

Command 1 - Have No Other Gods Before Me.

May 27, 2018

If you are new at CrossWinds, it is great to have you on this Memorial Day weekend. Today, we return to our study of the Ten Commandments. We had an introduction to the Ten Commandments a two weeks ago. Last week, we celebrated graduation Sunday. Today we are back to the Ten Commandments.

Let me remind you what we learned about the Ten Commandments two weeks ago. It is the theme of our series. *After God set his people free he gave them the Ten Commandments to keep them free.* God didn't give his people Ten Commandments and say, "If you keep them, then I will free you from Egypt." He freed his people from Egypt completely with his undeserved mercy and grace. There was nothing his people could do to save themselves. It was *after* he freed them, that he gave them the Ten Commandments to keep them free. The Ten Commandments came after God's grace. They didn't earn God's grace.

It is the same for us. We were a complete and total mess because of our sin, and there was nothing we could do to save ourselves from our sin. When we were helpless, God sent a savior to set us free. His name was not Moses. His name is Jesus. He is God's own son. Just as God used Moses to set his people free from slavery and death in Egypt in a small way, God used his own son's death on the cross to set us free from something far worse than slavery in Egypt. He set us free from Satan, sin, death and eternal punishment. Jesus is such a great savior he didn't just set us free but will eventually set the universe free.

The important thing to remember is just as God's people in Egypt couldn't do anything to save themselves, they could only trust God's power and grace to

save them, in the same way we can do nothing to save ourselves. We can only trust God's power and grace to save us through Jesus. *All God's commandments come after God saves us. They keep us free. They aren't required to set us free.*

I hope this changes your view of the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are all for our good and our joy. They are about giving us life. That is why we say with the Psalmist that "your commandments are my delight" (Psalm 119:47).

This morning we look at the first commandment. Let's read it.

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. Exodus 20:2–3 (ESV)

In this commandment, God says, "Worship me and me alone. Remember that you were dying. I came to your rescue. I brought you out of the house of slavery. Don't let your heart wander after other gods. If you think other gods are the way to go, remember what they did for you — absolutely nothing. I saved you. I rescued you."

This commandment to only worship God sounds very basic. Why would God start with something so self-evident? To understand why this is the first command, we need to understand Egypt and the Egyptian religion.

What was religion like in Egypt?

Egypt was one of the most polytheistic nations of the day. Polytheism simply means multiple gods. The Egyptians had many gods, all of which people were to worship. I did a little research on the ancient gods of Egypt and learned they had a god for everything. There was Amun — king of the gods, Anubis — guardian of mummification, Atum — the god who gave birth to the others gods.

That is just a few of their gods whose names begin with the letter “A.” They had gods with names that filled the rest of the alphabet.¹ They had gods for fields, rivers, fertility, love, war, light, darkness, sun and storms. The Egyptians figured that if they worshipped many gods, they had all their bases covered. It was a culture very similar to the New Testament city of Athens when Paul talked to them about their many gods. When God’s people spent 400 years in Egypt, a love for this cornucopia of different gods rubbed onto them.

There is an interesting passage in Ezekiel that describes the Jews while in Egypt. It tells us that many times God attempted to turn his people away from worshipping these false Egyptian gods while they were still slaves in the land of Egypt. Each time, they refused to worship God alone. They kept worshipping the gods of Egypt. God was so fed up with their infidelity toward him that he nearly destroyed them, yet for the sake of God’s name he saved them from Egypt.

That is why the Ten Commandments begin by commanding God’s people to leave the false gods and worship the one true God of the universe who saved them. Let’s look at Ezekiel.

