



The Ten Commandments – Part 3
Exodus 20:3; Mark 12:30
GCSP – 07/18/2009

I think I have shared with you before that during my tenure as a store manager with the Family Christian Store chain I was known as the rebel. I don't say that with pride, although I did at the time, because I now see and know that my behavior that earned that nickname was sinful.

I was known as the rebel because I rarely complied with the dictates sent down from the home office. I almost always thought I knew a better way of doing things. The only reason I remained a store manager was because my store outperformed the other stores of comparable size in most of the main categories in which they measured; and this only fueled my belief that my way was best.

Looking back, I'm not convinced that my store's success had anything to do with how I handled the dictates from home office, but instead was directly related to my relationship with my employees. Most of them would walk through a wall for me because of how they were treated, and so it was their hard work that gave my store the numbers that preserved my job, not the fact that I handled the business differently than home office desired.

The Ten Commandments are considered to be old fashioned and out of step with contemporary culture today. Quite honestly, most Christians feel the same way, even if it is to a lesser degree. We don't like the sound of the term "commandment." We are a rebellious lot of people to say the least, and the very essence of rebellion is having a belief that your way is better; not thinking your way is better but believing your way is better.

We generally do not like law. We despise being told what to do and how to do it, more often than not. Each one of you has an internal compass that always points to you knowing what is best and what is right and what is proper. You have the ability to lay that aside on a temporary basis but when push comes to shove your true colors will surface, and you will have your way. And if you cannot have your way you will in essence take your football and go home.

It is this obedience to our own fleshly desires that combats and counteracts and conflicts with our obedience to God and His Word. And allow me to tell you something during this introduction that may be a severe wake-up call: Each and every time you do things your own way as opposed to God's way, you have elevated yourself to God's throne; you have made a determination that you know what is best and God is off His rocker. You may not think of it in those terms but your actions do indeed speak louder than your words.

Most will not view their rebellion against God's Word as all that blatant, but instead will see shades of grey. But when we see things in shades of grey we are in essence seeing God's commandments as suggestions or soft principles or general rules of thumb to follow if and when the situation dictates. In other words, most Christians view God's

commandments as principles to live by when they suit them or when they fit in or benefit them in some way. I will agree with "Thou shalt not bear false witness (lie)" as long as not telling a lie is beneficial to me. If telling a lie is more beneficial than that commandment is just a general suggestion instead of a commandment.

I hope to be able to show you tonight how to avoid this sin of rebellion and arrogance, how to view God's Law as your best friend, and how obedience to God's Law is always of the most benefit to your life regardless of what you may think at the time.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Exodus** and the Gospel of **Mark**.

Exodus 20:3; Mark 12:30

Let's pray.

The fact that the Lord states "You shall have no other gods before Me" validates that there are other gods that exist and can be placed before Him. I think it is important for us to identify some of these gods so we can be aware of how they intrude on our ability to serve the one true God.

Near the end of his life, Joshua makes a bold statement to the Children of Israel. He says, "**Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve**" (**Joshua 24:15**). And while the God of the Bible is the one and only true God, there are a multitude of other man-made gods in this world, many of which reside in and around your homes or in your minds and hearts. You are given a choice. God does not force you to serve and obey Him. You can choose to serve all of the other gods of this world or you can choose to serve God; but the issue is you cannot straddle the fence and you cannot choose to serve God on a part-time basis. The choice is God alone, or all the others; and whenever one of the others takes precedence you have made the choice.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of **Luke**.

Luke 14:25-33

These are harsh words. And obviously Jesus is not commanding us to hate our parents and our spouse and our children, just as He is not literally telling you to build a cross and drag it with you everywhere you go, nor is He telling you to sell or give away all of your possessions; the principle Jesus is referring to is one of your priorities. What is more important to you, Jesus, or these other people and things in your life? This is what He is teaching us.

Do your parents take priority over the Lord? Does your spouse? How about your children or grandchildren, do they take precedence over God? Is your boyfriend or girlfriend or any other relationship the first consideration you make in your decisions, or is God's Word the first? Are you more concerned about your houses and your cars and your clothing and your big screen TV, than you are about the things of God?

These are the questions Jesus is asking all of us; and if the answer is anything other than Him you cannot be the true and genuine disciple you were meant to be.

