

NO OTHER GODS
EXODUS 20:3

INTRODUCTION:

God is about to write on tablets of stone ten words that reveal His will for humankind. What will He write first? What is His first concern for human beings?

When God began to write on the tablets of stone, He wrote first: "You shall have no other gods before me." This is of utmost significance for every person who lives on this planet. It reveals to us the thing that is first in the mind and concern of God. God's first concern is the relationship that man has with Him.

As we study these commandments it will become obvious that this is God's first concern. Actually, the first five commandments deal with man's relationship to the sovereign Creator. Then, the last five deal with man's relationship with his fellowman. So God has put our relationship with Him as the first concern. This means that if you do not get the first commandment right, then none of the others will be right. Everything begins by having no other god before the one true and living God.

I. THE MEANING OF THE COMMANDMENT.

When we look at the statement that God made, it is important that we understand exactly what He said. The version from which we are reading tonight reads, "You shall have no other god before me." This might leave the impression that there could be other gods in your life, but you

are to have God as the first god in your life. Some have chosen to translate it, "You shall have no other god besides me." This would make it clear that there is to be no other god in your life. This was obviously the meaning of the First Commandment. The first commandment means that there is to be in my life and in your life only one god, the true and living God who revealed Himself to Israel at Mt. Sinai and revealed Himself to us in Jesus of Nazareth.

Now, as we look at this statement there are some truths that become rather obvious with reference to the meaning of this commandment.

1. God is available.

The underlying assumption of this commandment is that God has made Himself known. He has made Himself known in such a way that it is possible for man to give to Him the first and only recognition of His life. Man is not left in the dark about the existence of God nor the reality of God. Paul made it clear in the first chapter of the Roman letter that there is enough of God revealed in the creation itself to lead man to obey the first commandment.

2. God is the Lord over all of life.

In that ancient world where idolatry became such a problem to Israel, there was a tendency to see gods who had responsibility over different areas of life. Unless you understand the idolatry of those nations like Egypt and the Philistines that occupied the land of Israel, and the Canaanites, you will not understand this part. For instances they had a god who controlled fertility. They had a god who controlled the weather. They had another god that they looked to prosper commerce, they had another god that was over some other area of life. The claim God is making is this - I

am the Lord over all of life. You are to have no other god; you will need no other god besides me. He is the God of all of creation and all of life.

3. God demands all of our devotion and worship.

This is the truth of this commandment. God wants all of my worship and all of my devotion. Anything less than that will be a violation of His perfect will for my life and for your life.

II. THE VIOLATIONS OF THE COMMANDMENT.

There are two great statements that I have found that have helped me understand the nature of idolatry. John Wesley made one of these statements when he wrote, "What is loved, feared, delighted in or depended on, more than God, that we made a god of." Wesley made this comment when he was expounding the implications of the first commandment for all of life.

The second quotation is from the great reformer Martin Luther. Mr. Luther wrote, "What ever thy heart clings to and relies upon, that is properly thy god." Think with me about Luther's definition specifically for a moment. Seeing this commandment in light of that observation by Luther will help us understand the danger of violating this commandment.

1. What ever thy heart clings to.

Wesley used the word "love." Anything that you love more than you love God is your god.

Luther sees in it a picture of clinging to something. It is something that you hold on to because you feel that your life will not have meaning and will be without significance if you do not have this thing. It could be any one of a number of things, but it is something that you cling to. Is there

something tonight that you are clinging to more than you are clinging to God? If there is, then you are in violation of the first commandment.

2. What ever the heart relies on.

This brings us down to the basic level of life. We depend on, we rely upon, we put our confidence in something. What ever you are putting that ultimate confidence in, what ever you are relying on in an ultimate way is your god.

Taking this statement of Luther and applying to the different spheres of our lives can become very uncomfortable. It becomes uncomfortable for me! What do I ultimately rely upon? Am I relying upon the trustworthiness of the American economic system more than I rely upon God? Am I relying upon some persons or group of persons more than I rely upon God? Am I relying upon myself more than I rely upon God? Whatever it is that I rely upon more than I rely upon God, that has become my god.

When you began to evaluate your own pattern of life, the real center of your life will become rather obvious to you. What God has said is that I want to be the one and only object that you trust in, rely on, and put your confidence in.

III. THE OBSERVANCE OF THE COMMANDMENT.

If I am serious about living in the letter and the spirit of the first commandment in my personal life, what do I need to do? How can I go about observing this commandment in my life? I want us to look into the New Testament for an answer to our questions. There are two statements that

Jesus quoted from the Old Testament, are affirmed in some way that give us insight into the observance, the keeping of the first commandment.

1. It is a matter of love.

Jesus lifted out of the Old Testament the statement that God gave to Israel in Deuteronomy, chapter 6. He affirmed it as being the greatest of all the commandments and the one that allowed a person to keep the other commandments. He quoted, "Here O Israel, the Lord they God is one; thou shalt love the Lord thy god with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength" (Mark 10:30). This is the secret of observing the first commandment - love God with all of your being.

This puts it on an entirely different level than where we ordinarily put the Ten Commandments. We look around and make sure that we do not have any grotesque idol sitting around, and assure ourselves that we have kept the first commandment. There is so much more involved than having no grotesque representation of god around us. In order to keep this commandment you must love God as a reflection of the love that He has bestowed upon you.

We know that the Lord Jesus lived by the first commandment because He was sinless. It is not enough to find that Jesus did not ever bow before an idol; we know that He kept the first commandment because He loved the Father with all of His being.

2. It is a matter of worship.

When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, Satan invited him to bow down and to worship Him. In fact, Satan promised Him the kingdoms of the world if He would only bow before him in worship. Do you remember how Jesus responded to that temptation? Again, He quoted from the Old Testament, "Thou shalt worship God, and Him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:10). As far as Jesus was concerned, that settled it. It was not proper for Him to give any kind of worship or worshipful recognition or reverence to anyone except the living and true God. Jesus did this. He was a worshipper of God.

If you want to intentionally and meaningfully and faithfully keep the first commandment you must be a worshipper of God only. Would the people who know you characterize your life by saying, "She is a worshipper of God?" This is really saying more than, "She attends church regularly." It is true that those who worship God generally do attend church regularly, but there is more involved than church attendance. There is a coming before God with the kind of awe and reverence, fear and respect that an eternal and holy God deserves. In order to be a keeper of the first commandment you must be a worshipper of God.

3. It is a matter of service.

You noticed the other word that Jesus said to Satan in His quotation, "And Him only shalt thou serve?" The other side of worship is service. Worship comes first but it is always followed by joyful and glad service. Jesus recognized this. He gave Himself to doing those things that were always pleasing to His heavenly Father. In doing this He lived by the letter and the spirit of the first commandment. Now, that gives us an overview of this first commandment. It is not something that you should take into your life legalistically. It is rather that you are to take before

your prayers to the Father and say to Him, "Father, it is my desire to love You, worship You, and serve You with all my being. It is my desire for You to be the only god in my life. I invite your Holy Spirit to so work in me that this will be true - I have no other god besides you! That kind of praying will bring your life into a life of obedience to God's first commandment to His creature man.