

## H.C. Questions 94-95 – Preface and 1<sup>st</sup> Commandment of the Decalogue – Sermon Outline

**Intro:** Last week we noted that to be a good Christian, you must keep God's moral law, summarized in the 10 commandments, which reveals God's will to us. The heart of the 10 commandments is to love God with all our strength and being, and to love our neighbor as ourself.

**Need:** God prefaces His 10 commandments by reminding us of the context in which they were given of old – to His people, as His people, whom He had delivered from bondage. So because God is our Redeemer, we are bound to keep His commandments, to love God and neighbor well, for His glory and for our good. The first commandment, then, commands our love and devotion to be given to the true God alone.

**Theme:** The first commandment requires us to know, trust, worship, and serve the true God alone.

1. We must avoid all idolatry and worshiping of mere creatures.
2. We must be wholly devoted to God, trusting in Him rather than idols.

### I. We must avoid all idolatry and worshiping of mere creatures.

- A. Ex. 20:1-2, sets the context and also the reason why the first commandment is in fact first.
  1. The LORD, Jehovah, the self-existent, eternal, only true God, is "**their God**"/our God!
  2. As God delivered Israel from physical bondage of old in Egypt, He delivers all His elect people from their Spiritual bondage, the "*Egypt desert*" of their sinful souls, in order to worship/serve Him.
  3. Jehovah, our God, alone, has done this, and can do this, **and so He alone must be worshiped.**
  4. You have not been saved if you do not like that God commands you to worship and serve Him.
  5. A true Christian recognizes his sinfulness, that he owes all allegiance to the Lord alone, and that nothing in this world can distract him or compete with God to give Him the glory alone in all things.
- B. So, God's law is given to us as His people, that is, it is given within the context of the covenant.
  1. The covenant now in Christ's blood is no different in essence. In the old covenant with the Hebrew people, God gave His law to them within the covenant, and was already their covenant God/Lord.
  2. The same is true for us now, but the Mediator of the new covenant is superior, perfect, it is Christ!
  3. But Christ changes not one jot or tittle of God's moral law, summarized in the 10 commandments.
  4. It is impossible for it to be changed. The moral law is not ceremonial, it is not something that Christ fulfilled so that we wouldn't have to obey anymore. **To obey God's law is to truly bear His image.**
  5. Through Christ, our law-breaking is washed away *in His blood*, and our ability to be law-keeping/obedient citizens in God's kingdom is renewed, *by His outpoured Spirit.*
  6. What has changed is the blood, from bulls and goats to Christ, and the fullness of the Spirit poured out. In the old covenant, the Spirit was given, but in a lesser fashion, but now in fullness in Christ.
  7. But as God has done all this for His people, whether before Christ's coming to Earth or after, all our glorying and thanksgiving and service must be given to Him alone, for He alone is true God.
- C. V. 3, We're first commanded by God our Creator and Redeemer, to have no other gods "**before Me**":
  1. "*Before me*" could indicate in His presence; given His presence is everywhere, we are to never in our hearts or in any location divide our affections and worship anything or give anyone glory but God.
  2. It also notes God is zealous for our affection, and especially despises our idolatrous waywardness.
  3. Our God is not affirming the reality of false gods, beyond what we have said before, that there are demonic/supernatural powers, created by the true God, that have fallen from heaven and deceive.
  4. **2 Cor. 11:14-15** show that Satan and his fallen angels/ministers present themselves as angels of light, or true Christian Apostles/pastors/messengers. This applies also to the false gods of the world.
  5. But in reality all purported gods are deceptions of our mind or tricks of the devil, and either way, we are to have no fellowship with such darkness and evil, much less deify it and worship it as God!

