

Honor the Lord Your God

SCOTT HOEZEE

The writer Frederick Buechner once said: There are two kinds of laws; laws for how someone *wants* things to be, and laws that express the way things are. A *no hunting* sign is the first kind; the owner of this property chooses to keep it free from hunters, and so puts up a sign; but someday he could change his mind and take down the sign. Some laws can be changed. The law of gravity, on the other hand, describes how things are, and this kind of law you cannot change. You cannot say you are repealing the law of gravity, and so step off a cliff and not fall. The Ten Commandments are that second type of law. They describe how things *are*. Today on *Groundwork*, we begin a new series on these famous laws. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, we are beginning what for *Groundwork* is a fairly long series, eight parts on the Ten Commandments; and if our listeners are wondering how we are going to do ten commandments in eight shows, this episode will tell you how we are going to do that, because we are going to, in just this one show, treat the first three commandments...they are all kind of tied together anyway, in terms of the character and reverence for God. So, we are going to take three commandments in this show, and then the remaining seven will each get their own program in the next seven parts of this eight-part series.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, when I think of the first three commandments, Scott, I always think that they are having us look up. We are looking up at our relationship with God—how important he should be—and the priority he should take in our lives; and so, it makes sense for us to group these three together because they are all dealing with how we are supposed to interact with God, and how we are to understand him to interact with us.

SCOTT HOEZEE

First, of course, the Ten Commandments, Darrell, are part of a larger, really long section in the book of Exodus detailing tons and tons of laws, rules, regulations...

DARRELL DELANEY

Over six hundred...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; ceremonial laws, worship rules, all kinds of housekeeping details; but the other thing that is really important to remember is when were these laws first given? They were given after the Exodus from Egypt. They were given after the parting of the Red Sea and the defeat of the Egyptians in pursuit. They were given after God had fulfilled one of his key promises to Abraham, which was to make a mighty nation out of his heirs; and that timing, Darrell, is important in terms of when the law came.

DARRELL DELANEY

I love that you brought that out, Scott. So, God delivers, God saves, God does miraculous things in the lives and in the history of Israel; and then, out of the new life that they need to live after that, God gives them parameters on how that life should go. So, it is not that the law comes first: These are the criteria by which you need to be saved. No; the salvation comes initially, and then out of gratitude of how God has done that, he is showing us in his grace how to live; and that is what he did for the people of Israel.

Scott Hoezee:

Exactly; if he had given the Ten Commandments while the people were still in slavery and said: Hey, once you get really good at this...once you get really good moral people...I will consider rescuing you. Well, then it would have been up to them, right? But they were rescued first. Grace comes first; and keeping the law comes second, as an act of gratitude. So, that is important to remember just in general. That is part of our grateful living. It is also important to remember that even though a lot of the ceremonial laws and stuff has been set aside, the Ten Commandments are sort of evergreen. These are the core commandments that still apply to anybody anywhere, and also to us as Christians saved by Jesus. This shows us how we should live.

DARRELL DELANEY

The standard by which they show us...they are always going to be helpful to us. They are always going to be a way for us to develop a holier character in our lives. They are never going to be expired—they are never going to go away; and the good news is, we don't use them to earn our way to get into good graces with God. We already have that but thanks to his grace; and so, now he has given us a way to walk alongside him and to honor him in the way we live.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; so, as we said at the beginning of this episode, the Ten Commandments tell us how life is. This is the way things are; this is like the owner's manual for life on earth. This is how it works; so, they are never going to go away; but it begins by knowing who is who. Looking up, as you said, Darrell. So, let's listen to the first three commandments from Exodus 20:

And God spoke all these words: ²"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ³You shall have no other gods before me. (one) ⁴You 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. (That is the second commandment.) ⁵You 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 the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. ⁷You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name."

So, there they are, Darrell: No idols, no images, no blaspheming.

DARRELL DELANEY

I see, Scott, these as like the beads on the same necklace; that whole cord that holds them together is keeping God first; remembering that this is the God who brought you out of Egypt—the God who has done all these things. It is really important that God always reminds them of who he is and what he has done first before he gives them the commandment; and so, if they keep God first...it's interesting how we see all over the world in other places, and in other countries around Israel, there is always someone trying to push their god...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And their ways of doing things, and these idols that they have made...these images that they have made...as always trying to encroach on God's actual, rightful territory of being the God of all the universe.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The Egyptians worshipped Pharoah as a god, and the sun and the sky—Ra. The Babylonians had Marduk; and of course, we know the Canaanites had Baal and Asherah; and sometimes we saw evil kings like Nebuchadnezzar, who would declare himself a god, and he would ask Daniel, and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to bow the knee to him...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, there was always that competition, but law #1—Commandment #1—is clear: No gods instead of the one true God...no gods in addition to this God or alongside him. We are going to think about that before this program is over, too; but then, Darrell, the second law is no images...don't make an image of anything.

