

# God on the True God

*The Ten Commandments*

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When I officiate a wedding ceremony, I ask the couple reciprocal questions before they exchange their vows to each other, exchange their rings and give the delightful kiss to each other. I ask them this, it's a traditional vow, it's what I now ask in every wedding. I ask them, "Do you pledge to love and comfort her," speaking to the husband. "Do you pledge to love and comfort her, honor, forgive and keep her in sickness and in health, and," here's the important part for this morning, "and forsaking all others to keep yourself only to her so long as you both shall live?" And there's this idea of exclusivity in marriage, there is this idea of complete and total devotion to one person alone that constitutes God's institution of marriage, and that commitment is made at the start, it is made publicly in the presence of God, and then there is a lifetime of living that commitment of exclusivity out to each other.

Physical and emotional exclusivity is central to biblical marriage and that is the best way I know how to lead you into our study that we are now beginning today of the 10 Commandments. We've done some introduction messages, several of them actually over the past two or three months, but now we enter into the commands themselves and that emphasis on exclusivity that we understand on a human level, whatever failures we may have made in living it out, we understand the principle, that principle of exclusive devotion to a spouse now becomes the illustration that helps us to understand something infinitely greater which is the exclusive devotion that the God of the Bible demands from every one of you to himself. We begin our momentous study of the 10 Commandments today and from the very start of them, we find that God demands exclusive worship from men and women, boys and girls, all the time without exception. High level exclusivity to God alone.

Turn in your Bibles to Exodus 20. I'm going to read verses 1 through 3. I'm very excited to have the opportunity to open this portion of God's word. I dreamed about preaching it this morning. I woke up tired as a result of that. But now it's the real deal. This is not a dream. This is reality and we see what the real and living God requires from real and living people, all men everywhere without exception, at all times. Beginning in chapter 20, verse 1,

1 Then God spoke all these words, saying, 2 "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Verse 3, the first commandment,

3 "You shall have no other gods before Me."

Just as wedding vows frame the life that follows for the couple, this command frames the way that God commands us to relate to him. Everything else in the remaining 10 Commandments, and you could say everything else in the remainder of Scripture, starts from this kind of cornerstone. You can think of it this way, taking perhaps a more familiar phrase from Scripture, a central theme in the Lord's Prayer is this, "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." That phrase comes after Christ taught us to pray, "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be Your name," sanctified be your name, set apart be your name, "Your kingdom come, Your will be done." There is this recognition of the high and sanctified and exclusive place that God holds in the universe. We recognize and honor and adore him for that and then we submit to that as we pray, "Thy will be done as in heaven, so also upon earth," as the original language sequence of the words states.

This is not simply a formal rote prayer that is done on Sundays, beloved, this is the way that God commands us to live and it is all-encompassing. It is all-encompassing and there is a moral aspect to that prayer, "Thy will be done." In essence, if it's prayed sincerely and with any degree of understanding, the prayer is saying this, "God, help me to know and obey Your will." It's not simply saying, "God, do what You want to do in the world." There is also this sense of recognizing that God has a moral will that applies to us, and we come to him and we consciously submit to it.

My friends, the will of God for your life is revealed in his word, and more specifically in a summary fashion the will of God for your life is revealed in the 10 Commandments. Now I realize, I understand that people are far more likely to want to understand the will of God in terms of earthly matters, what job should I take, where should I live, what school should I go to, who should I marry, "God, show me Your will in that." But friends, that stuff is all secondary and tertiary to the primary issue of what God calls us to and what God commands from us. We focus on these things, and somewhat understandably so. It's, you know, what we frame our life around, but these things are all passing. What the eternal God commands from us, first of all, is a vertical exclusive devotion to him and that is shown in the 10 Commandments.

