

The True God and You

The Ten Commandments

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The reality of the matter is, is that you have a God, the question is, who is your God or what is your God? And let me give you just a series of rapid-fire questions to help you kind of assess that question in your own heart. I'm speaking to you individually, personally here today. What is it or who is it that you love the most? What is it or who is it that you obey, that you follow, that you listen to? What is it or who is it to whom you give thanks? What is it or who is it that you turn to in adversity? When hard times come, as they always do in this fallen world, where are you turning for help, for counsel, for guidance, for deliverance? What is it or who is it that you believe to tell you the truth? Is it your own sense of reason, your own assessment of the state of things? Is it science? Increasingly the question these days need to be asked, is it the government that you believe and trust to give you insight into the real state of things? Who is it, my friend, or what is it that gives you ultimate joy that truly satisfies your heart?

Well, those questions are of profound significance and consequence as we turn back to the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20. Let those things be in your mind as we come to our text this morning in Exodus 20, and I invite you to turn there as I read the first three verses. Exodus 20:1-3,

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.

And then the first commandment in verse 3,

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

We started to consider that text, this commandment, last time and we saw that this commandment addresses us individually. It's not speaking corporately to the nation of Israel because the command is in the second person singular in the original text. This comes and addresses your heart directly and personally in a way that makes the presence of other people in the room inconsequential here this morning. God is addressing you and your heart today, me and my heart, and what we said last time is that this commandment calls each one of us, calls you whether you are in Christ or outside of Christ, the command and the authority is the same. You are to serve the God of the Bible with

faithful and loyal obedience. Your heart is to be devoted exclusively to him and your life is to be centered on living in obedience to him and living for his glory. That is what this commandment calls each man, woman and child to do. This is what the Creator of the heavens and the earth sets forth as the first commandment of them all. It has preeminence and priority in the 10.

And if you're just here for the first time or you're just joining us recently, maybe you've been away for a while, we've been preparing for a series on the 10 Commandments over the past several weeks. I've preached a number of introductory messages and now we're into the commandments themselves, and what we're doing is maybe a little bit different but it's the way that I think it needs to be done, is that we're preaching two messages, at least that's the plan, two messages on each commandment. So 10 times 2, 20 messages. Now that might seem to be a lot and maybe, you know, I had a critical correspondent write me who had been listening to some of my messages and said, "You're a long-winded fellow." I said, "Well, guilty as charged, I guess." But there's a particular reason for us to do it this way with the 10 Commandments because it takes time to simply understand what they're saying and to search out the Scriptures to have a full-fledged or at least an adequate idea of what the commandment itself means, and then it takes some time to absorb just that, and then we need time to kind of think through our lives and think through how it applies to us personally. You need to understand it and then you need to apply it, and in my judgment you can't begin to do that adequately in a single message on at least these initial commandments. It takes time to think through it. We are dull, stubborn people. We are not attuned to obedience to God. Our minds are flooded with worldly concerns and Jesus himself said as he spoke about the sower who went out to spread the word, that anxiety and the cares of the world and the riches of life will choke out the word so that it bears no fruit. Well, I don't want that for you. I don't want that for me. I want us to take the time to pull out the weeds so that the seed can fall on good soil and bear fruit in your life.

For some, I trust, I'm praying over the course of time that the seed will result in you being convicted that you've never known the life of God in your soul and you flee to Christ for salvation for the very first time, and you become like I was, a true Christian who looking back on his life, realized that he was a false Christian for many years. That may be true of many of you here today. Jesus said the way is narrow that leads to life. For those of us that are in Christ, we need a clear understanding of what God is calling us to in his word. We do not obey the 10 Commandments in order to earn our salvation, we are sinners who can only be saved by the blood of Christ, but the 10 Commandments have an enduring moral authority, the 10 Commandments apply to your conscience in a way that says this is what God wants from you, this is what God tells you to do, this is how God tells you to think and love and live. The moral law did not change simply because Christ redeemed us from our failure to keep it. Salvation, rather than abrogating the moral law, setting it aside, what salvation does for the believer is through the indwelling Holy Spirit, it gives us the power to live this way and gives us the desire to live this way. And in what we're about to see in the first commandment here, there should be in your mind if you are a true Christian, there should be an echoing in your mind that says, "Yes, do you know what? That is what I want. I'm so glad it's set forth there in God's word. It helps me understand

what the desires of my heart are and how to live it out." If you find yourself hearing these things and are just utterly dead and indifferent to it, and you're agreeing more with my critic who said, "Do you know what? That person was right. He is a long-winded fellow. When is this going to be over?" Well, something's wrong, something's wrong in your soul that might have profound consequence for you.