And I said to them, “Cast away the detestable things your eyes feast on, every one of you, and do not defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.” But they rebelled against me and were not willing to listen to me. None of them cast away the detestable things their eyes feasted on, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt. “Then I said I would pour out my wrath upon them and spend my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I acted for the sake of my name, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among whom they lived, in whose sight I made myself known to them in bringing them out of the land of Egypt.” Ezekiel 20:7–9 (ESV)

¹ <http://www.ancientegypt.co.uk/gods/explore/main.html>

This is why God put 10 plagues on the Egyptians. Each plague was a demonstration of God's power over one of the false Egyptian gods.² This is why God made his people walk across the Red Sea on dry ground with walls of water on their left and right. This is why he destroyed Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea. God was demonstrating his power over the gods in Egypt. He was telling them to stop worshipping the false Egyptians gods that had done nothing to help them and could do nothing to help them. This is why God came down to Mt. Sinai in fire, smoke and an earthquake that shook the mountain. None of the gods of Egypt could provide the supernatural shock-and-awe campaign of our God. Our God is the one with true power, and authority. He saved his people out of Egypt. Worship him and hHim alone. He gave them plenty of evidence that he is the real deal and all other gods are phony. Let's look at a few more reasons why God insists on worshipping him alone.

Why does God insist on exclusive worship?

Idols can do nothing.

The Bible describes idols this way.

Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they cannot speak; they have to be carried, for they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of them, for they cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good. Jeremiah 10:5 (ESV)

Idols are no different than scarecrows. They can do nothing. They cannot speak, walk or see. There are countless people worshipping carved blocks of wood. They are no different than a scarecrow. What a waste of time. Any other God we worship is a waste of time.

² <https://hubpages.com/religion-philosophy/Ten-Plagues-For-Ten-Gods>

Demons are behind idols.

While an idol and a false god can do nothing, the Bible does tell us one of the real dangers behind false gods is demonic power.

They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to the demons; they poured out innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan, and the land was polluted with blood. Psalm 106:37–38 (ESV)

The sacrifices people offered to idols were actually offered to demons. To participate in worshipping something other than the one true God of the universe is to worship a demonic power that is behind the idols. This is one reason we never worship anything but God and his son, Jesus. Anything else we worship is either as useless as a dumb block of wood or is demonic. Worshipping a demon leads to bondage. Remember, God set his people free and is committed to keeping his people free. I remind you that all of these commandments are for our freedom and our good. Pouring our affection to a false god opens us to the influence of demonic powers which are committed to our slavery and death.

This isn't just an Old Testament thing. We also find it in the New Testament.

I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons. 1 Corinthians 10:20 (ESV)

So behind this commandment is God's desire that we worship him alone, not just because he is the only God in the universe but because every other so-called god is powerless to help us or is putting us in contact with demonic powers.

Let's look at another reason why God cautions us against worshipping another god.

Our hearts are prone to wander.

You would think that after the 10 plagues in Egypt, after crossing the Red Sea, and after God giving his commandments to Moses from a mountain wrapped in fire that was shaking the earth and causing an earthquake, God's people would get the message that they needed to be faithful to him. You would think they would understand that God committed himself to them like a husband should commit himself to his wife in marriage. God does not want those he loves sharing their affections with anyone other than him. Yet as we trace our fingers through the Bible, we find God's people constantly struggle to keep their affections set on him.

A generation after the Ten Commandments are given, when the children and grandchildren of the Exodus generation are about to go into the Promised Land under Joshua, we find the people still haven't put away their worship of false Egyptian gods.

"Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. Put away the gods that your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the Lord, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Joshua 24:14–15 (ESV)

If we go a little further into Israel's history, we find Elijah in conflict with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. The people were still unsure if they should worship the one true God of the universe or Baal, the false god of rain.

And Elijah came near to all the people and said, "How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him." And the people did not answer him a word. 1 Kings 18:21 (ESV)

The truth is the heart is incredibly prone to wander after other gods that can do nothing for us, false gods that cannot save us. The only thing a false God can do for us is enslave us.

It was not just people in the Old Testament that had hearts prone to wander after other gods. It is no different for us today. Our hearts have an incredibly strong desire to find our hope, joy and identity in something other than the one true God of the universe who loves us so much he sent his son to die for us.

