

of God so exposes our sins and shortcomings? It is a law not only so right, but also so revealing. The reality in each of our lives is, even with the most godly and holy among us, we can so easily have and hold on to other gods before the one true God. By nature we are persistent idol makers and ongoing idol worshippers. So quickly, our lives can become ensnared with something or someone less than God which or whom we allow to take the throne in our hearts, and it becomes our obsession, and our preoccupation, and God above gets put in the background. The history of the Israelites as so prone to idol worship is not just a problem of that people of old, but it is the problem of man, fallen in Adam. No wonder the apostle John ends his first epistle to God's people with these words, "*Little children, keep yourselves from idols.*" [1 John 5:21] You can be sure he didn't write that because it was just some neat way to end his letter, but John realized this is such a constant threat for us, to get caught up with other and lesser things in the Christian life than God; and for this and that reason, no longer to have God and His Word and His honour and praise first and foremost in our lives. Any Christian not thinking this is a constant danger for us, is not thinking really, and not facing the reality as it is.

The first commandment in the original begins with the word "Not" shall you, suggesting this is our tendency by nature which we must be transformed away from. The unbeliever lives life having other gods before the face of the one true God, and the believer lives life constantly fighting having other gods before the face of the one true God. Is your life like that of an unbeliever or a believer? What is first and foremost for you in life? Hardly can there be a more important question as we speed along in life's brief journey also in this New Year. So, what is first and foremost in your life? If it is not God, the God of the Bible, you are heading to eternal destruction. Don't say you have never been warned. If God the Lord is first and foremost in your life, than it is by the grace of God and to Him be the glory, and blessed are you in wisdom's way, and the way everlasting. Thus saith the Lord. Amen.

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BANNER OF TRUTH RADIO BROADCAST

Radio Ministry of the FREE REFORMED CHURCHES of North America

Thou hast given a banner to them that fear thee that it may be displayed because of the truth. (Psalm 60:4)



THE FIRST COMMANDMENT [1]

Many people, believe it or not, do not know the Ten Commandments. They may have heard about them on the news but they have never themselves read them or heard them read, and certainly never listened to sermons on each of them. It is a privilege when you know the Ten Commandments and when you also may listen to a Bible-based, Christ-focused, God-honouring preaching on the commandments of God. It is a greater blessing still when you seek by God's grace also to live in obedience to them. The Ten Commandments are, as someone said, "blessed boundaries" given by God for us, and they are truly God's law of love for us, meant to lead us, as Jesus Himself says, in the pathway of true love before God and true love before all other people. The summary of the law is that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and that we love our neighbour as our self.

The Ten Commandments are to be understood as a package. We read in the Bible if you break one of God's laws, you break them all in fact. James 2:10 states, "*For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.*" There are two tables to the law, the first which teaches us how we must behave towards God, and the second, what duties we owe to our neighbour. Unless we learn to keep the first table of the law, we can in no wise keep the second either. We live in times where people want to forget the first table of God's law but still hold on to the second table. It doesn't work. You disown God and true love to Him, and you will despise your neighbour and show little true love to anyone. The Ten Commandments together, let us never forget, were first written in stone, suggesting their longstanding value, and later they were sealed in blood, no less than Christ's precious blood, emphasizing their ongoing importance. For sure, they are together a revelation of God's holy and good and unchanging will for us; they are His unbendable, just, and wonderful standard for all of life, counting even for the last judgment day.

The Lord has His holy law serve in different ways. It serves to convict of sin, and as a schoolmaster to Christ to draw and drive us to the Savior. It serves as a guard for society to restrain sin and as a guide for God's people in living a life of true and holy thanksgiving before God for all His salvation in and through Christ Jesus. The reality is all of us are of ourselves lawbreakers. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

But God sent His Son, Jesus, to live the law of God perfectly in the sinner's place even as He at the same time took upon Himself the punishment for sin in the sinner's place. The gospel is, whoever believes on Jesus Christ, the once crucified and now risen and forever exalted Savior, is delivered from the condemnation of the law and is saved by God's grace, and the law now becomes, as James says, "*the law of liberty*", that is, that law of God guiding us in the way of true love and true fulfillment and purposefulness and holiness to God's praise in each of our lives. Only if you are in Christ does the law become the law of liberty to you. Apart from Christ and faith in Him, the law remains as that which convicts and condemns you.

