

# Guidelines to Freedom Part 1 - Who Takes First Place?

by Alistair Begg

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*Alistair Begg explores the Ten Commandments as essential guidelines for freedom and a reflection of our need for God in a pluralistic society.*

**Duration:** 40:23

**Scripture:** Joshua 24:14, Jeremiah 9:23, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 22:37-40, Mark 12:30-31, Romans 12:1-2

**Topics:** "Freedom"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the transformative power of the Ten Commandments for believers. He explains that the law of God reveals our sinfulness and leads us to salvation in Christ. Once saved, we are then guided by the Spirit to love God and our neighbors through obedience to the commandments. The preacher also warns against compromising the truth of Scripture and encourages believers to engage with others in a loving and respectful manner. Additionally, he emphasizes the sovereignty of God over creation and rejects the idea of 'mother earth' or any other deity.

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## Transcript

Turn to the book of Exodus and to chapter 20, as we both seek to consider the first of these ten commandments and also to give something of an introduction to the commandments in general. Exodus chapter 20 and verse 3 reads as following, You shall have no other gods before me or beside me. If it was true to say that in the sixties we perfected, at least in the Western world, a sort of willful disregard for God, a defiant gesture on the part of humanity, and if we honed it in the seventies and lived with the implications of it in the eighties, now in these early years of the nineties, as we come to the end of a millennium and anticipate two thousand and beyond, there's an interesting change, it would seem to me, taking place in many parts of our world, not least of all here in the context of the United States of America.

Perhaps this is your experience also, but I find that people have no problem whatsoever about being prepared to listen or to read or to talk about spiritual things. Indeed, there seems to be a widespread interest in religion, so much so that people are prepared to listen to just about anyone or anything. That is the bad side of it.

The rise of Islam, the inroads of all kinds of mystical elements that attach themselves to the New Age movement are indicative of this very thing. And at the very same time, large segments of Christendom,

that which represents, if you like, historic Christianity, appears happy simply to set up their booths, as it were, on the corridors of time alongside all these other little displays of the various religious options. And so we live in this kind of syncretistic, pluralistic culture where men and women are increasingly interested in religion, and at the same time, decreasingly interested in doing anything that makes demands upon them.

I believe a door of opportunity is opening for us--an opportunity for us to share with people that there is something that they need, albeit not something that they want. Indeed, that what they want is actually a mirage, and that what they need is something very real. Now, whenever we encounter somebody like that, we've got a great opportunity.

Mainstream Christianity has tried to diminish its bits and pieces that folks won't like, so it said, Well, if that's a problem for somebody, we won't believe in that. And if Mr. X won't like that, then we can get rid of that. And if the teenagers don't like this, then we won't worry about that.

And so what it does is it just renders itself irrelevant. The opportunity opens to us to stand up authoritatively in our day, to take our Bibles, and to say, This is what God says, and we're unashamed about it. Now, that's why we're studying the Ten Commandments, so that we might get to grips with these issues.

In coming to them, it's vitally important that we understand a number of things, because great confusion surrounds the Ten Commandments. Some of us were brought up learning them off by heart. Although 96% of America says it believes in God, very, very few could get the Ten Commandments in order.

In fact, very few could even get the Ten Commandments. And some of us this morning would be hard-pressed, with a white sheet of paper in front of us, to write down more than two or three. So before we start applauding ourselves, we'd better just understand the context.

First of all, we need to say this, that what we have in the Ten Commandments is not a formal list of do's and don'ts that have been given to us by God to restrict our personal freedoms. People think that's what it is, to say, oh, the Ten Commandments, I hate that stuff. It's a bunch of things that you can't do, and it just makes life miserable.

You have to wear dark suits, you look like a donkey, and life is painful. Be done with that nonsense. I don't know who came up with that.

Well, the answer is, the Ten Commandments are not that. Rather, they are a blueprint for life. If you want a heading for the Ten Commandments, you could call them guidelines to freedom.

