

Such a God must be Revered!

Ex 19:16-20:1-3; LD 34 Q&A 94-95

Pre-recorded video message for Members of the

Reformed Church of Wainuiomata

For listening on the evening of 3 May 2020 (sixth Sunday after
lockdown started)

(Sermon put together by Pieter van Huyssteen)¹

Song before service: Organist to choose, please

Reading before the worship: Congregation, long ago, God humbled Israel to teach them something very important! Well, He still does the same with us. Deut 8:3 says:

He (God) humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your fathers had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.

Silent Prayer

START OF SERVICE

- 1 Votum: Our help is in the Name of the Lord, our God, the Maker of heaven and earth.
- 2 Greeting: Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father & from the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.
- 3 **SttL 98b:1,2 (= Blue Ps/H 192:1,2) “Unto God our Saviour sing a joyful song; ...”**
- 4 Profession of Faith
The Apostles’ Creed
I believe in God the Father, Almighty,
Maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord;
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary;
suffered under Pontius Pilate,

¹ Apart from God’s Word, I’m greatly indebted to the wonderful & comprehensive work of DOUMA, J. (1996. The Ten Commandments; manual for the Christian life. Translated by N.D. Kloosterman. Phillipsburg : P&R Publishing. 533p), which has been the main source of my studies towards writing this sermon.

was crucified, dead, and buried;
he descended into hell¹;
the third day he rose again from the dead;
he ascended into heaven,
and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty;
from there he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit.
I believe a holy catholic² church, the communion of saints;
the forgiveness of sins;
the resurrection of the body;
and the life everlasting.

Amen.

5 SttL 98b:3 (= Blue Ps/H 192:3) “Waves of mighty ocean...”

6 Scripture Readings: Ex 19:16-20:1-3; LD 34 Q&A 94-95

16 So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who *were* in the camp trembled.

17 And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

The LORD Visits Sinai

18 Now Mount Sinai *was* all in smoke because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently.

19 When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder.

20 The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

21 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, “Go down, warn the people, so that they do not break through to the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish.

22 “Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, or else the LORD will break out against them.”

23 Moses said to the LORD, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You warned us, saying, ‘Set bounds about the mountain and consecrate it.’ ”

24 Then the LORD said to him, “Go down and come up *again*, you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, or He will break forth upon them.”

25 So Moses went down to the people and told them.

Chapter 20

The Ten Commandments

- 1 Then God spoke all these words, saying,
- 2 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.
- 3 “You shall have no other gods before Me.²

94 Q. What does the Lord require in the first commandment?

- A. That I, not wanting to endanger my very salvation, avoid and shun all idolatry,¹ magic, superstitious rites,² and prayer to saints or to other creatures.³

That I sincerely acknowledge the only true God,⁴ trust him alone,⁵ look to him for every good thing⁶ humbly⁷ and patiently,⁸ love him,⁹ fear him,¹⁰ and honour him¹¹ with all my heart.

In short, that I give up anything rather than go against his will in any way.¹²

¹ 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; 10:5–14; 1 John 5:21.

² Leviticus 19:31; Deuteronomy 18:9–12.

³ Matthew 4:10; Revelation 19:10; 22:8, 9.

⁴ John 17:3.

⁵ Jeremiah 17:5, 7.

⁶ Psalm 104:27, 28; James 1:17.

⁷ 1 Peter 5:5, 6.

⁸ Colossians 1:11; Hebrews 10:36.

⁹ Matthew 22:37 (Deuteronomy 6:5).

¹⁰ Proverbs 9:10; 1 Peter 1:17.

¹¹ Matthew 4:10 (Deuteronomy 6:13).

¹² Matthew 5:29, 30; 10:37–39.

95 Q. What is idolatry?

- A. Idolatry is having or inventing something in which one trusts in place of or alongside of the only true God, who has revealed himself in his Word.¹

¹ 1 Chronicles 16:26; Galatians 4:8, 9; Ephesians 5:5; Philippians 3:19.

7 Sermon

² [*New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*](#). (1995). (Ex 19:16–20:3). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

Introduction (The Awe-Inspiring Sinai Event)

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

The Law-giving at Mt Sinai fills (makes up) some of the most impressive & awe-inspiring pages of Holy Scripture!

Every circumstance surrounding this major event simply fills the air with the glorious majesty of the All-powerful God. No other nation received their laws quite like this!

Just picture the scene of Ex 19&20:

- *That* day, all of Mt Sinai became the pedestal of God's presence!³
- Just imagine the limits that God set around the foot of the mountain so that neither human nor animal would touch this mighty pedestal on which the glory of the Creator God would appear that day!
- Imagine the thunder & lightning⁴ by which God's voice went out over His people!⁵
- The fire in which the Lord descended!⁶
- The smoke that billowed up from the mountain like smoke from a huge furnace!⁷
- The earthquake that shook Sinai to its very foundations!⁸
- According to other passages in Scripture,⁹ there were also present that day at Sinai, a whole host of heavenly beings (angels)! And automatically your mind goes to the heavenly hosts who would later on again appear over Bethlehem's field to again announce God's presence, a presence that descended that day in a very unique way: the birth of God's Son!

