



**THE CHRISTIAN
AND THE
TEN COMMANDMENTS**

Biola Hour Highlights

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CHAPTER I

THE SCRIPTURES AND THE LAW

Some fifteen hundred years before Christ was born, Moses, under God, led the Israelites out of the bondage of the Egyptian ruler Pharaoh. They were en route to Canaan, the promised land, when they stopped to pitch camp at the foot of Mount Sinai. Here the pilgrim host was to experience a series of events and learn some never-to-be-forgotten lessons. Sinai was to be a new beginning for Israel. Up until that time, God was constantly showing forth His grace and power in behalf of His people. Blessings had been showered upon them unconditionally notwithstanding their sins and failures. But in spite of fresh displays of the loving kindness of the Lord, Israel murmured and complained, charging God and Moses with neglect.

Thus began a new dispensation in the life of the nation Israel. Calling Moses up into the mountain, God gave him the Law. This doubtless was one of the outstanding events in human history.

Included in the Law were the Ten Commandments, sometimes called the Law of Moses. Perhaps no portion of Holy Scripture has been the object of such misunderstanding and the target of so much criticism as the Ten Commandments. Some religious leaders have made it the sole ground of man's salvation, while others have discarded it as having no value whatsoever in this age of grace. We have studied both these extreme views. Hence this introductory chapter is presented with the view to a higher concept and a true evaluation of the Mosaic Law.

A close examination of the Bible will show that all time is divided into eras, or dispensations. There are seven such periods set forth in the Scriptures. The first four of the dispensations are given little space in the Biblical records. They are fully covered in the book of Genesis and the first eighteen chapters of the book of Exodus. All that is recorded between Exodus, chapter nineteen, and Revelation, chapter twenty, has to do with the last three of the dispensations which are as follows.

1. THE DISPENSATION OF THE LAW OF MOSES.

This period began with the giving of the law at Sinai, and ended with the death of Christ on the Cross at Calvary. This age is wholly past.

2. THE DISPENSATION OF GRACE

This is the present age in which we now are living. It had its commencement with the sacrifice of Christ on the cross, and it will be consummated by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

3. THE DISPENSATION OF THE KINGDOM

The age of the earth-reign of Christ is yet future. Its duration is for one thousand years, and it is bounded on the one hand by the Second Coming of Christ to occupy His throne in Jerusalem (Matt. 25:31), and on the other by the ushering in of the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 21:1).

Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer has said: "Due recognition of the essential character of each of these ages is the key to the understanding of the exact manner of the divine rule in each age The practice of confusing these three ages in respect to their characteristics and the manner of the Divine rule in each is common, and is, doubtless, the greatest error into which many devout Bible interpreters fall." We must bear in mind, as has been outlined above, that the age of law is sharply divided from this age of grace by the death of Jesus Christ. In keeping this truth before us we will be aided greatly to an understanding of the lawful use of the Law. The separation of the present and the preceding dispensations is shown to us by John the Baptist when he said: "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

1. THE LAW WAS ASSIGNED EXPRESSLY TO ISRAEL

The Law had its beginning at Mount Sinai, and until that time it never was revealed to, much less imposed upon, any other people. We know there was sin in the world before the Law was given, and that man died as a result of his sin, for we read: "Until the law sin was in the world Death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" (Rom. 5:13,14). But at no time, from Adam to Moses, is there so much as a reference made to the laws of Sinai. When the Law was proposed, it was primarily to Israel as a nation. The few passages that follow are some of the many given to show its relation to Israel.

"Now therefore hearken, O Israel, . . . What nation is there so great that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" (Deut. 4:1,8).

"And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them" (Deut. 5:1).

"And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord" (Mark 12:29).

"Who are Israelites, to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and THE GIVING OF THE LAW" (Rom. 9:4).

The Law of Sinai had a direct bearing upon the Jewish nation, but it has no more direct bearing upon the Christian than it had upon the human race from Adam to Moses. To the Christian it is written: "Ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). It is said of the Gentiles that they "have not the law" (Rom. 2:14). Surely no other words could be plainer.

