

Christ In The Commandments — Week 5

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

THE OBJECT OF WORSHIP

Exodus 20:2-3

Shorter Catechism

Q. 45. Which is the first commandment?

A. The first commandment is, Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Q. 46. What is required in the first commandment?

A. The first commandment requires us to know and acknowledge God to be the only true God, and our God; and to worship and glorify him accordingly.

Review

I want to quickly review the last two weeks. In week 3 we looked at the third use of the law—meaning that as redeemed people, we are no longer bound to the punishment of the law (Romans 8:1¹), but we are bound to the obedience of the law as a rule of love (Romans 13:8²). Through the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ and His being punished for our sins, we have been freed from condemnation and freed to love God and our neighbor.

Last week, we looked at six rules of rightly interpreting the ten commandments. The point behind the rules was not to show us that obedience is a simple formula. The point behind the rules is to show that the obedience God requires is impossible. The ten commandments are a window to your failures. That was the point of last week's class. "Not" as Peter said in **Acts 15:10** "to place a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear." You cannot bear the yoke of the law. The law came

¹ There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus

² Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

to increase your knowledge of your sin so that you could see accurately the Savior. **Romans 5:20-21** “Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Intro

Here is my main argument for today’s class:

Jesus Christ *is* the fulfillment of the ten commandments and therefore He is the one whom the ten commandments mainly speak about.

After last week’s class, a helpful brother said “Why do you keep saying Christ fulfilled the law? Christ *is* the fulfillment of the law.” After thinking about that this week, I would say that it’s not inaccurate to say that Christ fulfilled the law. This was the language that He used in **Matthew 5:17** “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to *fulfill* them.” So Christ fulfilled the law. That’s true. But I do want to emphasize this deeper relationship. It’s not just that Christ fulfilled the law—He *is* the fulfillment of the law. The Ten Commandments are simultaneously a window through which we see all our failures and a window in which we see the work and person of Jesus Christ. In other words the Ten Commandments prophesy Jesus Christ.

The Ten Commandments as Prophecy of Jesus Christ

How do we know that the Ten Commandments are a prophecy about Jesus? If we read Exodus 20, it is not apparent at all, at least to me, that it is prophesying about Jesus Christ. And I think that would have been true for ancient Israel. Before the finished work of Christ on the cross, the ten commandments wouldn’t lend themselves to showing us Jesus. It’s from the New Testament that we discover that they predicted Christ. So let’s look at three places.

1) Romans 10:4

“For Christ is the *end* of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” This is like saying ‘love is the *end* of marriage.’ Not meaning that marriage is over when husband and wife love each other, but that the purpose of marriage is being fulfilled. The word *end*—τέλος *telos*—means aim or goal. The law’s aim is Christ like a marriage’s aim is love. The law existed for one main purpose: to tell us about Jesus Christ. That’s what Paul is saying in **Romans 10:4**. As Calvin says “...whatever the law teaches, whatever it commands, whatever it promises, has always a reference to Christ as its main object.”³

2) Matthew 11:13

Jesus when speaking about the ministry of John the Baptist said “For all the Prophets and the Law *prophesied* until John,” The law prophesied. It wasn’t the prophets alone that prophesied, the law prophesied. The law predicted. What did it predict? Jesus Christ. That’s why Jesus said in **John 5:46** “For if you believed Moses (the author of the law), you would believe me; for he wrote of me.”

3) Matthew 5:17-18

It’s possible for someone to object at this point and say that the narrative portions of the Moses—like Joseph and his brothers, or the sacrifice of Isaac—prophesied about Christ, but not the law itself. But Jesus won’t allow that objection to stand. He said in **Matthew 5:17-18** “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.” Jesus is saying that the smallest parts— the iota (the smallest letter in the alphabet); and the dot (the smallest strokes of letters)—will pass from the law until it’s all accomplished in Him. Meaning every part of the law, not just the narrative sections, prophesy about Jesus Christ, because He alone is the fulfillment of them.

³ John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XIX*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: BakerBooks, 2009), pg. 384

The NT teaches us that the Ten Commandments predict Christ

Therefore, it's the NT that sheds the proper light on the Ten Commandments. We wouldn't know that the Ten Commandments prophesy about Christ apart from it. But now that we have the completed Scriptures and Jesus has finished His work in the gospel, we can rightly look at the law and say "Look at Christ!"

Jesus Christ in the Preface

With that in mind I want to look at the preface to the Ten Commandments again and show us that this is Jesus who is speaking. This is not a generic God. It's Christ who speaks to us in the Commandments. So let's see if we can prove this out. **Exodus 20:2** "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." Bob Glenn points out five things that can be seen from this God who is speaking.⁴

First, this God is **personal**. He speaks using personal pronouns "*I* am the Lord *your* God, who brought *you*..." and then in v.3 "*You* shall have no other gods before *me*." What does this mean? God is relational. God is a person. Not a human person, but a Divine person who speaks to us relationally. We didn't invent relationships. They are a reflection of the God who speaks to us.

