

S E R M O N C L I I I .

Q U E S T I O N X L I I I .

WHAT is the Preface of the Ten Commandments ?

A N S W E R .

TH E Preface of the Ten Commandments

is in these Words, *I am the Lord thy God, who brought thee out of the Land of Egypt, out of the House of Bondage.*

Q U E S T I O N X L I V .

WHAT doth the Preface of the Ten Commandments teach us ?

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T H E

A N S W E R.

THE Preface of the Ten Commandments, teacheth us, that because God is the Lord, and our God, and Redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all his Commandments.

WE before observed, that the Law Moral, which in the first Inscription of it on Man's Heart, may properly in regard of that Inscription be called the Law of Nature, being every way adapted to Man's Nature, as it was Sanctified, by the Image of God, which it was stamped withal, having that Inscription very much blurred and defaced by Sin, was again revived by God, in his Covenant Transaction with his People Israel partly by word of Mouth, in that solemn Transaction at Mount Sinai, partly by writing it on two Tables of Stone, in which Proclamation, as he appeared with terrible Majesty, in fire and smoke, in lightnings and thunders, putting a Dread, not only on the People, but *Moses* himself; as we are told, *Heb. 12. 18, 19, 21.* Thereby displaying his Holiness, and righteous Severity, against all that should be found guilty of the breach of that Law, that he might convince them of their miserable State by Nature, and absolute need of a Propitiation, so to prepare them to entertain the ceremonial Law, in which, under Shadows and Types, he discovered to them the way of their Reconciliation; so to prevent their Despair, and nourish Hope in them, he saw meet to introduce the Precepts themselves, with a gracious Preface, thereby insinuating what forceable and indissoluble Obligations they lay under, to yield Obedience to that Law, giving them to understand, that it was an Eternal Rule for Man, and that they were so far from being discharged from Duty in reference to it, by the introduction of a new Covenant, that there were new and potent Engagements laid on them thereby to study Conformity to it. This Preface therefore contains in it, the Arguments with which God saw meet to enforce his Commands on his People, that they might therein be convinced, that it was a reasonable Service that he required of them, therein treating them according to the Nature he had put into them. And though the language of it is suited to the peculiar Concerns of that People, yet the nature of the Arguments themselves, is such as is accommodable to all universally, with whom God sees meet to transact in the way of the new Covenant, as will appear in the particular investigation of them; of which we may now take a brief & distinct account, that so we may see that it is not a blind Obedience which God requires of us, and be put upon the more serious study of the Law of God, in order to our careful Observance of it, and that we may know that it is not a vain thing, but that it is our Life, and to neglect it is worse than brutish. The Reasons then,

which God here makes use of to urge our Obedience are three, which are very suitably express'd in our Catechism. The first is taken from the Consideration of what he is in himself, *I am the Lord.* The second, From what he is to his People, in the Covenant of Grace, *Thy God.* The last is taken from what he hath done for his peculiarly, or those distinguishing Favours, whereof he hath made them to partake, *Which have brought thee, &c.* Let us then consider what force there is in each of these to bind us unto firm and free Obedience.

1. *HE puts them on considering what he is in himself; I am the Lord.* The word is *Jehovah*, a Name which God hath incommunicably assumed to himself, or which is not any where in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, tropically attributed to any other Being. A Name which Divines observe to be used to express his Divine Perfections, which are essential to him, comprehending under it, both his Being and his Attributes, which indeed are nothing else but his Being, though our Understandings are incapable of conceiving of them, but under distinct Notions. And the force of the Argument lies here, viz. That because God is *Jehovah*, therefore we are indispensably bound to yield him Obedience in all that he sees meet to command us. And that every one of his glorious Attributes gives force to his Precepts. Now this Argument respects all Mankind in general, and carries in it a reason, which the very light of Nature must subscribe unto, from the Conviction which there is on all Men's Consciences, that there is a God. Though the light of Revelation in which we have a more clear and distinct Discovery made to us of this God, in his Being and Perfections, adds to the force of the Reason, and renders our neglect of Obedience, the more aggravated and inexcusable. And the force of this may be more particularly observed, in the Consideration of some of those Attributes of his, which flow from his being *Jehovah*, and do thereupon forceably call for our Homage.