DARRELL DELANEY

When I think of images, I think of things that are already created...birds, animals, or things of that nature, and it is inappropriate to give creator status to created things...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is a problem, because the God of the universe is the Creator, and deserves this thing, but then, this image...if we look at our Reformed tradition, the image thing, we kind of decided to guard against because we saw in other places and other traditions that these images became more important than they were worth; and so, there had been a, I think, pendulum swing to the opposite side to make sure that it didn't happen; but we kind of lost something if we took that extremely serious, Scott...we lost something there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; not to have any art, or to criticize the iconography tradition of the Orthodox tradition; that doesn't necessarily mean we are worshipping a false god, but this commandment about images does give us a good warning, because, you know, you and I both, and everybody on earth, we tend to make God look like us...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is always dangerous, right? Somebody said: If horses had a god, it would be a horse...that would be a big horse, right? So, we want to be sure that any images we use in the artwork we have doesn't start to put God in a box. So, this is a good warning; and then, thirdly, Darrell, don't misuse God's holy name.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, you know, if you stub your toe and you say a four-letter word that goes in front of...and we have used God's name inappropriately, and when we call on him when we are not even actually using his name, when we are swearing by his name, or when we are promising, as in making oaths or whatnot, those things are inappropriate because the scripture tells us to make our yes, yes, and our no, no. You cannot take God's sacred name and pretty much drag it through the mud. That is what this command is, and that usually was what they call blasphemy when that happens...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DARRELL DELANEY

Now, in tradition of scripture, we see people who got stoned for that. I call it a rock concert. You get a rock concert if you blaspheme. If you claim to be God, or if you use God's name inappropriately. So, they decided not to use it, and eventually they forgot how to pronounce it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, exactly; another pendulum swing. But that is what blasphemy does, Darrell. We have talked about it before on *Groundwork*. What blasphemy does is it steals sacred language...or the names of God, or today we say also the name of Jesus...or it steals sacred symbols. So, think about what the Ku Klux Klan has done to the cross. A symbol of grace and hope now gets burned on the front yards of somebody as a symbol of hate. The total opposite of what the cross should be. It corrupts it; and so also with God's name...Yahweh...Jesus' name now...we turn it into a swear word because you hit your thumb with a hammer or you know, you just use it flippantly: Oh, no; I swear to God; I'm telling you the truth, really. That cheapens God's holy name, and we want to keep that name for what we truly want to do with it, which is proper worship, which we are going to look at in the next segment, so stay tuned.

Segment 2

DARRELL DELANEY

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, one of the things we say to our seminary students at Calvin Seminary, where I teach preaching, among other things...we always kind of warn them: In your sermons, don't let examples of sin be more interesting or colorful than examples of grace and virtue, and that can happen pretty easily because, you know, just turn on the news any given day and you are going to find plenty examples of sin...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But we want the good side of life...the grace side of life...to be equally colorful and vivid.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is really easy for us to sensationalize sin and romanticize sin, and make it more important than the virtues and the good things that God says are offered that are good for us. I think it is important for us to continue to remember the virtues of Christ and the virtues of God, and how he is blessing us. So, we need to look at that in the scripture to see where the virtues and beautiful things shine.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And so, in this series on the Ten Commandments, on every program, yes, we are going to talk about what sin the law is forbidding, yes; but we also want to look at the flipside, the positive things. What does following this law let us do, which is good and joyful and celebrative? And these three laws...not having any other gods, not worshipping an idol or an image, and not taking God's name in vain, or using it as a flippant swear word...what that allows us to do positively is we keep the name of Jesus and we keep the name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for their true place, which is worship and proper adoration of God; and a lot of the psalms talk about that. I mean, everybody has got to worship something, the old song says...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But we get to know who the right person is to worship.

