

# LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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## HOW TO LOVE GOD

When Jesus answered the lawyer's question (Matt. 22:36-40) about the greatest commandment, he summarized the Ten Commandments as loving God and loving our fellowmen. In commenting on these verses Carl F.H. Henry in *Christian Personal Ethics* stated: "No treatment of the virtues our Lord taught is adequate which does not assign first place to love. Love is the fountain of the pure heart and the forgiving spirit. Love is not simply an attitude which Jesus taught; it is the essence of his very being. He stressed it as the supreme virtue that includes all else in itself. All the commandments are fulfilled by love of God and neighbor". There are four commandments showing our relation to God and six showing our relation to our fellowmen. It is in these four commandments that we see not only our duty to love God, but also we see how we are to love God. Let's take the statement of I John 4:20 out of context and ask "how can we love God whom we have not seen?"

The first commandment shows that we love God by having no other gods before Him. There is a tendency to recognize and accept the one true God, but in practice worship other gods beside or before Him. After fashioning the golden calf Aaron proclaimed "tomorrow shall be a feast to the Lord" In describing this event Stephen says "they were rejoicing in the works of their hands." (Acts 7:41). Although they were the only nation on earth with a revelation from God, which condemned all other gods, Israel accepted as normal for the people of Jerusalem to worship Moloch in the temple (Jer. 32:34) and Solomon, the builder of the temple, saw nothing wrong with building altars and high places to Baal for his foreign wives. Having other gods besides Jehovah was to them a practical, acceptable and innocent thing to do. With such a tremendous revelation from God we wonder how such idolatry became the norm among his people. Yet, in the light of the fact that God has revealed to His church that the things of the world are "foolish, weak, base, despised, and without any true existence and are all passing away" (I Cor. 1:27,28; I Pet. 2:15) why do we see nothing wrong with bringing the things of the world into the church as our models in church growth and why is there such a scramble by churches and church leaders to be "relevant"? We have created the illusion that when God said "have no other gods before me" He was not aware of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We have failed to see that everything the church stands for is irrelevant to the world. If our "other gods" can do it for us then we have no need of God.

In *No God But God* author Oz Guinness quotes a "Christian" advertising agent as stating: "In Jerusalem when the church started, God performed a miracle on the day of Pentecost. They didn't have the benefits of buttons and media, so God had to do a little supernatural work there. But today, with our technology, we have available to us the opportunity to create the same kind of interest in a secular society." My question is: if our buttons and media can create the same opportunity as the coming of the Holy Spirit did on Pentecost, where are the results? When we reduce God to our human image, scale Him down by substituting the world's methods then we are having other gods besides Him. When we do this He is no longer God over us, judging us by His Word, but we are over God and using our own methods to justify

what we are doing and make judgments on what He should be doing. The Apostle Paul describes those who "even though they knew God did not honor Him as God but became vain in their speculations" (Rom. 1:21). Fallen man naturally is an idolater. As one who does not know God, he makes his wood or stone idols, which represents his concept of God (Isa. 44:9-17). Sophisticated, modern civilized man is not so naïve, but is equally an idolater. His idea of God is not that revealed in Scripture, rather he sees God as a god he wishes He were and as he wants God to be. The first commandment requires that we recognize no power as true and legitimate if it is not grounded in God and His Word. We would not expect to see those outside the church honoring God as He is revealed in Scripture, but certainly the church itself should never have become guilty of having the low view of God which is rampant in the religious world today. A.W. Tozer stated it well in *The Knowledge of the Holy*: "Always the most revealing thing about the church is her idea of God, just as her most significant message is what she says about him or leaves unsaid, for her silence is often more eloquent than her speech. She can never escape the self-disclosure of her witness concerning God". We violate the first commandment by raising anything less than God to the level of God Himself. Other gods always become instruments of mass destruction. God made a mockery of the gods of Egypt by basing the plagues on what they worshiped such as frogs, locusts, and the Nile. Hosea 8:4 states: "They have made idols for their own destruction." The N.T. teaches that the love of money (the god of mammon) destroys those who worship at its altar (I Tim. 6:9, 10), the god of sex becomes the instrument of plague and death to those who bow before it (Rom. 1:27), and the decision to deny the true God results in a depraved mind (Rom. 1:28). In Revelation 16:17 the beast that is worshiped enslaved those who worshiped it. The way to love God is to have no other gods before or beside Him.

The first commandment shows that we love God by having no other gods before Him. The second commandment shows that we love God by not making any graven images. The first thing that must be said about this second commandment is that the literal use of idols and images in worship is strictly forbidden (Lev. 19:4; 26:1, 2). This constitutes idolatry, which basically turns God into things. Isaiah 44:9-17 shows us how ridiculous idolatry is. If the first commandment is violated by raising anything less than God to the level of God Himself, then to violate the second commandment is to reduce the God who is God to anything less than God. In the light of what Isaiah says about idols in the above scripture, and considering the wording of the second commandment, we may conclude that no Christian is likely to carve out an image and worship it as a god. We might also excuse ourselves on the basis that we do not use religious statues, crucifixes, paintings and icons as is prevalent in Roman Catholicism. On that point we might say the Scriptures do not forbid engravings, picturing or art work in general. What we need to realize is that we do not need statues and images to be guilty of idolatry. Paul states in Colossians 3:5 that covetousness (greed) is idolatry, and he declares in Ephesians 5:5 that "no covetous man, who is an idolater has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God". Graven images in worship can

be mental pictures, concepts, ideas, understandings and traditions of what God is like, what He must do and what we must do to be pleasing to Him. By prohibiting the use of graven images in worship, God separated the Israelites from the pagan culture around them. It was always a mark of rebellion when they worshiped the graven images of the heathen world. It is difficult to understand why the modern church has become so enamored with methods, means and music of the world that we instead of being separated from the paganism of the world have embraced it. This was the sin of ancient Israel that brought God's judgment upon them. The Scriptures in every passage drawing our attention to God-centered worship unmistakably teaches that the God we worship must be God as He has revealed Himself in revelation, and not God as we choose to think about Him. Many times instead of worshiping God as He has revealed Himself, we worship in the image of the familiar, the emotional, the entertaining and often, the trivial.

