

LD 34 (QA 94-95) Dt. 6:10-15; Isaiah 45:5-7; Serve the LORD Alone I. The Foundation of this Command II. Avoiding Idolatry III. Pursuing Right Worship

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the first and the last commandment of the 10 Commandments form a sort of parenthesis around the entire law. As we will see today, the first commandment sets the stage and groundwork for us going forward, and the last commandment reorients our focus as it directs us back to the previous 9. In this way, the worship of God alone needs to be established before we can even look at who man is as a creature made in the image of God. But as we remember the 10th Commandment, it is clear that God is not content with the external actions either. I remember listening to a devotional from Focus on the Family that raised the issue of doing the right thing for the wrong reason- and the possibility of doing the wrong thing for the right reason. Well, the Christian life seeks to do the right thing for the right reason! So as we begin our series on the 10 Commandments, this morning we start by focussing on the One, True God who is to be worshipped alone. On the outside, it was easier to tell if this commandment was being broken in the OT. The contrast was clear and stark- either you worshipped the gods of the Egyptians and Canaanites- or you did not. All you had to do was look for a golden calf or an Asherah Pole and you would know which god was being worshipped. Did you go to Jerusalem to worship at the temple- or did you go to the house of Baal? But even Rachel was guilty of stealing her father's household gods when she fled with Jacob. But as we will see today, the battle against idolatry is much harder than simply avoiding the act of bowing down to idols made of gold, silver, wood or stone. So today we consider this theme: Jesus Christ liberates us to worship the one, true God as He is revealed in His Word.

I. The Foundation of this Command

In our first point, we consider the foundation of this command. Why is this commandment so important as to be included first in the 10 Laws of the Moral Code. As this command states- You shall have no other gods before me. There are to be no other gods in my presence- there shall not be any other gods in my sight. Now we have to remember the context out of which the Israelites were coming. They were coming out of

Egypt who had an estimated 2000 so called gods. And they were going up into the land of Canaan with their own hundreds of gods. And in Roman mythology- they had their own 12 main gods. This is not to say that there are any other true gods- only that the Israelites were being taken out of the context in which every nation had their own gods and goddesses which they worshipped. So they learned that these other gods were not welcomed in their midst- the gods of the nations had no place in the camp of Israel. Added to this fact, the gods of the nations were in fact false gods. They were but idols made of gold, wood and stone. As Isaiah puts it- they had eyes but could not see. Ears but could not hear. Mouths but could not speak. They were dumb and mute- and all those who worshipped them became like them. Worthless and futile. It did them no good to bow down to these other gods because they are in fact false and vain gods- empty and powerless. All false gods and idols have this in common- they are created by man to replace the one, true God! As such, they cannot save! This is the point God is making in Isaiah 45:5- I alone and God and besides me there is no other. In the beginning there was God- only 1. There always was and always will be only 1 God! So it is not like we are comparing the God of Israel to the other gods- and Yahweh is the strongest. No- there is and remains only one God! The fact is, these other so-called gods are nothing! Although the Bible may speak of so-called gods- these are only representations of power and authority. So the first commandment is really a call for truth! Worship the LORD your God because He alone is God and there is no other god besides him! Truth demands that we acknowledge the only God that is! God is God and wants to be – He deserves to be treated as He is! Our reading from Dt. 6 builds upon this fact. It is the Lord your God whom you shall fear. Him only shall you worship. Do not serve or go after other gods, for the Lord your God is a jealous God! In other words, God is jealous for His glory! He does not want His praise and honor to be given to someone or something else! To call something else “god” that is not god is to give the title and praise of God to another. This raises God’s ire and kindles His wrath! Calling fools gold, gold, does not make it so! Calling something that is not god, a god, does not make it true! Being God, the LORD alone deserves all worship and praise! It is His divine right! So identifying and acknowledging the true God is the first step in

truth and of true worship. Although we know this in our heads, we sometimes forget this our hearts. We tend to think of good and evil as if they were opposite and equal. The opposite of light is dark. The opposite of day is night. The opposite of God is the Devil- but that is not right. The devil is not equal to God but on the opposite side. No- God is God and He is God alone! Nothing is worthy of comparing to God! He is without equal! The devil can only pervert what God has already made. God is God- and besides Him there is no other!

