

Biblical Theology by Dr. Chuck Baynard

Lesson 33 (HCLD 34)¹

Preparation: Begin and end each study time with prayer. Pay particular attention to the background reading and pray over each passage asking God to reveal Himself to you.

Background Reading: Read all the Scripture verses in footnote # 1 & 2.

Question Which is the first commandment? And what duties does the first commandment require? What are the duties required in the first commandment?

Answer: The first commandment is, Thou shall have no other gods before me. The duties required in the first commandment are, the knowing and acknowledging of God to be the only true God, and our God;[1] and to worship and glorify him accordingly,[2] by thinking,[3] meditating,[4] remembering,[5] highly esteeming,[6] honoring,[7] adoring,[8] choosing,[9] loving,[10] desiring,[11] fearing of him;[12] believing him;[13] trusting,[14] hoping,[15] delighting,[16] rejoicing in him;[17] being zealous for him;[18] calling upon him, giving all praise and thanks,[19] and yielding all obedience and submission to him with the whole man;[20] being careful in all things to please him,[21] and sorrowful when in anything he is offended;[22] and walking humbly with him.[23]²

¹ The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 34

Q93: How are these Commandments divided?

A93: Into two tables:[a] the first of which teaches, in four commandments, what duties we owe to God; the second, in six, what duties we owe to our neighbor.[b]

a. Exod. 34:28; Deut. 4:13

b. Matt. 22:37-40

Q94: What does God require in the first Commandment?

A94: That, on peril of my soul's salvation, I avoid and flee all idolatry,[c] sorcery, enchantments,[d] invocation of saints or of other creatures;[e] and that I rightly acknowledge the only true God,[f] trust in Him alone,[g] with all humility [h] and patience [i] expect all good from Him only,[j] and love,[k] fear [l] and honor [m] Him with my whole heart; so as rather to renounce all creatures than to do the least thing against His will.[n]

c. I Cor. 10:7, 14

d. Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:10-12

e. Matt. 4:10; Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9

f. John 17:3

g. Jer. 17:5

h. I Peter 5:5-6

i. Heb. 10:36; Col. 1:10b-11; Rom. 5:3-4; I Cor. 10:10

j. Psa. 104:27-30; Isa. 45:6b-7; James 1:17

k. Deut. 6:5

l. Deut. 6:2; Psa. 111:10; Prov. 9:10; Matt. 10:28

m. Deut. 10:20

n. Matt. 5:29-30; 10:37; Acts 5:29

Q95: What is idolatry?

A95: Idolatry is to conceive or have something else in which to place our trust instead of, or besides, the one true God who has revealed Himself in His Word.[o]

o. Eph. 2:12; 5:5; Phil. 3:19; John 2:23; 5:23; II John 1:9; Psa. 62:5-7; 73:25-26; 81:8-9; Matt. 6:24

² 1. I Chr. 28:9; Deut 26:17; Isa. 43:10; Jer. 14:22 2. Psa. 29:2; 95:6-7; Matt. 4:10 3. Mal. 3:16 4. Psa. 63:6 5. Eccl. 12:1 6. Psa. 71:19 7. Mal. 1:6 8. Isa. 45:28 9. Josh. 24:15, 22 10. Deut. 6:5 11. Psa. 73:25 12. Isa. 8:13 13. Exod. 14:31 14. Isa. 26:4 15. Psa. 130:7 16. Psa. 37:4 17. Psa. 32:11 18. Rom. 12:11; Num. 25:11 19. Phil. 4:6 20. Jer. 7:28; James 4:7 21. I John 3:22 22. Jer. 31:18; Psa. 119:136 23. Micah 6:8

When we look at the Scripture reference list for this statement we might begin to wonder if the Westminster Divines were creating their own treasury of Scripture knowledge. I do not take exception to one single point of what the Westminster Divines have to say regarding the first commandment. However, I don't think this depth of understanding our duty to God was present and intended in the giving of the command at Sinai. It is not wrong to so attach these points by way of instruction later, but the commandment needs to be maintained in its simplicity in presenting the Moral Law.

