

No Other Gods Before Me

Exodus 20:1-3, "And God spoke all these words, saying: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. "You shall have no other gods before Me."

Heavenly Father, today as we contemplate who You are, what You have done and what You require of us, we pray that You would remind us that You are God and all the things that You have done for us and for all the many blessings You have poured down on us and all the glory that we owe to You. In Jesus' name, amen.

As we start going through the Ten Commandments this week, my current plan is to basically spend a week per commandment and then after the fourth commandment we're going to do Hebrews 4, which is about explaining what that commandment is. As we start to go through these Ten Commandments, I thought it would be worthwhile to first consider, what are the Ten Commandments? Even a simple thing such as breaking this passage where God is very clear there are ten commandments, this becomes a significant controversy. When you read it, it's not that hard to figure them out, you shall not, you shall not, you shall not, you shall not. It's pretty clear what the Ten Commandments are. The reason I want to talk about them is because this is a place where most false professions of Christianity twist. We shouldn't be surprised at that. When we were going through 2 Peter, 3:16 says, "As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures." Even a passage that's so central to what God says He requires of us and He says this is the purpose for which I have given the Bible, is for you to do the good things that I have commanded you to do so you will be thoroughly equipped for every good work and the Ten Commandments are central to that so of course people are going to twist them. For instance, the Jews say the first commandment is, "I am the Lord your God". That's not even a commandment, but yet they say that is the first commandment. They make it not about man's responsibility to God, but a declaration of who God is, they say it's the first commandment. Then they combine the first and second commandments, which means that the only way they need to worry about putting another god before God is by carving an image. They twist them so that they can get out of the responsibility of the first commandment. The Roman Catholics, they do the same thing. They combine the first and second commandment so they say the only way to put some other god before the true and living God is by carving an image. A lot of their theology, a lot of their twisting comes down to the fact that they say that the first and second commandments are really the first commandment because it gives them the right to worship saints, it gives them the right to worship Mary because they're not saying they're putting another god before God. So we just need to recognize that even in saying what the Ten Commandments are, there is significant twisting that goes on so that people can escape the responsibilities of the commandments. What the Roman Catholics do is they take the tenth commandment, ""You shall not covet your neighbor's house;

you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's" and they say that the tenth commandment is the first half of that and the last half of that and the ninth commandment actually comes after the tenth commandment. You don't have to look very far to see people twist Scripture. The Lutherans, they keep the order but they do the same thing, they split the tenth commandment in two. The ninth commandment is, 'You shall not covet your neighbor's house', and the tenth commandment is, 'You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his donkey,' and all the other things listed there. Again, they want to combine commandments so they can say the only way that you put another god before God is by carving an image. They twist it to their own destruction. My point about talking about this is people don't want to consider the breadth of the first commandment. "You shall have no other gods before Me." This is the same thing Jesus Christ is saying in Matthew 22:37-38, "Jesus said to him, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment." Putting any other god before Him is not loving the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. That is what it means to put some other god before Jehovah, it's to not serve Him with all your strength, heart, soul, and mind. It's not, 'Don't carve an image', although there is a commandment to not carve an image. This is far broader, this is far greater because none of us carve images, but all of us don't make God first when we should. All of us sin, that is sin. If we serve God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind, we would not sin because to sin is to not do that. To sin is to do what we want to do rather than what God wants us to do, that is what sin is. People want to narrow down the breadth of the commandment making it to mean you can't carve an image to worship in the place of God like what Aaron did with the golden calf, but what it really means is, are you dedicating everything to God? That's the command, are you dedicating everything to God? What do you put in front of God? What do you put in front of what God says is the right thing to do? As we go through this we should recognize how easy it is to put other gods before the true and living God. Remember why God says repeatedly that He is a jealous God, because when you put some other god in front of Him, He says He is a jealous God. We need to be diligent to remember our responsibilities to put God first in all things.

Verses 1-2, "And God spoke all these words, saying: "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." God speaks all these words, all the Ten Commandments and we know it's important for us to remember He's speaking these words to all the people. Moses had gone up and down the mountain multiple times, but he ended up down at the foot of the mountain with the people when he received the law. Remember, Moses clearly in chapter 19 and 20, is acting like a mediator between God and man. He's taking on this role of mediator that is Christ's role so it really matters that he is down with man at the giving of the law because the mediator has to be under the law. Galatians 4:4-5, "But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons." Moses, as a picture of Christ, is a picture of the mediator, he has to be at the foot of the mountain, he has to be given these laws, he has to be under that law. That's why He had to take on flesh to dwell among us. Another important thing to remember is that this is the picture of who God is giving