So today we're going to consider the practical duties of the first commandment. Last week's message was titled "God On the True God," meaning it is God telling us what he requires for a response to him. Today's message is titled "The True God and You." In other words, because this is who the true God is and this is what he has commanded, this is what it means for you personally and individually. And we're going to see the practical duties that come from an understanding of the first commandment. I think I've got four points here. Let me just poke ahead in my notes. Four points here this morning and we'll consider them one by one.

The first implication of the first commandment for you is this: you must know the true God truly. You must know him truly and what we mean by that is this: the true God of Scripture must be your God. He must be your God. My friends, that is what God commands. This is not optional. This is not something for you to take in a smorgasbord of post-modern pantheon of gods, he commands you to step out of the world, to reject your prior priorities and make him your one and exclusive priority and him alone. The true God of Scripture must be your God and so he becomes, in answer to the questions that I asked in the introduction, he becomes the one that you love most. He becomes the one that you obey. He becomes the one that you thank. He becomes the one that you trust. He's the one that you believe even if all of the wisdom of the world is contradicting him. He is the one who gives you your ultimate joy. That's the sense of having him as your God.

So look at Exodus 20:3 and then we'll look at some other Scriptures to help us interpret it again. Chapter 20, verse 3 of Exodus,

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

None. There is to be a unique, exclusive position in your heart for the living God as he is revealed in Scripture, now on the New Testament side of things, as he has made himself known in the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ said, "If you have seen Me, you have seen the Father. The one who honors Me, honors the Father." Jesus Christ, then, is to be your true God, to be your true Lord, and we'll see this as we go along but first we'll look at these things in an Old Testament perspective.

You must know him truly, and in the writings of Moses you see that fact emphasized if you'll go to the book of Deuteronomy 6. We looked at this last time and I make no apologies for repeating it here this morning. Deuteronomy 6:13 it says,

13 "You shall fear only the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name. 14 You shall not follow other gods, any of the

gods of the peoples who surround you, 15 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."

God is to be your God and if you refuse that, you are in imminent danger of a severe judgment. Those are the two alternatives, either you know him truly or you are under judgment and under the threat of this passage. There's no in-between.

Look over at Isaiah 45. I'll give you a moment to turn there. Isaiah 45:5. Friends, as you're turning there, God is serious about his holiness. God is serious about the fact that he is the only God and he will defend the honor of his name. He will defend the exclusivity of his name so don't let the post-modern subjective approach to truth, your God is your God, my God is my God and, you know, we can all get along, don't let that post-modern mindset confuse you about what God is actually saying here. Forget all of that stuff and take God at his word so that he says in Isaiah 45:5, he says,

5 "I am the LORD, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God. I will gird you, though you have not known Me; 6 That men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun That there is no one besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other,

And so it's no wonder that the first commandment starts with God saying, "You shall have no other gods before Me." There shall be nothing in your heart of higher preeminence than the God of the Bible, than the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the command of God on your life and the question is what are you doing with that? The question is where do you stand before this holy, exalted, august God and his command that you shall have no other source of competing affection for him in your heart? Where do you stand in relationship to that commandment because God does not share his glory with anyone else or with anything else. God does not share his glory and he is not pleased when our affections are muddled and that we love something in a way that competes with him. This is very, very serious and you can see that it's plunging a diagnostic needle deep into your soul. We're doing a biopsy on your soul right now and we're clipping out your affections and bringing it out for examination in light of the word of God. That's what's happening here. One writer put it this way, "God requires that we dedicate all we are and all we have to His service and praise."

