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The Commandments. I
Real and Practical Idolatry.

Exodus, 19: 1-20: 12

1 Cor. 10, Heb. 12: 15-30.

Rev. J. H. ...
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Exodus XX: 3. Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.

Fifty days after the Exodus from Egypt, the children of Israel stood before Sinai's solemn summits.

The Red Sea, at its northern extremity, reaches out two arms, embracing the peninsular part of Arabia Petraea. The name, Sinai, is applied both to this triangular peninsula, and to mountain range, with its borders. There are in the group, three principal peaks: Horeb, St Catherine and Djebel Musa. The traditions of the Arabs link the last with the theophanies of Sinai; but manifestly by mistake, as no space for an encampment is to be found here. Three miles north west, along the ridge, we reach

verdure or vegetation; - all is awful, silent, grand. Through aisles, winding between massive pillars of rock, the Israelites came into that vast audience room in Nature's great Cathedral, where, for the first and last time, Jehovah spake in tones of thunder to his people.

There, on the 6th day of the month Sivan 1491 B. C., behold the august assembly! Nature, as though conscious of the special presence of the Creator, veils her mountain-brow with clouds, and quakes with silent awe. No shape or form of Deity appears; but his eye flashes lightning and his voice peals like the voice of many waters. A trumpet sounds "exceeding loud" and at its echoes

another peak fronting the ample plain, Er Rahah, with an area of three square miles or more. Here, it has been thought, is the scene of the Law-giving. From this lofty pulpit, rising 1500ft above the level of the plain, was preached to the church that was in the wilderness, the grandest sermon of all history. In this colossal amphitheatre, whose vast semicircle is walled in with crags of granite and spanned by a celestial dome, were gathered the hosts of God's chosen people. What a sanctuary and what a sermon! The whole surrounding country favors the solemnity of the scene. Wild weird crags, rugged rocks, sharp cliffs, and deep chasms, a vast plain of sand with little or no

the people tremble, and even Moses saith "exceed-
ingly fear and quake." Sinai smokes like a volca-
nic furnace, for Jehovah descends upon it in fire,
and, amid this canopy of flame rests his invis-
ible throne, amid a circle of attending angels.
Such was the scene of God's awful enunciation of
the Moral Law. The event stands in history, like
a lofty peak in a landscape, solitary & alone,
towering high above the level of ordinary occur-
rences. We associate its grandeur only with such
events as the creation, the Deluge, the advent
of Christ and the Last Judgment. Surely what God
said, amid such scenes, in the hearing of such an
audience, must carefully repay our study.

But first, a word preliminary. We may view the Israelites either as human beings, a nation or a church. As a nation, they needed a civil code; as a church, an ecclesiastical code; as men, a moral code. So far as this law was a civil code, it has now lost its force, for the nation is split into fragments. As far as it was meant for an ecclesiastical code, it is no longer practically of use, for the church of the old Testament is merged into the church of the New. The types and symbols of the ceremonial law find fulfilment in Christ. State and church disappear in the great Christian Brotherhood and the Hebrew hierarchy gives place to a universal priesthood and kingship.

But man ceases not, amid all outward changes, to be an intelligent rational responsible creature of God. His political and ecclesiastical relations may change, but these are but the external drape-ry of the man who, amid all varieties of outward condition, still remains a moral creature, need-
ing a moral law. God's own voice proclaiming it, God's finger grav-
ing it upon stone tablets, and the ark of God enshrining it hint, if they do not assert, its perpetual force and obligation and we do not believe it ever has been essentially modified or will be abrogated. Even Christ, inaugurating a new and complete dispensation declared I am not come to destroy but to fulfil. etc. Matt. 5:17.18.

We find Him uniformly assuming the binding and lasting claims of the moral law - never lessening but rather increasing its force: and indeed we are not competent fitly to study the moral law save in connection with his comments and applications.

Looking at this law, as a unit, we find it comprising ten precepts and hence called δεκα λογους or ten words. It has been generally assumed that the first table comprehended the first four commands, which naturally rank first, since they all refer to our duties to God; and that the second table contained those precepts which relate to man. Our Lord expressed the true law of this division when he declared Love to God and Love to man as their substance
Matt. 22: 37-40.

And God spake all these words saying etc.

He first declares the august name of the lawgiver, "Jehovah" - a form common in all legal enactments; and affirms his peculiar relation to them, implying his right to command - "Thy God," and reminds them how he had demonstrated his almighty power in their miraculous deliverance.

