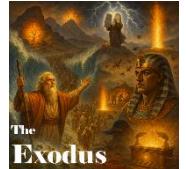




The Vertical Relationship:  
Loving God with All Your Heart  
Exodus 20:1-11  
(Lesson #20)



Thoughts and observations from our review on the actual location of Mt Sinai:

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This week: As we conclude the narrative of Exodus 19, the atmosphere is heavy with the weight of the Divine Presence. The LORD's final instruction to Moses in verses 24–25 serves as a sobering guardrail: We read this at the end of our lesson last week:

*"24 And the LORD said to him, "Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest he break out against them." 25 So Moses went down to the people and told them." (Ex 19:24-25 ESV)*

This "breaking through" (**pāras**, פָּרָשׁ) implies a violent or irreverent intrusion into the divine space. It reinforces a foundational truth: God's holiness is a consuming fire that cannot be approached through human presumption.

As the narrative transitions from the terrifying theophany of Exodus 19 into the formal delivery of the Decalogue, we find Moses positioned as the vital mediator (**mesitēs**, μεσίτης), between a holy God and a trembling people. Moses is of course foreshadowing the Lord Jesus Christ who would eventually bridge the gap between a holy God and a trembling people.

**A few key terms as we come to Exodus 20:**

- **The Ten Commandments:** In Hebrew, these are not called "laws" but literally in the Hebrew they are "The Ten Words." This is why they are often called the Decalogue (from the Greek *deka* "ten" and *logos* "word"). They are more than rules; they are the self-revelation of God's character.
- **The Book of the Covenant:** In Hebrew, **Sepher HaBerit** (הָבָרִיט פָּרָשׁ). In the Ancient Near East a "covenant" (**berit**) was a formal treaty. Today we will begin looking at the Book of the Covenant between Yahweh and the nation of Israel.
- **Justification:** The Greek term **dikaioō** (δικαιόω) used by Paul in Galatians is a forensic/legal term. It means "to declare righteous," not "to make righteous through gradual improvement."

Exodus 19 has set the stage for what scholars call the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20:22–23:33), a collection of statutes that includes the Ten Commandments, instructions for worship, and civil principles for communal life. The people later affirm this entire covenant in Exodus 24:7:

*"Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." (Ex 24:7 ESV)*

It is important to note that they again affirm the covenant after hearing the **entirety of these requirements**.

However, before we examine the specific "*words*" spoken by Yahweh, we must settle a foundational theological truth: **the Law was never intended to be a mechanism for salvation.**

Here is what Paul wrote to the church in Galatia:

*"yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified." (Ga 2:16, ESV)*

As the Apostle Paul argues here in Galatians 2:16, justification—our legal standing before God—comes through faith in Jesus Christ, not by "works of the law."

The Law functions like a mirror; it reveals the perfect righteousness of God and our own moral insufficiency, but a mirror cannot wash the face it reflects.

**Righteousness is not something we achieve; it is something we receive.**

Paul said this to the church in Corinth:

*"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2Co 5:21 ESV)*

According to 2 Corinthians 5:21, a "Great Exchange" occurs where our sin is imputed to Christ, and His righteousness is imputed to us.

Therefore, the Law given at Sinai was not a ladder to reach God, but a rhythm for those already rescued by Him.

Just, as we saw last week, Israel's obedience was a response to being brought out of Egypt "on eagles' wings" (Exodus 19:4), Christian obedience is the "fruit" of the Spirit, not the "root" of our salvation.

We do not obey *to be* loved; we obey because we *are* loved (John 14:15). So, **obedience is born out of justification.** Not the opposite.

**20:1-2 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 slavery.**

In Exodus 20:1, we witness a moment unique in human history: an entire nation standing at the foot of a trembling mountain, hearing the audible voice of the Creator. Moses later recounts this in Deuteronomy:

*"11 And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom. 12 Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice." (De 4:11-12 ESV)*

Notice that they "*heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice.*" This distinction is polemical and profound; unlike the Egyptians, who worshipped static, visible **images** (*tselim*), Israel was called to worship a **Sovereign** who is known through His **Word** (*dabar*).