So the first commandment places a positive duty upon you to know this God. It's not simply enough to go through life with a sense of outward morality and being generally nice to people and trying to get along with people on a horizontal basis. That's not enough. That does not satisfy the command of God. This is a command of vertical import. This is a command of your deepest priorities and affections and addresses them and says, "Are your deepest affections for the God of the Bible, for Jesus Christ and Him alone?" If it's not, you are living in rebellion to him no matter how much men might praise you for your outward morality. This is serious. We're not joking around here and you can know that it places a positive duty upon you to know the real God because –

follow the logic here, it's very clear, very direct, very simple – you must know the true God in order to distinguish him from false gods. You have to know who the one and only God is so that you are in a position to reject all the others.

Well, how do you do that? How do you begin to do that? Well, here's where some of the practical application comes into play. It means that you understand that your life is given to you in large part to undertake to know this God, to undertake to know Christ. That is the purpose for which you live. It is not your career. It is not primarily your family, or your children, or your parents, or your education, or anything else that you might want to substitute in there. The catechism tells us what our duty is. What does God require? We are to know him and to enjoy him forever. That's the import of the fact that God is the true God and what does that mean, how can we drill down to get something of our hands upon this to know what it is that we're talking about?

Well, the Puritan Ezekiel Hopkins, who I am going to gladly and proudly quote often throughout this series, he said this. Listen carefully. "The right way to attain to a true notion of the divine nature is by a serious consideration of His attributes. When we know them," in other words, when we know his attributes, "we know as much about God as can be known in our weak and imperfect state." God has revealed who he is in Scripture. God has made himself known. His characteristics, his perfections, his attributes are revealed to us in Scripture and we are to read Scripture, study Scripture so that we can come to know him. This is different than reading cheap devotionals. This is different than simply going to men's meetings or women's groups and just trying to talk to one another about earthly things even for the sake of earthly encouragement. This transcends all of that and we need to have it clear in our minds that those things are not substitutes for the reality of knowing God himself personally in a direct personal way as he is made known in Scripture. God commands you to know him as he has revealed himself to be, so much so that we read in the prophet Jeremiah, "Let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me."

So looking at it from a New Testament perspective, Jesus Christ said this as he prayed to his Father on the eve of his crucifixion, he said, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." That is a statement of deity. That is Christ saying that, "Eternal life is to know the true God and to know Me." One God in three persons. To know Christ is to know the true and living God. To reject Christ is to reject God no matter how much God-talk you might infuse in your conversation to try to impress people with your spiritual righteousness.

Let's approach this from a different direction, shall we? We shall. What this means is that if you do not know Christ, if he is not living in your heart, if you have not put your faith in him, if you have not submitted to him as Lord, if you do not know Christ, you do not know God. And do you know what that means? Do you know what that means? That means that your entire life is a violation of the first commandment. To not be a Christian is to live a life that is a violation of the first commandment. Everything about you is a violation because you do not know the true God. It's stunning, isn't it, how comprehensive and how searching this commandment is. Our friend, Phil Johnson, puts it

this way. He says, "You cannot have God as your God unless you know Him, and you cannot know Him apart from how He has revealed Himself in His word." You could say it a different way: you cannot know him apart from Christ. You cannot know him apart from the true gospel message revealed in the New Testament.

So the first commandment means that you must know God truly. Now secondly, this goes further, we're just kind of getting warmed up here in the bullpen, you might say: you must serve him exclusively. You must serve him exclusively. Go back to Exodus 20:3, "You shall have no other gods before Me." None others. Never. Don't ever do this, is the force of the command, and it's a remarkable call for exclusivity. What this commandment means is that it forbids us, it forbids humanity from mingling false religion with true religion. It means that we take a stand of commitment for the true God and because God calls us to have no other gods against him, we don't only affirm the God of the Bible, we deny the existence of any other gods and we recognize other religions for what they are, demonically-inspired false religions that are a violation of the first commandment because they hold forth false gods to be worshiped, they call people to trust in and to serve false gods, and that is a violation of the first commandment. So this excludes every other religion in the world from legitimacy, and what it does for us inside of the church is, is that it commits us to proclaiming an exclusive message. Not simply the affirmation Christ is the true God and you must believe in him to be saved, but also the negative, if you do not, you will be damned. And none of your outward morality matters, none of the rituals of your false religion matter. They attain nothing for you, in fact, they just dig you into a deeper hole as you continue to violate the first commandment and serve other gods.