II. Avoiding Idolatry

Now that we understand the foundation of this command in that it speaks the truth- there is and remains only one God. In our next point we consider how we are to avoid idolatry. How do we avoid treating other things that are not god, as if they were a god? As we saw with our definition of conversion, we are to put to death or put off the old man along with his desires and false believes. So in order to avoid idolatry, we have to stop thinking that created things are god- or that idols are worthy of our trust. We need to stop trusting in created things or looking to this world for lasting comfort and peace. So what is idolatry? Well, as QA 95 defines it, idolatry is having or inventing something in which we trust along side of our in the place of the one true God. Basically, idolatry is trusting in something that is not god as if it was god! So we are dealing with faith- in what do people tend to hope? What do people trust in order to secure blessings and peace. From where does your help come? In whom do you trust? This can be anything- not just in the place of God but even along side of God. As we look at the world around us, things have not really changed all that much from the days of old. Although in the OT the Canaanites worshipped Baan and Asherah, these were but tools or instrument used to gain what they really wanted. Baal was the god of nature- of rain and harvest. Asherah was the goddess of fertility and pleasure. But today our idolatry is much more subtle- we see a more polished form of rebellion today. No longer do we see temples erected to all sorts of gods on the corner of every street. But do not for a moment think that idolatry is dead- not at all. It is more hidden, but that makes it more dangerous as well. As it was in the land of Canaan, man still worships the things of creation.

Baal has given way to prosperity and material wealth. But do not be deceived, the god of mammon is alive and well in our society. And even though we do not see any Asherah poles, the pursuit of physical pleasure without responsibility is very much present today. Just look at the abortion mills! You see, anything created can be idolized. American Idol is not just a TV show, it summarizes the hearts of those who live here. Power, popularity, wellness, health, security, stability. There all have their faithful followers. Materialism is the worship of material things. Just look at the rise of gambling and betting. Technophilia is the love of and worship of technology. Scientism- the worship of science. Remember that our leaders kept drilling this into our heads- trust the science! Well, science does not save us! Some trust in horses, some trust in their military, some trust in their elected officials and the princes of man. Others look to sports teams and political leaders for pleasure and purpose. Mankind is incurably religious- we were created to be religious people. Everyone worships or trusts in something- even if they do not call it worship. Well does Rom. 1:23 describe our time- mankind claims to be wise while they worship images and other created things. This is foolish! To deny that the True God exists while worshipping things created by God! These cannot save- these will not give lasting peace and purpose- and will in the end leave us empty! Idolatry leads to slavery- promising what it can never deliver. Seeing that there are so many idols, what should our response be? Well, we must refuse to bow down to them- refuse to trust in them- renouncing anything that goes against God's will. Jesus said that you cannot serve two masters. A heart divided is a heart engaged in idolatry. Therefore I will, as QA 94 begins, avoid and shun all idolatry. I will cast every idol from the throne of my heart. I will refuse to trust in these created things- nor will I give lip service to any other god. Elevating anything above God- or comparing something to God- is the largest act of betrayal we can commit! It is treason- for a creature to forsake their creator! As I John 5:21 says, keep yourself from idols!

III. Pursuing Right Worship

But we must press on- as this commandment tells us not only what to forsake- but also what to engage in. I am to avoid idolatry- but I am also to pursue right and holy worship of the one, true God! As our reading

from Dt. 6:13 says, It is the Lord your God whom you shall fear. Him you shall serve. So lets break this down a little bit. What does it mean to worship the LORD? Well, it starts by knowing Him rightly. God can be personally known. To worship God, we have to know who this God is and what He has done. So true worship is rooted in knowledge- and we receive this knowledge because God has revealed Himself to us in His word. One of the unique privileges we have as Christians is that we can know and call upon God as our Father. The gods of the nations were always distant and fickle- they had to be appeased and you never knew what side of them you were on. But since we have come to know God through Jesus His Son, we are assured of His love and approval of us. God is our Father- we are His children. Even though God is high and lifted up, He is near and dear to us. He holds us in His hands- so that we can trust Him and depend on His promises. This really is where we find our comfort. Knowing that God is also our heavenly Father, we can be comforted with His promises. That Jesus has secured our peace and place in God's presence! In fact, we need to learn to trust the promises of God even over our own feelings! It is foolish to trust in idol gods that cannot save; but it is wise to trust in God our Father who has saved! So we not only need to know God- we need to trust Him. To look to His hand for all that we need. To honor and worship Him for who He is as God and to praise Him for what He has done as our redeeming LORD! In short, this means that we will seek to give God the honor and glory that He deserves. To give Him His due! As the summary of the Law says- loving Him with all our heart and serving Him with all our strength! So to summarize this last point, avoiding idolatry means that will positively and rightly worship the one true God and Him alone! Instead of looking to created things, we look to God for all that we need as we find comfort in His promises. As James 1:17 identified, every good gift that we have comes down to us from God our Father.

As we close, idolatry is the ultimate sin. Idolaters will not be welcomed into the kingdom above because they have trusted in false gods who cannot save! Idolatry is also a root sin- it leads to a host of other rebellious actions and errant loves. Jesus Christ liberates us to worship the one, true God as He is revealed in His Word. So may we love the LORD our God with all our heart- and worship Him as God because He alone is God!