

**The First Commandment***A Dark and Terrifying Day*

- Dark, terrifying day when God gave 10 Coms. Israelites encamped around Mt. Sinai. In middle of journey, Exodus out of Egypt where enslaved for hundreds of years. But then God sent plagues and angel of death; Pharaoh finally let them go. Then God parted waters of Red Sea; passed through on dry ground (picture Charleton Heston watching Egyptian army swept away). Finally arrived at Mt. Sinai, where God would give law to Moses. Dark, terrifying day when God gave 10 Coms. **Ex 19:16-20**. God gave Moses 10 Coms.
- God had given law before in garden – fruit from tree. Not so terrifying; A&E had no sin; perfect relationship with God. But when God thundered 10 Coms from heaven, people were filled with terror they knew filled with sin. Knew would never be able to keep; knew already had broken them, before God had given them. These were God's moral laws, stand for all eternity, already on hearts from birth (had conscience). And now as God writes them in stone with finger, people knew: there's no escaping holy will of Almighty God. These were his perfect demands. If you don't meet those demands perfectly, then you'll quickly, surely come face to face with stern anger and righteous judgment of God. Dark, terrifying day when God gave 10 Coms.

*Laws from a Savior God*

- Today, we begin summer sermon series on 10 Coms; basically 1 com each weekend. As we do, we need to approach this study with same terror. This summer as we delve into, wrap minds around 10 Coms, need to go back to Mt. Sinai (thunder, lightning, trumpets, smoke, fire, voice of God), realize, this is still his will! Has not changed. Still demands! And when we place God's holy expectations side by side with our actual behavior, should be filled with terror. We do daily what God hates. Either ignore or tremble, but can't deny it. No room here for any pithy platitudes about these being 10 suggestions. When we study 10 Coms, we need to look at mountain, peer into holy will, essence of God: see what he desires, expects. What 10 Coms are all about.
- As we begin this sermon series, also need to remember what Israelites all too often forgot: these coms come from a Savior God. This is God who 2 months earlier had brought them up out of Egypt. They saw plagues, Red Sea, outstanding displays of superior power and love of God on their behalf. **Ex 19:4**. God: "Don't you see, I love you!" This is their Savior God who had rescued them; now shares with them his will.
- Same is true for us: same God who gave Israel 10 Coms is our Savior God who has rescued us, as well. When we were enslaved by sin and Satan, like Israel in Egypt, God sent us his Son Jesus to rescue us. His death on cross and res from tomb are much superior displays of God's power and love on our behalf than plagues were for Israel, because when Jesus died and rose, didn't just free us from slavery, freed us from hell. So when God gives us his law in 10 Coms, he does so as Savior God who rescued us through Jesus. God says, "Don't you see, I love you!" That's when he shares his will.

*No Other Gods*

- First Com, **vs. 3-5a**. Sounds easy enough! Don't worship an idol. Hear idol, probably think American Idol. What word has come to mean: someone you admire for talents. So we have talent show called American Idol; we admire singers for talents. Not idolatry. Idolatry is worshiping another god, an idol. What 1st Com forbids. Sounds easy enough. Not like I'm going to bow down, worship statue of Buddha, Baal. Not like I'm going to do what Israelites did, worship golden calf (while at Mt. Sinai, and Moses on mnt: Aaron, gold, statue). "Don't worship an idol" – okay, I can do that, no problem.
- Timeout: **"You shall have no other gods."** Doesn't just mean golden figurines or carved statues. To have no other gods means allow nothing else in this world (no person, no possession), nothing other than the Lord, to rise to the top pedestal in your heart. Whatever is number one in your life; whatever you turn to in times of need; whatever you rely on to get you through difficulties of life; whatever your heart longs for, desires above all else – this is your God. Luther: **"Anything on which your heart relies and depends, I say, that is really your God" (LC).**
- If that's definition of a god, then we have many gods. Many gods that we've fashioned for ourselves to fill holes in heart that we feel Lord cannot fill. Hearts like vacuum; when they feel empty, have to be filled with something. Whatever we fill in our hearts, whatever rises to top pedestal in our hearts, that becomes our god.
- Think of gods we make for ourselves. Most common: money. We make money our god: having, getting, spending, even saving money, because we think problems we face, needs of our families, desires of our hearts – they all can be answered simply by having more money. And while, of course, money is important, it's not the most important; hard for American ears to hear. But once money becomes most important than anything

else, then it rises onto the top pedestal and becomes our god. Not single person in this room not guilty of letting money become our hearts desire and our god.