So it has a worldview implication that is very profound. It means that the true church is standing against all of the false religions of the world. We're not one religion among many. The gospel is the one true religion and everything else is false. That's the implication of this and you say, "Well, if that's true, then that means that there aren't many going to heaven, comparatively speaking, because there are billions of Hindus and there are hundreds of millions of Muslims, and hundreds of millions and billions actually, 1 ¼ billion Catholics in the world. What you're saying is that those people are lost and their religion amounts to nothing?" Well, yeah, and actually the Scriptures teach us that we're saying more. It's not only that it amounts to nothing, it's an actual increase in their condemnation. False religion is not innocent. It is a deadly sin and it is a great evil against the one true God. To bow before an image, to bow before statues, to pray to any other God than the God of the Bible is a horrific sin and we have to understand it in that exclusive way.

Now let's go a little bit further. So far you've been pretty comfortable, right, with this second point. This goes much, much further than that. Look over at the gospel of Luke 14 to see how great the exclusivity that God commands for your ultimate affections to be. Luke 14. I'll give you a moment to find that. I hear those pages rattling, that's good. In Luke 14:25, the Holy Writ of God says this,

25 Now large crowds were going along with Him; and He turned and said to them, 26 "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and

mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple."

In other words, your love for God, your love for God is so great that your love for anyone else seems like hatred by comparison. This is not telling us to literally actively hate our parents or our children, because elsewhere Scripture says honor your father and mother, and children are called to obey their parents, and parents are to love their children. This is given to us, in a sense, to help us see the contrast, that there is an exclusive place for God in your heart, an exclusive place for Christ that is in your heart that no one else competes with, so much so that there is a zone of exclusivity in your heart about these things and about Christ that no one else can enter into.

So do you see the exclusivity of this? This convicts more than the godless pagan, this convicts all of us. This convicts all of us and let me make a very specific targeted application of this that I think needs to be said, particularly in an environment like ours. My wife and I home-schooled our children, six of them from preschool all the way to high school graduation with one year of exception for my son in his senior year of high school. I'm a friend to home-schoolers. I believe it's a very lofty pursuit for those to pursue that are able to do so, but I've been around the block a few times, the decades are starting to measure my life, not just years, and this needs to be said. The first commandment convicts the outwardly moral home-school family. We all know the type and this needs to be said. They have their private circle within their own family but they transgress biblical teaching that calls them to accountability in a local church. They boast themselves and they pride themselves in the outward morality of their family and the conformity of their children, but they know nothing of involvement and commitment to the local church. Do you know what? That's a serious sin. That is a serious sin. You know, maybe the dad thinks he's the pastor also of his family and so they don't need the church. Or if they come to church at all, they're on the outer circle of it. They've got all kinds of family and children events that interfere with their ability and you can always tell what's going to get the priority when things go along. Or you observe some over the course of time and every 2-3-4 years, they're bouncing around to different churches, avoiding long-term pastoral oversight and accountability all while proclaiming and manifesting this outward appearance of a home-school righteousness.

Well, the reality of that, my friends, is this, is that in those kinds of situations, family has displaced Christ as Lord because Christ didn't die for the home-school family, Christ died for his people. Christ died for the church and the New Testament is filled with commands to believers to be involved in the local church, to submit themselves to spiritual leadership, 20-25 commands of "one another's," to love one another, and pray for one another, and serve one another, and all kinds of commands like that and you can't do anything like that if you've isolated yourself as a home-school family and you just avoid any kind of meaningful, serious, long-term interaction with the local church. Their lives become a violation of the first commandment because they've made their family and their children their God. It needs to be said. It needs to be said. God calls us to love him exclusively and that includes obedience to his commands about involvement in the local church.

Now look, I understand there's all kinds of shades of gray between the black and white that I'm presenting here, but the principle needs to be articulated without nuance. I'm speaking both within and outside of our walls as I say this. There are a lot of home-school families that need to take serious account of the first commandment and see what it is that they're actually serving and loving. Children make bad idols, and even if they come out right, eventually they leave. They go out and they establish their own lives and then what are you left with and families are left, "What do I do now?" Well, what have you been doing the past 25 years?