the law to. There's three clear biblical uses of the law, one is to convict the unbeliever of their sin, another is to constrain evil in the world, but the primary use of the law is neither of those. The primary use of the law is to teach the faithful how they should walk. The law is not given to everybody in the world, it is being given to unbelievers, but it's being given to the people who have been redeemed already. The problem is that when we joined at Adam in the fall, our understanding of who God is and what He expected of us was twisted and perverted and even when we have faith and truly say that Jesus Christ is our Lord, we need to be corrected, we need to be instructed and renew our mind as Paul says in Romans 12. To do that we need the law, we need to be able to understand this is what true righteousness is because we shouldn't deceive ourselves and think that we actually know what God wants. We need His Word so God gave His Word first to redeemed people, not the people who had not been baptized in the Red Sea, He gave His law to the ones who had been baptized in the Red Sea. It is important to recognize that the law does convict the unbeliever. Romans 3:19, "Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." The law does stop the mouth of the unbeliever and it's very useful in dealing with the lost, but their conscience already testifies that they are guilty before God. They don't need it to understand they are guilty before God, Romans 2:14-15, "For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)." They have enough of the law to convict them, they don't need the written law. We need the written law. The law does constrain the world, but that's not the primary way that sin in the world is constrained. How is the sin in the world constrained? Matthew 5:13-14, "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden." The church is the one that is supposed to stop the decay of the world. Yes, the church uses the law to do that, but the primary responsibility of stopping the sin in the world and constraining the sin is not the law of God, it is the church of Jesus Christ. It's important as we begin the study of the Ten Commandments for us to realize God is giving the law to Israel as a picture of this is what the church needs. It's not the words of the law that convict the world, it's the practice of the law that convicts the world. That's how the church acts as light, that's how the church acts as salt. Not just speaking of these things, but doing these things. Moses said all these things and they hated him for saying it, but they didn't kill him. Jesus Christ came and did all these things and they crucified Him. The world is far more convicted by seeing someone obey the law instead of just hearing the law. Cain knew he was supposed to do animal sacrifices, but he killed Abel because Abel did animal sacrifices. The world needs more than just words, it needs the example. The church, because we have a new heart, because God has given us a heart of flesh, because He has given us a desire for the law in our hearts, we're the ones who need the law because we're the ones who can rightly respond to it. The primary use of the law is for believers. Another point is that the law is for all of the redeemed people, all of Israel had to gather at the foot of the mountain. They all had to experience the thunder, lightning, and trumpet. They all had to experience the presence of God and they all had to hear the law because it was for all of them because the law is for all Christians. It's wonderful if a six-year-old makes a profession of faith, just as it's wonderful if an

eighty-year-old makes a true profession of faith, but if that profession of faith is not joined with a desire to obey the law and you say the law is not for that six-year-old and he can disobey his parents and who cares that the fifth commandment says to honor your father and mother? When the church accepts that, it is being very sinful towards that child because the law is given to all who believe. Anyone who believes is held accountable to the law. Everyone who professes faith, everyone who is baptized, they have a responsibility to keep the law and the church has a responsibility to enforce the law against them and not just say they're a six-year-old and all six-year-olds rebel against their parents. It's really easy for us to think that the law is different for some Christians and others, but the law was given to all of them, the law is given to those who are redeemed. It's given to those who are redeemed in the words of Scripture and that's who it's for and the church has to expect that if they have been saved, God has started the process of writing His law in their hearts. Their attitude towards that law is not that they want a veil between them and the law, it's not that they want to do what they have been told to do, it's that they have a desire to do it and in their flesh they will fall short, but they have a desire to do it and they need to be held accountable to it. The law is for all Christians. I've seen many baptist churches effectively become paedobaptist churches because they baptize upon profession and they don't hold them accountable until they reach a certain age. They won't say it's very clear you are violating the fifth commandment, you need to be excommunicated. Let's make sure that that's not us. If we bring somebody in, anybody that we bring into the church, anyone that we baptize then becomes accountable. They're supposed to have a desire, that's what it means to be saved, God changes your heart so instead of wanting to rebel against God you want to submit to God and that means that you want to submit to the law of God. The law was given to everyone in the church by God, verbally at the first pentecost, and through the work of the Spirit at the second pentecost. If you have been saved, God has given you a love for the law on your heart, that's what it says in 2 Corinthians 4. So then He spoke these words "saying: 'I am the Lord.'" He starts with His authority to give them the law. He is the One who is, who was, and always will be and because of that, because He is the Creator, because He is the only self-existence One, He is the only One that no one created and because of that He can demand of His creation whatever He wants. He is the Creator and again, since Moses, Joshua, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders all see Him it's pretty clear here this has to be Christ. He is the One through whom all things were made and He is our maker so when He says 'I am the Lord', He is saying He has the right to command you because He is your Creator. Then He goes on and says, "your God". That's the word 'Elohim' in the first commandment. He's the one with authority, He's the one with power, He's the one with the strength which is where the root come from. Because He is the Creator He has authority over us and He has the right to give us commandments. So He is the Lord our God, He is the self-existent one who is our authority. He is the Almighty God, no one has power except that it has been given to them by God. We never have the right to treat any authority that is subordinate to God as superior to God. So He starts out by declaring He has this right to give these commandments because this is who He is, but then He doesn't just go and give the commandments, He testifies first to His mercy, "who brought you out of the land of Egypt." We should not just say He has the right to tell us what to do, instead as those who have been delivered from their sin and delivered from the fear of death and bondage to sin and therefore has the right to do that because He is our Creator, we should also say that He delivered us so we can trust that His commands are good because He means

