

No Other Gods!
Deuteronomy 5:6-16

Turn to Deuteronomy 5 please. We will cover the first five of the Ten Commandments today.

There seems to be a natural division between the first five and the second five commandments, besides just being half of ten. One, the first five mention “the LORD your God” many times, but the last five do not mention him at all.

For another, the first five commands begin and end with “the land.” V6, the introduction to the Ten Commandments, ends with “out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery,” and the fifth commandment ends with “in the land the LORD your God is giving you.” It is probably an intentional bracket.

And the first five commandments aim us at God, the last five aim us at people. That is probably the most important division. So we’ll do the first five today, and the last five next week.

Remember what we talked about last week, that God spoke all these to Israel out loud. The Israelites heard these words from the voice of God himself.

There are three ways of dividing the Ten Words. We know there are ten (Deut 4:13, 10:4), but not sure where to divide them. There is ambiguity at the beginning and at the end.

A The first command is v7, no other gods, and the second command begins in v8, don’t make or worship images. Some ancient Jews used this, and it is the division most of us are used to.

B Augustine, Catholics, and Lutherans view vv7-10, our first two commands, as just one command – no other gods, don’t make images, don’t worship them. These people divide the last command on coveting (Dt 5:21) into two commands. #9 do not covet your neighbour’s wife. #10 do not set your heart on your neighbour’s house or anything else. There are two different words for “covet” used in Deut 5:21, so this works okay in Deut 5. This does not work as well in Exodus 20 because in Exodus 20 the same word “covet” is used both times, and order is reversed: first, do not covet your neighbour’s *house*, then, do not covet your neighbour’s *wife* or anything else.

C The conventional Jewish division (though early Jewish tradition did not have a fixed division): the first command is v6, “I am the LORD your God who rescued you.” The second command is vv7-10 (our first and second command), and the rest go like ours.

I will stick with our conventional division, I do not think it matters much. I do think that v6, “I am the God that rescued you” is crucial, and that vv7-10 is more or less three ways of saying the same thing.

Introduction: Relationship and Rescue - Deut 5:6 - *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*

In the normal way the Jews divide the ten commands in these days, this is the first commandment. (Early Jewish tradition did not have a fixed division.) Whether it is a command or not, it is the first thing God says to Israel, and it is crucial.

The Ten Commandments are not given randomly to people in general. They are given to rescued people, people that God has already rescued. The way the Ten Commandments come to us, here and also in the other list, in Exodus 20, is for people who are already in relationship with God.

God does not give these as rules for all people to live by. It would be good if all people lived like this. But God does not give these rules to all humanity. *I am the LORD YOUR God who brought YOU out of Egypt.* God already has a relationship with these people, and they know it.

God would say to us, *I am the God that has forgiven your sins, and given you eternal life, through my Son Jesus.*

And the Ten Commandments are how the relationship works after rescue. God, for his part, rescued Israel and will take care of Israel; and Israel, for her part, will obey these commandments. God shows his love by rescuing his people, caring for them, and God's people show their love by living daily life in his ways. That's how relationship with God works.

Important: The Ten Commandments are not the way to be rescued. These people were already rescued from Egypt and slavery, as we are from sin and death. But God rescues people so that he can be their God, and they can be his people, so that we can be bound to God, and he can be bound to us. That's why he rescues. And these commands are our part in the relationship.

First Commandment: no other gods – Deut 5:7 - “You shall have no other gods besides me.

This is the most basic part of the relationship: no other gods. “I am the God that saved you, I am the God that rescued you. You will have no other gods besides me.”

Don't just think stone or metal figures, people. Think about what gives you life, think about what fears steer your life. What is it that gets all your devotion, all your service?

I do not know when something becomes another god. I have wondered about this for years, and I'm still not sure. Here are two things I do know: one, others gods was a big problem in the OT, and I cannot imagine that our tendency to worship idols has disappeared.

Two, I know our God wants no competition, and he emphasizes this. He gave everything to get us, and he wants everything in return. (BECAUSE that is the way it will go well with us.)

Second Commandment: no images, no bowing down to them – Deut 5:8-10 - *You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁹ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ¹⁰ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

Deut 5:7-10 actually has three commands: (1) no other gods besides me, (2) do not make any image for yourself, (3) do not bow down to any image or worship it.

The first command, no other gods, is the center. Then: Don't make any image, including an image of me, the LORD your God. No images. You have never seen me in any shape, so don't make a shape to represent me. If God has an image, it is us. Let us make humans in our image, in our likeness, it says in Genesis 1.