That is why when we move to the New Testament Jesus talks about the same issue. He also says this first commandment is the greatest commandment.

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.” Matthew 22:36–38 (ESV)

In other words, if we can get this one right, following all the other commandments will flow from it.

Let’s look at two practical things that will help us keep our hearts fixed on Jesus.

How do we keep our hearts fixed on Jesus?

Remember God is our lover, not our kidnapper.

If you were kidnapped and your kidnapper told you to love him alone for the rest of your life, would you love him? You certainly wouldn’t love him willingly. You might attempt to love him out of fear, but that is as far as it could go.

Imagine this same scenario from a different scene. Imagine you are engaged and your future spouse has chosen you. She asks that you love her and

her alone. She is giving her life to you. She asks that you will love her and her alone. Would you refuse that request?

Our God is not a kidnapper that is forcing us to love him. He is our lover who chose to love us when we don't deserve to be loved. He chose to love us when we were unfaithful to him. We should be overwhelmed by the love we don't deserve. God the Father sent his own son to die in our place for our sin. Not only did God love us so much that his son took our sin onto himself and died in our places, but God's plans are to transform us from people that deserve God's just wrath into the most blessed beings in the universe for all of eternity. We are the adopted sons and daughters of God. That is a grand display for the entire universe of the greatest act of undeserved love God has ever shown. There is nothing more blessed, honored and loved in the universe than than we are through Jesus. Folks, it can't get any better. When God says, "Have no other God's before me," and "the first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind," it is not because he is our kidnapper and is trying to force us to love him. Instead, he is our lover who has given his life for us to save us and to make us the most blessed beings in the universe. It is only when we understand what God has done for us that our hearts won't be prone to wander.

Keep our relationship with Jesus fresh.

Every relationship requires maintenance. Those of us who are married know we need to take time to be with our spouses, to enjoy our spouses and to love our spouses if our marriage relationships are to stay strong. If we neglect

putting time into our spouses, our hearts will be prone to wander from our spouses.

It is no different with God. Our hearts need regular time with him to be reminded how much he loves us and in response how much we love him. We need regular refreshment from him. This is why we need to be regularly in our Bibles during the week so God can speak to us and remind us of His love for us. This is why we need to be regular in worship so we can take time to think about him and remember who we are in him and how much God loves us. The easiest way to let affections for another god develop in place of affections for the true God is to neglect time with Jesus.

What is God's competition today?

As we look at the false gods in today's world, let's start on a worldwide level. Let's look at personal false gods, some of which may be so personal they make us uncomfortable.

False Religions

In the ancient world, false gods were literal idols. You could see people putting fruit or meat in front of a large wooden doll. That still takes place in some parts of the world. Hindus worship between 3,000 to 330,000 different gods in a fashion similar to the false worship in the Old and New Testament times. They literally worship idols that look like wooden dolls. Muslims worship a false god called Allah, who is actually a powerful demon.

The Bible is clear. False religions are not alternate ways of worshipping the one true God of the universe but the worship of false gods that is actually worship of demonic powers.

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." John 14:6 (ESV)

And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. Acts 4:12 (ESV)

While overt idol worship takes place in many places of the world, there are also many covert ways false gods are worshiped. They are not physical false gods made of wood and metal but are cultural mindsets and beliefs that have become false gods in our lives. One of them is called pluralism.

Pluralism

Pluralism is the belief that all religions are essentially worshipping the same God. It is the belief that all religions have a little piece of the truth. It doesn't matter what you believe. What matters is that you are religious.

To show you how deeply embedded this is in our culture, I ran across an article describing how in 1993 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland was faced with a resolution calling for all churches to affirm that Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. It was defeated 400 to 300. The majority of church leaders in Scotland no longer believe Jesus is the only way to God. Apparently, they missed some important Bible verses.

