

The first commandment (Tabor Baptist Church – 14/06/2020)

This Sunday morning we will be considering the first of the ten commandments. Which is – You shall have no other gods before Me. Let us begin by reading together from the word of God. If we could open up our bibles to Exodus 20 and read together verses 1-3

Let us pray....Amen.

Growing up, the 10 commandments were one of the first things I remember memorising from the bible. Of all the verses in scripture, of all the lessons in scripture, the 10 commandments were the rules of God I was encouraged to memorise, learn, and live by as a little boy. Perhaps it is the same with you. Historically churches have placed a high importance in teaching the 10 commandments, especially to children and new believers. They set the outline of godly ethics and moral living. However, society and culture keep changing. The law of God once stood as the foundation of ethics and the standard of morality for our nation and many other nations. At least in the western world, laws of nations were more often than not, based on the law of God as set out in the bible. But now, society say they have progressed, they no say they no longer need standards and absolutes. But when society rejects the existence of absolutes, just as post-modernism is doing today; Any absolute statement of ethics and morality has become blurred, leaving it open to abuse. Have you noticed the constant change in the laws of our society? The moral compass of today's society has no ethical foundation, and so what our culture considers as moral sits upon the wave the culture is riding on. And so, morality has become subjective, it follows the mood of society, and ethics has completely lost its meaning. Sadly, these changes in society and culture has also affected the church. More so in the last century, Christians have been casting doubts on the importance and necessity of the 10 commandments and our obedience to it. Now, if we study the word of God properly, we would find that the law of God is still active and necessary in the life of the Christian. Jesus often pointed to the 10 commandments. Remember the rich young ruler that came to Jesus asking, "Good teacher, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" Jesus first questions the young ruler's understanding of what it means to be good and then Jesus said to the young man, "You know the commandments." Let me make this clear, Jesus wasn't saying that keeping the commandments is the path of earning eternal life, or a condition that is necessary for maintaining eternal life. Jesus was pointing out to two things concerning the law. Firstly, Jesus points to the law as the standard summary of our duties to our fellow neighbours. And secondly, Jesus was pointing out to the young man that through the law, this young man falls short of the glory of God. This is perhaps the main purpose of the law, the apostle Paul clarifies this for us in Romans3:20 – For by the law is the knowledge of sin. And again in Romans7:7 – What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. There are three uses of the law which is good to bear in mind. 1) The law is a mirror that shows our sin, and so points us to Christ. 2) The law is necessary for restraining sin. And thirdly, for the Christian in particular, the law is like a flashlight showing the path ahead in the Christian's pursuit of holiness. I do believe the Christian is no longer under the law, we are freed from the law in the sense that the law is not a requirement for salvation because through Jesus' life and death, He kept and fulfilled the law for every single person that is called by His name. Now saying that, the Christian must work out his salvation with fear and trembling pursuing holiness, but how does the Christian do that? 1John2:3 teaches us that we know we are saved, we know we belong to Jesus if we keep His commandments. Which commandments, the commandments that teach us to love. Isn't that the 10 commandments? Jesus summarised the 10 commandments with the word love as a prefix. "Love the Lord your God... and love your neighbour as yourself." So, in short, the commandments are crucial to Christian living and observance. It really is a good thing that

we as a church have begun to look again at the 10 commandments through this series in our Sunday morning services.