The so called worship war which is raging in the religious world today, dividing churches, intimidating people, causing criticism and misunderstandings is mostly concerned with traditional or contemporary music and songs. There is something to be said, both positive and negative, for both traditional and contemporary worship, but the fact that music and songs are at the center of the controversy means that worship seems to be limited to and regulated to what happens at church meetings. The Scriptures give no direction concerning a "worship service". The word most frequently translated "worship" means "to make obeisance, do reverence to, and pay homage to". There is four other words translated "worship" in the scriptures that means: "to revere, to honor, to serve and to act piously toward". The well known Greek scholar of the past century W.E. Vine in his *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* comments on these words translated "worship" by saying: "The worship of God is nowhere defined in Scripture. A consideration of these words shows that it is not confined to praise, broadly it may be regarded as direct acknowledgment to God, of His nature, attributes, ways and claims, whether by the outgoing of the heart in praise and thanksgiving or by deed done in such acknowledgement." We have engraved images in our heart in the terms of worship services. When we conceive of God according to our own imagination or experience and our worship services becomes audience driven or entertainment oriented and excludes people, whether its contemporary worship that may exclude older people, or traditional worship that may exclude young people, it is no longer worship in Spirit and truth.

To love God is to not limit our worship to a church service, but to align our life to the pure will of God in every aspect of life and express our love by dedicating our whole being to God alone. We love God by not making for ourselves any graven image, physically or mentally.

The third commandment shows that we love God by not taking His name in vain. Names in Scripture reveal the character and nature of the person named. A man's name changed as his character changed. Jacob's name was changed to Israel, Daniel's to Belteshazzar, Simon's to Cephas (Peter) and Saul to Paul. The third commandment deals with God's name: His position as the sovereign ruler of the universe. Every name or title of God reveals some attribute of His divine character. From Scripture we learn new facts about God's nature and character with each

new name by which He reveals Himself. God names Himself what He is. When anyone uses the name of God in a way that denies the true meaning and character of God, they break the third commandment. If we use the name of God but fail to obey the revelation of God contained in His name we are guilty of taking His name in vain. We cannot love God and at the same time disobey His revelation. It is not simply verbal expressions that constitute taking the name of God in vain. In speaking of oaths and swearing (which is one way of using God's name in vain) Jesus shows that God's name is comprehended in the heavens, the earth, the temple, and altar and the city of Jerusalem (Matt. 5:24, 23:16-22). The reason for this is that God expressed His glory to Israel in these. Therefore His name was manifested in this way. John states that "this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments and His commandments are not burdensome" (I John 5:3). We take the name of God in vain when we do not live according to His word. The shame of the modern church today is its blatant disregard for the word of God. Very little preaching today follows the apostolic pattern laid down by Paul in II Timothy 4:1-3. David Wells in *Whatever Happened to the Reformation* quotes a megachurch pastor in a newspaper interview as saying "I would never begin a sermon by reading from the Scriptures. That separates the sheep from the goats." How can people love God if they do not know His commandments, and how can they know them if they are never taught? Rousas Rushdoony in *The Institutes of Biblical Law* says "If a trifling and false usage of the Lord's name, His wisdom, power, justice, truth, mercy and righteousness constitutes blasphemy, then we must count most preaching of our day to be thoroughly blasphemous. It is blasphemous in that it either denies the faith on the one hand, or reduces it to trifling dimensions on the other. Much preaching may be pious in intention which is blasphemous in execution." I tend to agree with him.

A common understanding of the third commandment is that it was given to prevent swearing, and swearing is defined as foul language or cursing by using God's name to emphasize a point. Thus we inappropriately use God's name as a verbal amplifier. But there is more to the commandment than that. It has to do with both obscenities and profanities. In scripture "profane" or "profanity" is an aspect of profane worship. It is an invocation of power, calling upon the power of God (or gods) in order to achieve ones goals. This is calling upon God to execute His judgment at our word. It is using His name, not in adoration and praise but an unholy formula giving us control of God. Therefore any time the name of God is tampered with, it is an attempt to manipulate Him. If the making of a graven image was an attempt to whittle God down to size, taking His name in vain goes a step further, it demands that the God of the universe come and do my bidding. This is one aspect of black magic and the occult. It can also be manifested in our worship. Jesus said "and when you are praying do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose they will be heard for their many words" (Matt. 6:7). Meaningless repetition can be applied, not only to praying but to singing. Repetition has become an issue in many churches that are introducing new styles of worship. The picture of swaying, semi-conscious worshipers repeating words and phrases is now the picture of the goal of much current worship leadership. Much modern worship today seems to be a fascination with romantic imagery void of any effort to hallow the name of God. We love God by not taking His name in vain.

