

Every Mouth Stopped

Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Romans 3:19-20

REVIEW

Here is the flow of Paul's argument. He asserts:

1. The thorough corruption of the individual in thought, word, and deed
2. The universality of this condition among all human beings
3. Therefore the universality of guilt and condemnation
4. Therefore the universal hopelessness of sinful flesh fixing the problem

A. The word “flesh” used to describe people here points to *weakness*. See, for example,

“Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD.” (Jer. 17:5)

The Lord restrained His wrath, “For he remembered that they were but flesh; a wind that passeth away, and cometh not again.” (Ps. 78:39)

5. The Law serves to convince people of these truths. (Convincing people is the challenge.)

A. “Knowledge” in :20 – *epignosis*: “clear and exact knowledge.” See Col. 1:9, Jude 1:15.

B. The consequence is mouths being “stopped.” Literally, “fenced up,” the effect of overwhelming evidence upon an accused party in court. See:

“All iniquity shall stop her mouth.” (Ps. 107:42b)

“Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless.”
(Matt. 22:12)

The point is: “Only when these humiliating conclusions are accepted and felt, are we in a condition to appreciate and embrace the grace of the Gospel, next to be opened up.” *JFB*

Gaining a keener knowledge of the Law is an essential undertaking, for “by the law is the knowledge of sin.” Don't have the Law → don't see sin → don't see need to repent → don't find forgiveness → don't honor the Savior → die a guilty, condemned soul.

What is the “Law”? The meaning is not limited to Jewish law about how to mix incense, wear fringes, or drain blood. “Law” has a deeper and more general sense, communicating who God is and, correspondingly, what we are to be in all our interests, motives, desires, imaginations, thoughts, words, and deeds. The Law is clearly summarized in the Ten Commandments, a portion of which we will examine for an illustration today.

Let's start with the First Commandment as found in Exodus 20:1-3:

“And God spake all these words, saying, I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”

I. The first truth we notice is God asserting His reality and personhood.

A. Reality. **I am** the LORD thy God. He is in fact ultimate reality, the self-existing one preceding all else and indeed the fountain of all else. So He introduces His name to Moses at the burning bush. As such, that is, as Creator, He has the right to command us, so He says “Thou *shalt*”

B. Personhood. He is a God who speaks, who associates with people (“thy” God), and who has plans and power to execute them.

II. The point is that God is no *concept* to be molded by the perceptions of sinful man.

A. He is not to be voted on. He is not to be *felt* and then *described accordingly* in a song.

B. His essence will not be determined by people sitting at a campfire or classroom or battlefield or cemetery or church asking, “What do *you* think?” “What do *you* think?” “What do *you* think?”

C. Look at the *crime* committed by flesh when attempting to shape God after its own image. See God's rebuke to those who would so try – Ps. 50:21ff, Isa. 40:15-28.

III. Stating the First Commandment positively, then, we are charged to know God *AS HE IS*.

A. Do we? Can anyone honestly and *brazenly* profess to know and honor God precisely as He is?

B. If we are not to have false gods, we must thoroughly know the true God.

1. We have here, then, a rebuke against sloth in laboring to know God.

2. Deut. 4:29 says man finds the Lord if “thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.”

3. Any less pursuit would clearly violate the First Commandment, for who knows but that we are thinking that God is this or that, when in reality we have in mind an “other god.”

a. This was the error of Job's counselors, who misunderstood God's ways in hard times.

b. So the Pharisees who did not comprehend a God who desired mercy more than sacrifice.

c. Have we ever doubted: God to be Creator? That He could forgive *us*? That He sees us at all times? That He will lead us? That He will make something out of our lives? That He causes all things to work together for good? That He loves us with more love than our hearts can conceive? That every Word of God is true? That hell is real? That Christ is the only way? That by God's power sin shall not have dominion over us?

d. Do we ever worry? Murmur? Complain? Fear? All such transgresses ...

“Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.”

This Commandment, then, is a call to knowledge. And, secondly, it is a call to honor.

IV. Definition: What is a god?

A. Any person or thing that is given what is rightly the Lord's alone. That means to be given reverence, to be given credibility as the source of truth, to be given time and energy and resources that belong to God, to have power over the will, to capture one's imagination and desires, or to influence a person's values and command one's obedience.

