

## The First Word

### Deuteronomy 6:7

We begin this morning a study of the ten commandments, and I want to urge you to remember and think about the whole context of this book of Deuteronomy. The people of God are already the people of God, they have been redeemed out of Egypt. To use the language of our day, they have been saved. By grace, I should add. Through faith.

They have received the covenant promises of God, made so clear first of all to Abraham,

Gen. 15:1 “After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.” 2 But Abram said, “Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” 3 Then Abram said, “Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!” 4 And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, “This one shall not be your heir, but one who will come from your own body shall be your heir.” 5 Then He brought him outside and said, “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” 6 And he believed in the Lord, and He accounted it to him for righteousness. 7 Then He said to him, “I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to inherit it.”

The promised land. That was the focal point of God’s covenant with his people, and they were about to enter it. That promised land, for us, represents the promised land of heaven, and so I want you to be thinking about yourself, today, as being in the same position as these people of God were in Deuteronomy 5. And that land wasn’t promised to them upon the condition of

their faithful obedience to the law, these ten commandments. Rather, as the recipients of that promise, they and us receive the law as God’s definition for us of how we are to live as we enter that promised land. Even more specifically, these ten laws, or ten words, are the way in which we show forth our love to this great God who saves us. And so, as we studied last week, and as I have emphasized each week in our study of Deuteronomy, the law was NOT the way in which the people of God would be saved. Rather, the law was given to a people who were already saved. And so verse 7 of our text, the first word, comes after, v.6 “I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

Then, and only then, does God declare, v.7 “You shall have no other gods before Me.”

This law which which we are studying is not, and never was, the means by which we gain that relationship with God which we might call salvation. We do not keep the law in order to be redeemed. Instead, we are redeemed in order to keep the law! This law has no part and no place in the grounds of justification. We are not justified by means of the law and any law-keeping which we might do is entirely unrelated to the grounds by which a sovereign and holy God would justify a wicked sinner. We are justified by grace, through faith. And faith alone.

We are freed from the curse of the law, from the condemnation of the law. But once justified, once adopted, once the spirit of God bears witness with your spirit that you are a child of God, once you are taught by that spirit to cry out, “Abba, Father,” then the law becomes a delight. More precious than gold and sweeter than honey.

It is with that understanding that I will ask the question so

clearly phrased in our Catechisms,

## **I. WHAT IS REQUIRED IN THE FIRST COMMANDMENT?**

Let me start with the catechism answer: “The first commandment requires us to know and acknowledge God, to be the only true God, and our God; and to worship and glorify him accordingly.”

That’s a great place to start, knowing God. And by that, I mean “acknowledging God.” Recognizing and confessing that this one God, the God who has revealed himself in the Bible, is the only God. The one true and living God. You must know him as he has revealed himself, not as you might imagine him to be.

At the outlet, let me be evangelistic, for the first and primary requirement of this commandment is to trust in this one true God for your eternal salvation. The primary requirement of this commandment is a profession of faith. You must claim this one true God to be your God, by faith. And that faith is quite simple and not hard to comprehend.

Rom. 10:8 “But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach): 9 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes on Him will not be put to shame.” 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13 For “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Paul continues in that chapter,

Rom. 10:14 “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!” 16 But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, “Lord, who has believed our report?” 17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

So how do you come to know God? Through the Bible, the word of Christ. Faith comes by hearing! So believe, listen and hear as I preach to you.

1 Tim. 2:5 “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.”

1 Cor. 8:4 “Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one. 5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.”

And so, I proclaim to you this one God, existing eternally in three persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. And I proclaim to you the words of Jesus the Son, who said,

John 14:6 “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”

Therefore,

1 John 5:0 “He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a

liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. 11 And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. 12 He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

**A. You must know and confess the one true and living God.**

But that’s not all.

James 2:19 “You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!”

This is not simply a proposition you must believe, that there is one God. Rather, further, this commandment is a commandment regarding the object of our worship. So in your profession of faith,

**B. You must love and worship the one true and living God.**

The Children’s Catechism makes it even simpler, The First Commandment teaches us “to worship God alone.”

God says, “You shall have no other gods BEFORE ME.” Literally, before my face. You shall bring no other false gods before me! Worshipping other gods is compared to a wife bringing her lover into the very presence of her husband!

About that, Calvin makes this observation in his Institutes of the Christian Religion: “God being provoked to jealousy whenever we substitute our fictions in his stead; just as an unfaithful wife stings her husband’s heart more deeply when her adultery is committed openly before his eyes. Therefore, God having by his present power and grace declared that he had respect to the people whom he had chosen, now, in order to deter them from the wickedness of revolt, warns them that they cannot adopt strange gods without his being witness and spectator of the sacrilege.”

