

Honor The One True God Exodus 20:1-3

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Stone V. Graham*

1. In 1980, the US Supreme Court ruled in a 5-4 decision known as *Stone v. Graham* that Kentucky schools could *not* post the Ten Commandments on classroom walls.
2. The Court said,
 - If the posted copies of the Ten Commandments are to have any effect at all it will be to induce the schoolchildren to read, meditate upon, perhaps to venerate and obey, the Commandments. However desirable this might be as a matter of private devotion, it is not a permissible state objective under the Establishment clause.
3. Now, here's what's *absurd* about that ruling and reasoning –
 - a. the very *existence* of the Supreme Court is *ultimately founded* on the Ten Commandments!
 - b. the Constitution the Court is sworn to uphold and interpret, finds it's most fundamental *basis in* the Ten Commandments.
 - c. the Founding Fathers, the very framers of the Constitution, saw themselves as taking the moral, ethical, and political truths revealed in the Law of Moses, expanded on by Christ, and shaping them into a form that would govern a nation.
 - d. they understood that true liberty is not freedom *from law*, but a freedom maintained & protected *by law*.
 - e. and the Ten Commandments are the *heart*, the core of that Law.
4. Oh I am well aware of the loud voices today that are arguing over the religious and philosophical basis of the Founders but all of this can be easily cleared up by simply reading what *they* wrote, and what earlier Supreme Courts decided.
5. Let me just read some quotes,

Benjamin Franklin • While he was Ambassador to France and was encouraging the French to adopt a system of government like ours, said - “He who shall introduce into public affairs the principles of Christianity will change the face of the world.”

John Jay, the *first* Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, and one of the three main architects of the Constitution said – “Providence

has given to our people the choice of their rulers, and it is the duty as well as the privilege in the interest of our Christian nation to select and prefer Christians for their rulers.”

The great patriot Patrick Henry said – “It cannot be emphasized too strongly or too often that this great nation was founded, not by religionists, but by Christians *on* the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

John Quincy Adams wrote – “The highest glory of the American Revolution was this; it connected, in one indissoluble bond, the principles of civil government and the principles of Christianity.”

In the *People v. Ruggles* decision of 1811, the Supreme Court was hearing the case of a man who had publicly slandered the Bible. They sentenced him to 3 months in jail and a \$500 fine! They said – “You have attacked the Bible, and in attacking the Bible you have attacked Jesus Christ, and in attacking Jesus Christ you have attacked the roots of our nation. Whatever strikes at the root of Christianity tends to manifest itself in the dissolution of the civil government.”

Eighty years later, in 1892, in the decision of *The Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States*, the Court wrote this – “Our laws and institutions must necessarily be based upon and embody the teaching of the redeemer of mankind. It is impossible for it to be otherwise; and in this sense and to this extent our civilization and our institutions are emphatically Christian.”

6. But less than a hundred years after that, the Court was saying the Ten Commandments cannot be posted on the schoolroom wall!
7. Interesting, when the very Court that makes that determination has the same Ten Commandments posted on the wall above the head of the Chief Justice!
 - a. and they are posted there, not for decoration, but *with purpose*.
 - b. you see, earlier courts understood they drew their legitimacy and authority from the principles of justice the Ten Commandments most perfectly present.
 - c. the Supreme Court is based on the US Constitution, but the Constitution is ultimately based on the Bible!
8. Listen to James Madison, the single most important contributor to the Constitution.

“We have staked the whole of the American civilization not upon the power of government. We have staked the future of all of

our political constitutions upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God.”

9. In the *Stone v. Graham* decision of 1980, the Supreme Court in effect said that the Ten Commandments were not permitted for display in schools because some students might obey them and that would be showing favoritism to one religion!
10. So now, listen to the words of John Adams, Second President of the United States and a towering influence during the formation of the Republic –
“We have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people, it is wholly inadequate to govern any other.”
11. That last sentence bears repeating – “Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people, it is wholly inadequate to govern any other.”
12. Let it be clearly stated and let me be understood – what the Founders meant by the Establishment clause and what the modern spin on it are, are light years apart!
 - a. when the Founders banned the establishing a State church,
 - b. what they *meant* was that the *Federal government* would not prefer one *Christian denomination* over another,
 - c. as was the case in most European nations, and the reason why many of the immigrants to American had come.
 - d. if the Founders could drop in on today and see how the Establishment clause is being used now, they’d be appalled!
 - e. they never intended it to be used as justification for the government *banning* religion or forcing it from the public square.
 - f. they simply meant that the *nation* would not have a *National Church*;
 - 1) like the *Church of England*
 - 2) or the German *Lutheran Church*
 - g. no – the Founders understood that what they were doing was taking the principles of justice and goodness revealed in the Bible and implementing them to frame a national government.
 - h. that government would be based on the idea of *individual*