These two commands, "(1) no other gods; (2) no images," are to our knowledge unique in the ancient world. Ancient gods wanted certain things from people, but as long as the people did those things for that god, the people could also serve other gods. No problem. And of course there were always images of one kind or another.

Idolatry – what is it now? Here's a possibility that comes up a few times in the New Testament. Ephesians 5:5 says a greedy person is an idolater, and will not have any inheritance in the kingdom of God. Greed is idolatry.

Colossians 3:5 says the same thing: put to death what belongs to your earthly nature: evil desires and *greed, which is idolatry*. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

Greed is always wanting one more thing. All then of a sudden I am talking about myself, always wanting just one more thing. This sounds like the 10th command: "you shall not covet."

Jesus said, "No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve God and money." That sounds pretty close to idolatry too, doesn't it? Greed is idolatry. We cannot serve God and money.

We live in an economy that only survives because people always want one more thing. People worshipping things that they've made with their hands. Be careful, my brothers and sisters. We are in the thick of this.

No other gods, don't make other gods with your hands, don't bow down and worship them. Our God is a jealous God. He made us his treasured possession, and he expects us to make him our treasured possession. The first step: NO OTHER GODS.

Our God is a jealous God. That means we are bound to him, and he is bound to us. We feel jealous when someone close to us, dear to us, leaves us for someone else, they show affection for someone else that we thought would come to us. It makes us hurt and angry. That's jealousy.

To God, we are close to him, dear to him, bound to him and he to us. So, no other gods.

Punishing children to the third and fourth generation. I am not sure what this is about. The normal assumption of the Bible is that children do what their parents do. If parents worship images, usually their children will as well. Never in the Bible are godly children punished because of ungodly parents. Three or four generations is how many generations are typically alive at once – it probably means God will punish at one time all the living generations of a disobedient family. In any case, the contrast is with a thousand generations of love. Whatever God's jealous punishment is, it's small compared to his ongoing love. Notice also that all people are divided into two groups: those who hate God and those who love and obey God. The Bible often speaks like this, including Jesus himself. Everyone is one or the other.

Third Commandment: Respect my Name – Deut 5:11 - *You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.*

Commands 1 to 5 – No Other Gods! (Deuteronomy 5:6-16)

God has a name. In most of your Bible you can tell by the word “LORD” in all upper case letters. His name is “Yahweh.”

In Leviticus 24 there’s a story about two men fighting, and one of the men blasphemed the Name with a curse. He was executed.

This third command takes “no other gods besides me” a little farther. Treat ME with respect, treat my Name with respect.

Remember that this is for rescued people, people in relationship with God. People out there curse all the time, and that’s not good, but God did not give this rule to them. He gave it to his rescued covenant people.

“Oh my God” is a common response these days to different kinds of surprise. It is not the Name of God, so in that sense it is not exactly what this commandment is talking about.

Still, don’t say that. You have a God. When a follower of Jesus says “My God,” that means something. You are talking about your God, the one that raised Jesus from the dead, the one you call your Father in heaven. If you are not talking to him, or about him, do not say “oh my God.”

This third command, and the ninth command about false witness, have to do with speech. Respect God and honour him with speech, especially speech about God himself, especially the name of God. And the name of Jesus Christ needs to come under this as well.

Fourth Command: Keep the Sabbath Holy – Deut 5:12-15 - *Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has 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, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do. ¹⁵ Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.*

Teaching the Sabbath command ties me in knots, because I am not sure what to do with it.

The command to keep the Sabbath is the only one of the Ten Commandments NOT mentioned in the New Testament. There is no New Testament encouragement for Gentile believers to keep the Sabbath. There is no suggestion in the NT to move the OT laws for the seventh day of the week over to the first day of the week.

NT believers met on the first day of the week because Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week. It was a normal working day for them, they met either early, before work started, or in the evening after work was over, or perhaps both.

Three places in Paul's letters it is clear that Gentile believers are NOT called to keep one day different than the rest: Romans 14:5; Galatians 4:10; Colossians 2:16-17. As far as the Bible is concerned, a Gentile believer who works on Sunday is NOT disobeying God.

I do not enjoy anything I've said, because too many of us, me included, do not know enough about resting. I really wish the NT said that the first day of the week was the new day of rest, or that we all needed to make one day of the week a day of rest. But it does not say that.

