

\*A note about numbering the Ten Commandments.\*

Exodus 20:2-3: *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other Gods before me.”* [lit: “Before my face.”]

What do we learn from the “prologue” (Ex 20:2)?

1. *We learn God’s identity and our own.* He is Yahweh, the God of those whom he brought out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. Calvin: *“God adorns his divinity with sure titles, and so fences us in...that we may not rashly contrive for ourselves some new God.”* Rom. 8:11 names the true God as “He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead.”

And we are the ones whose God is Yahweh, the ones who have been brought by Yahweh out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. *How do we talk about God?*

2. *God’s law is set in a context of his steadfast love and mercy (i.e. grace).* Obeying God’s law is simply living out what he has made us to be (those who have been brought by Yahweh out of the house of slavery).
3. *It defines God’s authority over us* – he says to us: “I am Yahweh your God.” As Paul puts it in Col. 1:13, *“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.”* As Isaac Watts puts it: “My Savior and my Lord, my Conqueror and my King... thine is the power; behold I sit in willing bonds beneath thy feet.” (Join All the Glorious Names). As Calvin puts it: *“[We are] captivated to embrace the Lawgiver.”* Heidelberg Catechism #1.

**What does the First Commandment, “You shall have not other Gods before me,” mean?** This commandment means far more than just literally forbidding worshiping other gods.

Martin Luther: “[The First Commandment means] we must fear, love, and trust God more than anything else.”

John Calvin: “The purpose of this commandment is that the Lord wills alone to be pre-eminent among his people, and to exercise complete authority over them...in forbidding us to have strange gods, he means that we are not to transfer to another what belongs to him.” Calvin defines what we owe to God as 1) Adoration, 2) Trust, 3) Invocation, 4) Thanksgiving.

Calvin: “[This means...] to contemplate, fear, and worship, his majesty; to participate in his blessings; to seek his help at all times; to recognize, and by praises to celebrate, the greatness of his works—as the only goal of the activities of his life.”

Heidelberg: “That, on peril of my soul’s salvation, I avoid and flee all idolatry, sorcery, enchantments, invocation of saints or of other creatures; and that I rightly acknowledge the only true God, trust in Him alone, with all humility and patience expect all good from Him only, and love, fear and honor Him with my whole heart; so as rather to renounce all creatures than to do the least thing against His will.”

Frame: “The forbidding of literal polytheism is the ‘narrow’ meaning of this command. The forbidding of any competition at all with the true God for our allegiance, obedience, and affection is the broader meaning. *We are to recognize from the heart that God is Lord of all things and that therefore he will tolerate no rivals...* This [commandment requires] a personal confession, one of covenant allegiance.”

Frame: “The first commandment of the Decalogue is first of all a demand for exclusive loyalty to God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—which is another way of stating the law of love.”

*Exodus 34:12-16: "12 Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. 13 You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim 14 (for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), 15 lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, 16 and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods."*

Do we think of God as jealous for our loyalty, love, trust, etc? This is actually the story of sanctification in the life of the believer - being stripped of inordinate loves and having our heart trained to love God above all. God will brook no rivals for our hearts. Remember - breaking the First Commandment was the perpetual sin of Israel - it is our fundamental temptation as well. See Rev. 2-3.

*Augustine, Confessions: Late have I loved you, beauty so old and so new: late have I loved you. And see, you were within and I was in the external world and sought you there, and in my unlovely state I plunged into those lovely created things which you made. You were with me, and I was not with you. The lovely things kept me far from you, though if they did not have their existence in you, they had no existence at all. You called and cried out loud and shattered my deafness. You were radiant and resplendent, you put to flight my blindness. You were fragrant, and I drew in my breath and now pant after you. I tasted you, and I feel but hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am set on fire to attain the peace which is yours.*

Westminster Larger Catechism Q. 104. What are the duties required in the first commandment?

*A. The duties required in the first commandment are, the knowing and acknowledging of God to be the only true God, and our God; and to worship and glorify him accordingly, by thinking, meditating, remembering, highly esteeming, honoring, adoring, choosing, loving, desiring, fearing of him; believing him; trusting, hoping, delighting, rejoicing in him; being zealous for him; calling upon him, giving all praise and thanks, and yielding all obedience and submission to him with the whole man; being careful in all things to please him, and sorrowful when in anything he is offended; and walking humbly with him.*

WLC Q. 105. What are the sins forbidden in the first commandment?

*A. The sins forbidden in the first commandment are, atheism, in denying or not having a God; idolatry, in having or worshiping more gods than one, or any with or instead of the true God; the not having and avouching him for God, and our God; the omission or neglect of anything due to him, required in this commandment; ignorance, forgetfulness, misapprehensions, false opinions, unworthy and wicked thoughts of him; bold and curious searching into his secrets; all profaneness, hatred of God; self-love, self-seeking, and all other inordinate and immoderate setting of our mind, will, or affections upon other things, and taking them off from him in whole or in part; vain credulity, unbelief, heresy, misbelief, distrust, despair, incorrigibleness, and insensibleness under judgments, hardness of heart, pride, presumption, carnal security, tempting of God; using unlawful means, and trusting in lawful means; carnal delights and joys; corrupt, blind, and indiscreet zeal; lukewarmness, and deadness in the things of God; estranging ourselves, and apostatizing from God; praying, or giving any religious worship, to saints, angels, or any other creatures; all compacts and consulting with the devil, and hearkening to his suggestions; making men the lords of our faith and conscience; slighting and despising God and his commands; resisting and grieving of his Spirit, discontent and impatience at his dispensations, charging him foolishly for the evils he inflicts on us; and ascribing the praise of any good we either are, have, or can do, to fortune, idols, ourselves, or any other creature.*