These were divine laws given to a historic people in time. They made sense to that people in that place and did not need nonexistent Scriptures many of which would not be revealed for several centuries to bring about both understanding and obedience to that first audience. When we pack too much into one point of Scripture, it is as wrong as ignoring it altogether. This commandment was capable of standing alone in the day of Moses and is just as capable of standing alone today. It is a truth that we can by the most clear of implications tie every single verse of Scripture to several others, which in turn are directly related to another set, multiplied by the first rank of verses and so forth until there is no word of the Bible that is not part and parcel of the whole, and as such cannot be removed without the diminishing of the whole. Eve was the first one to practice the addition to God's word what may be true in another place, but which was not of the point being dealt with, e.g. touching the tree would result in death. Later we see one die from simply touching the Ark, but this has nothing to do with the story of the fall, and draws its power from another verse. Most pastors are good at this (guilty?) And our Puritan forefathers were perhaps the greatest masters of this ability to connect various passages together to have graced church history. Please read this carefully and try to understand what I am saying. God could have caused the tables of the law to occupy several thousand tablets of stone. He did not! God chose to present in concise format the core of His law, by which the whole was summarized. In our effort to teach, it is correct, as the Westminster Divines have here done, to make a statement based on the Moral Law, but in so doing we should not hinder the simplicity of the Moral Law. To lay six hundred and thirteen points of law before the people will confuse and frustrate. To give them ten points of contact for study and meditation will lead them into all righteousness.

Now, it is good to find more than one reference for a point we teach as doctrine. We might go so far as to say that a single point is sufficient to draw our attention, two points our obedience and discussion, three points a completed line of thought and four points gives to us a full born doctrine of the church. However not all that is of God and His word will lead us to four or more points of contact in the Scripture and I think it is error at best to force such. What I am saying that while I agree with all the points in this statement, many cannot be proof texted (not that it is a necessity to proof text) without reaching for materials that God would not reveal for several centuries after Sinai. Remember the context of the first hearer may be enhanced by later revelation, it will not be amended in such a way that the first hearer was in sin for the lack of what God had not yet revealed. The purpose of the Law was to instruct the people in the things of God and to reveal sin.

What then, did God say and what does it mean? God said there will be no other god's before me. It means that in a culture where gods abounded, and every household had its own gods that there was only One God. It was commonplace to worship many gods, and the concept of one God who was over all others and who would not tolerate any other god was a foreign thought that did not exist, even in the newly born slave nation of Israel. And yes as explained elsewhere they were still a slave nation even as we are today. The commandment has the same meaning to those hearing it for the first time today as it did several thousand years ago in the Sinai Desert. Perhaps for as much as 75 per-cent of the world, their culture permits, or even demands many gods. Our missionaries face this every day where a people profess Christ, but not exclusively, they simply add Him to the list of gods they serve. This is dangerous and brings not the blessings of God, but His wrath upon a people or person. This is the intent, and prime function of the first commandment. It can also be seen here that not only did God prohibit idolatry, God declared there is no other god. There is only one true and living God.

To move this to love of car, home, material possessions or even another person to me reduces the sovereignty and majesty of the God who dared look at all the so-called deities in existence and say

these are not gods, and only I Am God. Christianity has always been exclusive and conditioned with all of the duties the Westminster Divines so painstakingly outlined in this statement. However I don't think we need to anchor these rules of obedience to God's word here. If we were into systematics here perhaps we would label this acceptance of the great I AM as the only God as loci number one in the sequence of eternal life. Hear O'Israel the LORD your God is One! Hear O'Church, the LORD, your God is one! When we consider the context, that context is worship. SO while anything that comes before God is wrong and properly called sin, all are not with an intent of worship and therein is where I differ from some and would not call love of another or possessions to be a violation of the first commandment, though properly sin.

