

Text: Exod. 20:1-3

Title: "There shall be no other gods belonging to you"

Time: 4/11/2021 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Depictions of the Ten Commandments appear 43 times in our nation's Supreme Court building, including on the two oak doors that separate the central hallway of the building from the courtroom.

Judges meeting in that room, in a 1980 case called *Stone v. Graham*, decided that a Kentucky law requiring the posting of a copy of the Ten Commandments in every public school of the state was unconstitutional.

More recently, in 2005, two cases came before the Supreme Court involving the Ten Commandments. In *McCreary County v. ACLU of Kentucky*, the court ruled that a courtroom display of the Ten Commandments in that county was unconstitutional. Part of what made the display unconstitutional, according to the text of the decision, was the fact that the pastor of the county executive, while speaking at the ceremony at which the display was posted, "testified to the certainty of the existence of God" (*McCreary*, 545 U.S. at 869).

The second case, called *Van Orden v. Perry*, was decided in favor of the Texas state capitol's keeping one of a score of monuments on its 22-acre property, which depicted the Ten Commandments. The court reconciled its decision to do so with its disallowance of the Ten Commandments in schools by saying that the Texas case was a "more passive" use of the Ten Commandments (*Van Orden*, 545 U.S. at 690-691).

This US Supreme Court's recent disrespect for the Ten Commandments puts it at odds with the more supreme court of heaven. There is nothing passive about the Lord's insistence on the Ten Commandments. They must be known, not only in

our courtrooms, but also in our hearts. They must guide not only our jurisprudence, but also the way we teach our children. Listen to the King of kings and Lord of lords on the importance of the Ten Commandments: "O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever!" (Deut. 5:29).

This morning we begin our study of the Ten Commandments, and we do so in a world whose heart is dead set against them. May the Lord not find in us the heart of the worldling that rejects His commandments. Instead, may our prayer be the desire of our Lord's, that we would have "such an heart . . . that [we] would fear [the Lord], and keep all His commandments always, that it may be well with [us], and with [our] children forever."

We will notice three truths this morning as we begin with the first of the Ten Commandments: "There shall be no other gods belonging to you."

I. The Lord, not other gods, must command us (v. 1).

Illustration: The origin of the Ten Commandments has been a puzzle for those who do not accept the historicity of the Book of Exodus. For us who accept the Exodus as the work of Moses, there is no issue. God spoke the Ten Commandments to all Israel at Sinai, and then later He wrote them on the front and back of two stone tablets, which Moses would later smash and need to replace (Deut. 5:4; Exod. 31:18, 32:15-16).

Today's denial of these facts of history is traceable to evolutionary approaches to Scripture developed in the 19th century. Due to the comparative archaeological ignorance of the day, scholars then held that writing was unknown in Palestine in the days of Moses, and so he could not have authored the Book of Exodus.

By way of contrast, listen to some of the latest findings by Egyptologist David Rohl in this regard: “The actual Ten Commandments of Moses, composed atop Mount Sinai, must have been written in Proto-Hebrew which, in reality, was none other than the Proto-Sinaitic script we came across at Serabit el Khadim. Now that we know that the Exodus took place in the Middle Bronze Age, rather than at the end of the Late Bronze Age, it becomes obvious that the Decalogue (‘ten words’) of the Mosaic law were composed of the Egyptian hieroglyphic signs that Joseph and his kin had borrowed to write their Semitic alphabet. This then evolved into what scholars call Proto-Canaanite (which, in reality, included Late Bronze Age Proto-Hebrew); and from this came Iron Age Phoenician and Hebrew . . . and, of course, the Greek and Roman alphabets of the Classical era” [*Exodus – Myth or History?*, 229].

Application: There is no historical basis for rejecting the Ten Commandments as the commandments of God given to Moses at Sinai. Today, this rejection can only come from the natural desire of the human heart to be its own commander. God spoke the commandments. He is mankind’s Commander. The Lord, not other gods, must command us.

From whom will the commands you obey come today? Who is your commander? The answer to that question, very simply, is your answer to the question, “Who really is my God?” The first truth of the first commandment is that we are dealing here with the God who alone should command us. Does it work that way with you and me?

II. The Lord, not other gods, must save us (v. 2).

Note: We know that we are reading commandments that number ten in this passage because these commandments are elsewhere called the *Ten Words* (Exod. 34:28, Deut. 4:13, 10:4). Historically, you get to the number ten either by recognizing that verse 4 begins the second command, or by concluding

that the two “thou shalt not covet[s]” of verse 17 are two commands. We will follow the first understanding in our study. In addition, we know that some of these commands have to do with loving God and some with loving our neighbor. A question surfaces whether that is 3 commands and 7 commands, 4 and 6, or 5 and 5. We will say more about why later when we get to the fifth commandment, but we are going to conclude that the first five have to do with loving God, and the last five with loving our neighbor as ourselves.