- What other gods do we make? How about self-image: we make a god out of how we look, clothes, shoes, car we drive, house we live in, friends we socialize with, gadgets we own, toys we call ours – none of which, by the way, we can take with us when we die. When these consume us, and we drive ourselves crazy trying to improve self image (how we think of ourselves, how others think of us) this becomes our god. Again, of course, we need to take care of ourselves and things God has given us. But when our self-identity is wrapped around what we wear, drive, how look, how others look at us – then we’ve knocked Lord down off pedestal to number two or lower in our heart.
- See? We all have gods we fashion, fixate upon, let control our hearts. For some people it’s their kids’ sports: “Nothing more important than my children excelling in high-level competitive sports; how they’ll succeed in school and get into college!” Nothing wrong with sports. But who’s at the top pedestal, Lord or team? For other people it’s free time: “Nothing more important than going up north, four-wheeling, spending time on lake with family; how we relax and get away.” Nothing wrong with vacation. But who’s at the top of the pedestal, Lord or lake?
- We could sit here all day, come up with all kinds of things that hearts turn into gods. And point of 1st Com is not to call money, self-image, sports, vacations, or anything else evil in and of itself. All gifts from God. Point: when you turn any gift from God into a god, then God is no longer your God! And God says, **“You shall have no other gods.”** And of breaking this com, be sure, we are all quite guilty!
- In fact, there’s a reason this is first; reason made top of top ten list. This summer, we’ll go through all coms, focus on different one each weekend. Whenever we break one of those, we always break first. Whenever we sin against God, in whatever way, in that moment that sin (desire for something outside God’s will) becomes our god. I.e., stealing breaks 7<sup>th</sup>. But when we steal, we are looking God in face, saying, “More important to me to have this than obey you.” And the “this” becomes our god, and we break 1<sup>st</sup>. So anytime we sin at all, we always break 1<sup>st</sup> Com. That’s why it’s at top of list, why Jesus called it most important com of all: **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment” (Mt 22:37-38).**

#### *Fear, Love, and Trust*

- So if so important, how do we keep it? Luther’s explanation. Top pedestal! Train your heart to rely on, cling to, trust in the Lord alone! Fear, love, and trust. Trust: believe in him, even when world around you and circumstances of life beg you to believe in something else, trust only in God. Love: **“This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 Jn 4:10).** The reason we love God is that Jesus not only kept coms perfectly but also gives us credit for it. Jesus made it so that when God looks at us, doesn’t see filthy First Com breaker. Sees holiness of Jesus wrapped around us like beautiful white garment. So lot of things in this world we can love. But to be a Christian means to love God above all else! Fear: doesn’t mean tremble and cower in terror, but respect God. And if we love God for sending Jesus, and if we trust in God and believe only in him, then to respect or fear God means to take a look at coms and say, “Yeah, I want to do that! Yeah, God wants me to do that; I want to do it, too! I want to live for him! I want to follow his will! I want to keep his coms!”

#### *Spiritual Lifecycle of a Christian*

- Chart I developed few years ago that I think is helpful in understanding how 10 Coms fit into our lives as Christians. Top of p. 7. Today, talked about 1st Com; we make many gods. Run through chart. Repeat.
- As move through 10 Com sermon series, plug whatever com we’re talking about into this chart, think about this Christian lifecycle often. This is what Christian faith-life and struggle against sin looks like on daily basis. What it means to wage war against sinful nature and to obey First Com and have no other gods. We trust in Gospel of Jesus, the fact that we are forgiven of our sins by our Savior’s life, death, res; and we recommit ourselves this day to keeping God on top pedestal as number one in our lives. God help us to do just that.

#### **Exodus 20:3-6 (NIV)**

<sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me. <sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup> but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.