

Exod 03-12-28a

Let's begin our worship of the Word of God this morning through the Word of God. There's a misspeaking that needs to be addressed. We do not worship the Word of God.

We worship through the Word of God. We can unconsciously begin to make the focus of our worship the Word of God itself rather than the God who gave it. But we come to God and learn about Him through His Word and through the ministry of the Spirit.

And in order to do that, we take a moment at the outset to clear our minds and prepare our hearts and ensure that we're receptive to that ministry. So let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, thank You for granting us another day and all of the graces that pertain to it.

We thank You for our health and for our mobility, for our freedom, our privacy, our opportunities. We thank You for the challenges that You have brought into our path because we know that these are the obstacles and the stresses that bring Your Word to the forefront of our minds and give us the opportunity to grow and strengthen our faith. We thank You for the country in which we live and its leadership.

We pray for our president and his advisors and his key leaders in the various branches and areas of the administration. We thank You for our military and that they have been able to work and achieve the goals that we have both at home and abroad. We pray that You will continue to bless them and protect them.

And we ask now as we come to this time of fellowship in Your Word that You would give us insight and understanding, help us to find that truth which is pertinent and necessary for us to fulfill Your calling and Your purpose in our lives. We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

This is December 28, 2003. We resume our study in the book of Exodus in chapter 20, picking up at verse 13. Exodus 20, 13.

I want to review our passage before we do our Scripture reading because our Scripture reading is very closely related thereunto. So in Exodus chapter 20, we've already seen in the first several verses that there are two tables of the law. There are ten commandments given in this chapter, in this section of the chapter.

And on the first table of the law, the first five commandments have to do with God, relationship with God. The Lord Jesus in the New Testament sums up all the law and the prophets with two overarching commandments. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy might.

And thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, in the old King James. Well, the first table of the law, the first five commandments, pertain to that first overarching command to love the Lord God. Thus, having no other Elohim in the place of God, nothing occupying the place of priority and

reverence, not manufacturing something to take His place, an idol or a likeness.

Covetousness is idolatry, and the desire for something can supersede. We tend to think of a personage, some other God, being represented in idolatry. But we saw when we reviewed this commandment that in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul tells us that covetousness is idolatry.

And to have a desire for material things, to have the desire for an achievement. There are people who become obsessed with their academic degrees. There are people who become obsessed with some sort of reconciliation or some level of relationship within their family or within their circle of friends.

And it's just an obsession. I think about it night and day. How can I draw closer to this person? Of course, young people, this can be in the area of romance.

There is a normal level of infatuation that takes place in your dating and engagement phase. But even this has to be kept in perspective and cannot supersede the central place that God is supposed to occupy. So, idolatry covers a lot more ground than just a graven image.

And God spends quite a bit of time explaining that commandment, talking about the worship and serving of it, and explaining that He is jealous and will visit iniquity on families because this can spread to others. It is a contagion. Children see this in their parents and go and do likewise.

The priorities that are set in the home are absorbed by the children. And this is why God includes the generational cursing and blessing along with the explanation of that commandment. Then in verse 7, not taking the name of the Lord your God for evil, invoking it, implementing it, wrapping yourself in it, and then committing evil.

This goes on quite often and amazingly in our modern culture. It says the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes his name and implements it for evil. We mentioned, and I'll reiterate, this is not heathen.

This is not the vanity of Ecclesiastes. This is a word for operational evil. This is using it to accomplish unrighteous goals.

It could be false testimony. It could be misrepresentation of oneself, which goes on quite a lot in the Christian media world. Send me your prayer request, and I will send you back a prayer cloth and sew your money into our ministry, and God will open the windows of heaven and rain abundance down upon you.

God will not bless those who foolishly sew their money into ministries that are centered on money. These people themselves are idolaters. They have replaced the God of the Bible with the God of Avarice, and contributing to them, there's no excuse for it.

There's no excuse for that level of ignorance. And God will not leave him unpunished who takes

his name in vain. These ministries are going to be torn down in the day of judgment.

Verse 8, remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. We saw the principle of rest one day in seven. And in our age, we regard every day alike, so we are not tied to calendar days, but the principle still applies.

All of the commandments still apply in principle to us. So how do we observe the Sabbath and yet regard every day alike? We examine the features and facets of our situation, our circumstances, and we determine where is it that I must do my work, earn my bread by the sweat of my brow, get out and work out my own deliverance in fear and trembling, and where is it that I have to commit things to God and leave them in His hands and rest in His provision. And this is a higher and harder accomplishment, isn't it? Because we have to think.

