

No God but the Lord

Guard your heart

There are some good reasons to be talking about the ten commandments.

- ❑ They assert that God speaks and tells us how to live. We need this to truly live.
- ❑ They identify sin and show us why we need a Saviour (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:22).
- ❑ Being clothed with Christ ensures that we are not *under* law because its historical mission has been accomplished. But Jesus fulfills it himself, and in us, by the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22).
- ❑ Jesus says if we teach and keep them will be great in the kingdom (Matt. 5:17).
- ❑ They are a check on our egotism (Rom. 7:7-25) and wisdom for our living (2 Cor. 3:16).

The Lord has come to be God among us

The ten commandments are rooted in the events of the exodus.

- ❑ They are a revelation of God. Israel hears the voice from the mountain!
- ❑ They are not a myth but sober history. This event happened and must be taken into account.
- ❑ They are not an ideology—a humanly originated narrative and ethic. They assert the presence of God in our history. We cannot reduce them to ‘the Judeo-Christian ethic’.
- ❑ The same is true for the saving acts of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. He announces God’s reign, and the gospel is the revelation of his power.

The Lord says, ‘I am the Lord your God...’.

- ❑ God hears the cry of his people and shows he is willing and able to save them.
- ❑ He is related and bonded to them and is seeking that they be bonded to him (Exod. 19:4-6).
- ❑ God’s ten ‘words’ are not legislation to fix, or avoid, a problem but a declaration of what it means to be like God. God tells us what is important to him—what he is—so we will know how to be his image in this world. We are to be holy because he is holy—and as he is holy.
- ❑ Commandments—and obedience—that are not the expression of a relationship are ineffective. They tend towards mere control, and even cruelty.
- ❑ We need the Lord to command us. Ideologies don’t have the power to win obedience. After an initial enthusiasm, they have to be enforced.

The Lord must release us from our slavery for this to happen

The Lord continues, ‘I have brought you up out of your slavery’.

- ❑ It pleased God to give Israel an experience of idolatry and its resulting slavery at the beginning of their national life. They know what idols do. We will look at this shortly.
- ❑ The battle that happens between Pharaoh and Moses is really about who runs the world. Pharaoh gets his magicians to practice their ‘secret arts’, and Moses prays to the Lord (see for example Exodus 8:18-19; 9:29; 14:30-31).
- ❑ The Lord’s defeat of the gods of Egypt is comprehensive.

Our deliverance or ‘exodus’ (as in Luke 9:31).

- ❑ In like manner, Christ defeats the powers or gods of this world comprehensively.
- ❑ Jesus speaks to people who claim they are not slaves to anyone. ‘...everyone who sins is a slave to sin. Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever. So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed’ (John 8:33-36).
- ❑ He triumphed over the powers that ruled over us—sin itself, the guilt of it, the pollution of our persons and the death to which sin leads. He cancels this debt by nailing it to his cross. He has disarmed the powers that enslave us (Col. 2:13-15).
- ❑ The Lord has given himself to us fully, including giving up his Son for us. And now, he calls for us to give ourselves wholly to him—with no other ‘god’ to back us up in case he fails!

We must decide to have no other gods

The Lord says, 'Have no other gods in my presence'.

- ❑ The 'before me' is literally 'in my face' and means 'in my presence'. The Lord is jealous of this relationship.
- ❑ We only need one of this God! 'The Lord our God, the Lord is one...' (Deut. 6:4). Egypt had multiple gods—for river, for weather, etc. For us, there is one God, the Father, and one Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 8:6).
- ❑ So, we know we are not God! This is a huge relief! Many of our personal and social problems arise because we don't know God as our Father. But if he is, we know who we are and what we are here for. We are the Lord's creatures, his children, his beloved, his servants.
- ❑ We can trust the Lord to show us how to live. We can be part of the future God is creating—something wonderful and complete. Everything we do has great significance.
- ❑ Then, if everything is going well, we know who to thank. If we are in all kinds of need, we know who to ask for help. If we've sinned, we can ask him for forgiveness. If we are confused, we know he will show us the way to go. If we are being attacked, we can entrust ourselves to him. If we're always thinking about ourselves, we can ask him for love for others. The Lord, being God, can cover all bases!

Being without God leaves a vacuum that we fill with other 'gods'.

- ❑ 'Gods' are the empty space we leave when we refuse to know the Lord. Something must rise up to be 'the main thing' in our lives.
- ❑ The 'gods' have no real existence but have power because we are focused on them (1 Cor. 8:4-7). And Satan plays while we think we are pleasing ourselves (1 Cor. 10:19-22).
- ❑ Any other 'god' than the Lord is not up to the job. So, deceit, manipulation and even cruelty become necessary to show that the 'god' is working.
- ❑ We become slaves to what the world wants, what our cravings are demanding, and ultimately, the devil. He knows we are unsatisfied and guilty and keeps us running to fill up the empty space and to justify ourselves.
- ❑ Christ 'gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age' (Gal. 1:4).
- ❑ The world makes out to be a wonderful place but John tells us not to love it—what it craves for and boasts about. It is passing away (1 John 2:15-17). Only the Father truly cares about us! And only he has the breadth of knowledge, authority, wisdom and strength to do the job.
- ❑ When we see that this world cannot provide freedom, sometimes through considerable suffering, God sees our distress and turns to us. And we discover that he is God!

The Lord says 'You shall not...'

- ❑ This first command is entirely positive in its purpose. Moses says, 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength' (Deut. 6:5). Jesus repeats it. 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment' (Matt. 22:37-38).
- ❑ Loving the Lord shouldn't be any problem (Deut. 30:11-14). Paul says he is 'constrained' by love because 'one man died for all' (2 Corinthians 5:14). That should settle the matter. But it isn't just like that. We need God to say 'No!' Our hearts are a factory for making idols.
- ❑ If we have tasted that God is kind, and good, and that he has saved us, we will be grateful for this 'No!' Faced with a crisis, or an attraction, or a pressing need, some other 'god' may appear very attractive, natural and powerful. It seems impossible to see it any other way. But then, God's command protects us, and directs us back to the love of God.
- ❑ We have to 'wait on the Lord'. That is, we have to suspend our craving, for long enough to see what God is about, and how he is going to prove to us that he is our God. You can check a story about this in Israel's journeyings (Deuteronomy 8:2-6).
- ❑ God has been wonderfully gracious to us in saving us from this world and its idols. But his kindness does not mean softness. The Lord's kindness has brought us to himself. There is nothing more wonderful than this. And there is nothing that is more designed to make us strong—to be who we are created to be. So, don't entertain any other gods in the presence of our God and Father! Wait, and see, that the Lord is good.