

YOU SHALL LOVE GOD

Series: Awesome Father, Precious Son

by Ron Ritchie

A few years ago I heard Ted Turner, a major TV executive, say on TV what he thought of our current morality. I don't think I'll ever forget it. He declared the Ten Commandments obsolete and part of a religion for losers. He went on to propose ten "voluntary initiatives" as a humanistic alternative.

I believe that the reason most folks struggle with the Ten Commandments is that they have never established a personal relationship with the Author, the one and only living God, whose name is Jesus. But we who have a personal relationship with Jesus agree with the apostle Paul's statement that "...the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good" (Romans 7:12).

Hear, O Israel!

Deuteronomy 5:1-5a:

Moses summoned all Israel and said: Hear, O Israel, the decrees and laws I declare in your hearing today. Learn them and be sure to follow them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb. It was not with our fathers that the LORD made this covenant, but with us, with all of us who are alive here today. The LORD spoke to you face to face out of the fire on the mountain. (At that time I stood between the LORD and you to declare to you the word of the LORD, because you were afraid of the fire and did not go up the mountain.)

In the first four chapters of Deuteronomy we found Moses, the old shepherd, prophet, and mediator, reminding the second generation of Jews after the Exodus of the awesome character of their one and only living God and of the deeds that he had accomplished on their behalf in the past. They needed this review of their relationship with God in order to have the courage to enter the land God had promised to Abraham 685 years earlier.

They also needed a review of the Law in light of the many temptations that would be placed before them to forsake their God. They would be able to keep these commandments only if they allowed God to circumcise their hearts (see Deuteronomy 30:6).

We have come to the beginning of the second major address by Moses to the people of God (Deuteronomy 5:1-11:32). As we study verses 1-11 together, keep in mind our awesome Father as well as his precious Son, who hid these words in his heart and used them often to teach and confront the Jews of his day and to teach his disciples about his Father in heaven (see John 17:3).

"Hear, O Israel, the decrees and laws...Learn them and be sure to follow them." Hear (shâma') means hearing that leads to obedience. "The LORD our God made a covenant with us at Horeb." The covenant Moses is speaking of is the one God made with his people at Mount Sinai, which extended to the following generations. Within that covenant were the Ten Commandments, which revealed the pure, loving, gracious, and merciful heart of their God, and the implication that without his power they could never live up to these commandments. It was these commandments that would draw God's people into conformity with his pure character and draw other nations around them into his perfect plan of salvation.

Moses is saying, "Hear, O Israel! There is only one living God and he has revealed himself to you. He has given you his Law to bring life to you and your children. So in light of that wonderful relationship with the LORD, may your grateful hearts be open to hear and obey."

The Commandments of God

Deuteronomy 5:5b-6:

And he said:

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

This is the same One who spoke to Moses out of the burning bush, declaring when Moses asked his name, "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14). This is Yahweh, the God of Israel, He Who Is, the divine self-existing One.

We understand the name Yahweh to refer to the covenant God. "God also said to Moses, 'I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. Therefore, say to the Israelites: "I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God"' (Exodus 6:3-7).

The Lord is saying, "I am not just any so-called god, but I am personally involved with your whole life, day in and day out, as I seek to mold you into a nation that I will use to bring salvation to all the nations. And what I have done in the past for your parents I can do in the future in the land of Canaan for you: deliver you from the temptation of idolatry. Remember that Yahweh loves you and has demonstrated that loyal love to you ever since he established his relationship with Abraham."

Before we begin to look at the first four of the Ten Commandments, let me review some general principles. (1) It can be seen in many passages in Genesis (for example, 9:5-6), that God's Law was in the heart of man long before it was written on the two tablets of stone on Mount Sinai.

(2) God's love, grace, and mercy are the motivation behind his Law as it reflects his character, nature, and will. In the context of Deuteronomy, the Law was designed for a people already redeemed by a loving and gracious God. Once we come into a personal relationship with him and begin to know him, we are filled with a desire to please him by depending on his power to enable us to live within his laws.