³ His shekhinah

⁴ Ex 19:16

⁵ See Ex 19:9 for God's voice being audible through this cloud & thunder. Remember: God's voice going out to our Lord Jesus was also perceived by the crowd as thunder or as angels speaking. Cf. Jn 12:28-29 **Father, glorify your name!** "Then a voice came from heaven, **"I have glorified it, and will glorify it again."** ²⁹ *The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.*

⁶ Ex 19:18a

⁷ Ex 19:18b

⁸ Ex 19:18c

⁹ Acts 7:53 *you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it.* Gal 3:19 *What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator.* Hb 2:2 *For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, ³ how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation?*

Well, about ten years ago, there was an enormously strong wind blowing in the Foxton, Shannon & Palmerston North area. The front door of the manse was blown right open even though it was locked. Farm sheds in the area were flying across state highways. I had never before lived through such a storm! All people were stunned by the strong winds which God in His wisdom allowed for us (just one aspect of God's power)!

Now, imagine the awe that filled God's people there at the foot of Mt Sinai when not just wind, but thunder, lightning, smoke, fire, and earthquake all displayed God's awe-inspiring presence.

You see, my brother & sister, the entire Mt Sinai, enveloped in God's holiness, drives us to acknowledge that we stand here in front of a unique event – an event which significance we can never overestimate!

It's a watershed event in history!

Why? Well that brings us to point 1...

1. The Sinai Law & The Pre-Fall Law

For, you see, regarding its intent,¹⁰ is not the law given at Sinai the same as the law which was embedded in the heart of man before the Fall?¹¹

And why did God embed such a law in the heart of man before the Fall?

Is it not so that the whole creation should not only be at harmony with *itself* but also with *God*; that all things, including man's walk with God, would go in an orderly way? Is that not why the Apostle Paul said, *For God is not a God of disorder but of peace?*¹²

Thus:

- just as we have the sea that moves by fixed rules between high tide and low tide;
- just as we have the plants developing according to God's fixed laws of growth;

¹⁰ Or 'tenor, sense, meaning'

¹¹ Cf. Knap (1915:346) "... dat namelijk de wet, die op Sinai gegeven werd, wat de strekking aangaat, even dezelfde is als die, welke den mensch vóór den val als zijn innerlijke levenswet was ingeschapen."

¹² 1 Cor 14:33

- just as the stone or avalanche (roaring down the mountain slope) is simply obeying the fixed law of gravity,
- so, man once (before the Fall) automatically walked in the path of obedience laid out for Him by God.

But, of course, the Fall brought a terrible spiritual & moral derailment.

Yes, through our forefather, Adam, you & I lost the natural obedience he had to God's law!

And if this course was not stopped by God's grace, then its end would just have been total destruction for you & me.

So, by His grace, God (at this time in the history of man's salvation) brings back the same law as man had before the Fall, the same law except – the *form* in which God brings it has changed because of sin: whereas, before the Fall, the law was a positive desire in man's heart, now (because of man's natural bent to sin) God gives him the law in the form of a *prohibition*. But the law's content remains the same.

2. The Law's Three Functions

Brothers & sisters, although God's law which He gave to His people there, that day, at Mt Sinai, would never *save* His people (that task was reserved for the complete Sacrifice), the law was nevertheless of great importance, for you see, to the person who loves God (& is that not you & me?)...

- the law becomes a mirror by which he gauges his love for God & His Christ (After all, did Jesus not once says: "If you love Me you will obey what I command"?).¹³ So, just as seeing your unkempt hair in a mirror drives you to reaching out for your comb, so does seeing our imperfect lives in God's Law drive us in all humility to Jesus, for is our law-keeping (or our lack of it) not a reflection of where we stand with God Triune?

Well, so far the mirror-function of the law!

