

OpenTheo

1st & 2nd Commandments



Ten Commandments - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg explores the nuanced relationship between the Ten Commandments and Christianity in this lecture. He emphasizes that while Christians are not under the law of Moses, the commandments still hold relevance in understanding the nature of God and His expectations for His children. Through analyzing specific commandments, Gregg tackles issues such as idolatry, loyalty, and the importance of loving both God and one's neighbors. Overall, his lecture delves into the deeper meanings behind the commandments and how they relate to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Transcript

Let's turn to Exodus chapter 20. I think what we'll start doing this week is take a look at the Ten Commandments and each week proceed a little further through the Ten Commandments. We might take one in a given week or two.

Tonight I believe we'll probably cover two of the commandments. But before we even look at them, I need to make some introductory statements about the law in general. Because a lot of people have a very wrong view, I think, about the Ten Commandments.

There are people who, for instance, think that the essence of Christianity is to keep the Ten Commandments. Usually those people are not, you know, in Christian churches, but the average man on the street who is raised in America often feels that the Ten Commandments were given to be the basis of Christian religion, and therefore they place their security before God in the fact that they feel they have not broken the Ten Commandments. Though it's very hard for me to imagine how anyone could believe that he has not broken the Ten Commandments, in order to feel that, one would have to have the most insensitive conscience, I would think, because the person would have to be overlooking a great number of activities and thoughts that he's been having throughout his whole life, which are, many of them, violations of one or more of the Ten Commandments.

However, even if it were true that a person could keep the Ten Commandments and had kept them, that would not make them a Christian, nor give them any security before

God. In Galatians chapter 2 and verse 21, Paul said, I do not frustrate the grace of God, for if righteousness were by the law, then Christ is dead and vain. Now, what he means by that is, if anyone could be righteous before God by keeping the law, then Jesus might as well not have come, because the point of Jesus was to establish God's righteousness among his people, so that we might stand before God acceptably and righteous.

And if that could be done without Jesus coming and dying, as, for instance, through keeping the Ten Commandments, then Jesus paid a heavy price for nothing. And that's what Paul says, he says, that frustrates the grace of God, even to put ourselves under the law. Now, when Paul uses the word the law, he generally means all the law that Moses gave.

Now, when we say Moses, of course, we mean that God gave the law through Moses, and the Jews always recognized Moses as the great lawgiver, and so do Christians recognize that Moses gave the law. And it was Moses who brought down from the mountain the Ten Commandments on tables of stone, but besides the Ten Commandments, he gave a great deal of law besides. There were many other statutes and ordinances of God's law that were given by Moses.

In fact, a whole book of our Bible was dedicated to some of those laws, Leviticus, and in fact, the last half of Exodus contains a great number of them also. And so, when we talk about the law, we're talking about the Ten Commandments and these other laws as well that were given by Moses. Now, the body of jurisdiction, which is the law of Moses, is a unit.

Some people draw, I believe, an artificial distinction between the Ten Commandments and the other laws that Moses gave, as though because the Ten Commandments were written on stone, that means that they must be permanent and always binding, whereas those laws that were written not on stone, but by the hand of Moses, those would not be binding. And so, when you ask many Christians whether or not they are under the law, they say no, but what they mean by that is that they are not under the statutes and ordinances and the miscellaneous rights that Moses gave, but they still many times feel that they are under the Ten Commandments. And if you would suggest to them that the Ten Commandments are not binding on their lives today, they would say, well, do you mean then that it's all right to murder and that it's all right to commit adultery and that it's all right to steal and to bear false witness and to take the name of the Lord in vain and to have other gods before God? Because, of course, if we suggest that the Ten Commandments are part of the law and that the law is not binding on Christians under the New Covenant, then people immediately assume that you're saying that the law has no relevance whatsoever.

And this misunderstanding, I think, has caused a lot of perplexity because, as we know, among the Ten Commandments is one that says you shall keep the Sabbath holy and

that you shall work six days and no rest on the seventh. And because of that, certain Christians believe that you should not do any work on Saturday and that Saturday should be the day of worship. And sometimes they go so far as to say that if you worship on Sunday that you're really in violation of God's law and everything.

And I'm not one of those. I don't believe that. But I believe the confusion arises with not knowing the relationship of the Ten Commandments to Christians under the New Covenant.

After all, those who do insist that we should keep Saturday as a holy Sabbath are at least being consistent because Christians who believe that we're under the Ten Commandments must keep the Sabbath in the Jewish way. But I argue, and I argue because Paul argued, that we are not under the law. That is, we're not under the law of Moses.

And because we're not under the law of Moses, that means we're not under any of the law of Moses. Everyone agrees that we don't have to circumcise our children for religious reasons anymore. Anyone who's read the Book of Acts certainly knows that, or who has read Galatians or Romans.

And certainly everyone knows that we don't have to offer blood sacrifices anymore and that we don't have to keep the Jewish festival days anymore. The whole law stands or falls together. If we're under the law, we're under all of it.

If we're not under the law, we're not under any of it. Now, obviously, I said, I don't believe that we're under the law. Paul said, in fact, that if a person seeks to be justified by the law, that he's fallen from grace.

And I don't want to be one of those who Paul would say had fallen from grace. Because we're saved through grace, not of works. And if a law could have been given that would bring righteousness, then Jesus died for nothing.

But if I say we're not under the law, you might say, well, then what's the sense in embarking on a series of studies on the Ten Commandments, which certainly is part of the law, if you say we're not under the law. And in answer to that, I want to make very clear. In saying we're not under the law, I don't mean that we are lawless.

We are under law. The Bible makes it clear in the New Testament that we are under law. But we're not under the law of Moses.

We're under the law of Christ. And we can see that very plainly in several passages of Scripture that are very important and pivotal in a Christian's understanding of the relationship of the Christian to the law. And I want you to turn with me.

I turned you to Exodus 20, and we didn't even read anything from it. But before we get

back to Exodus 20, let's turn over to Romans chapter 7, because this, I believe, is one place in particular where Paul speaks most plainly about the relationship of Christians to the law of Moses. And here in this passage in Romans 7, Paul uses the expression the law, and he doesn't qualify it as the law of Moses, but we can tell by the context that that's exactly what he's talking about.

And the chapter begins like this. Know ye not, brethren, for I speak to them that know the law, how that the law has dominion over a man as long as he liveth. For the woman which hath a husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth.

But if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then, if while her husband liveth she be married to another man, she should be called an adulteress. But if her husband be dead, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.

Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, that she should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. Now, the whole reason he goes into this whole situation about divorce and remarriage is not in order to establish a new Christian principle about divorce and remarriage. In fact, he's not establishing anything new at all.