This preface to the Commandments was designed doubtless to give greater emphasis to the law and lay heavier stress upon the duty of obedience.

Thou shalt have no other Gods before me - against my face - in my sight - besides me. (Chaldee & Greek.)

The singular "Thou" giving great force to the individual personal application of the command.

First, observe the grand declaration of One God. It is often said that the Hebrews were made the guardians of this great truth: monotheism; but we do not appreciate the statement. They had just left Egypt, where every shrine was a pantheon sacred to countless deities, where the calf, cat, dog, ibis hawk, and more objects than we can now mention were worshipped. They were on their way to a country where a worse than Egyptian idolatry prevailed and Moloch, Ashtoreth and Chemosh were adored with horrible, repulsive, sensual and cruel rites. Thus with a shameless and abominable Polytheism behind and before them, God specially enjoined: Thou shalt have no other Gods before me.

Jehovah here presents himself as the one, only God. There is no concession that the other Gods have any existence, even as inferior deities, except in the superstitious imagination of the idolater. To Israel is forbidden all complicity with false gods. The people of God are to know no other object of reverent worship, love, obedience. The church in the wilderness was constituted the Ark of God to guard and keep this trust. Foremost among the treasures they were to bear with holy awe and vestal devotion, was this, first of all truths. "I am God and besides me there is no other." And, because they were false to this trust, God chastened them with exile and finally cast them off.

It may be that you feel yourself in no danger of violating this command. No heathen shrine is reared in our streets; no pagan pagoda lifts its silver spires to the sun. Our ears are not taught a polytheistic philosophy. And yet no precept is so constantly, commonly grossly trampled beneath our feet. Is there no practical idolatry, where there may be no visible idol? This command comprehensively forbids us to put anything or any person in the place of God, even in thought and feeling. You may have another God, without building an oratory and erecting in it a graven image. The human soul is either the temple of Jehovah or the fane of some false God. Whatever

has there the throne & shrine, whatever absorbs the thought and the love, whatever rules the will and the life, that is our God. The mind is idolatrous, that concentrates thought upon anything but God: the heart is idolatrous which makes anything but God the supreme object of love. Our god may have a name or no name - be consciously or unconsciously served - be a reality or a fancy; but if it sways our love and our life - that is our God.

And so the world is full of practical idolatry. The proud man is an idolater: he worships self. God asks his supreme love and service and he cannot and will not bow to God. His haughty spirit rebels against submission & surrender.

The idea of confessing himself a lost, undone sinner, hopeless and helpless, who cannot, by his utmost efforts, save himself, is repulsive & hateful to his soul. He cannot bear the thought of giving up all self help. Naaman was a proud man. Even leprosy, the loathsome scourge of God, had not made him humble. Even when he came seeking to be healed, he was the same haughty rebel against God. He came with royal retinue and letters - and in kingly state. He was angry because there was no ceremony befitting his cure. And he turned in a proud rage away from the Jordan, because he despised submission to God's will and way.

I doubt whether anything is so universally an

idol as sinful pride. We persuade ourselves that we are only waiting for more light upon questions of duty, or that some obstacle is in our way which we know not how to remove - or perhaps our pride even cloaks itself in humility and says "I am not good enough to be a follower of God - but if we could strip the sinful soul of all disguises and get beneath pretexts to real motives, we should find that a proud heart is resisting God - refusing to break into contrition over sin, and to bend to the will of God - refusing to give up every hope of self rescue, and look simply unto Jesus for salvation, to acknowledge that all its own wisdom is folly and its own strength worse than weakness.

The avaricious man worship money. Greed of gain
is his ruling passion: the almighty Dollar as Ir-
ving called it is his idol. The days of Nebuchadne-
zar are not passed by. On the plains of society
over against the Babylon of worldliness & wicked-
ness, behold the colossal image of Gold. Before fall in
obedience not the common people only; but gover-
nors and captains and counselors, judges & treas-
urers, mighty men of ambition and of war, until in
all society you can scarce find three who like
the holy children, yield not to the seductive wor-
ship of Mammon. Howsoever many may be the
true followers of God this golden image has today
the largest congregation in the world

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The ambitious man is worshipping a false God. Fame, honor, human applause, worldly distinction are his secret idols: and for these he is ready to sacrifice everything, even himself. He becomes an exile from his family, he expends energy, time + money - he sacrifices rest of body and repose of mind - he studies by day and thinks by night over this problem: how may I climb to the summit of my desire, and hear men say as they said to Herod, it is the voice of God and not the voice of man. Of the ignoble meannesses to which men stoop for ambition's sake. The word itself - "going about" hints the meanness of its origin - the roman candidates for office going about to solicit votes.