So I say these things because I love you and I love you enough to tell you the truth and to warn you about areas where people like us fall and stumble and don't recognize it until it's too late, and ultimately it's tied up in a recognition of who the first commandment applies to. It applies to all of us. It tells us to love the living God and if we're going to love the living God, it means that we submit to all of his revelation, the totality of his revelation, and you look at the New Testament, you see all of those letters written to the local church and the family is discussed in the context of the local church, not apart from it, and that has instruction for us about how we're to live. And I would not be a very good or faithful pastor if I didn't make that point clear to an audience like this. I love home-school families. I am a home-school family. Home-schooling is not a substitute for the living God and neither is the family that does it. It needs to be said.

So these are points of application. Number 3, point number 3 here. We've said that you must know the true God truly, you must serve the true God exclusively, and thirdly: you must serve the true God sincerely. You must serve the true God sincerely and, you know, as I've studied and prepared for this series over the past period of time, I have just grown in my respect for the 10 Commandments and my fear of the 10 Commandments and my fear of the God of the 10 Commandments, because as you follow the thought, you know, it's such a simple, short phrase, "You shall have no other gods before Me." All the commandments are like that, in such a short phrase there are implications that go everywhere. I mean, this sifts all of life. This sifts all of our inner man. No one comes and studies these and isn't confronted immediately by the holiness of God and the sinfulness of his own heart.

You must serve him sincerely. We could put it this way: you must worship God as he demands to be worshiped. You don't get to make up your own approach. God says, "This is how I must be known. This is how I must be worshiped. This is how I must be served." And so we line ourselves up with them rather than creating our own approach to some kind of self-righteousness. And what does Scripture tell us about the worship of God? Well, first of all, it tells us that it must be full-hearted worship. I appreciated the fact that this morning we were able to sing with our hearts under D. C.'s leadership, and to have that brought out. That's the way it ought to be and if you'll look over at Deuteronomy 6, you see that this is of day by day, moment by moment consequence. Deuteronomy 6:4,

4 "Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one!

There is one and no others.

5 "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Do you see those words "all, all your heart, all your soul, all your might"?

6 "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart.

You say, "Okay, Moses, well, then what does that mean? I see the principle, what's the practical application of it?" Verse 7,

7 "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.

Whether you're walking, whether you're sitting, whether you're lying down, these things are to be on your mind and to be on your lips. And this is a day by day, not simply a Sunday morning, midweek evening commitment or requirement, this is throughout the day every day that God gives us breath.

Think about it this way. God, the God of the Bible, is the eternal God and he is the Creator of all the world, meaning that all of life is under his hand, all of life is under his providential direction. There isn't a God compartment in the world where he's not involved in because he causes all things to work together for good. He works all things to accomplish his eternal purpose. All of life is embraced under his seeing eye. Well, as a result of that, all of life is to be directed back to him as an act of worship. Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. This is unavoidable. And the thing that I want you to see is that it is to be sincere. It is to be from the heart. It is to be a glad-hearted devotion to him. Earnest. Genuine. We must be faithful to him and give him, what this commandment calls from us is our total, unbroken allegiance, our loyalty. You honor, adore and revere him as your God and you do so through every day, through every moment of every day. This is what God calls you to. "You shall have no other gods before Me." Never. Not once.

The theologian, J. I. Packer, says this about the commandment at this point. He says, "It calls for love, responding to God's love in making and saving you, and it demands total concentration of purpose so that in everything you do there is just one thing you aim at: pleasing and glorifying the Lord." It's sincere, it's earnest, and beloved, it's done out of love. "I love this God," you say to yourself. "I love Him for making me. I love Him as a Christian for saving me. I love Christ for going to the cross and bearing my sins in His body in such inestimable torment of soul as He bore separation from the Father on my behalf. I love Him for that! I love Him for that! I give Him the exclusive place of highest affection in my life day by day because He is someone different than everyone else, and He did something for me that no one else could have done. My spouse," you say, "my

children," you say, "as much as they hold the affections of my heart, it all is superseded, surpassed by the greatness of God and the greatness of Christ and the greatness of love that He showered on my soul. How could I love anyone more than that? And how could I do anything but love Him sincerely."