So what the 10 Commandments do overall is that they teach us this principle of submission to the one and only God, a principle, a spirit of obedience to him. And friends, it is not a passing emotional sentiment. It has nothing to do with how you feel about God or how you feel about life. It's so much deeper than that. It's so much more significant than that. What you find as you go into the 10 Commandments and what you find as you study the very first commandment itself, is that you find a total approach to life laid out before you in those brief simple words, "You shall have no other gods before Me."

Think of God in all of his majesty, think of God in his Shekinah glory from heaven, think of God in his power to create the heavens and the earth, think of God in his power when Christ was crucified and the curtain in the temple was split from top to bottom and an earthquake occurred and the whole earth went dark for three hours as our Savior suffered on our behalf, think of God in the glorious way that Christ revealed it in the transfiguration in Matthew 17, and realize that this God of strength and power and majesty comes to us and commands us, the one who made us in our mother's womb says, "I command you to live this way. I command you that you shall have no other gods before Me." It's pretty impressive. As we said a few weeks ago, you may not remember this, but one of the principles of understanding the 10 Commandments is to understand that the entire Bible is the context in which the 10 Commandments are given and that's crucial to understand. What I'm about to say is really really important for everything that follows over the next few months as we go through these. I want to speak to you kindly, I want to speak to you pastorally this morning, but I want to speak to you very earnestly and directly, okay? You read through the 10 Commandments perhaps when you're doing a Bible reading plan or something like that, you read through them rather quickly, and I know what it's like because I've done this myself many many many times. You read through them rather quickly and they just roll off your mind like water rolls off the back of a duck. It doesn't strike you. It doesn't arrest your attention. You just go through and you read it and you say, "Okay, well, you know, I got today's reading done." Well, when that is how the 10 Commandments are read and understood, the whole point is being missed. Trust me, we'll see this as the days go by. As you search the Scriptures, as you read the 10 Commandments and then see what the rest of the Bible says about them in context and in the progress of revelation, something really frightening starts to happen, something earth-shattering and life-changing begins to dawn upon your mind like the sun rising across the horizon and bringing light to the previously dark night. As you search the Scripture and you read and study the 10 Commandments in any kind of depth at all, their majesty and the authority of God starts to rise in your mind and your understanding and it sobers you, and it brings a sense of fear upon your heart to realize the majestic authority with which God addresses the human soul. No longer is God our cosmic vending machine, simply one to get what we want from and then move along. No longer is God like the AAA roadside assistance who comes and helps you in a problem and then moves along and you're free to live your life anyway that you want to and there's no sense of responsibility to the one who had just helped you. No, in the 10 Commandments something entirely different comes up and you see majesty and authority and you see one before whom you must bow. No question about it.

And that's why we're going to take our time with them. It's why we need to take our time with them. We need to do this carefully and to take our time slowly with them so that we would really understand them. Is there any doubt in your mind as you sit there this morning, is there any doubt in your mind that the world has utterly lost any sense of respect and reverence for the 10 Commandments? Is there any doubt in your mind that the law of God has been abandoned as a revelation of his will for mankind? Well, look and understand, then, the vulnerability with which you and I approach this study of all of the 10 Commandments. We're vulnerable because our entire environment, and it's like,

you know, it's like a fish in water, it's hard to get out of the water and to look at it independently and objectively, but our environment has conditioned us to utterly disregard the 10 Commandments and not give any thought to them. God is just a teddy bear that we rub when we want something, he gives it to us and then we go on our happy way. That mindset is utterly foreign to the authority of these commandments, and in taking our time we will start to understand them for what they really are, and I earnestly long for you and others to have these things come to bear upon your mind and upon your conscience in a way that will have certain effects over the course of time that we'll discuss later.