good for His people. So these commands are not commands of evil, these commands are not because He hates us, these are commands that He is giving because He delivered us. He is giving it to them and saying that He delivered them out of the land of Egypt. Everything that something goes wrong they say Moses is just trying to kill them, why did he bring them out to this desert to die of thirst, did he just bring them out here so we die of hunger? God is saying He delivered them out of the land of Egypt, I did this for your good. The law is given to us for our good, it is not because God hates us, it's because He delivered us. He delivered them out of the land of Egypt, they did not deliver themselves. They did not deliver themselves with His help. That's the arminian view of the gospel, that they left Egypt out of their own will. That's not what the record says in Exodus 5:20-21, "Then, as they came out from Pharaoh, they met Moses and Aaron who stood there to meet them. And they said to them, "Let the Lord look on you and judge, because you have made us abhorrent in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, to put a sword in their hand to kill us." It was God that made them come out, they would have stayed, they would have said to not cause them to have anymore trouble, they would be satisfied to stay as slaves. God instead made them a free people, God delivered them. He delivered them "out of the house of bondage." What's frequently done in Hebrew for emphasis is to say the same thing using different words. In this case we can understand what it's really pointing to, it's pointing to delivery from the house of bondage, delivery from being slaves of sin. We were slaves of sin and God delivered us so because He delivered us, because He took us out of bondage and made us free, that means we should desire to hear what God says is the right thing for us to do. All the world should serve their Creator. Jesus is the Lord of all, all should obey Him. Those who God showed mercy to and delivered them from the house of bondage that broke their slavery, those are the ones who the law is intended for. It's not something to be rebelled against, which is in the nature of man, but when God gives us a new nature through salvation, then all of a sudden we should desire to understand the goodness of God, the goodness of His ways. We should desire to truly love our neighbor which means we need the law of God because the law of God is all summed up in this, love your neighbor as yourself and you cannot know how to love your neighbor when you are a fallen creature who has the old man of sin, you cannot know how to love your neighbor without having the law of God. God delivered them from bondage to serve Him. There's a sense that we serve Him as a slave as it says in Romans 6:22, "But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life." He delivers us from the bondage of the house of Egypt, the bondage of sin, and He delivers us to become slaves of God, but we're slaves only for a season. We are like slaves like a son is a slave until he receives the inheritance. That's how we are slaves, we're slaves like somebody who's a master like it talks about in the Pentateuch, how a master goes and buys a bride as a slave and she would be a bride until she married his son. That's the picture, we are slaves, but we are free when we receive the inheritance, we are free when all corruption is removed. Now we need the blessing of slavery to constrain our sin, but the day will come when corruption will put on incorruption and we will be completely free. We are slaves that have been promised the Sabbath year, we are promised that there will be a day when we are full grown and we will go free, we will marry the Master's Son, that is what will happen. We have been delivered from the house of bondage.

Verse 3, "You shall have no other gods before Me." That 'other gods' is the word "Elohim". God said I am your Elohim and then He says you shall have no other Elohim before Me. Elohim, God uses it for judgment, uses it for more than just idols. It's not just talking about vain idols when it says you shall have no other gods before Me. You are not to put any authority over the authority that Jehovah has over you. When you think about it, this is the sum of the rest of the Ten Commandments. The second commandment is about making idols, it's explicitly saying to not carve something and say this now has power and authority over God. The third commandment is about not taking the Lord's name in vain, it's explicitly about saying I have authority over myself, God doesn't have authority over me, I will do what I want to do even though I am called by His name. The fourth commandment is about keeping the Sabbath. It's saying that when you don't keep the Sabbath you are saying God doesn't have authority over my time and you've put some other authority. My boss says I have to work so I have to work, that is putting some other authority over God. The fifth commandment about honoring your father and mother is about submitting to the authority of your father and mother because their authority was given to them by God and if you reject their authority you are rejecting the authority of God and you are putting some other authority over God's authority. Not committing murder, adultery, theft, not bearing false witness, it's all about exalting your desires, your lust of the eyes, your lust of the flesh, your pride of life and saying you are going to change how God ordered the world because I don't like it. You are putting yourself, all these are related to putting yourself in authority over God. You shall not covet, that is about putting your desires before God's, it's about saying what God has done is not perfect and what God has done is not just and you should have this thing that you don't have, you should get this, this isn't fair. This is saying that your authority and your righteousness is greater than God's. This is the first and great commandment, you shall have no other gods before Me, you shall serve Me with all your strength, with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul. It's summed up in Colossians 3:5, that covetousness is this, "Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry." Covetousness is idolatry, that's why it's idolatry, because you are putting some other god before the true God. Notice this is also saying there are other gods and we need to recognize that. These other powers, these other beings with authority, there are angels and demons and we are never to put those before God. So how do we put demons before God? I remember probably ten years ago now that there was quite an argument at a Bible study whether there was some cosmic wrestling match between God and Satan. That is putting another god before God if you think, if you even imagine that somehow Satan is not the servant of God, that somehow they are competitors instead of him simply being a slave just like everything else, you are putting Satan before God and you're breaking the first commandment. Satan can't stand against the Word of God. There's many people who call themselves Christians that are more concerned about what Satan does than what God does. That's idolatry. Who cares what Satan does? It doesn't mean we are dismissive of it, it means that it pales in comparison to what God does. We're supposed to be worried about what God does because God controls Satan just like a well-trained dog is controlled by his master. It's not some cosmic wrestling match between good and evil, that's not what's happening. We can exalt demons, there are lots of pentacostal churches that go and make this big deal about casting the demons out of the church and doing all this other stuff and protecting from Satan and they are much more concerned about what demons do instead of what God does. They're idolaters. That

