



A group of theological students were given an assignment to rearrange the Ten Commandments in order of priority. There was general consensus that the most important commandment should be “*You shall not murder.*” They also agreed that the second most important would be “*You shall not steal.*” The third most important commandment was “*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.*”

However, there was a division as to which was the least important commandment. Half of the students felt that the least important commandment was “*You shall not commit adultery.*” The other half selected “*You shall have no other gods before Me*” as the least significant. After some further discussion the class agreed to put the “*You shall have no other gods before Me*” as the least important of the Ten Commandments.

That's an interesting commentary on the perspective of those theological students. When the Lord Jesus Christ was asked which was the greatest Commandment in the Law, He replied: “*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest Commandment.*” Matt 22:37-38

HOSTILITY TO THE LAW

At a Christian conference a discussion ensued over the Ten Commandments. One delegate commented that he didn't find the Ten Commandments very challenging or useful for his personal sanctification, because they mainly dealt with extreme sins like idolatry, adultery, stealing and murder. He was puzzled over the lack of mention of serious sins such as pride, selfishness or bad temper, which we struggle with on a regular basis. An older delegate observed that the Commandments were not specific enough.

THE 1ST COMMANDMENT

“*You shall have no other gods before me.*”

Exodus 20:3

—by Peter Hammond

A woman delegate expressed her opinion that the Ten Commandments were “too negative”. She would have preferred the Ten Commandments to present positive advice on life and how we could live our lives reflecting the Beatitudes or the Fruit of the Spirit. This would have surely been “more relevant” for Christians, she felt.

In this age of anti-nomianism, such hostility to and ignorance of the Law of God dominates our Theological colleges and Christian conferences.

THE HOLINESS CODE

Christ Jesus expressly affirmed the Law, emphatically taught the Law, perfectly kept the Law and saved us in terms of the Law. The Ten Commandments are the source and summary of every other passage in the Bible about Holy living and they cover every conceivable sin. Each Commandment actually covers a whole family of sins. And although the Commandments are mainly expressed in negative forms, they are also implicit commands to perform the opposite positive virtues. The Ten Commandments actually present us with God's code for Holiness.

Contrary to the opinion of the theological students who assigned God's First Commandment to the last place, the First Commandment is the most important Commandment. As Almighty God, our Creator and Eternal Judge, God demands first place in our lives, and it is only right that He should do so.

FOR OUR OWN GOOD

As our loving Heavenly Father, God does

not want us to waste our lives on falsehood, deception and spiritual poison. God knows what is best for His own children. He desires that we become the very best people that we can be, developing all the potential that He has placed within us to become successful sons and daughters of the living God. We will only find true peace and fulfilment when we give God His rightful place in our lives.

“And God spoke all these words: ‘I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me.’” Exodus 20:1-3

When God revealed the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai He declared: “*I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me.*” Exod 20:2

When God declared: “*I am the Lord*”, He affectively ruled out pantheism, polytheism and New Age thinking.

When God said: “*I am*”, He revealed that He is a person. God is not, as the pantheist teaches, “an impersonal force”.

Actually pantheism is the worst form of religion because if “all is God”, then there can be no distinction between good and evil. If “everything is true” then nothing is false. If “nothing is false” then everything must be true. Evangelism would be irrelevant and there would be no ultimate Truth of which anyone could be certain. If “God is all and all is good”, then a drunk driver running a red light and killing an innocent child,

would be morally equivalent to Florence Nightingale dedicating her life to caring for the sick and suffering.

ONLY ONE TRUE GOD

When God called Himself “*I*”, He also exposed the inherent lie of polytheism. Polytheism believes in many gods. However, God didn't say “we are the Lord your gods.”

He declared: “*I am the Lord your God.*” He is the one true God. There is no other. Those who worship the gods and idols of their own making are actually bowing before demons in disguise (1 Cor 10:20).

God's revelation on the mountain also ruled out New Age thinking which is nothing but the old lie of the serpent in the Garden of Eden who said: “...you will be like God...” Gen 3:5.

C.S. Lewis wrote: “We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition, when infinite joy is offered to us. We are like an ignorant child who wants to keep on making mud pies in the slum, because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday by the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

Matthew Henry commented that the First Commandment does not only refer to pagan idols: “To love, to desire, to »

THE 1ST COMMANDMENT

"You shall have no other gods before me."

Exodus 20:3

delight in, or to expect any good from, any sinful indulgence is prohibited. Equally, we are not to allow any person, or created thing, however valuable or excellent, to rival God in our affections. All atheism, infidelity and irreligion is opposition to

this world, had a joy and a peace that eluded the successful and celebrated Tolstoy. Leo Tolstoy could not get this joyful peasant out of his mind. He concluded that the difference between himself and this peasant was that the poor man knew God, while

Jesus affirmed the Law, taught the Law, perfectly kept the Law and saved us in terms of the Law. The Ten Commandments are the summary of Holy living.

God, an attempt to be independent of Him. The proud man is his own idol because he worships himself and expects others to do the same. The covetous man makes a god of his wealth, which he loves, depends on and expects happiness from. The sensualist by his practices worships deities as filthy as any seen in a pagan temple." We are commanded to "set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."

THE SECRET TO LIFE

Our first duty, and our soul's first need, is to place God first, and above all else, in our lives. Those who crowd God out of His rightful place in their lives, do so to their own detriment. If the One True God is not on the throne of your life, you will never know true, lasting peace and joy.

The Russian novelist, Leo Tolstoy, was wealthy and successful beyond imagining. He was honoured and acclaimed worldwide for his writings. Yet, despite all of his wealth and fame, he was dissatisfied and felt empty. One day, while walking in the countryside, he came across a peasant whose face beamed with joy, peace and contentment.

Leo Tolstoy later testified that he immediately realised that this man, although he clearly possessed very little in

he did not. This began the journey that ultimately led Tolstoy to Christ. He later wrote: "To know God and to live is the one and the same thing. God is life!" Without a relationship with God we are spiritually dead. To walk humbly before God: "He has shown you what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" Mic 6:8.

EXAMINE YOUR HEART

In the light of the first Commandment, we should examine our hearts by asking: What, or who, is first in your life? What is of greatest importance to you? What do you spend most of your time and money on? What do you think about the most? What are you most excited about and enthusiastic for?

If, after an honest examination of your own heart and mind, you realise that God does not have first place in your life, then you need to re-order your priorities in the light of Eternity. "It is appointed to men once to die, and after this the Judgment." Heb 9:27. The day will come when we will have to stand before Almighty God and give an account of our lives. "Abraham, the Father of the Faithful, proved that God was his first priority." (Gen 22:1-14).

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