

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

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

**W**HICH is the First Commandment ?

A N S W E R .

THE First Commandment is, *Thou shalt have no other Gods before Me.*

**I**T hath been formerly observed, that besides the Distribution given of the Moral Law into Ten Commands, unto which, as to so many several and distinct Heads, all moral Duties are to be reduced ; this Law was also written upon Two Tables, which leads us to a more narrow Distribution of these Duties, pointed to by God himself, in his so writing of them, And this also was taken notice of, to direct us to the next and immediate Objects of that Love which is required in the Law, and is to influence our whole Obedience to it, viz. God and our Neighbour ; which our Saviour Christ manifestly directs us to, in *Mat. 22. 37, 38.* So that by the Consideration of the mat-

ter contained in these Precepts, we are led by the hand to conclude, that the Four First of these did constitute the First Table, and the Six latter the Second. As to the *Popish* and *Lutheran* Distribution, allowing but Three to the First Table, putting the First & Second in one, and making Seven in the Second Table, by dividing the Tenth into two, that so they may retain the number of Ten, the vanity and sinfulness of this will appear, in the after Consideration of them. The former of these Tables prescribes to us the Duties of Worship to God, and the latter those of Charity to our Neighbour ; and each of these Precepts contains a distinct Topick under it ; as also may be made manifest.

NOW, in as much as God, is himself the best Object, and also the last End of all our Obedience, even of our Love to our Neighbour, whom we cannot Love aright, unless it be in order to God, and for his sake. It is therefore fitting that those Commands which respect the Worship of God, should occupy the first Place, and constitute the First Table. Which Worship also comes under diverse Considerations,

Considerations, and accordingly affords matter for distinct Commands: Which God hath seen meet to rank under Four Heads; which we are to take a distinct Account of. The Logical Distribution of these is variously assigned by Divines, which I shall not here Inquire into, but may take up with one; which may help us in assigning to each of these its proper Subject.

IN the Worship of God then, there are two things to be observed, viz. the kinds of it, which are directed to in the First & Second Command: And the manner of performing it, which is regulated in the Third & Fourth. As to the kinds of Worship they are two, viz. Natural and Instituted; the one of which flows, and is to be argued from the very Being and Nature of God, and directed according to that Nature of his: The other depends on Revelation, and is regulated by positive Precepts. And accordingly, the one is perpetual and unchangeable, the other variable, and hath admitted of divers Changes since the beginning. The former lyeth in common, as a Duty incumbent on all Mankind; the other becomes a Duty only to such to whom God is pleased to make it known. The former of these is the thing aimed at in the First Command, the latter in the Second. And to make but one Command of these two, is to confound things together, that ought to be separated in our Consideration. And the shuffling of them together by some, was the better to hide their Idolatrous Worshipping of Pictures and Images. Natural Worship, here properly challengeth the first Place, because that which is Instituted depends upon it, and is argued and enforced from it. And indeed, this Natural Worship of God, hath in it the Foundation of all Obedience, and gives force to every Command in both Tables; and therefore upon the account of its universal Influence, it most Methodically comes here to be considered.

AND before we proceed further, let this be in general observed, that every Command is both Directive and Cautionary; it is both a Rule to direct unto Duty, and a Hedge to keep us within the compass of Duty, that we may not transgress. Hence, as we before took notice, there is in every Precept something Required, & something Prohibited; something Affirmative, and something Negative. And it is very useful, in laying open the Rules of Religion, which are more peculiarly Practicall, to point out the Sands and Shelves, as well as the Land-marks: To shew Men, as what they ought to do, so what they ought to avoid. And because the primary End of every Command; is Directive, the Affirmative, or what is to be done, is first to be considered. Which leads us to,

#### QUESTION XLVI.

*WHAT is required in the First Commandment?*

#### A N S W E R.

THE First Commandment requireth us to know and acknowledge the only true God to be our God, and to Worship and Glorify him accordingly.

