

The 10 Commandments

Session #3: Exclusive Rights

OVERVIEW

Sunday Message Series: The 10 Commandments: Set Free to Live Free, Love God, Love Others

Resource: *The Ten Commandments: Living God's Way* by Mary Evans (CWR 2011)

Homework: Participants are asked to read the Scripture passages ahead of time in order to allow the Holy Spirit to inspire the understanding of their meaning.

Items needed for this session: Handouts of Session #3

A way to show the videos (laptop, screen, etc.)

LOVE: ENGAGE GOD AND OTHERS (10 minutes)

WELCOME

Prayer: Host prays asking for the Holy Spirit to lead the session, to inspire the understanding of the Scripture read, and to help participants apply the session to their daily discipleship.

Purpose: All grow groups during this series follow the same study on the 10 Commandments. These sessions are intended to help us grasp both what the 10 Commandments meant in their original context and also what they can mean for us today as a dynamic and profoundly relevant section of God's living Word. Further, we will explore why they are still relevant today, even though Jesus has come to put us "not under law but under grace" (Romans 6:15). Participants who take this study seriously will find it challenging and possibly even life-changing!

Calendar: 9 Sessions, ending by Wednesday, May 20 or Sunday, May 24.

NOTE: If the group chooses to spend a session doing a service project, it could omit Session #9 and adjust the dates so you still end on May 20. (May 27 is all church game night.)

Covenant: Participants agree to love each other by

- Attending as many of the nine sessions as possible
- Participating in a service project
- Making room for everyone to share: be okay with silence and resist over responding
- Creating a safe space where people can be heard and feel loved: no quick answers, snap judgments, or simple fixes
- Keeping anything that is shared strictly confidential and within the group
- Avoiding gossip and immediately resolving any concerns by following the principles of Matthew 18:15-17
- Giving group members permission to speak into my life and help me live a healthy, balanced spiritual life that is pleasing to God
- Inviting friends who might benefit from this study and warmly welcome newcomers
- Getting to know the other members of the group and pray for them regularly.

ICE BREAKER.

Many shops and businesses today issues "loyalty cards" or give a "loyalty bonus." Each person introduces him/herself and shares a loyalty program of which you are or have been a part, and the expectations by both parties.

SERVE: ENGAGE THE WIDER COMMUNITY (10 minutes)

SERVICE PROJECT (*see separate sheet*)

If the group has not yet made plans, decide on a service project idea and date.

GROW: ENGAGE GOD'S WORD (50 minutes)

INTRODUCTION (*By volunteer reader.*)

This session reflects on the uniqueness of our God and the unity of the Godhead, as well as on the necessity of absolute and exclusive loyalty. The exclusive loyalty that God deserves and demands is very different from any loyalty to a particular store or brand. Our disloyalty affects God. Faith today is often assumed to be or is seen as an optional extra, an interest or hobby that some people get really involved in, just as football or music might be the focus of attention for some. The danger of treating our service and worship of God as a hobby, incidental to our life, rather than the center of all that we are and do, may be greater than that of our serving something or someone else instead of God.

Most people find it difficult to understand and talk about God as Trinity, and avoid it. We are tackling it head on today! For Jesus, His one-ness with God was clearly very important (see the prayer in John 17) and it matters that we get to grips with these concepts. This affects how we understand that we worship only the one God, and have no other gods before Him. Visual illustrations and icons (idols) refer to statues for sure, but some believers take it so far as to include all visual representations for God. There is a danger in using images and imagery that fix our understanding of God in a certain way or direction. Group members are encouraged to think about their mental pictures for God. Two questions emerge: What do other people do that might be seen as breaking these commandments? and What is there in my behavior or ideas and attitudes that might be offensive to God?

CONTEXT:

Video: Christian "Trinity" Explained in 3 Minutes (Father, Spirit, Son) Part 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AQkFlzFJ3kA> (3:35 minutes)

Optional: Christian "Trinity" Explained in 3 Minutes (Father, Spirit, Son) Part 2

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mvj87QCF0lg> (2:50 minutes)

Discuss: How is understanding God as Trinity important to your faith walk?

OPENING OUR EYES

Read: Exodus 20:1-6

Read: Deuteronomy 4:15-20, 35-40, 6:4-7

Volunteer reader:

Now Yahweh has introduced Himself, and the ongoing covenant relationship begin to be made clear. The people of Israel must first grasp that their God is unique and incomparable.

The emphasis on the first "Word" (Exodus 20:3; Deuteronomy 5:7) is that God is *uniquely* to be served. This is like the exclusivity for marriage, or even brand loyalty or

sponsorships. Deuteronomy 6:4 makes it clear, however, that understood within God's demands for exclusive service is His own uniqueness. Nations surrounding Israel almost universally worshiped many gods: their pantheons were complex and divided. But Israel must understand that this does not reflect reality. "Yahweh is God, Yahweh is One" means both that there is only one God and that there is one-ness within God. Firstly, Yahweh alone is God. The command to "have no other gods" does not imply that other gods exist. Biblical faith is not just monolatry (the worship of only one God among many), it is monotheism (there is only one God and He must be worshiped). Isaiah's majestic arguments in chapters 40-45 of his book make this abundantly clear. Secondly, God is one, He is not divided. New Testament teaching which links the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (for example Matt. 28:19) and was explained in the Early Church in terms of the doctrine of the Trinity does not contradict the essential oneness within the godhead. Christians must be very careful not to give the impression that when we speak of God as three-in-one, this somehow diminishes His oneness or that there is or could be any difference of purpose or intention between the different persons of the Trinity. And this one, unique God must be served exclusively. Loyalty to Him must be absolute. In terms of our worship and service, nothing must replace Him or be added to Him. Pledging allegiance to any kind of other god is the equivalent of issuing divorce papers to Yahweh. Under those circumstances the covenant no longer exists.

