

The First Commandment

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By A. T. Jones

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Exodus 20

² I am Jehovah your God...

³ You shall have no other gods before me.

TO have Jehovah alone as God is to love Him with all the heart and soul and mind and strength. It therefore plainly follows that anything by which any part of the heart or the soul or the mind or the strength is turned from God, is devoted to anything other than to God, is in itself to have another God than Jehovah. And this is what is forbidden in the First Commandment,

Exodus 20

³ You shall have no other gods before me.

One of the chief gods which it is natural for men to have before the Lord is:

2 Corinthians 4

⁴ ...the god of this world...

Ephesians 2

² ...the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience.

1 John 2

¹⁶ For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.

Worship of Mammon

One prominent phase of the worship of “the god of this world,” is the worship of Mammon, or riches. And this is not by any means least, though it is the last one in the list; for it is written:

1 Timothy 6

¹⁰ The love of money is the root of all evil...

This is so wrapped up with the phrase “the pride of life,”—ambition, self-exaltation, self-aggrandizement, self-glorification—that it is, in great measure, inseparable from it. For there is nothing which gives worldly glory so quickly, so easily, and so abundantly as money; and there is nothing that gives power so quickly and so easily as does money.

All this, simply because mankind is naturally so worshipful of Mammon. And yet it is all idolatry; it is all a denial of the true God; it is a breaking of the First Commandment, which says,

Exodus 20

³ You shall have no other gods before me.

For, says Jesus:

Matthew 6

²⁴ ...You can not, [not, “You ought not”; not, “You shall not”; but,—“You can not”] serve God and Mammon.

Since the true worship of God is to love God with all the heart, and all the soul, and all the mind, and all the strength; and anything that draws away either the heart, soul, mind, or strength to it, and comes between man and the true worship of God, is another god; so the allowing of money, the desire for money, the love of money, to come between a man and his true service to God, is the worship of Mammon.

And to allow the desire for money, the love of money, to separate a man from true Christian thoughtfulness, and care

of mankind temporarily and eternally, is the worship of Mammon; it is to have another god than the Lord, it is to break the First Commandment.

What Will It Cost?

The distinction may be clearly drawn by saying that the keeping of the First Commandment is the being right, and doing right, with no thought whatever, at any time, as to what it will cost. No amount of money can ever have any consideration whatever in any question of serving God; in any question of loving God with all the heart, or our neighbor as ourself.

And yet everybody knows that “What will it cost?” does have a positive bearing with the vast majority, even of professed Christian people, upon the exercise of their love to God with all the heart, and their neighbor as themselves.

But to allow this question to have any bearing whatever is the worldly way. It...

1 John 2

¹⁶ ...is not of the Father, but of the world.

For with the world the first question is always:

“What will it cost?”

“How much can I make?”

In all the dealing, all the traffic of business relationship in the world, the way of the world, and the inquiry of the world, is only,

“How much can I make?”

And if more can be made by oppressing the neighbor, the oppression takes precedence of the love of the neighbor, and the neighbor is deliberately robbed.

Monopoly, Its Result

If a neighbor begins business of the same order as that of a

man who has already begun, he is deliberately underbid, undersold, that, if possible, he may be crushed completely out of business, in order that the first one may be left alone, to have all, in order that he alone may be rich, and have the worldly glory of his little kingdom of the crossroads.

And those that have succeeded most fully at this, form gigantic combinations to crush out, or absorb, all lesser ones, until there remains but one vast combination drawing tribute from all the people in the nation, and even of the whole world.

But of it all, God has written:

Habakkuk 2

⁵ ...he is a proud man...who enlarges his desire as hell, and is as death, and cannot be satisfied, but gathers unto him all nations, and heaps unto him all people.

⁹ ...that covets an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!

But,

⁶ Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increases that which is not his! how long?...

⁷ Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite you, and awake that shall vex you, and you shall be for booties unto them?

⁸ Because you have spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the people shall spoil you...

This is all “the pride of life,” which “is not of the Father, but of the world.” It is all Mammon-worship. And since the literal, original meaning of the word “mammon” is “that in which one trusts,” it is particularly appropriate that these various combinations, which crush out all individuality and demand tribute of all peoples, should be called “trusts.”

Yet the most gigantic of the “trusts” is but the extreme of

that trick of trade held by the individual by which, to get the trade, he undersells and crowds out the man across the way.

The most gigantic “trust” is but the extreme of that trick in trade by which the individual or the little partnership or corporation asks more for a thing when there is no competition than would be asked if there were competition. Whomsoever, without competition, demands a greater price than he knows that he would take if there were competition, is an exacter of unjust gain. And,

Proverbs 28

⁸ He that by usury and unjust gain increases his substance, he shall gather it for him that will pity the poor.

The most gigantic “trust” is but the extreme of that trick in trade on the part of the individual by which, through his beating down, or “jeweling,” he tries his best to get a thing for less than he knows that it is worth.

Proverbs 20

¹⁴ It is naught, it is naught, says the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasts.

The organizer of the president of the “trust” who boasts in his enormous gain is no more an idolater and a sinner in this thing than is the individual who, in his degree, and to the extent of his power, does the same thing precisely. If he had the ability, or the power, of the organizer or the president of the “trust,” he would be doing precisely the same things that he is doing now, only in the larger measure that would be his, as the head of a mighty corporation. And so certainly is it true, as written,

In the world, the god of traffic is the god of fraud.¹

All such is but the worship of Mammon, it is idolatry; it is to have another god before the Lord; it is not of the Father, but is of the world; it is neither loving God with all the heart

¹ Ellen White, *Paulson Collection*, p. 369.

nor the neighbor as the self.