2. THE LAW WAS A TEMPORARY COVENANT

God never intended that the Law should be in force permanently. The Law of Sinai was a temporary covenant given for temporary purposes. We have said that the Law as a dispensation ceased to be in force after the death of Christ. This is not man's view but rather the plain teaching of the Word of God. Four hundred and thirty years before the Law was given, God made a covenant with Abraham. He promised Abraham a "seed" through which salvation should come (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). The promised Seed was none other than Christ Himself — "That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles *through Jesus Christ*" (Gal. 3:14). The Apostle adds: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy Seed, *which is Christ*" (Gal. 3:16). The promise that God gave to Abraham was abiding and changeless. The subsequent giving of the Mosaic Law did in no way alter or affect the Abrahamic promise. It was an unconditional promise that was not fulfilled before the law was given, but instead, found its fulfilment in Christ. There was no condition of obedience to any law in the promises made to Abraham. It was a gift of grace. When the Law was given, it was added "till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made" (Gal. 3:19). The Law was never a part of the original promise made to Abraham. It "was added," but it did not invalidate the covenant of pure grace made to Abraham.

Now that Christ has come, the Law is done away, for it is not possible for the two to co-exist. In this present age the Law is not in force, either as a basis for salvation or as the rule of the Christian's life. The salvation and the security of the soul must now be centered in the Person of Jesus Christ. He is the sole object of man's faith. Paul said: "Before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up into the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster" [the law] (Gal. 3:23-25). Elsewhere Paul says that the law which was "written and engraven in stones . . . is done away" (2 Cor. 3:7,11).

The believer is one who has been "born of the Spirit" (John 3:6) and not of the Law, "for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life" (2 Cor. 3:6). The

Law is a ministration of death and condemnation while the Spirit is the ministration of life and righteousness. "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:2). Christians are also led by the Spirit of God: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). Paul concludes therefore that "if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law" (Gal. 5:18). Our Lord Jesus Christ "abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments" (Eph 2:15). When He cried from the cross, "It is finished," He completed our salvation, "blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross" (Col. 2:14).

3. THE LAW CANNOT BE KEPT BY MAN.

It is important that man sees himself exactly as God depicts him in His Word. Most of us flaunt our good points. We search for inherent goodness and console ourselves with the age-long saying that "There is a little bit of good in the worst of us." But listen to what God has to say.

"The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21).

"The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no not one" (Ps. 14:2,3).

"We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa. 64:6).

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9).

"There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Eccl. 7:20).

"There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God" (Rom. 3:11).

"There is none that doeth good, no, not one" (Rom. 3:12).

"For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1:8).

Thus we have God's view of the heart of man. Now we know that the Lord is holy and that He hates sin. Furthermore, His holiness and righteous judgments demand that sin be punished. How to escape the condemnation of Almighty God is the big issue that confronts the sinner. We know

that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7), therefore the heart cries with one of old: "How then can man be justified with God?" (Job 25:4). Certainly it is not by the keeping of the Law, for not one of us can fully or satisfactorily keep it.

The Apostle Paul wrote: "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be" (Rom. 8:7). Even if man would desire to subject himself to the law of God, he would find himself helpless to do so. The flesh, the hideously corrupt state of man, renders the law helpless. The Law can forbid, rebuke, and curse sin, but it cannot take it away. When we would do good we find that evil is present with us. The flesh "is not subject to the law of God." Since God gave the tables of stone to Moses there has been universal failure in keeping the law. Because of the universal failure to observe the law, it became a curse. This is difficult teaching for many to receive because they feel that if one does the best he can, that will be enough. But the Scripture says: "As many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in *all things* which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10). The Apostle Paul quoted this verse from Deut. 27:26, and it means simply that the Law never offered a reward for keeping some part of it, but that it always imposed a penalty for breaking any part of it. The Law demanded absolute perfection; it never required anyone to do the best he could. "For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the *whole law*" (Gal. 5:3). The Apostle James adds: "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, *he is guilty of all*" (James 2:10).

4. THE LAW IS POWERLESS TO SAVE

"For what the law *could not do*, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom. 8:3). God never purposed that the Law should make a man righteous. That was something "the Law could not do, in that it was weak." The sinner's redemption was planned by God in eternity past. Jesus was the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. By His death Christ has redeemed us from eternal death and condemnation, the penalty of a broken law. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Gal. 3:13). Though the Law was given to reveal righteousness, it never was intended to create righteousness. It could not. "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth" (Rom. 10:4).