He says he's writing to people who know the law and how that the law says these things. And he's giving only an example from the law how that a woman is freed from her husband when he dies. That is, she's not under his authority anymore.

But if she marries another, then of course she's under the authority of the new husband, and not at all under the authority of the old husband. And then he goes on to say that we have died to the law. And he's suggesting there that the law was an old husband to us, under whose authority we were obliged to live.

But now we have died to the law through the body of Christ, and we are now married to another. Now, in saying that we're dead to the law and we're not under the law's authority anymore, that doesn't mean that we have no authority over us. We are married to another, and as long as we're married, then we have an authority over us.

A woman who's married has an authority over her. And here he says we are married to the one who's risen from the dead. That's Jesus.

So from this we deduce that whereas before we were Christians, we would have been judged, it would seem, by the law of Moses, having come to Christ, we enter into his death and die to that old relationship to the law. Paul said in Galatians 2.20, I have been crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live. Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

I've died with Christ. I'm dead to the law. The law has no jurisdiction over a dead person.

But though that relationship, though that marriage to the law is broken, I've entered voluntarily into a new marriage, and that is to Christ. And because of that, his authority is now over me. On the Mount of Transfiguration, three of Jesus' disciples saw him glowing with the glory of God upon him, and two men stood with him.

One was Moses, and the other was Elijah. Moses seems to have stood for the law, and Elijah for the prophets. Now, the Old Testament is commonly called by the Jews the law and the prophets.

And Moses and Elijah, the law and the prophets, were there endorsing Jesus, speaking to him about what he was about to accomplish. And Peter tended to equate all three of these men, Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. And he said, Lord, it's good that we're here.

Let's build three tabernacles, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah, and we'll stay here a long time. And you can see he probably thought he was honoring Jesus by putting him on the same level with Moses and Elijah. After all, those were the great heroes of the Jewish faith.

All the Jews honored those men. And by putting Jesus on the same level with them, Peter thought he was really honoring the Lord. But in fact, he was dishonoring the Lord by bringing Jesus down to the level of those men.

And those men vanished from view, and they saw Jesus standing there only, and they heard a voice from heaven saying, This is my beloved son. Hear him. That is, God spoke to them and said, Hear him, as opposed to hearing Moses and Elijah.

Saying, basically, Moses was the highest authority God had sent until this time, but now God has sent a higher authority. God has sent his beloved son. We're now to hear him.

Jesus, when he came out of the grave, said, All authority in heaven and earth is given unto me. And if all authority on heaven and earth is given to him, that means there's no authority that anyone else has. Moses doesn't have any left.

The devil doesn't have any. Mohammed doesn't have any. No one has any authority over your life except Jesus, because all authority belongs to him now.

So that what Jesus said has lasting and final authority over our lives. What Moses said has no authority over our lives any longer. In another place, Galatians chapter 3, the Apostle Paul said the law was our schoolmaster.

Sort of like a babysitter, which was sent to keep us in line until the promised seed should come, which is Christ. But he says, But after faith is come, which means faith in Christ, there is no longer any need for the schoolmaster, which he said was the law. He clearly

says, then, that the law has no authority over us now that Jesus has come.

Jesus, our parent, has come and taken us home from the babysitter. If you turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 9, we see how Paul understood this new relationship with Christ. 1 Corinthians chapter 9 is describing how his method of evangelism is to seek to comply culturally as much as possible with those people whom he's trying to reach.

And he says when he's with Jews, he behaves like a Jew. That is, he puts himself under the law. But when he's not with Jews, he doesn't put himself under the law.

When he's with people who are without the law, he behaves as one who is without the law. And that's what he says in verse 21. He says, To them that are without law, I become as one without law.

But then he says this in parentheses, Being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ. Now, he's describing his own understanding of his relationship. He says, When I'm with Gentiles who don't keep the law, I have the liberty not to keep the law, which must mean he doesn't think he's under it.

Because if he was under the law of Moses, it wouldn't matter who he was with, he'd be under the law. He'd have to keep it, whether he liked it or not. The Jews strictly kept the law, even if they were among Gentiles.

But Paul was clearly saying he wasn't under the law of Moses. When he was around Gentiles, he could totally disregard the law of Moses. He only observed it when he was around Jews, because they thought it was important.

But though he says, I behave as one without the law, he says, However, I am not without the law to God. I am under the law to Christ. So, he's saying, We come out from under the authority of the law of Moses, and we have come under the authority of Christ.

Which is why Jesus said that we must go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever he has commanded. That's in Matthew chapter 28 and verse 20 and 21. So, if we're to command all nations to observe things that Jesus commanded, there's no reference there to commanding people to observe what Moses commanded.

Because Moses, well, the law came through Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ. Scripture says. And we are not under Moses anymore.

Now, that answers the question then, since we're not under the Ten Commandments, is it alright for us to commit murder? Is it alright for us to steal? Is it alright to commit adultery? No, it's not. But not because the Ten Commandments say it's not. They have nothing, they're not binding over us anymore.

But because Jesus says it's not. Jesus said, for instance, that we should honor our father and our mother. He said that more than once.

Mainly in discussion with the Pharisees. He said that we shouldn't steal. He said that we shouldn't kill.

He said that we shouldn't take the Lord's name in vain or shouldn't swear falsely. He said that we shouldn't commit adultery. Jesus spoke about all those issues.

Interestingly, he didn't say anything about the Sabbath. But all the other commandments he did speak about. And therefore, we have taken the law of Moses and we've said, this had authority over the Jews for a time.

But now that Christ has come, the law has no authority over us. Christ's law has authority over us. What Jesus said is what's binding on our lives, not what Moses said.

And since Jesus spoke about the Ten Commandments a lot, it is to our benefit, not only to our benefit, but we are obliged to learn what he said about these commandments. Because when Jesus taught, for instance, in Matthew chapter 5 in the Sermon on the Mount, he said, you have heard that it was said by them of old time, you shall not kill. You have heard that it was said by them of old time, you shall not commit adultery.

You have heard that it was said by them of old time, whatever. And he quoted from the Ten Commandments and from other parts of the law. Interestingly, he didn't distinguish between those things he quoted from the Ten Commandments and those that he quoted from the other parts of the law.

But he quoted from the law and he says, you've heard this, but I say this. And the very fact that he even said, but I say, implies that he puts his authority over that of the law. And that's exactly what his listeners understood it to mean, because at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, the closing verses of Matthew chapter 7, it says, and the people marveled at his teaching because he spoke as one who had authority.

He put his authority above that of the law. But that doesn't mean he ignored the law. He was a Jew, he lived under the law, but he gave a better understanding of what the law intended in the first place.