God is not an object to be scrutinized by the eye, but a Lord to be obeyed by the ear.

While the people eventually recoil in terror, begging for a Moses mediate between them and Yahweh:

"18 ¶ Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off 19 and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die."'"  
(Ex 20:18-19 ESV)

It is important for us to see that Yahweh is not providing a visible picture of what He looks like, quite the opposite, He is revealing His character to His people.

Notice Yahweh begins not with a demand, but with a self-disclosure: "***I am the LORD [Yahweh] your God.***"

By using His covenant name—the Tetragrammaton (**YHWH**, יהוה)—He identifies Himself as the self-existent, eternal One who is bound to His people by promise.

He then establishes the ground for their obedience: "***who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.***" In Hebrew, "house of slavery" is literally "the house of bondmen."

This serves as a profound "type" or shadow of the believer's experience. Just as Israel was physically incapable of breaking Pharaoh's chains, we were spiritually enslaved to our fallen natures and the power of sin.

He reminds them that their identity is not rooted in their performance, but in His power, He is the One who brought them out of Egypt.

Notice the divine sequence: God does not say, "Keep these laws so that I may bring you out." He says, "I have already brought you out; therefore, keep these laws."

Redemption is the **root**; obedience is the **fruit**.

Here we see God's "double claim" on His people: He is their **Creator** by right of existence, and their **Redeemer** by right of purchase.

**APPLICATION:** If you are redeemed, God has the same double claim on you. You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Paul said it like this:

*"for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." (1Co 6:20 ESV)*

Our freedom is not a license to do as we please, but a liberation to do as **He** pleases.

For the Christian, this is the ultimate motivation for holiness. We do not obey to earn our exit from "Egypt"; we obey because the Red Sea has already been parted for us through the finished work of Christ. God has brought us out of Egypt!

As we approach these "Ten Words," there is a temptation to treat them as "straightforward" or overly familiar—to briefly comment and move on.

However, to rush through the Decalogue is to miss the heartbeat of God's character. While the commands are concise, their implications are vast, stretching from the camp at Sinai to the teachings of Jesus on the Mount and the epistles of Paul.

We will take the "narrower path," slowing down to examine each commandment through a three-fold lens:

1. **The Old Covenant Context:** What did this mean for a former slave in the wilderness?
2. **The Civil Penalty:** What did the Old Covenant require when this law was broken? (This highlights the seriousness of sin).
3. **The New Testament Fulfillment:** How does Christ fulfill this command, and how is it re-applied to the Church under the New Covenant?

### ***Vs 3 "You shall have no other gods before me.***

Without preamble, Yahweh begins the Decalogue with a command as simple as it is absolute: "**You shall have no other gods before me.**"

This is the cornerstone of the moral code that applied equally to the highest prince and the lowliest peasant.

The phrase "**before me**" (**‘al-pānāy, בְּפָנָי**) literally means "to my face" or "in my presence." It carries a spatial sense: God is not merely asking to be at the top of a list or the "first among equals."

Yahweh is declaring that to bring any other object of worship is to set up a rival directly **in His face**. Yahweh does not seek to be the "number one" god on our shelf; He demands that the shelf be cleared of all others.

While modern critics often attempt to categorize Israel's Law as a mere evolution of the **Code of Hammurabi** or some other Mesopotamian legal systems, the text is explicit: "**And God spoke all these words.**"

This is **divine revelation**, not **cultural adaptation**. In the Ancient Near East, gods were territorial and specialized; Yahweh, however, asserts **universal** and **exclusive sovereignty**.

### **The Gravity of the Command: The Old Covenant Penalty**

The seriousness of this command is revealed in its penalty. In the Old Covenant, the violation of this "First Word" was considered high treason against the Divine King.