is not what we are to do. At the time of the coming of Christ there was a common attitude about the worship of angels. That's why in Hebrews 1, it talks so much about angels even though you don't hear much about angels in the Old Testament. It was one of the sins that was prevalent in the Jewish society at the time when Christ came because they were putting angels before God. They are holy and righteous angels, but they are not God. When we think of them as slaves of God, they are just doing God's will and we're not supposed to look at the angel, even though they are ministers to us for good, we don't worship the angels, we worship the living God. Not putting other gods before Me doesn't eliminate the reality of those gods, it means that we need to make sure they are in the right order. There are other real authorities in our lives beyond Jehovah and those authorities fit into the definition included by the 'gods' here. False worship frequently manifests itself as exalting one of the other legitimate authorities that God has put in the world. It's very easy to exalt one of these and put them before the true God. We can see this all over our country, why are we so divided? Why are people so angry and bitter? Because we took the government, which is legitimate and referenced in the Psalms as gods, and we have taken them in our society and made the government before Jehovah. We have said it is a more important god than God. It is not God who sent the sickness, it is the federal governments failure to respond to it that's the reason people are dying. That is putting the god of government before the true God. You look at Islam, this is Islam. This is why when Islam comes into a country they take over cities and install sharia law. Islam is saying that the government is god so they put the god of government before the real God. You can also do this with family. There are many oriental religions, especially China where most of the religion is based on the family, ancestor worship. They take what is good and has its place in the world and they take it way beyond where it's supposed to be. They take it and they make what is good and they make it evil because they put it before the true God. They say the family name is more important than serving God. This can happen with the church too because the church has real authority in the world and we can put the church before God. A clear example of this is Roman Catholicism where they say you have to bow down to the Pope in order to actually serve God. You have to worship the saints to serve God. This is putting other gods and in the case of the church, there is a real authority there, but we can get it out of whack and put it before what God would have it to be and instead of thinking of it as an authority that was appointed by God and delegated from God, it becomes the source. That's exactly what the Roman Catholics teach so we should be careful of that. When we think of putting other gods before God we shouldn't think of just making a carved stone, we should think about just getting things out of order that God put in a particular order and we flip that order, we give something more authority than it should have. We give something an ability to direct things that it doesn't have responsibility for. When we think of putting other gods before the Lord God, the Creator of heaven of earth, we need to consider how that happens if we give someone or something the role of God. It's not that you take a similar authority and put it in the same position, you can take a role that is God's and give it to something else. For instance, the theory of evolution puts chaos in the place of God. Instead of God being the Creator of the world, you put chaos and time and you have it all mixed up out there and somehow order comes from it. This is in violation of the first commandment because they've said evolution is what created the world rather than God being the Creator of the world. We can do this with the Savior. When we make something else the savior we are putting another god before God. That's what Arminianism does, when they make man the savior and