And as we study the Ten Commandments, we want to see that they were not something that was of no value. They were something that revealed something of the heart of God. They didn't reveal as much of the heart of God as Jesus' teachings did, but as we look at each of them, we can see that Jesus spoke about these things, and we want to look at what Moses said and then what Jesus said about it, so that we can understand what our relationship to these particular commands is supposed to be.

It will be, of course, what Jesus said, not what Moses or the rabbis said that will matter.

But since Jesus did teach within the framework of using the law of Moses, and then put his words on top of that, it is nonetheless to our value to study the law in the Old Testament. And you'll find, of course, Paul said, do we then nullify the law because we're under grace? He says, no, we establish the law.

Actually, if we follow Christ, we're better keepers of the law than those who are under it. Because Jesus not only forbade us to commit adultery, he forbade us to look at a woman with lust. He not only forbade us to kill, as the law did, he forbade us to be angry with our brother or to hate our brother.

So if we are really followers of Christ, living as we should, though we're not under the Ten Commandments, we keep them better than the Jews did. We keep them better than people who are under them do. Because we not only keep them outwardly, but we believe we have to keep them inwardly as well.

Because Jesus said so, not because Moses said so. We're getting back now to Exodus chapter 20. I don't know if that should, I hope, give you some idea of at least how I understand the New Testament relationship to the Old.

In the Old Testament, the law was like an old husband that's now died. But now we're married to another. And we have a new authority over us, and that's the words of Jesus.

But I'd like to read these Ten Commandments, and then we'd like to talk briefly tonight, and I believe it will be rather brief compared to usual, on perhaps the first couple. The chapter begins, And God spake all these words, saying, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them. For I, the Lord thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and the fourth generation of them that hate me, and showing mercy to thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain. For the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work. But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God. In it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates.

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day. Wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is thy neighbor's. Now, those are the ten commandments. The first two resemble each other in that they both forbid idolatry.

The first commandment, I believe, is verse three, which says, Thou shalt have no other gods before me. Now, before me does not mean before me in priority. It means before my face or in my presence.

You know, if we understood it to mean before me in priority, we could say, Well, I do put a lot of value on my hot rod automobile, but at least I don't put it before God. You might say it's kind of a god to me, kind of an idol, but I put God first, therefore I haven't put any other gods before him. But before me means in my presence, which means regardless of where they stand on your list of priorities, you aren't allowed to have any other gods, nothing else that you worship.

There's only one God that can be worshipped. Now, Christianity and Judaism and Islam are three religions that believe in one God. Islam believes in a different God than the Jews and the Christians believe in.

Islam believes in a God whom they call Allah, who is very, very different than the Christian God. And some people mistakenly think, Well, if you just worship one God, what's it matter? It's all the same. It isn't.

You have to worship the right one. But the Jews and the Christians worship a God who's revealed himself in the scripture under many names. Jehovah is the main one that he used, or Yahweh.

And he is the one true God. Now, all other religions differ from the Judeo-Christian view in that they all believe in many gods or more than one. Many of the cults that profess to be Christian, like the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses, really end up believing in more than one God.

They have to, because they don't believe that Jesus was the true God. But they can't deny that the Bible calls him God. Therefore, they have to have the one that they recognize as the true God, and then Jesus, another God.

And the Bible, of course, teaches that there's only one God, and it's true that Jesus is called God. Therefore, he must be the one God. And the Father is called God also, so he also must be the one God.

The Holy Spirit also is called God, and he, therefore, must be the one God also. But though we speak of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit being all God, we don't have three gods. We have only one God.

Christianity is a monotheistic religion. We believe in only one God. There was a statement found in Deuteronomy 6, verses 4 and 5, which was called the Shema.

The Jews called it the Shema, because Shema is a Hebrew word that means hear. And the first word in those verses is hear, hear, O Israel. And the Shema is quoted by the Jews at every synagogue service, right at the beginning of the service.

And it was basically their Jewish statement of faith, the Shema. It says, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy strength, with all thy mind. And that is something that the Jews quoted at every synagogue service.

In Matthew 22, I believe it was, when the Pharisees sent a lawyer to come and question Jesus and try to stumble him in one way or another, one of the questions they asked was, what's the greatest commandment? And they thought he'd select one of the ten commandments, but he didn't. He selected the Shema. He said, well, the greatest commandment is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy soul, with all thy heart, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.

And he said, there's another like it, and that is that you shall love your neighbor as yourself. That was taken from Leviticus. Those two commands are not found in the same place in the Old Testament, but both are in the Old Testament.

Now, he said, upon these two hang all the law and all the prophets. And I suppose what he meant by that is that if you really love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength, you will not break any of those laws that have to do with reverence toward him. You won't have any other gods before him.

You won't make any idols. You won't use his name in vain. You'll keep the Sabbath insofar as he desires it to be kept.

He will do all the things that are reverent toward him if you love him with all your heart. And as far as loving your neighbors yourself, that takes care of the other commandments, because if you love your neighbor, you'll honor your parents. You'll not steal from your neighbor or kill him, or you won't commit adultery with his wife or covet his things or bear false witness against him.

So upon those two commandments, Jesus said, hangs all the law. At least all the ten commandments hang on those two. And in quoting the Shema, Jesus was establishing, again, his strict belief in only one God, here, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord, and

also establishing the first and second commandment especially, which is you shall have no other gods before me, because you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your strength, with all thy soul, with all thy mind.

Now, if you really do that, there's not much room to love anything else, because you give your whole heart and all your love to God. But he guarantees he'll give you some back to give to your brother. You give it all to him.

You love him with all your soul. You do nothing except what you believe will please him, and he will give you sufficient love to give to your brother. You can't really have love toward God without love toward your brother.

It says that in 1 John chapter 4. I forget the verse number. In fact, it's the last few verses of 1 John chapter 4. It says, He that saith, I love God, and hateth his brother, is a liar. For he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God loveth his brother also.

So you can't love God and not love your brother, because God loves your brother. If you love God, you'll love what he loves. Love me, love my dog.

You love him, you love what he loves. He loves your brother, so you'll love your brother if you really love him. And so you really can't have one or the other.

That's why Jesus wouldn't single it out to one. They said, what's the great commandment? He said, I can't give you one, I'll give you two. Because on these two hang everything.

Well, in saying the Lord our God is one Lord, we see that there's the basic statement of Jewish and Christian faith is that there's only one God. Yet, the Bible says elsewhere, it speaks of other gods. Usually with a small g in our English translations.

Gods, the gods of the heathen. Often the word gods refers to idols. In fact, that's probably the most common use of the word whenever gods is used in plural.

It usually means the idols that the heathen people worship. Yet sometimes God, again with a small g, may refer to some people of God. As in Psalm 82, where God was speaking to the judges that he had appointed to represent him before his people.

