

Dear Friends,

Exodus 20: 1-6

"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt out of the house of slavery". The commandments do not start with a command. They start by reminding the people of God's goodness, of God's intention to work for their well-being. When we, each year, renew our covenant with God, we are reminded that the commitment we make is a response. What comes before and leads to the response is "God's readiness to enfold us in generous love, not dependant upon our deserving". The foundation of our commitment to God is God's commitment to us. "We love because God first loved us".

Once this groundwork is in place, we are ready to hear the commandments. The first four concern our duty to God. The first three are thou shalt nots. They are ways of showing disrespect to God which are to be rejected. Then the fourth is a thou shalt, a way of honouring God which is to be embraced.

1. You shall have no other gods beside me.

This is aimed at those who are tempted to worship other gods in addition to God. It does not deny the existence of other gods, but it does demand that you don't turn to them.

2. You shall not make for yourself an idol ... you shall not bow down to them or worship them.

Both of these first two call us to let God alone be God. Don't make of anything else a God. Don't give anyone or anything else mastery over you.

We are told why we should not do that. It says, "For I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me.".

The idea is that when we reject God, we also reject God's ways. We turn from good to evil. This has consequences. It does sound unfair that my children should suffer for what I have done? But it is the reality. Wrong doing spreads out, like ripples on a pond. One person's choice has an effect on the lives of many. This thought is intended to stop someone from allowing their life to take the wrong path. They are being warned that they could spend the rest of their days regretting it. They could find themselves watching as the consequences of their actions are played out in the lives of their children, their grand children and their great grand-children.

There is however another side. The quote continues with God saying, I show "steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments". The ripples of evil may spread out, but the ripples of good spread out further and for longer. When you get it right, your positive actions multiply a thousandfold. So, choose well how you live and spend your days.

God bless you,

Tony