Second, this God is **self-revealing**. He calls Himself "the LORD."⁵ This is the word for YHWH. This is God's self-disclosure. When God sent Moses back to Egypt to deliver the Israelites, he asked Him His name and God said "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:14) Now this name is incomprehensible. On the one hand it represents God's eternal, immutable, and sovereign nature that is infinitely above every creature. An small ant has more in common with the greatest archangel than any creature has in common with YHWH. But on the

⁴ Source: *No Other Gods*, 12/4/2005, R.W. Glenn

⁵ Where the Scripture uses the word "Lord" (no caps) it reflects the Hebrew word *adonai*. Where the Scripture uses the word "LORD" (CAPS) it reflects the Hebrew letters YHWH—no vowels because the Jews thought that God's personal name should never be spoken. Scholars call this—YHWH—the "Tetragrammaton." When the vowels from the word *adonai* are placed between the consonants of YHWH, this results in the word *Jehovah* that was used by earlier English Bibles. Source: Preface to the English Standard Version

other hand, this God actually gives His name, which means He is self-revealing. He wants to be known, but it's on His terms.

Third, this God is **condescending**. [Turn to Exodus 3:7-8] When Moses met God at the burning bush, God told him that He was going to deliver Israel from Egypt. Starting in v.7 “Then the Lord said, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. *I know their sufferings*, **8** and *I have come down to deliver them* out of the hand of the Egyptians.”⁶ Did you hear that? The King of heaven knows His people's suffering and He is going to come down to deliver them. That is who is speaking in the preface.

Fourth, this God is **redeeming**. This God says in the preface “I am the Lord your God, *who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.*” How did this God redeem them? Again **Exodus 3:8** “*I have come down to deliver them* out of the hand of the Egyptians.” Now what is important to point out here is that Israel didn't deserve any of this. They constantly rebelled against Moses leadership, tested God, and committed flagrant idolatry with the golden calf.⁷ Yet this God redeems them. Why? Because they deserve it? No because that is the type of God this is. The God who comes down because He hears the suffering of His utterly undeserving people and rescues them through free grace.

Fifth, this God is **covenantal**. Why did this God save Israel at all? Because He promised—He made a covenant with Israel's forefathers. In Exodus 3 He tells Moses in v.6 “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And He repeats Himself in v.15-16 and this is a constant refrain throughout the OT. God is redeeming because He made a covenant. And the word that best represents God's keeping His covenant in the OT is *hesed*. It's usually translated *steadfast love* in the ESV. Psalm 103:8 “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and **abounding** in

⁶ “God is present in all places (Ps. 139), but this figure of speech pictures Him as the King of heaven descending to be with His people on earth (2:23), an anticipation of the incarnation (John 3:13).” Source: <https://holybible.com/exo.3.1> accessed October 4, 2017

⁷ A constant refrain throughout the OT is that Israel was unfaithful to God in spite of His deliverance of them from Egypt (1 Sam. 8:7-8 Jeremiah 7:25-26).

steadfast love.” This God is abounding, overflowing, overwhelming, bursting with love towards an unworthy people. Therefore, God’s covenant keeping isn’t cold and contractual, it is a tender and compassionate never-failing, never-forsaking, always-rescuing love. That’s what *hesed* means. That’s the motivation behind why this God redeemed Israel out of Egypt. **Exodus 15:13** “You have led in your *steadfast love* (*hesed*) the people whom you have redeemed;”

Those are the five characteristics of the God who is speaking from the preface. He is Yahweh, Jehovah. He is a personal God. He is incomprehensible God yet One who is self-disclosing. He is condescending—coming down to redeem His people. And He does this because He is a covenant keeping steadfast love showing God. This is Jesus Christ. That’s who is speaking in the preface. Jesus is Jehovah.

Jesus is Jehovah

John Calvin’s confession read that He believed that Jesus Christ was Jehovah. Because of this he was accused of Sabellianism by a rogue pastor named Peter Caroli. Sabellianism (also known as modalism) is the heresy that says there are no distinct persons in the Godhead, but that God manifests His singular self in different modes: sometimes as a father, sometimes as a son, and sometimes as a spirit. Calvin rejected modalism outright. He defended himself by pointing out that when speaking the Persons of the Godhead, then certainly there are distinctions between Father and Son. But when speaking about the essence of the Godhead—Jesus is one God with the Father—“whatever can be said concerning God may also be applied to him, the second person in the glorious Trinity.”⁸

Jesus is Yahweh. Jesus is Jehovah. This is the testimony of Peter and Paul and John⁹ and of Jesus Himself. **John 8:58** “Truly, truly, I say to you,

⁸ “Certainly,” Calvin said “if the distinction between the Father and Word be attentively considered, we shall say that the one is from the other. If, however, the essential quality of the Word be considered, in so far as he is one God with the Father, whatever can be said concerning God may also be applied to him, the second person in the glorious Trinity.” John Calvin, *Calvin’s Selected Works, Vol. 4: Letters Part 1, 1528-1545*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Baker Book House, 1983), pg. 55-56

⁹ Source: <https://carm.org/does-the-bible-identify-jesus-as-jehovah> accessed October 4, 2017

before Abraham was, *I am.*” His reference to the burning bush was unmistakable. The Jews knew it because they picked up stones to stone Him. Jesus was claiming that it was He who delivered Israel out of the hands of Egypt.

