

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT  
(Give God First Place)

"And God spake all these words, saying, I am Jehovah thy God, Who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." Exodus 20:1-3.

This evening we are beginning a study of that ancient code known as The Ten Commandments. These rules for living will serve as guideposts to finer and fuller living. Violation of this ancient code brings disaster to the individual and to society. To observe these rules is to plant our feet on the road to a fuller individual and social life.

Very appropriately this passage begins with God. That is always the best place to begin. It begins by asserting that God is. The Bible never undertakes to prove that there is a God. It merely proclaims Him.

I. The Lawgiver—"God spake."

There are two things requisite in a lawgiver--wisdom and authority.

II. The Law—"All these words."

This means all the words of the moral law.

1. The moral law is perfect.  
"The law of the Lord is perfect." Psalm 19:7.
2. The moral law is unalterable.  
It still remains in force.

III. Our Duties.

Since God spake all these words:--

1. We must hear all these words.  
His words are too precious to be lost.
2. We must attend to them with reverence.
3. We must remember all these words.  
All that God speaks is worth remembering.
4. We must believe all His words.
5. We must love His words.  
"O how love I Thy law! it is my meditation all the day."  
Psalm 119:57.
6. We must teach all these words to our children.  
"These words which I command thee this day shall be in thy heart, and thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children." Deuteronomy 6:7.
7. We must obey all these words.

IV. The Divine Declaration—"I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

1. The Divine Name—"Jehovah."  
It means the eternal, self-existing, holy, ever-living, ever-acting, all-glorious One.
2. The Divine Relation—"Thy God."  
God is our God. Consider the misery of those who do not have Him as their God. What a wonderful privilege it is to have God as our God! "Blessed are the people whose God is the Lord." (Psalm 144:5). Note some of these privileges:--
  - (1) We may feel the stroke of evil, but not the sting. He is indeed happy who is in such a condition.

- (2) Our souls are safe.
  - (3) All that is in God is ours.  
God says, "I am thine, and all that I have." My wisdom shall be thine, to teach thee; my power shall be thine, to support thee; my mercy shall be thine, to save thee.
  - (4) He will love us dearly.  
He calls His saints "The dearly beloved of my soul." (Jeremiah 12:7).
  - (5) He will do more for us than all the world can do. What is that?
    - a. He will give us peace in trouble.
    - b. He will give a crown of immortality.  
"A crown of glory that fadeth not away."
  - (6) He will bear with many infirmities.  
He will chastise us, but not destroy us.
  - (7) He will be our God forever.  
"This God is our God for ever and ever." (Psalm 48:14). He is ours from everlasting in election to everlasting in glory.
3. The Divine Deliverance—"Who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."
- (1) Why does God mention this deliverance?
    - a. Because of the strangeness of it.  
He wrought miracle after miracle for their deliverance. He sent plagues, blasted fruits, parted the waters of the sea, etc.
    - b. Because of the greatness of it.  
God delivered Israel from the pollutions of Egypt; Egypt was a bad air to live in—infested with idolatry. Instead of worshipping the true God, the Egyptians worshipped
      - (a) Corruptible man.  
They deified their king, Apis, forbidding all, under pain of death, to say that he was a man.
      - (b) The hawk.
      - (c) The ox.
      - (d) Creeping things.  
The crocodile and the Indian mouse.
- Therefore, God mentions this as a memorable and signal favor to Israel, that He brought them out of such an idolatrous country. "I brought thee out of the land of Egypt." It is no small blessing to be delivered from places of idolatry. It is a great mercy and blessing to be delivered from a place of idolatry because human nature is so prone to idolatry, because we love to have our senses pleased, and because of the greatness of the sin of idolatry. Idolatry is giving that glory to an image which is due to God. Idolatry is such a silly and irrational religion. Sad judgments will be inflicted upon all idolaters. This is a sin which enrageth God, and makes the fury come up in His face. (Ezekiel 38:18).

Egypt and the house of bondage are the same, except they are expressed under a different notion. By Egypt is meant a place of idolatry and superstition; by the house of bondage is meant a place of affliction. Why does God allow His people to be in the house of bondage or in an afflicted state?

- (1) For Probation or Trial.  
"Who led thee through that terrible wilderness, that He might humble thee and prove thee." (Deut. 8:16).
- (2) For Purgation.  
To purge our corruption. "And this is all the fruit, to take away his sin." (Isaiah 27:9). Affliction is not to consume, but to refine.

(3) For Augmentation.

To increase the graces of the Spirit. Grace thrives most in the iron furnace. Afflictions on the godly make them better, but afflictions on the wicked make them worse; the godly pray more, and the wicked blaspheme more.

His deliverance of Israel from the house of bondage is the type of His deliverance of the soul from sin, from Satan, and from hell.

V. The Divine Prohibition--"Thou shalt have no other gods before Me."

Why did God use the second person singular, Thou, instead of saying, "You shall have no other gods"? Because the commandment concerns every one, and God would have you take it as spoken to you by name. Although we are forward to take privileges to ourselves, yet we are apt to shift duties from ourselves to others. This commandment is the foundation of all true religion.

What is it to make God our God?

1. To Acknowledge Him As Our God.
2. To Enter into a Solemn Covenant with Him.
3. To Give Him Adoration.
  - (1) Reverencing Him.

"God is to be had in reverence of all them that are about Him." (Psalm 89:7).
  - (2) Adoring Him.

"Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." (Psalm 29:2).  
Divine worship is the peculiar honor which belongs to God. This He is jealous of, and will not permit a creature to share in it.
4. To Fear Him.

This means to have such an holy awe of God upon our hearts that we dare not indulge in sin.
5. To Trust in Him.

"Mine eyes are unto Thee, O God the Lord: in Thee is my trust." (Psalm 141:8).  
God only is a sufficient foundation to build our trust upon. Trusting God is when we rely on His power as a Creator, and on His love as a Father.
6. To Love Him.
7. To Serve Him.

Put God first in thought, in desire, in motives, in determination, and in actions.