

Thoughts about the first commandment

As we read about the first 300 years of the church, we realize that the believers paid a high price and suffered a lot. Many Christians became Martyrs. As Jesus was tempted in the desert the enemy required from him that he would bow down and worship him (Matthew 4, 1-11).

Jesus answered with a word from the scripture as He said: ***“Away with you, Satan! For you shall worship the Lord your God and Him only you shall serve”***(Matthew 4, 10).

The issue of worshipping the Roman Caesar was a great test for the young body of Christ. According to the tradition, the first disciples had to go through the baptism of suffering and only a few died at normal age. The first centuries of church history are very interesting and therefore, I would like to share some information about this time. The local persecution of the Christians took place from the year 64 until 250 after Christ. But the common and much greater oppression of the Roman Caesar started with Caesar Decius in the year 249 and finished in the year 311 with Caesar Galerius. Every Roman citizen was requested to bring incense before the picture of the Caesar. Many left the faith in Yeshua and were called “Lapsi”, because of fear and weakness. They offered incense or found another way to get a paper that confirmed their offerings for the Cesar. But the number of those who remained faithful was also great. They endured and lost their property; they had been sent to do forced labour, were tortured or became martyrs. Especially the bishops were persecuted so that the church would have no leaders. Decius died in the battle with the Goths and Caesar Valerian (253-260) continued the persecution. After he died there was a break of persecution for forty years and some wonderful church buildings have been raised.

But the greatest test was still ahead under Caesar Diocletian, who began his reign in the year 264. In the year 303 he destroyed many churches, burned the bibles and like Decius, he too forced the citizens to offer a common sacrifice for the Caesar. If someone did not take part in it, torture and execution was his future. After Diocletian, persecution continued under Galerius in the same way until the year 311. In the time of Diocletian there was a captain with the name Marcellus. On the birthday of the Caesar the whole legion was invited for a great meal. During the feast everyone was supposed to bring an offering for the Caesar. A huge picture had been installed and sacrificial fire was burning in front of it. Everyone stepped forward and threw some pieces of incense into the fire. Captain Marcellus had put his weapons down and said: "I serve and offer sacrifices only to the king of heaven, Jesus Christ! If soldiers are required to give godly honour to the Caesar then I cannot continue to serve in the army and I lay down my arms and my belt. As they questioned and confronted him, he answered: I am a Christian and I am not allowed to give godly honour and worship to any Caesar. Godly honour and worship belong only to God and to his son, Jesus Christ. On the 28th of October 298 the Centurion Officer Marcellus was beheaded and killed. (From the book of Church History Kolder-Koch)

If we think about the time of National Socialism it came also exactly against the first commandment. Hitler thought about himself, that he was a messiah and redeemer for the German people and the whole world. Therefore, he demanded that the people to greet him, recognize him and worshiped him. Whoever was not willing to say "Heil Hitler" (salvation comes from Hitler) would be persecuted or killed. Sadly, the Church did not point out in the strongest terms that this greeting is against the first commandment, and therefore, it is impossible for a Christian to use it. Also, in the Islamic fundamentalist movement there are some leaders who claimed for themselves to be the 12th Imam or at least to be the ones who are preparing his way. If we do not learn from history we are not prepared for the future. Fear of men and the danger of pleasing men instead of God is still a problem in the church. If our discernment is not

deeply connected to the good shepherd, Yeshua, we are in danger of failing. In the book of Revelation, we see that everything will be related to the question: whom do we worship?

Revelation 7, 9-12: *“After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one can number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” All the angels stood around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures, and fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: “Thanksgiving and honour and power and might, be to our god forever and ever. Amen”.*

In the book of Revelation, we find many verses about the issue of worshipping God like: Rev.4,10; Rev. 5,14; Rev. 7,11; Rev.11,15; Rev.14,7; Rev. 15,4; Rev. 19,4; Rev. 19,10; Rev. 20,4; Rev. 22,9.

Many people will worship the beast and the dragon. Revelation 13, 4-6+8 tells us:

“So, they worshiped the dragon who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast saying, “who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?” And he was given a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was given authority to continue for forty-two months. Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle and those who dwell in heaven. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”.

Other verses that prefigure negative worship are in the book of Revelation 29,13,12-15; 14,9-11; 19,20. If we despise the first commandment, we are opening the door and will also fail as it comes to the other commandments of God. I believe we need a restoration of the fear of the Lord, and the grace of God, to overcome all the fear of men and pleasing of men, so that our Lord Yeshua will receive all glory and honour. It is possible that Europe will slowly become a Moslem continent and many will convert to Islam in order to save their lives or to receive

certain benefits. It is unthinkable, and totally out of question that the Jewish people would convert to Moslem faith.

Even the Moslem leaders recognize this reality and therefore they have only one desire: to wipe out the Jewish people, and the Jewish state in the Middle East. We could ask ourselves why we cannot expect the same determination and faithfulness as we see in the Jewish people, from so-called Christian countries?

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