

DATE: April 11, 2010

**TITLE: "TO PUT GOD FIRST"**

Series: Back to basics. Number 1 of 10

Exodus 20:1-3

\*\* PROP Big display – "Back to Basics" - work with logo and Trevor etc.

**INTRODUCTION:**

The Ten Commandments or in Hebrew the Decalogue, or literally ten words are relevant for the church today.

**ILLUSTRATION: Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (Matthew 5:17)**

This morning we are going to begin our journey by focusing on what is commonly known as the first commandment.

It is simply a commandment to put God first.

**I. (v.1-2) TO PUT GOD FIRST YOU MUST RECOGNIZE WHO GOD IS AND WHO GOD IS TO YOU**

**(Exodus 20:1-2) "And God spoke all these words: 'I am the Lord your God...'"**

1. The first four commandments deal with our vertical relationship with God and the rest deals with our relationship with others.
2. In these Ten Commandments or principles, we have the foundation for connecting with God and with others.

**ILLUSTRATION: John Slagter one of our precious people, who is now with the Lord said his favorite verse of the Bible was, "In the Beginning God."**

3. He understood that God is the center of it all.
4. To get back to the basics we must get back to God and our relationship with Him.

**ILLUSTRATION: (\*majestic background) H.G. Wells was never particularly religious, but after he had studied the history of the human race and had observed human life, he came to an interesting conclusion: "Religion is the first thing and the last thing, and until a man has found God and been found by God, he begins at no beginning, he works to no end. He may have his friendships, his partial loyalties, his scraps of honor. But all these things fall into place and life falls into place only with God."**

5. God is center stage.
6. The clear assertion is that God's first words to Israel at Sinai were spoken directly by God Himself to all the people.
7. The whole stress is that these commandments are words of revelation from God.
8. God is not silent about Himself.
9. God is a God who speaks and in this passage God speaks to us about who He is.
10. God is the one who has given us guidelines for living, for these are not from man.
11. God is the authority.
12. God chooses to identify Himself by saying, "I am the Lord your God," or in other words, "I am Jehovah your Elohim."
13. We must stop here for a moment to breathe in and soak up the significance and meaning of God's declaration about Himself.

**ILLUSTRATION: Several years ago in Britain researchers went door to door asking persons about their belief in God. One of their questions; "Do you believe in a God who intervenes in human history, who changes the course of affairs, who**

performs miracles, etc. When published their study took as its title the response of one man who was seen as rather typical of those who responded. He answered, "NO, I don't believe in that God, I just believe in the ordinary God."

14. God is no ordinary God for God is nothing less than God completely.

15. God is the unique God for there is no other like Him.

**(\*Majestic background with this) "How great you are, O Sovereign Lord! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears." (II Samuel 7:22)**

16. We are asking the classes to study the characteristics of God because we must know who He is.

17. As one theologian said, "An unknown God can neither be trusted, served, nor worshipped."

18. Knowing God better is a burning need for every one of us.

**(Jeremiah 9:23-24) states; "This is what the Lord says; 'Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' declares the Lord."**

19. To know God means more than just to know about God, for a theoretical knowledge of God can still leave us shallow in our relationship with Him.

20. We must know Him intimately and personally within our souls.

21. The soul is never satisfied with just information about God.

22. We must get our idea of God right and a right idea of God comes from God.

23. The God you believe in will mold your life.

24. The God we listen to determines the life we live.

25. Our perception of God matters.

**ILLUSTRATION: (\*Picture of book) Brad Bright in his book, God is the Issue, was right when he wrote, "The only way to truly change who we are is to change our view of God."**

26. The word declares God is an I, and not an it, for God is the living God.

27. The word says, "I am."

**EXAMPLE: (\*Picture of this with scripture) The very phrasing of this opening line is reminiscent of Moses' initial encounter with God at the burning bush over forty years earlier when God instructed Moses to inform the Israelites of His name. "God said to Moses, 'I am who I am.' This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I Am has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:14)**

28. This is a meaningful and powerful name for God.

**ILLUSTRATION: (\*John draw cartoon of this. Second one with words, "I'm not that I'm not!") "While watching the movie, The Ten Commandments, on television, four-year-old Melissa learned that one of God's names is, "I am that I am." For days after, true to her contrary style, Melissa strode around the house pronouncing, "I'm not that I'm not!"**