- liberty*, because it was believed that a people - and here's the key - *who governed themselves*, didn't need the outward coercion or force of an oppressive civil government.
- i. those who are *self-governed* don't need someone else to tell them what to do.
 - j. the Founders believed that people would either be governed, to use their words, "by the bayonet, or the Bible!"
 - k. thus John Adam's words about our form of government - "Our Constitution was made *only* for a moral and religious people, it is wholly inadequate to govern any other."
13. Without the Ten Commandments on the walls of our classrooms, ultimately, and inevitably, students have no moral basis, no fixed, abiding standard of right and wrong.
- a. they are left with no guidance but their own will and desires
 - b. and pretty soon we have a generation that is doing what is right in it's own eyes.
14. It doesn't take a genius to see that we're already there.

B. This Series

1. We begin a series today on the Ten Commandments.
2. We do so because we've come to them in our study *through* the Bible.
3. But as we begin, we need to be reminded of our motto here at Calvary -

"Learning & Living God's Word."
4. It's one thing to decry banishing the presence and influence of Christianity from the public square, and we lament the removal of the Ten Commandments from the schoolroom wall.
5. But let's be honest - how important are the Ten Commandments to us?
 - a. do *we* study them? Do *we* obey them?
 - b. do we even *know* them?
6. We'll be looking at one commandment per week, so today we start with the *first* Commandment.
7. As we study them we'll see that the Commandments are *progressive*; that is, each commandment lies on and presupposes the previous.
8. Where we need to begin *today*, is with the realization that the Ten

Commandments are *still* important, that they're worthy of our study and close attention.

9. You see, there are some who believe that because Jesus *fulfilled* the Law, we no longer need concern ourselves with the Commandments.
 - a. nothing could be further from the truth.
 - b. the Law still stands – and Jesus Himself calls us to study and apply ourselves to the commands.
 - c. in Matthew 5:19 Jesus said –
Whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.
10. Now, someone may respond, “Yes, but in the verses right before that, Jesus said this,
17 “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.”
 - a. and they will say – “See, Jesus has fulfilled the Law, so it no longer applies to us.”
 - b. really? Because Jesus fulfilled the Law, it no longer applies to us?
 - c. if we follow that reasoning then we have to say that means when the Commandment says not to steal, since Jesus fulfilled the Law, it's okay to steal?
 - d. Jesus fulfilled the commandment not to murder, so that means we can kill away?
 - e. of course not, that's absurd!
11. What does it mean then when it says that Jesus has *fulfilled* the Law?
 - a. it means that Jesus has met the *obligations* the Law requires for a person to find acceptance before God.
 - b. because of sin, no one else, in and of themselves can or will meet the obligations of the law.
 - c. but since Jesus *fulfilled* the Law, by believing in Him, we're credited IN HIM as having met the obligations of the Law as well.
 - d. does that then mean we're from *from* the Law?

- e. no – it means were; free *in* the Law!
- 12. The Law is no longer a rule that is outside us which we're trying to perform and so find acceptance by God.
- 13. Because of our faith IN CHRIST, we are now IN HIM, and since He's fulfilled the Law, that means our relationship to the law *has changed*.
 - a. it's no longer something that's external and outside us, written on stone tablets -
 - b. it's now *inside* us, written on the tender tablets of our hearts
 - c. it's not just the *Ten* Commandments – it's become the *Ten-der* Commandments.
- 14. We don't observe it to *find* acceptance – We obey it *because* we're accepted.
- 15. We've come to understand the Law, not as a way to *become righteous*; but because we are righteous in Christ, it's the guidelines He's given to protect the glorious freedom we've entered in to.
- 16. Let me use an example:
 - a. we have laws that govern society today. What happens if I break the law against murder? I'm arrested and thrown into prison.
 - b. what happens if I obey the laws? I remain free.
- 17. You see, true freedom isn't the freedom to do whatever I want, whenever I want, however I want and to whomever I want.
- 18. If I think that's freedom, it won't be long before I find myself in bondage.
- 19. Freedom is only maintained and enjoyed when it operates within just and good boundaries.
- 20. The Ten Commandments are the Boundaries our Loving Creator has given to make sure we stay free and enjoy His bounty.
- 21. And so we begin our examination of the Ten-der Commandments.

