



The Ten Commandments

Exodus 20:1 -17



REV. BRENT EVANS
REFORMATION PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, FCC.
Snellville, GA

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“Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”
Exodus 20:3

‘Heart Idolatry and Its Remedy’

Our attention this morning is on the first commandment. We find it recorded in *Exodus* 20:3.

“Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”

As we consider the first commandment, let me begin with a few observations:

1. The Connection Between the Preface and the First Commandment

First, we should notice the connection between the preface and this first commandment. In the preface we see the royal assertiveness of Jehovah God, the ‘I AM,’ in which he speaks from heaven unto men; in which he declares and asserts his own right to be obeyed. He is ‘I AM,’ and this is his law.

We also see the Lord’s gracious condescension. He says, “I am the Lord thy God.” In that pronoun, setting forth the substance of the Covenant of Grace in which he, the holy one, has found out a way to take a naturally sinful people unto himself, cleansing them from their sins, making them his own people; in the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit giving himself unto them as their God. So, this first commandment then comes right after this preface.

The first commandment is forbidding what would be contrary to what is contained in the preface; so, the having of any other god would be a denial of the Lord’s royal assertiveness, and his authority and right to be held, obeyed, honored, glorified, trusted, feared, and loved as God.

It would be contrary to his royal assertiveness, and contrary to his gracious condescension. If the Lord condescends to take a people for himself and has found out in Jesus Christ a way to overcome that separation that is between himself and sinful men, and to take them unto himself, binding them to him in cords of mercy; if we should say we will have another god before this graciously condescending Lord, this would be to spurn his grace and mercy.

2. The Distinctness of the First Commandment

So, we notice that there is a connection with the preface. We also want to understand the distinctness of the first commandment; that is, that it is distinct from the second commandment. I do not mean that the first and second commandments are radically separate from one another, or that there is no common ground between them. In fact, the opposite would be true; they are closely related, and when we speak of idolatry, we may be speaking of the violation of the first commandment or the violation of the second commandment, or both at the same time. It is often the case that a given sinful action will be transgressing both at the same time. So, there is common ground; however, we need to understand that in the design and intent of the Lord who gave the law that these two commandments are distinct.

Now, one reason we know that is that Deuteronomy 10 tells us that there are ten commandments. So, the Lord intends for us to be able to look at his ten commandments and to enumerate them; he has not put roman numerals in the columns of our Bible, but he intends for us to be able to understand which is the first, which is the second, which is the third, and so on.

The church of Rome has resorted to an untenable interpretation, whereby the first two commandments are made into one, and the tenth commandment is split into two. So that, “*thou*

shalt not covet thy neighbor's house" is the ninth commandment, and "*thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife*" is the tenth; as if, if you covet your neighbor's house you are breaking one commandment, you covet his wife you are breaking a different commandment. This is untenable, so it must be the case, then, that verse three contains the first commandment, and verse four through six contains the second commandment.

They are different in substance. The first commandment concerns 'who' should be worshiped, the second commandment concerns 'how' God should be worshiped; the 'object' of worship versus the 'manner' of worship. So, this morning we want to focus on who it is that should be worshiped and held as God.

3. The Searching Quality of the First Commandment

So, the first and second commandments are distinct. Also, we want to notice the searching quality of the first commandment. Few people are aware of how searching this first commandment is: "*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*" Few people are conscious that they have broken the first commandment.

Maybe, like me, you have seen on YouTube a brother from New Zealand, I think it is, and he is dead right in that he confronts people with the law of God in his evangelism. I have done the same thing he does. "Do you think you are a good person?" The person will usually say, "Yes." "Well, have you ever told a lie?" "Well, yes." "That makes you a liar. Have you ever committed murder?" "Well, no." "But have you been angry with someone without a cause? The Lord Jesus says that you are subject to judgment." And, so, this brother will go through... What is he doing? He is going through the second table of the law; he is going over the ninth commandment: false witness, the sixth commandment: murder, the seventh commandment: adultery and lustful looking. He is seeking to convict people with the law, and to make wounds in their soul, so that they will feel their need of the Savior. We very much appreciate what is embodied there.