Now look, this commandment separates, so to speak, the men from the boys. Scripture, especially in the New Testament, talks about those who speak the God-talk, but whose lives are completely inconsistent with it. Jesus asked the crowd in Luke 6, he said, "Why do you call Me Lord Lord but do not do what I say?" Why do you offend his office, his majesty by calling him Lord and yet living in indifference and disobedience to him? Don't you see the hypocrisy of that? Is that knowing the true God the way he demands to be known? Would you honor him with your lips but reserve your life to yourself? What is that kind of hypocrisy?

In Titus 1 it says they profess to know God but by their deeds they deny him. They say they know him, they say they have a God, but their life is a living denial of everything that they affirm with their lips and Christ says, Scripture says, the true God says, "I ain't having it. I'm not having it." At the judgment day, "Lord, Lord, did we not do all these miracles and do mighty things in Your name and in Your name cast out demons? And in Your name do all these things?" And he'll say, "Depart from Me, I never knew you." Their profession was not sincere, it was the profession of hypocrisy.

So you must know the true God truly, you must serve him exclusively, you must serve him sincerely, fourth and final point for this morning: you must serve him biblically. You must serve him biblically. Look, it couldn't be any other way. Look, you could not possibly know and serve the true God truly and exclusively if you don't know him biblically because that is where he has made himself known. That's why it's so good that you're here, it's so crucial that you're under the teaching of the word of God because this is how we know him and know what he requires. I'm trying deeply, trying with all of my limited might to drive out of your heart this sense of sentimentality of relating to God, and, "You know, I just feel things in my heart." Well, your heart is full of sin. That's not a good place to rely on whether you know the true God or not. You have to know him as he's revealed himself in his word and he's revealed in Scripture how we are to do this, how we are to serve him.

Let me just give you two quick passages just to stimulate your thinking as you meditate on this later on. In 1 Peter 3:15 it says, "sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts." In other words, the idea is and this is what we've been talking about all along here this morning, that there is a principle established and immovable in your heart like this, that says, "Christ is Lord and He is my Lord and that is not subject to negotiation. That is not subject to compromise. Christ is Lord. I recognize Him as such and I commit as a principle of life myself to following Him. Not because I can obey to earn my salvation but because that's who He is and I want my heart to be a reflection of that as the Spirit of God illuminates me." So that there is an irrevocable principle established in your heart that whenever the name of Christ is mentioned there is an echo in your mind that says, "Ah, yes, Christ. He is Lord. He is Lord and there is no other. He is Lord and so there is

never a legitimate reason for me to disobey Him. I might disobey Him, I do disobey Him, but it's never legitimate, it's never justified for me to rebel against my Sovereign." And that's settled as a principle in your heart even as you're stumbling as you walk through living it out on a day to day basis.

So Christ must be clearly and forever set apart in your heart as your Lord. Is he? Do you know Christ like that? Do you honor him like that? From the innermost depths of your being, is Christ honored as Lord there? I ask you because this is what God requires. This is not optional. This isn't a menu where you choose one thing out of many. This is required as the start of responding rightly to the one and true God, that it's set apart. Now I'm reminded of the words of Joshua, you know, "As for me and my house, we're going to serve the Lord. The rest of you can do what you want but for me and the people under my leadership, this is where we're at. We're going to serve the Lord." It's clear. It's unambiguous. It's not nuanced. It's not qualified. It's not conditional. "Well, we'll see how things work out. He's Lord but not in this area. I'm going to keep this area of sin in my life and don't talk to me about it. Don't talk to me, preacher, about my home-school family. Don't go there." Well, what is that if there are areas that you have fenced off from the word of God where rebuke and correction and training in righteousness can't take place? What is that for the one who says, "I know this God and I serve Him exclusively"? What is that?

For another practical application of it, turn to Acts 2. Acts 2 and just in verse 42 with a little roll in from verse 41. Peter had said at the end of verse 20,

41. ... "Be saved from this perverse generation!" 41 So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls.