The Law is holy, just, and good; but it is the symbol of bondage. When I was a boy I attended a Sunday School where it was required of me to

memorize the Ten Commandments. I knew them by heart and could repeat them with accuracy whenever I was called upon. I was in three different departments of the Sunday School and sat under six different teachers. Each teacher began with her new scholar by making sure he or she knew the Ten Commandments. After several years of studying the law, I was still a poor helpless sinner on my way to Hell. Then one day I was introduced to the grace of God in Christ. I saw my sins and Jesus hanging on Calvary's cross for me. I cried to God for mercy, and discovered by experience that, what the Law could not do, Jesus already had done for me — "For by grace are ye saved through faith."

*"Free from the Law! O happy condition!
Jesus has bled, and there is remission."*

5. THE LAWFUL USE OF THE LAW

"Wherefore then serveth the law?" (Gal. 3:19). Having seen from the Scriptures that man cannot keep the Law, and that the Law itself is powerless to save, Paul asks the question: "Wherefore then serveth the law?" If it will not save anyone, what use is there for it? If it does not answer the need of man's soul, is it not useless altogether? Since our salvation is complete in Jesus Christ, and the Law does not serve as a means of salvation, what practical good can I derive from the Law? These and many other questions enter the minds of those who hear for the first time that the Law contributes nothing toward taking a man to Heaven.

The Law is not something to be despised, "but we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully" (1 Tim. 1:8). If we use the Law for the purpose for which God gave it, we will profit thereby. It is lawful to use the Law as a means to an end, but it is unlawful to make it an end in itself. What, then, is the lawful use of the Law?

Paul said to Timothy: "The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners" (1 Tim. 1:9). We see here that the Law has no application to a righteous person. The Christian, having been saved by grace, is dead to the Law. But the Law was given to reveal sin and to make sin appear exceeding sinful. This was the personal testimony of the Apostle Paul when he said: "I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet" (Rom. 7:7). Where there is no law there is no consciousness of sin. Without a mirror, I may not discover that my face is dirty. God uses the Law as a mirror, for "what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God" (Rom. 3:19). In revealing sin, the Law has efficiently done its work. It cannot function beyond that point, for "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by

the law is the *knowledge of sin*" (Rom. 3:20). In order to have your sin removed you must come to the Lord Jesus Christ because "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

The beacon light can show the way to port, but it cannot loose the storm-driven ship from the rocks. The Law points us to the holy Mount, but it can never bring us to the top.

*"Run and work! the law commands,
But gives me neither feet nor hands;
But sweeter sounds the gospel brings:
It bids me fly, and gives me wings."*

Salvation from sin is by the grace of God and not by the Law of Moses. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8,9). If the Law, which was given fifteen hundred years before Christ came, could have saved man and taken him to Heaven, then God erred greatly in permitting His only begotten Son to die the awful death by crucifixion. But, thank God, it is "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost" (Titus 3:5). No, dear reader, God made no mistake when He sent Jesus Christ to the cross, "for if righteousness came by the law, then Christ is dead in vain" (Gal. 2:21).

*"Free from the law! O happy condition!
Jesus hath bled, and there is remission:
Cursed by the law and bruised by the fall,
Christ hath redeemed us, once for all."*

Must we conclude, therefore, that the Law has ceased to be of any value whatever to the Christian? The Christian did not receive life by the Law, nor is the Law the rule of life after a man has been saved. Christ is our life and our rule of life. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature (or *new creation*). And as many walk according to *this rule* (the *new creation*), peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God" (Gal. 6:15,16). In answering the question asked at the beginning of this paragraph, we only say that Exodus, chapter twenty, is as much a part of the Canon of Scripture as is any other chapter in the Bible. Inasmuch as "*All Scripture* is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. 3:16,17). I invite you to share with me in these sermons just as we would consider any other text in the Word of God.

CHAPTER II

THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

*"Thou shalt have no other gods before Me"
(Exodus 20:3)*

The Law reaches in two directions, Godward and manward. The first four commandments show us man's responsibility toward God, and the last six commandments deal with man's relationship to his fellowman. This is the divinely arranged order. It is necessary that we be brought face to face with God first, for unless we have in our minds and hearts the proper conception of God and our responsibilities toward Him, we shall fail in our associations with the rest of the world.