(3) We are never called to live up to the letter of the Law, but rather to live within the spirit of the Law. That is, God is always interested in the motives of our hearts rather than the outward manifestation of some religious activity alone. Jesus made that very clear when he revealed the Law in the Sermon on the Mount.

(4) The Law of God has two sides. For example, on the negative side, you shall not murder a fellow human being. On the positive side, you shall do all you can to contribute to his life and well-being.

(5) The spiritual principles within God's Law always remain the same, and are applicable to each new generation (see Matthew 19:16-20).

(6) His commandments are not to restrict life but to direct us into the fullness of the abundant life as we choose by his power to live in conformity to his will.

(7) The first three commandments deal with how we relate directly to our God, the fourth deals with our work, and the last six (which we will take up in the next message) deal with how we relate to our fellow man.

The First Commandment

Deuteronomy 5:7:

You shall have no other gods before me.

There is only one living God. "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts" (Deuteronomy 6:5-6). In light of that relationship of loyalty to God, who has already revealed himself to you in love and grace, you should not worship any created person or being, for that would come between his love for you and your love for him. Therefore, "You shall have no other gods before me [besides me]." The Creator of the universe not only created mankind but then revealed his character and nature to mankind, including his desire for all of us to come into a conformity with his definition of morality.

Moses knew he was talking to a people who had been surrounded for four hundred years by a variety of Egyptian gods and goddesses---from the dung beetle to the Nile River. He also knew they were about to enter the land of Canaan, which was inhabited by a pagan people who were enslaved by gods and goddesses like the following: El, the father of the gods, who gave increase to the families, fields, and cattle. Baal, one of the chief male deities of the Canaanite pantheon. Asherah, the goddess of the sea who sat alongside Baal. Astarte, the goddess identified with the planet Venus, sensual love, maternity, and fertility. This is to mention but a few of scores of gods and goddess that kept the Canaanites and the surrounding nations held captive by fear and superstition. So God was saying, "You shall not give power or position to anything or anyone else but me."

If you want to live an abundant life, one that is filled with peace, joy, and wholesomeness, then worship the true Author of life---Yahweh, the one and only living God. All the other gods and goddesses will serve you only death in all its horrible forms. Don't give your life over to nongods such as position, power, and possessions. Don't turn to family, friends, networking, psychics, channelers, self-help philosophies, new-age philosophies, health and wealth religions, etc. Each and every day of your life, turn to the one and only living God, Yahweh, whom we know as our risen Lord Jesus, for abundant life.

The precious Son of God, Jesus, was talking to a young lawyer one day who stood up to test him. "'Teacher,' he asked, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?'

'What is written in the Law?' he replied. 'How do you read it?'

He answered [quoting Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18]: "'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, "Love your neighbor as yourself."'

'You have answered correctly,' Jesus replied. 'Do this and you will live.'" (Luke 10:25-28.)

The first commandment is still relevant today for all of us. Brian Morgan wrote in Discovery Paper 3817: "Your god is whatever your heart craves for, what you are obsessed with. Your god is whatever you spend your money on, what you sacrifice your time for. Your god is anything you think will impart life to your soul. It could be a relationship or an ambition. The first commandment says to us, 'Do not say you love God and then allow your heart to go after other gods.'"

The Second Commandment

Deuteronomy 5:8-10:

You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Moses had already warned this people in Deuteronomy 4:15-19, "You saw no form of any kind the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape...." The issue was, and remains in every generation, that the Creator-God of the universe, who stands above and beyond everything he has

created, cannot be reduced to an image conceived of by man and crafted by his hands. God is Spirit and is not willing to allow anyone to try to place him into some distorted visible form. Don't make them, don't worship them, and don't serve them. God is also opposed to mankind's worshiping anything that God himself has created. (However, there was a difference between worshiping a handmade idol and making a piece of art to be used in the tabernacle or the temple of Solomon.)

