# Introduction:

When your status changes, so does your behaviour:

Take for example Parenting – before I was a parent, I could do whatever I want, whenever I want. Now if I stay up past my bedtime I still have to get up at six o’clock, no matter the day, there is no such thing as sleep ins, in fact there is no such thing as weekends.

I used to be able to eat dinner so calmly and relaxed but now it’s like entering world war 3, projectiles flying everywhere, my child screaming and I often go without food as my child steals off my plate. Projectiles, screaming and starvation – im telling you, it’s like war some days.

But on the other hand, parenting has shaped me so positively. It’s made me more organised than I have ever been in my life. I have become far more conscious of my actions and particularly my words as i seek to live out a life that I want my son to follow. And I think mostly I understand love to a deeper degree, a degree that allows me to love my child even when I have been bitten to bleed, even when I have to to clean poo out of the bath, even when he wakes up screaming every 45 minutes at night.

Whether it’s parenting, occupation, health or relationships. When we change status, we should change our behaviour to live appropriately according to that status.

People in a new job shouldn’t do the same work as if they were still in the old job,

Healed people shouldn’t act like they’re sick anymore,

Married people shouldn’t act as if they’re single.

And free’d people shouldn’t act as if they’re slaves.

# The pursuit of holiness

And here in Exodus Israel has just changed their national status. They have gone from being slaves to pharaoh in Egypt to being God’s freed people.

And in Exodus 20 God reveals to Israel what the appropriate behavioural changes should look like for their status change. He’s showing them what it looks like to be God’s holy people.

Holiness simply means to be “set apart”.

It’s kind of like the “indian plates” my mum has. These plates were artfully painted upon with drawings of American Indians and so these plates were set apart from the rest, the whole family was expected to treat them differently to other plates. We had to be more careful around them, we would never eat from them, and unlike the other plates, these ones were put on display behind glass in a cabinet. Just as these plates were set apart from the rest. So God wanted Israel to be set apart from the other nations. To be holy.

And so holiness towards God means to be set apart for God, to be his people and serve nobody else.

So how are Israel to pursue holiness?

Through the covenant of the ten commandments. These commandments create the character change that makes Israel distinct from the other nations but it also creates a relational change between Israel and God.

You see the ten commandments are also a covenant.

A covenant is a stunning blend of law and love. It’s an intimate bond of love that’s made more solid because it’s made legal. In this way a covenant is like a wedding, where vows are given to make the love even more strongly solidified. And here the ten commandments are comparitable to wedding vows between God and his people.

God promises Israel that he will be their God.

And Israel promise that they will be His people.

And there’s a few things worth noting about the commandments:

1. Firstly, They display the truth that humanity always worships something as it gives only two options:

Read Exodus 20:2-3 with me:

Exodus 20:2-3 “2I 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.”

You either worship God or you worship something else as a god. You cannot worship nothing.

And this is the pattern of our human hearts. It cannot worship nothing, it always desires service towards something, and whatever that thing is becomes our idol what we setting apart ourselves for.

Thomas Chalmers noted this tendency of the human heart in the 16th century when he said.

*Such is the grasping tendency of the human heart, that it must have a something to lay hold of… It may be dispossessed of one object, or of any, but it cannot be desolated of all.*

* *Thomas Chalmers*

And likewise more recently a novelist for the Pulitzer prize in 2008 named **David Foster Wallace** described this same desire of the human heart saying:

In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there… is no such thing as ‘not worshipping’. **Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.**

And so though it might be hard to believe, I hope we’ll all see that no matter who we are we all worship something.

1. The second thing worth noting about the ten commandments is that we cannot break commandments 2 through 10 without first having broken commandment one.

After all whenever we break one of the last nine commandments we must be doing so because we worship something else as more important than God.

Let me give you a few examples:

Example 1) Take for example **Adultery** – The act of sexual relations between a married person and someone other than their spouse.

So what is it that leads someone to commit adultery?

It’s seeking to satisfy their own desire for something like comfort, or power or Control over seeking to commit their desire to worship God.

Example 2) Secondly we have **Lying** – The Holding back or misrepresentation of the truth.

What causes someone to lie?

