

Sermon – God’s Law of Love, The 1st Commandment

Last week, we began a series of sermons aimed at examining the Ten Commandments. We found that these laws are still in effect for Christians and in fact, serve as the framework or outline of God’s Law of Love. In that introductory sermon, we showed that the laws of God were not done away with or “nailed to the cross”, but rather, they are a fundamental part of being a Christian. Indeed James, the brother of our Lord wrote that unless we are “*doers of the word, and not hearers only*,” we are deceiving ourselves (**James 1:22**). In **verse 25**, he tells us how to be doers of the word: by looking into the perfect law of liberty and continuing in it. In other words, we are to *look* into God’s inspired word – the Bible – to find the “perfect law of liberty,” and then *keep* that law!

And so as we proceed through this series, we are going to do just that – look into God’s Word and examine His perfect law of liberty. We will come to find that the commandments of God are not a harsh set of rules, but instead, they are guidelines for how we are to show love – for one another and for God.

Today, we will be looking at the first of the Ten Commandments. We will analyze the text, trying to understand not only the superficial meaning, but the deeper spiritual intent of the law. We’ll look at the various ways mankind has failed to keep this part of God’s Law, so that we in the Church may avoid the same pitfalls. Finally, we’ll suggest a few ways to make the keeping of this commandment easier for us so it becomes a part of our character.

There are two places in the Bible where the Ten Commandments are listed – **Exodus 20**, written just after the children of Israel had left the bondage of slavery in Egypt and **Deuteronomy 5**, written just before they were to enter into the Promised Land. As we go along in our study, you may notice that there is a slight difference between these two listings in the way some of the commandments are written, and for that reason, we will always read both accounts. When there is significance in this difference, I will point it out to you.

So, let’s begin by taking a look at this first and foremost commandment.

Exodus 20:2-3, “I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”

Deuteronomy 5:6-7, “I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before me.”

The main idea here is to put God first. It sounds easy, but as we’ll see – it is not. Before we get too deep into our examination of this commandment, I’d like to take the time to prove a point that I made in the Overview sermon – that ALL of the Ten Commandments, and commandment keeping in general, are timeless principles, meant for all men at all times – not just for Israel during the Old Testament period. I want to show that they were in force before God gave them to Moses at Mount Sinai, that Jesus Christ, the apostles and the NT Church kept them, and that they will be kept in the future, soon-coming Kingdom of God.

While there are many examples of the keeping of God’s Commandments in the Bible, I think we only need to show a few in order to make our point. Some will be more obvious than others, but I think you’ll be able to see the point if you keep an open mind.

Evidence Of the 1st Commandment Being Kept...

Before Sinai:

Genesis 35:1-4, “And God said unto Jacob, Arise, go up to Bethel, and dwell there: and make there an altar unto God, that appeared unto thee when thou fleddest from the face of Esau thy brother. Then Jacob said unto his household, and to all that were with him, Put away the **strange gods** that are among you, and be clean [pure], and change your garments: And let us arise, and go up to Bethel; and I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and was with me in the way which I went. And they gave unto Jacob all the **strange gods** which were in their hand, and all their earrings which were in their ears; and Jacob hid them under the oak which was by Shechem.”

Jacob knew not to have other (“*strange*”) gods before God.

By Christ:

Matthew 6:24, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”

Luke 4:8, “And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.”

Jesus clearly knew and taught to put God first and have no other gods before Him.

By the New Testament Church:

Romans 6:13-16, “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but **yield yourselves unto God**, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid. Know ye not, that **to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey**; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?”

Paul teaches that we should put God first (***yield yourselves unto God***). That which we put first is our “god”.

In the Future Kingdom:

Micah 4:1-5, “*But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the **mountain** [biblical symbol for a government] of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the **law shall go forth of Zion**, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*”

In the last days, in the Kingdom, God will teach the law – including the 1st Commandment.

Let's Analyze The Text:

Let's look once again at the text of this commandment. Since there is no significant difference between the two accounts, we'll only cover the one in Exodus.

Exodus 20:2-3, "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me."

If we're going to have any success at keeping God's Commandments, we really need to understand exactly what is being said.

First, let's notice the use of the personal pronouns: **thy**, **thee**, and **thou**. This commandment is addressed to the individual, not to the collective group. God wants a personal relationship with each of us. This was written to you and to me as if we were the only ones God was speaking to.