God formed a covenant of love with Israel. She in turn was asked to respond to his love by loving him with her whole heart, soul, and strength. If Israel began to make other images to worship, it would indicate that she was leaving her first love, causing her Lover, God, to become jealous because of her spiritual adultery. In this context, "Jealousy is that emotion by which God is stirred up and provoked against whatever hinders the enjoyment of that which he loves and desires." (W. Kaiser, Towards Old Testament Ethics.) Jealousy on the part of God means an intense interest in the welfare of another.

"...Punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me...." Those who worship other gods will in time suffer the judgment of God within their character and will affect their children's own relationship to him to the fourth generation. That is, if a father spends his life worshiping idols, the children in the next three generations will only naturally fall into worshiping the same gods because of that influence and pressure. However, each child is responsible only for their own sin; this is not automatic punishment. Each child has the opportunity to break the cycle of sin and begin a righteous generation.

The precious Son Jesus said in Luke 16:13, "No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other."

To worship an idol is tantamount to hating God. But we see the blessing of God when he shows love "...to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments." Certainly this is the story of Abraham and his spiritual seed.

Several years ago when I was in Portland, Oregon, a friend introduced me to Dr. Willard Aldrich, who was then president of Multnomah School of the Bible. I was invited to his home for dinner. Sitting around the table were his nine adult children---five sons (of whom the famous Dr. Joe Aldrich is one) and four daughters; all then married except for one son. I asked him what it was like to be the father of all those children. He told me, "The Lord has really blessed me. I'm from a family of four brothers, and all five of us are pastors. In my own family, four of my five boys are pastors, three of my daughters are married to pastors, and my two remaining children are Christians who are serving the Lord in the community. And then all my grandchildren are Christians." I got the feeling that he believed God shows love "...to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments." Of course, our sons and daughters don't have to become pastors or pastor's wives to please God---what they do is not as important as who they will become in their relationship with Jesus Christ. But this was for me a model of a godly man who was seeking God's blessing not only for himself and his generation but also the following generations.

The Third Commandment

Deuteronomy 5:11:

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

Many look at this commandment as forbidding the blaspheming of God's name (that is, speaking evil of him or denying some good attribute of his). But in this context it means that because God has revealed himself to his people as the Lord God, sovereign Lord of the universe, as well as the merciful and almighty God who made a covenant with Abraham and his children, we are not to attempt to manipulate God for purely personal ends. To misuse the name of the Lord God is to misuse his nature, his very person, and his teachings and doctrines.

The misuse of the name of the Lord God of Israel is clearly seen when Balak, the Moabite king, attempted to employ the false prophet Balaam to magically curse Israel in the name of the Lord (see Numbers 22-24).

We see another example of this in an incident that took place when Paul was first ministering in the city of Ephesus, and God was doing some extraordinary miracles by his hand. At that time some Jewish exorcists, seven sons of the Jewish chief priest, went from place to place attempting to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." One evil spirit answered and said to them, "I recognize Jesus, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them and beat them up, "...so that they fled...naked and wounded" (Acts 19:15-16).

Although the Branch Davidian case is not closed, we can certainly see some aspects of their leadership identifying them as one more in a long list of cults who have misused the name of God and Jesus Christ for selfish ends. We can find ourselves misusing his name when we tell a lie to someone and affirm it's true by saying, "I swear to God!" We can even misuse his name in offering grace only from the lips instead of from the heart. The bottom line is, be careful how you use the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. It should always be used in reverence and respect.

Now Moses moves from Israel's relationship with the one and only living God to their relationship with the work of their hands as commanded in Genesis 2:15: "Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it."

The Fourth Commandment

Deuteronomy 5:12-15:

Observe the Sabbath day by keeping it holy, as the LORD your God has commanded you. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your ox, your donkey or any of your animals, nor the alien within your gates, so that your manservant and maidservant may rest, as you do. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the LORD your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day.