God the puppet of man when they say it is the person who is the final determiner of whether they will be saved or not, they are putting that person before God because they are making themselves their own savior. God is the Provider. We can do this easily, instead of saying, 'Give us this day our daily bread', we can think our employer gives us our daily bread or our labor gives us our daily bread. This is taking the position that God has and giving it to someone else. This is putting another god before God if you think it's your job that causes your family to be fed rather than God using your job to feed your family. You are putting your job before the true God. God is the Prophet, He's the One that reveals the truth of the world and its order. People exalt themselves above the Word of God even if they say they have a revelation from God, which they don't. It's a death penalty offense if instead of saying this is what God says, you say it without it being from God. You can take the false prophets and put them before God. That's what happened in the Old Testament all the time and that's what happens in the church throughout the world. You have a man stand up in the pulpit speaking his own opinions without any basis in the Word of God and saying this is authoritative. When you listen to that instead of listening to the Word of God, you are putting another god in front of the true God. You can put other gods before God when you exalt other men's predictions and think it will actually happen and forget it is the Lord's will. You can look at a weather forecast and say this is what's going to happen in three days instead of saying these are men and considering in the light of these are men who just said in the similar circumstances over the last hundred years, when we have watched this, three days later this is what God usually does. God can change it all. It's really easy for us to say this is what's going to happen instead of saying this is what is going to happen if God wills. If we start to think these predictions of the stock market going up or it raining in two weeks, whatever it is, if you start to think that these things are real, that they're not just an expectation of what God is going to do, you are exalting them above God. It's exalting the world and saying the world is sovereign and God is not sovereign. God is the King, He is the One who is the Law-giver. When we think we can make laws that should be universal binding that are not derived from God's law is putting themselves before God. Obviously, as a country we should expect God's continued wrath upon us because when we say two men can marry or we say that a baby in the womb is just a mass of tissue that can be killed, this is saying we are the law-giver, as a nation we are the law-giver and not the Creator. We don't think this applies to us, that's why we fund abortion all over the world. That's why we use politics to manipulate other countries to accept sodomy. We think we are the universal law-giver. The United Nations thinks it's the universal law-giver. This is putting another god before the true God. So as we think of the first commandment it's important for us to realize how easily we can violate it without thinking about it. This is what our society does all the time, it always violates it because it despises the idea of obeying a God that it has to answer to. How many professing Christians a week ago were singing about Santa Claus? Santa Claus is clearly a violation of this. He knows when you are sleeping, he knows when you're awake, he knows if you've been bad or good. It's putting him in the omniscience of God and yet Christians sing about this, they say they are worshipping Jesus Christ, and at the same time they are exalting a false god and they think it's ok. How many churches in America think that's ok? It's easy for us to look and say we wouldn't do that. Let's make sure we recognize if they can do it that easily, don't think it's not that easy for us to do it. It's really easy to violate this commandment and it's really easy to do it and not recognize that you're doing it. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with

all your strength. If you're not doing that you are violating this commandment. So trying to think of applications, it was very easy, it was hard to stop because whenever you sin you are violating this commandment. You are saying you are God over yourself and God is not my Lord. That is a violation of this commandment because we put another god before the true and living God.

Applications:

1. Remember that God has the right to tell you what to do. The fact that He does it because He is merciful and He does it because He is kind, that doesn't change the fact that it starts with, do you get the concept that He has the right to tell you what to do? He is the Potter, I am the clay. He has the right to destroy us, the right to smash us. He can do whatever He wants with us and until you get that understanding, you are going to put other gods before the living God. That's something we need to believe from the bottom of our heart, that He has a right to tell us what to do. Of course there will always be some inconsistency in acting on that belief, but we must have that belief because that is central to the gospel. If you resent the reality that God can rightly send you to hell for what you've done by rebelling against Him, if you don't understand that would be the just response, you don't have the right view of God, you don't see Him as Lord, you don't see Him as the true God because you have to accept the fact that He rightly can judge you, that it would be just for Him to cast you into hell, that it is His mercy that prevents it. If you don't see that, then God hasn't given you a heart of flesh because this is what a heart of flesh is, it means we see who God is, we have eyes to see and ears to hear and a heart to understand. Like it says in 2 Corinthians 4, we can look in the face of Moses with our heart unveiled because we are with Christ. We have to be like Paul as he says in Romans 7:15-18, "For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find." Is that what you're like? Do you say you hate to sin, you desire to do the right thing? That's what it looks like to be saved. It's not that you always do the right thing, but from your heart you can say you truly desire to do the right thing. If you're not at that place, you've put yourself before God. Is your will truly to do the commands of God and not just to see what you can get away with? That's what's required to truly believe that God has the right to tell you what to do and that's what's required to truly not put other gods before Him. If you think that you have the right to tell God what to do, you are putting yourself before God.
2. If we're not going to put other gods before God we have to consider how we use our lips. In James it says that the tongue is like a rudder that steers the ship, the way you speak determines the direction you go. This is why we are commanded to give praise to God continually with our lips. If we start to praise other things, guess what? Our hearts move away from considering God to be the penultimate and we start to think other things are the ultimate. If we're not giving thanks continually, if we're not giving thanks always for all things, when this is not our practice, we will start to say this isn't good what's going on

around us and that is idolatry, that is covetousness. So God has given us commandments, He's given us these things that help us keep God in His proper place. What do you do with your lips? Are you praising Him continually? Are you giving thanks always for all things?