*“Whoever sacrifices to any god, other than the LORD alone, shall be devoted to destruction.” (Ex 22:20 ESV)*

*“13 It is the LORD your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear. 14 You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you — 15 for the LORD your God in your midst is a jealous God — lest the anger of the LORD your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth.” (De 6:13-15 ESV)*

We see this played out tragically in the episode of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32). The moment Israel attempted to synchronize the worship of Yahweh with the visible forms of Egypt, the "breaking out" of God's judgment occurred.

Under the Old Covenant, the penalty of death served as a physical shadow of the spiritual reality: to turn away from the Source of Life is, by definition, to embrace death.

### **The New Testament Fulfillment: From Prohibition to Heart-Devotion**

When Jesus was asked to identify the greatest commandment, He pointed directly back to the heart of this first "Word," but He framed it through the lens of the **Shema**:

*"37 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. 38 This is the great and first commandment." (Mt 22:37-38 ESV)*

Also, in the New Testament, the "other gods" are often unmasked as something more subtle than stone statues. In Colossians Paul expounds the definition of "idolatry":

*5 ¶ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming." (Col 3:1-6 ESV)*

The New Covenant moves the "courtroom" from the town square to the human heart. We may not sacrifice to Chemosh or Baal, but are we sacrificing our time, treasures, families, and even our integrity to the modern "gods" of this present world?

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**Vs 4-6** *"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

Having established that He alone is the sole object of worship, Yahweh now governs the method.

This command is notably more expansive and detailed than the first. Israel is **strictly forbidden** from creating a "carved image" (**pesel**, פֵּלֶל) or any "likeness" (**temunah**, תְּמוּנָה) of anything in the cosmos.

The prohibition is not an indictment of art itself (as God would later command the artistic adornment of the Tabernacle), but against the creation of physical objects for the purpose of "**bowing down**" or "**serving**" them.

The danger here is the attempt to **domesticate the Divine**. To trap the infinite, invisible God within the confines of a finite, created object is to lie about His nature. When we make an image of God, we inevitably **make God in our image**—limiting Him to what we can see, touch, and control.

Yahweh supports this prohibition with a revelation of His character: He is a "**jealous God**".

While human jealousy is often a petty vice born of insecurity, God's jealousy is a holy, protective zeal. It is the righteous jealousy of a husband for the exclusive affection of his wife—a recurring theme in the prophets (consider Hosea) who describe idolatry as spiritual adultery.

This command carries a sobering warning regarding the "**iniquity of the fathers**" being visited upon the children to the third and fourth generations.

This is not a statement of "arbitrary punishment" for innocent children, but a recognition of **generational momentum**. Idolatry creates a spiritual environment; children tend to imitate the false altars of their parents.

**However, the promise far outshines the warning!** While judgment may linger for four generations, God's "steadfast love" (**Hesed**, **חֶסֶד**)—His loyal, covenant-keeping mercy—extends to "thousands" (of generations) for those who love Him.

The ratio of grace to judgment is mathematically staggering.

**The gravity of this command is punctuated by the "Amens" of the congregation in Deuteronomy 27:15:**

*“Cursed be the man who makes a carved or cast metal image, an abomination to the LORD, a thing made by the hands of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret. ’ And all the people shall answer and say, ‘Amen. ’”* (Deut 27:15, ESV)

This highlights that idolatry is often a "secret" sin of the heart or the private home before it ever becomes a public scandal. Under the Old Covenant, to be "cursed" was to be cut off from the presence and protection of the Covenant King.

### **The New Testament Fulfillment: The True Image**

The New Testament does not relax this command; it internalizes it. The Apostle John concludes his first epistle with a sudden, sharp plea:

*“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”* (1 John 5:21, ESV)

Furthermore, Paul lists idolatry as a "work of the flesh", warning that those who persist in such things will not inherit the kingdom of God:

*“19 Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”* (Gal 5:19-21, ESV)

For the New Covenant believer, an idol is anything—a career, a relationship, or a desire—that we "bow down to" in our hearts, allowing it to define our identity or security.