1. THE CLAIM

The subject matter of this present chapter is *God*. It is but appropriate that we begin with Him. The first commandment is prefaced by a brief declarative statement — "I am the Lord thy God . . . Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." It begins by boldly asserting the reality of God. It assumes that God is. The ancient philosophers endeavored to think through the mystery of godliness. They tried to prove or disprove the existence of God. But the first commandment is in harmony with all the rest of the Word of God. None of the writers questions the existence of God. They delight in Him. They assume His existence and acknowledge His sovereignty. Though there is sufficient evidence to prove that God is, He is beyond finite reasoning and human analysis. It is asked in the book of Job: "Canst thou by searching find out God?" (Job 11:7). The man of wisdom replies: "No man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end" (Eccl. 3:11). The Apostle Paul cried: "How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out!" (Rom. 11:33).

When God said: "I am the Lord thy God," we know that He was addressing Israel. But the application is universal and eternal. God declares His eternity and self-existence in the divine name, "*I am Jehovah*." No mortal has fathomed the deep significance of this name by which God declares Himself. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan has pointed out that the name *Jehovah* is a combination of three Hebrew words that mean "He that will be, He that is, He that was." If, by any stretch of the imagination, we were

to look back into eternity past, we would hear God say: "I am He that was." If we concentrate on the present moment with all its recent discoveries and progress, we hear God say: "I am He that is." And if we peer into eternity future, we hear God say: "I am He that will be." Puny man errs greatly when he reckons in any age without God.

A significant passage will serve well here. While Moses was still keeping the flocks of Jethro, his father-in-law, God appeared to him on the backside of the desert. Suddenly there appeared to Moses a burning bush that was not consumed. Out of the fire came the voice of God saying: "Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel out of Egypt" (Exod. 3:10). Feeling his own insufficiency for the work, Moses offered God four excuses why he should not be the man for the task. Finally, God gave Moses the authority by which he should speak to the people — "Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you" (Exod. 3:14). Here we have God revealing Himself for the first time as the self-existent, eternal, ever-acting One.

Upon this statement rests the authority of God. He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. God is sovereign, and upon the fact of His supremacy, His authority over all things, He issues His commands to His creature. The first words in the Bible are: "In the beginning God" These words place the Almighty in the attitude of primacy and power. We must begin with God for He is sovereign over all. When God sent fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah and held back the waters of the Red Sea, He showed that He was sovereign over the realm of nature. By casting Satan out of Heaven and by overpowering the demons in men, God displayed sovereignty over the realm of spirits. He created man from the dust of the earth, pronounced the death-sentence upon him when Adam sinned, and struck dead Nadab and Abihu and others. Thereby He demonstrates His sovereignty over men's bodies. God only can forgive sins and reconcile man unto Himself. This He does, and thus shows that He is sovereign over men's souls.

We need a God like this. The marvel is that men shut Him out of their lives and live as though there were no God. Recently a group of girls who were leaving a factory on Friday night after completing their week's work, found it was raining rather hard, and several of the group began to curse and damn the weather. This is practical atheism and is typical of a universal condition. We fail to realize that the times and the seasons God keeps in His own power. The scientists tell us there are laws of nature, but we know that behind all of nature there is God. How thankful we should be that He makes the rain to fall and the sun to shine on the just and the unjust. Too often, by wishful thinking and occupation with our own selves and our

egotistical interests, we fail to give God His rightful place.

2. THE COMMANDMENT

"Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." Since God is what He claims to be, then He must be the one Object of worship. Since God creates and sustains man, it is reasonable that He should make such a claim upon His creature. The commandment allows for no compromise. Israel was to worship no other gods as a substitute for Jehovah, nor to worship other gods in addition to the worship of Jehovah.

After studying the non-Christian religions of the world, we are convinced that enthroned in every man's heart is a god whom he worships. Doubtless the god at the centre of many lives is a false god. Nevertheless, there is something which every man worships. Someone has said that when man dethrones God, he deifies and worships himself. Luther said: "That upon which you set your heart and put your trust is properly your God." We have seen that God has laid claim to being the only one eternal and perfect God. Upon the veracity of that claim He commands: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me."