1. *GOD as he is Jehovah, hath a supream right of Government over his Creatures.* He who is the absolute first Being, and gives Being to all other Beings, must of necessity be acknowledged to have the full disposal of them for his own Glory, according to the Counsel of his Will. Here is his Kingdom made indisputable; and so some understand that, *Psal. 29. 10. The Lord sitteth upon the flood; yea, the Lord sitteth King forever.* Viz. of his giving all things their Being, and refer it to *Gen. 1. 2.* Now the right of Government, respecting reasonable Creatures, is firstly Legislative, or prescribing Laws to them, which being stamped with his Authority, do therein make it their Duty to obey them; and hence, though there is a reason of all moral Duties, in the Nature of the things themselves so required, yet it is enough to command our Consciences, to consider that they

they are Divine Edicts, though we do not see into the Conventency and Equitableness of the things themselves. And this makes all positive Precepts equally obliging with those that are entirely Moral. God therefore often gives that only Reason of many Precepts, *I am the Lord.*

2. *GOD, as he is Jehovah, is infinitely Wise.* And therefore all His Works are done in Wisdom, *Psal. 104. 24.* Hence that, *Psal. 147. 5. Great is our Lord, and of great power; his understanding is infinite.* His Laws therefore are the Product of his unsearchable Wisdom, and so must needs be every way suitable for the Creature to whom they are given. On this Account they are said to make them wise, who are favoured with them, *Psal. 119. 7.* And the keeping of them is that which will recommend us for wise to others, *Deut. 4. 6.* Wisdom mainly appears in suiting of Means to their End, and the greater aptitude there is in them for this, the more doth the Wisdom appear in the appointing them. Now Man's great End is to glorify God, and therein to obtain his Favour, which is his Happiness, and for this the Law is accommodated, as, *Job. 28. 28.*

3. *GOD, as he is Jehovah, is Good, yet Goodness itself.* It is essential to him. Hence that, *Mat. 19. 17. There is none good but one, that is God.* And this essential Goodness of his, makes it necessary that all his Works of Efficiency be good; and this hath respect unto his Commands. Hence that Argument is used in, *Psal. 119. 68. Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.* This therefore is one of the Titles ascribed to the Law, *Rom. 7. 12.* And how else should it ever be enacted by a good God? And this is enough to satisfy us of the Goodness of it, because it hath him for its Author. It is good in itself, and good for us, or else he would never have prescribed it to us. With this God encourageth his People to careful Obedience to it, as that which was most profitable to them, *Mic. 6. 8.*

4. *GOD, as he is Jehovah, is most Holy.* And on this Account all his Commands are so. Holiness is God bound for his own Glory as his last End. And as this Attribute is made nothing in all his Works of Providence, (*Psal. 145. 17.*) so he hath displayed it in his Law. Hence that belongs to its Encomium, *Psal. 119. 8, 9. The Statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure enlightning the eyes: The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.* And, *Rom. 7. 12.* The whole therefore is calculated for the direction of the reasonable Creature in the best way wherein it may glorify him: the Consideration whereof must needs be of great Force, to oblige such as know and believe that they were made for the Glory of God.

5. *GOD, as Jehovah is Just.* His essential Justice is the rectitude of his Nature; from whence it follows, that he can do nothing

but what is right in his Administrations, *Psal. 145. 17. The Lord is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.* And hence though his Laws are Acts of Sovereignty, yet they are all very Just. For such is his Nature that he cannot will any thing but what is Just, and nothing more is requisite to vindicate the Equity of his Commands, but to consider, that they are willed by him. Now Justice is either commutative or distributive. As to that which is commutative, there is no room for that between him and the Creature. According to that challenge, *Rom. 11. 26. Or whom hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again.* Distributive consists in administering Rewards and Punishments to Men according to the Sanctions of the Law; and because he is Just, he will unfailingly thus do to Men, according as they are found, *Rom. 2. 6.* And this must needs be a powerful Motive to Obedience.