But, the **ultimate fulfillment** of the Second Word is found in Christ. While we are forbidden from making an image of God, God has provided His own for us:

*“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.”* (Col 1:15, ESV)

We no longer need a "likeness" of anything in heaven or earth because we have seen the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

**APPLICATION:** We must look to Christ alone, the only authorized "Image" of God and the One who brings us into the presence of the Father.

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**Vs 7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.**

Here we come to the third of the ten commandments, as you see the focus is still on Yahweh.

You shall not take the name of Yahweh your Elohim in vain. In the original context, "*in vain*" essentially means emptyly, falsely, or for no purpose.

This goes well beyond the Sunday School definition of not using bad words, to something much deeper.

As we consider this here are four primary ways theologians interpret what it means to take the name of the Lord in vain:

**1. Perjury and False Oaths**

- In the ancient world, people would swear by a deity's name to prove they were telling the truth (e.g., "As the Lord lives, I will pay you back").
- The Violation: If you swore by God's name and then lied or broke the promise, you were "carrying" His name into a lie. You were using His authority to back up something that was empty or false.

**2. Using the Name Casually (Profanity)**

- This is the most common modern interpretation. It refers to using the name of God or Jesus as an exclamation of surprise, anger, or annoyance.
- The Violation: It treats a name that is supposed to be "holy" (set apart) as a common, disposable "filler" word. It strips the name of its weight and significance.

**3. Hypocrisy (Claiming the Identity)**

- In Hebrew, "taking" the name can also be translated as "bearing" or "carrying" the name.
- The Violation: If you call yourself a follower of God (carrying His name like a badge) but your actions are cruel, dishonest, or hateful, you are representing that name "in vain." You are showing the world an "empty" version of what that name is supposed to stand for.

**4. Magical or Manipulative Use**

- In some ancient cultures, people believed that knowing the true name of a god gave them power to "summon" or manipulate that god to do their bidding.
- The Violation: Using God's name as a "lucky charm" or a magic spell to get what you want treats God as a tool to be used rather than a sovereign to be worshiped.

Then we have an additional warning that: ***the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.***

In a legal or biblical sense, to be "guiltless" means to be acquitted, cleared of charges, or declared innocent. Therefore, saying God will not hold someone guiltless means that this specific offense carries a weight that cannot be simply brushed aside or ignored. You will not be able to talk your way out of this one with the judge!

**Like the first two Words, the penalty of disobedience is severe:**

*“And speak to the people of Israel, saying, Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.” (Leviticus 24:15–16, ESV)*

The New Testament Speaks Clearly to this topic:

*“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.” (Matthew 6:7–9, ESV)*

God’s name and thus God is to be hallowed (set apart as holy) by us:

*“You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For, as it is written, “The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”” (Romans 2:22–24, ESV)*

For the New Covenant believer this command takes on many new nuances including our conduct should not cause others to speak poorly of God. Paul rebukes the church in Rome because their conduct was causing others to blaspheme (take in vain) the name of God!

**APPLICATION:** Do we truly hallow the name of our Lord and Savior. Listen, I suspect none of use His name as a curse word. But do we hallow His name?

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**Vs 8-11** *“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. 11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and 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.*

Yahweh next articulates the **fourth Word**.

First, Yahweh calls them to remember the Sabbath, and to keep it Holy. The Hebrew word here is (**שַׁבָּת** shabbath), and it literally means “rest.”

Yahweh then articulates how they are to remember it and how they are to hollow it:

- 1) They are to labor for six days.
- 2) They are to do no work but instead rest on the seventh day.
- 3) The reason is provided, the seventh day is a Sabbath to Yahweh their God.
  - a. Notice this language, it is not a Sabbath “for Him” like it is being done in His honor. It is a Sabbath “to Him.”