In many ways we see God demonstrate His power and sovereignty to the entire world for just this purpose, to reveal His glory and majesty. Consider the plagues on Egypt in the exodus, or the incident on Mt. Carmel with Elijah. Consider the feats of David and his mighty men. Or perhaps we can see it in the destruction of the walls and defeat of Jericho. In the day of Christ we see many miracles and one in particular comes to mind where our Lord says that a man was born blind just for the purpose of showing His power and glory in His day. In the beginning of the church, wherever the apostles went, great feats of God's power signified their position as the messengers of God. In the New Testament we look to the end times and watch the greatest armies ever called to battle destroyed by nothing other than the mighty Word of God. This God of creation and destiny dared proclaim, I will tolerate no other gods before me. Idolatry is adultery in the sense it is given to us in the Bible, and God is a jealous God as we read within this first table. Perhaps we can see the truth in the book of Hosea and understand if Hosea had said to his wife, a former harlot, there shall be no other men before me. God used this prophet to show this as His relationship to Israel as His chosen bride. All of mankind had already crawled into bed with another so to speak, and long before God called Abram from Ur of the Chaldees, this was the condition of man; in this sense God married a harlot. As God ordered Hosea to again and again redeem his wife, so God time and again worked physical salvation for His chosen bride. Continually Israel strayed, and except for God's faithfulness to her, she would have famished in the brothels of the world. Is it any different with the church today? I submit to you it is not!

Thus I don't attempt to refute or diminish what the Westminster Divines have here written for our help in being God's people and maintaining faithful obedience to our Lord. I am trying to say do not let us be like the Pharisees and major in the minor things, and minor in the major things of the kingdom. This addresses to whom you owe your loyalty, first last and always. We are called to obey God at the cost of all things temporal, to include friends and family, not to mention the material things. Thus we could see here the many points of the Westminster Divines, and quite properly so. But of the utmost importance to me is that we see God will allow no other god within His palace walls. As no man would tolerate another man in his bedchamber, God calls us to come away from the gods of this world and abide with Him in spiritual chastity.

The moral law was not given for a checklist of things we must lay aside, for the use of another generation of Pharisees, but as a rule for faith and life. I would then submit to you that in so giving God our complete loyalty as here demanded, the several duties of the Westminster Divines will flow from this as surely as the sun will continue its circuit until God says otherwise. In the language of the New Testament, by their fruit you shall know them, and the fruit of the Spirit will be evident in the life of those called by God into His glorious Gospel. I think then we need to take up the attitude of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15, whereby we too say; we lay no other upon you other than . . . " There shall be no other gods before me" is a statement that is quite sufficient in itself, from which a multitude of duties of love will flow quite naturally.

Here we find not the individual petals of the great Reformed TULIP, but rather the soil in which it is planted, God's sovereignty. Planted in this divine soil and fertilized by the Gospel of God, it will grow deep roots that no storm can wash it from the soil, and there, protected by the hedge of God grow to show forth His majesty for eternity.

Suggested Sermon Outline

The Law of God

What is the Law of God?

God spake all these words, saying,

What rules are to be observed for the right understanding of the Ten Commandments? Exodus 20

For the right understanding of the Ten Commandments, these rules are to be observed:

1. That the law is perfect, and binds everyone to full conformity in the whole man unto the righteousness thereof, and unto entire obedience forever; so as to require the utmost perfection of every duty, and to forbid the least degree of every sin.

The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple. (PSALM 19:7)

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: **But I say unto you**, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. (MATTHEW 5:21-22)

For **whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all**. (JAMES 2:10)

2. That it is spiritual, and so reaches the understanding, will, affections, and all other powers of the soul; as well as words, works, and gestures.