What I have never seen is someone on the sidewalk saying, "Are you a good person? Do you know that you have broken the first commandment?" In fact, people do not think they have, and maybe the reason it is not attempted is because it is very hard to get people to see that they break the first commandment; but where people are least conscious of the presence of transgression against the holy law of God there may in fact be the greatest degree of sin.

As we look at the first commandment, we remember John the Baptist saying that "the axe is laid at the root of the tree."¹ The first commandment in its forbidding aspects and its condemning of sin contrary to itself is the axe at the root of the tree; so that man's towering conceit of self-righteousness may come toppling down to the ground with thundering force, being cut off at the very roots.

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."² So great is man's transgression that none of us have kept the very first of the ten commandments but are condemned by the letter of the law to be sinners. The first commandment has a searching quality to it.

4. The Absoluteness of the First Commandment

Consider how absolute it is. "*Thou shalt have no other gods,*" or literally, "There shall not be to thee other gods." Other gods should be a thing of non-existence; not thought upon or sought.

5. The First Commandment is Personal

¹ Matthew 3:10; Luke 3:9

² Romans 3:23

It is personal. “*Thou shalt have no other gods,*” as if it said your name. ‘Thou’ is a singular pronoun; “Thou John Smith.” ‘Thou,’ and put your own name in it. God forbids ‘you’ to have any other gods.

6. The Exclusivity of the First Commandment

And then these words, which are particular to the first commandment, “no other gods before me.” We may misunderstand them; we may think that he is saying you could have other gods as long as they are ‘after’ me or ‘under’ me, but no other gods ‘before’ me or ‘above’ me. Well, that would be incorrect.

Our Shorter Catechism tells us:

“These words [before me] in the first commandment teach us, That God, who seeth all things, taketh notice of, and is much displeas'd with, the sin of having any other god.”¹

“No other gods before me; no other gods before my face,” and regarding the God who said this to us, we must say, “*Whither shall I flee from thy presence?*”² You remember Rachel, how she had her father’s idols, his images, and Laban came seeking her gods, his gods?³ Rachel hid her gods from Laban by sitting on them; but man can never hide his idols from the living God! The Lord God has a searching eye, and he sees all rivalry unto himself, and he absolutely forbids it.

So, as you think upon the first commandment, there are certain gross, obvious ways of breaking the first commandment, which I will seek to simply mention:

The first commandment is broken when it is repudiated in principle, which is what postmodernism does. Of all things, I once upon a time saw a bottle of soap which said, it was covered in blasphemy, it said, ‘All One, All One, all gods are One.’ That is postmodernism. Postmodernism says that it is not possible to break the first commandment; there is no such thing as ‘other gods,’ all gods are one. It repudiates the principle that one God must be worshiped and that it is sin to worship false gods. Postmodernism repudiates the first commandment.

There are others who explicitly avow the worship of other gods, such as in Hinduism, where many gods are worshipped; or in new age neopagan witchcraft; in Mormonism, where you will all be gods, if you follow the religion well enough; in Islam, where the god who is worshipped is not triune, and is therefore not the God of the Bible. These are explicit and avowed violations of the first commandment.

Also, when religious worship is offered to a creature the first commandment is broken in a very overt way. Where people pray to Mary; prayer is a part of religious worship, so one who prays to Mary, whatever he says about it, he is offering worship to a creature. This is a gross violation of the first commandment.

When people bow down to icons of saints, when they make a shrine, and offer incense to departed ancestors, they are offering religious worship to creatures, and they are breaking the first commandment.

¹ The Shorter Catechism (Q & A: 48)

² Psalm 139:7

³ Genesis 31:33-35

Now, those things I just mention, but I want to press on from them to show you that even where this commandment is not repudiated, even where there is no other god who is named and called upon, and even where there are not obvious religious honors being given to mere creatures, the first commandment may still be broken, and is broken.

I want to speak to you this morning, as God would help me, about the more subtle ways that there are of breaking this commandment. I want to speak about Heart Idolatry and Its Cure, or Remedy; to speak about how it is that the first commandment is violated when we transfer any part of that love, trust, honor, and fear which is due to God alone unto the creature.