So here's what we're going to do. I want you to have a sense of expectation here and not just guess week by week what is coming. My plan, which is subject to change, is to treat each one of the 10 Commandments in two distinct messages. Ten commandments, 20 messages. Now why would we do it that way? Well, it's because we're dull, it's because we're spiritual sluggards, and I'm including myself in the crowd here. I'm not pointing fingers here, I'm just stating a fact. We're dull. This isn't familiar to us. We've been conditioned not to take it seriously and so we need to take our time like a gentle rain falling on dry ground; you need a prolonged gentle rain to soak into the soil so that it actually does some good rather than just a quick shower that runs off and leaves the ground hardened on the other side. It's a frightening prospect to me, just speaking honestly and directly and personally here. It's a frightening prospect to teach the 10 Commandments and to do it in a way that will actually leave you more hardened against God than when we started, and I am convinced that a rapid approach that's just trying to get through them in a hurry would have that effect on you. So we're going to approach it a little bit differently. We're going to do it the way that I think is best. And so it's going to follow a pattern like this: the first message on the individual commandment will provide a basic biblical interpretation of the commandment, what does it mean, what is it saying, so that we can understand what it is that God is commanding us in any of the individual commandments. Then the second message following usually on the next Sunday, the second message will apply the commandment and help you understand how to obey it and what the issues are in your life, how we apply the commandment, but if we try to do that side-by-side with the interpretation of texts that are unfamiliar, it's all just going to be a garbled mess in your mind and you're going to go on and ignore it, and I'm not willing for that to happen to the extent that I have anything to do with it.

So that's the way that we're going to approach it. Two messages for each commandment. Today is the first message on the first commandment. It's really not too complicated, is it? We're going to find as we read and study the 10 Commandments together, we're going to find something that's strange and foreign to human experience. We're going to find that the 10 Commandments know our souls. The 10 Commandments know your soul. It's like the theologian from decades ago who when he first read a Bible said, "I've just found a book that knows and understands me." Well, the 10 Commandments know and understand you, and so what the result of that is, is that the 10 Commandments, they know our souls and they expose our sin. They humble us. They convince us of the sinfulness of our nature and over time, the goal and what I trust in the Spirit of God will be the effect, not only the goal but the result will be, is that the 10 Commandments are

going to expose and humble our pride. The goal over time is that the 10 Commandments will ultimately lead you more fully to Christ and you will see how necessary and how absolutely essential it was for him to die for sinners because without that no one could possibly be saved. The 10 Commandments instruct us on our own sin and the 10 Commandments instruct us on the utter necessity of the atonement of Jesus Christ at the cross. But it takes time. We don't hurry through this. We can't pop this in a microwave, spend four minutes on it, and then have a nice bag of popcorn come out. It doesn't work that way and so we're going to take our time and we're just going to trust the Lord for the results of that.

So with that introduction, let's read the first commandment again as we begin this momentous study. Exodus 20:3. We dealt with the preface to the 10 Commandments several weeks ago in a separate message and I'm not repeating that here. The first commandment, Exodus 20:3,

3 "You shall have no other gods before Me."

What we're going to do in today's message is answer two simple questions. We're going to answer two simple questions: whom does this commandment address, who is God talking to here, in other words, and secondly, we're going to answer the question what does this commandment require? Who is this commandment talking to and what is it telling us to do? That is the simple goal of today's message.

So let's start answering that first question: whom does this commandment address, or more colloquially if you prefer it, who is this commandment talking to? Well, in answer to that question, let me start here. You cannot tell this in English because the English word "you" is both singular and plural. I could look at one of you individually and say, "You," speaking to Eric, or say, "You," speaking to Lisa. Or we could just use "you" in the plural sense and I could say, "You need to hear what's said today," and I'm referring to everybody in the room and everybody over the live stream and everybody who hears it later. I'm referring to everybody with "you." We use, English uses the word "you" in different ways, singular and plural. Well, in the original language in the Hebrew – oh, this is really, my knees buckle at each step along the way – in the original language in the Hebrew, the "you" is singular. This addresses each person. God isn't simply addressing Israel as a nation and say, "You," as a nation, "shall not have any other gods before Me." He speaks to them individually.