29. In contrast to the little girl, God is the I Am.

30. God is the I Am, the one who is all sufficient.

31. The Israelites did not need any other God, for no other God is needed.

32. God is the all sufficient God who meets our every need.

33. God is the all sufficient God who sent His Son Jesus to be our all sufficient Savior and Lord.
34. In the New Testament, Jesus is the I Am. (\*\*Slides go through each of these statements quickly with a picture of each)
- **Jesus said, I am the Messiah;**
  - **Jesus said, I am the Bread of Life;**
  - **Jesus said, I am from Above;**
  - **Jesus said, I am, the Eternal One;**
  - **Jesus said, I am, the Light of the World;**
  - **Jesus said, I am the Door;**
  - **Jesus said, I am the Son of God;**
  - **Jesus said, I am the Resurrection and the Life;**
  - **Jesus said, I am the Lord and Master;**
  - **Jesus said, I am, The Way, Truth and Life;**
  - **Jesus said, I am the True Vine;**
  - **Jesus said, I am the Alpha and Omega;**
  - **Jesus said, I am the First and the Last.**
35. Jesus is the sufficient Savior, for God is the all sufficient God.
36. The Hebrew word Jehovah is translated here as God refers to the supreme eternal self-existent One.
37. The whole name Jehovah is translated here as the Lord carries the concept of, “He that will be, He that is, and He that was.”
38. Revelation 4 gives the picture of the living creatures giving praise and glory to God. 24:7 saying: (\*Majestic background) **“...Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.” (Revelation 4:8)**
39. Jehovah is the highest name ever breathed from the lips of man.
40. The words translated “your God,” emphasis the personal intimacy we are to have with God.
41. He is transcendent, eternal, and unapproachable, but He is also personal, omnipresent, and knowable.
- EXAMPLE: Turn with me in your Bibles to Psalm 23. Psalm 23 is one of the most popular scriptures. It speaks of how personal God is.**
- “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteous for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”**
42. The scripture says, **“I am the Lord your God.”**
43. The word for God here in the Hebrew is Elohim, the plural of the word Eloah, meaning the supreme object of worship.
44. God is is the all sufficient, supreme eternal, self-existent God which was, and is, and is to come, personal and to be worshipped.

**During his long career as pastor of New York's Riverside Church, the late H. E. Fosdick, spent many hours counseling students from nearby Columbia University. One evening a distraught young man burst into Fosdick's study and announced, "I have decided that I cannot and do not believe in God!" Fosdick said, "All right, but describe for me the God you don't believe in." The student sketched out his idea of God. When he was finished, Fosdick said to him, "Well, we're in the same boat. I don't believe in that god either."**

45. God is the great I Am.
46. God is nothing less than who He really is.
47. To put God first, we must let God be God.
48. Put God first because of who He is and who He is to me personally.
49. You put God first when you realize who He is and who He is to you personally.

## **II. (v.2) TO PUT GOD FIRST YOU MUST REMEMBER WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR YOU**

**"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."(Exodus 20:2)**

1. The demands of the law are based on who God is and what God has done for you.
2. God continues to identify himself by reminding them of what He had done for them.
3. He is the living God active in Israel history and in the lives of people.
4. God stepped into their lives and brought them out of Egypt where they were slaves.  
**ILLUSTRATION: (\*On screen) A few weeks ago I had the privilege with other pastors of interviewing some who are called to ministry for renewal of or granting of their minister's license. As part of that there was a particular question that we were to ask them and grade them upon. The question was, "Give a summary of the story of God's interaction with man, according to the Bible, starting with Adam and Eve. Please provide pertinent dates or timeframes." One of those key events we were looking for was the Exodus, possibly (1491 B.C.)**
5. The term Exodus means, "A going out, a way out, or departure."
6. It refers to Israel's deliverance, under Moses' leadership, from over 400 years of Egyptian bondage.
7. Israel had labored under a Pharaoh who not only claimed divinity, but refused to recognize Yahweh as God in the land, but through the deliverance of His people God revealed He truly was God.
8. The Exodus signifies a victorious deliverance and symbolizes redemption.
9. God redeemed and brought His people out.
10. They could not set themselves free, but God intervened through His grace and set the people free.
11. God is a God of grace.
12. Their relationship with God is rooted in history, and that history is one of God's interventions for their benefit.  
**But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh King of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 7:8)**

13. Yahweh reminded the people that He is the Redeemer God.
14. They were redeemed because God redeemed them or set them free.
15. God saved them through redemption which was the means.
16. Salvation is the end result of redemption.
17. If you are saved today it is because God's redemption was possible only by His grace.
18. Remember what God has done for you.
19. God sent a redeemer, for He is the redeemer sent to set us free from the bondage of sin.