So God is jealous to protect that which is his alone, namely your adoration and worship. Calvin adds, “God is called jealous because he permits no rivalry which may detract from His glory, nor does he suffer the service which is due to him alone to be transferred elsewhere.”

So please understand, that to worship God is to love God. To love God is worship him. Therefore greatest commandment, as Jesus expounds upon the fullness of the Old Testament, is very simply,

Mat. 22:7 “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment.”

This first commandment requires that you love and worship him alone. We will see this emphasis again in the next chapter, Deut. 6:13 “You shall fear the Lord your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name. 14 You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you 15 (for the Lord your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the Lord your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth.”

Listen to what else Calvin says about this love and worship, “The [purpose] of this commandment is, that the Lord will have himself alone to be exalted in his people, and claims the entire possession of them as his own...The duties which we owe to God are innumerable, but they seem to admit of being not improperly reduced to four heads: Adoration, with its accessory spiritual submission of conscience, Trust, Invocation, Thanksgiving.”

That’s what it means to have no other gods before him. Adoration, trust, invocation, and thanksgiving. We are to adore him, for all his glory. We are to trust him, resting and relying upon

him for all of life. We are invoke him, that is to call upon him at all times. And we are to thank him.

We are to love and worship him, and him alone. And so I urge you this very day,

Ps. 29:1 “Give unto the Lord, O you mighty ones, Give unto the Lord glory and strength. 2 Give unto the Lord the glory due to His name; Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”

## **II. WHAT, THEN, IS FORBIDDEN IN THE FIRST COMMANDMENT?**

Well, not doing what is required! That’s simple, isn’t it? These commandments can always be understood in that context. They are typically written in the negative form of prohibition, as one commentator writes, “because they presuppose the existence of sin and evil desires in the human heart.”

So most of the commands are in the form of prohibition, “thou shalt not.” Let me attempt to summarize those prohibitions for you, beginning with the simplest.

### **A. You must not deny or neglect the one true and living God.**

As the Shorter Catechism answers, “The first commandment forbids the denying, or not worshiping and glorifying the true God, as God, and our God; and the giving that worship and glory to any other which is due to him alone.”

First and foremost, that would include the sin of unbelief.

Ps. 14:1 “The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.”

This is the sin of the atheist, as well as the unbeliever who might claim a belief in a god but has no effort to worship and honor the true God as such. And it includes the sins of neglect, as God rebukes his Old Testament people Israel,

Is. 43:14 “Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: “For your sake I send to Babylon and bring them all down as fugitives, even the Chaldeans, in the ships in which they rejoice. 15 I am the Lord, your Holy One, the Creator of Israel, your King.”

Yet God continues,

Is. 43:22 “Yet you did not call upon me, O Jacob; but you have been weary of me, O Israel! 23 You have not brought me your sheep for burnt offerings, or honored me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings, or wearied you with frankincense. 24 You have not bought me sweet cane with money, or satisfied me with the fat of your sacrifices. But you have burdened me with your sins; you have wearied me with your iniquities.”

There is another specific way in which this commandment is so often broken in our day, even at times by professing to be Christians. The prohibition is this,

### **B. You must not attempt to blend the true religion with false religion.**

You might call it religious pluralism, as if all religions were essentially the same or at least lead to the same place. More accurately, the word would be syncretism, which is the attempt to actually blend together various religions into one, blending together irreconcilable principles and religious convictions.

This is particularly popular in modern America, and most public religion takes this form, with representatives from all sorts of different religions sharing the stage together, as if they are all one. The political correctness of our age essentially requires this form of public religion, and it is rampant in governmental and increasingly in military settings. That’s why the

name of Jesus is so offensive in that public context, because of what I have already emphasized from Jesus' own words,

John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

There is a reason that his name is offensive! Because the cross is a stumbling block, the gospel itself is an offense. And I have already read the most publicly offensive aspect of true Christianity, it's exclusive claim of truth. Jesus said,

John 14:6 "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

No one comes to God except through faith in Jesus. No one. Acts 4:12 "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

So according to the first commandment, you must not deny or neglect the one true and living God. You must not attempt to blend the true religion with false religion. And thirdly, most broadly,

### **C. You must not worship created things rather than the creator.**

And this is surely the age-old expression of idolatry, for all men are indeed religious. And in one way or another, all men will worship something. So we read in,

Rom. 1:18 "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, 19 because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. 20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,

21 because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things."