THIS is that which we call *Natural Worship*. And there are two Reasons for which more especially it may be called *Natural*, viz.

1. *BECAUSE the Natural Relation which there is between God and Man, plainly dictate it to us.* There are such Relations between God and the Reasonable Creatures, as speak it Man's indispensable Duty to Worship him after such a manner. As he is a Creature, he must needs owe all that he is and hath to the Service of God his Creator; for if God be the first Cause, he must be the last End of the Second Beings. This therefore is pressed as an Argument to invite all to serve him, Psal. 100. 3. *Know ye that the Lord he is God, it is he that hath made us, and not we our selves; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.* As he is the Preserver of their Beings so made, and they owe the continuance of their Being, and all the Supplies which render it comfortable to them, to his Conservation, so they can owe their Service to no other but him; and it must needs be due to him. Hence that, Psal. 66. 8, 9. *O biefs our God ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard. Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved.* As he is the Lord and Governour of all his Creatures, and this his Right is founded in the former, so they must needs owe Subjection to him: And as Reasonable Creatures are in Subjection to his special Government, so they owe him a Reasonable Service, Rom. 12. 1. *I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.* In which they are to pay to him all the tribute of Glorifying him, in all his declared Perfections, in which this Worship is concerned; as will appear in the Sequel. Hence God himself so argues, Mal. 1. 6. *A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master: if then I be a father, where is mine honour? and if I be a master, where is my fear?*

2. *BECAUSE the Light of Nature clearly teacheth Man this Worship.* That reason which God put into the Nature of Man at first, and which goes into his Definition, viz. that he is a Reasonable Creature, instructs him in this Duty, and all the Parts of it. This carries Conviction in it, both that there is a God, and that he is the Creator and Governour of all things; and therefore to be Worshipped. And this leaves all Men inexcusable, when they deny or with-hold from him this Worship, Rom. 1. 19, 20. And tho' Man's Apostasy hath greatly beclouded his Reason, and the exercise of it upon this account, yet those

Principles are rooted in him, and cannot be totally obliterated. This therefore is said to leave all Men without excuse, *Rom. 1. 21.*

NOW our Catechism sums up all *Natural Worship* under three Heads, viz. 1. *To Know God.* 2. *To Acknowledge him the only True God to be Our God.* 3. *To Worship and Glorify him accordingly.* In which we have both the Worship it self, and the Ground of it laid open to our Consideration. A brief distill'd & Explication of which may here suffice.

I. *THIS Command requires us to Know God.* And here is laid the Foundation of our right Worshipping of him as such. The Psalmist refers all true Worship hither, *Psal 9. 10. And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee.* For except we know him, it is impossible that we should Worship him. The Apostle taxes the *Athenians* with Superstition in this regard, *Acts 17. 22, 23.* The Understanding, Will, Affections, and the whole Man are to be employed in Natural Worship; for we owe our all to God, and are to glorify him with all, *1 Cor. 6. 20.* And tho' the Word *Know*, be sometimes used in a more lax sense, to comprehend all, yet here I shall look upon it as restrained to the Understanding, which must necessarily be employed in all true Worship, *Psal. 47. 7. God is the King of all the earth, sing ye praises with understanding.* Now in this Knowledge there are two Things comprehended, and requisite for our Obedience to this Precept, viz. 1. *The Assent of the Understanding upon Conviction, to the Truth of a thing.* 2. *The Apprehension in the Understanding by which it understands the Nature of the thing.* For we can know a thing no further than we conceive of the Nature of it. Both these then are to be enquired after, as belonging to the duty of Natural Worship.