¹³ Jn 14:15

- But the Law also has a praising function: just as the school student who loves his teacher, not wanting to grieve him, obeys the class rules, so is God's law for the one (you & me) who loves God, a joyful means by which we *praise* God for His great love which He showed us by giving us Jesus.
- So, the law is 1) a mirror & 2) a means to thank/praise God.
- But, my brother & sister, obeying the Law of God has a third added, gracious bonus: it becomes a *protecting instrument* in God's hand. You see, just as all road-users experience the protection of their lives when they stick to the traffic rules, so are you and I spared much pain, when out of love for God, we obey His Ten Commandments. No wonder God's word repeatedly says about the law, "by it you shall live!"¹⁴ See? You will live peacefully, if in love for God you obey His law!
- What a change would it bring for New Zealand whose crime rate has gone up drastically in the 22 years we have been living here? If only New Zealanders would en masse turn back to God, what a blessing this whole country would receive from the protecting nature of God's Law!
- My brother & sister, sure, the law does not give us eternal salvation – that comes by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus! But for the one who loves God and obey His law the bonus of protection is added.¹⁵

3. The Law is Comprehensive

Now, it's true: each commandment gives only 1 law, but that law covers & contains all possible circumstances covered by that law, e.g.:

¹⁴ Cf. among other Ex 19:5 *Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.* Also cf. Lv 18:5 *You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord;* Prov 7:2 *keep my commandments and live; keep my teaching as the apple of your eye;* Lk 10:28 *And he said to him, "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live;"* Rm 10:5 *For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them.*

¹⁵ If you obey the law, you will live by it (not eternal salvation, for that's worked by Jesus, but protective living on earth).

- The 8th commandment does not just cover *theft*, but even the slightest dishonesty;
- The 7th commandment does not just cover *adultery*, but even the slightest thought in that direction;
- The 3rd commandment does not just cover the open abuse of God's Name, but also the damage done to God's reputation when Christians commit God-dishonouring acts!

Thus, the *entire* life of the believer lies in¹⁶ the majestic law of God: the Ten Commandments; only ten (!), yet covering my entire Christian walk!

It's as if, with each commandment, only the "ripe fruit" is mentioned.

However, contained in this fruit (e.g. the fruit of murder), also the smallest roots of that fruit tree are included— the roots which fed the fruit; out of which that fruit grew (in the case of the 6th commandment the fully grown fruit is murder, but the command includes the tiniest root of murder's fruit tree, i.e. envy/dislike for a person).

My brother & sister, if you (I) can see this truth, then we have a deeper, spiritual knowledge of the law, the way our Lord Jesus understood it & broadened & deepened it in His Sermon on the Mount.

Well, so far some basic comments re God's Law!

4. The Law's Preamble

My brother & sister, hear the Preamble/Introduction to the Law of God: *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*¹⁷

This Preamble is the ground/basis, yes, the driving force towards obedience of all ten commandments.

With this preamble God says to His people, "Look what enormously gracious deed I have done to you! I led you out of

¹⁶ is covered by

¹⁷ Ex 20:2

slavery! What should your reaction be?” “Is it not that, out of love, you will glorify Me by keeping my commandments!?”

See, my brother & sister? From the onset, this law of Sinai is a law that appeals to the *heart* of the thankful person!

It is not a law that should be externally enforced. Reluctant law-keeping and legalism have never pleased the Creator God & His Christ!¹⁸

And how wonderful! You & I who love the Lord Jesus & who have been saved, hear the words of this preamble (Ex 20:2) in a new brighter, fuller way, “I am God’s promised Messiah/Christ who brought you (yes – and *bought* you with my own blood) out of the slavery of sin!”

Yes, the gratitude of him/her who has tasted Jesus’ forgiving love will spill over into a joyous keeping of the law, for you see, Christ did not come to abolish the law, but to uphold it – to give it its proper place!¹⁹

That’s why our Lord said, ***If you love me, you will obey what I command.***²⁰ First love for Jesus – then joyous law-keeping!

The apostle Paul confirms this thankful and loving attitude to Law-keeping when he says in Rm 12:1ff. ***Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy*** (His love in Christ), ***to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual^a act of worship.***²¹

My Brother & sister, thus comes then first the preamble of the Law, showing God’s love! *Then*, as a result, come all Ten Commandments!

5. First Commandment

¹⁸ Just remember Jesus’ anger against the Pharisees who tried to keep the law perfectly but without heart-surrender (love). Also Ps 51:16 ***For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.***

¹⁹ Mt 5:17 ***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.*** Also Rm 7:7-13, but esp. v.12 ***So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.***

²⁰ Jn 14:15

^a Or *reasonable*

²¹ Rm 12:1. Before the Apostle Paul urges the believers to serve God, he had first explained to them the tremendous grace of God in Christ ...(Rm 3:21-11)

5.1 Its Place within the Ten

And the 1st commandment *You shall have no other gods before me* is the key to the following 9 commandments. Someone²² has said – the first commandment is like the ground floor in a 10-story building: if you remove it, the whole law crumbles! Actually, it's more than the ground floor; it's like the ground floor and the supporting pillars that go right up through all other 9 floors!

5.2 It Prohibits

Well, firstly Q 95 (HC) focuses on what God *prohibits* by the first command. In saying, *You shall have no other gods before me*²³ God *prohibits* idolatry!