6. That would be to reverence idols, whether physical things made with wood or stone, or skipping that step, anything in this world, whether persons, rulers, powers, pleasures, etc., as if they were our Redeemer, our drug and power that delivers us from misery and evil, etc.
  7. This is why being given over to drug use or alcohol is not only bad for you bodily, but spiritually destructive. It is deifying these things as the ultimate source of pleasure, liberation, service, help.
  8. The qualification for Elders to "not be given to much wine" shows that it is addiction and devotion, loyalty, a sort of worship and idolatry, that must be avoided. Its moderate use is acceptable.
  9. This goes for everything in its place and proportion. But obviously, there is no such thing as acceptable, moderate worship of other gods, for there is no being like God Almighty!
- D. As God is the source of all goodness, truth, and power, He alone must be worshiped as such.
1. But because we are fallen, we have given ourselves to our own pleasures and desires, we are all born having partaken of the forbidden fruit, and lusting after such anywhere and everywhere.
  2. You don't have to teach yourself or your baby to sin, it is natural, inborn, because we are sinful.
  3. So because of this, the immediate thing we must be told is negative, in fact many of the 10 commandments are stated in the negative, because we are fallen and so near to sinning.
  4. If we are honest, our minds are often consumed with resisting sin, trying not to think about it or crave it, rather than putting our minds on things above. God starts where we are, still struggling against sin daily, and says don't commit sin, don't have any gods besides Me, which also means, worship Me!
- E. But because we are tempted to worship other things, and we know at root we should worship God alone, the command is most fitting to be stated in the negative – no other gods, no exceptions.
1. And so the positive requirement of the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment, as H.C. 94 says, is to "avoid and flee" idolatry, witchcraft, superstition, prayers to saints and other creatures, etc.
  2. These things are prevalent in this world, and indeed, all of creation that is visible, tangible, and desirable, can also tempt us toward idolatry. We must look beyond this world to its Creator.
  3. He alone, who is also our Redeemer, is worthy of praise, and worthy of truly knowing & serving.
  4. He was good when He created us upright and without sin, and He is gracious and merciful when He delivered us from sin and unrighteousness. Who God is, as Creator, and what He has done, as Redeemer, are supreme motives to reverence God who alone is great and does wondrous things.
- F. Idolatry, witchcraft, superstition, praying to other saints, etc., is to draw near to demonic deceptions.
1. 1 Cor. 10 shows how God's covenant people, after being baptized in the parting of the sea and the cloud around them, while in the wilderness perished because they lusted after evil things.
  2. The Israelites were ready to sell their redemptive birthright God graciously gave them as soon as they realized in the wilderness their food/dining would be inferior to their eating in Egyptian bondage!
  3. While Moses was on the mountain with God, the Israelites/Aaron the priest no less, built an altar and fashioned a golden calf, to which they worshiped, offered burnt and peace offerings, had a dancing and drinking party, and had a grand time of play and debauchery with their newly crafted idol.
  4. They, as God's covenant people, committed sexual immorality, idolatry, grumbling, and all the rest, and the source of this in many ways is idolatry of the heart, loving the things of this world as your highest desire, your purpose for living, your great God Almighty, Your Lord and Savior!
  5. So Paul says in 1 Cor. 10:14, "my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry" and continues to explain that eating meat offered to idols *at the very meals/sacrifices* of the unbelieving Gentiles to their gods, is to engage in idolatry, indeed, is to have "fellowship with devils" 1 Cor. 10:20.