We read before the words of our Lord Jesus, that the first and great commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and understanding, and strength.¹ ‘All’ is a word of totality; therefore, to love the creature apart from the creator is sin. To offer love to the creature that is not bestowed upon the creature because of something in the fountain, the Creator, is sin. For the understanding to dote upon the creature but not upon the Creator is violation of the first commandment and is sin.

So, let us first speak then about Heart Idolatry. We want to notice:

I. The Identity of Heart Idols

I will speak of three of them, the first is:

A. Self

The first temptation that was made was a temptation unto self-deification. *“For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.”*² “Come, and rival God in your understanding.” The temptation there was to make a good thing, and man was good as originally created, and to elevate it to the level of God himself.

It is the temptation which Isaiah the prophet exposes in the thoughts of the King of Babylon in *Isaiah 14*, that he said, *“I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.”*³

We find that the apostle Paul speaks about the idolatry of self in *2 Timothy 3*, *“This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves.”*⁴ To be a lover of one’s own self is a violation of the first commandment; it is a ‘not loving God’ with all the heart.

Now, isn’t there a proper way of loving yourself and taking care of yourself? Well, yes, certainly. But if someone may say of you, “He is a lover of himself,” then this is an idolatry of self. Where the affections are turned in upon self, the admiration and thought is turned in upon self, rather than self being cared for, for God’s sake; that God who made me in his image might be glorified by my care of myself. Paul says that this love of self will not be an isolated thing but, in fact, pervasive; it is the character of the times in which we live.

There are several species of the idolatry of self-love:

¹ Mark 12:30; Matthew 22:37

² Genesis 3:5

³ Isaiah 14:14

⁴ 2 Timothy 3:1-2

1. Self-pleasure

One is the worship of the belly. *Philippians 3:19* speaks of those “whose God is their belly.” A seeking above all things the gratification of one’s own appetites and making one’s pleasure one’s end. We remember that the people of Israel were ready to forsake the Lord because of food; because they were not satisfied with the manna because as they remembered it in Egypt, they had fleshpots. They were ready to put the appetites of the belly above the God who had saved them out of bondage!

2. Self-righteousness

There is the worship of the belly, there is the worship of one’s own righteousness, as in the prayer of the Pharisee. “*God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are.*”¹ What a difference between him, loving to recount his good deeds, “I am not an extortioner, I am not unjust, I am not an adulterer, I am not like this publican”, this inward conversation about how good he was, and contrast that to the sheep set on Christ’s right hand at the last day when he says, “When I was sick, you came and visited me. When I was in prison, you came and visited me.” And they say, “When did we ever do this?”² They were self-forgetful; they were not adoring and turning over and thinking upon all the good things they had done. They were not worshipping their own righteousness.

3. Self-appearance

There is the worship of one’s own appearance. It can be true of a man; it was true of Absalom. In the context of Absalom, his selfish deeds, burning down Joab’s field to get his attention, it is said that no one in all Israel was to be praised so much for beauty as Absalom: from that from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. When he cut his hair, the weight was two hundred shekels.³ What kind of man cuts his hair and then weighs it to see how heavy it is? The same one who raised up a pillar and named it after himself, thinking, O my glorious, beautiful hair. It was by that hair that he was caught in the oak tree, and he died.⁴ Absalom worshiped his own beauty.

The haughty daughters of Zion, in *Isaiah 3*, worshiped their own beauty “*walking with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet.*” You will read almost a torrent of words to describe everything they adorned themselves with; their wimples, and crimping pins, their changeable suits of apparel, and all these things.⁵ They were worshipping their appearance. This is a worship of self; this is a having of another god before the Lord, which God in the first commandment condemns as being sinful.

4. Self-opinion

There is the worship of one’s own opinion. “*The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason.*”⁶ Unteachableness; a man thinks so much of his own opinion that he is past the reach of anyone’s help. No one can talk to him. This is the idolatry of self, and God in the first commandment condemns it.