1. *WE must know that God is.* The Faith of this is declared to be absolutely needful to our coming to God in the way of Worship, *Heb. 11. 6.* This Principle is the Foundation and Corner Stone of all Religion. The very *Pagan Religion* was grounded on this Conclusion, viz. that if there be a God, there is a Worship due to him: And because they were perwaded of that, they engaged in this. And truly, all Theological Obedience is enforced on Men's Minds by this, that there is a Divine Command for it, that the Precept enjoining of it, derives from the Authority of God himself. Now his Authority cannot be confessed, if his Being be doubted of. These are therefore put together, in *Heb. 11. 6. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.* Atheists must needs be Men of no Religion; they can acknowledge no Rule of Divinity, nor embrace any Theological Principles. Knowing and serving of God must be inseparably connected so far, that without the former, there cannot be the latter. Now the first Principle in Religion must be, that there is a God; to which the Man is to give his

rational Assent: And that must be from such Evidence as commands the credit of the Understanding. For an humane Understanding doth not assent to a thing that is true, merely because it is in it self so, but because it is enlightened to discern the Truth of it; and therefore according to the force of this Evidence in it, proportionable is the Assent, which sometimes only amounts to an Opinion, sometimes to a certainty, which latter is here to be considered. Hence we must fortify our Understandings with all those Arguments, by which this Principle is established in the Hearts and Consciences of Men; and trample upon all those Sophisms that are brought by Men's corrupt Reasonings to enervate them: and the rather because of the addictedness of fallen Man's heart to Atheism, as *Psal. 14. 1. The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God: they are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doth good.*

2. *WE must know who this God is.* And indeed, the former cannot be without this; for these two are so inseparably connected in the notion of them, that the one cannot consist in the humane Understanding without the other. For, to the belief of the Being of a thing, I must needs have some Idea in my mind of the thing believed to be, or else I believe, I know not what, which is ridiculous. And for this reason it is not a little debated among Logicians, in what Order true method requires these Questions to be handled, viz. Whether the thing be; and what the thing is? Nor indeed, can a thing be really proved to be, without the consideration of the Nature and Properties of it. For it is not merely the Name that is inquired about, but the thing indigitated by that Name. For Names are only used to express things. Here let us observe, that a thorough & perfect Knowledge of God, is too big for the grasp of a created Understanding; so Infinite and Incomprehensible is He in his Being & Perfections. Hence that in, *Job 26. 14. Lo, these are part of his ways, but how little a portion is heard of him?* And *Chap 37. 23. Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out.* Yet such a Knowledge of God as he hath been pleased to reveal of himself, in his Word and Works, is to be sought and embraced, by all that would Worship him acceptably. And they that do not thus know him, are declared to be miserable, *2 Thes. 1. 9.* For Men to profess themselves to believe that there is a God, and withal to take up such Conceptions of him, as are altogether improper to such a Being, is Ignorance, and the root of Idolatry and Atheism. And it is certain, that according to the Opinion that we entertain of God in our Thoughts, such will be the Worship that we offer to him. If we make an Idol of him, we shall treat him as such in all our Services. If we have mean and ignoble Conceptions about his Being and Attributes, our Carriage towards him will be irreverend, and no ways becoming his Majesty. Whereas, when we have suitable Apprehensions

prehension of his Glorious Attributes, this will fill us with an holy awe and reverence of him. Yea, the very reason of our Worshipping him lieth in this Consideration, of what a manner of God he is. Now, it is God in his back parts who is the Object of this Knowledge: Of which we took a distinct Account in the beginning of the Catechism. Summarily, these are made known to us in his Sufficiency, and in his Efficiency, in his Attributes, and in his Works, in which these do shine forth convincingly. We should read his Word with Faith, and eye what a God he exhibits himself there to be. And we should ponder the great Works of Creation and Providence, and read in these Effects what displays are therein made of the Cause of them, and from thence argue our selves into Satisfaction, what a God he must needs be, who is the Author of them. Rom. 1. 20. *For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.* We must thus see, and be able Satisfactorily to prove to our selves, that he is Almighty, Eternal, Infinite, Omnipresent, most Wise, most Holy, most Just, &c. For in these lies the reason of our Worshipping him; and no little part of our Worship consists in our ascribing of these to him. And from this we may conclude, that one great Duty appertaining to this Command, consists in solemn and frequent Meditation of God: That by the Contemplation of his Glory, we may be the more raised to our Devotional Worshipping of him. Hence that, Psal. 104. 34. *My meditation of him shall be sweet: I will be glad in the Lord.* Not are we to rest satisfied in any measures of this Knowledge that we have already obtained, but press industriously after more, till we come to know as we are known.

