

YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME

Objective

To outline the reasons and usefulness of the first commandment

Reference

Holy Scripture

Scriptural Verse

Exodus 20:1-17

Introduction

The Ten Commandments were laws set by God and given to Moses and the Israelites when they came out of Egypt and were starting a new life in a new land. At first glance they sounded difficult to follow. But when you look at them at a deeper level you see that they reveal about the easy blessed and spiritual way of loving God and man.

- The Ten Commandments are a binding covenant between sinful man and a loving God. It's a contract that lasts forever. It's God's way of telling us that He will always be there for us and will never give up on us and He wants us to do the same.
- The Ten Commandments are relationship builders. God is not interested in us robotically carrying out strict rules; He is interested in our hearts and wants our love. God wants us to love him and to love others. The first 4 commandments deal with our relationship with God and the latter 6 deal with our relationship with man (see Matthew 22:34-40).
- Because we cannot love man except by loving God first, God starts the Ten Commandments with His relationship with us. When we are able to love God, then we are able to truly love and give ourselves to fellow men.
- Why should there be laws in this relationship? Why couldn't God just say you need to love me and love everybody else? God needed to set up constructs for man to achieve holiness because it is ONLY through holiness that man can become closer to God. God continually works in us to change our nature so that we can get closer to Him.

Lesson outline

The first commandment concerns the object of our worship, God, and Him only. The Egyptians, and other neighboring nations, had many gods, the creatures of their own fancy, and that is why the first commandment is set to make the Israelites aware of that transgression. They must entirely cleave to Him, and not be for any other, either of their own invention or borrowed from their neighbors. This was the sin they were most in danger of because polytheism was rampant, and none of that would change until the coming of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

How does this law relate to us today? Because today just as during the time of the exodus, the sin that we are MOST in danger of is giving the glory and honor to any creature or created thing which are due to God only. We may not steal, or commit adultery or commit murder but we can certainly be Christians who serve and go to church but our hearts are secretly worshipping other gods.

How do we worship other gods and what are these gods?

We make gods out of anything that is esteemed or loved, feared or served, delighted in or depended on, more than God. For example:

- Money – consistently picking up extra shifts on Sunday during church time
- My body – on more than one occasion skipping out on Bible reading time to go to the gym

- My spouse – thinking about him/her more than I think about God
- My reputation – skipping out on church to attend events that make me look cool in front of friends
- My friends – seeking their comfort more than trying to seek it from God through prayer

This first commandment was placed out of God's love for us. As God is the fountain of happiness, He knows that none of us can find happiness except through Him. When we seek happiness in a creation, we put the creation in the place of the Creator, expecting some form of gratification that can only be found in God alone. The very first commandment of the whole series is divinely calculated to prevent man's misery and promote his happiness, by taking him off from all false dependence, and leading him to God Himself who is the fountain of all good. Furthermore, we neglect what is eternal when we are so consumed by what is passing.

So what are we supposed to do? God has given us truly good gifts and we sometimes forget the Giver and get hooked on to the gift. We are called to carry out our secular duties in this world but to be inwardly detached from them (see 1 Corinthians 7:29-31). We are called to live as if we didn't have these things and if God were to take them away we would not cry or obsess over them. Being detached from things/people does not mean that I shouldn't enjoy my secular pursuits and approach them with energy and enthusiasm. It just means that every day I must offer all of my activities and interests to God and I must be ready to walk away from them should Jesus ask me to do so.

Examples of this are Peter, Andrew, James and John who were businessmen trying to make a living out of the Sea of Galilee which probably took nearly all the time and energy they had. They could have easily shrugged off the Lord's call to follow Him claiming that they had mouths to feed and bills to pay but they didn't. At His calling, they dropped their livelihoods and followed Him. Would I do the same? Would I leave a job where the work is unethical and displeasing to God even though the pay may be great? Could I give up a TV show so that I can help someone in need or spend a longer time in prayer, or give up the man/woman of my dreams who is unable to commit to a life with the Lord Jesus Christ? These are moments of truth that will test and reveal to me where my attachments lie.

What does God do when I am unable to let go of my attachments? He could either

- 1) Leave us to ourselves; if, out of our free will, we insist on leaving Him.
- 2) He could actively purify us from these attachments, if we so desire.

If God were to leave us alone then He wouldn't be very good because He knows the consequences of my attachments – misery, unhappiness and separation from Him. He wants the second path; He wants to become involved actively in purifying the soul from its attachments to all that is not Him.

It is a good practice to examine our prayer, in good conscience, and ask ourselves: "Deep down, what is it that I want from God in prayer?" What is it that we ask for in prayer, above all? We should be praying to God for the grace of having our hearts detached from the things of the world, so that they might anchor themselves more completely in God alone (see 2 Chronicles 1:7-13). When we ask God for the right things, He will always outdo us in generosity. King Solomon asked for wisdom in order to rule wisely and God responded by giving him not only wisdom, but many temporal blessings as well.

Conclusion

The first commandment was written for our own good. It establishes man's relationship with God. This relationship is essential to living a fulfilling life. Our disobedience towards this commandment will result in a life of misery as we become attached to the false gods of this world.

Activities/Discussion Points

1. What other things are we attached to?
2. How do our attachments affect our relationship with God and our faith?