

“And God Spoke all these Words:”

The first thing actually written down to form the Old Testament was the Ten Commandments given on Mount Sinai. It is quality of the Word as well as common communication, for the first thing to be important. And so we can look at the 10 commandments as the most important part of the Word, and especially the first commandment, since that is the emphasis the Lord gave us.

Still, when some people look at the Ten Commandments they don't see anything especially profound. They might argue that those laws are simply good practice or that they are similar to Egyptian or Babylonian law codes.

There are also Christians who wonder if the Ten Commandments are perhaps outdated or too difficult to actually follow, and needed to be replaced by a different, easier covenant. And even some people who accept that they are generally good rules, wonder why they are phrased as they are, particularly with many being negative commands instead of positive.

We are going to be looking at some of these questions and confusions about the Commandments and see why the Lord chose these 10 ideas as the most important and central teachings of all.

First though we consider this AC 2568.4: *There are therefore two principles; one of which leads to all folly and insanity, and the other to all intelligence and wisdom. The former principle is to deny all things, or to say in the heart that we cannot believe them until we are convinced by what we can apprehend, or perceive by the senses; this is the principle that leads to all folly and insanity, and is to be called the negative principle. The other principle is to affirm the things which are of doctrine from the Word, or to think and believe within ourselves that they are true because the Lord has said them: this is the principle that leads to all intelligence and wisdom, and is to be called the affirmative principle.*

If we want to understand them the commandments we need to start from the principle that the Commandments are the Word of God.

The objection that these were not new laws or that they are similar to contemporary legal codes of the ancient world, should not be surprising. If they are important rules for God, then it makes sense that they would be establishing in many places, not only in one comparatively small

nation. We are told directly that many ancient religions had an ancient Word which came before the Old Testament and taught people how to live (DP 254). Further, the reading we had for today from TCR, outlined that the reason the Ten Commandments were given in a miraculous way, and as the new beginning for the church, is that they are much more than civil and moral laws, but they are also divine and heavenly laws.

So what makes these laws so heavenly? Why are heavenly laws given in the negative? Since we are going to be focusing on the First Commandment today, we can ask why we are told not to worship other gods, rather than simply told to worship the Lord. There are in-fact many places we are told to love the Lord or God. But in the commandments it is phased as a negative, not to worship other Gods. This commandment has two parts not worshipping idols or other gods. On the most basic level these two ideas seem to be basically the same, that nothing should be held higher than the Lord. This can be things like money, success, good looks, fancy cars, anything that becomes our primary motivation. It might seem possible to Love God, and also hold onto some other value or goal, but one has to be the primary. And when the primary conflicts with the other goals, the primary is what wins. Loving the Lord or respecting Him as God, can feel a bit abstract, and so other priorities can easily take place if we are not making a conscious effort to keep things in correct order. Also when other priorities feed into our self-interest we are inclined to let them be the ruling loves. And the most dangerous alternative to worshipping God is worshipping our self or self interest,

This leads us to the internal meaning of the two parts to this commandment. Having no other gods is about first not loving anything else besides God and the things that come from Him. But also gods relate to truth, and so it also means not accepting any other truths than come from the Lord.

The Second part about not making graven images or idols is more specifically not to put our own ideas in the place of God, or to pervert the idea of God by making God conform to our ideas or “making God in our image” (AC 8867-8869).

What does this look like in practice? Using natural truths or scientific observations as the lens to understand the Word instead of the other way around. There are many kinds of adultery that are just accepted in our society because they don’t seem different on the outside to genuine marriage. It can seem like fairness to steal from someone or some company who is rich if you are poor. It can seem fair to hate other people who are doing things we don’t like.

Or can even be picking one truth from the Word as something primary and not being led

by what the Lord tells us is most important.

At times the Israelites took the special place that they had in caring for the written Word as an excuse to look down on other nations. Christians took the importance of Faith and put it above love, charity, and obeying the Commandments. Even in the New Church we can put the special knowledge of the Heavenly Doctrine or the Second Coming, as a justification for looking down on others. Or an excuse that we are special just for knowing the truth, and not need to live according to the teachings.

Other teachings that can be misused are that doing our job well is a key part of charity and there is nothing bad about being well off, but that doesn't mean that we should skip church just to work, or that we can make financial success a competing priority.

In the New Church we also have the wonderful teaching that people from any religion can go to heaven, but that is only part of the truth, that anyone can go to heaven who loves God and follows the commandments, which are in every religion:

DP 254.2 When once a religion is established in a nation the Lord leads that nation according to the precepts and dogmas of its own religion; and He has provided that in every religion there should be precepts similar to those in the Decalogue; as, that God is to be worshipped, His name is not to be profaned, a holy day is to be observed, parents are to be honoured, murder, adultery, and theft are not to be committed, and false witness is not to be spoken. The nation which regards these precepts as Divine and lives according to them as a matter of religion is saved,

We need to be careful not to let anything other than the Lord and His word define our focus in life. But the wonder of making the Lord our focus, is that everything else in life then takes on more beauty and purpose. From science, work, and human interaction the Lord gives us the guidance and perspective to make each of them truly loving and human.