Here's the way to live in freedom, says God. They are the kind of instructions that a parent would give, a good parent would give, to their child. Say, honey, this is how I want you to live, and this is how you will be protected, and this is how you will grow to be the kind of person that God intends for you to be.

That's the framework in which the Ten Commandments are given. So don't immediately react to them as a dreadful list. As Malcolm Muggeridge, writing in Punch years ago, said, most people regard the Ten Commandments the way to treat the average examination paper in England, where the questions are set, and it says at the top, four out of ten to be attempted.

And so that's the way people are posting Ten Commandments. They say, well, there's ten of them, and frankly, I'm going to try to have a good shot at four. I mean, I might not do too well on the other six, but at least, you know, I'll know I'm doing well on four.

It doesn't work that way. Second thing to notice is this, that these commandments expound the instruction of Jesus given to us in Matthew chapter 22. You remember one occasion, the Pharisees, who were really into rules and regulations, came up to Jesus and asked him, Teacher, what is the greatest commandment in the law? That's Matthew chapter 22, verse 36.

And Jesus replied, Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment, and the second is like it. Love your neighbor as yourself.

All the law and the prophets hang on these two commandments. Now I wonder if you have thought this or met anyone who thought it. This is what you find.

You talk to people, and they say, I know the Ten Commandments are in the Old Testament, but we don't bother with the Old Testament. We're the New Testament people, and in the New Testament what we have is just love the Lord your God and love your neighbor as yourself. Well, first of all, that is not true.

Jesus said, these two principal statements are the very hinges upon which all of the law and the prophets hang. In other words, he said, if you get these two things and understand what they mean, then you're set. But if you don't, you're in difficulty.

So I asked you this morning, you read this, it says, I'm supposed to love the Lord my God with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind, and all my strength. Good. Well, how do you do that? What are you supposed to do? You just walk around going, I would love the Lord your God with all my heart, all my soul, all my mind, all my strength.

Kind of like a mantra? What does it mean? It's got to mean something. How do we find out what it means? What it means is answered in the first four commandments. They tell us what it means to love God with all our heart.

See? First thing is, you don't have any other gods. You don't worship anyone other than the living God. Secondly, you don't worship the living God any other way than the way in which he said, and so on.

And we love our neighbor as ourselves. What does that mean? The last six commandments answer that question. If I'm going to love my neighbor as myself, it's got to mean something practical.

It means you don't sleep with a lady next door unless she happens to be your wife and move next door. All right? It means you don't rip your boss off and steal stuff out of the office. It means you don't fiddle your income tax.

It means you don't drive around your neighborhood resenting the fact that your car is the smallest car in the neighborhood and everyone else has a bigger house and put an extension on the back and you didn't get one. It's got to mean something really practical. You see, to love your neighbor as yourself doesn't just mean having a funny feeling in the pit of your stomach.

That may have nothing more to do with that. That may only have to do with pizza. That's not necessarily loving.

Okay? So I want you to understand, any of you who have come with a notion, and many will have, that in the Old Testament we have the Ten Commandments, but somehow or another those got blown out and now we just have two new ones. No. What Jesus was saying is expounded in the Ten Commandments.

Okay? Third thing to say, in general, is that the Ten Commandments are not a ladder up which we climb to acceptance with God. You went in the street and said to somebody, how do you think you can ever get to heaven? One of the classic responses will be, obey the Ten Commandments. Okay? Try your best.

Do the things that God said. Where are they said? Well, they're said in the Ten Commandments. But in point of fact, what we discover is that the Ten Commandments are not a ladder up which we climb to acceptance with God, but they're rather a mirror in which we see ourselves.

Because when we read these commandments, we realize we've got a problem. For example, commandment number one that we're about to deal with now. We're supposed to have no other gods before God.

That's tough. You put your girlfriend before God any time this past seven days, guys? Put your boss before God? Put your marriage before God? When I read the Ten Commandments, it's like a mirror. I go, ooh, I didn't know that was on my face.