And he said to them, I have said ye are gods, but you're going to die like men if you don't repent. But the idea is that people who represent God were sometimes spoken figuratively of as little gods. Like Moses was a god to Pharaoh, and Aaron his brother was his prophet, God said.

So the word gods is used various ways. Almost anything that's worshipped really is a

god. A car can be a god, a house can be a god, your country can be your god.

Whatever you put your highest loyalty in is your god. And we're not supposed to have any other gods. In a sense, we're not supposed to have any other loyalties except to God himself.

And then of course, in obedience to him, we'll end up showing loyalty to those things that he wants us to. That is showing faithfulness toward our wives, for instance, and our children and our country, insofar as that's required. The idea is that our whole heart, our whole loyalty has to be to God.

All other gods are false gods. It says in 1 Corinthians chapter 8, there are lords many, or those which are called lords, many, and gods many. But for us, there's only one God and one Lord, Jesus Christ.

There may be many gods, but only one is alive. The only true God, Jesus called him. In John chapter 17, in verse 3, Jesus said, This is eternal life, that they might know thee, the only true God.

Which means all other gods are false gods. And Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. In, I believe it's 2 Timothy 1.17, or it might be 1 Timothy 1.17, It says, Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever.

Amen. The only wise God. There's only one wise God.

There's only one that has intelligence. There's only one that's alive. There's only one that's true.

And while there may be many things that are called gods, none of them are true gods. None of them are gods in essence. Anything that you worship may become a god to you, but it is not a god in itself.

It is not a self-existent god, as our God is. There's one God who is always God, whether anyone worships him or not. Do you know, if no one ever worshipped God again, he'd still be God.

That's not true of any other god. Other gods, with a small g, are only gods because someone is foolish enough to worship them. But if all the worshippers disappeared, those things wouldn't be gods anymore.

But God is God of himself and in himself. He is self-existent, and his identity as God is not dependent on what we ascribe to him. And so there is only one God, and we are quite foolish if we allow anything else to be thought of as a god to us, or to be a god.

Now, Christians, of course, usually would say, probably hearing me this far, they'd say, well, why are you saying, oh, we're Christians, we don't believe in other gods, we know

there's only one God, you don't have to give us that whole rap. Why do you even talk to us about this whole idea? We know better than to have idols in our homes, you know, we don't have Buddhas on our mantelpieces. Actually, some of you might.

Some Christians I've known have. But I'm not sure why they do, but it seems like some do. But there are many things in our lives which may be more a god to us than we have realized, or than we've been willing to face and admit.

I'd like to turn your attention to something in 2 Kings. 2 Kings 17. Just one verse.

2 Kings 17.33. Talking about the Jews at a certain point in their history, it says, They feared Jehovah, the true God, and served their own gods after the manner of the nation whom they carried away from thence. Now, that's an important statement. It says they feared Jehovah, or they feared the Lord, and they served their own gods.

Now, feared in the Old Testament is often a synonym for worship. In fact, it is a synonym for worship in most places whenever it talks about fearing gods, fearing the Lord or fearing other gods. It's saying essentially here that they did conduct their worship of Jehovah, but really they were also worshipping their own gods.

And it was so in many times in Jewish history that they would continue to worship God in the sense that they'd go to the tabernacle or to the temple, they'd offer their sacrifices, they'd say their prayers, they'd attend synagogue, they would do all the things that were typical of worshipping Jehovah, but they would have their own little gods at home that they worshiped also. And this was in violation of this commandment. He doesn't want to just be one of many.

He doesn't even want to be on the top of the heap. He doesn't want to be at the top of the totem pole. He doesn't want there to be a totem pole.

He wants to be the only chief and everyone else Indians. In Joshua chapter 24, I'd like you to look there because of what Joshua found exposed about the people of God at that time. Joshua 24, Joshua at the end of his ministry, and this is the end of the book of Joshua, is reminding the people of their tendency toward idolatry.

And it's an amazing thing when you read the Old Testament how people tended toward idolatry. And yet we do too. We just have more refined and western forms of it, so we don't know that we do.

But, I mean, we don't carve idols usually. Now, some of that's coming into our culture through TM and Eastern religions and things. There are some actual carved idols and pictures and things that are bowed down to in our society these days, and men who are considered to be gods.

But among Christians, there's not much of a tendency to actually carve idols. But we

have our own westernized forms of idolatry, which we don't recognize as such, and that's why we need to talk about it a little bit. But in Joshua 24 and verse 2, Joshua said to all the people, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah the father of Abraham and the father of Nahor, and they served other gods.

Now, that's interesting. Abraham and Nahor and their father Terah served other gods at one time. But at some point, Abraham came to believe in only one god, and that's why God singled him out, I guess, and took him out and did some special things with him and actually brought forth the Jewish nation out of him.

But this tells us at least that Abraham's father was an idolater. And what he's saying here is you Jews, who are all descended from Terah, have idolatry in your roots, and it's in your blood, just like it's in other nations' blood. Don't think that because God has singled you out to be a holy nation that you are less prone toward idolatry than anyone else.

It's in your blood just like everyone else's. And then going down further, verse 14, he says, Now therefore fear the Lord and serve Him in sincerity and in truth, and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood and in Egypt, and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, and that means the Red Sea, which they crossed to escape Egypt, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land ye dwell.

But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods. For the Lord our God, He it is that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed.

Now look down at verse 19, And Joshua said unto the people, You cannot serve the Lord, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God. He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins.

Meaning, if you're trying to hang on to your sins and hang on to God too, He's not going to tolerate that. If ye forsake the Lord and serve strange gods, then He will turn and do you hurt and consume you. After that, He hath done you good.

And the people said unto Joshua, Nay, but we will serve the Lord. And Joshua said unto the people, Ye are witnesses against yourselves, that ye have chosen you, the Lord, to serve Him. And they said, We are witnesses.

Now therefore put away, said He, the strange gods which are among you, and incline

your heart unto the Lord God of Israel. Now the interesting thing about this story is that when Joshua said, Now you need to serve the Lord and only the Lord, and they said, We'll do that. He said, No, you won't.

And they said, Yes, we will. That's not up to you, that's up to us. We decide to do it.

And they were almost indignant, it seems, that Joshua would even suggest that they be prone to get into idolatry. And he says, No, you can't serve the Lord. He's a holy God.

He's a jealous God. He won't tolerate your idolatry. And they said, But we will serve the Lord.

We will put away those things. I mean, we have put away those things, or whatever. And they were indignant that Joshua would speak to them this way, and yet they had idols.