...brought thee out of the land of Egypt...house of bondage:

This phrase has a dual meaning:

- 1) this showed that I am the Real God, not a fake like those in Egypt
- 2) Egypt is a type or symbol for sin, so God shows He alone can deliver us from sin.

Some Christians today talk about being free from the bondage of the Law, but it is **Sin**, not the **Law**, that the Bible refers to as **bondage**.

...no other gods: This is the Hebrew **Elohim acherim** – no strange gods – none that you are not acquainted with, none who has not given you such proofs of his power and godhead as I have done in delivering you from the Egyptians, dividing the Red Sea, bringing water out of the rock, quails into the desert, manna from heaven to feed you, and the pillar of cloud to direct, enlighten, and shield you. By these miracles God had rendered himself familiar to them, they were intimately acquainted with the operation of his hands; and therefore with great propriety he says, "*Thou shalt have no other [strange] gods before me.*"

...before me: in place of – don't substitute anything else for Me.

What is God?

Let's look at a dictionary definition of God:

God: 1. A being conceived as the perfect, omnipotent, omniscient originator and ruler of the universe, the principal object of faith and worship in monotheistic religions. 2. An image of a supernatural being; an idol. 3. **One that is worshiped, idealized or followed:** "*Money was their god.*"

One of the major problems our world has in trying to keep the First Commandment is that they just don't have a good understand of who or what God is. Is God the power of nature or some cosmic force? Is He an alien from outer space or is He within each of us?

All of these false ideas and many more like them are held by otherwise intelligent people from every walk of life. Even those who profess to be Christians sometimes have a vague or fuzzy idea of the nature of God. Many have been taught the false concept of the Trinity.

But this word “trinity” is not even in the Bible, neither is the concept of God being three in one. The Bible teaches us that man was made in the image and likeness of God, and if that were true, then we would have to be a trinity too. But obviously we are not. God made us male and female and established and blessed the family relationship as the model for all mankind. He made us a family.

We find that the Bible uses family terms for God as well – Father and Son. Christ came to reveal the Father, who, up until that time, no one had known. Notice in Matthew 11:27:

Matthew 11:27, “All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knows the Son, but the Father; neither knows any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.”

Jesus showed us that the relationship of the Godhead is that of a Family. He told us about the loving relationship between the Father and the Son. And what's more, He invited us to join in that relationship, by becoming actual members of the God Family!

John 1:12, “But as many as received him, to them gave he **power to become the sons of God**, even to them that believe on his name:”

God made us in His image after all, so it should make perfect sense that He would want us to grow up to be just like Him. He wants us to call Him Father, and doesn't every father want their children to become just like they are? And we will find that this understanding – that God is a Family – is essential to properly worshipping God.

So is it any wonder why today's society is way off the mark when it comes to keeping the First Commandment?

The Result of Not Knowing God:

Man was made with a spiritual as well as a physical nature. But because they don't really know God, mankind has channeled their spirituality into worshipping everything **but** God. Let's examine some of the more common “other gods” that man puts before the True God.

Paganism:

Wicca – This popular form of paganism has taken hold in America and Europe. It is a form of Nature Worship in which all things [trees, rocks, animals] have a spirit or are part of God. God warned us about this tendency of ours in Deuteronomy 4:19:

Deuteronomy 4:19 “And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven.”

Animal Worship – India’s people starve while “sacred cows” are worshipped.

New Age – Psychic hotlines, tarot card readings, horoscopes, channeling.

Ancestor Worship – Praying to the **Dead**, Reincarnation.

Deuteronomy 18:10-14 (NKJV) “There shall not be found among you *anyone* who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, *or one* who practices witchcraft, *or* a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things *are* an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you. You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. For these nations which you will dispossess listened to soothsayers and diviners; but as for you, the LORD your God has not appointed such for you.”

Trinity – a closed Godhead, as opposed to the Biblically revealed **Family of God!**

Let’s look at some other, more common errors that people stumble on when they don’t know the True God. All of these are things that people put before God, making them into a “strange god” before Him.

Materialism (Money)

We’ve already read **Matthew 6:24**, “*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and **mammon**.* [wealth or riches personified]”

1 Timothy 6:7-11, “For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be **rich** fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful **lusts**, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For **the love of money** is the **root of all evil**: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.”

Luke 12:15-21, “And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth. And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”

Work:

I'm sure we all know someone who could be described as a "workaholic." Sometime this is for the pursuit of "things" – materialism, but sometimes it is the work itself, and the pleasure succeeding gives, that is the "god". To be sure, we are to work, but it should not be the driving force in our life.

