else. It's kind of like when you get up in the morning and you're getting dressed and if you button the wrong button at the top of your shirt everything else is messed up. In that same way, if we don't get this first commandment right, all the rest of life is messed up. Everything flows out of this. That's why the Ten Commandments start with the vertical; they start with our relationship with God. Only after we get that right can we turn to the horizontal, i.e., our relationship with people. Some people today want the second part of the Ten Commandments without the first. They agree that murder, adultery, stealing, lying are all wrong. But they want this moral code without the God who himself defines morality. But if you cut out the author of life, it's hard to respect life. If you cut out the author of marriage, it's hard to respect the marriage vows. If you cut out the author of truth, it's hard to tell the truth.

C. There is room for only one throne your life. The third reason God wants to occupy this place in our life is simply that there is room for only one throne in your life. I believe that's the point of a story we see in the New Testament about a young man. He approaches Jesus and asks what he needs to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus tells him simply to keep the commandments, referring to the Ten. The young man makes the startling claim that he's done just

that since he was a boy. Then Jesus puts that claim to the test. He starts with the very first commandment to see if there is any god that this young man has put above the true God. "You lack one thing," Jesus says. "Go and sell all that you have and give to the poor. Then come and follow me." To that the young man had nothing to say and he walked away sad. Why is that? Because Jesus just stepped on his god. And I believe at that moment he knew he hadn't kept all the commandments; he hadn't even gotten past the first commandment. He'd put his money before God. Oswald Chambers wrote, "Let me fix my heart on gain and I do not see God. If I enthrone anything other than God in my life, God retires and lets the other god do what it can." You see, there's room for only one throne in your life.

Now I would imagine that at least most of what I've said you would agree with. If I asked you, is God supposed to be your all in all, you would likely say, yes. We know that. But the problem is deep down we all struggle with this and drift towards other gods.

IV. For most of us, "other gods" are idols of the heart.

This is especially true when we come to grips with the fact that most of our idols today are not little statues we carve and then bow down to. Few of us have a golden cow in our backyard that we gather around to worship whenever there is a full moon. Some of us may struggle with the idea that there is only one way to God. We may be tempted to join in with those who tell us the gods of Islam or Buddhism or Hinduism are all pretty much the same. That was the kind of temptation the Israelites had to deal with for sure, but for most of us it's different. For most of us the struggle we have is with what I would call "idols of the heart." John Calvin called these "shadow deities." These are things in our life we tend to give ultimate significance to. These are most often good things given to us by God. Somehow, because of our own twisted nature, we take these good gifts and we put more weight on them than we should.

All of us were created with certain needs: security, significance, purpose. And what happens is we discover some of these needs can be at least partially met by the good gifts of creation that come from God. It might be talent we have that gives us a sense of identity or purpose. It might be a hobby like scuba diving or hunting or doing triathlons. It might be material things like food or wine or furniture or cars. It might even be a friendship or an idealized romance. It might even be something as wonderful and God-given as our marriage or our children. These good things can so easily become bad things when we bring them into the center of our life. And sometimes the only way we really know if they're idols or not is by how we react when someone or something threatens to remove them from us. If a good thing in your life

is threatened it will be hard for you. You'll struggle. But if an ultimate thing is threatened you'll totally freak out and have a hard time even going on. Or if you lose a good thing it will be really, really hard. You'll grieve; you'll be very sad. But if you lose an ultimate thing you'll despair even of life itself.

I can't help but think of poor old Abraham. Abraham and Sarah had waited and waited their whole long lives for a son and finally when it seemed it was too late and they'd given up hope God gave them Isaac. It's a strange and wild thing then for God to come along one day and tell Abraham to sacrifice his own son on the altar. Not a metaphorical altar, mind you, but a real one with a real knife. We wonder, what kind of God would ask for that from a father? Even more surprised are we when we see Abraham climbing up Mt. Moriah ready to do the unthinkable. What kind of father is this? Do you think that was hard for Abraham? Of course it was. But you see the root question of this story has to do with the first commandment. Does Abraham have any gods before Yahweh? Has he taken this gift of God and given him ultimate significance? No, he hadn't. Of course, God stopped him from killing Isaac, but Abraham passed the test that the rich young man would later fail.

One of the ways we know if a good thing has become a bad thing is by the impact it's having on our lives. When good gifts become idols they tend to spoil; they tend to become burdensome compulsions. In the movie, *Chariots of Fire*, this is played out in the lives of two Olympic runners. Eric Liddell is a Christian. Harold Abrahams is a secular Jew. Both run for Great Britain but Abrahams runs for his own glory and fears losing so much that he can't even take pleasure in winning. Running is a compulsion, not a joy. Liddell, on the other hand, puts his call to serve and obey God first in his life. He showed he was willing to put it all on the altar by not running on the Sabbath. But he had this joy. He said, "God made me fast...and when I run I feel his pleasure." When good things have their proper place in our lives, they bring us pleasure rather than pain.

V. We can evaluate whether or not we worship God only.

It's important that once in a while we step back from our lives and evaluate whether or not he's really our all in all. Is he really "first," not in the sense that there are other things on the list but in the sense that he's the center of our existence? Someone has made an acrostic out of this that might help us evaluate.

"F" stands for focus. What is it that you focus on? What is it you think about? What has your eye? What are you watching? What are you listening to? In Colossians Paul

tells us to **“set your mind on things above, not on the things that are on earth”** (Col.3:2). That’s talking about our focus.

“I” stands for income. What do you spend your money on? We tend to pour our dollars into things that are meaningful to us. If someone were to evaluate what’s important to you based on your checkbook register, what would they say? Jesus said, **“Where your treasure is, there your heart be also”** (Mt 6:21).

“R” is for relationships. Who is influencing my life? Who is in my inner circle? Who do I go to when I need some counsel? Perhaps even a better question is who am I trying to please? Who am I trying to impress? Whose eye am I trying to catch?

“S” stands for spiritual food. How is your spiritual diet? What place does the word of God really have in your life. Have you cracked open your Bible since the last Sunday? Are you feasting on the word of God on a regular basis? Peter says, **“Like newborn babes long for the pure milk of the word”** (1 Pt 2:2). Is that you?

“T” stands for time. How do you spend your time? We all need time for important relationships, time for work, time for play. But it’s amazing to me how many hours we can spend doing things that really aren’t that necessary or important and then when it comes to the things of God we say, “I don’t have time for that.” Scripture says, **“Be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time because the days are evil”** (Eph.5:15-16).

CONCLUSION

I know that when I ask myself these questions I realize how short I fall. And I don’t ask you these things just to make you feel guilty. But if you do feel the Holy Spirit dealing with one of these areas of your life the first thing I encourage you to do is simply run to Jesus. Get real with the Lord, confess your sin. Be reminded that **“there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”**

But don’t let it stop there. Take the next step and ask him to help you make some changes. If you know the Lord then you have the Lord in your life. The Holy Spirit doesn’t just convict you from the outside but he helps you and empowers you from the inside. Remember he didn’t give you these laws to enslave you but to enrich you. You can yield to the Holy Spirit and begin to make God your ONLY God. There is an old hymn that might help you put this into words as you pray. It goes like this:

*“Dearest idol I have known,
whatever that idol be,
help me to tear it from thy throne,
and worship only thee.”*