**(\*Picture) "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace."(Ephesians 1:7)**

20. As the people of God were redeemed by grace, so are we redeemed by grace.
21. As the people of God were redeemed from bondage, so are we redeemed from the bondage of sin.

**ILLUSTRATION: (\*Picture of him etc. with song) In the 1980's Melody Green, wife of deceased songwriter and singer Keith Green, wrote "There is a Redeemer, Jesus, God's own Son, Precious Lamb of God, Messiah, and Holy One."**

22. There is a Redeemer.
23. We must remember that we are called to be a redeemed people.
24. If you have been redeemed through the precious blood of Jesus you are to live a redeemed life.
25. The commandments were given to Israel not so they could perhaps gain salvation by keeping them, but because God had already redeemed them and this was how they were to live in the light of that fact.
26. Some have misunderstood the end of God's grace, which is the fulfillment of the law.
27. God is reminding them that He had redeemed them through grace and is now saying, "Obey Me, keep my commandments, and live in the freedom I have provided you."

**ILLUSTRATION: Years ago Tolstoi, the humanist said, "The distinctive mark of this age is its lost sense of God."**

28. The tragedy today is the lost sense of who God is and what He has done for us.
  29. We must remember that we are redeemed and that we have a Redeemer.
- "Praise the Lord, O my Soul, and forget not all his benefits-who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion." (Psalm 103:2-3)**

30. Because of this we must live in the power and freedom of that redemption.
31. Through Christ we are free to live for God.

**"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." (Galatians 5:1)**

32. Live every day in the freedom we have in Christ, not in the bondage to sin.
- ILLUSTRATION: (\*\* PROP wood looking (simple) red if possible, Sailboat) A favorite story of the little boy who built a sailboat. He built the sail and had it all fixed up, tarred and painted. He took it to the lake and pushed it in hoping it would sail. Sure enough a wisp of breeze filled the little sail and it billowed and went rippling along the waves. Suddenly before the little boy knew it, the boat was out of his reach, even though he waded in fast and tried to grab it. As he watched it float away, he hoped maybe the breeze would shift and it would come sailing back to him.**

**Instead he watched it go farther and farther until it was gone. When he went home crying, his mother asked, "What's wrong, didn't it work?" And he said, "It worked too well."**

**Some time later, the little boy was downtown and walked past a second hand store. There in the window he saw the boat. It was unmistakably his, so he went in and said to the proprietor, "That's my boat." He walked to the window, picked it up and started to leave with it. The owner of the shop said, "Wait a minute, Sonny. That's my boat. I bought it from someone." The boy said, "No, it's my boat. I made it. See." And he showed him the little scratches and the marks where he hammered and filed. The man said, "I'm sorry, Sonny. If you want it, you have to buy it." The poor little guy didn't have any money, but he worked hard and saved his pennies. Finally, one day he had enough money. He went in and bought the little boat. As he left the store holding the boat close to him, he was heard saying, "You're my boat. You're twice my boat. First you're my boat 'cause I made you and second you're my boat 'cause I bought you!"**

**If you ever think that you aren't worth much and if you think you're cheap, just remember what God thinks of you. He thinks you're His. Twice His. First you're His because He made you. And second you're His because He bought you on the cross. He paid a price to redeem you. So let go of your stress to God's care, and let go of your sins to God's cross.**

33. We must remember who we are and what God has done for us.

34. We are people loved and redeemed by the Lord our Redeemer.

35. Therefore we must live redeemed lives by putting God first.

### **III. (v.3) TO PUT GOD FIRST YOU MUST FULLFILL YOUR RESPONSIBILITY**

**(Exodus 20:3) "You shall have no other gods before me."**

1. The two prologue verses introduced the Ten Commandments and set the stage for the first commandments.

**ILLUSTRATION: Pastor Chris Hodges tells that in the early 1990's, several university professors passed out copies of the 10 Commandments to students and asked them to arrange the commandments in order of importance. Over 90% of the students rearranged the commandments and placed the commandments dealing with man's relationship with his fellow man above the commandments dealing with man's relationship with his God.**

2. The first commandment is first because it all starts with God.
3. The first of the Ten Commandments is basic to the nine that follow it.
4. It sets forth an expectation of God as our absolute priority.
5. The words, "You Shall," call for our attention.

**ILLUSTRATION: Broadcaster Ted Koppel speaking at Duke University's commencement ceremony several years ago reminded the students that the Ten Commandments are not God's ten ethical suggestions. This is law.**

6. He was highlighting the fact that this is a command and requirement.
7. The special relationship God wanted them to have could develop only if Israel committed themselves to Yahweh alone.