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus... 1 Timothy 2:5 (ESV)

I, I am the Lord, and besides me there is no savior. Isaiah 43:11 (ESV)

This belief that all religions are the same and it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you are religious has not just permeated Scotland. It has permeated our culture. Another survey I found said three-quarters of Americans believe that many religions lead to eternal life.

Pluralism is not just biblically false. It is logically impossible. If all religions are equal, that means no religions can be considered false. That means we have no right to tell a suicide bomber he can't blow up a plane filled with Americans if he thinks that will get him to paradise. It means we have no right to tell Hindus that the burning a widow in her husband's funeral fire is murder. Pluralism is not just biblically untrue but it is logically implausible. None of us accept all the beliefs and practices of religions around the world because we know so much of it is inherently evil.

Remember that everybody has a right to their opinion, but not all opinions are equally right. Don't let yourself fall into the trap of thinking all religions are equal. We are to be gracious, courteous, and love all people, but that doesn't mean all religions are the same.

Syncretism

Another trap we fall into is called syncretism. While pluralism is believing there are many different gods that are all heading the same direction, syncretism is mixing the Christian faith with other non-biblical beliefs around us. Today, we find this all the time when cultural pressure leads people to ignore clear Bible teachings. An example of syncretism would be the way many churches are handling the lesbian and gay issue. Just this past week Pope Francis was in the

news because he told a gay man “God made you like this and loves you like this.”³ That may be what the culture wants to hear but is that what the Bible says? Absolutely not.

Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things... For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. Romans 1:22-23, 26–28 (ESV)

The Bible says homosexuality is the end result of violating the first commandment. When people walk away from worshipping the true God of the universe, they worship false gods that look like animals. Ultimately, God removes his restraining influence and lets them go. The end result according to Romans is people don't just end up with a twisted worship, they end up with twisted sexuality.

Romans says God didn't create anyone as a homosexual. The genesis of all homosexuality comes from a violation of the first commandment. It begins with worshipping a false god instead of the true God.

In our age of tolerance, we face strong pressure for syncretism, to modify what the Bible says so it fits our culture. The pressure is so strong that even the pope is giving in to it!

³ <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/pope-francis-gay-man-god-made-article-1.4001245>

How can I identify false gods in my life?

Let's move from big cultural false gods to our inner world. Our hearts are little idol factories. What are the false gods we can start worshipping in our hearts?

What I long for can reveal a false god.

What do my thoughts turn to when my mind goes into neutral? There is nothing wrong with having things we enjoy. God has given us many things to enjoy.

As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 1 Timothy 6:17 (ESV)

It is OK to enjoy things. The things we enjoy should move us to give greater thanks to God who is the giver of all good gifts. The problem is sometimes good things can become god things. We can start worshipping God's gifts instead of the giver of the gifts.

Even if we don't have some of God's good gifts, we can develop a burning fixation for those gifts in our minds. That can become a false god in our hearts because we center all of our time, thoughts and energy around something we desperately want instead of our great God.

Maybe this morning you are a young single woman desperately hoping to get married. Every waking moment, you are dreaming of Mr. Right. You are so consumed with the thought of meeting the right man that you can't think of anything else in your free time. The desire to be married has become a little false god you worship in your heart because you pour all your thoughts and affections into that desire.

Maybe for you, the burning desire that you daydream about when your heart goes into neutral is a new car. You are constantly thinking about the new car. You have watched every video on Youtube that features that car. All of your thoughts and affection are for that new car. The new car has become an idol, a little false god you worship. For many of us, it is easy to let a good thing we enjoy or long to enjoy become a god thing. We pour out so much time and affection on it that it becomes the little god we worship.

The funny part is, what happens when we finally acquire the thing we long for? We aren't happy once we get it. Nothing else ultimately satisfies us other than God and his love.

What I turn to in times of stress can reveal a false god.

For some people their god is alcohol. When they have a bad day, they need a drink. When it is a good day, they need a drink. When they face stress, they need a drink. The bottle is the answer to their problems. The bottle is their false god. The bottle is their savior.