¹ Luke 18:11

² Matthew 25:33-40

³ 2 Samuel 14:25-26

⁴ 2 Samuel 18:9,14-15

⁵ Isaiah 3:16-23

⁶ Proverbs 26:16

What other thing may be the object of worship? Not only self, but secondly:

B. Mammon

I give it the memorable name that our Lord Jesus gave to it. Mammon is, to some degree, a different object of worship than self, because mammon is outside of you. It stands for money, stuff, and possessions; for the getting of the world.

Now, is there something good about money? Solomon said there was. In fact, he said in *Ecclesiastes 10:19*, “*Money answereth all things.*” Money is a very useful thing to have. A child of God can count himself blessed when the Lord has given him money, and he sees this money that the Lord has given me, it answers all things. All kinds of needs, in situations that I might have, it is useful to have some money to answer the need. I praise the Lord for giving it to me for a purpose to be used for him.

If there was nothing at all good about money, then no one would worship it. But you know how our Lord Jesus Christ spoke of it in *Matthew 6:24*, “*No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.*”

Our Lord Jesus is opening up the idolatry of money and things in three ways:

1. Service

He is speaking first of all about service; that to make money an idol is to serve it. “*No man can serve two masters.*” What does a man do towards his master? The master owns everything about the servant. The servant’s time is not his own; he is at the master’s beck and call day and night, to do anything that the master says.

So, a man is surely serving money when there are no limits. When thoughts of his money and stuff will break in upon his thoughts at any time of day. When his thoughts are interrupted in his service to God and man by thoughts about his mammon. This is a sign of serving mammon.

2. Love

“*He will hate the one, and love the other.*” Money is an idol when it is loved, and when the affections are bent towards money. You remember how it was with Achan: that he saw a goodly Babylonish garment, and the silver and gold. He saw, he coveted, he took; the heart went out after the glitter of stuff, and the affections wrapped around the stuff.

It may be the case, maybe someone has been in a breakroom at work, and you are overhearing a conversation. One person is saying, “You know, this person I know, here is how he got rich. You would not believe the kind of career he discovered, where he hardly has to do any work and he is fabulously rich. And do you know what? I found out that if I am investing in this certain thing, you would not believe how fast my money is going to grow!” Perhaps other people start pricking up their ears and saying “Wow, someone is talking about how to get money!” The affections, O so easily, incline after mammon; whereas, if the conversation we overheard were, “Is not the Lord Jesus Christ lovely!” How many people would be pricking up their ears? Maybe they would be pricking up their ears and saying, “That is a strange kind of talk.”

The affections: loving money is a violation of the first commandment. Also,

3. Trust

“*He will hold to the one, and despise the other.*” Trusting money is a violation of the first commandment. We should trust the Lord and not money. The word ‘mammon’ refers to the thing

that is trusted. People believe all kinds of things about money: they believe that it will continue to have value; that they believe that money will insulate them from sorrows and miseries; that it will bring lasting enjoyment; that their decisions about how to spend it will not be followed by regret. When, in fact, experience shows otherwise, they still cling to their beliefs about money. They are trusting it.

So then, mammon, stuff, things, and money are another object that can easily be worshiped. There is a third thing in this idolatrous anti-trinity: Self, Mammon, and the third is,

C. Men

Men can be made an object of worship:

1. When We Fear Men

When we fear men; not in the sense of when honor and reverence is due under God, but when, as Jeremiah was told, “do not be dismayed at men’s faces.”¹ When the fear of man’s disapproval, even the expression that goes across his face, turns you aside from your duty; this is an undue fear of man, that is transferring the reverence that is due to God alone, to the creature.

2. When We Look to Men for Deliverance

When we fear men, when we look to men for deliverance in any ultimate way; again, not under God, that God might use them as means, looking to the Lord, but when we (Psalm 146) “trust in princes.”² When we trust in doctors or politicians, looking to them for deliverance, is transferring to them what belongs to God alone.

3. When We Let Men be the Lords of our Consciences

We know that our Lord Jesus spoke of those who taught as doctrines the commandments of men.³ When we regard the man, rather than the reason. When we fail to be as the Bereans, searching the scriptures to see whether these things were so.⁴ When we accept the teaching because of who the teacher is, rather than because of the ground that is shown from the word of God, we are then putting man in the place of God.