For we know that **the law is spiritual**: but I am carnal, sold under sin. (ROMANS 7:14)

And thou shalt **love the LORD thy God with all** thine **heart**, and with all thy **soul**, and with all thy **might**. (DEUTERONOMY 6:5)

Jesus said unto him, **Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind**. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, **Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself**. (MATTHEW 22:37-39)

3. That one and the same thing, in divers respects, is required or forbidden in several commandments.

Mortify therefore your members, which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and **covetousness, which is idolatry**: (COLOSSIANS 3:5)

Saying, When will the new moon be gone, that we may sell corn? and the sabbath, that we may set forth wheat, **making the ephah small, and the shekel great**, and falsifying the balances by deceit? (AMOS 8:5)

So are the ways of **every one that is greedy** of gain; which **taketh away the life of the owners thereof**. (PROVERBS 1:19)

For the **love of money is the root of all evil**: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. (1 TIMOTHY 6:10)

4. That as, where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden; and, where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded: so, where a promise is annexed, the contrary threatening is included; and, where a threatening is annexed, the contrary promise is included.

If thou **turn away thy foot from** the sabbath, from **doing thy pleasure** on my holy day; **and call the sabbath a delight**, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt **honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure**, nor speaking thine own words: (ISAIAH 58:13)

Thou shalt **fear the LORD** thy God, **and serve him**, and shalt swear by his name. (Deuteronomy 6:13)

And saith unto him, **All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me**. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, **Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve**. (MATTHEW 4:9-10)

For God commanded, saying, Honour thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death. But ye say, Whosoever shall say to his father or his mother, It is a gift, by whatsoever thou mightest be profited by me; And honour not his father or his mother, he shall be free. **Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition**. (MATTHEW 15:4-6)

Let him that stole steal no more: but rather **let him labour**, working with his hands the thing which is good, **that he may have to give to him that needeth**. (EPHESIANS 4:28)

Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. (EXODUS 20:12)

The eye that mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother, **the ravens of the valley shall pick it out**, and the young eagles shall eat it. (PROVERBS 30:17)

At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, ***I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them.*** (JEREMIAH 18:7-8)

Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for ***the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*** (EXODUS 20:7)

In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. ***He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.*** He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. ***He that doeth these things shall never be moved.*** (PSALM 15:4-5)

He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully. He shall receive the blessing from the LORD, and righteousness from the God of his salvation. (PSALM 24:4-5)

5. That what God forbids, is at no time to be done; what he commands, is always our duty; and yet every particular duty is not to be done at all times.

And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) ***Let us do evil, that good may come?*** whose damnation is just. (ROMANS 3:8)

Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, ***than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;*** (HEBREWS 11:25)

And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? Only ***take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen,*** and ***lest they depart from thy heart*** all the days of thy life: but ***teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons;*** (DEUTERONOMY 4:8-9)

But if ye had known what this meaneth, ***I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless.*** (MATTHEW 12:7)

6. That under one sin or duty, all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded; together with all the causes, means, occasions, and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto.

Abstain from all appearance of evil. (1 THESSALONIANS 5:22)

And ***others save with fear,*** pulling them out of the fire; ***hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.*** (JUDE 23)

Fathers, ***provoke not your children*** to anger, ***lest they be discouraged.*** (COLOSSIANS 3:21)

7. That what is forbidden or commanded to ourselves, we are bound, according to our places, to endeavor that it may be avoided or performed by others, according to the duty of their places.

But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God: in **it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son**, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, **nor thy stranger** that is within thy gates: (EXODUS 20:10)

Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, **and not suffer sin upon him**. (LEVITICUS 19:17)

For I know him, that **he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD**, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him. (GENESIS 18:19)

And if it seem evil unto you to serve the LORD, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but **as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD**. (JOSHUA 24:15)

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt **teach them diligently unto thy children**, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. (DEUTERONOMY 6:6-7)

8. That in what is commanded to others, we are bound, according to our places and callings, to be helpful to them; and to take heed of partaking with others in what is forbidden them.

Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand. (2 CORINTHIANS 1:24)

Lay hands suddenly on no man, **neither be partaker of other men's sins**: keep thyself pure. (1 TIMOTHY 5:22)

And **have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness**, but rather **reprove them**. (EPHESIANS 5:11)