We are now studying the law especially as the rule of thanksgiving for the believer. The life of obedience before God is not one of independence from God, but one of humble, hearty dependency on God in and through Jesus Christ the Saviour. May our study now draw us to Christ and result in more and more Christ-likeness through His Spirit and Word applying God's law in each and all of our lives. When you truly belong to Christ and love and serve God in spirit and truth, it will show also in holy reverence for and hearty devotion to all God's law.

This message, and next week's, is about the first commandment, "*You shall have no other gods before Me*" [Exodus 20:3]. This is a foundational commandment, calling us to have God alone as first and foremost in our lives. Is God first and foremost in your life? Whatever your heart most draws to and trusts in, that is your god, you might say. Is your God Jehovah, God Triune, as revealed in Jesus Christ? Is He your chief love and highest priority every day, or do you have other gods before Him? What do you think is most necessary in your life, and which, if lost and should be taken away, would leave you empty and devastated? Is your answer God or something else? What really makes you just so happy and that you desire always to have? God - or something else?

Literally the first commandment reads, "Not shall you have any other gods before My face." Is this a commandment you want to live by too with all your heart and soul and mind and strength? Having God first and foremost? Let us notice together how the Christian knows this commandment is so right, so revealing, so rich, and then close with some rules to follow in keeping it.

Why is this commandment so right, according to the Christian? Because the believer knows from God's Word that there is only one true and living God, the God of the Bible! The Author of the Ten Commandments is not only the one supreme and eternal God but He is the Creator of the whole universe, and of each one of us, and He is the God Who is the only Saviour of sinners. The God Who says, "*You shall have no other gods before Me*" is the God Who says too in Exodus 20:1, "*I am the Lord your God, Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*" God doesn't say we

should have Him as first and foremost in our life just because, but it is on account of the fact that He is the only God and He rightfully deserves this obedience and exclusive devotion as our single Maker and sole Provider of every blessing and our only Redeemer God! He made us that we be wholly belonging to Him and always glorifying Him, and it is only always sin and rebellion when we don't so live before Him. All the other gods of our making are not gods, but lifeless, useless, helpless, hopeless refuge for us, who only lead to dismay and death and destruction. But God, the Lord, the great "I am that I am", is God from everlasting to everlasting, the one true, supreme, sovereign, good-doing Saviour God. We are His creatures created in His being for His praise, and it is only right and good to serve love Him above all, in all things, in all our life.

The Christian knows it is right that God have first place in his or her life, and always it is so wrong and sad when that is not the case in our life. God has a rightful claim on our lives. The Bible also teaches us, and again the Christian understands this is so right, God is jealous for our love and devotion with a holy and righteous jealousy. We are to have no other gods, literally the commandment reads, "before His face". It is like a husband and wife relationship...what rightful jealousy and zeal for the marriage there would be and should be if all is good, should the man come home with another woman. Imagine that a man takes another woman home before the face of his rightful wife. She could and would and should be rightfully angry and resistant against such dishonour and such shameless breaking of the marriage vows. If you and I have other gods we will honour and live for more than the one and only true God of Whom and through Whom and to Whom are all things, how wrong that would be!

It is so right that God says to us, and commands to His people, 'Love Me above all, having Me and My will first and foremost in and with everything'. The Christian knows it is so right that God will allow no rivals in our relationship with Him. It is so right that we are called to value Him above all! Thinking especially also of God's redeeming work for such undeserving and rebellious sinners as we all are by nature, and all that God has done as foreshadowed in the Old Testament history and fulfilled in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, the crucified and risen Saviour, how wrong not to have Him and hold Him as first and foremost in your and my life! Yes, says the Christian, it all makes so much sense, this first commandment of God, and how right the Lord is in giving it, and how important it is that we keep His holy law, especially also this foundational opening commandment. "Not shall you have any other gods before Me!" the Lord says. Do you agree with all your heart and soul and mind and strength that having God as first and foremost is so right and not having Him so in your life is always very wrong, and surely something most offensive to God the LORD?

Even as I ask these questions, who will not also admit this first law