

“Loving God” Exodus 20:1-11 Trinity 6 2024

Dear brothers and sisters,

One day, Jesus spoke to a group of Jewish converts. His conversation is recorded in the eighth chapter of John’s gospel. In verse thirty-two Jesus says, “The truth will set you free.” Jesus follows this statement up in verse thirty-six with, “If the Sons sets you free, you will be free indeed.” It appears that freedom is very important to Jesus and to God.

This should not be too surprising. From the time of creation in Genesis, God has made it clear that He wants his children to experience an abundant life and certainly freedom is part of that abundant life. What is surprising, though, is how readily God’s people are willing to give up that freedom and enslave themselves once again.

The Ten Commandments or the new phrase that I find appealing “The Ten Promises,” is a guideline for God’s people on how to stay free. Ten “simple” rules to live a Godly life and to earn our own freedom. Of course, we fail at this miserably, just as the Israelites did.

The Lord accomplished mighty works to set the people of Israel free from their slavery in Egypt and for a new life in the Promised Land. Israel was set free so that they could freely respond to God’s love by loving God and by loving their neighbour.

Unfortunately, the Israelites were unwilling to ignore the evil forces and temptations around them, and they often yielded to the temptation to enslave themselves again and again. From worshiping Baal, building golden calves and desecrating true worship with high places dedicated to foreign gods, to attacking God’s prophets, His people show a remarkable gift for rejecting the

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rules and promises of God. So, God had Moses bring down the ten promises to try and guide the people to a righteous life under Him.

In the first commandment/promise, God reminds the Israelites that he is the God who delivered them and that they should not have any other God besides him. The Lord, God is the only being who deserves their loyalty and service.

We may no longer make any graven images, but that doesn't mean that we don't have our gods and idols. Luther said that an “idol” or “god” is anything in which we place our faith, trust, and hope.

One of our gods is affluence, or as an internationally known speaker, Tony Compolo has named it “influenza”. We acquire our self-worth from things. We are what we own, and we believe that we will find happiness or be happier if we have just one or two more things.

Our retirement accounts are another one of our gods. This isn't to say that we should not have a retirement account or invest wisely. It is to say that we shouldn't place our faith in a comfortable life in these accounts. Ultimately it is God who provides for us, and God will provide through our retirement account or other means.

Another example of a false god is popularity. We gain our identity and security from others. We do not allow ourselves to be ourselves if there is a possibility that it may alienate us from our friends. We become enslaved to others.

All idols enslave. God is not only a jealous God demanding that we serve no other gods besides him. God wants us to be free to serve him.

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Many of us get our identity from what we do. When we are asked to describe ourselves, we usually include what we do--“I’m a pastor,” or “I’m a farmer,” or “I work at such and such factory” When we stop working, we sometimes lose our identity. Also, when we stop working, we fear how we are going to make ends meet.

God invites us to honour him by remembering the Sabbath and keeping it holy. Certainly, the Sabbath is a day of worship, it is also meant to be a day of rest. In the not-too-distant past, work was seen as worship. We serve God and our neighbour by using our gifts, talents and time. A person was invited to not only worship on the Sabbath but also rest from his or her work.

Observing the Sabbath is an act of faith. It is saying not only that we do not get our identity completely from our work, but we also trust God to care for us. Our survival is not solely in our hands. God’s hand is upon us. God will provide for us. We can rest and be free in that thought.

If you take a moment to consider them, the Ten Commandments/Promises - despite being given directly to us through Moses - are not about us, despite them being given to us. The Ten Commandments are about our God and our neighbours. Incorporating the Ten Commandments into our lives enables us to love and serve both God and our neighbour. May you be blessed this Sabbath day as you worship the one true God. Amen