6. *GOD, as Jehovah, is Omniscient.* And this carries matter of great Awe in it, to make us very careful of keeping his Commandments; because on account of this, none can escape his righteous Judgments; in this regard, none of our Actions can be hidden from him; he cannot be mistaken or imposed on. Hence that, *Heb. 4. 13. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked, and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.* Especially when we consider, that he improves this Omniscience of his, in a curious Observation of all the Actions and Courses of Men. According to his acknowledgment, *Job 31. 4. Doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps? And 1 Sam. 2. 3. The Lord is a God of knowledge, and by him all ones are weighed.* And still more, when we add to think, that he sees and observes our very Hearts and Thoughts, and all the secret movings of them, and not one of them escapes him, *Psal. 139. 2, 3, 4.* And he is a Judge of all these, *Jer. 17. 10. I the Lord search the heart, I try the reins, even to give to every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.*

7. *AS Jehovah, he is Omnipotent.* And this added to the former, gives them yet the greater force. He is not only Holy and Righteous, and so hath a Will to remunerate Men according to their Actions, and All-seeing, and so cannot be ignorant of, or mistaken about them, but he is also able to recompence Men, nor can he be impeded in the Execution of his Law. He is able to protect his Servants that obey him, against all that would harm them; and he is able to punish all that disobey him; and there are no created Powers that can rescue them out of his Hand. Hence that warning given, *Psal. 50. 22. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.* And that advice, *Mat. 10. 28. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.* And when all these

things are put together, it will appear to be our greatest Wisdom to obey him, and the greatest folly and madness to provoke him.

II. *HE adviseth them what he is to his own People, who are related to him in the Covenant of Grace; Thy God.* This word, *thy*, is a term of approbation, and when God assumes it to himself in respect to Men, it is to express and intimate Relation between him & them, which refers to some Covenant in which it is made. It cannot be intended of the Relation which is made by Creation, in which he is their Creator, and they are his Creatures; for so he is the God of all Second Beings, which equally derive their Original from him: But it properly points to a Covenant in which he hath taken them to be his People, and engaged himself to be their God. Thus it is express'd, *Exod. 6. 7. And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God.* And if it be here enquired, from what Covenant God fetcheth this Argument; whether it lead us back to the Covenant of Works, or calls us to the consideration of the Covenant of Grace? I answer, The moral Law was first given to Man, immediately upon his Creation, and then ratified as a Rule of Government in that Covenant which God plighted with Mankind in their first Parents; and there was a forceable engagement laid upon Man, to pay Obedience to God by that Covenant. For, besides that it required of Man no more than what was his natural Duty to his Creator, and he could not without horrible unreasonableness withhold himself from God also endowed him with both ability & disposition for that Obedience, by imprinting his own Image upon him, and made Promise of a glorious Reward in case of his Obedience, and threatened him with a miserable Death if he should disobey. But altho' God thus became his God in Covenant, and would have been his Portion for ever, if he had not revolted from him, yet Man's Apostasy violat'd the bond of Friendship therein made, lost all claim to God as his Inheritance, and instead of being his God, he became his Enemy: Tho' therefore Man's Duty abides, yet there is no encouragement left in that Covenant, nor can he ever by that recover this Title to God again; being totally fallen out from the Promise of it. Hence the Argument here used in this Preface refers to the Covenant of Grace, which God was pleas'd to open to Man upon his failure in the former; and with respect to that People, then immediately concerned, it aimed at the Covenant which God had plighted with *Abraham*, and renewed with *Isaac* and *Jacob*; and hath pleas'd to continue to his Spiritual Israel as an Everlasting Covenant, in the Substance of it, tho' there were some particular & typical Promises made to them. God therefore, when in the Scriptures he speaks to his People of being their God, and assumes that Title to himself, always designs a Covenant which he hath taken some into since *Adam's* Fall; which Fall had cut off

the primitive tenure, that Man held by the first: nor could Man ever more have challenged an interest in God by that. That the Covenant made with *Abraham* was a Covenant of Grace, *Paul* frequently asserts and proves in his Epistles. And God was *Israel's* God, because he was *Abraham's* God. And this is that Covenant which is continued & extended to us Gentiles; who are on that account called *Abraham's* Children, *Gal. 3. 7. Know ye therefore, that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.* *Rom. 4. 16. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed, not to that only which is of the law, but so that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.* Now from this Covenant, there is a mighty inducement to Obedience on all those who are concerned in it. We are here to carry in mind, what hath before been evidenced, viz. That God requires Obedience to the Command under the Covenant of Grace, the Law being a Rule adapted to regulate Man in his serving of God. Now there cannot be greater engagements laid upon Man to this Obedience, than what are exhibited in this Covenant: So far is it from opening a door to Sin, and encouraging Licentiousness, as some would pretend. And this may be considered under two Particulars,