Family:

This, like work, can be deceptive, because we are to take care of our families. But again, we must watch our priorities and not put our family above God.

Self:

Our civilization continues its paganized teaching that MAN is the ultimate judge of what is right or wrong and puts man completely in the place of God and His laws!

Education:

It is quite common for the highly educated to scoff at those of us who acknowledge and worship God. Science (from the Latin word meaning "to know") has become the "god" of the modern world. But even for those who seek to know the Bible, education can become a false god. In a recent issue of **Bible Review** magazine, there is an article reviewing a recently produced biography of King David by recognized critical Bible scholar Steven McKenzie. The conclusion of article was that King David is more like Saddam Hussein than the man we know from the pages of our Bible.

These are the people who are influencing the religious thought of the Day. Many of the professors teaching at Christian universities today don't even believe that Jesus is God or that many of the biblical stories are factual. More and more, secular thinking has replaced a belief in and respect for the Bible.

What is the result of this kind of nonsense? Our society has thrown out any kind of religious training or moral teaching from our educational system. Listen to this quote from Chester Pierce, a professor of educational psychiatry at Harvard University, while addressing a gathering of teachers:

"Every child in America entering school at the age of five is **mentally ill** because he comes to school with certain allegiances; toward our Founding Fathers, toward his parents, toward our elected officials, **toward a belief in a supernatural being**, and toward the sovereignty of this nation as a separate entity. It's up to you teachers to make all of these sick children well by creating the international child of the future."

Science (Evolution or Darwinism):

Today, the greatest deception of all is not communism or atheism, but the false, pagan doctrine of **evolution** preached by the false god of science. **Evolution is an attempt to explain the creation without the Creator.** It denies the true God and His very nature and office! It is the very basis of most of this world's "education"! But the wisdom of this world is FOOLISHNESS with God.

1 Corinthians 1:19-21 (NJB) "As scripture says: *I am going to destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of any who understand. Where are the philosophers? Where are the experts? And where are the debaters of this age? Do*

you not see how God has shown up human wisdom as folly? Since in the wisdom of God the world was unable to recognise God through wisdom, it was God's own pleasure to save believers through the folly of the gospel.”

The apostle Paul explained that the human tendency was to attribute intelligence and life-giving powers to the **physical creation**. This has been a major source of superstition and religious blindness throughout the ages.

Romans 1:18-25 (NIV) The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen.

They praise God's creation, but completely ignore Him and even deny that He exists!

Modern science is trying desperately to give man power far in excess of his mental and spiritual capabilities for handling such forces! As former President Eisenhower said in his first inaugural address: "*Science seems ready to confer upon us as its final gift the power to erase human life from this planet.*" And now -- realizing what they have already done forebodes destruction of this earth -- scientists are working feverishly to invade the very heavens!

What has this led to? We now have more respect (worship) for the creation than for God's plan to reproduce himself through mankind. So we see our society accepting sex changes, abortions and now attempting to alter the genetic code of human beings, but going out of its way to protect whales, spotted owls and wilderness areas.

Religion (Even God's Church):

Some people think the whole purpose of a church service is to entertain, uplift, and refresh. Some people go to church, not so much to worship God, but to sit back and enjoy the music and the sermon. Of course, they expect the church building to be attractive, the pastor to be well-groomed and smooth-mannered, the pianist to be talented, the choir to be majestic, the coffee hour to be well-stocked, the parking lot to be convenient, the people to be well-dressed and friendly, and if they have small children, they won't attend if there is no nursery. All they want to do is sit back in their (preferably padded) seats and drink it all in!

There are even people who select their church, not by religious criteria, but by these amenities alone! **A newspaper in Texas** carried this so far that the religion page editor began to visit churches and rate them with **stars**, just as a restaurant critic rates restaurants.

Many people leave church asking themselves, “What did I get out of the service today?” instead of asking themselves, “What did God get out of my worship today?”

It is true that most professing Christians think of their religion as just occupying a corner of their lives. But in all fairness and love we say that the day will come when they will realize that that type of religion is false religion and false worship!