He speaks to them personally and particularly and that has a momentous important effect right now. It's time to forget about the person that is sitting next to you, it's time to forget that you're sitting in a room and just view this that you have a private audience with God here and God is speaking to you and you alone. He's speaking to us as individuals and showing, therefore, that we are individually responsible for this commandment. Regardless of what society is doing around us, regardless of what happened in biblical history, this is what you and I are personally responsible to God for no matter what anybody else does.

My friend, Phil Johnson, put it this way. He said, "This was not a general instruction to the nation to keep every idol but God out of their national pantheon, it was a command to individuals forbidding them ever in any circumstance to set anything or anyone above God or even alongside of God in order of priority." This is a command to individuals. This is a command to you personally and it forbids you from doing something. It tells you what you cannot do, and by implication also what you must do, and it tells you to have a particular sense of priority and affection toward the God of the Bible and him alone, that establishes him as the one and only priority and object of your ultimate affection in life. That is what this command is doing and it addresses you personally and individually to live and have your heart this way.

Now there are some other aspects of grammar that are pretty interesting to me, as my knees continue to buckle, at least in my mind, over the majesty of what we're addressing here. Look at verse 3 with me again. The first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before Me." You shall have no. Friends, this is an emphatic command. It is an emphatic prohibition. It is a negative command. It is a permanent prohibition and what that means is this, what the grammar of this means for you is this, is God is coming and emphatically saying, "Never do this. Don't ever think about doing this. Don't ever do this, not one time." And so already we see from the simple basic grammar of it that it's addressing us personally and it is making a comprehensive demand on every aspect of our life for all of time. "Never do this. Don't stray from the path even once."

We're not used to, here's another aspect of our modern society, we are not used to anyone talking to us this way. Maybe a parent, maybe a boss a little bit but, you know, we don't take it all that seriously. We're certainly not used to the idea of God coming and telling us exactly what we are to do and not to do. We live, and I was alluding to this earlier and I'm probably going to repeat these things more in the days to come, we live in a society where truth is viewed as something sentimental, you know, what do I feel about it. Truth is viewed as something subjective, you know, what I think is true is true and you can think what you think, and there's no such thing as absolute truth. We're used to truth being sentimental and subjective. We're used to it being sensual and by which I mean, things that we see. We live by what we see. And the 10 Commandments, the first commandment comes and violates all of those modern conventions and addresses our minds and addresses our will and says, "This is absolutely the truth. This is absolutely what you must do." And it speaks to us with the very authority of God himself. So just the very nature of the way the command is framed is an assault on the current culture of our age. It's incredible.

Now go back to verse 3 again. I want to keep your eyes deeply in the text here. "You shall have no other gods before Me. No other gods before Me. Before Me," has the idea of before the presence of God, in his presence or in his sight. It's not saying that there is an order of priority where you can have God first and then other things second and third. It's not simply that God is first among your other gods and priorities. No, that's not it at all. What God is saying here is that, "There are no other gods tolerable in My presence. You can't have any." God comes and makes an exclusive demand for exclusive devotion, exclusive worship and he won't tolerate any rivals in his sight.

Now that sounds, you know, again, we're not used to God speaking to us this way. Many of you that have come maybe from seeker-sensitive churches, you know, you're used to the sense that everything's kind of loosey-goosey, you know, and none of this is taken really seriously as shown by the fact that the pastor can joke and laugh in the pulpit, and you get conditioned by that. But the word of God comes, the 10 Commandments come and say it's time to sober up. It's time to get serious about what we are doing here. What God is saying is there are no other gods that are at all tolerable to him and so the idea is this, is that it's talking about something that happens in the face of God, in the presence of God, and immediately, immediately you are confronted with the fact that everything is in the presence of God, isn't it? God is omnipresent. He is everywhere present. He's omniscient. He knows all things. So God is everywhere present and he knows all things and he addresses your heart and says, "You must not have any other gods in My presence."