II. *THIS Command requires us to acknowledge the only True God, to be our God.* The acknowledging a thing, contains something more in it, than the bare knowing of it. This properly refers to the Understanding, and is very needful in order to that; but that reacheth to the Will and Affections and the whole Man. For such is all Obedience. So that the former Knowledge is no farther to be referred to Obedience, than as it helps to this Acknowledgement; for the use of that was to enlighten the whole Man to this Acknowledgement, and this is manifestly contained in the Precept; for the Hebrew is, *there shall not be to thee other Gods.* Whereas such Acknowledgement is essential to our having him a God to us. For the more distinct laying open of this, we may consider both the Nature of this Acknowledgement, and the Things to be acknowledged.

1. *TOUCHING the Nature of this Acknowledgement:* There are Three Things contained in it, or there are Three ways in which God is to be acknowledged by us.

1. *WE are to acknowledge him in our Hearts.*

This is the first and principal, and without it, any other is but vain and Hypocritical. This therefore is the great thing which God requires of us, Prov. 23. 26. *My son give me thine Heart, and let thine eyes observe my ways.* And indeed, this cordial Acknowledgment of him, is the root and spring of all true Obedience. This is the first Qualification of our Divine Love, Mat. 22. 37. Thus the Psalmist engageth, Psal. 9. 1. *I will praise thee, O Lord, with my whole heart.* And this principally points to the Will and Affections, which are to be employed in it; when these are entirely set upon God: Which how it is to be done will afterwards be considered,

2. *WE are to acknowledge him with our Tongues.* Though our Acknowledgement must begin at the Heart, yet it must not rest there, but proceed further. The Heart and the Tongue must go together in this Affair; Rom. 10. 10. We are not to be ashamed of our God, or suppress our Religion, but to make open Confession of him, and his Service. This was one main end for which Man's Tongue was given him; and for that reason is David supposed to call it his glory, which he calls upon to its Works, when he had gotten his Heart fixed, Psal. 57. 7. 8. And if the Heart be right, the Tongue will follow. Psal. 45. 1.

3. *WE are to acknowledge him in our whole Lives.* There is a practical, as well as an Heart and Lip Acknowledgement due to God, by which we are to prove the Sincerity of the former. And this is when we live as becomes those, who profess themselves to be the Servants of this God. When we are holy as he is, 1 Pet. 1. 15, 16. By this we shew forth his Praises or Vertues, Chap. 2. 9. And there must be all these three going together to make up a thorough and compleat Acknowledgement of God, according to this Precept,

2. *AS to the Things that are to be acknowledged:* They may be reduced to Three Particulars,

1. *WE must acknowledge but One God.* And this is a main Article belonging to this Command; for in it God challengeth of us that we own him to be God and no other. The Unity of the Deity, is one differencing Note between the true and false Religion, as 1 Cor. 8. 5, 6. *For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many and lords many.) But to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him, and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.* We are required to have but one ultimate Object of our religious Worship, in whom it is to terminate, Deut. 6. 4. There can be but one first Cause, and so but one last End, and consequently, we cannot lawfully pay Divine Honour to any more than one. To confess a plurality of Deities is to dishonour that One God by taking from his Glory, and giving it elsewhere; which he hath told us he will not bear, Isai. 42. 8. And our Saviour hath assured