Isn't that embarrassing when you've got something on your face and you don't know? And even your best friends won't tell you? I remember in Scotland, I was visiting some old ladies and I was taking them flowers. They seemed old at the time, they were probably only 40. And I was visiting, and somehow or another I got the pollen on my fingers.

I was driving my car, I rubbed my face. So I looked like a Mohican by the time I got this lady's house. I walked in, fired his punch, gave her the flowers, sat down, had a cup of tea, read the Bible, prayed with her and everything else.

Large is life. I came out, and as I looked in my rearview mirror to drive away, I said, holy smoke, I didn't realize I had that all over my face. Why does she never tell me? Once you see in the mirror, you find out what's going on.

And see, here in these Ten Commandments, we look in the mirror. That's why a lot of people don't want to deal with them. And the mirror shows us we're dirty.

And you can't wash your face in the mirror, so it sends us to the solution to the problem we've encountered. So don't anybody go out of here this morning saying, I've got it clear. There are Ten Commandments, you try and do them.

If you do them, God likes you. If you don't do them, God hates you. And the way to really make God like you is obey the Ten Commandments.

No. What the Ten Commandments do is say, hey, I got a problem. And they don't answer the problem.

Therefore, I must go look for an answer. And you don't have to look far, as you'll find out. The fourth thing to say is this, that the impact of the Ten Commandments on the unbeliever is to bring restraint in the civil

realm.

In other words, in the realm of politics and in democracy. Both Britain and America share this, insofar as the Ten Commandments have largely framed the basis of their laws. And the Ten Commandments are there to restrain evil.

If you think about it, there is no way to restrain evil unless the society embraces a moral consensus. Soon as the society decides that it doesn't matter if you kill people, then it's the Wild West. Soon as the society decides that it doesn't matter if you steal, then it's all shot.

And the Ten Commandments have framed in Western culture the basis largely of the civil jurisdiction of our day. Fifthly, the Ten Commandments exist to bring about conviction in the theological realm. I've largely said that in terms of referring to them as a mirror.

In other words, it is there that we find out that we're not all that we thought we were. And fifthly, for the believer, for those who are trusting in Christ, the Ten Commandments are there not in order to enable us to meet requirements for God--because Jesus is the only one that can meet those requirements--but in order to enable us to walk in the fullness and freedom that our Heavenly Father intends. This is how it is.

All of humanity has God's eternal law written in its conscience. Every man or woman, boy or girl, is made as a moral being. They know things are right, and they know things are wrong.

It is not simply environmental. They know instinctively. God has written it into conscience.

But the law is only written on the hearts of those who trust in Christ. And until I come to trust in Christ, the law of God only convicts me and only condemns me. So if you keep coming here and you are living outside of a personal relationship with God in Christ, this series in the Ten Commandments is either going to drive you far away from this building, or it is, God willing, going to drive you to the wonderful discovery of faith in Christ.

Because the law of God is written in your conscience, but it's not written in your heart. As sinners, we break the law of God. We don't delight in the law of God.

It is only when he writes it in our hearts that we say, I delight to do your will, O Lord. I delight to obey you. Your paths are the paths of righteousness, and all your ways are peace.

More to be desired than gold are your laws and your statutes. They rejoice my heart. That is a radical transformation.

And for the believer, that's what the Ten Commandments are. The law of God shows me I'm a sinner, sends me to Christ for salvation, Christ returns me to the law in order to frame my way of life. The Spirit of God works within my heart, says, Come on now, you want to love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and your mind, your strength.

How do I do it? The first four commandments. And your neighbor is yourself. How do I do it? The last six commandments.

Now, having said all of that, let me say a couple of things about God with a large G, gods with a wee G, and then a point or two of application. Okay? Number one, God with a large G. I am, he says, the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery, you shall have no other gods. The

preamble, you see, is vital to understanding the laws.

In the same way that the preamble of the Constitution is a very important preamble because it sets up what is about to follow. We, the people of the United States of America, believing that this and this and this and this, do hereby do this. See? And so what happens with the Ten Commandments is people unearth them from the context.

All they hear is the you shall, divorced from the I am. And it is the I am that gives foundation to the you shall. I remember 1972, I was standing on a wall in Trafalgar Square.

There was a huge mass of people there. It was a festival of light rally. Thousands of people from all over Great Britain had come to stand around the statue there of Nelson in Trafalgar Square.

And I was standing up on a wall as a vantage point. I heard a voice behind me saying, get down from the wall. I spun around, I said, who says? I wasn't smart.

The man was dressed in blue and he had a helmet that went up like this. It wasn't one of my buddies that said get down. It was the law.

This is what he said. I am the policeman. You shall get down.

Now, God, you see, is the one who says, I am God, and because I am, you shall. Now, the problem for us in our arrogant little tyrannies in which most of us live is that we don't like anybody telling us what to do. Anybody.

We don't want our moms and dads to do it. We don't want our bosses to do it. We don't want our teachers to do it.

We don't want policemen to do it. We don't want anyone to do it. And the reason that we're such a rebellious group of people is because we haven't settled it at the level of commandment number one.

The reason for the incipient rebelliousness that pervades our culture is because we've missed it here, back here. We get this right, then other things fall into place. You see, I am your mom.

You shall clean your room. Answer, I don't care. Because all authority is derived from the authority of Almighty God who says, I am God.

Therefore, you shall. Now, let's say these couple of things about God. Why should we put God first? Answer, because of who he is.

Because of who he is. What we have here in Scripture is the statement that God has revealed himself. That he is the creator.

The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork. You look up at the ceiling and it's fantastic, right? You look up at this and you say, I can't believe it. All those lights in, in symmetry, and they come on and they go off and you say, there's somebody really smart did this.

And rightly so. You stand out on a starlit night and look up into the vastness. And in your heart, because God has said eternity in your hearts, you're saying to yourself, somebody bigger than me did this.

The psalmist says, Psalm 100 verse 3, know ye that the Lord, he is God. It is he who has made us and not we ourselves. We are his people and the sheep of his pasture.

That is why, you see, since the tail end of the 19th century, with the, um, the shakiness of German theology that fed its way into Britain and into the United States, and at the same time the accompanying influence of Darwin, we have had for basically this whole century a declining commitment--an exponentially declining commitment--to the truth of the creative handiwork of God. So that while men and women are prepared to talk about God, they are not talking about a God who made them. And that is the only God about which the Bible speaks.

Know ye that the Lord, he is God. It is he who has made us. This God, says the writer in Deuteronomy, is unique.

Deuteronomy chapter 4 and verse 39. You should turn to it if you would like to see it. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy chapter 4. This is very important when you're talking to your friends.

Deuteronomy 4.39. This is what God says. Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above and on the earth below. I am so sick of this Mother Earth junk.

I'm fed up with it. I'm fed up with these people on channel 3, 5, and 8 sitting there as if they were in charge of the weather, or they were in touch with somebody who's in charge of the weather. Oh, Mother Nature will be shining on the air show this afternoon.

Oh yeah? It's bogus. Acknowledge and take to heart this day that the Lord is God in heaven above. He makes it rain, he makes it drought, and he's in charge on the earth below.

There is no other. There's nobody else. There's no one else.

You see, that immediately backs you into a corner, doesn't it? Because our culture says, we don't mind you having a God, provided you've just got a God, but we don't want you coming here with the B-God story. See, we can have the A-God story, but not the B-God story. Because after all, this is the realm of competition.

And as long as we have a McDonald's, we don't have a Burger King. As long as you have a Burger King, you have the right to have an Arby's. And in the same way, when you talk God, everybody sets up their little stall.

You go to the average university, they've got all their little deities set up. And the last thing in the world you want to do is to be thought some kind of obscurantist freak who says, you know, I think Deuteronomy 439 has got something to say here. There is no other rather than the God who made us.

And because of that, he says in verse 40, keep his decrees and his commands, which I am giving you today, so that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may live long in the land the Lord your God gives you for all time. In other words, I'm God. I thought it up.

This is how you should do it. Do this, and it's really good. But if you want to bring home a tumble dryer and try and mix concrete for a new patio in the back of your house, that's not a smart idea.

There is not a tumble dryer made that will do that job the way that the concrete mixer is supposed to do it. And I don't suggest that you put your laundry in a concrete mixer. Why? Because they weren't put together

for that.

This God that we worship is creator. He is unique. As we saw in a previous study, he is plural, he's powerful, he's perfect, and he's praiseworthy.

You should write those four things down. Perfect doctrine of God. All you need to do then is go and find the whole Bible explaining those four words.

The God that we worship, the God who reveals himself here in Exodus chapter 2, is plural. In other words, he is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Now why is this important? Well, it's important for multiple reasons, but it is interesting to note that the USA is second only to one other country in the world in church attendance.

There's only one other country where more members of the population go to worship. I bet you don't know which one it is. How many of you think it's South America? Cowards.

How many of you think it's somewhere in Europe? Okay, none of you know anything. Okay, that's fine, here it is. It is the Republic of Ireland.

That's the only place in the world where more people go to church per capita population, driven in many cases by total fear. Now despite the fact that all these people go to church, let me quote you, although 95% of Americans say they believe in God, it is by no means clear that they acknowledge the God of biblical revelation. They don't.

Who speaks to them from beyond himself and awakens in men and women a sense of moral unworthiness and a sense of obligation to do his will? See? So they say, well I want to get religious and I want to come to church. Okay, come along to church. This is Parkside Church.

Well, what's it like? Well, it's like a lot of things. Yeah, but I mean, what will happen if I come in there? I mean, will I feel good? Well, what do you mean? I mean, will the seats feel comfortable? The seats are comfortable. Yeah, but will I feel like I'm a good guy? No, probably not.

Not unless your wife tells you you're a good guy or one of your friends or something else. The Bible speaks that way, then you'll feel great. But if the Bible says you're a bad guy, you don't feel like a bad guy.

And guess what? If you don't like feeling like a bad guy, you're never coming back. Because if your view of God is that he exists to make you feel like a good guy, the only place you're ever going to go and worship is someplace where God fits your bill. And men and women today are unwilling to admit what they have to admit to start a relationship with God at all.

Number one, I'm a sinner. See, here--and I don't think it's unique to this country, I don't want to sound like a wailing prophet from across the Atlantic or something--but Americans that I talk to use the word God with a large G to refer to a general principle of good in life. God is a cosmic principle, or God is a force, or God is whatever you want him to be.

But the idea that God is self-existent and he is to be feared and he is to be loved is nowhere in the reckoning. So we've got a paradox. And that is that while a knowledge of this God of the Bible, and a knowledge of the Bible, and a commitment to the core beliefs of historic Christianity, while all of those things plummet, America remains one of the most religious countries in the world.

But at the expense of truth, at the expense of the God of revelation, at the expense of the reality of Scripture, at the expense of a commitment to the core beliefs that have underpinned all that built this place on the foundation on which it now stands, we're on shaky ground. That's why I say to you these are days of great opportunity to talk to our friends in these lines, to engage them in conversation. Enough of this being known as a bunch of crazy people waving things and tramping around.

We meet people one at a time. Their lives are their lives. There's good, there's bad, there's problems, there's success, there's questions, there's everything.

By and large, many of them are confused. Some have a background that is understanding these things, some of them come from nowhere. Slogans are not going to do it.

Trite expressions of the religious right will not transform men and women's lives. It's going to take a painstaking commitment to engage in dialogue concerning truth, concerning God, concerning the Bible. And loved ones, I say to you this morning, you cannot do that unless you learn your Bible, unless you know the truth, and unless you're sensitive to those things.

So when you say to people, you know, we had this thing on the Ten Commandments. Someone's going to say, oh, Blooming Ten Commandments, isn't that a drag? Well, you can say, well, the sermon was a bit of a drag, but the Ten Commandments, they're not. No, they're okay.

Why is that? And then you can start to tell them. Tell them that we must do this because of who God is and because of what God's done. Isn't that what he says here in Exodus 20? He says, the reason I want you to do this is because I redeemed you.

I redeemed you. I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. And having brought them out, he gave them the law.

Why? To redeem them? No, to frame their way of life. What has happened to us? First Peter chapter 1 verses 18 and 19. Check them, you'll find it.

He says we haven't been redeemed with corruptible things like silver and gold. We have been redeemed by the precious blood of Jesus. We have been set free, realizing we're unable to keep God's standard, casting ourselves upon God so that Christ would give to us what we do not deserve.

Then, having been redeemed, we want to find out how to live. And number one, you shall have no other gods before me. Okay, well let's finally talk about God with a small g. What does it mean, you shall have no other gods before me? Or in your translation it might read, besides me.

Well, it would be like taking a second wife while your first wife is still alive and well and happy to be your wife. It would be the breach of an exclusive relationship. And God says, I am in an exclusive relationship with you.

I have pursued you. I have redeemed you. I am your God, and therefore you shouldn't have any other gods that take my place.

Now we need to realize, and we'll say this again and again going through these ten commandments, that the commandments are not restricted to outward actions, but they are also relating to the disposition of our minds and our hearts. I don't know about you, but I think I come to the first commandment, and I look at

this, and I picture scenes from subcontinents of the world, with people dancing around poles or bowing down before statutes or going through elaborate incantations and rituals and mantras and so on. And I say, oh man, I'm glad I was born where I was born, so we don't have to really worry about the first commandment.

Because we're not into any of that stuff. I mean, we got a first commandment down. You shall have no other gods before me.

Got it. We don't have any of those dumb gods, none of those idols, none of that stuff. We're not burning all that tissue paper like on the streets of Hong Kong.

We're not taking perfectly good apples and oranges and leaving them there to rot, waiting for the little deity to come by and feeling like a Granny Smith some afternoon. We're not that stupid. We don't do that stuff.

We've got it down. Hey, wait a minute before you go too quickly. You see, in paganism, the reason that they do all of those things in relation to God, is because they believe that God exists for them.

And so if they will do something for it, or him or her, then he in turn will do something for them. So therefore we come along and we do our little ceremonies. And then we seek to make God obligated to us.

We say our mantras, then God fills in for us. We do our incantations and then God does something for us. That's the view of paganism.

Did you hear what I said? That's the view of paganism. That's the view of secular America. We don't know who it is, but we figure he's up there somewhere.

And if we don't want to find out what you're supposed to do, then we can obligate him or her or it to us and all will be well with us. So before we start congratulating ourselves that we've got space exploration and the shuttle got off, mercifully, and we've got microwave ovens and we've got TVs and we've got computers, therefore presumably we don't have a problem with these gods with a small g. Listen, all of these things, all of the advances in technology and all of the improvements for which we're thankful, cannot mask the deep foolishness and immaturity that pervades our culture. Think about the best campuses now in the American university context.

Now I won't mention any for fear that you and I didn't go there and then we'll feel bad, but those that are on the forefront, what are they doing? They're establishing professorial chairs for earth cults, for feminine deities, and for new age nonsense. I mean just get their brochures and check. Just check and you'll find out it's true.

What? The people who put the men on the moon are thinking about worshiping the earth? All these scientific rationalists who woke up one morning at the end of the 19th century and realized how smart they could be are talking about worshiping some kind of feminine female god deity? Yeah. Why? Because when men and women cease to believe in the God of Revelation, they don't believe in nothing. They start to believe in everything.

And that's where we are. It's not that men and women don't believe in God. It is that they believe in gods.

And any belief in we gods means that we're not believing in the God of Revelation. And so this morning, if the cap fits, let's wear it. Think of those of us even who profess faith in Jesus Christ and we would want to

go out and say, oh yeah, we've got this one really buttoned down.

We understand this. We're not going to put any other gods in God's place. Can I ask you, do you have a comprehensive understanding of the rule of God within your life? I'm not asking you a divorce from me.

I've been asking myself a question this week. Is God in charge of your Mondays? Do you have a view of God in charge of your work? Or is work another department under the control of a different head of the department, namely another little deity? Is God in control of your relationships, of your comings and goings, of your dating game? Or is that actually in the department of another little deity? Is God in charge of the success quotient of your life and of mine, of our aspirations and our dreams, of our apparent successes, of our amassing of things and of stuff? Is this God of Revelation in charge, or have we delegated it to sub-deities? To the degree that I allow anyone else or anything else to enable me to make my decisions, which I ought to make simply in obedience to God, I am violating the first commandment. When I put my job and the privileges of my task before God himself, I have begun to worship the privilege of preaching.

When you worship your family as if you were going to have your family forever, you are no longer worshipping God. I want to go so far as to say that when you or I put our families, no matter how much we feel the right to be committed to our families in places that is God's alone, then we just violated the first commandment. Or your wife, or your husband, or your girlfriend, or the one you're going to marry, or your job.

Let me end by turning you just to two verses in the Old Testament. Jeremiah 29, I beg your pardon, Jeremiah 9 and Joshua 24. I'm just going to read them and we're done.

God speaks through the prophet Jeremiah, and he says, I'm commanding you today, if you want to start boasting, to make sure that you don't boast about these few things. Verse 23, this is what the Lord says, let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, or the strong man boast of his strength, or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who exercises kindness and justice and righteousness on the earth, for in these I delight, declares the Lord. Is it right to be physically fit? Definitely.

Do we really need to stand in front of those mirrors all the time, freeing ourselves? Probably not. Is recreation wrong? Definitely not. Is golf good? Depends how you play.

But whenever even good things and good people take my heart, then I have ceased from obeying the first commandment. The final verse is in the book of Joshua, and in verse 24. You know the situation well.

The covenant has been reviewed. Joshua has rehearsed the way that God has led his people out. He's given them a land, and he's done all these things for them, and then Joshua stands them up and he says, now listen, verse 14, Fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness.

Throw away to God your forefathers' worship beyond the river and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourself this day whom you will serve. Because the fact of the matter is, we'll serve something, or we'll serve someone.

And every one of us, when we walk out these doors this morning, we go out to serve and worship. We worship at all kinds of shrines and in all kinds of ways, and the question is, are you going to worship the living God, or are you going to serve these other gods? Choose whether you will serve God, or whether

the gods your forefathers serve beyond the river, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you're living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.

Can I ask you this morning, where are you in relationship to this first commandment? God's law has been written on all of our consciences, but only in Christ is it written on our hearts. Ask yourself in this dying moment, who's in charge of my life? Who's on the throne of my life? Who calls the shots in my life? Who takes first place in my life? I am the Lord your God, he says. You shall have no other gods before me.

Let's pray together. We bow in prayer. If you would like the chance to talk some of these things through or to pray with someone, as it says in the bulletin this morning, we'd love to respond in that way or to give you literature if you would like it, and you can just proceed directly to where our folks are happy to help and respond in that way.

Father, look upon our hearts today. You know us. You made us.

We don't want to pretend before you. We don't want to play a church. We don't want to be simply sloganeers walking out from here.

We want your truth to take root in our hearts. We want to hear your word in the Bible. We want to understand it, and we want to live it.

We want you to help us to get rid of little gods that we've begun to include in our thinking, gods of our looks, of our ego, of our success, of our acquisitions. Help us, Lord, not to worship there, and then help us tomorrow when we feel like worshipping there again to remember that we said today that we didn't want to worship there. Help us to help one another in this because all of us are learners from the one who knows the answers, and may the love of the Lord Jesus draw us to himself.

May the joy of the Lord Jesus give us strength to obey his command, and may the peace of the Lord Jesus keep our hearts and minds today and forevermore. Amen. The following message was produced by Truth for Life Ministries at P.O. Box 398000 Cleveland, Ohio, ZIP Code 44139.

They have a website called [www.truthforlife.org](http://www.truthforlife.org). God bless you now. Goodbye.

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