Oftentimes we allow these other people and other things in our life to slowly creep in and influence us, and before you even realize it they have control over you. Suddenly your life is planned around these other people and these other things. Your desire to follow God in everything becomes follow God when it doesn't conflict with my family, or my relationships, or my friends, or my career, or my hobbies, or my relaxation, or my fun, or my favorite TV programs, etc. It will be easy to justify why these other people and these other things get slotted in at number one. And can I be so bold to say that if you feel the need to justify yourself, you have probably crossed the line?

And please make sure you understand that this is an issue of priority. Family and friends and relationships and careers and hobbies and relaxation and fun, and even to some extent, TV is not inherently wrong or bad, it is just when they take priority over God that they become wrong and bad. For when they do take that priority they have now become a god before Him.

Let me share a rather extreme example of a chaplain who served in Vietnam in the mid sixties. This man had a tremendous ministry amongst the troops. God was bringing many to salvation and many others were involved in discipleship classes he taught. Lives were genuinely being impacted for the kingdom of God in glorious and miraculous ways.

This chaplain also had a wife and young daughter back home in the states that loved and missed him greatly. His tour of duty was up and the decision to go home or commit to another two years of service needed to be made. The chaplain longed and ached to be with his wife and daughter but he also was compelled by the Holy Spirit to continue to minister to the soldiers in Vietnam; many of which would not survive the war. The decision was made to stay in Vietnam for two more years.

To many it would seem as if this chaplain did not love his wife and daughter, to subject them to two more years of being separated, but that wasn't the case at all; he simply knew beyond all doubt that the Lord wanted him to stay. And he chose to put the Lord first in this agonizing decision.

Connie and I were given a similar choice eight and a half years ago. It was very clear that the Lord was leading us to move away from all of our family and friends to pursue ministry in Colorado. My mom was not in good health and I knew this move most likely meant I would be sacrificing being able to be at her side during the last years of her life.

Some may say, and some did say, I made a mistake leaving my mom and the rest of my family to move to Colorado, let alone Connie leaving her family as well and uprooting our son from the only home he knew. But it was all a matter of priority. We had a choice to put God first or to put family first. And while I by no means always make the decision to put God first in everything, in this specific case the decision was abundantly clear even though we temporarily alienated family and friends in the process.

Sometimes the choices you will face may include having to sever a relationship that is keeping you from doing what God has lined up for you. God may be leading you to full-time service but a certain relationship in your life makes that impossible. And let me be clear that this is not a statement about getting a divorce when you have a spouse that is not in agreement with you. God hates divorce and He will never lead you into any

ministry that would require you to get a divorce. I'm talking about other less binding relationships that are keeping you from following God's plan for your life.

Whoever or whatever is holding you back from following the Lord is a god you are placing before Him, and this puts you in direct violation of the first commandment.

If I was to ask you, or you were to ask me, what's the greatest challenge you face every day? The honest answer for any genuine Christian would have to be, maintaining a close, personal, and growing relationship with the Lord; keeping Him first in our lives. Our number one task is to make sure that nothing – no god – no person, object, task, duty, or pleasure, comes before Him, in our priorities, our plans, and our affections.

And before you make the leap to thinking this means being busy for the Lord, let me stop you right now. You may indeed be very busy for the Lord but the issue here is relationship not busyness. You can be busy for the Lord but have a very shallow relationship with Him, and if this is the case your ministry has just become a god placed before Him.

Yes, we need to be passionate for ministry and passionate for good deeds, but these things should be the overflow from your intimate relationship with the Lord and not for any other reason.

If you come early on Saturday evening to help set everything up before the service, it should be out of a love for God not because you feel sorry for Pastor Al having to haul this equipment every week. If you sweep the floor of this building after we are done here tonight, it should be out of a love for God not out of a sense of duty or because you don't think anyone else will do it. If you witness to your friends and family, it should be out of a love for God not because you attended our Wednesday night evangelism training.

Everything you do should be out of a love for God. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 10:31**, **"Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God."**

In **Colossians 3:23** Paul says, **"Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men."**

Solomon tells us in **Proverbs 3:5-6**, **"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him (put Him first), and He will make your paths straight."**

All of these passages are simply applying the first commandment; God first! And in the Proverb we just read we get a promise when we put God first – **"He will make your paths straight."**

Straight paths means more than just clear direction, it also means all obstacles and hindrances will be removed. It means the Lord **"will go before you and make the rough places smooth; (that He) will shatter the doors of bronze and cut through their iron bars."** And that is a quote from **Isaiah 45:2**, which the leadership

of Grace Church have been quoting and praying and claiming over the building project. And we experienced some of the fruition of that promise this week in the county meetings when we received approvals for the rezoning and the conditional use without a hitch.

