



One Page Sermon

By Pastor Robb McCoy

May 30, 2021

Words of Life: The introduction and first two commandments in Exodus 20

We begin a new series today on the Ten Commandments. Most people make one of two mistakes when they think of the Ten Commandments. They either consider them to be archaic, obsolete or an overly simplified list of prohibitions; or they treat them as idols themselves, wanting to engrave them in stone and place them in prominent public squares.

To those who idolize the Ten Commandments, I must ask, "Which Ten?" Most do not realize that the Ten Commandments are found in three different places in our Bible, that two of them are very similar and one is very different, and that the Jewish, Protestant, and Catholic traditions all number them differently.

This series however, is aimed more at those who feel as if the Ten Commandments are an interesting piece of history, but have little application to a life of following Christ or a life of modern trials. Some think, "I've never considered killing anyone. I've never been tempted to build a calf to worship. Sabbath is a nice idea, but just impractical for a modern life." Thus, the Ten Commandments are worth knowing, but not all that important anymore.

The Protestant numbering of the Ten Commandments lists the first two commandments as "You will have no other Gods before me," and the second is "You will not make idols." These two are clearly related. So much so that they are combined as one in the Jewish tradition, and the phrase "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, our of the house of slavery" is considered the first and primary commandment. In fact, there is a Jewish tradition that claims that all of the people at the foot of Mount Sinai heard this phrase from the direct voice of God, and then the rest of the nine commandments were told directly to Moses, who then brought them to the people.

For Protestants and Catholics, "I am God who brought you out of slavery," could be thought of as the introduction to the other Ten. It could faithful to list each of the ten commandments with this phrase as the introduction.

To understand the commandment to "not make an idol," it is important to remember the context out of which the Israelites were escaping. The land of Egypt was full of images of their gods. Egyptians believed that carved images of their gods

were imbued with a special power, and that each god had a primary function (such as fertility, victory in battle, or weather). To have an image was to have a piece of that particular god's power.



Throughout history it has been common to depict gods as seated on thrones. There are great hallways and monuments built to the Egyptian gods and pharaohs (who became gods in death). Often these were seated on great thrones. The Greeks continued this pattern as most statues of Zeus depict him as seated on a throne. You could argue that American architects copied this same style when building the Lincoln Memorial (which is modeled after Greek temples).

The God of Israel however—was different. God could not be grasped in an idol. God could not be seated on a throne. In fact, when God gave instructions to build the ark of the covenant to hold the tablets, upon the ark was the "mercy seat," which was intended to be the throne of God. It was intentionally empty (as pictured above).

The God of the Israelites was not like the other gods. This God was invisible, uncontainable, and unparalleled. God is the God of sea, land, and sky (unlike Egyptian and Greek gods who each had their own realm).

God's image could not be contained in any carved object, but could only be seen in something created by God — humanity. Adam and Eve were created "in the image of God." This does not mean we worship other humans. This means that in order to worship God, we must care for the one thing in Creation that truly captures the "image of God." That thing is not a statue, but is you and me.

To follow the first commandment, we put God first. To live out what it means to put God first, we must truly care for one another.