DARRELL DELANEY

Look at what it says in Psalm 99. It says: ²Great is the Lord in Zion; he is exalted over all the nations. ³Let them praise your great and awesome name—he is holy. ⁴The king is mighty, he loves justice—you have established equity; in Jacob you have done what is just and right. ⁵Exalt the Lord our God, and worship at his footstool; he is holy.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is who our God is, and that is who we get to worship, and he is holy. We did a series on *Groundwork* not long ago about how God is faithful even when change in our life is inevitable. God is faithful, and we get to worship this God. You know, Darrell, sometimes out in the wider world we refer to a certain person as a “fallen idol.” Maybe it is a celebrity or a sports superstar, unfortunately, sometimes even a Christian religious leader. These are people who are admired by millions, people whose talents in acting or singing or playing basketball inspired us and moved us. Maybe it was a preacher whose sermons always shined with beauty; but then, a scandal comes...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then we say: Oh, it's a fallen idol.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think that happens because: 1) We underestimate the power of sin and our human frailty. 2) We place people higher than they should be placed...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

But when we worship our God, we place God in the high and lifted up place that God is worthy and deserves to be in, not just because of what he has done, but because of who he is. Now, when we try to do that with humanity, we are going to be disappointed every single time, and this is the part that makes us disappointed when we look at who we put on a pedestal, so to speak, and then they have a mistake or they fall off or they do something wrong, we put too much stock into them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and it is heartbreaking. I mean, depending particularly, Darrell, when a pastor or a preacher, you know...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Falls down in scandal, that can just kind of corrupt a whole congregation and just bring a lot of people down and cast doubt on our faith; but it is wonderful to know that when it comes to God, and when it comes to our savior, Jesus Christ, that will never be a fallen god. God will always be faithful; and that is why we keep God's name holy, and we treat it specially; because listen to Paul in Romans 10: ⁹If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. ¹¹As scripture says, “Anyone who believes in him will

never be put to shame.” ¹²For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile—the same Lord is the Lord of all, and richly blesses all who call on him, ¹³for, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

DARRELL DELANEY

I love this, and I hold it dear in my heart as a promise; and so, Scott, when he says anyone who believes in him, being Christ...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Will never be put to shame, that is an assurance that we can pretty much hook our wagon to the faithfulness of God and who he says his character is; and the fact that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved—period—that there are no conditions, there are no caveats, there are no asterisks. That promise is sure.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and that is why we want to follow those first three commandments that we are looking at in this program, to keep God holy and in that proper space of reverence and awe, because when we keep the name of Jesus and when we keep Father, Son, and Holy Spirit...when we keep them pure...when we set them aside, we do so because it is, as you just said, Darrell, it is our very salvation. Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord...everyone who knows the name of Jesus...can be saved by that Jesus, and that is a wonderful gift. That kind of worship is also going to have a preview of the new creation...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Where we can worship purely in the beauty of holiness. But even now in our lives, it opens us up to singing, and Paul talks about that in Colossians 3.

DARRELL DELANEY

¹⁶Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷And whatever you do, whether in word or in deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

We get to sing those praises even now, and remembering when we set God’s name right, and when we put him in his rightful place, then good things can happen.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; let that message dwell in you richly is a very interesting phrase in the Greek language. It is a third person imperative, which doesn’t make any sense. They only use that kind of language when you are just really being emphatic: Let the word of Christ dwell in you, as Paul would say. Let it stick in you because it is going to fill you with singing, and that is why those first three commandments are so important in keeping God holy; but in just a moment, as we wrap up this program, we will think, Darrell, about some practical implications of all this, so stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And this is the first program of an eight-part series, Darrell, on the Ten Commandments; and we are taking the first three commandments on no other gods, not bowing down before any images, and not taking God's name in vain—not swearing by it. It really all keeps...as we were just saying at the end of the last segment...it is all about keeping God in God's proper place of holy reverence in our lives; but the problem is, as John Calvin once noted, the human heart is a perpetual idol factory...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are constantly manufacturing false gods.

DARRELL DELANEY

Unfortunately, because of our brokenness, Scott, I don't think we can help it. The good news is that God has given us the opportunity to name those, surrender those, and put him in his rightful place; and I think that is one of the reasons why he had to give his people the Ten Commandments in the first place, so they could know that that wasn't appropriate, and that God needs to be restored to his appropriate place in our hearts and in our lives.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And, I guess that God mentioned it first because it is of first importance, and that probably means that it is also something that we are going to struggle with and need to be aware of. When my daughter was in high school religion class years ago, they were given an assignment. They had to find one New Testament verse to accompany each of the Ten Commandments, and so for these first couple of ones, my daughter eventually went to 1 John...the first letter of John, Chapter 5. This is the very end of the letter; in fact, what I am about to read will be the last words of 1 John. John wrote:

²⁰We know also that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son, Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. (And now, here is the last line of John's letter:) ²¹Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

DARRELL DELANEY

Zinger!