6. **Matthew Poole** notes that the heathen, though intending to make offerings and meat sacrifices to God/gods, were really offering themselves up to devils and their deceptions.
  7. So he rightly says that the Papists/Roman Catholic Church and others who try to worship through images are idolatrous, are actually paying homage to something creaturely -- an image or icon -- and thus to the devil and not to God; which is to draw near not to God, but to Satan, which is witchcraft!
  8. This is in part why Paul in 1 Cor. 10 is contrasting true worship and the Lord's Table and sacrament as a drawing near and communion with God, and false worship and the table of the pagan idolaters as a drawing near and communion with the demonic realm. ***It is possible to draw near to Satan!***
  9. **WLC 105** references Lev. 20:6, "*the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people*" as a violation of the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment by "***consulting with the devil***".
- G. Satan fell from glory/heaven, likely was an angelic being wanting to be greater than God, and many angels fell with Satan to become demons/deceivers of the whole world, as **Rev. 12:9**, etc. explain.
1. So the crafty serpent in the garden was not an evil serpent by its nature, but was already influenced or possessed by the old serpent/the devil himself, using the natural cleverness of the serpent to speak lies and half-truths to deceive Eve in eating the forbidden fruit, which Adam also ate.
  2. **Poole** notes Adam and Eve possibly conversed with angelic spirits that appeared before them.
  3. So this was perhaps not abnormal; a serpent speaking could have seemed like an angelic being, or perhaps God even permitted serpents to be able to speak in human languages before the Fall.
  4. What is clear is that Satan and his angels had already fallen/rebelled against God by this time, and so was already tempting the world, even in its unfallen condition, leading to this world's downfall.
  5. **Calvin** notes Satan spoke through the serpent, for Satan, not the serpent is called the "*father of lies*".
- H. **So the Fall itself was a forbidden meal in communion with the devil, lacking devotion to God!**
1. Idolatry is still real in this world, and so are the works of Satan/the demonic realm.
  2. The binding of Satan through Christ's ministry has limited Satan's power to deceive the nations, and yet even Christians are still called to resist the devil, and as we do so, the devil will flee from us.
  3. **James 4:7-8** says to submit to God by resisting the devil, who will flee from you, but also to draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Idolatry even in the heart is having other gods before the one true god, and if you trace that heart of idolatry back to its source, you will discover Satan.
  4. Satan, really, is the source of sin, lies, murder, etc. So when we sin, we are not resisting the devil, nor our own sinful/demonic like passions, but actually draw near to Satan's influence by our sin.
  5. **Jesus in John 8** sharply rebukes the unbelieving Jews who sought to kill Him, saying though they have descended from Abraham, he is not their true father, but the devil is, and they desire to do the lying and murdering of their father the devil, listening to the devil's voice rather than Christ's.
- I. Seeking out witchcraft or living by superstition is demonic, as is idolatry a drawing near to Satan, and a deception, listening to his voice rather than God's, as becomes clear in **Deut. 18:9ff**.
1. God's people are commanded not to be like the wicked nations under Satan's sway, not to offer their children to false gods in a burnt sacrifice, nor practice witchcraft, soothsaying, sorcery, calling up the dead, etc.
  2. These are the very "abominations" in the Lord's sight that led Him to drive out these wicked nations to give the land to Israel in the first place. **Deut. 18:14**, "*for these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the Lord your God has not appointed such for you.*" **So the Church today inherits the earth as we are obedient/devoted to Him!**

3. Then Moses relays God's message that God will raise up "a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear." This, of course, would be Christ, the God-Man, **Acts 3:20-23**.
  4. Likewise if you live by superstitions, you are not listening to God and His voice, but to silly charms and deceivers, obsessive compulsion, fables, good luck charms, and all the rest. That's witchcraft.
- J. As prayer is an act of worship and devotion, our prayers should be made to God alone, the one alone who can hear and answer prayer. **Praying to Mary or other godly saints is forbidden as idolatry.**
1. Now, we can and should ask others to pray for us, but that's plainly different than praying to them.
  2. The reason we ask other Christians to pray for us, is because they, too, are redeemed in Christ and have access to the Father, just as we do in Christ. But our access is the same – through Christ, not our own holiness, but His grace.
  3. So it is good to ask a minister or a godly person, one fervent in prayer, to pray for us.
  4. God hears the persistent prayers of righteous persons. Diligence in prayer makes a difference.
  5. But a godly person, a "prayer warrior", is not someone we should pray to, nor should we cease praying to God directly even as we ask others to pray for us. God answers all our righteous prayers.