See political demagogues descending to trickery
and knavery, making common cause with the
keepers of saloons, and the breakers of Sabbaths, as-
sociating with ignorance, brutality and infamy,
simply to climb to the high places of power & honor.
Think what some of our most gifted statesmen
have condescended - descended to, for the sake of four
years at the White House - belying their life long pro-
fessions, disobeying their life long convictions, for-
saking the very principles they had espoused and
defended - sacrificing magnanimity and man-
liness and morality in hopes to wear for a season
the fading laurels of a presidency. Many a Lucifer
son of the morning has thus fallen forever.

Even a minister of God sometimes betrays idolatry
of ambition. I know of nothing that makes one
more ashamed of his kind than to see an am-
bassador of God prophesying smooth things and
deceits, to obtain the applause of the multitude,
sacrificing his independence and his conscience,
trailing in the dust the sacred robes of his office.
He keeps back part of his message, because it will be dis-
tasteful: he has a soft word of apology for sinners,
his very rebukes are half excuses. Like a weather vane
he swings just which way the wind of popular feel-
ing blows. If temperance reforms are the watch
word of the day he is their advocate: if there is a
reaction in favor of wine bibbing, he is the suave

apologist for the moderate drinker. If he is speaking to rigid sectarians he is a bitter denominationalist: if he is addressing a union gathering, he is all catholicity & charity. Now he is the strenuous champion of orthodoxy; and now he is the special apologist for heresy. In his hands you never know what the gospel is. The message he brings always accommodates itself to the prevailing tone of the public mind. If men cry out "Jehovah is great" he joins the shout: if they cry "happens to be great" as Quana of the Ephesians, he shouts with the rest. O my brethren, insist, I pray you, upon the independence of the ministry. Burn with the blistering brand of your red hot indignation every

pulpit-demagogue! Shew that you have both
the principle and the courage to stand by any
man who, however he may differ even with you,
strives to be true to himself and Christ! Just so
far as you discourage an independent and con-
scientious utterance in the pulpit, without fear
or favor, do you help to set up ambition as the
god of the preacher, and turn the ambassador
of Christ into mere pulpit auctioneer, bidding
off gospel wares to the highest bidder! Give no
man your encouragement who speaks anything
but his honest convictions, and who for any pop-
ularity consents to be false to himself. He will be
sure to be false also to you!

Of all idolaters the lowest and meanest is he who worships sensual pleasure. He whose idol is self, worships an image of God, however defiled and defaced: a soul rational, intelligent, immortal. He whose idol is fame is betrayed by a grandeur that however fleeting has a regal splendor about it.

But he who bows before sense, sets up in his heart the bestial appetites, and sinks into the most abject slavery to his lusts. A man may worship Ambition and, like the devil who sought to dethrone God, keep even in his fallen condition his angelic greatness. There is a certain grandeur about the Devil for he is an Archangel in ruins. And so some men, even in sin, do not lose their greatness even in losing

their goodness: the very crimes they commit have a sort of awful stateliness and grandeur which tell of great powers of mind and heart. So many a man has worshipped Fame like Herod, who has made a mighty impression on mankind, and compelled men to account him almost divine. But when we see a man make a god of his own belly - caring for nothing but what he can eat and drink - living to feed and fatten the swine of his own lusts - we turn away in instinctive loathing; we can think of nothing but a leper, a hound feeding on carrion - or a hog wallowing in the mire. He elevates the animal part of his nature to the throne and the spiritual becomes its subject & slave.

To what an extent the idolatry of pleasure degrades
I adduce two historical examples which are so
bad that I cannot utter the actual truth but am
compelled only vaguely to hint it. In the most
cultivated nation of antiquity and at the very
focal center of its culture, in the city which was
known as the mother of arts & eloquence, there was
a temple of Venus, and a temple of Bacchus, and
in connection with the religious rites of both, there
were such shameless indecencies that even history
commonly does no more than hint at them. The
Bacchanalian orgies were so vile that they have be-
come the synonym for what is worst in vice. And it
would be impossible to tell one half the truth.

Let it suffice to say that no one could engage in the religious services and ceremonies connected with the festivals of Venus and Bacchus without becoming victims of the lowest & most loathsome impurities.