8. There is a personal relationship with God that can only take place when God is first in our lives.
9. God had given himself to them and they are therefore no longer to have any other gods save Him.
10. The Old Testament makes very clear in ancient Israel there were other gods people had in their lives.
11. The first commandment, in a sense, was called for by the many gods who wanted of Israel the allegiance and loyalty Yahweh alone had the right to command.
12. No other gods before me – literally before me is, “before my face.”
13. It carries the idea of in addition to me, side by side, or besides me.
14. Nothing is equal to God or on the same level.
15. This commandment is not given for just a few, for it is for each of us.
16. Each one of us must assume responsibility for not having other gods.
17. We live in a society where we blame others.

**ILLUSTRATION: (\*Frame on screen this poem) John Guest wrote a poem about blame. The last lines say.**

**“I’m so glad since I have learned that lesson so well taught,  
That everything I do that’s wrong is someone else’s fault.”**

18. This first commandment makes it clear there our relationship with God is our responsibility.

**ILLUSTRATION: Two kids sat down for lunch. One opened his lunchbox and began to gripe. “Baloney again?” This is the fourth day in a row! I’m sick and tired of baloney!” His friend said, “I Bet if you just tell your mom you don’t like baloney, she’ll fix you something else.”**

**“Mom?” replied the first kid. “I fix my own lunches.”**

19. It is my responsibility not to have anything in front of God.
20. Our personal happiness depends on our personal commitment to this responsibility.
21. Each of us must take responsibility to deal with the things that get in our way of God first.
22. Our individual excuses must be crucified at the cross.

**ILLUSTRATION: In an article for the Gospel Coalition, pastor and author Tim Keller offers this potent definition of sin: "Sin isn't only doing bad things, it is more fundamentally making good things into ultimate things. Sin is building your life and meaning on anything, even a very good thing, more than on God. Whatever we build our life on will drive us and enslave us. Sin is primarily idolatry."**

**ILLUSTRATION: A 2007 study by the Barna Group found that seven out of ten adults choose their earthly family over their heavenly Father when asked to choose the most important relationship to them. Of the 1,004 adults over the age of 18 that were surveyed.**

23. Who is first in your life?

**ILLUSTRATION: At the end of a long letter, C. S. Lewis wrote: “When first things are put first, second things are not suppressed but increased.”**

24. When God is first everything else falls into place.
25. God’s call is to love God.

**Example: An expert in the law asked which is the greatest commandment in the Law? “Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment.” (Matthew 22:37-38)**

26. Who is it I really trust?

27. Who do I adore?

**Example: Church of Ephesus.**

**“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first...” (Revelation 2:4-5)**

28. Repent is the translation of a Greek verb metanoeo, meaning to have another mind, to change the mind, and is used in the New Testament to indicate a change of mind in respect to sin, God, and self.

29. It is a word that calls for a change of direction.

30. It was a call to repent for forsaking their first love, which was sin.

31. Repenting is taking responsibility and admitting we are going in the wrong direction and doing something about it.

32. If something is pushing God out of first place in my life I must repent and turn from it.

33. First love requires action.

34. God wants our exclusive love.

35. There is nothing greater I can do but love God, everywhere we go, God must be first, for there is no place from which Yahweh’s presence is barred.

36. No other God before me is not a Sunday thing.

37. It is every moment of every day, God must be first in my life and have the number one place.

38. We cannot have divided devotion.

**“But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day, whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24:15)**

39. Jesus taught the same principle when He said,

**“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.” (Matthew 6:24)**

**ILLUSTRATION: “In World War I, Theodore Roosevelt blasted German-Americans who had divided loyalties. He called them, “Hyphenated Americans.” He said, “America is not a polyglot boarding house...If a man is an American and something else, he is not an American.” We can’t be hyphenated Christians! We cannot have divided devotion. That is the single most important fact of moral law.**

40. God does not call us to have a mixed up or man made God, but the true God first.

**ILLUSTRATION: In August 2009, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life conducted a survey to, “explore the complexity of faith in the modern world and the overlap between religions and other supernatural beliefs.”**

**Alan Cooperman, a member of the Pew Forum research team, concluded: "Mixing and matching practices and beliefs is much more the norm than the exception." Scott Thumma, a professor of sociology of religion at the Hartford Institute for Religious Research, said, "Today, the individual rarely finds all their spiritual needs in one congregation or one religion."**