Job 31

²⁴ If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold,
You are my confidence;

²⁵ If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because my
hand had gotten much;

²⁸ This also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge; for I
should have denied the God that is above.

And this equally and as really as if I were a worshiper of
the sun and the moon.

There is a better way; it is the way of the keeping of the
commandment of God.

Exodus 20

³ You shall have no other gods before me.

It is the way of Christianity:

Matthew 7

¹² All things whatsoever you would that men should do to
you, do you even so to them.

You know that you do not like to have a man work a
scheme upon you, by which he requires you to pay for a thing
more than he would take for it if there were competition. You
know that you would not like to have people “jew” you down
to take for a thing less than you know that it is worth. Put
yourself in the other man’s place—and stay there. Look at
things from his side, and continue to do so.

Philippians 2

⁴ Look not every man on his own things, but every man also
on the things of others.

This is Christianity; it is the keeping of the First Command-
ment. Yea, it is the keeping of all “the law and the prophets.”
Nor is it hard to do this. It is the easiest thing in the world for
him who has the heart to do it. And God gives the heart to do
it; as it is written:

Ezekiel 36

²⁶ A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.

Idolatry in Giving

A further method of manifesting idolatry in the worship of Mammon is in giving away the money that has been so obtained. There is just as much idolatry in giving away money that is obtained by idolatry, as there is in getting it by idolatry.

Not all Mammon-worshippers are misers; only a very few of them. Many of them are abundant givers, and these have just as much satisfaction in giving away the money as they had in getting it, because it is further indulgence of the same idolatry.

The poor man is oppressed and robbed in the increased prices; small dealers are oppressed and robbed entirely out of business in order that a few in the great combinations may draw to themselves the tribute of all the people. And where that is done, gifts of millions will be made to colleges and universities, hundreds of thousands to business, thousands to churches, etc., etc., and the givers further pride themselves upon the world's idolatry of that "great benevolence." But there is not a particle of benevolence in any gift that is thus made, it is sheer idolatry.

The Value of Gifts

We say it with emphasis, for it is applicable to people who are not millionaires, as truly as to those who are: All the value of our giving as measured by the Lord, in perfect justice and righteousness, rests altogether upon the basis upon which we make or obtain our money. If my money is not made honestly, not a cent that I ever give away will stand to my credit, in righteousness, and in justice it can not. I robbed another man to get it; it is his still, and when I give it away, it is his money that I give away.

And this is another reason why the two mites of the poor widow, that day when she gave it, was more than all that the wealthy put in of their abundance. We know that the Mammon-worshippers in Christ's day were like the Mammon-worshippers in this day. They would crowd down in the dealing when the people were selling to them; and they would round up on the price when people were to buy of them, and thus at both ends they increased their gain. Then they would put great offerings into the temple treasury of the Lord, and take credit to themselves because they gave "so much to the cause."

But that poor widow, who, because of these men who devoured widow's houses and for a pretense made long prayers, was reduced to substance honestly gotten, but by the hardest,—the widow, who, out of her love to the Lord, gave what little she had left after she had passed through the devouring hands of these men—when she came into the temple of the Lord, giving the little that she had, she gave more than all the others together, every particle of it was honest. Every particle of it came from honest effort.

And that was a gift that measured according to righteousness in the sight of God. there is such a thing as honest dealing, and it can be practiced in this world. And whatever means is not acquired in that way, how much soever of it may be given, it can not be counted as the gift of him who gave it. It will be counted to those widows and the poor whom he has ground down to get it, to the laborers whose wages he ground down to the lowest notch to increase or to preserve his great gains.

God Will Righteously Adjust Matters

That is why God says to the laborers:

James 5

⁷ Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waits for the precious fruit of the earth, and has long patience for it...

⁸ Be also patient; establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draws nigh.

Your labor is not in vain. God knows the just wages that you earn, and of just how much of it you are robbed. And in the day of reckoning He will return it to you in full justice and righteousness. Be patient. Serve God.

Colossians 3

²² Obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God:

²³ And whatsoever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;

²⁴ Knowing that of the Lord you shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for you serve the Lord Christ.

In that day God will distribute justly all the rewards of labor. He is the righteous God. The Christian can cheerfully bear to be ground down, robbed, and oppressed; he can wait for the day of great distribution in righteousness; for he knows that in that day he will receive all that his honest toil ever earned, and he shall have the eternal glory of it.

Even though in this world some Mammon-worshiper absorbed it, and made a great gift of it, and got the worldly, fleeting glory of it; yet since from the beginning it belonged in righteousness to him who was defrauded of it, in righteousness it, with all the fruits of it, will be reckoned to him to whom in righteousness from the beginning it belonged.

This is the word and the message of God to the robbed, oppressed, and defrauded workingmen everywhere today, who are clamoring for a more equitable distribution of the fruits of their labor:

Ecclesiastes 12

¹³ Fear God, and keep His commandments.

No righteous distribution can be made by force and violence. In that way, an iniquitous and bad condition can only

be made more iniquitous and worse.

Isaiah 8

¹³ Sanctify the Lord of Hosts Himself, and let Him be your fear, and let Him be your dread.

James 5

⁸ Be you also patient; establish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draws nigh.

Then shall...

1 Corinthians 3

⁸ ...every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor.

Exodus 20

² I am the Lord thy God...

³ You shall have no other gods before Me.