So, as important and even primary it is to shun other false idols, and love the Lord the Lord is not demanding worship for His own sake. One of the ways we can experience the Lord's love is through other people and in mothers in a special way.

Jesus said: *How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!* (Matt 23:37).

Mothers are given a special gift of love from the Lord. They get to share His love with other people especially their children. What is the quality of that love? It can be called unconditional which is true, and yet that can be misconstrued. A spiritual mother gives her

children healthy food, early bedtimes, and boundaries. Not because mothers want to control their children, but because they want what is best for them.

This is a reminder and picture of why the Lord is so insistent on us obeying and loving Him above all else.

AC 5957. The Lord does not demand these things for His own sake, for the Divine has no glory from man's humility, adoration, and thanksgiving. In the Divine, anything of the love of self is utterly inconceivable—that such things should be done for His own sake; but they are for the sake of the man himself; for when a man is in humility he can receive good from the Lord, because he has then been separated from the love of self and its evils, which are the obstacle; and therefore the Lord wills a state of humility in man for his own sake; because when he is in this state the Lord can flow in with heavenly good.

The Lord wants us to be happy and so He warns us to not do the things that will make us unhappy.

But to return to the main point, we turn away from false gods so we can love the Lord.

What does Loving the Lord look like? Again we can think about loving an earthly father or mother. One way to show love is to spending time together or even talk on the phone if you are not nearby. How do we spend time with the Lord? We go to church, we read the Word. The Word is the Lord with us. We can talk to the Lord in prayer, but if we want to hear His voice we listen to the Word.

But if you ask a mother or father what gives them there greatest joy, it is not just about their children are doing nice things for them, but when they are treating each other well. So too we show Love to the Lord by keeping all the other commandments too.

Amen

Glory be to the Lord Jesus Christ, The One God of Heaven and Earth... of His kingdom there shall be no end.

Readings: Exodus 20:1-6; John 14:15; TCR 282, TCR 293-295; Mark 12:28-31.

Exodus 20

1 And God spoke all these words, saying: 2 “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 3 “You shall have no other gods before Me. 4 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; 5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

John 14:15. If you love Me, keep My commandments.

TCR 282. CHAPTER 5 THE CATECHISM OR DECALOGUE EXPLAINED IN ITS EXTERNAL AND ITS INTERNAL SENSE.

There is not a nation in the whole world which does not know that it is wicked to murder, to commit adultery, to steal, and to bear false witness, and that kingdoms, republics, and every form of organized society, unless these evils were guarded against by laws, would be at an end. Who then can suppose that the Israelitish nation was so stupid beyond all others as not to know that these are evils? Anyone therefore may wonder that laws so universally known in the world should have been promulgated from Mount Sinai by Jehovah Himself in so miraculous a way. But listen: they were promulgated in so miraculous a way to make known that these laws are not only civil and moral laws, but also Divine laws; and that acting contrary to them is not only doing evil to the neighbor, that is, to a fellow citizen and society, but is also sinning against God. Wherefore these laws, by their promulgation by Jehovah from Mount Sinai, were made also laws of religion. Evidently whatever Jehovah commands, He commands in order that it may be a matter of religion, and thus some thing to be done for the sake of salvation...

Mark 12: 28 Then one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, perceiving that He had answered them well, asked Him, "Which is the first commandment of all?" 29 Jesus answered him, "The first of all the commandments is: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' This is the first commandment. 31 And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

TCR 293. In the natural sense, which is the sense of the letter, this commandment means also that no one except God, and nothing but what proceeds from God, is to be loved above all things, which also accords with the Lord's words (Matt. 22:35-37; Luke 10:25-28). For any person or thing that is loved above all things is God and is Divine to the one who so loves. For example, to one who loves himself or the world above all things, himself or the world is his God; and this is why such persons do not in heart acknowledge any God, and in consequence are conjoined with their like in hell, where all who love themselves and the world above all things are gathered.

294. The spiritual sense of this commandment is, that no other God than the Lord Jesus Christ is to be worshiped, because He is Jehovah, who came into the world and wrought the redemption without which neither any man nor any angel could have been saved. That there is no God beside Him, is evident from the following passages in the Word:...

295. The celestial sense of this commandment is, that Jehovah the Lord is infinite, illimitable, and eternal; that He is omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent; that He is the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, who was, is, and is to be; that He is love itself and wisdom itself, or good itself, and truth itself, consequently life itself; and thus the one only Being from whom all things are.