Another danger of religion is to make **IT** a god. This trend is especially prevalent in the Churches of God. One needs only to pick up a copy of *The Journal* or join one of the many Internet forums to see how many “experts” we have on a variety of subjects: the Calendar, Women’s roles in Church, End-time events – almost everything except the Love of God! It seems everyone has a paper on some subject. I’m not saying that there’s no value to well researched articles, but as renowned Church author and researcher Dr. Samuel Bachiochi stated in one of his e-mails, “*It takes more than 15 minutes on the toilet to create a research paper.*”

The problem is not that people want to know or are interested in digging deeper into God’s Word. We need to do this. The problem occurs when we **elevate** our position on a given subject over the worship of God. We can easily make **our knowledge of God into a god!**

Possitive Suggestions:

So what can we do? How should we approach the First Commandment?

We really need to understand and appreciate our relationship with God.

It is paramount that we begin to understand how God wants us to think about Him. This will help us to understand Him better – who He is – what His plan for us is – how He thinks and why He does what He does.

In short: **we must come to know God’s Character! (KEY POINT!)**

God Is Our Father

Jesus came to reveal the Father. Notice these scriptures in the book of John:

John 1:18, “No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him.”

John 5:37, “And the Father himself, which has sent me, has borne witness of me. You have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape.”

John 6:46, “Not that any man has seen the Father, save he which is of God, he has seen the Father.”

We said earlier that Jesus was that member the **God Family** who spoke with Moses and the Israelites; who gave the Ten Commandments to them. Here is more proof of this fact. If the God of the Old Testament – the One who gave the Ten Commandments to Moses – were in fact the one we now know as “the Father”, these scriptures we’ve just read could not be true! God wants us to think of Him as a loving Father!

Matthew 10:29-31 (NKJV) “Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your **Father's** will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows.”

Matthew 7:11 “If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your **Father** which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?”

God Is A Family!

As we said in the beginning, Christ came to reveal the Father, who up until that time had not been known. Let’s read again from **Matthew 11:27**, this time from the New International Version.

Matthew 11:27 NIV, “All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.”

Jesus not only demonstrated that the Godhead was a Family, but He invited us to join in that **relationship**, by becoming actual members of the God Family! Notice these plain scriptures:

John 1:12-13, “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

Romans 8:14-17, “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, **they are the sons of God**. For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you have received the Spirit of adoption [**sonship**], whereby we cry, **Abba**, Father. The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.”

“*Abba*” is a child’s word, equivalent to our modern term “*Daddy*”. That’s how we should think of God – as our loving Dad, wanting us to grow up to be just like Him!

1 John 3:1-2, “Behold, what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knows us not, because it knew him not. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.”

Romans 8:19-21, “For the earnest expectation of the creature [creation] waits for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature [creation] was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who has subjected the same in hope, Because the creature [creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the **children of God**.”

This is the marvelous destiny that awaits you and me. God has a Master Plan to bring “many sons unto glory.” Far from being a harsh and cruel taskmaster, giving us laws that are hard to bear, God is a loving Father who wants us to be a part of His Family. Are you willing to accept His offer of everlasting life?

God Is Our Creator

The Bible is clear concerning another relationship with God: He is our Creator – as that last scripture attests to!

He created for us a wonderful dwelling - our beautiful planet Earth! He fashioned it to provide us with everything we need for our material well-being and survival. He wants us to enjoy and appreciate His gifts to us. However, we must never allow our worship to be directed toward anything that God has created. Only the Creator is to be worshiped - never the creation.

We’ve seen that exalting the creation is a cornerstone of today's materialistic, secular world. While most scientists continue to try to prove the existence of a creation without a creator, there are some responsible scientists which refute the belief in the spontaneous generation of life. Some have demonstrated the scientific impossibility of life evolving from the nonliving.

Recent research has demonstrated that cells, the building blocks of life, are made up of so many complex, interactive and **irreducibly complex** systems that the possibility of life originating spontaneously defies even the most extreme view of the laws of probability.

Michael Behe, associate professor of biochemistry at Lehigh University, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, writes: “*The result of these cumulative efforts to investigate the cell - to investigate life at the molecular level - is a loud, clear, piercing cry of "design!" The result is so unambiguous and so significant that it must be ranked as one of the greatest achievements in the history of science*” (**Darwin's Black Box, 1996, pp. 232-233**).

Dr. Behe refutes even the possibility that life could have evolved. In other words, solid scientific evidence now makes it clear that the existence of the creation necessitates a Creator.

God Is Love!

Now the **title** to this series is “*God’s Law of Love*”, so I want to emphasize the fact that each of the Ten Commandments was given by God for our own good. They reflect His very character and nature, which is Love. True love, Agape love, not selfish human love.