The prohibition of work is expounded: You do not work, your children do not work, your servants do not work, your livestock do not work, even the strangers who are inside your gates, they do not work.

This is an important principle that might be easily passed over. But here Yahweh is declaring the dignity of women, slaves, and strangers, that they had the same right to a day of rest as the free Israeli man. This was certainly a radical concept in the ancient world.

The reason, they are to keep the Sabbath, as stated on Mt Sinai, because it mirrors what Yahweh did when He created. He created for six days and rested on the seventh day. This becomes a model for Israel.

By the way, not to pick a fight, but it is impossible to believe in evolution and believe this statement.

God created everything that is, and all the life that was alive at that time in six, literal, 24 hours days. Just to remind you in passing:

*“For in six days the LORD made heaven and 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.” (Ex 20:11 ESV)*

Later, Moses will connect the Sabbath with Israel’s deliverance out of Egypt:

*“12 “Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. 13 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 14 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter or your male servant or your female servant, or your ox or your donkey or any of your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your male servant and your female servant may rest as well as you. 15 You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.” (De 5:12-15 ESV)*

We have discussed how abnormal this would be for a nation of slaves who are no doubt accustomed to working every single day. But the Sabbath is a rest dedicated to Yahweh!

***Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.*** That is the reason that God blessed the seventh day and made it holy.

Now of course this creates a weekly rhythm for the nation of Israel, but more than that it sets apart not any day in seven, but the seventh day! The day we call Saturday.

Like the first three words the penalty of disobedience was severe:

*“While the people of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks on the Sabbath day. And those who found him gathering sticks brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation. They put him in custody, because it had not been made clear what should be done to him. And the LORD said to Moses, “The man shall be put to death; all the congregation shall stone him with stones outside the camp.” And all the congregation brought him outside the camp and stoned him to death with stones, as the LORD commanded Moses.” (Numbers 15:32-36, ESV)*

For the nation of Israel violating the Sabbath was a capital offense.

### **What does the New Covenant say about this issue?**

The answer may surprise you.

First, Paul says this to the church in Colossae:

*“Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.” (Col. 2:16-17, ESV)*

Notice, kosher and non-kosher (a shadow), festival days (Passover, Feast of Weeks, Feast of Booths (shadows), the new moon celebration (a shadow) and the keeping of Shabbat (a shadow), but the **substance is Christ**.

These things (what they ate and drank, the festival days, the new moon celebration, and even the keeping of the weekly Sabbath), are all here lumped together by Paul as "shadows" of things to come, that are meant to point us to the substance (The Lord Jesus Christ)!

The author of Hebrews explains that the physical Sabbath and the "rest" of the Promised Land (Canaan) were incomplete.

He argues that there is a "Sabbath rest" that remains for the people of God that isn't about a specific day, but about a state of being:

*"For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not have spoken of another day later on. So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his."*  
*(Hebrews 4:8–10, ESV)*

Is this not what Jesus was really saying:

*"Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."* (Matthew 11:28, ESV)

The Sabbath was a day for the body to rest from physical labor. Jesus claims to offer a deeper, permanent rest for the soul.

By placing this invitation right before Jesus declares Himself "Lord of the Sabbath" (Matt 12:8), Matthew shows that the rest that the Law promised is ultimately found in a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

As you continue to think about the Sabbath, it is noteworthy that throughout the New Testament we see God's people assembling on the first day of the week (Sunday) to honor the resurrection of Jesus Christ:

Paul in Macedonia:

*"On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul talked with them, intending to depart on the next day, and he prolonged his speech until midnight."* (Acts 20:7, ESV)

Paul to the church in Corinth:

*"Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come."* (1 Cor 16:1–2, ESV)

We will pause here for today, having focused on those first four commandments, each of which is all about our vertical relationship with God. We observed that for the Old Testament saint, failure to keep any one of these four Words was a capital offense.

We will pick back up here next week (Lord willing) and look at those commands that focus on horizontal relationships.

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