

INTRODUCTION

The first commandment requires that the object of our worship be God alone, and no other.

The first commandment alerts us that our worship of God alone must be not only in the sight of men, but also in the sight of God, who sees all the way to our hearts.

The first commandment requires us to worship God not as we might imagine Him to be, or wish Him to be, but as He truly is, as He has revealed Himself to be.

The first commandment forbids us giving to any creature what belongs to God: the faith, invocation, gratitude, fear, obedience, submission, repentance, joy, knowledge, and veneration that are our duty toward God. The giving of anything that is due God to any creature constitutes idolatry.

So much I have put to you already, over the past few weeks. As I mentioned to you before, I am trying not to be satisfied just to say to you again what I learned years ago about the Ten Commandments. It's good to remind you of what you already have heard, but I also want to learn more about God's Ten Commandments, and provide you with more good instruction in them.

To that end, I was reading in John Calvin's commentary Exodus - Deuteronomy, and I came across his analysis showing that one of the ways that God, in the scriptures, expounds the First Commandment to us is by charging us to be holy. This seemed to me that it could be very helpful to us.

To be holy means to be separate from all that is sinful, and devoted to God. Today, let us consider the first commandment in that light.

TEXT

Exodus 20:2-3 I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

BODY

I. God Is Holy

- A. He is separate from anything sinful
- B. He is pure in Himself from anything sinful
- C. So perfect is He in holiness that the creatures in heaven say, “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty...” (Revelation 4:8)
- D. In God there is nothing whatsoever that treats anything as a god except Himself, who truly is the one true God

God is holy; and

II. God Commanded Israel to Be Holy

- A. When God had commanded “I am the LORD thy God...Thou shalt have no other gods before Me,”
- B. God also commanded Israel “Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.” (Leviticus 19:2b)
- C. With The Ten Commandments, which apply to all mankind, God gave Israel special laws that applied only to Israel in the old covenant
 1. that they abstain from certain foods
 2. that they not mix fabrics together, or different kinds of seeds together, or different animals together
 3. that they have an annual holy week, in which they removed all yeast or leaven from their houses
- D. God commanded Israel, with these special laws, that the nation “be holy”
- E. Those laws were not about Israel keeping themselves separate from sinful things per se, since there is nothing inherently sinful about eating certain foods or wearing certain mixed fabrics or having yeast in your house; but
- F. Those laws, if obeyed
 1. would teach them the meaning of holiness
 - a) with yeast or leaven as a symbol of sin, removing leaven from the house represented removing sin from the heart
 2. would keep them separate from the sinful nations around them
 - a) they could not eat in the homes of foreigners
 - b) other nations would find them strange

III. Israel Did Not Keep Itself Holy

- A. During the time of Moses and of Joshua, Israel lived as holy unto the LORD to some degree
- B. When Joshua had died, Israel did not keep itself holy - Judges 2:7-12
- C. God's special laws for Israel were not obeyed
 1. Israel came under the influence of the pagan nations around them
 2. Israel worshiped the other gods of those nations
 3. God chastised them severely in several ways, finally sending a remnant off to captivity in Babylon, and destroying Jerusalem and the temple
- D. Finally God's laws were obeyed
 1. when God granted that the remnant of the people could return to rebuild Jerusalem, with the temple
 2. under leaders that God provided, such as Zerubbabel and Ezra and Nehemiah
 3. with prophets such as Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi
 4. Israel finally obeyed God's laws to teach them the meaning of holiness and to keep them separate from the nations around them
 5. Israel was, to some degree, and for a short time, holy unto the LORD
- E. But that revival of righteousness in Israel did not maintain holiness
 1. in the centuries after Malachi, the movement of zeal for God's law degenerated into the hypocritical, legalistic Pharisees and the worldly, political Sadducees
 2. so that, in many ways, Israel was then holy on the outside, having no actual bowing down to carved images
 3. but in many ways, Israel was not holy on the inside, having internal idolatry, having a god of their own making in their minds

God is holy; and

God commanded Israel to be holy; but

Israel did not keep itself holy; but

IV. Jesus Christ Is Holy

A. The Bible says so verbatim

1. A thousand years before He was born, David called Christ the “Holy One” (Psalm 16:10b)
2. Before Jesus was conceived in the womb of the virgin, the angel Gabriel told Mary that Jesus would be holy - Luke 1:35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.
3. After Jesus had died for our sins, and been buried, and rose again, Peter preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, referring to Jesus as holy - Acts 3:14 But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;
4. When the congregation with the apostles prayed, they referred to Jesus as “holy” - Acts 4:30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.
5. When Paul preached the gospel far away from Jerusalem, he quoted the Psalm, proclaiming that what David had prophesied about the Holy One was fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth. Acts 13:35 Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