I'd like to tell you a little about my elder brother John. He's an agnostic - which literally means "one who doesn't know" WEBSTER defines it as: "*one who believes that there is no proof in the existence of God, but does not deny the possibility that God exists.*"

On a rare occasion, we'd have a conversation about God. John once told me "if a Supreme Being did exist, he wouldn't create beings and then make them obey commands which were against their nature." Sadly, this idea that my brother holds is shared by many in this world. They've been taught that God's Commandments are harsh restrictions on our enjoyment of life. They believe we'd all be better off without them.

What did Jesus have to say about the Law of God?

Mark 12:28-34, "And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt **love** the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt **love** thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these. And the scribe said unto him, Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he: And to **love** him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to **love** his neighbour as himself, is more than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices. And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God. And no man after that durst ask him any question."

Jesus taught that God's Commandments were all about Love. So did His apostle John.

1 John 2:3-5, "And hereby we do know that we know him, **if we keep his commandments**. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is **the love of God perfected**: hereby know we that we are in him."

1 John 4:7-8, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who **loves** is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for **God is love.**"

The problem my brother has is that God is not real to him. To him, God, if He even exists, is so far away and removed from everyday life, that it is meaningless to even think about Him. If only he, and others like him, could understand how **close** a relationship God really wants to have with him. One day soon, they will!

What Should We Do?

How can the **true God** be more **real** to us? How can we develop a closer relationship with Him?

One key is to analyze how you use your time. For your time is your life! The Bible commands us to "*redeem ... [buy back] the time, because the days are evil*" (**Eph. 5:16.**) How

much time do you actually spend each week studying and meditating on God's Word and law as David did? How much time do you spend in earnest, prevailing prayer to God – working to develop that Father/Son or Father/Daughter relationship? How much time do you spend in discussing the Bible with others, teaching it to your family and friends?

Another key is to **remember** that God is the **Creator**, so go out and enjoy the beautiful creation He has given us! There in Africa it should be very easy to do. You've been well blessed with an abundance of natural beauty, as we have here in Colorado. But no matter where you live, there is a great benefit in getting away from the crowded cities to enjoy the gifts God has given us.

Isaiah 5:8, “Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!”

Spend time enjoying the beautiful creation He has given to you and me!

Remember also, God is also our **Father**. He gave us family relationships to help us to appreciate that aspect of His character. Do we approach Him when we pray as a loving Dad? Do we look forward to sharing our day, both highs and lows, with Him? Or do we still picture Him as some aloof, far-off, all-powerful being that is somehow untouchable. Are we afraid or even uncomfortable talking to Him? Do we shy away from praying because somehow we think He's too big to care? We've got to change that perception if we are ever going to succeed in being like Him and with Him forever.

Matthew 6:26-32 (NKJV) “Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. **Are you not of more value than they?** Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, **will He not much more clothe you**, O you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For **your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things.**”

We need to have faith that God loves us and will take care of us. We can then be freed up to put Him first – to obey the spirit of the First Commandment.

Verse 33, “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

And just what does it mean to seek His righteousness? Turn to **Psalms 119:172**.

Psalms 119:172, “My tongue shall speak of thy word: for **all thy commandments are righteousness.**”

We must seek to be like Him – and a key here is to know, understand and DO all of His Commandments!

Psalms 111:10 “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that **do his commandments**: his praise endures for ever.”

So clearly we see that it is important to keep God first – to worship Him in spirit and in truth. In order to do that effectively, we need to come to an understanding of who God is, what our **relationship** to Him should be. But why is it so important that we understand the details of God's **character**? Because He wants to create in us that very same character - His divine nature. Peter tells us:

2 Peter 1:4 “Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

This comprehension involves a major shift in our way of thinking. As Paul tells us,

Romans 12:2, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.”

What kind of **renewal** should occur in our thinking? Paul explains,

Philippians 2:5, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus:”

God wants us to become like Him by emulating the **thinking, attitudes** and **outlook** toward life that our perfect example, Jesus Christ had. How are we to do this?

Matthew 5:48, “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.”

It will take effort on our part to become perfect, with Jesus Christ as our example. He kept the commandments – not **for** us, but for an example to us – that we might walk in all His ways.

Herein lies the awesome purpose of our existence: the continuing development of righteous character and our ultimate destiny as members of God's family.

In Conclusion, please turn to **2 Corinthians 6:14-18**.

2 Corinthians 6:14-18 NKJV, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.’ Therefore ‘Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.’ *[Then, if we come to understand the proper way to keep this and the other Ten Commandments – that is to develop godly character and the relationship that God wants with us,]* **I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.**”