But let's look at this commandment, and see where it goes.

The basic command is to keep the day holy. The core of the command is not, make sure you REST one day. That is NOT what God said. God said, keep it HOLY. One day a week is MY day, a HOLY day. (Which IS in some ways what the first day of the week was, in the NT.)

The reasons for the Sabbath Command (and tho' we are not given the command, the reasons hold true for us as well, that's why I still stew on this): Three reasons.

One reason for the Sabbath: to imitate God, who rested on the seventh day. In Deuteronomy 5 Moses does not mention this reason, but it is front and center in the ten commands in Exodus 20, and other places in the Bible.

God worked six days, then rested one day, so his people also shall work six days and then rest one day. We are not commanded to do this, but if we can, why not?

Second reason for the Sabbath: everyone gets a rest. V14b - *On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns, so that your male and female servants may rest, as you do.*

God likes rest. No other ancient society had one day of complete rest out of seven. Only God's redeemed people. Think about God. What is it like to be completely faithful to God? More rest than the others! For everyone, including the animals, including foreigners in your towns who don't worship me. Everyone including animals gets a rest.

God did not command people to work, but he did command them to stop, to rest. This is how we make a day God's day, this is how we imitate the God who worked and rested. To rest is worship, we do it out of reverence for God, to honour him by imitating him. Second reason: rest.

Third reason: to remember redemption. ¹⁵ *Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.*

God says: Before you met me you were SLAVES. Now that I've brought you out of that you will rest, to remember that I brought you out of slavery. One day a week to remember redemption. (That's exactly why NT believers met and meet on the first day.)

This fourth command begins and also ends with this line that Moses sticks in there: “As the LORD your God has commanded you.” Verse 12, and again end of v15. People don’t want to rest because they can get more done of they WORK. They did not keep the Sabbath because they were afraid they’d not get enough done, or they were greedy, or both mixed.

Can I get enough done in six days? To feed myself and my family? To pass my courses? To do well at whatever? We don’t want to rest for the same reasons Israelites did not want to rest. We fear it for the same reasons they feared it.

Remember: the Sabbath is not about rest. This is about God. To honour God. To give him a day. To imitate God. To trust God that he can take of his child who works six days when others are working seven. To remember that we were slaves to horrible masters, without God we would still be slaves, but then God rescued us. It is about trusting and remembering God.

Fifth Command: Children Honour your Parents – Deut 5:16 - Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God has commanded you, so that you may live long and that it may go well with you in the land the LORD your God is giving you.

“So that it may go well with you” – that line and that idea occur many times in Deuteronomy. God wants his children to have good lives. This is part of being in a relationship with God.

Relationship with God is good for people, being bound to God and him being bound to us is good for us. These commands are our part in this relationship.

Children, honour your parents. Deuteronomy puts a big responsibility on parents, always to teach God’s ways to their children and grandchildren (4:9-10; 6:6-7, 20-21). The second commandment told parents that if they worshipped images, the consequences would go to their children and grandchildren.

Parents, teach your children to trust God, to love him and obey him. Children, honour your parents, is the other side. Children, your mother and father are going to teach you God’s ways. So, Honour your parents, which means, you take God’s ways to heart.

In the context of Deuteronomy, this is not only about family relationships, this is about children taking it to heart when parents encourage them to trust and obey God. For children, parents are God’s messengers, to teach the children about God. That’s why this command goes with the first five commandments, which are more directly God-centered.

“Honour your parents” is also true in the wider sense. Children are to obey parents, honour them, respect them. There is much disrespect from children toward parents. It is encouraged by movies and other things around us.

Children, if you are a child of God, do yourself a favour: honour your parents. Do it because your Father in HEAVEN says to you that this is an important part of your relationship to HIM.

In the Bible, by the way, mother and father, together, are the head of the home. Always. Obeying and honouring your mother is every bit as important as honouring and obeying your father.

Honouring parents changes when parents are old; honouring them means taking care of them, providing for them. Jesus spoke about that in Mark 7.

The Ten Commandments are for God's people, people he has rescued. The Ten Commands are our part in our ongoing relationship with this God. He loves us by taking care of us. We love him by obeying these commands.

He rescued us from slavery, from death.

So, Respect God.

Above all else, respect only God, respect no other gods, ignore other gods, respect only our God.

Respect God's Name.

Respect God's day.

Respect God's messengers, your parents.

This is how we love him with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. Amen.