

## Exodus 20 home group questions

*By Phil Bailey*

### Summary of sermon:

In the sermon I tried to show that the context in which the ten commandments were given is very important: they were given to God's people Israel as the basis for his covenant with them and only after they had been redeemed by the blood of the Passover lambs. The commands were not given to humanity in general and cannot be kept outside of right relationship with God. Nor were they given for Israel to earn God's love; he had already promised and covenanted to set his love upon them centuries before in Genesis 12-17. Moreover, he saved them from slavery and brought them to himself entirely by his own gracious initiative – they contributed nothing.

The commandments were given for God's people to know how to *respond* to his love and fulfil their calling as a kingdom of priests and holy nation (Exodus 19:4-6). These commandments are still relevant to us under the new covenant because, even if we are gentile believers, we have been grafted into the true, spiritual Israel (Romans 11). Moreover, one of the main purposes of the new covenant is to write God's law (which is encapsulated in the ten commandments) upon our hearts, so that we will keep it where ancient Israel broke it (Jeremiah 31:31-34). Although we are not under the Mosaic law, we have been given the Holy Spirit to change our hearts and empower our obedience so that we can *fulfil* the Law (e.g. Rom 6:15-18, 13:8-10; Gal 5:13-14). We do this by following the example of Jesus, who has kept the commandments perfectly (Matt 5:17).

I focused on the first two commandments, since they get to the heart of right worship. We should have no other gods to rival YHWH (v.3), since his saving deeds are unparalleled. Moreover, nothing in creation is comparable to him (v.4). He alone is the uncreated, self-existent and self-defining creator (his name means 'I am who I am' don't forget!). Nothing else is worthy of worship in comparison to him, or fit to represent him. Therefore, we must be very careful to base our worship and even our own mental images of him only on what his Word tells us.

As a devoted husband to his people, who has unreservedly set his love upon us, he is rightly jealous for our affection and faithfulness in return (v.5). Therefore, what he desires is not just our undivided loyalty, but our love, expressed in obedience (v.6). If Israel had ample reason to love YHWH for his saving mercies to them, we have so much more in Jesus Christ! And the more we love him, the more we will willingly keep and fulfil the other eight commandments. We will increasingly want to honour his name and use it carefully. We will increasingly trust him to provide for our needs and look after unfinished business so we can rest and spend quality time with him – and we will increasingly long for this time with him. We will increasingly love our fellow human beings as his image bearers and want to protect their lives rather than harming or defiling them through murder, adultery or lies. We will increasingly want to honour the basic social order that God has ordained in marriage and the family. And we will increasingly be content with what he provides for us – and ultimately with having him, which is better than all worldly goods or relationships – so that we will not covet.

In summary, we can see that true worship encompasses all of life – our thoughts, words and deeds. But it has only one true object: YHWH, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And it begins in the heart, with love.

Questions (feel free to choose those you think will be most helpful):

- 1) Why is the context of the ten commandments so important? Why can't we just treat them as nice moral code for all humanity?
- 2) Why is YHWH (i.e. Father, Son and Holy Spirit) worthy of our undivided worship?
- 3) Why should we not make images of Father, Son or Holy Spirit as the focal point of our worship?
- 4) In what ways are you tempted to make God in your own image?
- 5) How can we keep a right view of who God truly is?
- 6) Why does YHWH want the love of his people above all else?
- 7) Why does he deserve the love of his people above all else?
- 8) How will greater love for him help us keep the other commandments?
- 9) How could you spend better quality time with God to foster and grow that love?