

THE FIRST AND SECOND COMMANDMENTS

EXODUS 20:1–6; DEUTERONOMY 5:6–10

We are now expounding the Covenant at Sinai, and particularly Part I, the Moral Law. And here I wish to commend two books to which I have already referred. First, a copy of the *University Lectures on the Ten Commandments*, by Boardman, which is the best in the world. I have never seen anything equal to it. If I were a young preacher, I would live on one meal a day to purchase it, if I had not enough money, and could not get it in any other way. It is impossible for me to go into details with the exposition as Doctor Boardman does, and yet there is not a superfluous word in his book.

The other book I commend is the *Presbyterian Catechism on the Ten Commandments*. The Presbyterians excel most other people in instructing their children in the Word of God. I say it to our shame, that we seldom use a catechism in our families. As a rule, Presbyterian children are better instructed religiously than any other children.

1. What books are specially commended?

Answer—Boardman's *University Lectures on the Ten Commandments*, and *The Presbyterian Catechism on the Ten Commandments*.

2. What are the variations in the form of the Ten Commandments as they appear in Deuteronomy 5?

Answer—The variations are very slight. In the fourth commandment, there is this addition by Moses: “And thou shalt remember that thou wast a servant in the land of Egypt, and Jehovah thy God brought thee out thence by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm: therefore Jehovah thy God commanded thee to keep the Sabbath day.” There is a change in the order of the words of the tenth commandment: “Neither shall thou covet thy neighbor’s wife.” The explanation of the variations is that Exodus is the law as it was given; Deuteronomy is an orator’s public restatement of the law.

3. Which is the original form?

Answer—The original form is in Exodus 20.

4. Which ones of the Ten Commandments are not quoted in the New Testament?

Answer—I could answer that, but I will leave it for you to find out. But I will put this additional rider on the question: Why is the fourth commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy,” not specifically quoted in the New Testament? What is your explanation of that? There is a great distinction between the Sabbath and the seventh day. “Sabbaton,” sabbath, is a perpetual law, but the seventh day is not the seventh day, the “hebdomal” Sabbath, the seventh-day Sabbath of the Old Testament, is changed; the change, the transition from the seventh to the first day is significant. You will find the whole matter discussed in the first book of sermons by the author. There are three sermons on the Sabbath

day. If you wish to pursue that subject further, go to that book.

5. What are the characteristics of the Ten Commandments?

Answer—I cite five:

(1) Their solidarity. It is not necessary to break all of them in order to make a breach in the covenant. "He that is guilty in one point is guilty of all." And that same solidarity you can observe in our law. If a man is indicted for murder, it is not justification that he has not stolen, that he has not committed adultery, that he has not refused to honor his father and mother. If he is guilty of murder, he loses his life. The one point is sufficient.

(2) Every one of these commandments has the negative and positive form, whether it is expressed or not. Sometimes it is given in the negative form: "Thou shalt not kill"; and sometimes in the positive: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." But in each case, whether it be expressed or not, there are both forms; a negation and prescription of what is right, and a proscription of what is wrong.

(3) The third characteristic may be expressed in three ways:

(a) Deep, broad and high, one way; that is, these commandments go to the root, to the trunk, to the branches, and they go to the fruit; or they prohibit the following thought as well as the following speech or the following deed: our Savior in interpreting these commandments, said that "whosoever hateth is a murderer"; that he is a murderer in his heart; that he is a murderer in

the sight of God, whether he ever killed anybody or not. That is the root of it. It goes down into the mind where the germ, the spring, the source of action lies; it goes to the intent.

(b) Then the Psalmist says: "Thy commandments are exceedingly broad"; they touch every correlative thing.

(c) And they are exceedingly high; they touch the throne of God.