3. Do you control your thoughts? 2 Corinthians 10:4-5, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." Bringing every thought to captivity, that is about tearing down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God. By bringing every thought into captivity is how we stop putting other gods before God. Every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, that means everything that tries to be God and in God's place, it tries to be before God. So are you taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ? That's how we make sure we don't violate the first commandment, that's how we reduce our violations of the first commandment would be a better way to put it because we all violate the first commandments, but we are supposed to be working to turn from those violations. Just like our tongues need to be turned to thanksgiving and praise, our thoughts need to be about how do I obey Christ. We need to not let them wander, but we need to take them captive to the obedience of Christ. That's how you can cast down arguments. That's how all the things that try to exalt themselves against Christ, we're seeing this all over the place in the church where they are not able to cast down arguments, they are not able to bring things down that exalt themselves against the living God because they're not taking their thoughts captive to Christ. We need to ask ourselves if we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ, is this what Christ would have me to do? We see this so often in the history of the church where people think that they can take every thought captive, but without it being captive to the obedience of Christ, it's the scholastic movement, the people decided that the brilliance of their thoughts was more important than the truth that God commanded. That manifests itself now, people throughout the world think education will save. You don't have to take them to obedience to Christ, you just have to have control of your thoughts. It's been proven time and time again that it doesn't work, it's exalting it above God, it's putting education above God. It's taking education and making it the provider instead of God. Taking your thoughts captive is not enough, they need to be taken captive to the obedience of Christ. Colossians 2:8, "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ." This was happening when Christ walked the earth, that all the wise men, all the philosophers of the day made arguments about if you give your money as korban to the church, He will bless you because you are really fulfilling the fifth commandment and they really twist it so it's not about the obedience to Christ. Paul is saying, I understand that philosophy and how twisted that was, don't fall for it. We need to not just take captivity of our thoughts, but they have to be in obedience to Christ.

4. Do you believe in the true God or have you made a false god? Everybody in this room, probably almost everyone, certainly all the members of the church, say they believe in the true God, they believe in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That doesn't mean that you believe in the true God. Children, if you're not obeying Him it doesn't mean that you believe in Him even if you come here every week, even if you say these things, it only means that you believe Him if you actually obey Him and don't put other gods before Him. If you twist Him and still call Him the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, you still call Him Jehovah but say He has to obey you and say this is ok and acceptable, then you have made a false god. You have made another god that you put before the true God. Understand we all need to constantly work to make sure we don't do that. That's why you need to be in the Word of God because what the Word of God should do is the world is always pushing us to change who God is, to make Him into a false god, to make a false god that we worship instead of the true God. What we need to do is constantly go back to Scripture and say that God is like this. The reading of Scripture should be this constant focusing of the lens so we get a clearer and clearer view of who God is. We should be afraid that it's easy for us to go astray and be misled because the world works at it. We are wrestling against power and principalities of the air. It's not like there's not a battle going on. That battle is to get you to come up with a false god for you to worship instead of the true God, for you to come up with a false god that you put before the true God. Make sure that your view of God and your understanding of God is constantly being cleansed and perfected through the Scriptures because that's how we know that we're worshipping the true God. There's plenty of people that call themselves Christians that go to churches and never open their Bible and read it. How do they know if they're worshipping the true God or not? Through His word and revelation we can know. It's through His Word and revelation that we should constantly be getting corrections so we turn from our view of who God is and turn to the true God. People make gods in their own image all the time, make sure you're not doing that.
5. Do you think your health and your provision will come from the government? This is where we are, this is why the churches are shutting down, this is why as a nation we think that the government will provide health, that the government will provide provision, that they can send out checks to everyone and we will all be ok because we can make something from nothing. The American government thinks it's God and if you think they are going to be your savior, you have put the government before God. You have taken this god who is a legitimate god and a legitimate authority that God has put in place, but you are putting it in front of the real God. This is what the package of laws that were passed last week were about. Sending checks to most people in the United States was passed because people wanted to look to the government as their provider even though the government cannot make manna fall from heaven. The so-called stimulus bill was about the government pretending like they can make manna come down from heaven because they want people to trust them like the living God. We need to think about something that God has delegated some of His authority to as being in the place that they're supposed to be and that does not give them authority to act outside of what they are supposed to act on. When we do that we can put that thing before God. When we say that's a good thing we can make it idolatrous. Make sure you understand it happens

on the right and it happens on the left and we have been swimming in it for so many years. I remember when we interviewed a man that was talking about the Civil War and the economics leading up to the Civil War. He said the Civil War, all the states realized they should not be in the road-building business because that was evil. Yet we sit here and think, 'Well, how else do we get roads? Because none of us have ever experienced roads being built by anything other than the government. Do you realize God did not give the government the right to build roads. It is acting as God, it is taking a role that was not given to it and we just need to recognize how easy it is for us to think that that's just how it's supposed to work. No, that's not how it's supposed to work. We need to realize how easily we can put the government in the place of God. When we see other people's examples of them doing it where they are saying we haven't been able to work, but the government will send this check so that we don't have to work and manna will rain down from heaven and we'll be able to eat. You might think, 'Well that's wrong for the government to be able to do that.' Don't just think that way, ask yourself where do you look to the government and pretend like it's god, like it has the right to do things, like it is the Creator or Provider. With all these lockdowns or the corporate worship of God, it's clear from reading some statements from churches that they have put the government before God and it's pretty scary. Let's not just think how they do it, let's ask ourselves whether we do it. It's easy to look and see the government intentionally cultivating this view. You look at the symbolism with President Obama where the picture of it whether he was designated as the savior. He was designated that his position was very awkward in his campaign literature because they put it and made him look like he was on a cross. They intentionally made it so that he was hope. They're doing this intentionally and we need to make sure that we recognize that, that they are intentionally trying to put themselves before God and make sure we are thinking that way so we don't fall for it. Again, it's not just the left. George W. Bush had this clever thing he would do in his speeches where he would quote part of the line from a hymn and in the end he would replace God with man or God with the government. He did this all the time where he spoke "Christianese" but they didn't actually know what he was saying because they didn't listen to the words of both the left and the right who want you to treat the government as gods. We need to make sure we are not treating the government as gods, it's not righteous, it's not good. It's usurping the placement of God and the worship of God. Ask yourself do you put government before God? Are there areas that you are looking to government to solve your government when that's not the point of government? The point of government is to be the avenger of God's wrath, to punish those who do evil, and to praise those who do good.