To be modest was to be undevout: the surrender of chastity was one condition of engaging in the festive rites. And yet in Athens, it is said that over 60,000 priestesses surrounded the altars of Venus alone.

Livy says it was a principle of society to hold in contempt every ordinance of God & nature in contempt.

And one of the rules of the years 187 and 188 B. C. allowed nobody to be initiated above the age of twenty years that licentiousness under the name of religion might claim fresh victims from among the youth. 4: 366.

Another example illustrating the depths to which the most civilized community may sink under the sway of sensuality is found in Pompeii. The excavation of this buried city brought to light certain buildings bearing carved symbols of debauchery - and these - not inside, or in any secret apartment but on the very wall facing the street, openly heralding the fact that the learned wealthy & elegant city of Italy gloried in the shame of making the most loathsome sensuality as honorable and lawful as the most impregnable virtue! O, what idol is so base, so vile so disgusting that man will not bow down and worship it. Could it be believed that a man could erect sensuality as the ruler and idol in his soul!

Even human affection may degenerate into idolatry by forgetting the creator in the creature. God has given us all things richly to enjoy, among them human love. But to allow any human being to usurp God's place and have our practical preference so as to hinder us from offering our best love and obedience to Him, is the basest ingratitude as well as idolatry. But not to adduce further examples, what are the two tests of a violation of this Command?

I answer Supreme Love and practical obedience.

Whatever has most your affection and your service is your God. Whatever your profession vocation or employment - whatever you are seeking - fame, gain sensual pleasure, or intellectual culture - if your

mind and heart are absorbed in any worldly object however gross or refined, you have other Gods before Je-
hovah. Selfishness in its most cultivated form is idolatry. It matters little how lovely or lovable one may seem - how moral in external conduct, if he would turn sorrowfully from the Saviour, for the sake of his worldly possessions, pleasures or ambitions he is an idolater as truly as the lowest fetich worshipper in Ethiopia. Do not deceive yourself with the notion that while reared in a christian land and even numbered among the Israel of God you are safe from idolatry. There are those still who like the Samaritans fear the Lord and serve their own gods. Yielding outward worship to the true God in their

hearts He holds neither the shrine nor the throne.
It matters not in what temple we bow or at what
altar we offer oblations + libations, if we are serving
Self, sense and sin. We may wear the cross on our
bosoms and turn our back on the crucified - the
cross as a badge is quite another thing from - as a
burden

Look around upon this assembly. What if God
should give his judgment of us to night? You bear
the sacred name of Christ. But when a chance to get
gain by a lie or a fraud or a deception offers, does the
love of money prevail against conscience? While God
is calling for your service in his vineyard, are you
busy growing your own grapes that you may press

from them the wine of worldly joy? While God asks
one day in seven, is your worldliness indifferent
to the sabbath bell, and even while you enter God's
house are your thoughts upon trade? Are you a dev-
otee of fashion? Do the charms of dress, flashing
jewels and fluttering laces, soft silks and glossy
satins fill your thought? Do giddy gaieties, fashion-
able festivals, exciting revels draw you from the
word of God and the place of prayer? Do the fictions
of a novel displace the facts of life and eternity in
your attention? You are as much an idolater as if
you were bowing before the image of Vishnu or Brahm.
Has the angel of Death touched with blighting fin-
ger, the flower of your love - and broken from the

household stem the opening bud of your child's life, and do you, unsubmitive charge God with cruelty, and harden your heart even to the power of what might be a softening sorrow: or do you for the sake of your living companion withhold yourself from God's service, loving father mother son daughter wife or husband more than Him - you are then breaking the first commandment.

There is a lofty self sacrifice expressed in some of our hymns. "The dearest idol:" "nearer to thee" &c. These are sublime prayers when we are conscious of their sublime meaning. But how often are they thoughtlessly & heartlessly sung. What if God were to answer our request - sweep away secret &

shrines where our real gods are enthroned. there
are voices that would never sing again? Many a
golden calf worshipped right under Sinai's brow
would be ground to powder in his indignation.
Many a household might be in mourning as for an
only son - and many a palace might be exchanged
for a hovel. If for the sake of God you would not
be willing to have it so - to lose all that you hold
dear, you are not a worshipper of Jehovah.

Rise in thy might, O child of the only God. Tear
down every idol temple and sweep away every
secret idol. To every worldly good - pleasure and
honor, fame and luxury, to selfishness & sensu-
ality however charming their siren song, shut