Ok, let us now go on to opening up the first of the 10 commandments. Which is – You shall have no other gods before Me. God, in all His wisdom and righteousness decrees this as the first commandment. I'm sure I don't have to explain this, but usually what is at the top of a list bears a mark of importance and priority. God in all His wisdom marks these words at the top of this list, "You shall have no other gods before Me." What does that say about this commandment? This commandment is the foundation to which all the other commandments flow from. It sets the precedent to our understanding and obedience to the other nine commandments, in fact, to all the laws of God. You see, to have a wrong understanding of this first commandment affects our whole life in relation to our duty and requirements towards God, and consequently it affects our attitude towards our fellow men. The first commandment concerns worship. It is about God being the only one worthy to receive honour and adoration. Not just because of what He does for His people, but He is worthy of worship because of who He is. This commandment has everything to do with worship. If I were to ask you, what is our ultimate priority, what would you say? Well, with this first commandment before us this Sunday morning, worship is set forth as our ultimate priority. This is the importance of true worship to God. Worship is the theme of the commandments, it is the theme of all scripture, it is the theme of redemptive history and it is the theme of eternity. To worship the true and living God, that is our ultimate priority, and this is where God begins in giving us His laws. He introduces Himself in v2, and then He straightway demands worship. He says, "I am the Lord your God..." then immediately commands, "You shall have no other gods before Me" God is here declaring that He is God, and that there is no one like Him. He is the one and only God. Infinite in being, glory and perfection; all-sufficient, eternal, most wise, most holy, creator of all things and in Him alone we live and move and have our being. Therefore, you shall have no other gods before Him. God from the top sets the ultimate purpose of the law. His glory. You see, because of who He is, God's right to demand and receive worship is unquestionable. God hates the breaking of this law, as it is an outright act against Him. Breaking the first commandment is a heinous crime deserving of the most severe punishment from God. To have any other god, even worshipping self is deserving of eternal death. This is taught by God ever since the fall, where Adam and Eve elevated themselves to a godly status. The garden of Eden is the first place humanity broke this commandment. Satan promised that by eating the forbidden fruit they would be like God. They ate the fruit making themselves gods before their Creator. And as a result, they died, and the whole universe began to decay because of this heinous sin. This command speaks right to the core of humanity's sinfulness. It is vital that we understand this command, and that by understanding it we would obey it.

So, what is the commandment saying? God is saying, "Do not give anything else the worship that is due to Me alone. Do not elevate anything or anyone to My position. "I am God and there is no one like me." In v2 of Exodus 20, God introduces Himself just before He demands worship. Notice how God introduces Himself. He is the God who brought His people out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. God introduces Himself as their redeemer God, their mighty saviour. The Egyptians had many gods they worshipped. But the way in which God saved His people from slavery in Egypt, all the gods of Egypt were proved to be nothing and powerless and worthless. God had shown His people that nothing can be likened to Him or compared to Him or made equal to Him. The Egyptians and all the other nations hired goldsmiths to make gods for themselves, and these fallen worshippers prostrated themselves and adored these handiworks. But these man-made gods cannot move. Even when their worshippers cried out to these gods, they could not answer nor save them out of their troubles. But the God of Israel, He heard His people's cry, He moved from His holy habitation and He rescued His people with a mighty arm. God is saying, "I am God and there is no

other, I am God and there is no one like me.” Therefore, do not make for yourselves any gods, and do not render your worship to anything other than the God who saved you from your house of bondage. The God who saved the Israelites is the one true God. He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is the God of Noah and Enoch and the God of Adam and Eve. He is Yahweh, the great I Am, He is the creator of all things, sovereign over everything. Israel did not choose God to be their God. Left to themselves they would have succumbed to the gods of Egypt and their wrong manner of worship. Move on from Exodus 20 and you will see how quickly Israel turned to idolatry. Even though their intention of worship was toward Yahweh, the true God, their manner of worship was abominable to Him. That is what sin in their hearts drove them to, sin defaces true worship, even if the true God is the object of worship. But sin can in no way cast a shadow over God, sin can in no way stop God from being God. Even though sinful worshippers, in a manner of speaking rob God of His glory, God’s glory can never be extinguished. He is forever glorified. Even when evil seems to be ruling God is ultimately glorified. God cannot and will not abdicate His glory to anything or anyone else. Isaiah 42:8 God says, “I am the Lord, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another, nor my praise to carved images.” You see, the most loving thing God can do for us is to glorify Himself. God saved Israel for Himself. God saves Christian’s for Himself and His glory. And at the same time God is saving, God destroyed the powers of Egypt for His glory. God destroyed the power of sin and death for His glory. God saves for His glory and He destroys for His glory. This is the worthiness of God. Nothing happens apart from His will. Good or evil, He is sovereign, worthy of adoration. This is where the purpose of all creation can be understood. God did not need to create. God did not need to make man. But of His own will and pleasure, for the His own glory He created. So that all that He has made will give Him all that is due to His name. And so, the God who created, has the right to demand honour and adoration from His creatures. By saying, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” God since creation has revealed His worthiness to His creatures. Psalm 19 begins with – The heavens declare the glory of God. In fact, our very own make up, our bodies also declare the glory of God as we were fearfully and wonderfully made. God continues to reveal Himself, so that no one can claim ignorance. And through the bible God has so clearly revealed Himself to us. His glory is so manifest through His word that none can question His glory and holiness. Through His word, God affirms to us that He is living and true, He is infinite in being and perfection. He is eternal, unchanging, most free and most absolute. And towards us He is most loving, merciful, gracious, patient and just. He is the fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things. To Him is due from all angels and men, and every creature, whatsoever worship, service or obedience He is pleased to require of them. Well then, this is the God who has given us the ten commandments. And above all commandments, He demands that, “You shall have no other gods before Me.”