1. *THE wonderful Kindness of God herein appearing, in that he is willing to take fallen Man gain into Covenant with himself.* Certainly, great Kindnesses are great engagements to Gratitude, but never was there a greater heard of than this, nor can we ever sufficiently testify our Thankfulness to him for it. The Breach of the first Covenant was an infinite Provocation, it was unreasonably ingrateful, a rising up in Rebellion against the Lord that made us, a despising his Government, a contempt of his Favour, a conspiracy with his Enemies against his Throne. Man by his Fall was become unprofitable, having lost all his power of Obedience. *Rom. 3. 12. They are all gone out of the way, they are altogether become unprofitable, there is none that doth good, no not one.* His strength was gone, nor could he do any thing but Sin against God, and dishonour him. God stood in no need of him, or his Service. It was his Benignity at first that he would accept and reward any thing of his. He is bettered by nothing that Angels or Men can do in Obedience to him. *Job 35. 6, 7. If thou sinnest, what dost thou against him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what dost thou unto him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand?* And he could have glorified his Justice in his ruin: He need'd not to have been a loser by him: His declarative Glory was secur'd, let things fall which way they would. His Glory and Man's Salvation were not inseparably connected, because Justice will have its triumph Eternally, in those who shall suffer under the execution of the Sentence of Wrath that is denounced for Sin. And that God should look

look upon such a Creature as Man hath made himself by Sin, with such a kind respect as to open a Covenant of Grace with him. Eternity will be too short to celebrate the Gratitude for it. Well may we say as he, Job 7. 17. *What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him? and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?* And what is it wherein we are to testify our Gratitude, but in obeying & serving him; as, Deut. 10. 12. *And now Israel, what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul.* And can we do too much of this? Especially if we add,

2. *THE wonderful Encouragement afforded to new Obedience in this Covenant.* The Old Covenant indeed, affords matter of dread to Sinners, to terrify them from Sin, but it gives no encouragement to Obedience; it discovers no help to it, it offers no reward of Life for it: it maketh known no acceptance of it with God. All these things are out of doors as to that. But in the New Covenant there is all that may serve to animate it. In this is discovered, the way for us to escape the misery fallen upon us by the Curse of the Law, by which we are detained as long as we are under that, Gal. 3. 10. In this is revealed to us the way of Salvation, and it offers us all direction to guide our Feet in the paths of Peace. It not only declares to us that there is Life to be had, but how we may obtain it, and opens to us a Treaty about it. This not only requires faithful Obedience of us, but also provides new Strength for us by which we may be enabled to run the way of God's Commands, *Isai. 45. 24.* This also hath provided for us the acceptance of our sincere, tho' imperfect Obedience, in and through Jesus Christ. It pities our Frailties, it covers our Infirmities, it accepts of our cordial Desires and Endeavours, and assures us, that God will not be strict to mark what is amiss in them, but affords forgiveness to us upon our renewed Repentance, *Psal. 130. 3, 4.* And it secures us a glorious Reward of our meanest Services done for God in uprightness, *Mat. 10. 42.* And can we withstand the force of such Engagements as these are?

III. *HE acquaints them with what be had done for them, or those distinguishing Favours, which he had bestowed on them; Which brought thee out of the Land, &c.* It is taken from the consideration of those Benefits which God had bestowed on them: Which tho' in the Letter of them, they were appropriate to that People, yet in the Spiritual intendment of them, extend to all that stand related to God in the New-Covenant. Here let us observe,

1. *THAT all the Good which God doth for Fallen Man, is an Obligation on him to Obedience.* God owes him none: He hath forfeited all Blessings, and pulled down all Miseries on himself. Hence the common Goodness of God leads Men to Repentance, *Rom. 2. 4. Or*

desp'st thou the richest of his goodness, & forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance. Every Mercy that we receive from God, challengeth our Love to him, and if we do Love him, that will bind us to keep his Commandments. It will therefore be an Article against Sinners, to aggravate their Guilt, that they have abused these Blessings of God. Hence that, in *Act. 14. 17. Nevertheless he left not himself without a witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food & gladness.* *Rom. 1. 21.*