The commandment is one against idolatry. Since man must have a god and has not the true God, he invents a god to suit himself. This is a common practice among civilized people as well as among uncivilized. It was sadly true in Israel only a short time after the Decalogue had been given. Moses had returned to the top of the Mount to receive further instructions from the Lord. "And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us" (Exod. 32:1). How tragic! "Make us gods!" They became weary of waiting upon God whom they could not see with the eye and created for themselves a visible counterfeit. Aaron, submitting to the demand of the people, asked for their golden earrings, and made them into a molten calf, fashioning it with a graving tool. The people bowed themselves before it, and cried: "These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt" (Exod. 32:4). This is typical of the human heart. It seeks after that which can be seen and which satisfies the senses. The Church has suffered because men have turned from the unseen realities of Heaven to the visible earthly imitations. With "graving tool" in hand, some of the church-leaders have made false gods, and the people bow down to them.

The Bible contains accurate accounts of men bowing before false gods. Think of *Baal-peor*, the god of the Moabites, who was worshipped in services openly impure and licentious (Num. 25:1-3); *Baal-zebub*, the lord of the fly, who was worshipped at Ekron (2 Kings 1:2,3); *Moloch*, the

fire-god of the children of Ammon, who was worshipped in acts of most awful and degraded cruelty; and that of *Mammon* which "debased its devotees to the lust which dreams that power lurks in possession." It all sounds so heathenish and uncivilized that we are undone when we realize that there is a duplication of just such gross idolatry in the civilized nations of the world in the twentieth century.

The commandment forbidding idolatry had no sooner been given than it was broken. And for nearly thirty-five hundred years since the Law was issued, man has denied the one true and living God, set up his false gods, and ignorantly worshipped them. Some of these idols have been the sun, moon, stars, images, statues, pictures, trees, and animals. Since a man's understanding has been darkened by sin, he has not had the right conception of God. But when Jesus Christ came into the world, He revealed God to man. The mission of Christ was to lead the Father into full view. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" [or made Him known] (John 1:18). Now all who are in Christ have viewed the Father. Jesus said: "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30 R.V.).

3. THE CHRISTIAN

The moment a person becomes a Christian he enters into a new relationship. Unbelievers are without Christ, without hope and without God (Eph. 2:12). Christians are called sons of God by faith in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:26). Upon entering this new life the believer is faced with the eternal truth of the first commandment, that God is sovereign and that He demands first place in the heart and the affections of His children.

We have stated that men in Old Testament times had false gods because they failed to conceive the nature of the true God. It is not until the Christian becomes intimately acquainted with Jehovah — Jesus in the New Testament that he ceases to have any other gods. Let there be no mistake in our minds concerning the Deity of Jesus Christ. The "I AM" of the burning bush and of the first commandment is none other than Jesus Christ of the New Testament. Christ is the express Image of God's Person and the effulgence of His glory. Jesus is God. All of the attributes of Deity are ascribed to Him. He is holy (John 6:69), *eternal* (John 17:5), *immutable* (Heb. 13:8), *omnipotent* (Matt 28:18), *omniscient* (John 16:30), *omnipresent* (Matt. 18:20; 28:20). As we see who Jesus is, the New Testament enforcement of the Law begins to lay hold upon us.

When writing to Christians, the Apostle John said: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21). The command to abstain from

idolatry is needed no less today than it was in Moses' day. It grieved the Apostle Paul while in Athens "when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry" (Acts 17:16). Elsewhere Paul says that idolatry is one of the "works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:19,20). Christians are exhorted to "mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. 3:5). My contention is that God, in this age of grace, has not given up His claim to sovereignty nor has He made void the command that men should worship Him and have no other god. Jesus said: "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4:10). Again He said: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment" (Matt. 22:37,38).

ARE CHRISTIANS GUILTY OF IDOLATRY?

Not only was the Jew guilty of idolatry, but the modern Christian also can be charged with the violation of the law that forbids this. I am well aware of the fact that some of you will protest the application of this commandment to the Christian. However, all I ask is that you share with me in the New Testament passages that follow.