Now, let me put forward the question, why do we need this commandment? Why do we need God to say, “You shall have no other gods before me”? I think the answer lies in the negative tone of this commandment. You shall have no other gods. This negative tone suggests that God’s people were in fact constantly breaking this commandment. Have you noticed that 8 out of 10 commandments are negative, they begin with “you shall not.” The reason for this is man’s natural inclination to break these commandments. Because of man’s nature to bow to other gods, it is necessary for God to command His people to have no other gods before Him. Even though His people were miraculously saved from their bondage. Even though God’s people had witnessed His glory in visible action, they would continue to make for themselves false gods. Now, this problem continues even today in the hearts of Christians. And God continues to say today, even to His church, “You shall have no other gods before Me.” So, what is the nature of humanity, that makes it necessary for this to be a commandment? Since this commandment concerns worship. To answer this question, let’s consider

the nature of man in relation to worship. You see, the need to worship is ingrained in every single person. It is part of our nature. We are all pre-disposed to worship. You can scour through the history of humanity, and in every age, in every community and society that has come and gone you will find that humans have had gods or idols or objects of worship. You see, everyone worships. We are spiritual beings, we are not just a body, a mass of molecules who merely think and feel because of chemical reactions and activity in our brains. We are spiritual creatures, created in the image of God. We are relational, we have desires and wills, we have a conscience, a mind that thinks and feels, and in all that God has designed into our hearts the need to worship. All humans have an irresistible inclination and drive to worship. Even the most ardent atheist worships, that is a fact. Worship is essential to a spiritual creature. The atheist may not be worshipping a god or a supposed deity. But that intrinsic need to worship can't be denied. So, he worships material things or even himself. And the worship of self is the most common form of worship, and God abhors our self-worship. Humans can't escape the need to worship. However, we have a problem. We have a condition that obstructs us from true worship and acceptable worship. Sin is that problem. Since the fall of Adam, our first parent; all people are born in a fallen state. We have an inherent condition called sin. The sinful state of humanity is wrapped around the heart of men. Everything that flows out of an unsaved men's heart is sinful from its inception. Unregenerate humanity is dead in sin and all parts and faculties of their body and soul are completely defiled. And since worship is the heartbeat of each individual soul, the worship of fallen humanity will only be sinful in nature. Sin turns everything that God created for good and His enjoyment, sin turns them into what is evil and abominable to God. That is what sin has done with humanities need to worship. God created the need to worship in humans for the purpose of His glory, for His enjoyment; but our sin has turned what is good into what God hates. Sin has obstructed us from true worship. Sin in us blinds us to who God is. We have made God small and insignificant and at the same time we have elevated our own needs and desires, we have elevated our own objects of pleasure. So, if God has been made small, and we have given ourselves worth, we would naturally not worship God. We would worship that which we treasure the most, we would worship that which we ascribe the most worth to. And so, because of our sinful nature of worship, God continues to command, "You shall have no gods before Me." That is where our sin has elevated ourselves to. We think that we are worthy. We are convinced that we deserve to be satisfied and gratified. We believe we have the right over our own lives; even above God our creator. This is how God describes, through the apostle Paul, our sinfulness in relation to worship: "Although humanity knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became foolish, and changed the image of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man...they exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator." You can find that in Romans 1. This is the sinful nature of man, this is the state of humanity in relation to worship. Are you understanding why it was necessary for the first commandment to say, You shall have no other gods before Me? Because in our sinfulness we are not giving God what is due to His name. We are not worshipping God as He deserves. This goes for the Christian too. Let me make this clear; The fallen state of humanity, during this life, continues to remain in those who are saved. The sinful condition of mankind remains in the Christian. Even though sin has been forgiven and put to death through Jesus Christ, a sinful inclination remains in the flesh of every Christian. Even deceiving the Christian into wrong worship. There is a law of sin that continues to have power and dominion over believers. Of course, through the Holy Spirit's work that power and dominion of the law of sin has greatly diminished in the heart of a Christian. But that indwelling sin still exercises dominion in some respects. It may be weakened, but its nature is still unchanged. The apostle Paul speaks of this in Romans 7:21 – I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. So, how does this sinful state, affect our

worship? It blinds us to what true worship is. Sin, which is ultimately a rejection and rebellion against God, incapacitates true worship. Therefore, condemning us as breakers of the first commandment. Sinful humanity, who need to worship something or someone, cannot in and of themselves worship God. This is why the worship of false gods is the norm and pattern in this fallen world. When people reject God, they invariably worship false gods. These may be either material objects, creatures, mythical supernatural beings, or self. The sinner can never truly worship the one true God. But you who are a Christian, do you desire to truly worship God?