41. God calls us back to make the one and true God our priority.

42. What are the other gods in our lives?

43. Other gods can include person, thing, ideology, or purpose.

**ILLUSTRATION: One theologian defined other gods as that upon which one relies; technology, appetites, sex, money, or self.**

44. We live in a nation where a variety of gods are served.

45. People have an allegiance to God, but they have an allegiance to other gods as well.

**ILLUSTRATION: One person said it this way, "I believe in God, but I have other priorities in my life."**

46. God is not just a piece of the pie.

47. Through His power I must deal with anything in my life that gets in the way of God.

48. God is not just one of many important things in my life.

**ILLUSTRATION: (Use three balls) I haven't juggled in over 25 years. Years ago I was, "Juggles the Clown." I would juggle balls at clubs and did the basic things to entertain. In juggling, the object is to keep a number of objects in the air.**

**Hold a ball for a second, toss it up in the air while you toss another one up. God has not called us to a juggling relationship with Him. God is not a juggling ball to be kept in the air along with all the other things. God is one of many things and then we add more and more. Eventually God is dropped.**

49. For some God is eliminated from the day because they have too many other things in their day.

50. For some, God is eliminated from their thoughts because they have too many other thoughts.

51. For some God is eliminated because they are too busy with other things.

52. Too many balls in the air is a reason God is not first for many.

53. Get God first and He will guide you in all other things.

54. Too many of us get caught in a balancing act in our life.

55. Our lives get out of balance when God is not where He should be.

56. If God is out of balance, our life is out of balance.

57. As a Christian I have a responsibility and privileged of putting God first.

58. If we center our life on people, we will be out of balance, for people will fail and control.

59. If we center our life on things, we will be out of balance, for things break and pass away.

60. If we center our life on what we can do or our identity, we will be out of balance, for we are limited.

61. If we center our life on pleasure, we will be out of balance, for pleasure is for the moment.

62. If we center our life on God, we will be in balance, for God is stable and is always right on.

63. When God is truly first, everything else will fall into place, for God will put other issues of life in their proper place.

64. When God is first, sin loses its fuzziness, for sin is exposed where God is truly Lord of all.

65. The priority of our lives is to make sure God is in the right place.

66. Put God first and everything else falls into place around Him.

**“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33)**

67. If God is on the throne of your life, He will put your life into order.

68. We spend too much of our time working on other things and not making sure God is where He needs to be.

69. You shall have not other gods before me, but you shall have me.

**“For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.” (I Corinthians 8:5-6)**

70. Sometimes we focus on the God we don't have instead of the God we do have.

71. We have the all powerful God.

72. We have the all compassionate God.

73. We have the all loving God.

74. God is enough when we put Him first.

**ILLUSTRATION: (\*\*PROP - Big rock (1-2 feet)—probably paper mache with words, “God First”) A high school science teacher wanted to demonstrate a concept to his students. He took a large-mouth jar and placed several large rocks in it. He then asks the class, “Is it full?” Unanimously, the class replies, “Yes.” The teacher then takes a bucket of gravel and pours it into the jar. The small rocks settle into the spaces between the big rocks. He then asks the class, “Is it full?” This time there are some students holding back, but most reply, “Yes.” The teacher then produces a large can of sand and proceeds to pour it into the jar. The sand fills up the spaces between the gravel. For the third time, the teacher asks, “Is it full?” Now most of the students are wary of answering, but again, many reply, “Yes.” Then the teacher brings out a pitcher of water and pours into the jar. The water saturates the sand.**

**At this point the teacher asks the class, “What is the point of this demonstration?” One bright young student raises his hand and then responds, “No matter how full one's schedule is in life, he can always squeeze in more things.”**

**“No,” replies the teacher, “The point is that unless you first place the big rocks into the jar, you are never going to get them in. The big rocks are the important things in your life---your God, your friends, your family, and your personal growth. If you fill your life with small things---as demonstrated by the gravel, the sand, and the water--- you will never have the time or the space for the important things.**

75. This commandment calls for a life dominated by a relationship with God.  
76. Is God first in your life?  
77. It is up to you.

CONCLUSION: God wants to be first in your life.

**I. (vs.1-2) TO PUT GOD FIRST, YOU MUST RECOGNIZE WHO GOD IS AND WHO GOD IS TO YOU**

**II. (v.2) TO PUT GOD FIRST, YOU MUST REMEMBER WHAT GOD HAS DONE FOR YOU**

**III. (v.3) TO PUT GOD FIRST, YOU MUST FULLFILL YOUR RESPONSIBILITY**