II. **We must be wholly devoted to God, trusting in Him rather than idols.**

- A. **Note H.C. 95's definition of idolatry:** it is anything we trust in for Spiritual salvation/help, rather than or in addition to God as He truly is revealed in Scripture.
1. **So we open our worship services keeping the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment,** affirming various Psalms that say "*our help is in the Name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth*" or "*Our soul waits for the Lord, He is our strength and our shield*", etc.
  2. This should be coming from our heart, not just rote repetition, a confession of our devotion and dependence upon Him alone. We gather for worship because we trust God alone for salvation.
  3. We gather for worship because we know we owe Him all our love and loyalty alone.
  4. The focus of worship, then, should be on God and His glory alone, not the minister or singer or musician or choir or stage lights or candles and incense or any other created thing.
- B. **This all smacks of divided devotion,** that creaturely things are needed to love and worship God fully.
1. Now, aids to order our worship well, such as musical accompaniment, is not in itself something we are "devoting" ourselves to. It is meant to aid in our singing/devotion to God.
  2. But it is very easy for churches to let such aids descend, really, into idolatry. "We have the best pianist, the largest organ, the best singers, choir, etc."
  3. The adornment of our worship, our buildings, pulpit, etc., should not be overly ornate or distracting.
  4. It should be relatively plain & simple; worship is in Spirit & in Truth, by faith in the invisible God known through His Word, not through visual or auidial aids. **Worship is a feast for the soul, not the eyes.**
  5. The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper are the only sanctioned elements of worship that would constitute means of grace/visual and tangible parts of our worship. The water representing Christ's shed blood and outpoured Spirit, the bread and wine His broken body and shed blood.
- C. **Remember, whatever the 10 commandments forbid, they also command the opposite.**
1. So the command to have "**no other gods before Me**" is a declaration of God's all-sufficiency for us.
  2. This also implies that God is one, in His essence, and that there is only one God over all things.
  3. Otherwise, it would be reasonable to have other gods that we worshiped, at least to some degree.
  4. But as **H.C. 94** says, since God alone is God, and He is one, perfect, all-sufficient and glorious God, we must wholly trust and devote ourselves to Him.

5. This means we must truly know God as He is, as He has revealed Himself in His Word, and then know how to take that information and properly praise Him for it, then imitate Him in obedience.
  6. God, by His very nature then, must be submitted to by us, for we are not His equals, nor in heaven will we become equals to God, for we are mere creatures, redeemed by grace, and our very life, breath, existence, and redemption is from the uncreated God and His power alone.
  7. So we must submit to Him with all patience, no matter what hardship He places us in.
  8. We should expect all good gifts and all good things to be traced back to Him alone.
  9. **James 1:16-18**, *“Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures.”* Then we are exhorted to be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath, etc.
- D. Because we are sinful even as Christians, and prone to idolatry, even God’s blessings can tempt us to forget Him, trust in ourselves, or others, and so Deut. 6 is critical still for us to heed today.
1. We are exhorted to heed all of God’s commands in the land God is giving us, which today applies to wherever we live, and with our household/family. Moses mentions our sons and grandsons, that we teach and train them, live godly lives before them, pray for them, that they too worship God alone.
  2. **Deut. 6:4-5** says we are to love Jehovah our God, the LORD our God, who is one, with all our heart, soul, and strength, and all that He commands we are to teach diligently to our children, as we sit in our house, walk by the way, when we lie down, and when we rise up.
  3. The Church collectively is to teach and encourage one another in this way as well.
  4. As God prospers us and blesses us, giving us cities we did not build, full of good houses and possessions, etc., that we did not fill or build, vineyards and olive trees we didn’t plant yet we inherit and they bear much fruit, etc., we are warned to “beware” of forgetting the Lord!
  5. The unbelievers around us, who may also have nice things, may tempt us to worship their gods, that is, their own lusts, pleasures, possessions, and so forget God and true devotion to Him.
- E. Thus we see something of the unity of all 10 of the commandments. In a sense, to break one of them, as a ripple effect, is to break all of them. And to keep one of them, truly, keeps them all.
1. To keep the first commandment, to have no other gods before the one true God, to worship Him alone, and trust in Him alone, requires that we lead our families, friends, neighbors, and church family toward God alone, in knowledge, worship, and holiness. **Loving God/neighbor go together.**
  2. Our children are holy to the Lord, and if you do not devote them to God, in baptism and especially teaching and training them in the Lord, you’ve sinned against your neighbor, your precious children.
  3. But above all and at root, you’ve sinned against God, who created and owns these children, whom Christ said are part of His kingdom that He purchased with His blood, **Mk. 10:13-16.**
  4. And so by neglecting our children to be devoted to God, we also even break the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment, we do not devote our families/households to serve and worship the Lord alone.
  5. Yet Joshua in Joshua 24 says, **“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.”**
  6. The point is not that we can change the heart and will of our children, nor of our friends/family. But true devotion to God, points all under our care and our near relations to devote themselves to God.
  7. For our children, we do devote them to God, in baptism, bringing them to worship, teaching them.
- F. So Eph. 5:5-7 connects various sins back to idolatry against God, having other gods before Him.
1. *“For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, **who is an idolater,** has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for*