It's easy to look at a calendar and say, well, this is Saturday, let's shut down and meditate. It's a greater challenge for us to look at the different facets, look at areas where they have the old poem, and I'm not a big fan of it, but it does address this principle, God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, and so on. The idea there is discernment.

You need the wisdom to know the difference, and that actually is a biblical principle. You go to the Apostle Paul and he says, I pray that you will come to know the difference, that you will be able to discern the better things. There are things that are not illegal or illicit or prohibited in the Word of God, but they're not best.

And the ability to discern where we should labor and do our work and where we should rest and let God do His work, and to know the difference is the principle that we apply based on this commandment. In the area of evangelism, this has been widely abused. God brings about conviction.

It is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to convict of sin. We have worldwide ministries and we have hundreds of thousands of believers running around trying to convict people of their sin. It's not our job.

We need to rest in that area. It is not our job to go and tackle people, to stop people in the street and confront them about their salvation. This is God's work.

We need to rest in that area. We need to be ready when He has done His work to give an answer to those who ask us. That's our part.

The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female servant. And here, once again, we have the household principle.

In the same way that we have the household principle in idolatry and covetousness, not setting a pattern of replacing God with something else, also in the area of what we do and what we leave to God, in the area of prayer, family prayer, this is going to show up. In the area of

example, godly parents are going to leave an example that impresses on their children the importance of rendering to Caesar what is Caesar and what is God's to God in terms of work and labor. He goes on to address creation.

And that is a reminder that in the area of things that belong to God and are His work, He's got the power. If He created the universe, He can provide. He can protect.

We should not be insecure. We should not be frightened. We should not have a spirit of fear.

We should not fret ourselves over evil men. There is evil that goes on in the world. Some of it is near at hand.

Some of it is far away. Whether it is terrorism, we're on the orange alert. I think it is highly likely that another major terrorist attack is imminent.

And depending on whether or not God sees fit to bless the efforts of our intelligence and counterintelligence arms, I think He probably already has, which is why we have had a period of peace ever since 9-11. I have no doubt that there have been several major things that have been successfully thwarted and have not been publicized. But sooner or later, these guys are going to pull off another major attack, and it is going to strike fear into people's hearts who do not rest in God's provision.

We cannot, by worrying, turn one hair of our head white or black. We cannot alter the length of our lives. God has determined it.

If God has determined I will live, there is no human being on earth that can kill me. If He has determined that it is my time to go, there is not a human being on earth that can save me. My life has been numbered in eternity past.

Its very days, hours, minutes, and seconds were determined by God before I was ever born. Nothing will change it. I need to be prudent.

I don't go walking out in front of trucks on the highway. God would have foreseen that and determined that my life would be much shorter because I'm an idiot. We need to exercise prudence, but we need to leave in God's hands and rest in God's provision and in God's work.

Then we saw last time that honoring father and mother is the fifth commandment on the first table, and that it is a part of honoring God. We're going to look at a passage this morning that may make you think I'm wrong about that, but I believe it is on the first table. It isn't to live or die, which table it's on, but I believe that it is a part of honoring God.

It is a part of obedience to God because honoring father and mother is the recognition of authority, and if you cannot recognize the authority of parents, you cannot recognize the authority of God. This is the first place that children are trained up to see themselves objectively and realize that they are not the center of the universe and that everything does not revolve

around them, and the fact that they are unhappy should not create an emergency on the part of everybody around them. They need to get used to the fact that they are part of a fabric.

It begins in the family. It extends to community and ends up being national in scope. They are citizens of a country.

They are members of a community. They are individuals within a family, and there is authority that defines and orders all of those contexts. To not understand and not respect that authority is to reject the divine order of things.

This extends to the feminist movement, to women who do not understand the role that they have been assigned. They misunderstand and think that they are somehow labeled as inferior or secondary if they have a subordinate role. All you have to do is talk to someone in the police force or someone in the military who has a subordinate role, who is a sergeant instead of a detective, or who is an NCO instead of an officer.

Ask them if they think they are inferior to the higher-ups. They are not. They are serving in a particular role.

Ask the Lord Jesus Christ if he thinks he is inferior to the Father. Ask God the Holy Spirit if he is inferior to the Son and to the Father. They are not.