So, we have then this unholy trinity; the things that may be worshiped: Self, Mammon, and Men. It is very possible to break the first commandment without ever avowing the worship of a false god. These are some things that may be worshiped, but we need to continue. Not only ‘the objects of heart idolatry’ but:

II. The Marks of Heart Idolatry

How may we discover the presence of subtle heart idols? There are several directions that I will seek to give you:

1. When Our Defense of Something is Angry and Impassioned

¹ Jeremiah 1:17

² Psalm 146:3

³ Matthew 15:9; Mark 7:7

⁴ Acts 17:11

When our defense of something is angry and impassioned, then we may know it to be an idol. You will remember when Jeroboam had erected his altar in Bethel, and the man of God from Judah came up to confront him about his idolatrous idol, Jeroboam put forth his hand and said, “Lay hold on him.”¹ The angry outstretched hand!

Likewise, when your idol is confronted if you respond with heat and vigor, if you are more agile verbally in your arguing and defending this thing, if someone suggests that your affection to it is inordinate, and the time and energy that you have expended upon it is inordinate, if you defend it with heat and vigor, this is a sign of idolatry.

Whereas James says that “the wisdom that is from above is easy to be entreated.”² It welcomes questions. It welcomes being engaged or sought out. So, an angry and passionate defense of the thing, also:

2. When Nothing Could Make Up for the Loss of the Idol

When the thing is lost, or you fear that it will be lost, when you are inconsolable, then surely that ‘thing’ that you are inconsolable about is an idol.

You will remember Ahab, O king Ahab, king of Israel; yet how much like a child he acted! There he wanted a convenient place to plant his herbs. He wanted an herb garden that was next to his house, and when Naboth, the principled man, said “No,” Ahab was sullen, peevish. He would not eat his bread, and he went and laid upon his bed. “O, my herb garden!” He was ready to wink at murder. He loved that plot of ground coveted it, and desired it, so that not even God himself could be satisfying unto Ahab.³ This is idolatry, when the removal of the thing, or the threatened removal of the thing makes you inconsolable.

3. When Our Longing for the Idol Makes Us Unfit for Other Duties

Demas loving this present world and forsaking Paul.⁴ Eli honoring his sons above the Lord and, therefore, not restraining them; though he did speak to them about their sin, yet not as zealously as he should have.⁵

4. When God Lays His Afflicting Hand Upon the Darling Idol

It may be that God lays his hand upon something and takes it from you in order to show forth the grace that you have. He may lay his hand upon something and take it from you so that all the world may see that the thing was not idolized, and that God was loved above the thing.

So, we cannot say one for one, God took something from me, therefore it must have been an idol. It may in fact be the opposite. Though it could be that his afflicting hand is laid upon the darling idol.

The people made an idol of the Temple itself, *Jeremiah 7:4*, “*The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord.*” Trusting in the mere existence of the building, and God brought it to the ground.

¹ 1 Kings 13:1-4

² James 3:17

³ 1 Kings 21:1-17

⁴ 2 Timothy 4:10

⁵ 1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25

Nebuchadnezzar swelled up with the glory of his kingdom, laid into the dust and made like an animal for seven years.¹ God laid his afflicting hand upon the thing. How do we respond to that?

So, these are some directions for how we may discover heart idolatry. Thirdly, as we consider heart idolatry we want to think of:

III. The Destruction of Heart Idolaters

This is a fearful thing, but it is the truth of the word; that God is a jealous God and does not tolerate rivalry with himself. We have that in the Old Testament; God's heavy judgments falling upon the people for their idolatry.

We have it also in the New Testament, and we have it in the New Testament in terms of heart idolatry. In *Ephesians 5:5-6*, "*For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.*" The man who is covetous is an idolater; he whose affections are inordinately set upon things, the creature rather than the creator, he is an idolater. If this is his habitual character, he is an idolater and the wrath of God is coming upon him, unless he repents. God's jealousy burns against idols; even heart idols, they are absolutely forbidden.

"*Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*" This is the royal word of the 'I AM,' and this is his law. It is spiritual and searching and leaves no covering and no escape to any flesh or blood. The word of God strips away excuses and penetrates to the heart of things and shows sin to be sin and to be damnable as sin. This is the Lord, and this is his law.

