

# **FIRST PRIORITY: (Exodus 20: 1-3)**

## **(Sermon Summary)**

### **Reading: Exodus 20: 1-17.**

This is a new series we are starting on the Ten Commandments. We find out in this passage our duties towards God and towards our neighbour. We might say that these are debts of love that we are repaying. The Ten Commandments set out the moral law which is binding on all mankind through all ages. These were spoken by God in the hearing of all the people at Mount Sinai. They were written by God on tablets of stone and were to be placed in the Ark of the Covenant. Other laws which were given to Moses were more temporary or needing careful interpretation. The civil law looked at matters to do with the government of the nation at the time but it still has vital principles about crime and punishment, restitution, and degrees of culpability. The ceremonial law sets the rules for worship under the old order. Its system of sacrifices has been replaced by Christ's once and for all sacrifice for His people. In the new covenant, all believers are priests to their God.

The Ten Commandments are framed negatively. They have a severity indicating that disobedience will be punished. They are a warning against complacency and set the standards of perfection. No failure is acceptable. This is the convicting work of the law, exposing sin in our hearts because we do not obey the law but do the very things we are told not to do. Other uses of the law are for wider society in restraining the worst expressions of evil. And for believers it is the continuing rule for life, setting out the things to avoid but also inviting us to consider the opposite positive virtues that we are to live out.

### **1. Everything is about God.**

The First Commandment tells us that everything is about God. He is the first priority. Any commandment we break always involves the breaking of this First Commandment. For when we break His laws, we are asserting our own right to govern ourselves, and putting ourselves ahead of God as having the authority to guide ourselves. In doing this, we have become 'gods'. But there are and can be no other gods. There is only one true God. He alone has created the world, governs and guides the world, redeems and judges. We can see this in Psalm 115:3-8; Isaiah 41: 21-24; and 1 Corinthians 8: 4-6.

For a non-Christian, this is a foreign concept. Or if the person does believe this Commandment, it is built upon an illusion. For a Christian, not to be God-centred is to leave ourselves conscience-stricken, feeling guilty, and berating ourselves for a lack of

obedience and appreciation for His mercy. Obeying the First Commandment makes it unthinkable to ourselves that we would steal, or that we should lie or have another god for we are aware that we are always living in His sight. (See Genesis 39:6-9; Psalm 44: 20-21; 1 Corinthians 6: 15-20; and 1 Corinthians 10: 20-22). It is unthinkable to ourselves that we should have guilty secrets, or secret places, or secret daydreams.

## **2. We are to behold God aright.**

Our inner world is to accord with who He is. We are to respond to God who is everything. This is what we find in Matthew 22: 35-38. Our life is to mirror appropriately who God is and show that we obey the First Commandment by our total, unreserved giving of ourselves and all that we are to Him. We can only do this aright if we are beholding God aright. If we think He is a tyrant, then we would not be able to respond to Him in this way. Otherwise, we will be responding to Him out of fear. So we need to be clear about who this God is.

We are to behold Him as the only one who is worthy to receive our full commitment and obedience. We are to hold Him as a Being of great honour and majesty and think of Him like this. (See Psalm 93: 3-4; and Psalm 97: 1-6). He has matchless and unrivalled power, authority, righteousness and glory. In a sense, who would dare resist Him? But we are to behold Him and His Commandments in the light of Jesus Christ. He is the lens through which we must view them all. We see Him as the one who obeyed all the laws of God perfectly. We fail in the keeping the Commandments, but He did not. We do not follow through with the positive opposite virtues, but He did not fail. We see that His sacrifice atones for all these failures and so we are to respond wholeheartedly to God in the light of God's mercy to us in Christ Jesus. So in thinking about the Ten Commandments, we are to be Christ-centred. We come not to Mount Sinai and to Mount Zion.

## **3. Our own welfare is at stake.**

Our obedience is not to be blind and unthinking. It is actually a response to one who is benevolent and kind beyond words. If we are careless about our obedience, we are at risk of doing great damage to our soul's best interests. For we are doing injury to our peace, our joy, our fellowship with the Lord if we fail to heed His Commandments. We are to rather suffer injury to our wealth, our reputations, our standing in the community, than lose a good conscience through disobedience and lose the favour of God upon us. It is an act of faith to forgo visible earthly advantages to gain unseen-as-yet spiritual and heavenly advantages.

If we have other gods, they will destroy our faith, hope and love. They will produce unbelief, disobedience, self-love. Because the First Commandment is actually a promise to us as well. God is promising to be everything to us. He is promising that He will be able to make our work go better if He is first in our lives. He is promising that He will

make our relationships go better. He promises that we will be happier people. He tells us to trust Him, believe in Him and to honour Him. He instructs us to make prayer our priority and the people our source of truth and guidance. He tells us to make sure that we have His Son clearly in view. For He is welcome in the sight of the Lord.