The word Sabbath means a cessation of activity as God ceased his creative activity on the seventh day: "Thus the heavens and the earth were completed, and all their hosts. And by the seventh day God completed His work which He had done...Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made" (Genesis 2:1-3). This rest was to apply to the whole human race ever since the beginning of humanity. To rest on the Sabbath day was to remember that man, as a part of God's created order, was totally dependent on the Creator.

God commands the Jews of the second generation after the Exodus to keep the Sabbath day for two reasons: (1) He had commanded their parents to observe the Sabbath day in Exodus 20:8-11 as a symbol of their willingness to rest from their labors as he himself had at creation. During that Sabbath day they were to worship him and renew their dependence on him for all their needs. (2) The second generation was told to remember also that they had been slaves in Egypt and had had no rest until God delivered them. The whole community was to rest on that day as a symbol of appreciation and worship of the God who delivered them. (The Sabbath rest also illustrates that God is Lord over creation and time, and that work is a gift from God, not slavery as it was in Egypt.) Both reasons complement each other in that both illustrate that man is totally dependent on God. As God created the universe out of nothing, so he created his people as a nation out of nothing.

The Sabbath day was to be a shadow of the spiritual reality of a lifestyle of resting in God from all physical activities; a day to symbolize total trust in him. In Jesus' time the Jewish rabbis had taken it and turned it into a day of burdens. In the New Testament it is faith in the work of Christ that supersedes the ritual elements of the Jewish Sabbath as the real meaning of the Sabbath.

Jesus, the precious Son, came one Sabbath day to the home of some Pharisees who had invited him to eat bread with them. When he arrived they watched him closely, because in the house was a man suffering from dropsy. Jesus then asked the Pharisees whether or not it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath. But they kept silent. So Jesus healed the man and then said to the Pharisees, "Which one of you shall have a son or an ox fall into a well, and will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?" And they refused to reply (see Luke 14:1-6).

What day should be the Christian's Sabbath? The spiritual principle behind the Sabbath is the same for the Jews as for the Christians---both are totally dependent on God for all their needs. But the day is changed for the Christian from the seventh day to the first, because Christ arose on that day. However, as we have seen, God is interested not in the day itself, which is just a shadow, but in the spiritual principle behind the shadow. The writer to the Hebrews explained the spiritual reality (4:9-11): "There remains, then, a Sabbath-rest for the people of God; for anyone who enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from his. Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest...." Since creation God has sought to show mankind that without faith in him, we could never be the men or women we desire to be or achieve what we desire to achieve without him.

Ray Stedman in his message *Living Out of Rest* (Discovery Paper 86) said, "The only one who can live the Christian life is Jesus Christ. He proposes to reproduce his life in us. Our part is to expose every situation to his life in us and by that means, depending upon him and not upon us, we are to meet every situation, enter into every circumstance, and perform every activity. We cease from our own labors." Our risen Lord is willing to work through our minds and emotions as we daily learn to depend on him to enter our Sabbath rest. What day should be the Christian's Sabbath? Every day of the rest of our lives on earth and into eternity!

The precious Son said, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27-28).

Some may not think that the Ten Commandments are relevant to solve the problems of our modern society. But God through Moses, his Son Jesus Christ, and his apostles declares that the Ten Commandments are as relevant as our next breath. The reason that the Ten Commandments are relevant to the Christian and that they are possible to live is found in the words of the apostle Paul when he wrote to the Corinthians: "Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant---not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:4-6).

Part of that "new covenant," or eternal covenant, is found in these wonderful words spoken by Jeremiah and quoted by the writer to the Hebrews:

"I will put my laws into their minds
and write them on their hearts.

I will be their God,
and they will be my people."
(Hebrews 8:10; see also Jeremiah 31:33)

The fact that we have willingly chosen to respond to the love, grace, and mercy of God should fill our hearts with a desire to (1) love him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength; (2) choose to have no other gods before us; that is, neither make nor worship any other god or goddess, including ourselves; (3) avoid misusing the name of the one and only living God for selfish reasons; and finally (4) depend on him to teach us how to enter our Sabbath lifestyle.

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July 23, 1995

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