



The First Commandment

PROTECTS TRUE WORSHIP

¹Then 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.
³You shall have no other gods before Me."

EXODUS 20:1-3

KEY IDEA: God alone is worthy of worship and obedience.

OUTLINE:

- A. THE GOD WHO SPEAKS—revealing His mind and will (v.1)
- B. THE GOD WHO SAVES—revealing His name and character (v.2)
- C. THE GOD WHO SANCTIFIES—revealing His purposes (v.3)

DISCUSSION:

- As long as we are sincere, are we free to worship God in any manner or place we choose? Why or why not?

LESSON:

A prologue is an *introduction*, and the prologue to Ten Commandments binds together with the first commandment and sets the tone for all of the others. In the prologue, we discover something about the Lawgiver's *authoritative, gracious, redemptive* nature. **The occasion** of these commandments given by God was one of unspeakable terror. As God "came down" to give His Law, it was the most utterly dreadful and awesome event that the people of Israel had ever experienced (*Read Ex.19:16-22; 20:18-21; Heb.12:21*).

A. THE GOD WHO SPEAKS (v.1)

Then God spoke all these words, saying, "I am the LORD your God..." Notice, in the first place...

1. **The "source" of the commandments**—"Then God...I am the LORD your God..."

What this means is:

- These commandments were NOT the commandments of *men*. (*Cf. Matt.15:1-9*)
- The very commandments were spoken *by God*. *God is their divine source*.

- God identifies and introduces Himself as *"the LORD your God."* The word **"LORD,"** in all capital letters, is the most sacred name in all the Hebrew language. It is the name "Yahweh" or Jehovah—the covenant name of God (*Cf. Ex.3:12-14*). It teaches the self-existence, independence, eternity, and immutability of God. In other words, the first name God uses to describe Himself to His people in the giving of the Law is the name by which He promised that He would graciously deliver them from their bondage.
- The second title here claimed by the Lawgiver is **"God,"** which in Hebrew is Elohim. It appears in the plural form, and the only satisfactory explanation of the plural concerning God is that it is intended to recognize a plurality of persons in the Godhead. Being in the singular, Jehovah expresses the divine unity. Being in the plural, Elohim points to the Trinity. When the Lord says, *"I am the LORD your God,"* He declares that He is the only God who claims to have a people in covenant with Himself.

In fact, all throughout the Ten Commandments, God speaks as if to a single listener. It is as if God is saying, "I am the LORD your God—and you personally, you specifically, shall have no other gods before Me."

What does this mean for us? Two things. In giving His commandments, God lets us know that He is a personal God who desires us to know Him by name and who knows us by name. The personal God who speaks also calls us to personally apply His commandments to our lives individually.

2. **The "manner" in which God gave the commandments**—"God spoke..."

- The commandments were not simply *a human effort to express* what people THOUGHT God wanted.
- The commandments were not merely *a summation of religious sensitivities and tendencies.*
- Rather, God Himself clearly communicated, clearly uttered, exactly what He wanted in syllables, words, and sentences. (*Cf. Deut.5:3-6*)
- Read Acts 7:53, Galatians 3:19, and Hebrews 2:2. There seems to be a contradiction. Who spoke, God or angels? By bringing all these passages together, we discover that angels were in reverent attendance at this event. Just how angels may have been involved is not clear. All we know is that angels were servants on that occasion and that some of the solemn and impressive circumstances were carried on by their agency. The trumpets and thundering and other attendant demonstrations may have been due to their agency. The same will be seen at Second Coming of Christ (*1 Thess.4:16-17; Matt.24:31; 13:41; 1 Cor.15:51-52; Heb.12:19ff; Rev.8:1-5; 11:15-19*). All of this underscores the tremendous authority of God's commands when He spoke with angels in reverent attendance! What a scene! What authority!

3. **The "content" of the commandments**—"...God spoke all these words."

- God did not simply send Moses a facsimile of His commandments, and Moses didn't simply copy down what God said: but rather, each word and syllable had, as it were, the full authority of God.

- Read Exodus 34:27-28 and 34:1. Moses was on the mountain with God for forty days, and forty nights, he neither ate nor drank water (God sustained him), and God wrote the commandments Himself (*Deut.10:3-5*). Think about it—holding something in your hands that was written upon by Almighty God! No other document has ever rested upon the earth which had more authority! God spoke them. God wrote them! Every single word in these commandments came from God.

APPLICATION: There is a three-fold application for us.