So think about it this way. God is the Creator and that means that you give him your total and exclusive worship. In Christ, Christ is our Redeemer. You give him your total and exclusive loyalty. Your heart affection, the core reason of your existence, what you live for, what you love, what you worship is God alone. It reminds me of the song that Steve Green, no relation, used to sing, "God and God alone is fit to take the universe's throne." Well, there's a sense of his royal holiness, his royal majesty that informs lyrics like that and what the 10 Commandments are saying is that all of your life, all of your worldview, you view everything through the prism of the glory of God.

Am I saying too much? Am I simply saying this out of, am I making too much out of an Old Testament text? No. No. In different words, in different words the New Testament says exactly the same thing. For example in 1 Corinthians 10:31 it says, "So then whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." This is telling you how to live and how to think about living and what you love and what you give.

Do you know what ultimately underlies this commandment and all of the 10 Commandments? Do you know what ultimately underlies it all, what attribute of God ultimately underlies all of this? It's his holiness. His holiness underlies this commandment. In Exodus 15:11 it says this, "Who is like You among the gods, O LORD? Who is like You, majestic in holiness, Awesome in praises, working wonders?" God is holy and therefore the way that we respond to him, God is high and exalted and set apart, and therefore the attitude, the heart response that we make to him is set apart and our response to him is holy and different from any other thing in the universe. That's the sense of this. God is high, God is lofty, and as a result of that, he tolerates no rivals and he tolerates no rivals in your heart.

Deuteronomy 6:5. We'll look at this passage again in a moment. But Deuteronomy 6:5 says, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." That is the command of God on you this morning. This is what God calls you to be. And because the moral law is universal, it addresses all of us, and because

the commands are personal and singular, it addresses you individually. It address you individually. This is the way that God commands you to live.

I can't speak for you and I'm at the risk of overstating things, this perspective puts all of the other questions about the will of God in their place. What does it matter to know what God's will is for you on where you go to school or where you work or who you marry, what does it matter if that's just a convenience factor for you and the rest of your life is indifferent to loving him and obeying him in this way? What do any of those individual aspects of life matter if the comprehensive nature of the way that you live life doesn't even take this into account? What's the purpose? Why are we playing such games if the holy God says, "You set Me apart in your affections and don't let anything ever interfere with it one time." You can see how petty and superficial our lives are.

Let me simplify it this way. The Lord God, the God of the Bible, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, as we'll see at the end of the message, Christ himself insists, commands, requires you to give him the place of highest priority in your heart. The highest, deepest love that you have for anything is reserved for God and God alone. This is what God says he requires and anyone who tells you anything different or to the extent that you resist and buck against that, we're just showing how easily we just manufacture idols in our heart and just make God whatever we want him to be so he's convenient for us. We don't get to do that, beloved. God is the Creator. God is our Maker. He's the one who made us in our mother's womb. God is the one who say, "I am God and this is what I require." What you think about it is irrelevant. What you think about it is irrelevant in the sense that it doesn't change anything. You can kick and scream and resist it and someone could walk out and be angry about it, raise, you know, theological objections against it, but in the end when the whole tantrum has been spent, you come back and it still says the same thing, "You shall have no other gods before Me." God means business. God is serious about his own character. God is serious about worship.

And so as with the wedding idea with which we started, now we drop the illustration for the sake of the spiritual reality. God comes to you and he commands you to forsake all others and keep yourself only to him as long as you shall live. The wedding, the marriage is just an illustration of a greater spiritual point. That's the way the Bible treats it. As important as marriage is, as wonderful as it is, as wonderful as those early days of love are, it's all just a picture, God's given it to us to illustrate what it means to belong to Christ, Ephesians 5, clear and simple and direct as it could possibly be. And so the commandment is addressing you in that way, addressing the totality of your life.

Question 2: what does this commandment require? What does this commandment require from us? Well, I've kind of been answering that question all along but we'll treat it separately. Beloved, God requires you to respond to him from the innermost part of your being. You respond to him with a high love, with a separate love that is given only to him, a unique love that belongs only to him. And when you understand, when you think it all rightly about his holiness, you see that it could be no other way. It could be no other way. God is holy. There is no one like him in the universe. He is high and lofty and majestic in his praises. Well, a God like that obviously requires and is due a love that is



unlike any other in your heart and life. If God is unlike any other, then the response that we give to him is unlike the response that we give to any other.