And it is blasphemy to say that they are. And yet, the Son has subordinated himself to the Father, the Spirit has subordinated himself to the first two members of the Trinity. And it is not inferiority, it is function.

In some cases, it is superiority. I have known many staff NCOs that I would much rather stake my life on than a lot of officers I have served with. They were more knowledgeable.

They were more steady. They were more wise. They were more reliable.

They were more consistent. They were more experienced. I served as the Chief of the Enlisted Instruction Branch of the Gunnery Department at Fort Sill.

I had 60 staff NCOs with whom I worked and who I oversaw. Nearly all of them knew more about gunnery than I did. Was I superior to them? Could I take a classroom full of recruits and inject their tiny brains with gunnery information the way those men could? I could not.

They were in no way inferior to me. And yet, they were subordinate. And they followed my orders and carried out my policies and supported me in my work.

And it is a very healthy and necessary relationship. So in the same way, honoring Father and Mother, this is the first place you learn that principle. And you don't begin to have doubts about your worth if you're in a subordinate position or you have a lowly or demeaning job.

You separate your valuation of self from your functions and your duties and your position and

station in life. Our self-worth ought to be based on what God thinks of us. And the way I look at it, if the Lord Jesus Christ died for me and applied his work on my behalf and made me, gave me the authority to be called a son of God, then I don't have to bow my head to anyone.

I am the equal of the Apostle Paul in that regard. I am the equal of any human being that has ever lived, not because of who and what I am, but because of who and what the Lord Jesus Christ is. And that is an identity and that is a value that no one can take away from us.

It is divinely assigned. And whether you're flipping burgers at a fast food restaurant or you're the president of a large corporation, your station in life is not determined by your work or by the opinion of others. It is God's opinion that counts.

As many as received him, the Lord Jesus, to them God gave the authority to be called sons of God. What label do you want? What value would you like to be assigned? Do you want to be a child of the king? That's about as high as it gets. So, if God be for us, who be against us? Why should I fear what man says about me or can do to me? All of that is wrapped up in this verse 12.

Now, this morning, we begin the second table of the law at verse 13. We can cover it very quickly. You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's. Verse 17 sounds like many commandments all rolled into one, doesn't it? Thou shalt not covet is the main idea, but we are told specifically what it is that we should not have an unhealthy desire for.

Now, this is literally looking over the fence at someone else, isn't it? You have the house, the wife, male and female servants, ox, donkey, or anything else that is his. His lawnmower, his new digital camera, his computer, his car. You know, back in these days, it wasn't a matter of, well, my ox cart is better than your ox cart.

I've got chrome hubcaps on my ox cart and you don't. But the measure of social standing and a measure of success was in the ornate nature of the house. How many houses were there in Israel when these commands were given? Doesn't say anything about coveting his tent, does it? And there were no houses, so is this looking forward to the time in the land? Has to be, because as they are encamped about the foot of the mountain, there is not a house in sight.

What is the idea here of house? This is not just the physical structure, obviously. This is everything that's in the house. So you have sort of a bracket here of beginning and ending with anything that is your neighbor's.

It begins with looking at the exterior, looking at the facade. And it looks forward to the time when they will be in the land and they will have permanently constructed dwellings. But the idea here in verse 17 is beginning by looking at the Beit, the house.

Beit Lechem, Bethlehem, we've heard a lot about this last week. House of bread, the word Beit, also the second letter in the Hebrew alphabet. And it looks like a house.

It has a roof, a back wall, and a floor with a little porch sticking out. That's the letter B, Beit, in Hebrew. Actually, I guess I'm giving it backward for you all.

It looks good to me, but I'm the only one who can read it anyway. So, you shall not covet your neighbor's Beit, his house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.

The whole idea of a trophy wife has come into the modern parlance. People like to squire about an attractive, socially competent wife, and especially in business circles. In Dallas, if you get in the upper crust of the business community, there are gatherings.

People go to the club. And in the same way that when you walk into a room, there is an immediate sort of evaluation meter on your clothing. There are people who can tell you within \$10 what you spent on your suit or on your shoes, because that is the circle in which they move.

And a man is judged, a business person, man or woman, is judged on their clothing, on their ride. People see you drive up. Well, is it a Lexus? Is it a Mercedes? Is it a Volvo? Is it a Ford? And there is an evaluation.

And people rank and sort out people in their periphery by this. That's what's in view here. Because coveting isn't just a Scrooge saying, give me one more gold coin.

