

The Only God (LD 34; Q&A 94-95)

Reading: Deuteronomy 6:1-25

The 10 commandments cover the whole width and depth of human life in all relationships.

And keeping them is nothing less than a whole-life response of love to God's love.

Traditionally, we understand the commandments to be broken into two sections.

The first 4 commandments teach us:

1. Our relationship to God
2. To worship him
3. How we may use his name
4. And, to observe His day.

These look at our vertical relationship to God.

The fifth commandment...about honour for parents...

sits between the first and second group...

As it talks about the horizontal and yet has a vertical component.

In the horizontal relationships God teaches us to respect:

1. The neighbours life
2. The neighbours marriage
3. The neighbours possessions
4. The neighbours name.

The 10th C addresses the root cause (coveting) of all the commands of the second group.

But through it all the majesty of God and the rights of human responsibility must be held in tandem.

You can't have one without the other...

as Jesus confirmed when asked what the greatest commandment was.

If he sees them locked together, so should we.

So we can't see good people keeping the second part of the table as worthy of anything, if they have separated that from their love for God and his holy name.

Neither can 'religious fanatics' claim anything special when they kill people of other faiths...in the name of their god.

In the first commandment God says to us, "You shall have no other gods before me."

This first commandment is foundational.

Think of the first commandment in terms of the Sydney harbour Bridge.

This bridge is an engineering marvel.

Take away the foundation, and the bridge comes tumbling down.

It is the same way with the Ten Commandments:

take away the first commandment, and all the commandments come tumbling down

In other words, unless God is recognized and obeyed as Lord, the other rules cannot be maintained.

There's no way to protect my neighbour's life, wife, goods, and reputation if the first commandment is not obeyed.

This first command asks the question, 'Whom do I serve?

God says, 'You shall have no other gods before me.'

But is God saying that there are other gods and he, out of them, must be worshipped?

Is God giving recognition to a whole multitude of other gods?

The Biblical message is clear that there is no god besides the Lord.

For example, the confession of Deuteronomy 6:4 – a confession recited three times daily by every pious Jew: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one" (Deut 6:4).

The Biblical message is clear: there is no other god besides the Lord God.

Yet, the Bible also makes clear that people do worship other gods.

Man's mind is so corrupt and so depraved that he bows down and worships what is not a god.

Idol-worship is man's greatest and most basic temptation.

A fallen mankind cannot help but to erect something or someone in the place of God.

When you think of communist lands, where leaders work so hard to wipe out the worship of God, what do you always see?

Statues...huge statues of the dictator trying to control the lives of the people.

Dictators who want the worship.

I'll never forget the liberating of Iraq from the control of Saddam Hussein...

That image of the people working to topple the huge statue of him.

The people in joyous celebration when it fell.

Think of the images of Stalin and Lenin etc.

People will always worship something.

Even God's covenant people are not exempt from this.

The Old Testament is filled with examples of Israel worshipping other gods.

Remember what happened when Moses stayed on Mount Sinai with God too long?

The people made a golden calf and worshiped it.

They said to each other, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt" (Ex 32:4).

The Bible's message about these idol-gods is that they are worthless nothings.

Remember how impotent Elijah demonstrated Baal to be?

On Mt. Carmel Baal's 450 prophets called for half a day to Baal to light an offering on fire.

"But there was no response; no one answered" (1 K 18:26).

Then they began to yell louder and dance harder and slashed themselves with swords and spears for another half a day.

Again, "there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention" (1 K 18:29).

Contrast this to what happened when Elijah prayed: the Lord God sent down fire from heaven that "burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench" (1 K 18:38).

After this wondrous demonstration of power the people of Israel fell on their faces and had to cry out, "The Lord--he is God! The Lord--he is God!" (I K 18:39).

This meant, of course, that Baal is not a god.

God demands that his people worship no other than the one who delivered them.

This command comes to a covenant people.

In NT language it requires that the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and no one else, receive the wholehearted worship, love and trust of all of his people.

God alone is the foundation of all good things.

We must trust him completely...

To look for security, hope, protection and provision is to break this command.

The First Temptation

"You shall have no other gods before me."

According to the Catechism this means that I "avoid and shun all idolatry, magic, superstitious rites, and prayer to saints or to other creatures."

It means "that I give up anything rather than go against his will in any way."

And, it means that I do not trust in something or someone "in place of or alongside of the one true God."

I am to worship God and God alone.

The God of the Scriptures is to be honoured as the only Lord of my life.

My first concern, my biggest priority, is to seek His kingdom and the glory of His name.

God, and obedience to God, is to be the most important thing in my life. God is to come first.

And, if this is not the case, if we are not obedient here, then we are guilty of idolatry.

The Catechism also wants us to avoid and shun the practices that allows and even encourages prayers to Mary and a whole list of saints.

Prayer to anyone other than the one true God is idolatry and is forbidden by the first commandment.

We are living, of course, in the 21st century.

In our age of science and reason no civilized person would fall for idols made of wood or stone.

Yet, this does not mean that idolatry has disappeared.

But what about the horoscopes that appear in every newspapers and many magazines. Amazing, isn't it, that otherwise rational people believe that the movement of the stars control their destiny?