He said, Okay, you've witnessed against yourselves, you've said you're going to serve the Lord, well then put away your idols. Now that's the amazing thing, that these people were almost offended by Joshua suggesting that they might be prone toward idolatry. He said, No, our loyalty is with Jehovah all the way.

And then it turned out that they had idols. And he said, Okay, get rid of your idols then. A lot of Christians today, if you suggested to them that they were idolatrous, they'd be offended, they'd be indignant.

They'd say, How could you say that? We're Christians, we believe in the true God, we believe in Jesus. But there are idols. There are idols in some people's hearts, there are idols in some people's homes.

And I'd like to quickly talk about what some of those idols might be, and how we could detect what they are. Because a great commandment, the great commandment, is that we love the Lord with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind. The first of the ten was that you have no other gods in God's presence.

And since His presence is everywhere, that means you can't have any gods anywhere. In 1 Corinthians 10, chapter 10, and verse 20, 1 Corinthians 10, 20, Paul said, Know ye not that the sacrifices that the heathen offer, they offer unto demons, and not to God. Paul said that idolatrous religion is demonic in origin.

That in another place, and it wasn't too far from that statement, it was earlier in the same book, in 1 Corinthians chapter 8, he said, We know that a demon is nothing at all. He didn't put much stock, I mean, he didn't say demon, an idol. He said, We know that an idol is nothing at all.

And he didn't put much stock in idols, but he realized that those who worship idols are under the sway of demons. He said, The sacrifices that the heathen offer, they offer to

demons. That's 1 Corinthians 10, 20.

And it means that when someone bows down to an idol, though that idol may have no power in itself, yet there are demons that are drawing that person into that religion, that they are actually drawn to demon worship. Now, they wouldn't believe that, most of them probably. But whenever there's idolatry, it's demonically inspired.

And because it is demonically inspired, and not just something that is, you know, not that if the idol only had the power of stone or of wood, there wouldn't be much that it could do to us. But because there are demons behind idolatry, we shouldn't be surprised that there's a drawing in our very nature to it, because the demons, it's a demonic attraction. C.S. Lewis, in one of his many candid statements about his own spiritual life, said that when he visited Stonehenge, and when he visited Greece and saw the Parthenon and places like that, he just felt this almost irresistible urge to worship the Greek gods, to worship the gods of the heathen, to worship the Druid gods.

Now, you might be aghast that he'd say that, but he was just an honest man. He was just telling the truth. He didn't say he did worship them.

In fact, because he was a Christian, he didn't. He was just admitting he felt this real drawing to do so, which he resisted, of course. It was just a temptation that he resisted.

But it's an amazing thing. I've never seen those places. But those places where idolatry was focused in the ancient world, no doubt there are strong demonic presences there that could really tempt and draw and allure and seduce into idolatry, into demon worship in places like that.

But we would say, well, we're not very close to that. We live in a country where demons have never really been worshipped. But there are idols, and the New Testament tells us what some of those idols are.

In New Testament time, the Jews didn't have any idols in their land. In the days of Jesus, the Jews had purged their land of idols. They wouldn't tolerate them anymore.

After they spent 70 years in captivity in Babylon, they had learned their lesson. They wouldn't go into idolatry anymore. But the heathen nations around still worshipped idols.

In the Roman culture that all the epistles were written to, there were idols, a lot of idols. In fact, that was one of the big problems that the Christians ran into, because the emperor himself was considered one of the many gods of the Romans. And at certain points, the emperors demanded worship.

And when the Christians refused to say, Caesar is Lord, they were sometimes thrown to the lions or burned at the stake or mistreated in other ways because they simply wouldn't idolize the state. But there were many types of idolatry that the Christians were

pressed and tempted to get into in those days. And there's other forms and some of the same forms even today.

I'd like you to look, for instance, at Ephesians chapter 5. Ephesians chapter 5 and verse 5. Paul says, For this ye know, that no whoremonger, which is a fornicator, nor an unclean person, nor a covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Now he says that no one who is an idolater has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ or in the kingdom of God. But who does he identify as idolaters? Covetous people.

He says a covetous man who is an idolater. Now what does covetous mean? It means actually the desire to possess. The desire to possess.

It's the love of possessions. It's the same thing that Paul refers to in 1 Timothy chapter 6 when he calls it the love of money. He said it's at the root of all evil.

The love of money is the root of all evil. At this point, the cassette tape was stopped and turned over to record on the second side. A round is strictly because of the sexual drives of people.

But in fact, it's money. It's the drive for money. You can have all the sexual drives you want, but if there's no money in selling pornography, there wouldn't be any available.

It's the love of money that's at the root of all kinds of evil. And he said covetousness, which is the love of money or the love of possessions, is idolatry. Now, so much so, I mean, it's almost the closest thing we have to actually having engraved images in our society.

Because my money, at least the money in my pocket, has a graven image on it. It has a picture of a man. The paper money does and the metal money does.

Now, there is a command that follows the first, thou shalt have no other gods before me. There's one about graven images too. And because of that command about graven images, the Jews would not carry money that had engravings on it.

At least they weren't supposed to. Jesus didn't. And when they came and asked him, is it lawful to pay tribute to Caesar, he didn't have a copy of one of their, he didn't have one of their coins.

Because he wouldn't carry it. But he asked the Jews and amazingly they had one. And their tradition said they couldn't carry one because of the inscription on it.

But they didn't have any trouble coming up with one. They were hypocritical. They'd be putting a law on one person, but they'd be breaking it themselves.

And he said, well, show me a coin. So they pulled one out. And he said, whose inscription

is on there? And whose face? And they said, Caesar's.

And it's clear that money is a graven thing, and it's a graven image, but it's not necessarily an object of worship to everyone. It shouldn't be to a Christian. And the forbidding of graven images is strictly related to bowing down and worshiping them.

The second commandment is you shall make no graven image of anything in heaven or on earth or in the sea, under the earth. And you shall not bow down and worship them. If there was not the part about bowing down and worshiping them, if making a graven image in itself was forbidden whether you worshiped it or not, then all pictures of anything, pictures of anything in the sky, pictures of anything on earth, pictures of trees, of flowers, of brooks, they would be all forbidden.

And I don't believe that that commandment deals with that issue. I think what it's saying is that you're not supposed to make any image to bow down or to represent God to you. But the point is, even though we don't have idols and maybe we don't idolize the coins in our pockets or bow down to the images on them, yet people often are idolatrous toward money in general as a principle.

Sometimes they don't even care if they see the money, just so they see it on their bank book, just so the figures are there. They don't bow down to the coins themselves, it's just possessions, it's just money, it's just wealth itself that they desire. Paul said there's a real temptation that draws people in to idolatry, to money.