Often we are so concerned with the approval of others that we will lie in order win that approval.

In that case we idolise approval over God. Desiring it more than God.

Example 3) And **Coveting** – To be consumed with a desire to possess what belongs to others.

I’ve been susceptible to coveting the status of others that I’ve worked with, the behaviour of others children, the belongings and wealth that others have and it always has something to do with one or more of the four root desires.

- comfort,

- Power,

- Approval, or

- Control

These four things are often what we idolise and serve instead of God. These four things are often the desires we pursue when breaking our covenant with God. And this is the dilemma of holiness.

**The dilemma of Holiness:**

1. Israel and ourselves alike, we fail to keep the commandments. We fail to worship God alone. We can try as hard as we want but we cannot be holy.

This is bad because idols are false saviours: They seem like they will save us but they actually lead to despair.

Worship **power** through seeking a higher **occupation** or working out continuously to be physically strong and you will end up feeling weak and afraid, and you will find yourself needing ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay.

In a desire for **comfort** or **control** we may worship **money** and **material** **things** — if that is where we tap real meaning in life — then we will never have enough. Because there’s always more.

In a desire for **approval** you may worship your **intellect**, and once being seen as smart, you will end up feeling stupid, like a fraud, always on the verge of being found out.

Worshipping anything other than God for the sake of one of these idols will eat us alive. They are false saviours.

But more importantly, our failure to worship God alone makes us covenant breakers. We no longer treat God how we should. We no longer worship him in spite of it being in our best interests. We break our covenant with him.

<PAUSE – count backwards from 3>

And this raises two major questions:

* + - If we can’t act like God’s saved people, are we even saved? and
    - How do we pursue holiness if we’re so susceptible to idols?

**The remedy for unholiness.**

The bible points to one remedy for both of these questions. **Jesus**.

The bible shows us that through Jesus, God declares those who trust in him as holy.

Though we cannot act Holy, God still declares us as holy. And this was achieved at the cross. That’s where the holiness of Jesus is traded off with the unholiness of humanity.

You see the punishment for breaking God’s covenant is death. But God loves us so much that he was willing to send his own son into the world to take our punishment for us.

**Jesus** *died* though he was holy so that **we** could *live* though we are unholy.

And just as the Israelites were called to pursue holiness because they were saved from slavery to Pharoah, we too are called to pursue holiness because God has freed us from our slavery to idols through Jesus.

<Pause>

And God’s graciousness doesn’t end there.

Jesus also enables us to pursue holiness by redirecting our hearts desires from our idols and to a better substitute.

You see it’s not enough to just show that our idols will lead us to despair and false hope. After all they are good things, they’re just not meant to be worshipped above all else.

We can’t just expect a man to burn down his house because we tell him that it won’t give him true security and comfort from all things.

In order to remove an idol, you have to replace the idol.

And it’s only in Jesus that we can fulfil the root desires of our heart.

Only He can give us **Certainty** in His control, despite our lack of control,

Only He will **Approve** of us and love us despite our sin,

Only He provides for us **Comfort,** despite our failures,

And only He displays His **Power** in us despite our weak nature.

And it’s all in Jesus!

For what more **certainty** could you want then to know that even death cannot destroy you through the example of Jesus?

What more **approval** could you want than the approval of the God who loved you so much that he came down as Jesus and died in order to call you his own son or daughter?

What more **comfort** could you have than the comfort of being eternally secure in the loving hands of God, the covenant faithful who promises to be with you always, despite the hard times and the suffering.

And what is more **Powerful** that we could desire security in, than the power of God which Romans 8 tells us that nothing can separate us from?

I will only be able to reject the temptation to lie when I’m so secure in the approval Jesus offers me that I don’t seek the approval of others.

I will only be able to reject the temptation to covet what others have, when I realise that Jesus has given me all that I need and more.

It’s only once we realise that we will gain a better, more comfortable and secure house in it’s place if we burn down the first that we will be able to light the match that sets it ablaze.

Without Jesus we are left with the 10 commandments condemning us as evidence that we are not God’s saved people. But by placing our faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection we are declared holy, and enabled to pursue holiness over our idols. Praise be to God!