Now what? Let us sum up all that has been discussed. How are we to understand and come to obey the first commandment? God through the first commandment demands that His people should have no other gods before Him. Even being wonderfully saved from Egypt the Israelites needed God to give this negative commandment – a warning against worshipping anything or anyone other than Yahweh. Because of our sinful nature we find that we have created for ourselves other gods. We have made gods out of objects, out of ideologies, philosophies and even science. We make gods of our jobs, families and even our hobbies. These are worshipped as gods even without conscious thought that they are deities. We have even made our own selves as gods. You see, anything in your life that takes precedence over the will of God have become objects of your worship. And if you make treasures of anything or anyone in the presence of God you are worshipping that thing and you are dethroning God. Let me make a point here. By this commandment, God is not saying it is ok to have treasures and make gods of anything as long as you put God first. That is a wrong understanding of this command. Satan is subtle in his deceit. Satan would have you see it that way. He would have us treasure our money and our hobbies, giving ourselves the excuse that as long as God is first, these are fine. But that is not what God demands of His people. God demands that the whole person worships Him and treasures Him alone. All of our worship has to be directed to Him. The words we have here, “before Me” is not a term signifying priority. I think the better rendering of the first commandment would be, “You shall have no other gods before My face” – “You shall have no other gods in My presence.” To worship God, while we have any other treasure is abominable in the presence of God. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.” We cannot truly worship and serve God while we have even an ounce of loyalty to something else. If loyalty to a hobby, person, or job, takes precedence over the will of God you are worshipping that thing and you are dethroning God. I would ask that you would work out this principle in your own life asking yourself, where is my treasure? Is God my only treasure? Is the source of my joy and delight found in God alone? God does not accept worship that is not wholehearted. Jesus said, true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and truth. Now, dear Christian, you may find this commandment to be a burden, you may even be tempted towards discouragement. The Christian desires to honour and adore God alone, but we fail with this duty. “For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.” I would point you now to our Redeemer, Christ Jesus our Lord. Through His life, He fulfilled all the law for His people. Even this first commandment, Christ Jesus honoured and loved His Father, fulfilling this commandment in the hearts of His regenerated people. In Christ Jesus, the law of love is written in the heart of every Christian. Through the word of God, and by the Spirit of God dwelling in every believer, the redeemed person is able to worship God in spirit and in truth. Through Christ Jesus, the holiness of God is made ever clearer. The Christian, who like Israel has been brought out of Egypt, the house of bondage, by the blood of the lamb. The Christian has been delivered from his Egypt, which was his bondage and slavery to sin. The blood of Christ covers the Christian saving him from God and for God. This first commandment is now ours to observe, by giving God the Father all honour and adoration through Jesus Christ His Son and by His Holy Spirit. Let the law of love be the

rule of your life. Let this command be evidence that you are the Lord's. He is worthy of our obedience. Now, if you do not know the saving love of Christ Jesus, let this command be a mirror reflecting your sin. Have you been robbing God of His glory? Is your life worth more than your creator? Christ Jesus, who is the express image of God, worthy of all honour and adoration, humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death. For the joy set before Him, and for the glory that He shares with the Father, He endured the cross. Jesus who is equal in honour and worthiness with the Father. Died to save sinners. To save worshippers of false gods. To save rejectors of God. O would you not look to Christ and behold His glory. Won't you look to Christ and give Him all the honour that is due to His name? May we all see the wicked nature of breaking this law. And may all we come to a deep repentance knowing that we deserve eternal death, but also knowing that in Jesus, and only in Him, there is full forgiveness of sin, even forgiveness for breaking this law. May we forsake all other gods in our lives, may we even deny ourselves. Let us decrease, so that He would increase. God is worthy of all our affection and worship. How I look forward to that day when all the saints, and all the angels in a myriad of voices will worship the triune God saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God almighty... You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power forever and ever." Until then, may this law be written in our hearts and minds, "You shall have no other gods before Me."

Let us pray.... Amen.