Christ in the First Commandment

Therefore it is Jesus who says in the first commandment: “You shall have no other gods before *me.*” Jesus is the *me.* Jesus who is infinitely personal, self-revealing, condescending, redeeming, and full of steadfast love, is calling His people *to have Him and no other.* He wants to have our all our affection, all our devotion, all our soul exclusively. He wants us to give ourselves entirely over to Him. He will not be shared. I believe this commandment is meant for us to think about marriage. This is how the Lord speaks about His relationship to His people. **Isaiah 54:5** “For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called.”¹⁰

The first commandment is meant for us to think about giving ourselves to Jesus Christ in the deepest, most intimate relationship imaginable: marriage. That’s how Paul describes our relationship with Christ. **Ephesians 5:31-31** says “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, *and the two shall become one flesh.* This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.” The Christ in the first commandment forbids us from having any other husband, any other God before Him.

Counterfeit Gods

If you have not read Tim Keller’s *Counterfeit Gods*, I would highly recommend it. Because what Keller does is show how really we are breaking the first commandment all the time. As Calvin said, our hearts are idol factories. The last words in 1 John are “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1

¹⁰ Anytime Israel forsook God and took to the worship of idols, God accused them of whoredom. You can see this especially in the book of Ezekiel and Hosea. And you see it in the New Testament as well. James 4:4 “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?”

John 5:21) So what are idols? Idols can be anything. Keller walks through the main ones: your personal dreams, your love life, money, success and reputation, power and control. All of these things can be idols. An idol is anything that functionally controls your heart. An idol is anything less than Jesus Christ that you build your life on. The imagery from Lord of the Rings is so helpful. All of middle earth is after the one ring. The ring of power—Sauron’s ring. But the problem with this ring, is that whoever possesses it is corrupted by it. Whoever possesses it is controlled by it. Sméagol murdered for it. Frodo almost died trying to keep it from destruction. That’s what idols do. They take possession of your heart and demand you to serve them above all other concerns. All means are aimed at securing the prosperity of that one thing.

An idol, or “a counterfeit God” Keller says

“is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living..an idol is whatever you look at and say, in your heart of hearts, “If I have that, then I’ll feel my life has meaning, then I’ll know have have value, and then I’ll feel significant and secure.”¹¹

In other words, an idol is anything that becomes more essential to your happiness than Jesus Christ. That’s what it looks like to break the first commandment. If we find ultimate meaning, ultimate satisfaction, ultimate identity in anything or anyone because Christ, we are serving another God. If we are building our life around anything other Christ, than we are serving another God.

How so how do we keep the first commandment?

How do we keep the first commandment then? We look to the *me*. “You shall have no other gods before *me*.” Jesus is the *me*. And what have we know about this me? First that this Jesus is **personal**. You cannot conceive of a more

¹¹ Tim Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters*, (New York, NY,: Penguin Books, 2009), pg. xx

relational, more personal intimate person that Jesus Christ. He loved little children and brought them close to him. No prostitute or tax collector was too dirty. No sinner was too far gone. He pursued both demoniacs and fallen disciples. He dined, and wept, and rejoiced with actual people. And He promises to do so again at the marriage supper of the lamb.

Second Jesus is **self-revealing**. Meaning, Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God.¹² God revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush and on Mt. Sinai. But all of that pales in comparison to the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The Son of God put on flesh and came to planet earth so that we could know God. He was free not to do this. But Jesus is the God who wants to be known by His people.

Third, Jesus is **condescending**. In order to be known by us, meant that Jesus had to take on the form of a servant. The Creator became creaturely. He became the God man. And the glory of this truth, is that Jesus took on flesh forever. He has forever united Himself to the nature of man, so that we could forever relate to Him.

Fourth Jesus is **redeeming**. When Yahweh delivered Israel out of Egypt and shed the blood of the passover lamb, this pointed to a greatest deliverance imaginable. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus didn't come to earth to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom.

Fifth Jesus is **covenantal**. Jesus is the fulfillment of all of God's promises. **2 Corinthians 1:20** is a radical verse. It says "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory." The reason why summer changed to fall again was because God promised Noah that the seasons will remain as long as the earth remains. That promise was purchased by Christ. That's what 2 Cor. 1:20 means. And what this means for you is that Jesus Christ is the seal of all of God's promises. Meaning Jesus is God's pledge of loyal—never forsaking—never diminishing steadfast

¹² Source: *No Other Gods*, 12/4/2005, R.W. Glenn

love. “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”

Take away

What more incentive do you need for having no other gods? Because you have Christ, you have all things.

You have a personal God

A God who reveals Himself to you.

A God who condescends in the person of Jesus so that you can know Him.

This Christ has redeemed you with His precious blood, so that you will never come under condemnation.

This Jesus loves you with a steadfast love that can never be shipwrecked.

This is your God.