Some Christians worship *the god of money*. The Apostle Paul expressly declared this to be idol-worship when he spoke of "covetousness, which is idolatry" (Col. 3:5). We agree that the Israelites practised idolatry when they worshipped the golden calf, yet we Americans are equally as guilty in our worship of the "golden eagle." Our American money bears the inscription, "In God we trust." Someone has suggested that we alter it to read: "In *this* god we trust." The ancient patriarch Job has said: "If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much . . . I should have denied the God that is above" (Job 31:24,25,28). This is exactly what our Lord meant when He said: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24). Paul said: "a covetous man who is an idolator" (Eph. 5:5).

A story in one of McGuffey's readers tells of a miser who had under his basement a secret sub-basement known to no one but himself. Here he hoarded large sums of silver and gold. Daily he would come in secrecy to worship. He delighted to run his bony fingers through the coins and listen to the music of their clank, as he said: "O my Beauties, O my Beauties!" One day while he sat worshipping the god of gold, a breeze blew the door of the sub-basement shut. A spring lock that could be turned only from the outside fastened the door. The miser was shut in with his gold and his god.

Years later when the old house was being torn down, some men came across his skeleton stretched over the pile of gold and silver. He made money his god, and the god had finally destroyed him.

Now money is not to be disdained. Frugality is not to be frowned upon. There is no virtue in being a pauper. Money honestly earned and wisely used can bring untold blessing. Someone has said: "I can take a dollar and use it so that the eagle upon it will turn vulture and tear at somebody's heart. But I can also take that same dollar and so use it that the eagle upon it will become a mocking-bird to make music in somebody's soul." Not one of us would sanction the worship of Baal or Moloch, yet we put Mammon into the first place in our lives. "The Mammon of unrighteousness" is the god before whom some Christians bow daily. "The love of money is the root of all evil;" and if this disease is not checked, it will eat like a canker.

Next comes *the god of pleasure*. Paul spoke of those who are "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God" (2 Tim. 3:4). Mark me! I am not despising pleasure and pastime. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." But all play and no work makes Jack an idolater. The one purpose some folk seem to have in life is to find excitement and to have a good time. Pleasure is not sinful in itself provided it is not sinful pleasure. The body demands recreation and diversion, the kind that strengthens one physically, mentally, and morally. But to become a slave to pleasure makes one a dissipated idolater. Riches and pleasure become idols of this world when they are permitted to engross us.

Another idol is *the god of the belly*. Does the suggestion seem vulgar to you? Yet Paul by the Holy Spirit speaks of those "whose god is their belly" (Phil. 3:19). There are those who are engrossed in self-indulgence, slaves to the sensual appetites, and "they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly" (Rom. 16:18). The table has become their altar, and their motto is: "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." I am reminded of a certain man whose wife is deprived of worship in the house of God every Sunday morning simply because he insists upon having his dinner promptly at twelve o'clock. Like the gods of gold and pleasure, the god of sensual appetite will destroy us unless we turn from it and give Jesus Christ first place in our lives.

Then there are Christians who worship *the god of fashion*. It has been said, "Cleanliness is next to godliness." Our bodies and our clothing should be kept neat and clean, but the adornment of the body has become the idol of many. The Bible says: "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works" (1 Tim. 2:9,10). Some Christians own they stay away from church because their clothing is "not

good enough." The adorning of the true child of God is not the "outward adorning . . . but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Pet. 3:3,4). When Christ occupies the throne of the heart, the god of fashion will have been cast out.

Finally, there are those who make an idol out of *the Holy Bible*. Too many people have little more than a superstitious regard for the Word of God. They look upon it as being somewhat of a lucky charm. An expensively-bound Bible is purchased only to be left lying in some place where it can be looked upon but never read, much less studied. It is the common practice that a copy of the New Testament or a Bible be carried on the person of many of our service-men going overseas to battle. Often this Book is not studied nor practised, but serves, in the minds of the bearers, as some sort of charm for protection. This is akin to the wearing of Roman medals and the carrying of prayer-books for the same purpose. If your Bible serves for nothing more than a household god, then you are guilty of idolatry.

We have mentioned but five of the present-day gods of professing Christians, but they will serve to show us that the sin of idolatry prevails in our midst. There is spiritual truth to be learned and applied from the first commandment. Let us get alone with our God and Saviour Jesus Christ, the God who was, who is, and who will be; and if we can discover any one thing or any one person in the life that relegates God into the background, we must confess the sin of idolatry, cast out the idol, and bow down to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