2. *BUT that which is more peculiarly intended in these expressions, is the Spiritual Benefit which God hath provided for his People, in and by the Redemption wrought out for them by Christ; and applied to them by the Holy Spirit.* That outward favour which God shewed to Israel, in freeing them from Egyptian Bondage, was not only a real benefit in itself, and laid them under engagement to serve him, who had so delivered them, but it was also Typical. There was something more shadowed in it, than the Mercy itself. The Egyptian Servitude was a Type of our Spiritual Captivity under Sin and Satan, and the Curse of the Law: And their miraculous rescue from thence was a figure of our Deliverance from Devils, Hell, and Curse. *Moses* was a Type of Christ, who leads his People from all these; who brings them out with a mighty Arm, and carries them through the Wilderness of this World, and gives them safe conduct to, and finally full possession of the Heavenly Canaan. This Argument therefore is levelled for the Children of God, to bring them under special Engagements to glorify God by new Obedience, from the consideration of the great Work of Christ in their Conversion, in which their actual Deliverance was wrought about: And this naturally and necessarily calls them to look back to that Work of Redemption by which way was made for this Delivery, by the Death and Obedience of Christ, which carries the most forcible and commanding engagement of all in it. Yea, there are manifold Threads of which this Cord is made, and by which it is made strong, viz.

1. *THE Consideration of the necessity of our perishing for ever, if Christ had not thus redeemed us.* We were all involved in the Curse, going to endless Perdition: There was no Eye to pity us, nor any Hand in the Creation able to save us; our Redemption had ceased for ever. We must have perished without the least hope, as the fallen Angels do, if He had not stepped in for our relief. Here lies the reason, &c. *Job 33. 24. Then he is gracious unto him, and saith, Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom.*

2. *THE great things which he did and suffered for us, to the end, that he might so redeem us.* Our Redemption was precious, it cost the Son of God, his Blood, his Life, *1 Pet. 1. 18, 19.* He was made a Curse, that the Blessing

Blessing of the New Covenant might derive to us, Gal. 3. 13. And if we would know what this was, let us read and meditate on, 2 Cor. 5. 21. *Isai.* 53. 4, &c. Certainly, there never was such a Love heard of, or could have a parallel with this.

3. **THE** great things which he hath purchased for us by this Redemption. Certainly, the greater the Benefit is, the more potent is the Obligation. Christ did not come to procure for us earthly favours only, which had been little things in comparison, but a Crown and a Kingdom, a Title to Life Eternal, an Inheritance among those that are Sanctified. We are therefore told, Joh. 10. 27, 28. *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me. And I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.*

4. **THE** consideration of the great end of his Redeeming us. It was not only to bring us to Heaven, but that he might have a People that should serve him. We are therefore said to be redeemed from our vain Conversation, 1 Pet. 1. 18. And this design is very frequently recorded in the Word of God. See, *Psal.* 22. 30. *Luk.* 1. 74, 75. *Eph.* 5. 26, 27. *Tit.* 2. 14. So that we can in no other way answer the end of our being so ransom'd. The Apostle therefore so argues, 1 Cor. 6. 19, 20. *What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

5. **IF** we consider, that our dying Saviour, left

this as a thing that he required to be a pledge or token of our Love to him, for all the Love which he hath shewn to us, in doing and dying for us. This therefore is put into his last Charge given to his Disciples when he was about to leave them, Joh. 14. 15. If ye love me, keep my commandments.

USE. I. LEARN hence, how much their Sin is aggravated who live under the Dispensation of the Covenant of Grace. Because these break the strongest bonds of Love. Well might our Saviour say, as in, Joh. 15. 22. *If I had not come, and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloak for their sin.* How directly then do they contradict the design of the New Covenant, who say, let us Sin, that Grace may abound?

USE. II. LET this then instruct us, with what Arguments to quicken our selves to Duty, and to resist the Temptations to Sin. If we think to fetch them from the Covenant of Works, we delude our selves. There is no Promise there to relieve us; there is no Threatning there kindly to excite us, since the Menaces of that, tend directly to drive us to despair. But if we would be faithful to God; and cheerfully serve him in new Obedience, let us secure an Interest in the New Covenant, and in God through it: And then let us be ever entertaining our Thoughts with the stupendous Benefits that we are made Owners of by it: Which will make the hardest Duty easy, and the most Self-denying Service for him delectable unto us.

[M A Y 6. 1701.]

S E R M O N C L I V.