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-2

¹ And God spoke all these words, saying: ² "I *am* the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of

Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

1. In Deut. 5, we learn that when God gave the commandments, the *entire* nation heard Him speak.
 - a. these words weren't spoken in private to Moses who then carried them back down the mount.
 - b. he was standing *with* the people at this point, having just warned them about trying to rush up the side of the mountain to get a closer look at God.
 - c. as soon as he finished delivering the warning, before he had a chance to ascend, God spoke and all 3 million of the people heard this.
2. He began with a reminder of Who He was.
I am the LORD your God
 - a. or literally, "I, Yahweh, your God."
 - b. since Yahweh means "I Am" an even better translation is, "I, I Am, *your* God"
3. We may have too much of the Hollywood image of this scene.
 - a. we can too easily imagine these words spoken with a hard edge to them.
 - b. but that would betray the words
4. God didn't say, "I am God, so listen up and do what I say."
5. These are words of utmost tenderness – "I am *your* God."
 - a. you've just spent over 400 years in Egypt where there were hundreds of gods
 - b. you've seen all kinds of deities and been under all kinds of laws
 - c. but none of those gods the Egyptians worshipped are your god.
 - d. I'm your God! I belong to you , and you to Me.

I am the LORD your God - who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

6. I'm the One who delivered you from slavery, Who came to you when you were without hope and gave you a future and a hope.
 - a. I, your God, am your Savior, Redeemer, Rescuer, Deliverer, Emancipator, Liberator!
 - b. I opened the door of Egypt, the place of your slavery, and took you out of bondage into liberty!
 - c. My gift to you is freedom! Stay free!
 - d. and in order to ensure you do, here are some guidelines, some boundaries that mark off the territory of freedom from the

region of bondage –

B. V. 3 – The First Commandment

3 “You shall have no other gods before Me.”

1. The children of Israel may not have been too inclined to renew the worship of the idols the Egyptians worshiped simply because Yahweh had shown Himself to be so vastly superior to them in the plagues.
 2. Israel’s victory over the Egyptians at the Red Sea demonstrated their God’s pre-eminence over the deities of Egypt.
 3. But it wouldn’t be long before the children of Israel were entering in to Canaan, and would be challenged with a whole new set of idols; chief among which were Baal, Asherah, and Molech.
 4. And God knew when they saw these gods and *how* they were worshiped, there would be strong attraction to them.
 5. So he gave this first and most foundational command.
“You shall have no other gods before Me.”
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6. What does this command *reveal*?
 - a. first of all, it reveals that there *are* other gods besides Yahweh.
 - 1) that’s right, there *is* more than one “God” –
 - 2) if by “god” we mean that which is the center and ordering principle of one’s life.
 - 3) now, as far as reality and being goes, there can be only one God, one deity who is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe; the very definition of what we mean by God in *that* sense dictates that there can only be one such Creator.
 - 4) but that’s not what God means by the word “god” here
 - 5) He’s referring to that which is the central feature of a person’s life.
 - a) what they live for, sacrifice for, worship, and turn to when they’re in need.
 - b) where do they draw their values from, what’s the last thing they’ll give up?
 - c) that’s what He means by “god.”
 - b. second, when God says, “**You shall have no other gods before Me**” He’s not saying you *can* have other gods, just none who come in front of Him in order of priority.
7. When God says, “**You shall have no other gods before Me**” He’s