*because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. Therefore do not be partakers with them.*" This especially relates to covetousness, which sure enough the 10<sup>th</sup> commandment forbids. The whole law is one, all has to do with our devotion to God at root.

2. And so as we close, God willing you see that we all break the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment regularly, daily, because every sin at root is having that sin and an affection for it above/before God. Sin dethrones God for another god, casting our love/adoration upon the sin rather than our righteous God.
- G. **So to close, consider WLC 105, "What are all the sins forbidden in the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment?"**
1. *"The sins forbidden in the first commandment are atheism, in denying, or not having a God; idolatry, in having or worshiping more gods than one, or any with, or instead of the true God; the not having and avouching him for God, and our God; the omission or neglect of any thing due to him, required in this commandment; ignorance, forgetfulness, misapprehensions, false opinions, unworthy and wicked thoughts of him; bold and curious searching into his secrets; all profaneness, hatred of God; self-love, self-seeking, and all other inordinate and immoderate setting of our mind, will, or affections upon other things, and taking them off from him in whole or in part; vain credulity, unbelief, heresy, misbelief, distrust, despair, incorrigibleness, and insensibleness under judgments; hardness of heart; pride; presumption; carnal security; tempting of God; using unlawful means, and trusting in lawful means; carnal delights and joys; corrupt, blind, and indiscreet zeal; lukewarmness, and deadness in the things of God; estranging ourselves, and apostatizing from God; praying, or giving any religious worship, to saints, angels, or any other creatures; all compacts and consulting with the devil, and hearkening to his suggestions; making men the lords of our faith and conscience; slighting and despising God and his commands; resisting and grieving of his Spirit, discontent and impatience at his dispensations, charging him foolishly for the evils he inflicts on us; and ascribing the praise of any good we either are, have, or can do, to fortune, idols, ourselves, or any other creature."*
  2. Do you see how David, after murdering Uriah and committing adultery with Bathsheba, in one sense could say in his prayer of repentance in **Psalm 51**, *"Against You only have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight."* All our sin is above all a sin against God, a lack of allegiance to Him as God.
- H. **Each sin listed in WLC 105 has Bible verses/proof texts with it.**
1. A good exercise in your prayers would be to go over the WLC, read it and look at the proof texts, and then to confess to God how you break His commandments, and ask for His help to not do so.
  2. This helps us see our sin, grieve our sin, confess it, and ultimately turn from it, which enables us to keep God's commandments, including and especially the first commandment, to be totally trusting and devoted to God alone, more faithfully.
- I. **Think upon Christ's perfect obedience as well in your prayer.**
1. How he never once in the slightest swerved from devotion to God His Father, and by that obedience became our righteousness, and then wiped out our disobedience on the cross.
  2. Thank God and Christ for this in your prayer, and thank Him for the same Holy Spirit which enables us to live for God and like Christ, albeit imperfectly and with the remnants of our sinful nature still warring against the Spirit.
  3. Ask Him to strengthen you by His Word and Spirit to live for Him, to keep His commandments, and He will grant this to you far above what you can imagine. **Let us pray.**