

Testify

Exodus 20:1-21

October 5, 2008

You know the commandments:

Worship no god but me ...

Nothing, no one, should take God's place. Nothing, no one, should be given higher priority, higher honor, in our lives than God. Not our children, not our jobs, not money, not our country.

Do not make for yourself images of anything ...

Because no image is the real thing. Any representation of God, even representations of ideas and language are something far less than the real thing. Our ideas about God are not God. We must let God shatter all our images, all our preconceptions. We must never think we have God figured out, because as soon as we do, we have lost touch with the living God altogether and are merely worshipping our own reflection.

Do not use my name for evil purposes ...

God's name is holy and should be treated as such, not tossed about casually in curses or exclamations. And God's name should not be paraded about shamelessly to add credibility to violent crusades of our own invention. There are crusades still, you know.

Observe the Sabbath and keep it holy ...

We need to stop the routine, regularly, so we won't be fooled into thinking the routine is life, that life is about producing and getting and having and winning. Life is about being. Life is about being with. We need to take a day, regularly, not to give back one day a week to God while we hang on to the other six, but to remember that all our days -- every one of them -- are God's gift to us.

Respect your father and mother ...

Not only because you owe it to them, but because you owe it to God.

Do not commit murder ...

We may have the power, but we never have the right, to take the life of any other human being, under any circumstance, period. The right to take life belongs only to the one who gave it.

Do not commit adultery ...

Because when we do, we shame the always faithful God who calls us into lives of faithfulness.

Do not steal ...

We must not take or make a profit on what belongs to someone else -- their money, their possessions, their ideas, their joy. We must not make a profit on something we have not earned, but have taken from someone else. By the way, isn't this what the banking crisis is about? Making a profit on something not earned, but taken from someone else? Isn't it about stealing?

Do not accuse anyone falsely ...

Lies, gossip, innuendo, half-truths. It may all be business as usual in politics, but that doesn't make it right. It is never right to use language as a weapon -- speaking to hurt instead of speaking the truth -- not against any person, not against any nation, however virtuous you may think your cause to be.

Do not desire what belongs to someone else ...

Because to do so shows no gratitude for what God has provided and no trust in what God will provide. It's a slap in God's face.

You know the commandments, but do you know their purpose? It's right there at the beginning, at the beginning of this list of ten commandments: *I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves.*

I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you were slaves. Worship no god but me. Is God saying: "I saved you. Now you owe it to me!"? Well, yes! But it's more than that.

God's act has a purpose. God brought the descendants of Abraham out of Egypt to save them, to free them, and to make them his own. God brought them out to give them a new life in a new place with a new purpose and the commandments give shape and form to that new life. God didn't bring them out of slavery in Egypt only to have them fall prey to other kinds of slavery. Their lives will be full and rich and good as they live in communion with God and with each other, so the commandments are God's gift to them, to protect them and enrich their lives and ensure their well-being. But it's more still than that!

I am the Lord your God! They are the Lord's people and the Lord is their God. God identifies himself with them, and they will reflect in their lives, for better or for worse, who God is. They are called out of Egypt to fulfill God's call to Abraham, to be a witness people, to be a people through whom all the nations of the world will be blessed, because in their words, in their worship, in their lives, people will see and come to know the living God. They are called to testify, to testify by their faithfulness to God and by their righteousness in their relationships with each other, to who God is and to what God does.

We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father, and to your deeds we testify ...

How do you testify to God's deeds? How do you offer a compelling witness to the reality, the benefit, the glory, of what God has done? If it is only with your words, who will believe you? Or who will believe you for long? We testify to God's deeds with our deeds.

How do we testify to the God who *calls the worlds into being and creates persons in God's own image*?

We testify to the God who is creator by taking good care of the world God has made, and by treating with great respect every human being made in God's image.

How do we testify to the God who *seeks in holy love to save all people from aimlessness and sin*?

People will begin to believe there really may be a loving God when we love them. When we love them. Not when say nice things to them, but when give something of ourselves away to provide them a healthier, happier, fuller life.

How do we testify to the God who *judges people and nations by God's righteous will*?

People will believe in justice, believe there is a God who is just, when they see us standing up for justice, even when it puts us at risk, even when it may run against our own best interests.

How do we testify to the God who comes to us in Jesus Christ *conquering sin and death*?

By demonstrating that sin and death are conquered. By clearly working hard -- and succeeding -- in overcoming the sin in our own lives, and by showing that we are not afraid of death.

How do we testify to the God who *binds in covenant faithful people of all ages, tongues, and races*?

By crossing boundaries that most people won't cross. By welcoming people most people won't welcome. By bringing together the kind of diverse church community that can't be explained any other way than as a group of people brought together by the grace and love of God.

How do we testify to the God who *calls us into the church to be disciples, to be servants, to proclaim good news and resist evil*?

By following Jesus eagerly. By serving people gladly. By sharing our faith boldly. And by standing up to evil even when everybody else is silent. If we are ashamed or embarrassed or closed or timid about our faith, who will think we know anything about a God worth believing in?

How do we testify to the God who calls us *to join [Christ] in his passion and victory*?

By showing that we really do follow a different way, that we don't choose the path that is easiest, most comfortable, least threatening, of most benefit to ourselves, but the path to which God points us, even when that path is hard, even when we know we will suffer along the way, even when we cannot see where the path leads but must trust ourselves entirely to the grace of God.

When people see a church or a Christian who values the things everybody else values -- success, a good reputation, comfortable surroundings, a high return/low risk lifestyle -- why should they think that church or that Christian has anything important to say to them?

But when people see a church or a Christian joining Christ in his passion, joining him in his self-giving passion for the lowest and the least, for the most vulnerable and the most ignored, then they may think we do have something important to say about the One in whom we believe.

We believe in you, O God, Eternal Spirit, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and our Father, and to your deeds we testify ...

Will you testify?