In 1 Timothy chapter 6, it says in verse 9, 1 Timothy 6, 9, But those that want to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some covet it after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows. Then going down to verse 17 in this chapter, he tells Timothy, Charge those that are rich in this world, that they be not high-minded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God who giveth us richly all things to enjoy, that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, or more probably, willing to share, laying up in stores of themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Now, Paul gives special instructions that Timothy was to pass on to the rich people in his congregation, people who had money. He said, you people, don't be high-minded and don't trust in uncertain riches. Really, there may be more than one reason why people would have more than appropriate love for money, but most of us don't really ever intend to get rich.

If you had a few million dollars, you'd probably plan to make more millions with it, and usually a millionaire or someone who's a multi-millionaire will just want to increase it, increase it, because the more rich you get, the more rich you want to be. But for most of

us, we can't relate to those particular motives. We don't have millions.

Sometimes we wonder how we're going to pay the phone bill. And for that reason, we might not love money in the same way, but it becomes more important to us because we have only barely enough. And, you know, a lot of people put their security or want to put their security in a certain sum of money that's socked away.

Commercials for savings and loans on the radio really know how to appeal to people's love for security. In these risky times, you don't want to take any chances. You want to get this kind of a money market certificate or something.

The name of our bank spells security. The whole idea is putting your security in having enough money to get you by, having enough money to get through the winter, having enough money to get to retire someday, you know, putting it away so that someday you'll be able to retire, and putting your trust in uncertain riches, which Paul said, rich are supposed to be told not to do that. But anything you put your trust in is taking something away from your relationship to God because he is to be trusted in wholly, completely.

And if we put our trust in any other thing, it is becoming, in some sense, a God to us. Because God alone is to be believed and trusted. The Bible says it is folly to put your trust in man, but men ought to put their trust in the Lord.

It says, You trust God, that's part of your worship of him. In fact, from reading Paul's letters, you get the impression that's one of the most important parts of our worship of God is belief, faith, trusting in him. But if you put your trust in any other thing for your security, it becomes something like a God to you.

And that's why Paul could say that people who are covetous, who desire money, are idolaters. And the word was not a mild word to Paul's readers. The word idolater meant someone who had other gods, a worshipper of other gods.

And so we need to examine our hearts and see if there's any degree of trust in uncertain riches in our thinking. To what degree are we putting our security and our ability to continue to work or at this point to collect money against some future contingency? We're not supposed to put our trust in those things. Jesus said that we should pray, give us this day our daily bread.

God knows what our needs are. He feeds the sparrows. They don't worry about it.

He clothes the lilies of the field. They don't worry about it either. They don't store up for tomorrow.

They know that he'll be there tomorrow to take care of them too, then, just like he is now. But we don't always take that into consideration. We know that God has provided

today, but we're not sure if he will tomorrow.

And since we don't trust him fully, we put our trust in other things. We find other crutches, other buffers against future hardship. And money is one of those things that people do.

And that becomes a god to us in the sense that we are supposed to trust only in God and not in money. So that if there's any trust, if any part of our security about the future is in money or in possessions, or the fact, well, I could always sell this or that, that's not a good thing. Now, I'm not saying that it's wrong for you to know that, well, if something came up, maybe I should sell this or that.

As long as you know that those things are the Lord's and that you're trusting the Lord, and it's up to the Lord whether you sell it or not, and that your whole trust is in the Lord anyway. The fact is, the Lord may have you do something like that, sell something to provide some need further down the line. But if you're trusting in that rather than trusting the Lord, then you're going to be not only insecure, but you're going to be violating the first and the great commandment, having other gods.

There's another kind of idolatry sometimes in the church. According to Philippians chapter 3, I'd like you to turn there, it's only a couple pages over from where we've just looked. Philippians chapter 3 in verse 18 and 19.

Paul said, For many walk, of whom I have told you often and now tell you even with weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things. Now, here he talks about people, he describes them as enemies of the cross of Christ. He says their God is their belly, and the belly would be not just a reference to their stomach, but actually their flesh, their fleshly appetites, symbolized by the stomach.

For some people, money isn't that big an issue. They don't have enough to worry about it anyway, but they still serve their stomach. And another part of our worship for God besides trusting is serving.

One of the major words in the Greek and in the Hebrew in the Bible that is translated worship, actually literally means serve. And if we serve anything other than God, then we have another God. Jesus said, You cannot serve two masters.

You'll either love the one and hate the other, or you'll cling to the one and despise the other. There's only one, you can only serve God. You can't serve God and mammon.

Again, there's money again. But you also can't serve God and your flesh also. You can't serve God and any other thing without becoming guilty of idolatry and having more than one God, having other gods before him.

And it becomes evident easily whether we are putting our flesh first before God. I mean, we don't even have to wonder if we know that we ought to be rising earlier to spend time in prayer, and we don't really need the sleep that we're getting, but we're just lazy and we want to relax a little more. We prefer to sleep than to pray.

Or if we realize that we tend to overeat and that perhaps too much of our time and money is spent on that indulgence, when we know that God would be better glorified by use of our time and money in other ways. To say nothing of the fruit of the Spirit, which is self-control, glorifying God through the way we eat and drink. In fact, the Bible says, whatsoever you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God.

Everything you eat, you should eat to the glory of God. You eat not because your body demands it. After all, Jesus showed us that you don't eat every time your body demands it.

He was hungry when he sat down at the well in Sychar in John chapter 4. And suddenly a woman came along who needed some ministry, so he got involved talking to her. His disciples were sent off for food, and when they came back with the food, they offered him food. He was no doubt still hungry, but he waved it away and said, I have food you don't know about.

And they said, did someone bring him food? And he says, my food is to do the will of him that sent me and to finish his work. Now, Jesus was physically hungry at that time, but he was much more concerned about doing the will of his father than feeding his stomach, which was growling at the moment, because his God was not his belly. When he fasted 40 days and was tempted by the devil, the first temptation was for him to feed his stomach.

And it was a tremendous temptation. After 40 days, it says he hungered. And probably most of you have never fasted 40 days.

I look like I have, but I haven't. And I've never been as hungry as he must have been on that occasion. And yet I've succumbed to the same kind of temptation at much less provocation than he had.

When I was really much less hungry than he was, but he showed that his God was not his belly. He said, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God. His God was not his belly, but how many of us could say the same about ourselves? We live in a fluent society, and when there's affluence, there's opportunity to indulge the flesh.

So much so that we find ways of justifying indulgence, usually a little bit at a time. Or we might just compare ourselves with other Christians and say, well, they're doing all these things. There's no sin in eating these things.