So you think about the one that you love most in your life, your spouse, a child, whoever it may be, you think about what you most love on earth, your job, your hobbies, whatever it is, you think about and you process all of those and understand, "As much as I love her, as much as I love him, as much as I love this, there is in my heart a transcendent love, a greater love for God, for Christ, that nothing can compete with." That's what God requires. And we'll work through the implications of that from the general to the specific.

Let's go back to Exodus 20. In verse 2 he says, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." He's applying it there in verse 2 to the immediate audience of Moses in the day. We've shown in many messages past why this applies to all of us. The immediate context is the exodus from Egypt. The people of Israel had just been led out of slavery after 400 years of slavery in Egypt. God had miraculously led them out under the leadership of Moses. He had performed 10 awesome miracles to judge Egypt and to judge their gods and delivered the people and brought them out and made them separate from where they had previously been. God had just defeated the gods of Egypt in the early part of Exodus. Subsequent to that, he delivered his people through the Red Sea. They had seen his miraculous work and they had just miraculously walked through a sea on dry land. Wall of water on the left, wall of water on the right, and they're walking through, this is contrary to nature. It was a supernatural deliverance that God had given to them and so they immediately saw that God was unique, in their personal experience they saw how different he was. No one does this. No one walks through water on dry land. No one does that. But they had just done it.

So God comes to them here in verse 2 and with astonishing understatement says, "I am Yahweh your God. I brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." Therefore, first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before Me." How could there even be a thought of anything else? Of course that's right. Of course that's the command. Not only is God unique in his essence, he had just done unique things in their national life that compels this conclusion.

Think of a husband, a loving husband who finds a young woman, perhaps having gone through difficult times. She's kind of broken, kind of shattered. She's emotionally hurt by what's happened to her in the past and a loving husband comes and sets his love upon her and says, "I will care for you for the rest of my life and you will be the object of my affection and I will love you." Well, that's sweet and emotional and right. Don't you see that her response to that should be, "Well, then I'm going to respond to you with giving you my exclusive love as well. You've loved me and cared for me. I'm going to respond to you with an exclusive devotion. As far as I'm concerned, every other man in the world is dead to me. There is no other. It's you, babe." Well, multiply that by infinity and understand that this is what the Lord is saying. He set his love on this unworthy undeserving people. He calls them out, he delivers them, and now by right of creation and by right of redemption he says, "You shall have no other gods before Me. I have saved you. You shall worship no other." I mean, this is just morally right. This is the way things

should be and this is the way that things are. Now that they know this God, now that they have been delivered by him, here's what they are to do: they are to acknowledge him and serve him.

Go to the book of Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy 5. You'll recall, I hope, that in Deuteronomy 5 you find a parallel account of the 10 Commandments as Moses is summarizing things for the people of Israel before they enter the Promised Land, and as part of that he repeats the 10 Commandments to them in Deuteronomy 5 so that in Deuteronomy 5:6 you see this, "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." First commandment, "You shall have no other gods before Me." Now in the verses that follow, in the immediately following context, Moses gives them explanation of what that means. He helps them understand the implications of that commandment so that, we read it earlier but now I want you to turn in your Bible to Deuteronomy 6 and see this with your own eyes, see this with your own eyes. Deuteronomy 6, verse 3, let's say, he says, "O Israel," Deuteronomy 6:3, "O Israel, you should listen and be careful to do it, that it may be well with you and that you may multiply greatly, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you, in a land flowing with milk and honey. Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!" There is no other. "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up." This is a way of life. Every waking moment is engaged with this in one way or another, Moses tells them, and you do this not in a halfhearted way, not in a sleepy way, not in an indifferent way, not part time, not just on the Sabbath, not just on Sunday. You do this day after day with all your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your mind. This is the great commandment.

