

## No other gods

HN 10/04/05 p

Reading: Exodus 20, Luke 9:43f

Study Text: Deuteronomy 5:6-7

Palms : 105:1-6, 105:7-10, 119:89-94, 117

*Take your son, your only son Isaac whom you love and go to the land of Moriah and offer him there on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you (Genesis22).* God tested Abraham the Scripture tells us. Tested him for what purpose? What was the point of this test? Was God just playing tricks with this poor fellow? Well let us see the outcome. *Now I know that you fear God since you have not withheld your only son from me.* God wanted to be sure that Abraham feared him, indeed loved him more than anyone or anything else, including his own son.

*You shall have no other gods before/besides me* is the first commandment. The Lord (YHWH) set his love upon the children of Israel and he brought them out of slavery. He was about to bring them into their own land. No other people have such a god, for the God of Israel is sovereign over all nations, over all creation. He alone is the true God, Lord of heaven and earth.

The Lord made a covenant with his chosen people to protect and provide for them all their days. He was like a husband to them – *your maker is your husband* (Isaiah 54:5). As a husband he is jealous for his bride, for his holy nation. He will tolerate no rivals. He will not tolerate spiritual adultery. He demands whole-hearted, undivided devotion and worship. *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your strength* (6:5). Half hearted devotion is not acceptable. You cannot worship God while ever you love anyone or anything more than him.

What are some other gods that we might worship, gods which will arouse the jealous anger of God? Some are easy to identify but others are more subtle as Abraham found out.

## Other religions

The people of God were about to enter a land where the people worshipped gods of wood and stone. They would meet people who worshipped many gods. Some people like to play it safe and please all the gods – and all the people!

In Canaan the male gods would be complemented by female deities – the male would not want to be lonely! Or if the people were feminists they would demand a female god. Have you noticed the tendency for gods to have female consorts? Even Christianity is not devoid of this tendency?

‘The Israelites were told that God can never be one, even the favourite one, among many deities. Such teaching ran counter to popular religious ideas in their day, for other religions were not remotely exclusive in their demands. Syncretism was widely permissible’. Already some men in Israel had been seduced into worshipping local gods (Numbers 25).

I had a friend in India, a well educated man, who liked to read the New Testament; he was attracted to this man Jesus and his teaching. But he also read the Koran and the Hindu holy books, for he found good things in them also. He considered himself an enlightened and tolerant man. He accepted all gods and worshipped them all in his own way.

Have you met anyone like this man? In our pluralistic society syncretism is the way followed by many. Supermarkets of religions appear from time to time- new, old and recycled religions are promoted. Men who will go to a church, a synagogue, a temple and a mosque to worship are applauded in the media. Any hint of exclusivity is denounced.

Whenever God's people encounter pagan religions they will be tempted to compromise – because the flesh is weak. These religions often appeal to the flesh. In India men sometimes converted to Islam so they could have a number of wives. We see nominal Christians from the west, especially women, being attracted to the mysticism and aura surrounding Eastern Gurus. God gave the command *you shall have no other gods besides me*.

## Things

*You cannot serve God and mammon* said Jesus (Matthew 6). The love of mammon, the desire for riches or treasures has led many men and women to break the first commandment. Jesus' words are very clear but still we try to have it both ways. We may not desire other gods to help us just in case our God fails, but we sure like to have that investment, that bank account just in case God does not provide for us.

A young man came to Jesus one day, a rich young ruler. He was a fine young man who kept the commandments- some anyway. And he wanted eternal life. Jesus invited him to come and follow him – however there was a condition- total allegiance. He was a man who loved his money. He was no use to Jesus, nor was he fit for the kingdom of God, until he submitted to this first commandment – you shall have no other gods besides me.

I heard a young woman confess she felt called to the mission field. But when she counted the cost she decided it was not for her. She had a secure well paid job. She was not prepared to risk her job in order to follow the call.

And so it is with many today. It is very easy in our materialistic society to seek security in our house, in the government or in our job, rather than in God. We put aside all that God has done for us in Jesus Christ. We forget the promises we have in Jesus, the great promise of an eternal home in heaven. We so easily and quickly get attached to earthly things. A few days skipped reading our Bible, a few times missed from being in church and we find ourselves depending on things of this world rather than on God – for the message of this world is 'serve mammon not God'.

*You shall have no other gods besides me*. God will provide all your needs according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus (Colossians 4:19). You need not worry; you must not start trusting in your money or the things you have. God demands that you trust in him alone, that you worship him alone.

## People

*A man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and the two shall become one flesh* (Matthew 19:5). *Children are a heritage from the Lord* (Psalm 127). The Lord made families. He made man to love his wife and his family. We often hear people say 'I love my family', but then they say 'my family is everything to me'. But is this what God wants? Does he want us to live totally for our family? It sounds very noble but there a danger of idolatry here.

Abraham loved his son, his only son Isaac. But God called upon him to give up his son. He was testing Abraham to see if he loved God more than his son. Many see this as an unreasonable demand – they would not be prepared to obey such a command. Yet they would claim they obey the first commandment- they have no other gods. We may never be tested as Abraham was but lots of Christians have been e.g. in communist Russia.

Men flocked to Jesus wanting to follow him (Luke 9:57f). But – they all had a 'but'! And not just a but – but 'but first'! But first let me go and bury my father one man said. But first let me go and bid farewell to my family said another. These were reasonable requests we might think – to go and say goodbye to our family. But Jesus said they were not fit for the kingdom of God.

*If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes and even his own life also, he cannot be my disciple* (Luke 14:26). Harsh words again we might think. Unreasonable demands some would say. But Jesus is simply saying what the first commandment says – you shall have no other gods before me. Not even family, your nearest and dearest, must come before God.

## Self

'The idolization of self (adoring ourselves) is a common form of contemporary worship. Baal was the pragmatic god of self-interest; you worshipped him for what you got out of it- good harvest, large families, increased herds, success in battle'. If we transpose these things into modern day rewards it looks a bit familiar don't you think? Do you see Christians who have such an attitude? A church with such a teaching will be very inviting to self-seeking people.

The world of course teaches self before God. It teaches self before everything. You have the right to be happy. You have the right to do what makes you feel good. This is the shrine before which the world worships – the god of self. And such an attitude may come into the church. You have the right to the good things of this world – God wants you to have the best. God does not want you to suffer.

But what do we find in Scripture. Remember that man who sat on a heap of ashes, scratching the sores that covered his body from head to toe. And why was Job there? Because God allowed him to be tested – tested even in his own body. 'Job only loves you because of what he gets from you' sneered Satan. He does not really love you with all his heart, all his soul, and all his strength. But Satan was proved wrong. Job submitted even his body to the will of God. Truly he had no other gods, not even self did he put before God.

The apostle Paul was similarly tested. This is a far cry from us who struggle to get out of bed and come to church. Not to mention the effort to get to Bible study and prayer!

Do you need to re-evaluate your attitude towards things, material things of this world? Do you need to re evaluate you attitude towards family in the light of this commandment. Do you need to re-evaluate you attitude towards yourself, your body, in the light of this commandment – *you shall have no other gods before me.*

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