B. Simply put, a false god is any thing or person whose interests are put above God's.

V. Examples

A. Gods of other religions

1. As of the Egyptians or the Canaanites. (typically affording sensual and emotional release)
2. Or of the Islamists or reincarnationists or other world religions today. (often cultural)
3. Or of counterfeits of true Christianity – where the god is appeased by infant baptisms, prayers to a “perpetual virgin,” bloodless sacrifices, prayer repetition, suffering of souls in the flames of an intermediate state; or where the god has not created hell, or his righteousness is satisfied by people trying their best, or who is pleased by whatever kind of music, dance, or other forms of “worship” people want to throw up there; or religions that deny the Scriptures, deny the centrality of Christ, deny His substitutionary death, deny His resurrection from the dead, or deny His coming again
4. All of these practices fall under the condemnation of I Corinthians 10:20 – “But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.”

B. Other gods

1. We can live for or trust in **riches** even though the Scriptures say, “Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy.” (I Tim. 6:17)
2. We can elevate our **minds** into final sources for determining good and evil, coming to values, opinions, and standards without even consulting God, though the Scriptures say, “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool.” (Prov. 28:26)
3. We can turn our **wills** into gods, making choices according to our own desires even though Jesus said that if any man would come after Him he would have to deny Himself.
4. We can live under the dominion of our **imagination**s, slaves to vanities, fantasies, and unspeakable passions, though we are called to cast down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. (II Cor. 10:5)
5. We can worship our **bodies**, obeying their impulses as base and contrary as they may be, in spite of Paul's charge that sin shall not have dominion over us. (Rom. 6:14) We can be gluttons, whoremongers, narcissists, and sloths. We can make gods of our appearance, down to our hair or teeth or nails or clothing.

6. We can serve the god **liquor** or **drugs** or **cigarettes** or **pornography** or **theater** or **television** or **phones** or **computers** or **internet**.
7. We can turn our **job** into a god and live for it. We can direct our lives according to **public opinion**, loving the praises of men more than the praises of God.
8. We can be lovers of **pleasures** more than lovers of God, as shown by unfaithfulness in church versus making room for other things; maybe slighting personal devotions or fasting and prayer or witnessing, but finding time for the couch or the cafe.
9. We can serve **education**. We can love those places of higher learning. We can ever learn and never come to the knowledge of the truth. We can be lovers of science so called.
10. One god of ours might be **sports**. What would I do without football? Where would my life be without running? How many hours have been given to watching people hit a ball?
11. And what of **persons**? We haven't begun to talk of stars and athletes and musicians, bosses and preachers and beautiful people and teachers and family that can be turned into gods.

Again, a god is any thing or person whose interests are put above God's. And we can't cop out by protesting that we don't know God's interests, for we have seen that such ignorance is sin too.

And we have just begun to list persons and things we can turn into gods. What shall we say of houses and lands, possessions, reputation, awards, achievements, claims to fame, talents, our health, our politics, our nation, our ethnic group, our social groups, our clubs, our environment, our pets, our games, our honor, our legacy, our notoriety, our length of life, our plans for our life, the way it all ends?

Clearly not all that has been listed is intrinsically evil. That's not the point. The point is that there is a God in heaven whose First Commandment is to acknowledge and live out His supremacy in every thing all the time.

Is He saying this so we know how to get to heaven? No, no, no, no, no.

A primary purpose of the Law rightly explained is to convince the most hardened, deluded, insane soul that he can't keep the Law and stands guilty before a holy God. And it would be wrong to read the guilt as so many infractions and so many incidents and so much time versus times when we didn't do bad stuff. We have a continuum here. We have a general ongoing status here. We have a diagnosis of our condition. And note: we've covered ONE Commandment, and that partially, of which there are TEN!

Listen: we are all guilty. There is none righteous. No, not one. It's time to cease all protest and defense and before the overwhelming evidence admit we are guilty before God.

DISCUSSION

1. Prepare to share your testimony of how you have broken the First Commandment and have been convinced that you are a sinner.