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How to Use This Study

Almost all good Bible studies have some combination of study questions and commentary. Often the authors will comment on the passage to be read and then ask questions based on the passage and their comments. But ours is different.

This Bible study is designed so that the students' first steps into a passage of Scripture are taken by themselves with the help of the Holy Spirit. That is why the first thing you will find, after a brief introduction, is not commentary but questions that are designed to help the students to read, search, discover, think about, and apply the great truths of the Scriptures for themselves before they are influenced by notes, lecture, or commentary from others

After immersing themselves in the passage, pondering it, and answering what questions they can, we then suggest that the students participate in a group discussion and/or lecture. Then, after that, in preparation for the next meeting the notes for the following lesson should be read to reinforce, enhance, and clarify learning. After the notes are read, the students will have studied the passage at least three or four times (by themselves, in a group, hearing a lecture, and reading the notes with the passage). Then, following the notes, the questions in that lesson begin with one or two review questions to identify the "take-aways" from the study on that passage. Those are followed by the questions on the new passage of Scripture to be studied for the next class period or small group discussion

George Robertson and I developed our studies while teaching the men's and women's Bible studies, respectively, at The Covenant Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, Missouri. We had both morning (women's) and evening (men's and women's) classes. Our format was fairly simple. The morning schedule looked like this:

9:30-10:05	Small group discussion of lesson questions led by trained group leader
10:05-10:20	Small group sharing of prayer requests and praying together
10:20-10:30	Travel time to assembly of all groups together
10:30-11:00	Lecture over the passage just discussed

The evening schedule was basically the same but began at 6:30 p.m.

When participants registered for the study, they were given the Introductory Questions to answer in preparation for the first class. (If you are receiving the study in a one-book, bound form, then simply give instructions to complete the Introductory Questions before the first class session.) Those questions were brought to class and discussed in the first small group discussion session before the first lecture. Then, after class, the students read Lesson One and answered the questions in Lesson One in preparation for the discussion in the second class session. That is the pattern on which the materials were designed.

We have heard of other groups that have utilized our studies using a similar schedule but with many variations. I have been using one of our studies with a small group of women with a very relaxed format, leading them through their answers of the questions and then giving them a teaching wrap-up

to explain, summarize and apply the passage at the end of our time together. We follow that with a time of prayer for each other.

The material may be used for individual study. We do recommend, however, that you grapple with the Bible passage and the study questions and try to answer as many as you can before you go to commentaries, other study helps, or the next lesson's notes. We tend to learn best what we dig out for ourselves. If you miss the mark on a question, count that as an opportunity for learning; we tend to learn best from our mistakes!

We pray that this study will help you know God in Jesus Christ through the study of his Word

Mary Beth McGreevy
St. Louis, Missouri
June 2008

Introductory Questions

Ten Commandments

1. What led you to begin this study, and what are you hoping to receive from it?
2. Read **Deuteronomy 5:1-22** and **Exodus 20:1-17**. What are the Ten Commandments?
3. In the preface to the Ten Commandments—**Deuteronomy 5:1-6**—what reasons can you find for why we must keep all of the commandments?
4. What is the first commandment? What is its essential meaning?
5. Read **Exodus 3:1-15**. How did God identify himself to Moses? (With what name and description?) Why is this significant?
6. Read **Psalms 139** and give all the attributes of God that you find in it. What is your personal response to these things?

7. Read **Isaiah 42:8; 48:11;** and **John 5:19-23**. What does God refuse to share with another? How do you sometimes try to take that same thing for yourself?

8. Read **Genesis 1**. What things does God do in this chapter that only God can do?

9. Take some time to read **Deuteronomy 3:24; 2 Samuel 7:18-29; 1 Kings 8:53; Psalms 68:20; 71:5-16; 73:28; 109:21; 140:7; 141:8; Isaiah 28:16; 30:15; 40:10; 49:22; Jeremiah 32:17; Habakkuk 3:19; Luke 2:29;** and **Revelation 6:10**. What is the dominant character quality of God mentioned in these passages? How does this attribute of God comfort and encourage you?

10. Read **Exodus 6:6; 15:13; Deuteronomy 7:7-8; 9:26; Galatians 3:13-14; 4:4-5; Titus 2:11-14;** and **1 Peter 1:18**. What do you read in these verses that demonstrate why God alone is worthy of our worship?

11. How does obedience to the First Commandment make an important difference in your life today?

1

The First Commandment Deuteronomy 5:6-7

*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.
You shall have no other gods before me.*

A few years ago I attended the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Christian high school from which I was graduated. There I saw a living illustration of the grace of this commandment. At our banquet on the first night, the emcee announced that Eddie Jones¹ would come and give a testimony. Eddie had been graduated from the school a number of years before me, but I remembered his senior testimony in which he said that he had no testimony because he was not a Christian and had no desire to be. I asked my friend beside me, “What is going on?” He said, “Just wait, you won’t believe it.”

