

The First Commandment



Learning by Living (Part 9)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again, as we continue with our theme for this week: "Learning by Living"—a theme in which I am sharing lessons I myself have learned in serving the Lord and His people.

Yesterday, I shared with you a hard but blessed lesson that I learned through bereavement—when the Lord called home my first wife, Lydia, after 30 years of happy marriage.

I learned that God weans us from the temporal to the eternal. He lets us enjoy beauty and friends and pleasure, but then he shows us these are just temporary shadows of the reality which is eternal and permanent.

And so there comes a time when the weaning process takes place and we release our grip on that which we've loved and enjoyed and we let it go but in its place we receive something that is permanent and eternal.

I am not going to say that is an easy lesson, but it is a blessed lesson. The lesson I am going to share today concerns the only secure and enduring basis for the whole life of faith. And yet it is one which people often tend to overlook, to their own great loss.

You see the Bible opens with this lesson. The opening words of the Bible in many ways are the key to the whole Bible. In Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning GOD..." If we would always keep God in the beginning, and that means a lot more than just at the starting point. The Hebrew word is directly connected with the word for "head." It means in the chief place, in the first place, GOD. And as long as God is in the first place, in the chief place in our lives, in all our attitudes, in all our actions, believe me, life will go well. Things will work out the way that we desire. You see, this is contained, too, in the first two commandments.

You know, I knew the commandments as a child, I memorized them at some time in my childhood, but they never really impacted me. And it is only fairly recently, that I have come to see that the first commandment, is the first commandment. It is the one that really matters. These are the first two commandments:

> "'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.' [And then the second one is related.] 'You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 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 sins of the fathers to the third and forth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to thousands who love me and keep my commandments.'"

I want to tell you, that the basic issue in your life, in my life, in the life of each one of us, is very simple; Who is your God? That ultimately is going to determine everything that you experience in time and in eternity. It sounds so simple, but it is absolutely basic. And if we ever remove that basis, then our whole spiritual life will begin to crumble and fall apart.

This was confirmed, of course, in the teaching of Jesus in the New Testament. In Matthew 22:35–38, we read:

> "That a certain man, an expert in the law, tested Jesus with this question: 'Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law? Jesus replied: '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.'"

Very clear. Before anything else in life, comes our attitude to God. To love him with a pure, total, unreserved love.

Sometimes we get a wrong idea of what faith is. Through many centuries of church doctrine and theology, a lot of people got the impression that faith is accepting the right truths and holding on to them. But I have to tell you on the basis of careful word study, that both in the Hebrew of the Old Testament, and in the Greek of the new testament the root primary, basic meaning of the word for "faith" is loyalty or faithfulness.

It is not what we believe in our heads—that is important, but it is our attitude toward God. Basically, faith is being totally committed and loyal to God. You can entertain all the right doctrine, say all the right things with your mouth, but if you are not totally loyal and committed to God, you are not based on biblical faith. I think there needs to be a tremendous revolution in the thinking of millions of Christians. We have got to re-think what faith is. Faith is faithfulness and primarily, it is faithfulness to God.

And God tolerates no rivals. How important to see that. In 1 John 2:15, the apostle says:

> "Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

These two things are incompatible: loving God and loving this world with its materialism and its rebellion and its sin and its self-pleasing. The two are incompatible. If you have one, you cannot have the other.

And then, in his epistle, James, in chapter 4, verse 4, speaks about spiritual adultery:

> "You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God."

That is plain talk. But you cannot mix them.

You see, everything of value in life has its origin in God. How important to see that.

In Matthew 4:4, when Jesus was tempted by the devil, He answered:

> "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

The only real source of life is God through His Word. If we do not have the Word coming from God, we have no real source of life.

And then, again, going back to the epistle of James in his first chapter, verses 16–18, he says this:

> "Don't be deceived, my dear brothers. Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created."

You understand? The new birth doesn't come because we will it, it comes because God wills it. And everything that's good and everything that's perfect has only one source: it's

God. If we lose our contact with God, if God loses His primacy in our lives, we are cutting ourselves off from everything that is good and everything that is perfect.

Now I want to turn for a few moments to the negative—the opposite of obeying the first commandment, which is turning to false gods. And in modern terminology, that is turning to the occult. I feel that so many people do not appreciate how terrible this is. What a sure and certain path it is to darkness and disaster. I have come to believe, in my ministry, in counseling and preaching and ministering to people, that at the root of every serious problem in human life is some involvement with the occult, with false gods. Listen to what God said through Moses in Deuteronomy 18:10–12:

> "Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire…"

That's a person who offers his own child in living sacrifice to be burned in an oven to a false god. Now, you say, "That's terrible!" But listen to the other things that go on in the same verses, just separated by a comma.

> "Let no one be found among you sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery [that's any kind of fortune telling], interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord…"

We really need to give serious heed to them. The first commandment is total loyalty to God. Loyalty to God is incompatible with any other loyalty to other kinds of spiritual beings or forces. If we are in the one category, we cannot be in the other.

And the ultimate way we acknowledge God, as God, is by worship. This again comes out in the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. It says in Matthew 4:8–10:

> "Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

Worship is the ultimate indication of who is your God. Whatever you worship becomes your god—whether it is money, sex, self, a political or a religious leader—whatever or whoever, that becomes your god.

I heard a fellow minister talk about a certain man and he said of him this: "He's a self-made man and he worships his Creator." Do you understand, he worshiped himself. "Self" was his god.

Now I want to ask you: In your life, what place does God hold? Is He the beginning? Is He in the first place? Is He the source? Or do you perhaps need to make or renew a commitment to the one true God and say, "You are my God. There is no other. You alone I will worship and serve." If you do that, you will have a solid foundation for your life.

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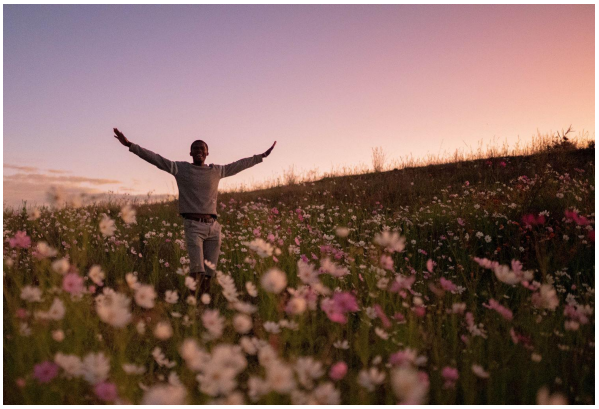
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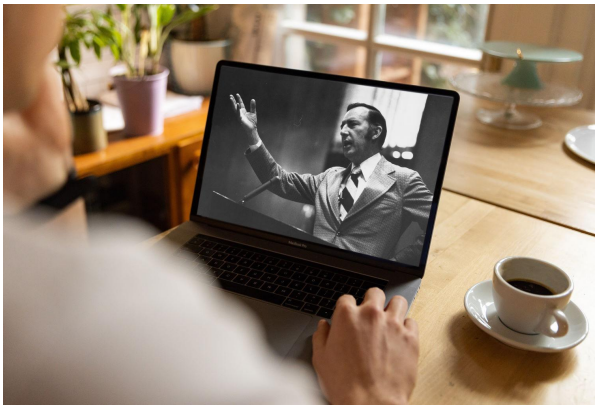
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