(4) The next characteristic is that these commandments are moral. Now, you know, or ought to know, the difference between a positive enactment and a moral enactment. A positive enactment has only one reason; that is, that God has commanded. A moral commandment is one which has a reason for it; to be seen by an intelligent mind and calling forth a decision. The commandment to be baptized is a positive ordinance; "thou shalt not kill," is a moral commandment. Whether in any commandment a reason is given for the commandment, that is proof of the moral character of the commandment. Let us take the first commandment to illustrate: "I am Jehovah thy God, who brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before (or besides) me." There a reason is given. Now take the fourth commandment: "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy," because in six days Jehovah created everything and rested on the seventh day and because they were in bondage in Egypt and God delivered them. A man can take hold of those reasons.

(5) The last characteristic is that though these commandments were addressed to a vast multitude of people, millions of them, every one of them is personal: "*Thou*" shalt not; "*thou*" shalt not, and so forth.

Now we come to the exposition of the first two commandments, taking up the first commandment under question.

6. What is the meaning of the name Jehovah?

Answer—If you go back to Exodus 3:1–15, you will find that Jehovah himself gives to Moses an explanation of that name: “I am that I am” or “that I will be,” and when you study it out, you will find that that word covers these thoughts:

(1) That Jehovah is the personal, self-existing, eternal ever-acting One;

(2) Who first reveals Elohim: “I am Jehovah, thy Elohim.” He is the revealing God; that is why in Genesis, first chapter, God said “Elohim,” and in the second chapter, it is Jehovah—Elohim who

(3) Covenants with his people. “Jehovah” is the name of the covenanting God, who reveals the Father and enters into relations with his people and delivers them.

Now let me repeat: What is the meaning of the name Jehovah? It means (1) the personal, self-existing, eternal, the ever-acting One, who (2) reveals the Elohim, (3) covenants with his people and (4) delivers them.

7. What are the affirmations and prohibitions of the first commandment?

Answer—It affirms the existence and government of one God; it denies polytheism (many gods), atheism (no God), materialism, which is another form of atheism,

assuming the self-existence of matter, and the bringing about of everything by a fortuitous concourse of atoms. What it prohibits: "Thou shalt have no other gods besides me." "Before me" is the same as "besides me"; that is the sense. There is but one God: "Thou shalt have no other God"; that is what it prohibits. The reader will understand that from the Semitic people came the three great religions which advocate monotheism, that is, one God—the Jewish, the Mahometan, and the Christian.

8. What is the application of this commandment to us?

Answer—Jesus is our Jehovah. He is Jehovah the self-existing One; "Before Abraham was I am"; "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God, . . . and the Word became flesh." He is the revealer of the Father. We would not know the Father except as Jesus makes the Father known to us. He is called "The express image of the Father"; he is the visible of the invisible God; he is the Immanuel, God with us. "Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the world." His eternity is expressed in such expressions as these: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last." His immutability is expressed in such expressions as these: "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and for ever."

In making the application to us, he is our Deliverer. Jehovah delivered the Jews from Pharaoh; Jesus delivers us from the devil. They were delivered from Egyptian bondage; we are delivered from spiritual bondage.

9. Cite the poem of Hildebert.

Answer—I will give the poem quoted by Board-

man as to the meaning of the name Jehovah. It is in Latin. I will give the translation by Herbert Kynaston:

First and last of faith's receiving,
Source and sea of man's believing,
God, whose might is all-potential,
God, whose truth is truth's essential,
Good supreme in thy subsisting,
Good in all thy seen existing;
Over all things, all things under,
Touching all, from all asunder;
Centre thou, but not intruded,
Compassing, and yet included;
Over all, and not ascending,
Under nil, but not depending;
Over all, the world ordaining,
Under all, the world sustaining;
All without, in all surrounding,
All within, in grace abounding;
Inmost, yet not comprehended,
Outer still, and not extended;
Over, yet on nothing founded,
Under, but by space unbounded;
Omnipresent, yet indwelling,
Self-impelled, the world impelling;
Force, nor fate's predestination,
Sways thee to one alternation;
Ours today, thyself forever,
Still commencing, ending never;
Past with thee is time's beginning,
Present all its future winning;
With thy counsels first ordaining
Comes thy counsel's last attaining;
One the light's first radiance darting
And the elements departing.