- a. We should never add to or subtract from the commandments or seek to change or misinterpret them in any way to suit our wishes. (*Matt.5:18; Deut.12:32*)
- b. We should never lose sight of their authority or fail to keep them before us. (*Deut.4:9*)
- c. We should endeavor, by God's enabling grace, to carefully obey them. (*Deut.12:32; Josh.1:8*)

B. THE GOD WHO SAVES (v.2)

"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

The Exodus is a Gospel story. The historical, physical deliverance of the people of Israel was a type of spiritual deliverance that God would provide for His people in the New Covenant. The Exodus involved bringing the people of Israel out of Egyptian bondage by a miracle—the parting of the Red Sea. Regeneration of the believer and salvation from sin's bondage also involves a miracle—the new birth. The Exodus was a monergistic work—God did it and God alone. Salvation of the believer is also a monergistic work—we are saved by grace through faith in Christ alone (*Eph.2:8-9; Acts 4:12*). The Exodus story is a preview, a "picture pop up" book, as it were, an Old Testament illustration of the salvation that Jesus would provide for all who repent and believe.

In the Exodus narrative, Jehovah, by means of a mediator named Moses, delivers His people so that they might worship Him in the land. He does not redeem Israel because of anything the nation had done except to groan and cry out. Fulfilling His promise to Abraham (*Gen.12:1-3*), God overcomes the obstacles of Egyptian oppression from without, and Israel's discouragement from within. Moses leads them safely to Mount Sinai and gives them God's holy Law to govern them. In summary, the Exodus narrative reveals God as a Warrior, a Lawgiver, and a Redeemer of His people. He is the God who saves.

Here are several key observations:

- God did not promise to deliver or rescue them IF they kept His commandments, but rather, first, *He delivered them* and brought them out of bondage into freedom, THEN He called them to keep His commandments. The same is true of our salvation (*Gal.5:1*).
- Why did God deliver them? God rescued Israel because He loved them and chose them for purposes known only to Himself (*Deut.7:6-11*). Why does God deliver and love believers? He saves us because of His electing grace and divine purposes (*John 15:16; Eph.1:4-6*).
- The commandments begin with the Gospel. The good news is that God is *a personal God* of stupendous grace. He is the Almighty God who rescues undeserving and unworthy sinners and brings them into covenant relationship with Himself. He is a gracious God who speaks authoritatively

and saves sinners personally to transform His people into His image (*Tit.2:11-14*). The God who speaks is also a God who saves.

APPLICATION:

- Have you been delivered, rescued, by God from sin's slavery?
- Has God brought you out of darkness and transferred you into the kingdom of His Son?
- How do you know? What is the evidence?

When God *saves* a sinner, He *sets them apart* from the world and for His glory.

C. THE GOD WHO SANCTIFIES (v.3)

"You shall have no other gods before Me."

This commandment is directed to every single individual—"You." Not only you, but every single one of you. "*You shall have no other gods before Me*" is a command to have no other [false] gods before the one true God. There are a number of deities, and we must choose the right One. There is only one God worthy of the highest devotion and the greatest praise (*Deut.4:35, 39; 6:4; Ps.115:1-8; Is.45:18, 21-22; 46:9; Jer.10:7, 11; 1 Cor.8:4-6*). In verse 3, we discover a *positive implication* and *negative prohibition*. It requires something and forbids something.

First, the positive implication is to have God as your God. "*You shall have no other gods before Me.*"

To "**have**" God as your God means:

- To bow down and submit to His authority as He has revealed it.
- To know Him by bringing the control of your heart and life into conformity to the truth of God. (*Tit.1:16; John 17:3*)
- To believe and accept His gracious self-disclosure without seeking to add to it or take from it.
- To actively worship and adore Him as He truly is.
- To privately and publicly express wholehearted love and worship toward Him.
- To turn to Him to meet your needs and satisfy your deepest desires.
- To depend upon Him as your primary Helper and Provider.
- To obey His will above your own and anyone else's.
- To love Him, confess Him, and fear Him with the desire to bring others to be acquainted with Him.
- To make it our business to please Him and wait upon Him. (*1 Thess.4:1; Ps.25:3; 130:5*)

The Word of God makes it abundantly clear that the only way to "**have**" God as your God is *to enter into relationship with Him through an active, personal trust in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ* (*John 14:6; 1 Tim.2:5-6; 1 John 2:23*). There are many who claim to believe in God and even to worship Him and serve Him, but all who claim to have God as their God must acknowledge that they are lawbreakers (*James 2:9-11*). They also embrace Christ as the only Mediator between God and man and are willing to take up their cross daily and follow Him (*Luke 9:23*). Those who do not acknowledge their sin, repent, believe, and obey Christ as their Lord and Savior, do not have God as their God, no matter what they profess.