It has a motivation. Why would you want something? You know, there's sort of a fable about the man who is stranded on a desert island. And he's stumbling around there year after year.

Nobody ever finds him. And he stumbles on a pirate treasure. And he opens up the chest.

And here's all of these gold doubloons. But what he would really like is just a good sharp knife. And what would be valuable in another context is totally worthless.

He can't do anything with the gold, maybe weight down a fishing net with it. But what he really needs is something to help him survive. And in that context, the gold is worthless.

And, you know, sharp steel would be better. Well, coveting, desiring something. Why do we want something? Why would we want someone's house? Why would we want someone's wife? Why would we want someone's servant? Do you ever think about this? We kind of understand the idea of the wife.

You say, oh, here's some beautiful, talented, desirable woman. But what about a servant? Why would someone want the male servant or the female servant? What did male and female

servants do? They had different areas of responsibility, didn't they? Male servants transacted business. You see this in the parables of the Lord, the steward and so on, the unfaithful steward who squandered his master's goods and then was called to account.

So to have a male servant, this could be anything from a butler. You see in the 1920s and 30s high society type of things. And someone would have, you know, my man Godfrey here, and he's such a good butler.

Oh, I wish I had him. Look how he organizes the house. And he's genteel, and people get an impression when they come to the mansion.

And someone would say, that's the impression I want to make. It's not really about the man. It's about the impression.

I want to be well thought of is what is behind coveting. So what is idolatry? Coveting is equal to idolatry, Paul says. We've sort of come full circle because idolatry has two sides to it.

It has the Godward side, and it has the manward side. On God's side, any time you are desiring to be well thought of, any time you're desiring material things that belong to someone else, you're wanting to impress people. And what have you done? You've basically broken two commandments at once because you have made an idol out of public opinion.

You have made an idol out of being well thought of. It's been called approbation lust, the desire to be approved, to be well thought of. People wouldn't covet a Mercedes if they were stranded on a sandy shore.

They would covet what they needed to survive. But in a social context, now we want to be seen. These are all things that are seen, the house, the wife, the male servant, the female servant.

These are the ones who handled all the domestic chores, made sure groceries are laid in and that the subordinate servants serve the meals and do all of the domestic operations within the household. The male servant would operate a lot of the business. If it's agricultural, would make sure the crops are sowed and reaped.

It would be the foreman, the overseer, the ranch boss, if you will. His ox, his donkey. This is not just a single ox or a single donkey.

This is the livestock complement that belongs to the neighbor. And this was a measure of wealth. How is Job's wealth measured? Number of camels, number of she-donkeys, and so on.

This is the visible measure of wealth. And then there is the invisible wealth, anything else that is your neighbor's. Well, all of these pertain to the neighbor, to the horizontal as opposed to the vertical that was on the first table.

And all of them have applicability to us. And if there is one thing we remember just as we review this, we haven't even done our scripture reading yet, but as we review these five

commands, it is a reminder to us to be objective. Objectivity looks at our life from a divine perspective.

How does God evaluate? You cannot implement, you cannot respect, you cannot observe any of the principles in these commandments in subjectivity. These actually define and illustrate the subjective point of view, where it is all about me. The man who is living by faith, the believer who is achieving righteousness by faith, who is operating in that triad of Christian virtues, faith, hope, and love, is going to have God in mind, and is going to have others ahead of self.

Because the very definition of love is self-sacrificial, beneficial to others. I will put myself out, I will deny myself, as the Lord denied himself, to take up the cross and follow. And this is a description, it is an illustrative picture, of the person who loves God, and who loves his neighbor.

We are going to look in detail at these aspects when we come back from the break. But how do we enter into the true observance of these commands? It requires divine provision, divine power. Why did Israel constantly fail in these areas? They did not have the resources that we have.

They will have. They will get the chance to. God is not going to hold them as accountable as he holds us.

From those to whom much is given, much is required. We have a higher standard to meet, because we have been given the full-orbed ministry of God's Spirit. We have the complete canon of Scripture, which they did not.

So we will be held to that higher standard. How do we meet that high standard? By using what God provides. What is it we have that they don't have? We have the constant ministry of the Spirit.

We have the availability of the truth of God's Word. And it is by concentration on those that we can live, and that we can pass muster at the judgment in these areas. We will look at them in more detail when we come back, but let's pause here and take our break.