They truly believed in Christ and what was the overflow, what came out of their lives as a consequence of the new birth? Verse 42,

42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

True life from God lived out in a New Testament way has vertical and horizontal aspects to it. It's a life that is somehow devoted to the word of God. It's a life of prayer. It's a life horizontally that is involved in fellowship with the people of God and gives respect and attendance to the ordinances of the church, baptism and communion, so that serving the true God biblically is a life that is marked by some kind of reading and study of the word of God, some kind of growth in private prayer, some kind of fellowship with the people of God, serving them, loving them, caring for them. If it's Christ's flocks and we love Christ, then we're going to love them too. And horizontally also those participation in the ordinances that Christ has commanded. Do you claim Christ and haven't been baptized? Something's out of whack there. Do you claim Christ and don't take communion seriously, you take or pass it, you know, "Maybe I'll be there, maybe I won't"? Or are the church ordinances an important factor to you?

So vertically you read and heed God's word. You pray to him. Horizontally, you fellowship with his people and you participate in the ordinances as a priority of life. I'm just trying to suggest things that help you apply this and to see them in the context of the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before Me." Okay, God, you've revealed yourself in your word. I know you by knowing your attributes. Now what do you require? "I want you in My word. I want you praying. I want you to be in fellowship with My people. I have these church ordinances that are important in a strategic part of church life." You know, God gives these things, these are the means by which he's given us to know him, to serve him, and to grow in him, and an indifferent regard of those things is a sign of disobedience at the most fundamental commandment of them all.

So this first commandment confronts us with searching questions. Do you, talking to you individually. I'm not talking about who's next to you. Do you give Christ undivided loyalty? Is he set apart as unique in your heart? Or do you ignore his right to demand that from you, challenge and question his right? "I don't need this. I don't want this." That kind of attitude is a violation of the first commandment. "You shall not do that. You shall have no other gods before Me."

The hymnwriter got it right in "Be thou my vision," the third verse as it appears in our hymnal, when he said this. This is an echo of a right response to the first commandment. I'm tempted to sing it but I'll spare you that.

"Riches I heed not, nor vain, empty praise
Thou mine inheritance, now and always
Thou and thou only first in my heart
High King of heaven, my treasure thou art."

That's the spirit of it. Is there anything like that in your heart?

Let me put my pastor's hat on, so to speak. We're all sifted by this and we're all convicted by it. There's none of us who can look at the breadth and depth of the first commandment and say, "That's me. I've done that. I've done that perfectly throughout all of my life." None of us are in that position. None of us could say that about one day of our lives. What the first commandment does from the start, we are challenged at the first commandment and we realize in practical ways that we fall short of the glory of God. None of you have lived this way and I haven't either. This first commandment doesn't congratulate us on our righteousness, it convicts us of our unrighteousness.

We have not loved God this way and so don't miss the big picture here, my friends. Just the first commandment, just it with nine left to go, just the first commandment makes us despair of our own goodness, our own righteousness. You look at that and say, "I don't measure up to that. What's going to happen to me?" Well, do you see why the gospel is good news? We need a Savior, you need a Savior because you are a sinner. You fall short of the glory of God. You need someone to deliver you from your sinfulness because you do not measure up.

You don't measure up but Jesus Christ does. Jesus Christ lived a perfect life including perfect obedience to the first commandment, and at the end of his perfect life, he offered himself up, he offered that perfect life up as a sacrifice to God for the sins of people just like you. And for those who believe in him, who receive him, who rest in him as Lord and Savior, trusting him and not their own righteousness, to enter into the presence of God. Those in Christ are forgiven. You're forgiven of all of your failures of the first commandment. He credits you with the righteousness of his, and then he gives you strength to start moving in this direction while you live in this life.

So for those of you that are not Christians, I invite you to Christ. You need him more than you know. More than you know, he is willing to receive your sinful soul to forgive you, to embrace you, to adopt you into the family of God. More than you know, he's willing to do that. And for those of you who are in Christ, thank him, sanctify him, and then let us embrace the first commandment as our glad and welcome duty and set our hearts to love our Redeemer from sin.

Let's pray.

Dear Father, help us to be a people who have no other gods before You, who love, embrace and submit to You, and want nothing more than to know You truly, to serve You exclusively, to serve You sincerely, and to serve You and know You biblically. Please help us to that end. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

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