6. Do you put your family out of place? It's very easy to put the government out of place, but I've seen a lot of homeschool families where they put the family out of place. We have real responsibility for our families and we need to be careful to fulfill those responsibilities, but we can exalt them too. Christ makes it very clear we need to be willing to sacrifice family relationships if necessary to follow Christ. Matthew 10:35-37, "For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.'" He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And

he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.” It is very easy for us to put our children, to put our wives, to put our husbands, to put our parents before God and Jesus Christ is saying in that passage that that is idolatry, that is a violation of the first commandment. That is putting something before the true and living God. It’s easy for us to say we don’t do that, but watch, be careful because it’s very easy for it to sneak in, it’s very easy for us to accept this with our families without thinking about it. We can do it in subtle ways, one person is sick so we say that we will all stay home. I’m not saying when someone is sick that there aren’t times when everyone needs to stay home, but I am saying, do you make your family and the church a unit or is it individual? The reality is each of us that are members of the church, we are individual members of the church and we can individually forsake the gathering of the saints. Family is visiting from out of town so we can say we won’t go to church or we won’t go to prayer or these other things because I don’t want to offend or abandon my family so we will abandon the family of God. Again, there can be ways to do this in a righteous way, but we have to be careful because it’s really easy for us to put things out of order. Should we go to prayer or does that mean our children will stay up later than normal? That’s not good so we’re just never going to go to prayer. Where do we put our family? Where do we put our order in the home? Where do we put these things in comparison to God?

7. We can also put the church before God. I hope it doesn’t happen here, but I have definitely heard cases where people were shown something from the Scriptures and they couldn’t argue from the Scripture so they say to just ask the pastor and find out what he thinks. That’s exalting the church above God and the church should never be exalted above the Word of God. It doesn’t mean that we don’t need to correct one another, that we don’t need to discuss these things, that we don’t need the brethren to sharpen our understanding, but the Word of God is the authority and not the church. The Word of God is the law-giver, not the church. Another way you can do that, and I see this in Nigeria, you go there and they ask you to pray for them. They’re thinking that somehow my prayer is more effective than their prayers. We can think that about the church, when the church gathers to pray about something, then God will hear the prayers. If we pray alone that doesn’t really matter. No, God doesn’t say that. He says you can go to the Father, you can go to Christ, we don’t need the church to pray. Not that it’s a bad thing for the church to pray for something, but we don’t need the church to pray for something, we all have access to the Father. We can elevate the body and make it greater than what it’s been called to be. We do the same thing, give undue authority to the speaking of the church. That’s what the Pope says, if I said it that means it’s what God said. We need to make sure we don’t think that. God is the ultimate authority, we need to make sure we don’t put other things before God.
8. Here’s another check to see if you have put another god before the true God. Who do you fear? When you put something in control rather than it being God who is in control, then your fear will shift to that thing and that will be your God and you will have exalted them above God. One example is if you don’t do what you know God would have you to do, then you have put man before God. Matthew 10:28, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and

body in hell.” If our response is to obey man rather than to obey God we need to recognize this is about idolatry, about putting another god before the living God. An easy way to measure this is fear. If you are afraid of getting sick, getting cancer and dying, you are putting you fear as more than the God that judges. How we look at our fear, how we put our fears in the world and in their place is the primary fear of God or fear of things in the world? Fear of men or fear of ideas? There are all kinds of things that we can fear, but who is your ultimate fear? Do the other fears pale in front of that fear? If they don’t, you’re putting your other fears in front of God.

