

Lord's Day 34

6 June 2010

Sermon notes by Pastor Paul Goh

Beloved, at Lord's Day 33, we learnt what are good works? Good works are works which proceed from a true faith, are performed according to the law of God, and to his glory. And this naturally leads us to ask, what is the law of God? We ask this question because as covenant children of God, we surely want all our works to conform to the law of God so that in doing good works we do out of true faith and seek the glory of God.

Today, we consider Lord's Day 34, questions and answers 92 and 93. And in this sermon, we will consider the law of God. What can we learn from the form or the way the Ten Commandments have been arranged? And what is the significance of the place of the first commandment in the Ten Commandments and finally, what does the first commandment declare about God.

The subject is the law of God. First, we consider the form of the law of God. Secondly, the significance of the first commandment and finally, the principle of the first commandment.

What is the law of God? This is the law of my covenant God, which we learn from the preface of the law. Exodus 20.2 and Deuteronomy 5.2-4. From the form of the law, we notice firstly, that tables are made of stone and this means that it was engraven upon them by the finger of God. This is symbolic of the fact that the law could never be wiped out and the moral law is everlastingly valid and always relevant. Secondly, the law is complete as seen by the symbolic number "ten". Everywhere in Scripture the number ten indicates completeness or the fulness of the measure determined by God himself. And the law is perfect, nothing else could be removed and nothing else could be added to them. The law is also the full expression of the will of God concerning our whole life in the present world and in our relationships with one another. The first table consists of four commandments and the second table six commandments. The first table deals with our relationship to God while the second table proceeding from the love of God deals with our relationship with our neighbours. The love of God is the controlling principle in the law of God, as it was summarised by our Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 22.37-40. Therefore, there are not two commandments, the one greater than the other, but there is only one commandment, which is the whole law, that is to love God. Without that love of God there is no love and without it we cannot truly love our neighbour. We must love our neighbour for God's sake.

The significance of the law of God can be seen in the preface to the law. First, by these words, Jehovah reveals himself to his covenant people. Israel was encamped at Mt Sinai; the mountain was smoking and there was lightning and thunders, a thick cloud and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And from the darkness of the mount, Israel heard a mighty voice as of a trumpet. Whose voice was that? From the preface, the voice identified himself as "Jehovah". Therefore, these words are a self – revelation of the living God, Jehovah, and the God of the covenant, to his people Israel.

Secondly, by these words, Jehovah reveals his peculiar covenant relation to his people, Israel, to the church. He is Jehovah their God. He is the God of his people in a special way for he is their covenant God. He reveals himself to them in the promise: "I will be your God and ye shall be my people". He possesses them in his love and as his peculiar

treasure. He blesses them in his favour, takes them to his bosom, receives them into his fellowship and gives them eternal life. God's servants are called to love him with all their heart, mind and soul. They are to show forth the praise of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light. And this covenant relation is seen in Hosea 2.19, 20, "I will betroth thee unto me for ever; yea, I will betroth thee unto me in righteousness, and in judgment, and in loving-kindness, and in mercies. I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord."

Finally, by these words, they reveal God as the Redeemer of his people. He brought them out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage with a mighty arm. The Lord who spoke to them from the quaking mount is the same that became known to them in the wonders of salvation accomplished in the land of their oppression. Jehovah is therefore the God of our salvation in Christ, who redeemed and delivered us from the bondage of sin and death, in order to lead us into Canaan of his everlasting rest. He promises us to enrich us with all the blessings of salvation. And let us begin our study in the first commandment.

The first commandment is basic for all the rest of the commandments. We can compare the law of God to a beautiful, holy temple with a hall, above the entrance we find the words, "I am Jehovah your God, who hath brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage". It is through the entrance hall, and therefore, as God's redeemed covenant people, that we now enter into this holy temple. This temple has ten rooms and over the entrance of these rooms we find the inscription of each of the Ten Commandments. We must be not satisfied by merely reading the inscription of each room but we must enter and contemplate the interior of every room or we must study the commandments in light of the whole of Scripture with its relation to all of our life as believers in the midst of this world. The first commandment of the ten is fundamental to its relations to the rest. The first commandment is basic. Keep it and you keep the entire law, for our relationship to God is the fundamental relationships of all of life. And the fundamental principle in the first commandment is that God is one. He is God alone and there is no god besides him. The first commandment leaves room for only two alternatives: we either worship God or we serve idols.

The positive significance of the first commandment is, "thou shalt serve the Lord thy God, and serve Him alone". But this is expressed in a negative way, "thou shalt have no other gods before me". The implication is naturally, if you do not serve other gods, you serve the true God and if you refuse to serve the true God and him alone, you necessarily must serve idols. The reasons are firstly, man originally was created after image of God and it was engraven in his soul that he needs God. The image of God was not only lost through sin but it was also subverted into its very opposite. His knowledge was changed into a lie; his righteousness was changed into iniquity and his holiness became impurity in all its inclinations and desires. But sin did not change his being for he remains as man, a rational moral creature. He still needs a god and when he rejects the true God, he will seek after some other object of worship and adoration.

Secondly, man is a servant and in the covenant-relation, he was God's servant – friend. And this relationship was subverted by sin, so that he refuses to serve the true God but he is still a servant. He is a sinner, a slave to sin. And in his sinful imagination, he may exalt himself as God, but he remains as servant and is no God. And by his very nature, he will seek some god to serve, in whom he can put his trust, and upon whom he may rely.

Thus, thirdly, all things proclaim that he is dependent. Man has no existence in himself for the very origin of his beings he is dependant. He did not create this world nor does he sustain it. He does not bring rain and sunshine, the fruit of the trees and the herb of the field. And on literally all things, over which he has no control, man is dependent. He is dependent on the air which he breathes, on the water he drinks and therefore everything proclaims his dependence.

And finally, he lives in a world upon which God has placed the curse, and that testifies to him that all things are vanity. God has put a curse of death upon the world that man lives. And in that world, the very powers over which man has no control turned themselves against the sinner. In the fire and water, in the wild beasts of the field, in the destruction of the powers of nature, in sickness and death, famine and pestilence, things turn against men. And when he turns himself away from the true God, he must of necessity serve some god in whom he may trust and thus he becomes inevitably an idolater.

All these imply that we always serve some god, if we are not delivered from the inclination of our sinful nature. This means that we are inclined to rule out the true God and to place something next to him in whom we trust. How often do we not place our own strength and cleverness next to the living God or instead of him? Or, how infrequently in distress or difficulty, in trouble or adversity, in sickness and suffering, do we fix our eye on men, on the things, next to the Lord of life? All these are idolatry. Next to the Lord, there is nothing. He is God and God alone. Beside him there is no Saviour. All things and every creature are but means in his hand. And therefore, to place our trust in things or creatures is to rob the living God of his glory and to serve idols.

And finally, principally from the first commandment, God is one and that he is God alone. There is no God besides him. God is a simple being and he is not composed of parts. You cannot divide him for all these virtues are one in him. He is his virtues. He is God alone. There is no God besides him. There are no gods. God is not a god but he is God. But you cannot say that the lord is a god; there are many gods, and Jehovah is one of them. This commandment cannot mean that there are indeed other gods, but that you shall not offer them your worship or put your confidence in them. It does not mean that among all gods, Jehovah is supreme, and he is the highest above all gods. We have our god and you have yours and we prefer own. Instead, the believer confesses, God is God. He is God alone. There is none beside, that can be called or many be worshipped as God. The idol is nothing and it is the product of man's imagination.

God alone is the Lord: "hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one Lord". That he is Lord and one Lord, and this implies that he is the sole and absolute owner of all things for the earth is the lord's and the fulness thereof". He is the creator of the heavens and the earth and all things they contain. This signifies that he alone has all authority, that he alone determines what the creature shall do and what purposes he shall serve. He is the only lawgiver, whose will is the criterion for the whole universe and for every creature. Besides, he is the only judge, that judges the entire world with justice. He governs all things according to his eternal good pleasure and no creature is beyond his control. Mark this: he is not a lord but the lord. He is not merely supreme Lord, but he is the Lord alone. He is Lord not only over the good but also of the evil; not only of the righteous, but also of the wicked; not only of life but also of death. All things are absolutely under his lordship: "thou shall have no other gods before me".

And thus, with joyful thanksgiving in our hearts, we respond to the language of this law, "Yea, Jehovah, thou art my God and thou art God alone. There is none besides thee. Thou art Lord. And I know and confess thee as my Lord, my sovereign and king forever. And thou hast redeemed me, delivered me out of the power of sin and death, and clothe me with righteousness and life. And then the prayer arise from our heart and from our lips, "Lord, what wilt thou have me do?" and the answer comes from the first commandment, "thou shalt have no other gods before me". And this commandment we love. Though we deeply feel the motions of sin in our members, and are always inclined to serve other gods. Yet we understand that we shall know and acknowledge and worship the one only true God and him alone. Amen.