God's incomparability also comes out in the second commandment that they are to make and to serve no images. Any image that human beings themselves create is not and should never be seen as an image of Yahweh. However well-intentioned such creations might be, bowing down to an image counts as bowing down to another god, and Yahweh cannot and will not tolerate this among His people. Deuteronomy 4:15-19 expands this concept. Using verbal imagery to describe God is common throughout Scripture and clearly not seen as wrong. God is pictured, for example, as a shepherd (Psalm 23), as soldier (Exodus 15:3), a mother (Isaiah 66:13) or a lion (Isaiah 31:4), but there is always recognition that this language is metaphorical. These are pictures, not definitions. Most of us are unlikely to sculpt any image and call it God, but perhaps we are in danger of creating mental images. Do we imagine God as an animal, bird, fish or star? Probably not; but do we picture God as a female, or more likely, as a male? Deuteronomy 4:16 warns us against this as well. Exodus 20:5-6 (and Deuteronomy 5:9-10) is sometimes seen as contradicting Deuteronomy 24:16, which unambiguously teaches that punishment does not cross generations. But the point here is that every generation that hates God (apparently evidenced by worshiping images) deserves punishment. Parental teaching does influence children, but this is not inevitable. The difference between the three or four and the thousand is meant to emphasize the extent of God's love.

INTO THE BIBLE

Read Isaiah 43:1-13

Read Mark 12:28-34

Discuss the following as time allows:

1. If God were to give you a loyalty card, what would you expect to give and to get?

2. If you were to give God a loyalty card, what would you expect to give and to get?

3. Are there any aspects of our lives where we owe or expect exclusive loyalty? Think about how you might feel if you were betrayed by someone who owes you such loyalty. Does this help us to understand how God might feel when He is betrayed?

4. What people, things, or ideas might be likely to draw us away from exclusive worship of God? Is there any action we can take to avoid this danger?

5. People today are very wary of absolute claims. How do you understand the Bible's teaching about the uniqueness of God, and how does this actually affect the way you live your life?

6. Jesus said, "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). Talk about how we can understand this unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

7. Medieval paintings almost invariably picture God as an old man with a white beard (think of Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling). Is there anything wrong with this?

8. Do you have a mental picture of God? Is there any danger of this picture becoming a definition of God for you rather than an illustration of some aspect or aspects of God's character?

SEEING JESUS IN THE SCRIPTURES

Volunteer reader: No humanly created image, whether mental or physical, can adequately represent God. But Colossians 1:15 reminds us that "The Son is the image of the invisible God." We can test the accuracy of any picture or idea we have of God by asking whether or not that idea is reflected in Jesus.

Discuss: Name some popular or common images that are used to describe God. How are they reflected in the person of Jesus? How are they not?

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

Volunteer reader: One of the biggest barriers to giving exclusive allegiance to God is our failure to identify the “gods” we are really serving. We all know that commercialism, money and the love of money are major problems in modern society, but it is easy to assume that because we are not the richest in our social group, or we give more to charity than others do, we have avoided the problem. Or we hide behind the excuse of: “we are doing this for the family.” But do our children really need the latest I-gadget, or designer trainers, or even the “best” education? Indeed has education in itself become a “god” for us? Has obtaining this or that certificate or degree become the primary goal in life for either ourselves or for our children? Or is it reaching a particular level of promotion so that, in our heart of hearts, we look down on others (or on ourselves) if that level is not reached? The answers will be different for all of us, but it is worth asking ourselves what is our greatest ambition for ourselves or for our families—and whether or where God comes into that picture.

Discuss: How will you apply what you learned in this lesson to your life this next week?

LOVE: ENGAGE GOD (5 minutes)

LOOKING AHEAD:

Invite someone new to come next week! I will invite:

Do we need to call/text/email and remind one another? I will remind:

Homework:

Read Exodus 20:1-7 (If you wish, you can also read ahead next week’s passages: Deut. 32:1-4, 1 Kings 8:20-30, Proverbs 18:10, Ezekiel 36:16-32 and Philippians 2:9-11.)

Commit: Look for triangles in your daily life (buildings, signs, frames, etc.). Each time you see one, do an inner check to ask who you are serving as your “first love.”

Snacks/sweets for next time:

CLOSING PRAYER:

Use The Pocket Prayer we learned as a church two years ago. Pray this prayer out loud together, but then pause at the end to allow each group member to name something out loud for which he or she thanks God. Prayer:

Together: **Father, you are good. I need your help. So do they. Thank you!**

Individually: *[Each participant names a thanksgivings.]*

Group Host: We pray in Jesus’ name.

Together: **Amen.**