

INTRODUCTION

There are many nice things about Memphis. But I told you before that one thing I do not like about our hometown is the traffic. We live in smaller city. However, the way some people drive is worse than those from big cities. People always tailgate me when I am driving on a one-lane street. They think I am too slow even when I am doing speed limit. Cars running red light at intersections all the time. Do you have some or all of those bad habits? When you are cruising on the highways you may notice those big electronic display boards the Department of Transportation put on the roadside. They alert drivers of important incidents like construction or accident ahead of them. Sometimes, the messages can be humorous. Once I saw a note that read: "It is called speed limit, not speed suggestion." The traffic laws forbid you to drive like a race-car driver. It is to ensure your safety and the safety of other people. Laws are restrictive for a good reason. In the Exodus, God was about to present His Law to the Israelites. We mentioned two weeks ago that the Law does not create a relationship between God and His people. The Law is to govern their relationship. God would bless the Israelites if they obeyed the Law. Violate the Law, then there would be discipline. Today we will study the first four of the Ten Commandments. Those four orders mandate how God wants His people to treat Him. Even today, God demands our complete allegiance. We should obey Him because He is our Lord.

EXPLANATION

Commandment 1: No Other gods 誡命 (一)：不可有別神

The first commandment is that we should have no other gods except Jehovah. Read **verses 2-3**: "2 I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. 3 You shall have no other gods before me." Verse 2 is not only the basis for the first commandment. It is the foundational clause for the whole Law. God had a plan in mind long before the nation of Israel existed. He took the initiative to make a covenant with Abraham. God also delivered Israel from Egypt. He triumphed over the Egyptians and the idols that protected them. God made the Israelites His people, and He became their God. There was no other deity that invited a nation to establish a personal relationship. Because of all those reasons God told His people that they should not have any other gods before Him. Many of us grew up in the Chinese traditional belief system. It is polytheistic in nature, meaning that there are many deities. Every god has its own area of specialty. There is a door god, a money god and even a kitchen god. It worked the same way in the ancient world. The Israelites came out from Egypt, which was polytheistic. They were about to go into Canaan, which was another polytheistic region. It made sense to the worshippers that each god had its own territory: the river god, the sun god and the god of birth, etc. Therefore, it was a new concept to the Israelites that from now on they could only worship one God. He is the Creator of the whole universe, and He sustains the whole world by His power. He would take care of every aspect of their lives. Our God is the number one because He is the Only One! Paul said **Ephesians 1:21** that (God's power is) far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. God continues to exercise His power in our world. He also has sovereignty over our lives. He protects

us and provides for us. He asks us to fully devote ourselves to Him. There should be no other gods in our hearts. Some of you worshipped the traditional beliefs before you became a Christian. You used to put different statues in your china cabinet. God is saying to you: “After you have accepted Christ you should only have me in your heart.” There should be no fear for the future unknowns because God will take care of us. Some people buy home insurance but they are still anxious. What if there is a flood, earthquake or even terrorist attack that is not covered by the policy? Some Christians look at God like an insurance plan. What if something happens that God cannot handle? Therefore, they still follow feng-shui, wear beads on their wrist or a Buddha around their neck as supplementary insurance. Get rid of those things! Trust God alone. Only He can give you peace. A kind of peace that surpasses any life circumstance.

Commandment 2: No Idol Worship 誡命 (二) : 不可拜偶像

The first commandment deals with our hearts. We should have no other gods. The second commandment is related to our practice. We should not worship any idol. God said in **verse 4**: “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.” Whether in the Biblical world or in our Chinese culture people use their imagination to transform what they see in nature to become idols. Therefore, a piece of rock, a tree or an animal becomes the object of worship. God continued His prohibition in **verse 5**: “You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God...” God forbade the Israelites to pay tribute to idols because He said that He was a “jealous God.” In the Old Testament the word “jealous” is only used to describe God. We may wonder why God is so narrow-minded and possessive. Those of us who are in a dating relationship can fully understand it. Who would be so generous to share their boy-friend or girl-friend with another person? If you do not mind at all then it is possible that you do not care about the relationship! Love demands full commitment. God looks at us the same way. His heart will be burned with jealousy if we allow idols to occupy our mind. Why do people worship idols? There are a few possibilities. A statue is visible and can be touched with one’s hands. People also feel that idols are easily controllable. They worship idols and expect some benefits in return. But the question is: if I burn some incense or present a roasted pig to a deity and it will bless me with a baby boy or get me into Harvard, then who is the master and who is the servant? Later on, when the Israelites were about to get into Canaan, God warned them over and over again to stay away from idol worship. For example, God alerted His people in **Deuteronomy 12:29-30**: “29 The Lord your God will cut off before you the nations you are about to invade and dispossess. But when you have driven them out and settled in their land, 30 and after they have been destroyed before you, be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, ‘How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same.’” The locals would tell the Israelites: “We have rain because we bow down before the god that controls the climate. Our cattle and sheep multiply because we maintain good relationship with the god of reproduction.” The Israelites would be led astray into thinking that they too had to please those idols to ensure a prosperous life. Sadly, in the next few hundred years Israel turned a blind eye to God’s warning. God executed His judgment to discipline His people. God wants to be the only God in our hearts. What is your idol? Today, most Christians would not carve an image and bow down before it. However, we allow other things or relationships to occupy the throne that God should be sitting on. We chase after money and materialism, we worship our career and we even serve our kids like kings. We believe that

those stuff or relationships can bring us security and fulfillment. It is time to re-prioritize our lives and let God be the only King.