Although Eddie was always a nice guy, his heart was hard as stone. But this night as he began to speak, he wept. He recalled his senior testimony and said, “I am not ashamed of my tears tonight because they reflect what Jesus has done for me.” He related how he had met with the pastor of the church a few years ago about some business. At the conclusion of their meeting the pastor asked Eddie if he was walking with the Lord. Matter of factly, he answered, “No.” The pastor asked if they could pray together. Eddie agreed and with tears the pastor began to pray for his conversion. In the middle of the prayer, the pastor looked up and asked, “Eddie, are you sure you don’t want to believe on Christ?” “I can’t,” Eddie insisted, “I can’t leave my friends and my ways.” The pastor concluded the prayer and Eddie rose to leave. But as he was reaching for the door, after the manner of Paul’s conversion, he fell to the floor. There he began to weep, confessing his sins and asking Christ to save him.

That young man tried to insist on having other gods, but in the end God insisted on being his God. And his right relationship with his Redeemer is resulting in joyful and thankful obedience.

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* says that the preface to the Ten Commandments gives us three reasons why we must keep all the commandments—because God is the Lord, because he is our God, and because he is the Redeemer. In one way or another we will look at how these reasons must motivate us to obedience in each of the commandments.

In this lesson, we will look at how they must drive us to obey the first commandment—to have no other Gods before God.

¹ Not his real name

The Lord

The most obvious reason that we must obey this commandment is that God is God. The most holy name of God is used here—Yahweh.

THE NAME (Exodus 3:14). It is the same name used in Exodus 3 when Moses is commissioned by God to lead his people out of Egypt. Moses asks, “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?” God said, “I Am who I Am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I Am has sent me to you.’”

This verb (translated “I Am”) is probably derived from Yahweh. It indicates that God is timeless—no beginning or end. Such a thought is unfathomable, because we are all finite creatures and there is nothing in our lives or world that is not time-bound. God is God.

Furthermore, because God is God, he does not need to explain himself. He owes us no explanation for his actions, his decrees, or his commands. “I Am has sent me.” In other words, nothing further needs to be said.

THE IMPLICATION. When David meditated on the infinity of God he exclaimed, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain” (Psalm 139:6). You must recognize that God is God. It must jolt you into reverence that there is One who has the power of life and death over you for eternity. It is healthy for everyone regularly to be frightened by the realization that there is someone tremendously bigger and more powerful.

The British Romantics, for instance, wrote of their experiences with darkness in expanses or great seas or great mountains which made them shudder to realize that there was someone or something (not all acknowledged God) still greater.²

And because God needs not to explain himself—in other words, he is absolutely sovereign—we may either acknowledge it willingly or begrudgingly. But we must acknowledge it. God explains this fact to Israel in Isaiah 48:11. It is an amazing passage in which God graciously explains his chastisement. He stoops to explain himself though he is not obligated, but does not budge. He explains why he had to discipline them: “For my own sake, for my own sake, I do this. How can I let myself be defamed? I will not yield my glory to another.”

In other words, you can either acknowledge that God is God and you are not, or he will impress it upon you. He will insist on being God.

Several years ago one of my pastoral colleagues was killed in a mountain climbing accident. He was a young, brilliant man and left behind a wife and four young children. When I received the word, it became my duty to inform another colleague who regarded this man as a brother. I will never forget his response after a very long silence. It was from Habakkuk, “The Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth

² Percy B. Shelley, for instance, referred to an “awful loveliness” in “Hymn to Intellectual Beauty” and an “unknown omnipotence” in “Mont Blanc.”

keep silent.” There are times when we must recognize that because God alone is God, his thoughts and ways are above ours, and no other explanation is needed.

Our God

If God’s Lordship were the only reason for having no other gods, that would be sufficient. But the God of grace adds another. We must love and serve him exclusively because he is our God. “I am the Lord, your God,” he says. Here he uses another name, his royal name Elohim. It is the name used in Genesis 1. “In the beginning Elohim created the heavens and the earth . . . And Elohim said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light . . . And Elohim said, ‘Let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.’”

God says to you, “I am your Elohim.” The same God who with infinite power spoke the worlds into existence and painted waters and skies with living creatures is your God.

The use of this powerful name conclusively reminds us that we are not God. In case we missed it with the great name Yahweh, the name Elohim with all its association with God’s mighty acts comes like a steam roller behind a bull dozer and flattens any delusion. You are not God; God is your God.

And what relief that is! Self-deification is our most basic sin. It is the delusion that we are God that inspires foolish, braggadocios speech. It is by supposing that we are God that we become so frustrated when we lose control of circumstances. It is when we have thought that we were God that bitter resentment follows suffering. It is self-deification that produces impatience and bullying and loses friends and frustrates marriages.