us, Mat. 6. 24. *No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one & love the other; or else he will hold to the one & despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.* For, though there is a Plurality of Divine Persons in the Godhead, to whom Divine Honour is due, yet are they not diverse and distinct Beings, but One. 1 Joh. 5. 7. *For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the holy Ghost: and these three are one.* And so the Worship that is paid to each of them, must terminate in that One undivided Being, Mat. 4. 10. We must acknowledge, that there is no Being like to him, nor to be compared with him, but that his Being and Perfections do surpass all other; Psal. 86. 8. and 89. 6. Exod. 15. 11. On this Account, we are to ascribe the Divine incommunicable Attributes, to no other but to him, and those that are called communicable, must be ascribed to him, after another and more transcendent manner than to any other. There are some Attributes which so belong to him, as in no respect to agree with any second Being; such is the Name Jehovah, which is therefore no where in Scripture predicated of any second Being. *Isai. 41. 8.* And such are all those Attributes which appear from his Being, considered as the most absolute first Being, as Infinity, Eternity, Omnipresence, &c. There are other Perfections which are in him eminently, and are to be found by way of Analogy in the Creature, and we must be sure to make an immense Difference between these considered as in him, and as in other Beings. Holiness, Wisdom, Goodness, &c. are in their measure to be found and acknowledged in some of his Creatures, but they infinitely differ as they are in him, and in them. They are but Rays and Faint Beams that are in them, but he is the Fountain of them. They can be ascribed to the Creature but in the Concrete, whereas they belong to him in the Abstract. There is Goodness in the Creature; and yet our Saviour saith, Mat. 19. 17. *There is none good but one, that is God.* For he is Goodness itself. The Wisdom of the Creature is but a Drop, but his is an Ocean, *Prov. 8. 14.* And so of the rest. To ascribe therefore any of these to any other abstractively, is a complemental Blasphemy.

2. *WE must acknowledge the True God.* We must be sure that we pay our Acknowledgement to no other. It is not enough that we restrain our Judgment to one, and maintain that he who is God can be but one, but we must take heed that we be not mistaken in this one; for if we confess but one, yet if this be any other besides Jehovah, it is as truly a Breach of this Command, as if we pleaded for many. The first Command is mainly concerned about the Object of Worship, and it is of infinite Concern that we be right here. The Nature of Worship is, to testify our Dependance entire upon the Object, for all good and Blessedness; and there is none but he who is God, can be such to us.

Though there is but One true God, yet there are many that are called Gods, 1 Cor. 8. 5. And it is of infinite moment that we do not mistake one of these for the true God. And that we be not misguided here, it concerns us, not only to entertain a general Notion of a God, but be sure that all the Properties and Perfections of a Deity be in him whom we adore. Paul could say, 2 Tim. 1. 12. *For the which cause, I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.* And let us be able to say after him, or with the Church, *Psal. 48. ult.* *For this God is our God for ever and ever, he will be our guide even unto death.* We must not frame to our selves an Idea of a God suited to our own carnal imaginations, and ascribe to him only such Properties as please us, but be able to say that he is Incomparable, and challenge all the Idol Worshipers in the World; and say as the Church, *Deut. 32. 31.* *For their rock is not as our Rock, even our enemies themselves being judges.* Thus the Psalmist, *Psal. 115. 3, 4, &c.* For this end, we must take a strict account of our selves, what manner of God it is whom we have chosen to be to us for a God: That he is Infinite and Eternal in Being, Almighty in Power; a God Omnipresent, and Omniscient; Glorious in Holiness and Justice; who loves Righteousness, and will Reward it, hates Iniquity, and punisheth it: The God who made Heaven, Earth and Seas; who giveth unto all Life and Breath, and all things; Infinitely Wise, and Good; before whom all the Nations are as the light dust in the Ballance, and are counted by him as nothing, and less than nothing and vanity: A sufficient Portion to all that trust in him; and Everlasting Burnings to his Adversaries: This God, and no other, must be acknowledged by us, in Obedience to this Command.

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## SERMON CLV.