Commandment 3: Don't Misuse God's Name 誠命 (三) : 不可妄稱神

We should not have another god in our heart, and we should not worship any idol. In the third commandment, God told the Israelites that they should not misuse His name. **Verse 7** reads: "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name." The word "misuse" has a sense of making something worthless. One way to degrade God's name is to misuse it for our own gain. In **Matthew 5:34** Jesus warned people against using God's name when making an oath: "But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne." At that time people swore by God's name to make themselves look more credible. They might say: "Let Jehovah take my life if I am telling a lie." Or: "I guarantee that I will fulfill my promise, otherwise, let Jehovah punish me." The issue is that one cannot make himself more trustworthy only because he swears by the name of God. Nowadays before people testify in a court they swear to tell the truth. But many people still lie because they have no fear toward God! As Christians, since we understand that God knows our hearts we should always be truthful with or without making an oath. We do not misuse God's name because His name is full of power and honor. Paul said in **Philippians 2:9-11** that: 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. When Jesus was risen from the dead God the Father gave Him the title "Lord." One day all creation will bow down before Lord Jesus. Every time we think of the name "Lord" it should bring sweetness to our souls. Our Lord loved us so much to die for us while we were still sinners. He has a perfect plan for each of us. He is our Great Shepherd leading us in the right path. Last Sunday, Carol played the song "He Keeps Me Singing" during offering. The chorus reads: "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus – Sweetest name I know. Fills my every longing, keeps me singing as I go." I could not help but humming in my heart as I heard the melody. Some people address their children, boy-friend/girl-friend or spouse as "baby," "honey," or "sweetheart." Though sometimes our love for another human being is limited and conditional we treat the significant people in our lives dearly. How much more should we revere the name of our Lord? Nowadays, a lot of people utter God's name in a disrespectful manner. Some of them begin a conversation with OMG without even thinking about it. Others use God's name in profanity, feeling that it is a cool thing to do. That should grieve our hearts. Our lips reflect our hearts. If we truly love God, then we should give Him glory every time we mention His name.

Commandment 4: Don't Forget the Sabbath 誠命 (四) : 當守安息日

The first three commandments told the Israelites what not to do. In contrast, the fourth commandment told the Israelites one thing they should do. They had to observe the Sabbath. Let us look at **verses 8-10**: 8 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. 9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work, 10 but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates." The Hebrew word "Sabbath" means to pause. The idea was to give people and animals a day of rest from their labor. From

then on, God ordained a routine of six days of work plus one day of rest. In today's calendar the Sabbath falls on a Saturday. But why was the rest put on the last day of the week? The next verse in the passage was quoted from **Genesis 2:2-3** – 2 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. 3 And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done. God being the all-powerful being would not feel tired and does not need any rest. However, He set up a pattern for us to conduct our lives. As humans, we need rest so that our mind and our bodies can be rejuvenated. We need to step aside from work so that we can spend time with our family too. But notice in both the Genesis and Exodus passages there is another important aspect besides resting. God made the Sabbath holy. The Israelites did not spend their day of rest on a vacation, fishing or shopping. God ordered them to set aside the Sabbath to worship Him. Thus, the point is more on what people should do on the Sabbath, rather than what they could not do. However, the Pharisees in Jesus' days went the extreme. God forbade people to "work" on the Sabbath. The Pharisees thought that they had to clearly define what constituted "work" to prevent any violation. They outlined 39 categories of work. Under each group there were many sub-categories. There were literally thousands of rules to follow. For example, a person could not drag the legs of a chair on soft ground on a Sabbath, because by making troughs, it was considered plowing a field. A person could not climb a tree on a Sabbath either, for fear that he might break a branch, and thus unintentionally harvested the fruits. It is quite laughable. When Jesus came, He disclosed the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. They were more interested in picking on people when they did wrong, instead of encouraging them to honor God. In Mark 2 Jesus' disciples pinched some heads of the grain when they walked through a field. The Pharisees condemned them for harvesting on a Sabbath. In **2:27**, Jesus corrected the Pharisees by saying: ... "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath." The day was dedicated to worship God. It should not be used to burden people for their mistakes. Today we do not need to observe the Sabbath. Instead, we worship God on the Lord's Day. We are not restricted by a long list of don'ts. But are we treating the Lord's Day holy? I know as a fact that a few brothers and sisters in our midst come home late from work on Saturday. But they attend our worship regularly. In the previous church I served some people do not see worship as that important. I was told that some people sat with their kids in the fellowship hall during the service. They had to finish their Chinese school homework because it was due that afternoon. There is a balcony in that church. Some people prefer to sit up there because they feel free to check on their phone or to doze off. They did not know that I saw them. Even if I didn't, God did! Brothers and sisters: when you come on Sunday don't just come in person. Bring your hearts too! Treat the Lord's Day as holy because we come to worship a holy God.

CONCLUSION

God demands our complete allegiance. We should obey Him because He is our Lord. Those four commandments are not just for the Israelites. They are timeless truths for every believer to follow. God redeemed us as His people through the blood of Jesus Christ. He established an eternal covenant with us. We submit to God's requirements out of love, and not out of guilt. He is our loving Master and we should be His obedient servants.