Idolatry is having or inventing something in which one trusts in place of or alongside of the only true God, who has revealed Himself in His Word (A.95 LD34 HC).

And here's a scary reality: idolatry is something that comes naturally – i.e. it comes naturally to sinful man.

Even the regenerated person (sadly, that includes even you & me) has a natural bent against God, and will only by God's grace seek after God.

5.2.1 Exchanging God

Now here's something important: the Bible tells us that those who have shoved the true God out of their lives, they are never god-less, i.e. never without any god! No, they just replace God with something else. For it is a fact that God has programmed the human heart in such a way that man desires the protection & guidance of some higher power.

That's why the Apostle Paul explains how those who rejected God *exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.*²⁴

If man rejects the true God, he simply adorns a dead god of his imagination & bow in worship before *that* – his own creation.

²² Cf. Kuyvenhoven (1989:204)

²³ Ex 20:2

²⁴ Rm 1:23

Yes, that's what all the nations around ancient Israel did when they worshiped creatures like, the sun, moon, stars, & planets or water, earth, & fire; & fertility & sexual immorality.

That's what the Roman Catholic Church did (does) in praying to human beings & saints.

But that is also what those do who replace God & His word with black magic and soothsaying, mascots / talismans.²⁵

Well, about twelve years ago Massey University introduced a new course for their students – a course in witchcraft! The study guide lists 6 outcomes for this course.²⁶

One of the outcomes is that students should engage empathetically with both the exponents & critics of magic & witchcraft. In other words, that the students should, among other, also have their heart and emotion defending the views of witchcraft.

In the Internet debate for/against this course at Massey, one pro has said that he is very glad about this course for it takes Pakeha students back to their pre-Christian European roots which, in *his* mind, are better than Christ who was imported into Europe.

Brothers & sisters, these are people who replace the True God with something else.

5.2.2 Supplementing God

²⁵ Occultic practices:

- Deut 18:10-12, 20
- Mic 5:12
- 1 Cor 10:20, 21

²⁶ For course details, cf. website

http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/fms//Colleges/College%20of%20Humanities%20and%20Social%20Sciences/Documents/Outlines/2008/135/135103_0802_PNTH_E.pdf

Learning Outcomes:

Students who successfully complete this paper should be able to:

- engage empathetically but critically with both the exponents and critics of magic and witchcraft in selected societies
- show how magic and witchcraft illustrate the beliefs, values, structures, and social tensions within particular societies
- demonstrate an appreciation of the significance of primary sources (including texts, images, and artefacts)
- locate suitable sources of information
- demonstrate a critical understanding of the relevant secondary literature
- present informed and reasoned interpretations in well-structured, accurately written essays, with appropriately formatted referencing

However, the catechism & God's Word warns that people do not only have the inclination to *replace* God but also they're also inclined to "supplement" God in their lives – to trust in something else *alongside* God.

It's like Jacob's wife, Rachel, who was not confident with Jacob's God alone, so she also packed her father's house gods in for the journey with her husband to his country.²⁷

What are the modern versions of this?

- Well, already Christ warns about people who loved God AND *mammon* (money).
- Some others love God whilst not just loving their children but worshiping them!
- Still some others say they love God but they are filled with *self-adoration!*

5.3 Love – the Positive Factor

But true love for God is the love which gives Him and Him alone the throne!

Well, how significant (as one commentator points out)²⁸ that the letter of *love*, 1 John, finishes off by saying, ***Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.***²⁹

See? The *first commandment* and *love* for God – they go together!

Which brings us to the other side of the first commandment – the positive side – also pointed out by Answer 94 (HC).

Here it is:

“That I sincerely acknowledge the only true God, trust Him alone, look to Him for every good thing humbly and patiently, love Him, fear Him, and honour Him with all my heart!”

My brother & sister,

He/she who is touched by God's love for lost sinners, will simply stand in awe of Him – put Him first, love Him, and will also understand that, whether He makes us, like old Israel, to drink (so

²⁷ Gn 31:34ff

²⁸ Cf. Knap (1915:353) & Kuyvenhoven (1989:206)

²⁹ 1 Jn 5:21

to speak) from the bitter fountains of Marah³⁰ or whether He makes us to lie down in the green oasis of Elim,³¹ every step that He takes us through this desert land, brings us closer to the land that flows from milk & honey.

Thus, together with the psalmist we say, “*Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.*”²⁶ *My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*”³²

AMEN (2,472 words excluding footnotes)

8. Prayer regarding preached sermon

9. **SttL 116b:1,2,3,10 (= Blue Ps/H 228:1,2,3,10) “I love the LORD...”**

10. Benediction

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. ³³

AMEN

³⁰ Ex 15:23ff.

³¹ Ex 15:27f.

³² Ps 73:25-26

³³ [The Holy Bible: New International Version](#). (1984). (2 Co 13:14). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.