

DEUTERONOMY 26:1-11
THE LORD YOUR GOD

Lord have mercy. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord has laid on [Jesus] the iniquity of us all” – Isaiah 53:6.

The Ten Commandments are the Law of God, the will of God, how God wants us to live. These Ten Commandments, this Law of God, can only do two things. One, it makes you aware of your sins against the Lord your God, and from there it will either drive you further away from God, or it will drive you to Jesus, your only hope as He fulfilled the complete Law for you.

So let's start off by thinking about God's act of salvation, God's deliverance, and the joy that we have because of what God has done for us. This same God whom we look at in the book of Deuteronomy, who's talked about as delivering the people of Israel, has also delivered all people through the death and resurrection of Jesus. He has delivered you. The Ten Commandments then are your response to God's deliverance.

The summary of the Ten Commandments is seen in two tables. The first three commandments are all about God, and the last seven are all about others, and together they're all about loving God, and loving others.

And so we start with the First Commandment – You shall have no other gods. We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things. This is a great text for us to look at as we contemplate this commandment. Eleven verses, and ten of them mention the Lord your God, and they detail why you should fear love and trust in God above all things. From beginning to end this is all about what the Lord your God had done for the Israelites, and thus by extension what He does for you, and then how you can respond and show your gratitude to the Lord your God.

However, first let's stop and contemplate God. Why should you have no other god? What's wrong with polytheism, the belief in many different gods so that you can cover all your basis? Who is this God who demands your complete loyalty? We call Him the only true God. We say He's triune – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Three distinct persons in one divine being – the Holy Trinity.

For a simple demonstration of that think of the blessing at the end of the service. It's a blessing in which God's name is placed upon you, but that name is done in triplicate. The Lord blesses you and keeps you; the Lord makes His face to shine upon you and is gracious to you; the Lord lifts up His countenance upon you and gives you peace. We use this name in baptisms as we go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Yet, still, the Lord our God is only one God. One God, three distinct persons, and no other gods.

So what is this three in one God forbidding us from doing? The commandment says, no other gods, and the definition of that is idolatry. The Bible talks about carved idols and the Lord our God not giving His glory to others. Yet, for most of us Christian we don't have a problem with worshipping carved idols, we don't do it, and generally we don't know of other people who do such things.

However, you don't have to worship statues of other gods to break this commandment. It's broken when you place anything before the Lord your God. When you don't come to church on Sunday because you have something 'more important' to do you're breaking this commandment, and the third commandment, which we'll cover later. Yet, it's hard to talk about one without talking about another, because, as the Bible says, "For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it" – James 2:10.

So, back to having other gods. You have other gods when you fear, love or trust in any person or thing as you should fear, love and trust in God alone. Listen to how serious God is about this. Proverbs 11:28 says, "Whoever trusts in his riches will fall. In the Gospel of Matthew Jesus said, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (10:28). "Whoever loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me" (10:37). That's how serious God is about you fearing, loving, and trusting in Him alone.

So, what are you to do? Yes, I said fear, love and trust in the Lord your God, but how? We fear God above all things when we revere Him alone as the highest being, honour Him with our lives, and avoid what displeases Him, meaning any type of sinning. Thus, you are to fear displeasing God by sinning against God. Proverbs 8:13 says, "The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil."

And if you hate evil, the opposite is that you love God above all things by clinging to Him alone as your God, and gladly devoting your lives and service to Him. Basically, you're to think of God more than anyone or anything else. Put God first in your life, and esteem Him as your highest good.

Finally, the trusting part – you are to trust in God above all things by committing your lives completely to His keeping and relying on Him for help in every need. Again, the Proverbs (3:5) say, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding." Too often we think that we know better than God. We like to follow the ways of the world to fit in. Or we pick back and forth between different religions or different Christian denominations. We find different faiths that suit our different preferences.

The Lord your God doesn't change – Malachi 3:6. Therefore say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?” And remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” – Hebrews 13:6-8.

However, no person can keep any or all of the commandments perfectly, no pastor, no congregation, only Jesus Christ. Sure, all those who have faith in Jesus will, by the power of the Holy Spirit, strive to keep the commandments. But we'll fail. We'll fail individually, and we'll fail as a congregation. Yet, we can also be forgiven together as a congregation, and forgiven individually. We have to be honest with ourselves that “there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins” – Ecclesiastes 7:20.

We say that in the opening of every service, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” – 1 John 1:8-9.

Why else would we worship this One God if He didn't forgive all of our sins? Could you fully confess your sins to God if you weren't sure of full forgiveness? Would you feel safe and comfortable praying to a god who didn't forgive you, but rather held some past misdeed against you? Think of someone who harbours feelings of anger and unforgiveness towards you, or you towards them. Do you feel comfortable being around someone who doesn't forgive you, or whom you don't forgive? Those aren't nice feelings to live with.

Thankfully we don't have to live with them from the Lord our God, and I pray that we'll learn to forgive and let go of anger towards one another. And we'll learn to do this together from Jesus, the Lord our God.

In our reading we see that through God's continual gracious acts He was bringing the people of Israel into His family. He brought in sojourners, that is foreigners, people who weren't Israelites into His family. He gave them a place to live and food to eat and they responded by worshipping Him and rejoicing in all the good that the Lord their God had given them. We can do them same, rejoicing in all the good that the Lord our God has given to us as different people brought together into the family of God.

Over Lent we focus more deeply on God's greatest gift. We look “to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:2). We remember again more deeply what the Lord our God has done for us, and we return to regular worship of the Lord our God, as the people of God, the family of God, forgiven brothers and sisters in Christ. Amen.