B. The Bible tells us that whereas in Jesus the Son of God became man like us, He is not sinful like we are; He is separate from sin

C. The Bible records that Jesus specifically resisted temptation to break the first commandment, when the devil urged Him to bow down and worship him, but Jesus would not

Jesus Christ is holy; and

- V. Now God Commands Us, the Disciples of Jesus, to Be Holy
- A. God, who is holy, has chosen us in Jesus to be holy - Ephesians 1:4
According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:
 - B. Jesus Christ, who is holy, has made us holy, by washing in His blood - Ephesians 5:27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.
 - C. Having been so lovingly sanctified by God through Jesus Christ, we now are to obey the first commandment by striving to be holy - 1 Peter 1:14-16 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: 15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; 16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

CONCLUSION

The meaning of the First Commandment is well expounded to us by all the ways in which God commanded Israel to be holy.

Obedience to the First Commandment is well modeled for us by how our Lord Jesus Christ is holy.

We now will do well to obey the First Commandment with this thought in our hearts, "be holy, for the Lord is holy."

Dillon - Call to Worship and Opening Prayer - Ephesians 1:3-4

Willie - Scripture Reading - Psalm 119:73-80

Stephen - Congregational Prayer

Benediction - 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13

Lord's Supper - Ephesians 5:25b-27

Haven - Prelude - "Christ the Lord is Risen Today"

Haven - Trinity 690 "Jesus Paid It All" - Alex lead

Rita - Trinity 449 "The Law of God Is Good and Wise"

Journey - Trinity 689 "One Day" - Andrew lead

Leviticus 11:44-45 For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. 45 For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.

Poole:

by the diligent observation of these rules they might learn with greater care to avoid all moral pollutions, and to keep themselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit

Gill:

that is, separate themselves from all other people, and be distinct from them, by using a different diet from theirs, as their Lord and God was different from all others, so called

and so be preserved from falling into idolatry, and continue a holy people, serving and worshipping the Lord their God, and him only; and which seems to be a principal view as to religion, in delivering out the above commands

Leviticus 19:1-2 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2 Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.

Calvin:

This is the object of the exhortation: first, that they should not measure the service of God by their own conceits, but rather by His nature; and secondly, that they should begin by studying to be holy.

...although the most perfect come very far short even of the angels, yet the weakness of the very humblest does not prevent him from aspiring after the example of God.

To this point did all the ceremonies tend, whereby God exercised His ancient people unto holiness, as we shall hereafter see.

Geneva:

That is, void of all pollution, idolatry and superstition both of soul and body.

Poole:

separated from all the forementioned defilements, and entirely consecrated to God, and obedient to all his laws and statutes

Henry:

We are the followers of the holy Jesus, and therefore must be, according to our capacity, consecrated to God's honour

Gill:

a separate people from all others, abstaining from all the impurity and idolatry they are cautioned against in the foregoing chapter, and observing the holy precepts expressed in this

in his nature, essence, originally, independently, immutably, and perfectly; and the more holy they were, the more like they would be to him;

JFB:

Separated from the world, the people of God were required to be holy, for His character, His laws, and service were holy.

Deuteronomy 18:13 Thou shalt be perfect with the Lord thy God.

What does "holy" mean?

Gill on Rom 12:1 - in allusion to the sacrifices under the law, which were separated from common use, and devoted to God, and were not to have the least spot and blemish in them; and regards men sanctified by the Spirit of God, and whose actions flow from a principle of holiness, and are performed under the influence of the Holy Spirit

Jesus as holy

Luke 1:35 And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God.

Acts 3:14 But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;

Acts 4:30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

Acts 13:35 Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

“be holy”

Ephesians 1:4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

Ephesians 5:27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

1 Peter 1:14-16 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: 15 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; 16 Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

Henry: The Old Testament commands are to be studied and obeyed in the times of the New Testament; the apostle, by virtue of a command delivered several times by Moses, requires holiness in all Christians.

JFB: God is essentially holy: the creature is holy in so far as it is sanctified by God. God, in giving the command, is willing to give also the power to obey it, namely, through the sanctifying of the Spirit (1Pe_1:2).

Exodus 22:31 And ye shall be holy men unto me: neither shall ye eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field; ye shall cast it to the dogs.

Leviticus 11:44 For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

Leviticus 11:45 For I am the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.

Leviticus 20:26 And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD am holy, and have severed you from other people, that ye should be mine.

excerpts from Durham: “5 Ways to Diagnose the Hidden Idols of the Heart”

<https://www.reformationscotland.org/2019/11/15/5-ways-to-diagnose-the-hidden-idols-of-the-heart/>