- saying that He and He alone is to be the center of our lives; the one thing that even on the pain of death, we refuse to relinquish.
- a. He is to be the ordering principle of our lives.
 - b. we look at all of life through the filter, the lens of our relationship with Him.
 - c. He is the One we life for, worship and turn to when in need.
8. Though the command is cast as a *negative*, “**You shall have no other gods before Me**” it implies a positive – “I shall be your God.”
 9. What God is saying to the people here in vs. 2 & 3 is this
 - a. “**I AM Yahweh, *Your* God – I shall be your God.**”
 - b. in other words, “I am your God, so *take* Me, and Me alone!”
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10. As I mentioned, later when the people entered Canaan, they would be flooded with temptations to worship the idols of the Canaanites.
 - a. Baal was the god who promised *power*.
 - b. Molech was the god who promised *possessions*.
 - c. Asherah was the goddess who offered *pleasure*.
 11. And the worship of these gods, while enticing and pleasurable at first because it catered to the fallenness of man, became a heavy duty and cruel bondage after a while.
 - a. archaeology has unearthed ample evidence of just how hideous the demands of these idols became.
 - b. human sacrifice, burning, turning your family members over to ritual prostitution and acts that are simply not allowed in polite, civilized company.
 12. God wanted his people to stay free, and that’s why He gave them this command. = “You shall have no other gods before Me.

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Today’s Gods*

1. How does this commandment apply to us today?
2. We don’t face the threat of the Egyptian or Canaanite idols; or do we?
3. Well, what do you think - Do people live for power, possessions, and pleasure today?
4. We may not bow down to sculpted images of Baal, Molech, and

- Asherah, but make no mistake, the idols are no less real – they’re just in the heart instead of a shrine or temple.
5. In Habakkuk 1:15-16, the prophet speaks of those who worship *technology* because it brings them whatever it is they want.
 - a. we call our time the Information or Technology Age.
 - b. one of the cable channels is Tech TV; where most of what they do is show new gadgets and systems that are meant to make our lives and work easier and more fun.
 - c. what are *Brookstone* and *The Sharper Image* but modern day temples to technology?
 - d. do you know any gadget guys or gals; people who seem to be wired to have to have the latest and greatest new *gizmo*?
 6. In Philippians 3:19 and Romans 16:18, the Apostle Paul speaks of those whose god is their *belly*.
 - a. these are those who define their lives by pursuing the “good life”
 - b. and most of the magazine industry is made rich off of them.
 - c. just peruse the racks at the bookstore next time you are there to see how many periodicals are devoted to food, decorating, clothing, fashion, and exercise.
 - d. when we read these passages from Paul, we tend to think of those who have *bulging bellies* because of the food they consume.
 - e. but we could just as easily spin it the other way today – those who belly is their god, and what they want is a trim, firm six-pack god.
 - f. they will sacrifice many hours every week, and not a few bucks – in order to *manifest* their god.
 - g. then they look at it in the mirror and pat and rub it – look at my god! Don’t you want to worship it too?
 7. In Matthew 6, Jesus warned us about the threat of being seduced into the worship of *money*, rather than God.
 - a. He said, “You cannot serve God and mammon.”
 - b. in Job 31 we read –
 - 24 “If I have made gold my hope, Or said to fine gold, ‘You are my confidence’; 25 If I have rejoiced because my wealth was great, And because my**

hand had gained much; . . . ²⁸ This also *would be an iniquity deserving of judgment, For I would have denied God who is above.*

8. But really, all of these idols, these pretenders to the throne of our hearts are masks the real contender to God wears – Self!
 - a. power, possessions and pleasure are about ME!
 - b. gadgets, food, drink, the body, money, all these are but the means getting one thing – what *I* want.
 - c. when you boil it down to it's simplest terms – either I sit on the throne of my life, or God does.

B. Who Sits?

1. Let's end with that – Who sits on the throne of your life?
2. Who's your center – God or yourself?
3. God says that the life of freedom possesses Him as it's center.
4. He IS God, and He wants to be YOUR God because He knows that's the only way life works.
5. He created us *for* Himself and life only works when we surrender to Him.
6. You may believe in God – that He exists. Great, but that's not enough.
7. As it says in the Bible, even the devil believes in God, but it doesn't do him any good because he doesn't surrender to God.
8. You have to take it farther – do you own Him as YOUR God?
9. Christian – understand this; God is a jealous for your complete love and undivided affection.
 - a. not because *He's* fulfilled by it, but because He knows you will only be fulfilled when you love Him and Him alone.
 - b. so He will pursue you and your freedom relentlessly,
 - c. if there is something that eclipses Him in your heart, some lesser love that competes with Him, He'll do whatever has to be done to help you see it, loath it and turn from it.
10. May I suggest that you open yourself to the Spirit's searchlight and ask Him to illuminate any idol, any little god that has gotten in the way and hindered your liberty in Christ.