Have you been wounded by the word of the Lord? "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."² "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."³

We have seen, to some extent, heart idolatry. But we also want to see:

IV. The Remedy of Heart Idolatry

Let me speak to this: We have seen the convicting power of the searching law of God but let us also now seek to apply the gospel of the Lord our God.

I will remind you that this first commandment comes immediately after the preface of the ten commandments; in which the Lord, in the preface, is declaring something rather than requiring something. The first thing that he gives is a promise, and declaration, and pledge, saying, "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."⁴ First we hear what God has done and then we understand what we must do.

Who is it who breaches the first commandment, and why is it? Where do our breaches of the first commandment come from? They come from a failure to do something positive. Our having

¹ Daniel 4

² Matthew 11:28-29

³ John 7:37-38

⁴ Exodus 20:2

of other gods before the Lord, in his face, comes from a failure to embrace the Lord as our God in the covenant of grace by faith in Jesus Christ.

You see, here is the great and glorious fact: that God took unto himself a people out of Egypt, and what did they learn in Egypt? If we read *Ezekiel 20*, we read about the idols of Egypt; that they had not forsaken the idols of Egypt. So, here the Lord had brought out of the house of bondage, out of the land of Egypt, a people who had been committing spiritual adultery in worshiping other gods which they learned in Egypt. What would God want with an idolatrous people?

O, but he is a God of grace! Here is the wonder of the thing: that the Lord God in grace, sinful as his people were and sinful as you are today, that the Lord God in grace steps forth to take a people to himself, not for any worthiness in themselves.

Let us consider, regarding the remedy of heart idolatry, a great promise of the word of God. We have it in *Ezekiel 36:25-28*, *“Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you. And ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.”*

These are gospel promises, and what is the crowning thing in this promise that the Lord has made? *“I will be your God.”* There is the state of things as they ought to be and as they are made by grace. *“I will be your God.”* No place for idols because the Lord is all in all unto his people.

There are three things that I will have you notice in this gospel promise from Ezekiel 36. The way that the Lord brings this state of things about; making himself all in all unto his people. The first is:

A. Sprinkling with Clean Water

“I will sprinkle clean water upon you. And ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you.” What a wonderful word that ‘all’ is! We love that word ‘all’ because we know that it leaves nothing out. Yes, a cleansing for those who come unto God through Christ if they have espoused the worship of some particular false god and they have named the name of that god. Those who have been sunk in paganism and witchcraft, etc. may come unto God through Christ knowing that he will surely sprinkle them from such idols. Those who have been worshipers of devils may come unto God through Christ knowing that the promise is of a sprinkling clean even from such worship.

But the promise applies also to these heart idols that we have been speaking of. How do we come to be Christ’s? Through Christ’s washing of us, and we remember it from Ephesians 5. Speaking of how Christ washes his bride with water by the word, that he may present her to himself a pure Church not having any spot or wrinkle or any such thing.¹ When Christ goes forth to take a bride unto himself you would say that such a royal bridegroom should surely have a pure virgin for his bride, But, O look, what kind of bride has he taken? What kind of bride does Christ take? He takes those who have defiled themselves in spiritual adultery!

Here is the truth of the book of Hosea; Hosea took to himself an adulterous wife and sought her again and brought her back. Here is what God in the gospel of his Son does: He comes to those who have feared men, loved money, and adored self, and says unto them, “Peace to your

¹ Ephesians 5:26-27

conscience by the blood of Christ!” To everyone who looks unto the blood of Christ there is peace of conscience even for having done such a wicked thing as transferring love, fear, trust, and devotion to the creature, even for that great and towering sin! Sprinkling with clean water, this is the first thing that God promises to those that come to him through Christ. But also:

B. The Gift of a New Heart

The gift of a new heart is promised in this great gospel promise: *“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.”*

How is it that we can be effectually parted from the service of idols? It is not by a makeover. It is not by a few surface reformations. We need a new nature, a new heart. The nature that we have inherited from Adam is bent upon idolatry and incapable of the true and acceptable worship of God. *“Ye must be born again.”*¹ God promises this new nature in the gospel. Where does it come from? Well, from the Lord Jesus Christ and by his Spirit. You will remember *Romans 13:14*, *“But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.”* Put him on!

