

No Other Gods

Exodus 20:1-3

God speaks personally to His people (v1). He speaks from the fire, but it's a fire of burning love, for their good (Dt. 10:12-15). The first commandment leads off, as Thomas Watson says, because it is the foundation of all true religion. God must be our God, and He must be the only one.

NOTES:

Law of Liberty

James describes the commandments as “the law of liberty” (Jms. 2:12). True freedom is not found in doing anything you want, but rather in doing the things that glorify God and bless man made in His image. The preamble of the Ten Commandments makes the nature of the law plain: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (v2). Yahweh, the promise-keeping God, provides these instructions so Israel will thrive in the land they're entering. These are called the “ten words”, and along with the ordinances that follow, we have a remarkable breadth of doctrine (Ex. 34:28; 21:1). Jesus taught not one jot or tittle of the law would pass away until all is fulfilled, and Paul said we are under of Christ (Matt. 5:17-18; 1 Cor. 9:21). Much of the law is kept differently because of Christ's fulfillment, but it is still kept. We keep the Passover by getting the leaven of malice and wickedness out of hearts, and we sabbath on the first day, the Lord's Day, because Jesus fulfilled and transformed these festivals (cf. Heb. 7:12). There is creation and redemption laws, those that are kept indentically in every age and those that are transformed by Christ. This is a far better guide than seeing the law through moral, ceremonial, and civil categories, where the latter two are discarded. John Calvin summarized the threefold use of the law:

- I. Evangelist: The law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, convicting us of sin (Rom. 3:20, 4:15, 7:7-11; Ps. 19:7; Gal. 3:24; Jms. 2:10).
- II. Civil Use: The law serves to restrain evil in society (1 Tim. 1:8-10). Every society is a theocracy of some sort with laws coming from the highest authority, the god, of the people. English Common Law comes from King Alfred (r. 871-900 A.D.) who applied the general equity of the Mosaic Law to forming the law of England. We would have far more freedom, and a much smaller government, if we returned to God's law as our standard.
- III. Guide: The law teaches us how to love God and our neighbor (Jn. 14:15; Matt. 28:20). We need to know practically how to live (e.g. Ex. 22:14-15).

The True God

God has created and redeemed Israel, and therefore claims allegiance. He is the one true God, and throughout Exodus He makes Himself known. It wasn't Hapi or Heqet or Pharaoh or Israel's own strength that delivered them from Egypt, but God who brought them out on eagles' wings. This is the jealous nature of God's love (cf. v4). We tend to think of jealousy as necessarily sinful, but the love

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between a husband and a wife ought to be exclusive. It's not okay to have a general commitment to some spouse or another most of the time. A husband and wife should be jealous for one another, having a love that forsakes all others. This is necessary for marriage, and if someone wants to be married without it, they don't actually want to be married. It would be absurd to complain about the rules of marriage and instead insist it's really about an emotional relationship. The relationship is defined, protected, and enjoyed as you observe the "rules". So it is with God. We are made in His image and designed to honor and be satisfied with Him alone as God. It doesn't matter how we feel; to be a consistent Christian is to have no other gods before Him. When we worship Him faithfully in our public and our private lives, our affections follow and we grow in holiness. As Jesus said, "The most important [commandment] is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength'" (Mk. 12:29-30).

Idols for Destruction

The language of the first commandment is specific: "You shall have no other gods before Me." The *you* here is singular. He's talking to *you*. Each person is commanded to have no other gods. The phrasing at the end is striking: before Me. Obviously God is not speaking in terms of priority such as to permit worshiping some gods in addition to Him just as long as He has pride of place. *Before Me* means in front of me, which makes us ask, where is He? "O Lord, you have searched me and known me! You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O Lord, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it... My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them" (Ps. 139:1-6; 15-16). God is omnipresent and omniscient, knowing our beginning, end, and everything between. Not many, but some people will say out loud that God doesn't exist. A few more will say in their hearts there is no God (cf. Ps. 14:1). But deep down, everyone knows God exists, that something doesn't come from nothing: "because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (Rom. 1:19-20). In order to not be functional atheists—Christians who cling to idols—we must ask ourselves, whom do we praise? Where do we find our security? Whom do we call upon in time of need? Who and what is in our picture heaven? We come to the only God, our Father, through the Son (Jn. 14:6). Have no other gods before Him.