I talked a little last week about confusion, and how it can paralyze us and how it should not be part of our lives. When confusion reigns in your life you are in a maze. Walking through a maze can be enjoyable for a little while but when you are in a hurry or when you have a destination to get to at a certain time, a maze is a hindrance and a burden. You don't know the way out and your life seems to be going around in a circle.

Solomon says if you will just put God first in most of the things in your life he will make you paths straight. Is that what it says? How about if you put God first in 99% of the things in your life; do you get the promise of straight paths then? So if we choose to let spouses and children and grandchildren and friends and relationships and careers and leisure, and anything else have first place in our life will we get straight paths or confusion?

What about if we lean a little on our own understanding or trust in the Lord with most of our heart; do we get the promise of straight paths then?

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Gospel of **Matthew**.

Matthew 6:33

So what are "**all these things** (that) **will be added to you**" when you put God first? Well the passage lists a few specific things such as food and clothing, but the overall theme of the passage is the stuff in this life you worry about. So Jesus is telling us if we will put His kingdom and His righteousness as the priority of our lives, all of the stuff in this life we worry about will be added to us; our worries will melt away.

In essence, this passage and so many others like it, say that when we make God the number one priority in our life, He in turn makes our provision His number one priority. God is always faithful to us regardless, according to **2 Timothy 2:13**, but when we put Him as our number one priority it opens up the floodgates of His blessing and provision so to speak; we will not have any cause for worry of any kind.

So do you see that leaning on your own understanding is actually a god that you are placing before Him? Do you understand that worry is a god you place before Him?

But, you may say, my understanding seems right and logical and prudent. And God says in return, "**There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death**" (**Proverbs 14:12**).

And beloved, most of the time, we lean on our own understanding simply because we were not paying attention. Sometimes we aren't purposely excluding God from first place in our lives, we just lost focus, or like Peter, we temporarily took our eyes off of the Lord.

At a winter pastor's retreat in the wilderness of New England on a beautiful moonlit night, one of the pastors got out of bed, slipped on a pair of snowshoes and headed out for stroll. He didn't bring a flashlight, a compass, or any other provisions, and he didn't mark his trail or pay attention to which direction he was headed or even how long he had been walking. After an hour or two of enjoying his walk he suddenly realized how cold he was getting and that he had no idea where he was in relation to the retreat center. He didn't plan on getting lost he just didn't purposely pay attention.

When another pastor woke up and realized what had probably happened they organized a search party and found him; cold and embarrassed but otherwise in good condition.

This is an example of how deceptive our own understanding can be. It only takes a momentary loss of focus or a faulty calculation here and a misunderstanding there to have us lost and hopeless. The same can be said about the paths of the world. They look good and initially it seems fine, but suddenly you realize you don't know where you are or how to get back.

When you place God first in everything, and I mean everything, He will be right beside you directing your every step. He will tell you when to turn right and when to turn left. He will tell you when to stop and when to forge ahead. He will keep you from stumbling and even keep you from growing weary.

Psalm 119:105 promises us, "**Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.**" **Isaiah 40:31** promises us, "**Yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not get weary.**"

Promise after promise after promise in God's Word tells of how He will take care of our every need and even the desires of our heart according to **Psalm 37:4-5**, which says, "**Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He will do it.**"

So let me ask you a question: Do any of the other gods in your life give you these promises? Is it worth it to be the rebel? Is the payback for doing things your own way and leaning on your own understanding bigger than everything God has promised?

It's not even close. It's no contest. So why do we break this first and foremost commandment so easily and so casually? It's because we do not love Him with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength; which we will cover in more detail next week.

So if you desire to put God first in your life, where do you start? Everything starts with repentance, so make sure you do that. Then make sure you are spending ample time reading and studying and meditating on and memorizing and being immediately obedient to God's Word. Get involved in some group Bible studies. Listen to good biblical sermons when driving. Read solid Bible-based books. When you're not listening to good Bible teaching, have some God-honoring music blaring through your speakers. And pray all the time.

That's a good start.

Let's pray.