Essentially, this defines idolatry for us, worshiping the creatures or created things rather than the creator. It was obvious in Old Testament life,

Jer. 2:26 "As the thief is ashamed when he is found out, So is the house of Israel ashamed; They and their kings and their princes, and their priests and their prophets, 27 Saying to a tree, 'You are my father,' And to a stone, 'You gave birth to me.' For they have turned their back to Me, and not their face. But in the time of their trouble They will say, 'Arise and save us.' 28 But where are your gods that you have made for yourselves? Let them arise, If they can save you in the time of your trouble; For according to the number of your cities Are your gods, O Judah."

We still have such idolatry today, don't we? Those who worship the god they call Mother Earth. Or Mother Nature. Or other created things as well. Matthew Henry puts it this way, "The sin against this commandment which we are most in danger of is giving the glory and honor to any creature which are due to God only. Pride makes a god of self, covetousness makes a god of money, sensuality makes a god of the belly; whatever is esteemed or loved, feared or served, delighted in or depended on, more than God, that (whatever it is) we do in effect make a god of."

Did you catch that list, written several centuries ago! Pride makes a god of self. The god of self, to whom we are so often called upon to love and esteem! Ultimately that is nothing but

idolatry, yet the calls for self-worship are everywhere today. Clearly one of the most common false gods of our day.

And then, of course, money. The god of materialism. In the older language, mammon. “Covetousness makes a god of money.” Just listen to these words of Paul,

Col. 3:5 “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.”

Covetousness is idolatry! Just like those wooden idols of the Old Testament. We even ascribe names of God to our money, calling it the almighty dollar! And so it is, in the idolatrous hearts and minds of so many people today, those who ignore Jesus’ warning,

Mat. 6:24 “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

To go back to Matthew Henry’s list, “sensuality makes a god of the belly.” Sensuality meaning the desire for physical pleasure, be it food and drink, comfort and luxury, sexual pleasure, entertainment, or any other form of physical delights. We make a god out of our physical desires, satisfying those desires with the worship that God would claim for himself alone! Again, from Matthew Henry’s quote, “whatever is esteemed or loved, feared or served, delighted in or depended on, more than God, that (whatever it is) we do in effect make a god of.”

So what is the false god whom you are most tempted to serve? That’s the question I press upon you this morning. What is the false god whom you are most tempted to serve? The words of Psalm 139 seem so very appropriate,

Ps. 139:23 “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me,

and know my anxieties; 24 And see if there is any wicked way in me, And lead me in the way everlasting.”

So who is the false god to whom you are most likely to give your devotion and your faithfulness? These are just a few examples, but they give you a good starting place to think. “Pride makes a god of self, covetousness makes a god of money, sensuality makes a god of the belly; whatever is esteemed or loved, feared or served, delighted in or depended on, more than God, that (whatever it is) we do in effect make a god of.”

If you are without Christ, if you are not a Christian, then this law condemns you. Because you have not kept this law. Thus to you I would proclaim, flee to Christ that you might be saved. And be forgiven your sin.

As I end, let me quote another old book, *The Body of Divinity*, by the Puritan writer Thomas Watson. His are such penetrating and personal applications. He writes, “I fear, we have more idolaters among us that we are aware of...To trust in any thing more than God, is to make it a god....If we trust in our riches, we make riches our god...If we trust in the arm of flesh, we make it a god...If we trust in our wisdom, we make it a god...To love anything more than god, is to make it a god. If we love our estate more than God, we make it a god...If we love our pleasure more than God, we make a god of it.”

And that is where I want to leave you this morning, thinking of the ways in which the temptation to break this first commandment might be ever before you. There is none of us who has kept this command fully and purely. Thankfully, to the eternal praise of our gracious God, your relationship with God is not contingent upon the keeping of this command perfectly. Your justification is not suspended until you prove yourselves worthy by the keeping of

this command. Your eternal destiny is not in doubt, you who truly trust in Christ and not in yourselves for your salvation. But your gratitude to Christ for his saving work ought to be heightened and intensified, with motivation to obey his first commandment.

So learn from this law, with all its implications, how you can all the more love the God who has freed you from the condemnation of this very law. This law prescribes what must be the object of your worship, the object of your devotion. Hear these exhortations as a means of grace, stimulating your heart to that worship of God that he alone deserves.

Deut. 6:4 “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!  
5 You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

And in Jesus’ own words, when he was tempted by the Devil to break this first commandment,

Mat. 4:10 “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve.”