What you need is perfect and complete already in Christ. By believingly taking hold upon Christ, you draw out of him what you need to be a keeper of the first commandment. Our Lord Jesus Christ, if we look at him, if we look at his life, he was the one who from his early days had to be about his Father’s business; who was patient under affliction, and who even upon the cross said what? *“MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?”*² Our Lord Jesus Christ under the sorest, the greatest misery and sorrow did not depart from taking his Father to be his God! It was true of him of course as a man in his incarnation, and in his position as mediator he willingly subjected himself as man unto obedience to his Father, calling him his God. But he never in the least departed from taking the Lord alone to be his God.

That is what you need, and it is stored up for you in Christ.! It is as if it were a great reservoir of water, and faith is that which draws forth from Christ. *“The life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God.”*³ So, how can I live free from idolatry? By living by faith in Christ and drawing upon him.

So, there is the sprinkling with clean water, and there is the gift of a new heart, and there is the result of this gift of a new heart which is:

C. Walking in the Lord’s Statutes

Ezekiel 36:27, *“And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”* So, ability given by the Lord and then fruit that comes from it.

Perhaps you say today, “By the grace of God I have been brought over.” Perhaps you say, “I am convicted, I am guilty of heart idolatry. But I have looked to the Lord Jesus Christ in order by his blood to cleanse me from the guilt of even that sin, that red-letter sin, of breaking the first commandment; even that sin I believe his blood is able to cleanse me from, and I believe that he has given me in grace a new heart and a new nature, so that I have ability in him. And now, what must I do?”

¹ John 3:7

² Matthew 27:46

³ Galatians 2:20

The thing for the Christian to do is to walk in his statutes, including walking in obedience to the first commandment. What would this mean? What would be the fruit that results? A few things would result, one would be:

1. Knowing God

Thinking and remembering God's works and studying God in his word; thinking upon the attributes of the one true God and the works of each of the three Persons; thinking upon the names and titles of the Lord our God.

We live in a pragmatic age, where people say, "What can I do with this knowledge?" I had read to me the other day a passage from a contemporary Christian book in which the authors said to their audience, basically, "I am really sorry, but now we are going to say something theological, and you may want to go take a nap some of you." I was insulted! It is insulting to the reader of the book, for one thing, but it is insulting to God(!) if we are about to say something about God and his ways to say, "Maybe this will be boring or uninteresting." It is your first commandment obligation to know God, study him, think upon him, and meditate on his works!

I read a very 'unpragmatic' chapter in the Bible this morning, which is Ezekiel 1. There is the prophet Ezekiel, he is taken with the captives, and he is by the river Kebar. What would the kind of needs be that captives have? They have been taken away from Jerusalem, they have witnessed horrific things. What need would they have?

Ezekiel saw visions of God. He saw a vision of God which is baffling to our understanding! A vision of four living creatures surrounding the throne, and the four wheels full of eyes upon the rim. The first thing that Ezekiel needed, and the people needed was to know God, his greatness and his majesty!

So, by knowing God and studying God, this is part of the way to walk in the first commandment. Knowing God, and also:

2. Loving God

Delighting to see his name glorified; loving his people; loving his worship; choosing God. Not that we can do that apart from grace, this is why I have spoken about the new heart. The flesh never chooses the Lord. It is the new heart that closes with God, takes God, chooses him, submits to his will, and learns to submit freely to all his commands and all his ways.

Knowing God, loving God, choosing God to be our portion, and delighting in him, these are the works that flow forth from the new heart. These are the things that the people of God should be seeking to stir up.

So, we are brought before the Lord our God by his word. We have seen heart idolatry and its remedy. We have seen that the first commandment is not to be passed over quickly; not at all to be thought of as that which we have easily or certainly kept because we have never professed a false god. We see in the first commandment a very searching commandment, and this casts upon our need for grace, for cleansing from our heart idolatry, and for God to give us a new heart and a new nature that we might walk in the way of this good and right commandment. How happy are those who seek such grace from the hands of the Lord.

AMEN