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

He hits them right with a zinger right before he walks right out the door. He says: Oh, one more thing...BOOM! And what is interesting to me is that even though John may be talking about wood and stone and animals and birds of that nature, then when we fast-forward to this time, those idols have not gone away, they have just changed in form. There are digital idols, there are technological idols, and more updated ones that are constantly around us; and we still need to heed this warning to keep ourselves from idols.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Sage advice. Now, sometimes some of us might think: Well, I do, you know; I don't worship false gods; I mean, yes; we know there are gods out there like Allah or Vishnu or Shiva or Confucius--gods of other religions; but we are not terribly tempted to worship those, so, you know, I probably don't have a problem with idolatry or worshipping the wrong god. I know who God is...but, here is the thing: The classic Reformed confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, makes great comments on all the Ten Commandments. We will probably be coming back to it a lot in this series; but here is what it says is the meaning of these first commands. This is a quote from the Heidelberg Catechism: Idolatry is having or inventing something in

which one trusts in place of, or *alongside of* the only true God. It's the alongside of part that scares me.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is a convicting line because we often, if we are honest, Scott, we try to help God in certain situations, or we think God needs an addition to, and that can be dangerous, especially if God wants to be number one. Do we go to him as our ultimate source of trust or do we think we need to help that out? That is really tricky.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; we sing: In Christ alone my hope is found...but, in the back of our minds, we also think: Yeah, but I really like having all that money in the bank, and my stock market portfolio is pretty good. I've got a solid retirement portfolio...

DARRELL DELANEY

Your 401k is good...

SCOTT HOEZEE

In Christ alone, and these other things help; and Jesus knew this, right? I mean, the Sermon on the Mount, right? No one can serve two masters; either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money; but there are other idols other than money as well.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, what is interesting about what Jesus says is that you cannot serve two masters...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we will think we are being devoted to one, but if our time, if our energy, if our thoughts, if our emotional connection is with the other, then that is our master...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, we have to have an honest conversation with the Lord and people who we are accountable to, to see where that time and energy goes. I spend a lot of time with people who are in relationships, whether they are good or bad, whether they are healthy or unhealthy, this is a litmus test that I have for them, Scott: How much time, how much energy, how much resources do you spend in it versus how much time you spend in the Word or in devotion or in prayer? Because you will know if that person's heart is moving away from God or toward him in those situations.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is right; we might spend more time thinking about how glamorous or physically beautiful or handsome we are. We make an idol out of our appearance. In America, we make a big idol out of success...

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We pour all our energy...I mean, look at that singing show, right? It is even called *American Idol*...right? Who is going to be the next American idol? They call it that for a reason. There is the seductive idol of political power; and some churches have been seduced by wanting to get more political power. All of these

things...oh, they don't take God's place...I mean, we don't worship them...we don't sing hymns to them...but maybe it is that alongside of thing again, that kind of scares us. You were just mentioning about your litmus test. It reminds me of the movie: *The Devil Wears Prada*. We see this young woman named Andy, and she gets slowly sucked into and seduced by the world of high fashion and glamor, working for a very high-profile person, who demands 24/7 commitment. She has to be available every minute of the day, and it puts a real strain on her relationship with her boyfriend; and so, she is trying to tell him: No, no, no, no; you are still the most important to me. It is ten o'clock at night, her cellphone rings, it's her boss, she says: I've gotta take this, and her boyfriend says: Yeah, you know, the person whose calls you always have to take? That is who is really important to you. That is what we need to guard against, that we are not more: Dear children, keep yourselves from idols, the Apostle John warned us, and not just the idols that take the place of God, but that go alongside of God.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think that if we remember these three commandments, and keep God priority, then it will help to guard our hearts, like the Apostle John is telling us, and that is something we are going to need each and every day. Thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney. We hope you will join us again next time as we study the fourth Commandment and discuss what it means to remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Connect with us at groundworkonline.com to share what *Groundwork* means to you, or tell us what you would like to hear discussed next on *Groundwork*.

DARRELL DELANEY

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