The most popular idol-gods today, do you know what they are?
They are materialism, hedonism, and selfism.

Materialism is nothing new.

Man has always worshiped wealth, possessions, and money.

Hedonism too is nothing new.

Throughout the centuries man has worshiped pleasure and indulging your desires.

In worship of this god, man pursues women, wine, and song;
drugs are used to give a high and avoid a low.

But easily the biggest idol-god today is **selfism**.

Nothing illustrates this better than TV commercials that tell us we, individually, are the most important person in the world.

Most of you have heard of the power of positive thinking...
the Gospel of a positive self-image.

Advocates of this gospel say that whatever robs a person of self-esteem is sin.
We say that sin is disobedience against and alienation from God.

They say the will to self-love is the deepest of all human desires;

we say the deepest desire of man's heart is to know and love God.

They describe the gospel as God's way for us to get rid of self-doubt and self-condemnation and to build up self-confidence and self-affirmation;

we say the Gospel is God's way to save us from our sin and misery and to bring us again into His presence.

In the Gospel of Self-Image everything revolves around the self;

whereas in the understanding of the Gospel everything revolves around God.

This trend to worship of the self is to be found in the church too.

We have always insisted on the authority of the Word of God.

But in the last few years what have we seen?

Now we have decided that there is no longer any ultimate truth,

only truths held by each person;

there are no guiding principles, only the preferences of the individual.

Each person decides what is true for him or herself.

Each person decides what to accept or reject in Scripture.

Dangerous stuff!

I think you would agree with me that very few of the people we know decide to worship a god in place of the one true God.

Rather, they worship a god alongside of the one only true God.

That is what the Philistines did.

They took the ark, representing the presence of God,

and put it in the temple of their god, Dagon.

They thought they could have both Dagon and the one only true God.

Many people today think the same way.

They think they can have all the gods of the world in their homes...

plus the one only true God.

Most of their worship, time and devotion is spent on materialism, hedonism, selfism;
this is what they live for.

But, still, they feel they ought to have some place for God too.

So, they say family prayers now and then,

do a bit of Bible reading,

and attend church once in a while.

They worship the one only true God on Sunday,

but the rest of the week it is clear they are like the Philistines – with God added

The first commandment means you worship God and God alone.

It means you live for God and God alone.

It means that God and God alone comes first.

It means that God and God alone has the highest priority.

The question needs to be asked, "Do I have an idol?"

Do I worship someone or something besides God?

Do I put my trust in someone or something "in place of or alongside of the only true God?"

You know, not all idols are ugly.

Some people live for art or music...good things from God.

But they become idols when we give them what is due to God alone.

Martin Luther said, "Whatever your heart clings to and confides in--that is really your god."

And Jesus said, "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Mt 6:21).

What do I treasure most in life?

What does my heart cling to?

What is the most important thing in my life?

My answer, of course, should be, "God, His kingdom, His glory, His name are the most important things in my life."

But if that isn't my answer, then I have an idol.

Fulfilment of the First Commandment

God says to us this evening, "You shall have no other gods before me."

In order to obey this command of God, do you remember what Jacob and his family had to do at Bethel?

They had to have an idol-removing exercise.

After talking with the Lord, Jacob said to his household, "Get rid of the foreign gods you have with you, and purify yourselves and change your clothes." (Gen 35:4)

So they gave Jacob all the foreign gods they had and the rings in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the oak at Shechem.

Or, remember the rich young man who came to Jesus seeking eternal life.

Jesus knew that money was his god. So what did Jesus say to him?

He said, "Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me" (Luke 18:22).

"Get rid of your idols," said Jesus, "then you are ready to follow me."

In order to obey the first commandment, then, we have to rid ourselves of all other gods.

Only the God of the Scriptures, the God Who reveals Himself in Jesus Christ, may have the first place in our lives; everything else must be second.

However, even if we have an idol-removing exercise we have not yet fully obeyed the first commandment.

The fulfilment of the first commandment also consists in loving God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength;
it consists in trusting Him so much we do not doubt He will provide whatever we need for body and soul; it consists in giving God the first place in my life.

Only when we also do this are we obeying the first commandment.

Only God Saves

The Catechism also tells us why we are to serve only the Lord.

I serve only the Lord because I do not want "to endanger my very salvation."

Remember the preface to the Law?

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."

At the start of the Law, God gives a reminder of Who He is and what He has done. He is the one true God Who has given His people deliverance from the slavery of Egypt.

He is the God Who saves...

not only from Egypt but also from the misery and guilt of sin.

No other god can possibly do this.

No other god can save from physical and spiritual bondage.

Think of what this means.

If we have idol-gods, if we worship anyone or anything besides God, then we endanger our very salvation.

We endanger our salvation not because of the fierce anger of a jealous God, but because in worshipping anyone or anything else, I have left the only source of salvation.

In other words, I am to worship God alone for He alone is our Saviour God.

He alone has the power to save.

Conclusion

Our God is the one only true God.

He, and He alone, is the God Who saves us from our misery and guilt.

How are we to thank Him for such a great deliverance?

He tells us: "You shall have no other gods before me."