I mean, there's nothing in the Bible that says you can't eat that. But the question is, are you doing it to the glory of God? Is your eating glorifying God? Or is it satisfying the flesh? Are you bringing satisfaction to God by serving him, or are you satisfying your flesh by serving it? Part of your worship to God is service. If you serve your flesh rather than God, it becomes a God to you.

And the same is true, of course, of any other fleshly appetite besides eating. Probably most of us have more trouble in the area of overeating than in other fleshly appetites, because a lot of the other ones are more grossly sinful. Of course, sexual appetites and things.

To indulge them every time they wanted to be indulged, most of us would at least have control over that, because we don't want to do horrible, scandalous things. But then again, some people do those things. Some Christians even do.

And that's even more telltale of whether their flesh is their God or not. When they know that God has forbidden certain things, certain sexual activities, and they do them anyway. You shall have no other gods in my presence, God said.

And essentially what he ended up saying to his people was, if you have other gods in my presence, you can have your gods, but you won't have my presence. And that's what he showed them when he sent them off into Babylon for 70 years. But our flesh is a God to some of us, and it had better not be.

There's another thing that's an interesting problem with idolatry, and we can just keep moving right through the New Testament to the next book. We were in Ephesians, then Philippians, now we're in Colossians, chapter 2. Colossians, chapter 2, in verse 18, it says, Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind. Now you say, oh, I get it, you're going to talk about worshipping angels.

Well, at least I'm clean there. I might have gotten convicted about some of those other things, but I've never worshipped any angels, I can guarantee you that. And probably Paul really is talking about worshipping angels or angelic beings, but the word angel in the Greek literally means messenger.

The same word, angelos, in the Greek, can be translated to mean an angel, like the angels that sang at the first Christmas, or it can mean any messenger. And the word is sometimes used to speak of human messengers. And while Paul probably wasn't speaking about human messengers in this case, it would be equally wrong to worship a human messenger or a spiritual angelic messenger.

But the word angel means messenger. It says, don't let anyone get you involved in worshipping messengers, God's messengers. You have to worship Him, but not His

messengers.

When John, in the book of Revelation, was shown around heaven by an angelic person, there were at least two times when John was so overwhelmed by what he saw that he fell down at the feet of this angel and actually began to worship him. And he was rebuked both times by the angel, and the angel said, Nope, don't worship me, just worship God. I'm just one of your fellow servants.

When Peter came to the house of Cornelius, Cornelius had been told by an angel that Peter would be coming to teach him the ways of God. And when Peter arrived, Cornelius and his family fell down at Peter's feet and worshipped him. And Peter said, Don't worship me, I'm just a man like you are.

And Paul and, I believe it was, I believe, yeah, it was Paul and Barnabas, I'm quite sure, came to Lystra. The people there, after Paul healed a man there who was lame in his feet, the people there brought animals to worship and sacrifice to Paul and Barnabas. And they gave them nicknames, they thought they were two of their Greek gods that had come down in human form.

And Paul and Barnabas had to run out and they tore their clothes, as a Jewish expression of disgust, really, or grief. And they said, No, don't worship us. The whole reason we came here is to turn you away from idolatrous practices like this.

And there is a tendency to worship God's messengers, whether they be supernatural angels or human beings. And that worship does not necessarily always take the form of falling down at their feet. I know people who have actually fallen at the feet of other human beings.

If you were initiated into Transcendental Meditation, then you had to fall down and, basically, and worship, really, a photograph of a man named Gurudev and offer an offering to him. Hopefully, none of you were into that. If you were, I hope you've renounced it and are out of it now.

But I remember when the Beatles first came to America. There were some girls who I knew watching TV and the news program showed the Beatles coming off the airplane the first time when they touched down, when they were coming to be on the Ed Sullivan Show. And I was in a house where the TV was on and there were several teenage girls in the house.

And they were watching the news because they heard the Beatles were going to be on it. They were going to show the Beatles showing up. And when the Beatles walked out of the airplane, these girls literally fell down on their knees with their eyes fixed on the television tube.

And were practically, well, repenting, you know. You think that we live in a monotheistic

country where people don't worship idols. But there is worship.

And Christians sometimes tend to worship people who have the anointing of God on them. Just like an angel is sometimes, you know, if an angel came and gave you a powerful message, if these men in the Bible are any indication, you'd probably be tempted to fall down and worship them. But if it's a human messenger, maybe you don't tend to fall down and worship, but you might still have the same kind of wrong attitudes.

And that would be manifested largely probably in a disproportionately great loyalty to a person's message, perhaps. For example, a loyalty to a denomination because of, you know, some great messenger that started that denomination. The Methodists were started by John Wesley.

John Wesley was a mighty man of God. If I knew him, I would probably be prone to have really honored him, perhaps more than was right. Just from reading his life, he was a powerful, fantastic man of God.

And because a messenger, a great messenger might have started a movement. George Fox, who started the Quakers. Or General Booth, who started the Salvation Army.

All those men were mighty men of God, mighty messengers of God. Angelos, angels. Because of the anointing and the power that was upon them, and the effectiveness of their message, there would be a tendency perhaps to worship them.

Especially by those who were in the denominations that they started. Not to worship them really, not to bow down to them, but to almost cite their words as though they were the words of God. And I know Christians who will stand loyal to their own particular denominational position in the face of conflicting scriptural information.

Because they will honor a messenger, whether it's an organization or a person. One of God's messengers, they'll honor that above the word itself. Above God's word.

And this is bordering on idolatry also. Actually, there are many loyalties that we have in our society, which probably are very much like idolatry as God views it. Nationalism is one of them, I believe.

Now, I'm not saying that we shouldn't be thankful to God for all the wonderful things we have as citizens of this nation. We are very blessed, and I know we are. But some people would put their loyalty to the nation above their loyalty to God.

There are some people who look down on people of another nation because they happen to be the enemies of this nation. And would even fight and kill them if necessary. If they thought it was necessary.

Even though some of those people in that other nation might even be Christians. There

are many people whose first loyalty is to their nation and not to the kingdom of God. There are people who are loyal to, and this will seem awfully small compared to the examples we've been giving, and yet it's amazing that people get into it, an athletic team that they follow.

You know, when I was in Los Angeles, everyone was into the Dodgers. When I was in Northern California, it was the Oakland Raiders. Those are different sports, but those big teams that everyone was into, and everyone would follow their progress.

And Bandon, it's the Bandon something or another, I don't even know who they are. And I don't intend to go out of my way to find out, frankly. No offense if you happen to be on one of the teams.

But I know people who are more loyal to the local football team than to God, in a sense. For instance, I know people who'd rather go out and cheer for people running around butting their heads together over a pigskin than to be here on Friday night cheering for God. I don't know why.

I can't relate with it at all. But it's our cultural conditioning, and there's something in our culture that says that's okay. It's okay to put that first, and then this.