Is God cruel or egotistical by insisting that we are not God? On the contrary, when we reflect on the misery that self-deification produces, we must conclude that he is only gracious.

The blessing of recognizing ourselves in God’s hands and not our own is seen most clearly in suffering. When I preached this sermon to my congregation, I referred to R. C. Sproul, Jr.’s article in a recent issue of *Table Talk* magazine. He wrote that month on the comfort of God’s sovereignty. I must confess that I read most of it sort of boringly thinking, “Oh yes, another article on God’s sovereignty—nothing new.” I read it that way until I read that he and his wife had just lost a baby. In that experience he said he and his wife knew the practical lesson of the comfort that God was their God and they were not. Though they could not understand why, they did understand that because God is sovereign it must be. And furthermore they understood that their sovereign God is good, and because he is they will someday go to be with their child. Since then my wife and I also lost a pregnancy. We can testify to the same relief that the sovereign God is good . . . and he is ours.

Redeemer

Finally, we must have no other gods before God because he alone is our Redeemer. Every time we read a reference to the Exodus from Egypt we read a reference to the cross of Christ.³ That is what the exodus was intended to foreshadow. Therefore we may understand that we must have no other gods because Christ has redeemed us.

None of us is tempted to fall down before a stone altar or a carved icon, but we make gods in other ways. Matthew Henry applied it this way: “Pride makes a god of self, covetousness makes a god of money, sensuality makes a god of the belly; whatever is esteemed or loved, feared or served, delighted in or depended on, more than God, that (whatever it is) we do in effect make a god of.”⁴

In view of Christ’s sacrifice for you, how can you esteem or love or fear or serve or delight or depend on anyone or anything besides him?

Only an exclusive relationship with Christ is fulfilling. All other substitutionary relationships make miserable and destroy. In his *Collected Memoirs*, Gerald Moore the famous accompanist wrote about a world famous opera singer whose career was ruined in its latter stages because of a destructive relationship. He writes that the singer was ‘destroyed by a man she loved deeply, by a man without an atom of music in his soul, cruel and callous, who enjoyed torturing her by telling her she was nothing.’

Such will be the same with relationships that come before your Redeemer.⁵

Not Safe . . . But Good

In C. S. Lewis’ allegory *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Mr. and Mrs. Beaver are describing Aslan, the figure of Christ in the story, to the children who were lost in the woods.

Here is what they discover about Aslan from the Beavers:

“But shall we see him?” asked Susan

“Why, Daughter of Eve, that’s what I brought you here for. I’m to lead you where you shall meet him,” said Mr. Beaver.

“Is—is he a man?” asked Lucy.

“Aslan a man!” said Mr. Beaver sternly. “Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the wood and the son of the great Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea. Don’t you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion—the Lion, the great Lion.”

³ Robert L. Reymond demonstrates that the Old Testament text describes the Exodus as a *redemptive* event (Ex. 6:6; 15:13; Dt. 7:8; 9:26). He then finds four “salvific principles” in the Exodus that precisely parallel Christ’s redemption, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 518-21.

⁴ *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, n.d.), 358-59.

⁵ Raymond Brown, *The Message of Deuteronomy* (Leicester: IVP, 1993), 106.

“Ooh!” said Susan, “I’d thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion.”

“That you will, dearie, and no mistake,” said Mrs. Beaver. “If there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they’re either braver than most or else just silly.”

“Then he isn’t safe?” said Lucy.

“Safe?” said Mr. Beaver. “Don’t you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? ’Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”

That is the message of the first commandment. He is not safe . . . but he is good.

Lesson 1—Ten Commandments

1. What did you find interesting or challenging in the notes and/or lecture?
2. When in your life have you experienced the fact that God “is not safe . . . but he is good”?

Read Deuteronomy 5:8-10.

3. What is the second commandment? What is its essential meaning?
4. What reason does God give for this commandment? How does this explain the prohibition against idols?
5. What is the warning to those who disobey this commandment?
6. What is the promise to those who obey it?

7. What does this imply about the importance of parents' worship?

8. Read also **Exodus 32**. What was so terrible about the people's actions that made the Lord want to destroy them?

9. How is this similar to **Romans 1:18-23**?

Read Exodus 33:1-34:14.

10. After the people's worship of the golden calf, what did Moses ask of the Lord?

11. What was God's reply? How does it express his grace and splendor?

12. How do people today (you!) create physical and mental images to worship God (idols)?

13. Take some time to read **Deuteronomy 4:15-24; 27:15; 1 Samuel 15:23; Isaiah 44:10-22; 66:3-4;** and **Habakkuk 2:18-20**. What further insights about idolatry do you learn from these verses?
14. How does obedience to the Second Commandment make an important difference in your life today?