Second, the negative prohibition—to “*have no other gods before Me*,” forbids idolatry of any kind. “*No other gods*” is a strong emphatic prohibition. This is not a suggestion, but it is a demand by Yahweh that we give Him absolute allegiance and absolutely exclude all so-called gods with a little “g.” The pagan gods do not represent a living god, but the deception of demons (*1 Cor.10:19-20; Deut.32:17; Ps.115:4-7*).

The prepositional phrase “**before Me**” is best translated “*before My face*.” It specifically refers to God’s omnipresence and omniscience. It is a multi-dimensional word which means “beside me—over against Me—above Me—below Me—in front of Me—behind Me—or anywhere around Me.” You get the idea. This is a command which allows no gods around to claim obedience, solicit affection, or require anyone to follow after (*Jude 11-13*). To have God as your God means a rejection of all false gods and/or a mingling of worship of the true God and false gods (*Is.44:6, 8; 45:5-7*).

What is a false god or an idol?

Generally, when we hear the word “idol,” we think of some statue or figure worship in some temple or through some sacrifice or deviant form of behavior. However, idolatry can be defined as ANYTHING that we set in the place of our hearts that only the true God should occupy.

To *have* God means to trust Him above all—but if we find that when we are faced with trials or problems in life, we trust other things more than God, then we have made whatever object of trust an idol. It could be our jobs, our abilities, our education, our family, our government, our church leaders, or even our own appetites for legitimate pleasures. Thus, we read...

- **Psalm 146:3-4**—Do not trust in princes,
In mortal man, in whom there is no salvation.
⁴His spirit departs, he returns to the earth;
In that very day his thoughts perish.
- **Philippians 3:17-19**—Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us. ¹⁸For many walk, of whom I often told you, and now tell you even weeping, *that they are* enemies of the cross of Christ, ¹⁹whose end is destruction, whose god is *their* appetite, and *whose* glory is in their shame, who set their minds on earthly things.

APPLICATION: Does that in which you ultimately trust in reveal that you need to repent of having placed another god before the true One? Some love *pleasure* more than God. Some love *power* and *influence* more than God. When a man believes that the chief end of his existence is to provide the means of gratifying the appetites of himself and his family, he has already plummeted into idolatry. Some have idolatrous regard to their good name and credit among men. They would rather be dead than to be out of favor with others. Some have the idol of self-will set up in the shrine of their hearts. Their will is directly counter to the will of God. Still, for others, self-righteousness is the idolatry of choice. Living in self-deception, they prize morality, prayers, and religious activity more than the righteousness that comes by faith in Jesus Christ alone.

The first commandment reveals that *the God who speaks is the God who saves*, and the God who saves, *sanctifies*, or sets us apart unto Himself. We are created and called to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (*Deut.6:4-5; Matt.22:37*).

Philip Ryken says, “All people, including atheists, have their gods. You can determine your own god by two tests: **First**, what do you love? This focuses our desires. Because of our fallen nature, we all must

fight against the love of self and the love of the world. We're prone to love success, money, and sex outside of marriage because we love self and the world. We can even use God to try to fulfill self in the hopes that He will give us what we want. At the core of it all, we put self before God. The **second** test is, what do you trust? Do you trust in your wisdom or ingenuity to get out of problems? Do you trust in your investments of wealth to meet your needs? Do you trust in your good works to get into heaven? Or, is your trust in the Lord alone?"

APPLICATION:

THE COMMANDMENTS and CHRIST—How did Christ fulfill this first commandment?

THE COMMANDMENTS and THE CHRISTIAN—As we consider the first commandment, we discover four applications for us.

1. The commandments' authority is total—is there any commandment that you are out of line with that needs to be repented of?
2. The commandments' Giver is gracious—His grace is greater than all our sin. Pause and wonder.
3. The commandments' application is personal—What does the Law mean FOR you? Today. Right now. Examine yourself.
4. The commandments' context is redemptive—God's grace supplies what it demands and instructs us to say, "NO" to ungodliness and worldly desires, and, "YES" to sensible, righteous, and godly living in the present age. (*Tit.2:11-14*)

What is your takeaway from this lesson?

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