Look at verses 14 and 15. Look at it from the negative side. Actually, let's go to verse 13. We'll come to this passage often in coming weeks. Verse 13, "You shall fear only the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name." The positive side. The positive commandment. Now follows the prohibition that helps us understand the first commandment. Verse 14, "You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, for the LORD your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the LORD your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth."

Friends, I read that to help you see the positive and negative side, two sides of the same coin, you might say, but also to impress upon you the fact that God takes this seriously even if no one else does. It doesn't matter at all if you have never taken this seriously. This is the standard that God has been applying to your life all along. It doesn't matter if you think that that's something that God shouldn't do. It doesn't matter that you say, "But no one else, no one in the world talks this way." None of that matters. That is utterly irrelevant. God has come to you individually, spoken to you in the singular and said, "This is what I require of you."

Is that what you've been giving him? Is that what God has gotten from your life, my friends? I ask you has he gotten your best? Has he gotten your highest? Has he gotten your exclusive? In the name of the devotional, have you given your utmost to the highest or not? Apparently if we haven't, we're in a world of trouble.

Charles Spurgeon's Catechism, which he wrote at a very young age, asks this question. What is required in the first commandment? And he answers it in this way, "The first commandment requires us to know and acknowledge God to be the only true God and our God, and to worship and glorify Him accordingly. The first commandment," I'll repeat it, "requires us to know and acknowledge God to be the only true God and our God, and to worship and glorify Him accordingly." In other words, while the command comes in a negative form, in a prohibition, you shall have no other gods, it implies the positive that you shall have him as your God.

God commands you to have him as your God and what does that mean? Well, we'll look at that more next week but just in the simplest of terms it means this, it means that you live for the God of the Bible as one who belongs to him. You live for him because you belong to him. He owns you. The New Testament talks about being a Christian as being a slave of Christ, having no independent will of your own, one who is Master, one who is Lord. Now beloved, I ask you: do those terms mean anything or not? If he is Master, then he owns us. If he is Lord, then he is King. And our perspective on life is such because that is who he is, then that requires my soul, my life, my all. You serve him with faithful and loyal obedience.

We can look at this from another perspective. Scripture says that God requires from us fear. Proverbs 1:7 says, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge," fear in the sense of having a sober-minded respect for him, a concern to please him, a heart that loves him and is devoted to him. He is a transcendent God to whom you and I are going to give an account and this is his first and preeminent command. This is first among the 10. This is the foundation of true morality that we would have the God of Bible as our God like that. I ask you if you do? I ask you if you do? Do you have him like that?

Can I gently remind you of other things just as we're wrapping this up? Let me remind you that God sees your heart. He requires you to have him in your heart, in your affections, in your devotion, in your priorities. Psalm 51:6 saying to God says this, "You desire truth in the innermost being," in the innermost man. We can't fake our way through this. It doesn't matter if you can put on a show and fake me out. It doesn't matter. None of that matters. Do you see how exclusively vertical this is? The God who sees your heart says, "Have Me like this in your heart, in your innermost being. Treasure Me like that."

What does all of this mean in practical terms? What is being commanded here? You must be faithful to him. You must give to this God your total and unbroken allegiance. You must honor him and adore him and revere him as your Lord and your God. That's what Thomas said when Christ came and revealed himself in his resurrection glory. He said, "Thomas, put your fingers here. It's Me. It's Christ." And Thomas said, "My Lord and my God," first person singular again.

