

The Second Commandment Deut. 12:29-32; Heb. 12:25-29

by Rev. Tom Aicken

There are 2 ideas of freedom which many people, including Christians, often get confused. The one idea of being free is being able to do whatever one wants to do, and, in worship, being free to worship God according to any practice he likes, as long as God has not specifically forbidden it. The other idea of freedom, fully in line with the Bible, is being free from the bondage of sin – being free to do what God Himself wants, in other words – and, in worship, being free to do what God has prescribed, even delighting in that because this is what pleases Him.

Consider Deut. 12:29-32. Israel is here given instruction, not about WHOM to worship as we saw in the 1st commandment, but about HOW to worship, which is the substance of the 2nd commandment, Ex 20:4-6. “Whatever I command you,” the Lord tells us, “you shall not add to it nor take away from it.” That’s what He wants, what He delights in, and that only will He accept.

Today, people tell us, our worship is supposed to be seeker-friendly. This is to draw people, to attract the unchurched and bring them out to our services. This doesn’t demand any personal commitment of anyone, or even any serious thought. It’s not meant to enlighten and amaze but to entertain and amuse. But this is the wrong emphasis because it focuses on men rather than on God, and because it fails to give them what they most need to hear.

Consider, too, Jer. 7:30,31. The children of Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord. They burned their sons and daughters in the fire. We aren’t told that it was evil because it was a wicked thing to do – though, indeed, it was! – but because the Lord had not commanded it. Someone says, “Oh, that’s just the Old Testament. What about the New Testament? Surely, God has relaxed His standards in worship for us today!” Well, let’s consider that under 3 headings:

Sincerity. Both in Is. 29 and John 4, the Lord demands that we worship Him in spirit, that is, sincerely and genuinely. In Acts 5, Ananias and Saphira were put to death for lying to the Holy Spirit in regard to their offering, which is a specific element of worship. Right at the beginning of the New Testament Church, then, God demonstrates to us very graphically that sincerity in worship is just as important now as ever before.

Substance. Again, both in Is. 29 and John 4, the Lord demands that we worship Him in truth, that is, according to His own Word of truth, the Bible. In 1 Cor. 11, the church in Corinth observed the Lord’s Supper, but in a way that was not prescribed, and, as a result, many of them became sick and even died.

Reverence. Both in Deut. 4 and Heb. 12, we are told that the Lord is a consuming fire, that to serve and worship Him acceptably we must do so with reverence and godly fear. Again, this is New Testament as much as it is Old Testament. In fact, reverence is the missing jewel in worship today, and, until we see the need to love and fear the Lord more than we do now, we will probably see little or no movement in the churches to our going back as in the Reformation to worship God as He has commanded. Oh, but let us pray for such a day!