e. Exposition of the Individual Commandments

Preface: Exodus 20:1-2 -- "And God spoke all these words, saying, 'I am Jehovah your God who brought you out of the land of Mizraim (Egypt), from the house of slaves.'"

Here at the very beginning the Lord reminds the Israelites that He chose them ("I am your God") and redeemed them (by the blood of the Passover lamb, which marked their coming out of Egypt) and delivered them from bondslavery ("brought you out"0. All of this places them under a great debt of gratitude to Him for His grace and mercy.

(1) The First Commandment

Exodus 20:3 -- "There shall not be for you other gods before My face"

(a) What are "other gods"?

In a more concrete sense, "other gods" doubtless refers to the gods of Egypt and of the other surrounding nations.

In a more abstract sense, "other gods" could refer to the following:

[1] anything that claims to have ultimate control over events in the universe or in our lives

[2] anything to which we perform religious worship and service

[3] anyone or anything that we love more than anything else in the universe

[4] anyone or anything in which we place our trust, our confidence, for salvation

(b) What does "before My face" mean?

Here the idea does not appear to be that found in Henotheism, i.e., that the Israelites can have other gods that they worship and serve, so long as these gods do not assume first place in their lives (one current meaning of the words "before Me") Rather, the idea in the text appears to be that the Israelites are to have no other gods at all!

(c) What is positively implied in this commandment?

When we combine the first commandment with the emphasis of the preface, it appears that the Lord is strongly implying "You shall have Me!" "You shall have Me as the one true and living God; and you shall worship and serve Me as your Creator, Redeemer, Judge, and King!"

(2) The Second Commandment

Exodus 20:4-6 -- "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any representation of that which is in heaven above or that which is on