9. Another way we can break this commandment, and I didn’t talk about this much, but when it talks about putting other gods before Him, that ‘before’ literally means ‘before My face’. I didn’t emphasize this because I think the primary interpretation is actually to read it figuratively as in putting it in order of where you have put it in place before Him. Another way we can break this commandment is just not realizing that we are in the presence of God at all times. When we forget we are in the presence of God, when we forget that we are before God, we get to the point where we are saying other things are before the living God. We need to be thinking like David thought in Psalm 149:7-8, “To execute vengeance on the nations, And punishments on the peoples; To bind their kings with chains, And their nobles with fetters of iron.” One way to make sure we don’t violate the first commandment is to always remember we are in the presence of God. Right now we are in the presence of God, but you are also in the presence of God when you are laying in bed asleep. You’re also in the presence of God when you are spanking your children. You are in the presence of God at all times, you never escape His presence. So when we think about putting another god before Him, we forget that we’re in the presence of God. Cultivate that understanding, cultivate that thought that you are always in the presence of God. A way to see if you’re thinking that way or not is, do you think you are alone and you can do something that if someone else was in the room you wouldn’t do it? What you’re saying is, you’re alone so you will go to that website. You’re alone so you will do this or that or whatever it is. You have rejected the idea that you are in the presence of God and you have also testified where your fear is, the reason you constrain when someone else is in the room, it’s because you fear man and you fear him more than you fear God. You have put him before God. What is your behavior like when you are alone versus when you are with other people. It’s a good measure of what you believe and whether you are practicing the thought that you are in the presence of God.
10. Another application, are you constantly knocking down idols in your mind? We need to be working to do this. You have an old man that doesn’t want the true God, you have an old man that wants to set up an idol, you have the old man that wants to put something before God and we need to fight the flesh. If we’re not fighting it, we will lose. If you are not knocking down idols, you will be creating them. Calvin said the heart is an idol factory. That is the nature of our fallen man, we want to create idols so we have to deliberately work to tear them down. Romans 12:1-2, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and

acceptable and perfect will of God.” That’s what we need to do, we need to be renewing our minds and doing the work to renew our minds because if we aren’t renewing our minds, we will set up idols which is why John ends 1 John with ‘little children keep yourselves from idols.’ It’s because it requires constant work. He was just talking about all these checks to see if you are saved and at the end he says, ‘little children, keep yourselves from idols.’ This needs to be our work, are you working to keep yourself from idols?

11. If you want to keep this commandment, God gives Moses really practical ways to do it. When Jesus Christ says this is the first and greatest commandment, He’s speaking about Deuteronomy 6:4-9, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” This is simple instruction, this is how you make sure you don’t put other idols before God, put other gods before the true and living God. You meditate on His Word, you keep His Word in your heart, and it means more than just intellectually knowing what God says. It’s a desiring and you cultivate a desire. You think about how God blesses, you think about God’s mercy and how His commandments are all about mercy and you think about them, you meditate on them. You have to do more, you teach them and you train your children and you talk about them with your children. This isn’t just for your children, this is for you to keep it present and at the forefront of your mind and thoughts. As you walk through your life, this is so you don’t put other idols before God. It is good for our children, but it’s also for our sake that we don’t break the commandments. If we’re talking to our children about them and teaching them what God says and how God’s working, do you see the testimony of who God is in this? We are creating accountability because when we don’t do it, our children say, ‘But you told me to do this and now you’re doing this’, ‘you said this testified to who God is, but now you’re doing this’. That helps us because the heart is an idol factory and we will turn from the living God. We need to have zeal and passion and part of it is to talk about it, part of it is to direct our tongues because the tongue is the rudder that steers the ship and if we’re talking to our children about what God requires, this is the testimony of the Word of God in the world, then we’re a lot more likely to keep God in His proper place. Then it goes on and says to make this the center of your time. It doesn’t matter what you are doing, you can do this while you are doing other things. You can teach them and talk with them while you are rising up, while you are sitting down, while you are walking and while you are lying down. This isn’t something that just becomes something you dedicate time to, this becomes the pattern of our life so we remember and see God in all aspects of our life. This is how you remember that God is God and there is no other.
12. The last thing in Moses’ instruction is look at what you do and where you go because if what we’re saying is we’re going to do what God wants us to do and go where God

wants us to go, you won't set up another idol that you set up before God, you won't put other idols before Him. God has given us clear instructions about how we're supposed to do this to prevent us from slipping to idolatry, but it starts with do you really want to keep the first commandment because otherwise you will let it slip. If you don't, God has given us ways to prevent it, He's given us ways to reduce its frequency, He's given us ways to recover when we do that, but do you want to keep God before all other gods? Do you want to give God the honor that God is due? If you do it means real practices and real behaviors in your life and if you're not willing to do those practices, you are violating the first commandment because you are putting something before God.

Let's pray. Oh Lord God, we do thank You for this passage that You have us in. We thank You that You have it here as we start this year. Even as we think You have given us signs and seasons so that we understand that there are beginnings and ends, that there is a pattern to life, and as You have given us this new year Lord, I pray that You cause this year to be a year that we do a better job and that the year after that we do a better job and the year after that we do a better job and not putting other gods before You. Lord, convict us of where we do it, open our eyes so we can see it so we can bring You more glory and honor this year. We ask this in Your Son's name, amen.