One reason for this conclusion is that the phrase here in verse 2, “The Lord thy God,” occurs in the first five commandments. In this verse it introduces commandment 1. In verse 5 it explains commandment 2. In verse 7 it identifies whose name command 3 refers to. In verse 10 it identifies the owner of the day that command 4 mentions. And in verse 12, it reminds us from whom our reward comes when we obey commandment 5. In a special sense, the first five commandments refer to “the Lord thy God.”

Application: What does verse two tell us about the Lord our God? Very simply, the true God becomes the Lord our God when He brings us out of our Egypt and from the house of our bondage (v. 2). This is the Lord’s saving work of redemption, and it is the reason we desire to obey God’s law. It is the life of the redeemed that becomes a lawful life; it is not the lawful life that accomplishes redemption. Peter put it this way: “But as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy. . . . forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1 Pet. 1:15-19).

Jesus is our Passover Lamb. We must have no other gods, because there is salvation in no other. We have been saved by the

blood of the Lamb. Only His sacrifice and resurrection can save us from our sins. Isa. 44:4:6, "Thus says the Lord, the king of Israel and his Redeemer, the Lord of Hosts: 'I am the first and the last; beside Me there is no god.'"

The wonderful truth about the one true God is that He has worked to save His people from their sins, and that He did so to become their God. David rejoiced in this truth: "Wherefore thou art great, O Lord God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods? For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee forever: and thou, Lord, art become their God. (2 Sam. 7:22-24).

David desired that his son, Solomon, would share his faith in his Redeemer: "And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off forever" (1 Chron. 28:9). The Lord, not other gods, must save us and save our children. Has He saved you?

III. The Lord, not other gods, must be my God (v. 3).

Note: One of the advantages of the KJV's use of Elizabethan English is that they had available to them both singular and plural second-person personal and possessive pronouns, which was also true of Hebrew and Greek. So we can read the Ten Commandments in our KJV and see the word *thy* in verse 2, *thee* in verse 2, and *thou* in verse 3 and elsewhere, and know

that all of these pronouns are singular, just like they are in the original language.

Application: So when we say, “The Lord, not other gods, must be my God,” we are saying something that is true for every individual. Every individual must choose for himself, but every individual must choose the Lord, not other gods, for himself. This is how the believer views religious freedom. Every individual must choose for himself, and so the government must leave citizens free to choose (this is where the Equality Act is dangerous, which legislates for every citizen acceptance of a religious view of anthropology and human sexuality), but many choose wrongly, and they do so with eternal consequences.

Illustration: If a homeowner’s house is on fire and a fire fighter is pleading with him to exit the second-story window and join him on the ladder, he must make that choice himself, but the choice has consequences that simply will not be altered because he is free to make the choice.

In the same way, religious freedom is the right of the individual to choose, but religious freedom does not save. Gospel truth is the choice that every individual must choose correctly. The Lord, not other gods, must be everyone’s God. On the one hand, it is a perversion of religious freedom to say that every person can safely choose his own god without eternal consequence. And on the other hand, it is the denial of religious freedom to say that someone other than the individual can make him choose the true God. Our message to our lost neighbors must be, “You have the political freedom and personal responsibility to choose, but unless you choose the true God of the Bible, you have chosen wrongly with eternal consequences, which are worse than political ones.”

How prone we all are in our sinful flesh to make the wrong choice about who shall be our God is highlighted by the an-

swers given by the *Westminster Larger Catechism* to two questions about the first commandment:

“Q. 104 – What are the duties required in the first commandment? A. The duties required in the first commandment are, the knowing and acknowledging of God to be the only true God, and our God; and to worship and glorify him accordingly, by thinking, meditating, remembering, highly esteeming, honoring, adoring, choosing, loving, desiring, fearing of him; believing him; trusting, hoping, delighting, rejoicing in him; being zealous for him; calling upon him, giving all praise and thanks, and yielding all obedience and submission to him with the whole man; being careful in all things to please him, and sorrowful when in anything he is offended; and walking humbly with him.”

“Q. 105 – What are the sins forbidden in the first commandment? A. 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 anything 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.”

Conclusion: Jesus is our righteousness before this law. Although Himself God, He became man to obey this first of the Ten Commandments, to make His Father His only God. He did so perfectly. The *WLC* pins nothing on Him. We read in Matt. 16:23 that Jesus, as the perfect man, was committed to the things that be of God, not of men (Matt. 16:23). This would mean obeying God’s will, including the cross where He would cry out, “My God, My God; why hast thou forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46). He died for us and arose again. Today, Jesus is exalted as the sinner’s Mediator before the One He called our God and His God (John 20:17). In Christ alone, we are justified as having obeyed the first commandment. Through Christ alone, we can seek to be more like Him and obey it.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching