

Lord's Day 34b  
**4 July 2010**

Sermon notes by Pastor Paul Goh

Beloved, at our last sermon on Lord's day 34, we learn, firstly, the Ten Commandments are the laws of my covenant God. It is the complete command and it is the full expression of the will of God concerning our whole life in the present world and in our relationships to one another. Secondly, we began to look at the first commandment and it is basic for all the rest of the commandment: keep it and you keep the rest of the commandments. And the principle of the first commandment is that God is one he is God alone. There is no God besides him.

Today, we look at Lord's Day 34, question and answer 94 and 95, which explains to us what God requires from us in keeping the first commandment and what God forbids. And we will consider the following questions: as I desire the salvation of my soul, what are the things that I must avoid and how do I keep this commandment? Is idolatry merely objects of stone or wood that others bow down? What are the other idols?

We consider the theme of the sermon: Worshipping the True God Alone. First, what God requires? Secondly, what God forbids and thirdly, how do we keep it.

What God requires? First, we must rightly know the one true God only from his revelation. It is a main characteristic of idolatry that it creates a god of his own imagination. It implies that man says who and what God is instead of diligently listening to the Word of God himself. Idolatry rejects God's revelation of himself in order to have a god according to his own invention and creation. But God alone can reveal to us what he is and how he must be worshipped and glorified. Thus, we must be silent and let God speak. This is done by diligently searching his word as it is revealed in the Scriptures and attend to the preaching of God's Word that we may be instructed in the true knowledge of God. The first commandment teaches us that we must reject all human ideas about God: for when man speaks about God from his own mind and heart, he always speaks lies. We turn diligently to God's own revelation in Jesus Christ our Lord, and thus rightly know him and acknowledge him as God alone. And after knowing him, I love him.

Secondly, I love this God as I know him from his own word, with all my heart, with all my mind and all my strength. This response is according to grace, that God causes us to seek his glory and to do his will. And knowing the true God, we now bow ourselves before him, and exclaim in adoration, "My lord and my God". This means that we reject all and every form of lordship that is contrary to his sovereign word. God is the Lord! And to have other gods before him means that we acknowledge no other lords, but he is our lord alone. We confess and want to live according to his truth that he is the lord over our body, soul and mind and therefore we submit ourselves and all things to him to serve him by them. We acknowledge that he is Lord over all our relationships in the world: the relationships of the home: the marriage relationship, the parental relationship, the relationship between brother and sister, and in all those relationships we shall ask, "Lord, what wilt thou have us do?"

He is Lord over all the relationships in society and state: he is lord over our life in the shop, in office, in school, in college and university. He is lord over all the relation

between employers and employees, over our good and possessions. He is lord over all our relationships in the church: relations between elders and deacons, between office-bearers and members, and between members mutually. He is the only Lord over all the relationships in the state: between those that in authority, those who are called to obey, and our obedience to this God is out of love to him. We love him as our sovereign Lord.

The final thing that God requires of us is we put all our confidence in him alone, that we refuse every creature as the ground of our trust. This is only possible in Jesus Christ for the sinner apart from Christ cannot possibly put his trust in the living God. This confidence is based upon the assurance that this God loves us. This assurance that God love us is possible only when the Spirit of God in Christ Jesus has shed abroad the love of God in our hearts. God has revealed this love in Jesus Christ in the cross. And looking at our God in Jesus Christ, we know that he love us. He forgives all our sins and he delivers us from sin and death. He will cause all things to turn to our advantage and salvation. And since he loves us, we can patiently submit ourselves to him in all the circumstance of life. We are assured that all things work together for good to them that love God. Then, we can trust in him alone. Then we fear him only and we rather refuse all creatures than to walk contrary to his will. And whatever men or devils may do to us, we fearlessly and with a good conscience keep his testimonies and fight the good fight of faith in the midst of the world.

What does God forbids in the keeping of the first commandment. First, avoid and flee from all idolatry. What is idolatry? According to answer 95, "Idolatry is, instead of, or besides that one true God, who has manifested himself in his Word, to contrive, or have any other object, in which men place their trust". The god which a sinner trusts is always an idol. The natural man cannot love God because he stands as an enemy of God. And seeing that it is impossible for him to live without some object in which he may put his trust, he devises an idol. He imagines that besides his idol he can also put his confidence in the true God but this is impossible. For there is one God, and we must put either all our confidence in him, or none at all. And we may imagine that since we do not bow down to the powers of nature, the beasts of the field or the idols stone that are certainly cannot be called idolaters. But what is idolatry? Idolatry is to form any other object besides the true and living God, or instead of him, in which we put our trust. And as far as sin still reins in us, the inclination of my heart is always towards idolatry and always inclined to rule out the true and living God, and to place himself next to him or instead of him.

And thus, there are idols of the heart. In the passage which we have read in Ezekiel 14, the children of Israel has set up idols in their own hearts which causes them to stumble into iniquity. And from these idols they are separated from God and as a result, God is against them. Heart idol #1 – I CAN CONTROL MY WORLD. We erroneously think that if we could control our world, life would be manageable and have meaning and purpose. And our desire for control also tempts us to get power over others because we assume that power equals control. And when I have power and control I will then have meaning in life. The idol here the lack of security and instead of resting in the Lord for our security, we which to control our people and situations. Does not Scripture called us to rest in the Lord and trust in him alone?

Heart idol #2 – RELATIONSHIPS BRING FULFILLMENT. We look to relationships to give us meaning. We yearn for closeness with friends, family members and people at our workplace, or at school. We may even think that if only we are married or had a

close friend life would be much better as it would cure our loneliness. Relationships are not wrong by itself, but if we are willing to do anything to gain friends and keep our relationships because we cannot live without them at the expense of our relationship to God, then our desire for such friendship has become idolatrous. Our friendships with others have become an idol.

Heart Idol #3 – MONEY BRINGS ME FREEDOM. Advertisements cry out to us with this message: if only we had enough money, life will be meaningful. And thus, we look to money to bring us security, pleasure, freedom and pleasure. And as a result, money has become an idol and we worship it in the hope of getting our needs met and desire fulfilled. Is this why you work? Is this why you pursue your studies, locally or overseas? Are you chasing after money> if so, money has become an idol to you.

Heart idol #4 – PLEASURE WILL SATISFY ME. Pleasure means different things to different people. To some, it is sinful pleasure, to others it is eating at buffet, gaming and watching anime that for hours. Some pursuits are lawful in its own ways but it becomes an idols when we neglect our God –given calling to spend time in reading and meditating in the Scriptures and to come punctually to God’s house to worship. Did not the apostle Paul warn us that in the last days, men will be lovers of themselves more than the lovers of God?

Heart idol #5 – KNOWLEDGE WILL PUT ME ON TOP. The smarter we are or having all the titles at the end of our names will secure an easy life and a life of honour and prestige. And we stand in awe of the top student or the molecular scientist or the thirteen-year-old who graduates from MIT. Such knowledge has become an idol when we value this knowledge greater than the knowledge to know God and to have eternal life.

Know this that OUR ANGRY REACTION WHEN OUR IDOLS HAVE BEEN EXPOSED. We like to polish our idols, protect it from criticism. Our idol in our heart is our darling sin and don’t you dare criticize it. When we are criticized why are we reacting angrily? Is it because our idols of the hearts have been exposed? Our excellent and perfect work in our own eyes did not receive appreciation or our good opinions have been ignored.

The catechism also calls us to avoid and flee from sorcery, soothsaying, superstition, invocation of saints and any other creatures. Sorcery is magic. It is seeking knowledge with the help of evil spirits. It is the power to command such evil spirits to obey our instructions. The Old Testament warns against this form of idolatry. Lev. 19.31, “Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I *am* the LORD your God”. Deu. 18.9-11, “When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you *any one* that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, *or* that useth divination, *or* an observer of times, *or* an enchanter, *or* a witch, *Or* a charmer, *or* a consulter with familiar spirits, *or* a wizard, *or* a necromancer”.

Soothsayer is a person supposed to foresee the future by looking at the stars like an astrologer or looking at the intestines of an animal. Superstition is a belief in good or bad luck. E.g. Bad luck day is Friday the thirteenth. Bad luck number is 4 (04-00), and bad luck comes to one when you see a black cat pass your way. It is bad luck to wear red on a funeral or black on a wedding day.

Invocation of saints and of other creatures. This is directed against Rome with its Mariolatry, calling upon the saints, angels, to which may be added the worship of the host, which is HC calls it an accursed idolatry. Rome denies that they are worshipping these saints but merely giving honour but clearly it is idolatry. All these are idolatry, rooted in a denial of the true God as he has manifested in his word.

And finally, how do we keep this commandment? We are to obey God's commandment antithetically. We must know the true God, love, fear and worship Him alone in the midst of this present world of sin and darkness. The first commandment like all other commandments is antithetical. you cannot serve God and mammon. You cannot serve God totally disregarding mammon. We are called to serve God antithetically, rejecting mammon. In the midst of the world, we must live from the principle of regeneration and according to God's Word. We must be his witnesses in our walk and confession and we must reject all things that are against God's Word. And we fight the good fight of faith against the devil and his host, against the anti-Christian powers in the world and against sin that still is in our members.

Thus, the preaching of the first commandment will prove to be a means of our continued conversion. It will lead us to a deeper knowledge of sin and to a more complete confidence in the cross of Christ. Through the preaching of the first commandment will encourage us to pray more earnestly, "God be merciful to me, for my sins are very great" We are exhorted to crucify the flesh and to forsake the world and to walk in a new and holy life. At the same time the believer in Christ will be comforted with the only comfort in life and death, that he belongs to him who has delivered us from the power of sin and the devil. And though the handwriting of sin of the first commandment is against us, we read the sentence of God's boundless grace: "atoned and forgiven". Amen