I certainly don't think people have to come here to worship God. They can worship God at the football field if they want, but I doubt if that's what they're doing. And I'm not saying it's wrong to go to see games.

Early Christians in the first century, I think they probably went to the games sometimes, the Olympic Games. Paul gave some of his illustrations from the Olympic Games about how runners run in a race, and how we have to run in a race like that. There's nothing wrong with sports, at least certain sports.

Some sports are worse than others, I imagine. But the point is, where is our loyalty? I have things I like to do for entertainment, too. And some of them are no more lofty or wonderful than going to sports events.

I'm not into sports, you can tell that. But I mean, some of the things I do are no more noble than going to sports games. But the question is, do I put those things before my obligations or my opportunities to worship God? And, you know, we have loyalties to a lot of different things.

Loyalties to our family, to our children. Jesus said, if any man loves his father or mother or wife or children more than me, he is not worthy of me. And I've told this story before, and those of you who have heard me for years have heard it from me, maybe more than once.

I believe I got it from Richard Wurmbrandt, or from one of those guys, who's one of those

ministers behind the Iron Curtain. They were telling about a pastor who was arrested for his faith and was put in jail in, I believe, Russia or one of those Iron Curtain countries. And he was tortured by his captors in order to get him to break and to deny the Lord.

And he was standing up well. He wasn't inclined to break. He would be tortured to death before he'd deny the Lord.

And they were beginning to get that impression. And so they brought in his 12-year-old son into his cell, and they started beating and torturing his 12-year-old son in front of his eyes. And he just, whereas he could have stood torture himself, he got to a place where he just couldn't stand to see his son being tortured.

And he said to his son, I can't stand this anymore. I've got to do what they want. I've got to deny the Lord.

And his son said, if you deny Jesus, you're no father to me. And I guess the father stood rebuked. And he held his conviction firm.

And his son, as I understand the story, was actually beaten to death before his eyes, but he would not deny the Lord. Now, some people say, well, isn't that fanaticism? When you have opportunity to save your son's life by just denying the Lord, just denying the Lord, Jesus said, he that denies me before men, I'll deny him before my Father, which is in heaven. And that's not very good.

And yet, suppose his son had said, Dad, if you don't deny the Lord and you let me get tortured to death, you're no father to me. That's the way probably most children would feel. Boy, I think the pressure would be under then.

But it would be no more right then than otherwise for him to deny the Lord. Jesus said, if you love father, mother, wife or children more than me, you're not worthy of me. Now, I don't say that lightly.

I have two children myself to whom I'm very attached. And if there's any idols in my life, I suppose the closest thing to idols I've ever had in my life have got to be my children. And it's occurred to me many times that that persecution could happen here, just like it's happened in other places.

The places where Christians are persecuted today, there wasn't always persecution. They used to have freedom like we have now. They didn't think it would happen there.

It could happen here. I realize that. And I think about it a lot, in fact.

And when I do, I think about my children. And it concerns me, of course. I pray for my children.

But I know that whatever value I put on my children, it can never be high enough. I

cannot allow it to be high enough to cause me to compromise my Christian stand in any way. Knowing, of course, that during times of persecution, it's Christian leaders and teachers and people in ministry whose families are sought out could incline a person to think, well, if persecution comes, I'll just stop preaching.

Then my family will be secure. It's not me I'm worried about. It's them.

But if God doesn't want me to stop preaching, I've got to put Him first and not my family. And so, you see, sometimes our loyalties, we have traditional loyalties that we think we're expected to have. And we are.

We are supposed to have loyalty to our family. But sometimes we allow these things, too, to become idols. And God said you shall have no other gods before me.

And your god can be your children. It could be your denomination. It could be your nation.

It could be money. It could be your own belly. But none of these things are gods that are permitted to Christians.

And as far as making graven images, I'm not going to treat that separately because I feel that it's very similar to the first commandment. The second commandment is you shall not make any graven image to bow down to it. And I think we've treated sort of that in treating the first commandment.

The focus there seems to be not to reduce God to some physical image because He is so great that no image could properly portray Him. A.W. Tozer said we probably shouldn't try to imagine God when we're praying. He says if you seek to imagine God, then you'll have an imaginary God.

Because we're not required to imagine Him only to love Him. We can't picture Him. And it's our desire as physical beings to want to picture Him.

That's why such strong commands had to be given against making graven images. We are so conditioned to relate on the physical, tangible, visible level of things. That God who is a spirit and invisible and has no form that we know of and can't be reduced into any form.

We can't get a handle on that. We can't imagine Him. We can't picture Him in our minds very well.

And perhaps that's why He became a man so that He would accommodate Himself to some degree toward that weakness in us. That we could at least see Him in human form and know what His nature is like. Nonetheless, we're still not permitted to make images of Him.

And of course we have images. We do have images in many Christian homes. They're not images like carved images.

That's the only kind of images they had in those days. Nowadays we have images on a TV screen. We also have images in our mirror.

There's lots of images in our house. And there's nothing strictly forbidden about images unless they become something that becomes a priority. That becomes something that's worshipped.

Some people do worship the image in the mirror, I think. Judging by how much of the day they spend looking at it. And I think even more people tend to worship the image on their TV screen.

Judging by how much of their day they spend looking at it. And allowing it to govern their thinking instead of God. Instead of exposing themselves to the Word of God.

And spending their time in prayer and in meditation on the scripture. They spend their time vegetating in front of a tube. There's images in our society that become God's to us.

But God won't tolerate any of them. And just as Joshua said, listen people, you can't serve God. He's a holy God.

He's a jealous God. He won't tolerate your idolatry. They were offended, really.

That he would suggest that they wouldn't be true to God. And yet it turned out they had these idols in their houses. They feared the Lord and served their own gods.

And there's a great deal of that that goes on in the Christian church today, too. And I trust that if it's going on in your life, that you won't take a light view of it. And that you will tear down the idols.

And cut out the groves. And tear down the high places and the altars that are dedicated to any other god. Because it can't be imagined that a God who gave everything for us would expect anything less than everything from us.

Jesus said we need to count the cost. It costs everything to be his disciple. It cost him everything to be our God.

To be our Savior. It cost his life. It cost him his son.

And we should not be so foolish as to imagine it would cost us anything less than everything. To be his followers. Our whole heart.

We have to love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength,

with all your mind. If we don't, we violate what is called the greatest commandment. Which means we commit the greatest sin.

And it's something we often take very lightly, but had better not. Now, in following weeks we will be continuing to talk about the Ten Commandments and seeing what the New Testament says about them. Because the New Testament authority will be the main thing that we need to examine on the subject.

But you can see that we are not in a situation where they don't apply to us.