You know, we've discussed all of this. We've discussed all of this, my friends, and the clenching aspect of this we've hardly even touched on. When you consider that this God who commands this is the same God who became Incarnate in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, you understand that Christ not only commands this but he deserves this. He deserves it. He went to the cross for you. He laid down his life for you. He bore the wrath of God for you. It's not just that God is your Creator that compels this response. That would be enough. But for those of you who are in Christ, it's magnified exponentially infinitely more. We're talking about the God that you say you love because he laid down his life for you and without whom you would have been under the judgment of God and fallen into hell for eternal judgment that you righteously deserve because of your gross sin against him, and Christ in love gave himself up for you so that you would not experience that unspeakably bad fate. Well, listen, how could we be anything other than exclusively devoted to the one who loved our souls like that? God requires this and God deserves this. You owe this kind of devotion to him because he is your Creator who made you in your mother's womb and he is your Redeemer who delivered you from sin and hell and judgment and the chains of Satan. He's done so much. He is so much.

Do you see why, go back to Exodus 20, do you see how utterly righteous this command is? In light of who God is and in light of Christ and Christian salvation, do you realize how righteous this command is? Verse 3, "You shall have no other gods before Me." It should be evident to everyone in this room that's only right. The thing that's not right is the fact that we haven't loved him in response like that. The command is right, what's wrong is our hearts. So the scope of the first commandment is breathtaking. It takes my breath away. God commands our supreme affection and says, "Let nothing and no one interfere with it ever." That's what the first commandment means.

As we close, turn over to Mark 8. There's something I want to show you here. Same exact principle, different terms. Mark 8. This passage in light of the first commandment is a compelling testimony that Jesus Christ asserted deity, asserted that he was God in human flesh because he required from his disciples things that could only be righteously given to God alone.

Mark 8:34. Let Christ be big as we read this and us be very small. Mark 8:34. It seems to be said so casually. "He summoned the crowd with His disciples, and said to them, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me.'" The only way that that can be a righteous command is if Christ is God himself, otherwise he's setting himself up in competition with the God who commanded it in the Old Testament. But because he is equal to the God of the Old Testament, he can do this righteously. And to those of you today who are not in Christ, this is his call and command upon you.

"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross and follow Me." You say, "I'm not going to do that. I refuse to bow my knee to Christ." Well, just understand the transaction that you're making with the devil when you say that. Christ says in verse 35, "whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses

his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it. For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels." Christ is coming back and he's coming back with equal glory to God the Father. He's God, that's why he could make a command like this.

So beloved, we have all fallen short of this, haven't we? None of us have lived a day perfectly like this, let alone all of our lives. This commandment comes and convicts us of sin at the deepest, most profound level. We have not loved God like he's required us to love him. That is why it is such a blessing that Christ came to offer his life for sinners like us. That's why we rest in Christ and his righteousness, not our own as that which makes us right with God. That's why you who are not in Christ, you must come to him for salvation because you are miserably and hopelessly condemned by just the first commandment, let alone the other nine. And my friends, we come before this God, we confess that we fall short and yet we are able to rest in the fact that Christ has loved us, Christ has satisfied what God has required, and in Christ God accepts us not on the basis of what we have done, not on the basis of the perfection of our love because our love is not it, he accepts us on the basis of Christ and Christ alone.

Are you in him today? That's the only question that matters.

Let's pray together.

*Father, we agree with the rightness of Your command. It is right that You should tell us that we should have no other gods before You. You are alone, You are high, You are lofty. We recognize that. And you righteously claim the exclusive affection of our hearts at all times and all places. In principle, Lord, we give that to You as we close today. We give that to You in principle even though we know that in practice we fall short. But Father, we acknowledge the righteousness of it. We desire that You would have that place in our hearts even though we fall short, and because we fall short, we rely not on our own obedience but in the righteousness and shed blood of our Savior Jesus Christ. Father, search us by Your Spirit. Know us in our innermost being and where there are idols alongside of You, things that we have loved more than You, help us to repent. And for those that are here with us that have never even given this a thought, Father, may Your Spirit bless them by arresting their attention, convicting them of sin, and leading them swiftly to the Lord Jesus Christ who alone is the friend of sinners. May You impress these things and sift these things through our minds in the coming days until we're able to come back again next week and respond better to Your word. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

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