The way I handle food can reveal a false god.

For other people food is their god. The Bible says:

...their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame... Philippians 3:19 (ESV)

Some people so orientate their lives around food that it becomes a false god they worship. When they are stressed, they eat. When they are happy, they eat. When they don't know what to do, they head for the grocery store. They dream about food. They talk about food. They want more exotic food. Their god is their belly. They have so orientated their lives around food that they give more

love and affection to a T-bone than Jesus who loves them so much he died for them.

The way I spend my free time can reveal a false god.

For some people their hobbies are their false god. Watching television can be a false god because if that is the way you spend all your time. If you give all your devotion and energy to Netflix, it is no longer a pleasure you enjoy that causes you to thank God more, it has become a false god you worship instead of the one who loves you and died for you.

Video games can be the same way. If almost all of your free time is spent on a video game, like Fort Nite, it can become your false god. When you find yourself saying you have no time to read your Bible, no time to hang with your friends and no time to help others because you spend four hours a day on Fort Nite, that is because a video game has taken too big of a place in your life. You are devoting so much time and energy to it that it has become your false god.

God tells us our time is not our own. We invest it and spend it wisely to do the most good for Christ and for other people. Video games are not wrong but they can quickly become a waste of precious time. They can become first place in our lives. Remember what we learned about the Ten Commandments. Every time we violate them, it leads to our slavery, not our freedom. When our hobbies become our false god, we end up in slavery, not in joy.

Conditions I put on God reveal my false god.

Many times we give God conditions in our prayers. “God, if you heal me, I promise to attend church every week.” We are saying, “God, let’s make a deal.

You give me health and healing and I will serve you.” That means the real god you are worshipping is the false god of health. You are trying to use the real God to get your false god.

Some people say, “God, I will take a job anywhere, as long as it is in this town because I don’t want to move.” What is the true god in that prayer? It is your home and community. When we put conditions on God we are often trying to use God to get our false god.

My financial giving reveals the truth about the place God holds in my life.

I told you things were going to get personal and uncomfortable. For some of us, this topic is too close for comfort. The best way to see God’s place in your life and to find the false god of your life is to look at our money.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Matthew 6:21 (ESV)

If we love God, we will worship god with our resources. Where our money goes reveals what we truly worship.

No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money. Matthew 6:24 (ESV)

For some of us, when God looks at our checkbooks there is plenty of money spent on our hobbies and our homes but absolutely no money given to Christ and his kingdom. That reveals our hobbies and our homes are the true gods we worship, not Jesus.

In 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, it tells us Christians are to give to Christ generously, sacrificially, proportionately, and joyfully. Many Christian use a tithe as the basis for their giving. Tithe means 10 percent. They give 10 percent of

their income to their church first because that is their way of worshipping God and expressing their love for God through their wallet. They trust God to live on the rest. I can guarantee you God always takes care of them.

The truth is there are some of us this morning that don't give anything to Christ and his kingdom. Our standard of living is more important than our standard of giving. The false god we worship is affluence. We are not willing to give to God first and trust God that we can live on less.

Others of us do not give because we have debt. We reason that we can not give a percentage of our income to Jesus because we love him because of our debt. Perhaps we tell ourselves that once we no longer have a loan, then we will give. The honest truth is those in this situation are also worshipping the false god of affluence. The affluence we worship is the desire to get out of debt faster.

Incidentally, most of us will not be out of debt any time soon. When we pay off a student loan, it will probably be replaced with a car loan or a mortgage.

The honest truth is when we don't worship God with our wealth by giving to God in worship what is first from our checks, the reason we don't worship him with our wealth is because we don't love him and don't trust him to provide for our needs. We are most likely worshipping the false god of affluence. If that is you, God calls you this morning to repent. Give to him a percentage of your income; many people give a tithe — 10 percent. Do it because you love him for loving you. Do it because you know you can trust him to provide for you.

Do it to weed out the false gods in your life because where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.



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