

Commandment 1

God began the Ten Commandments with 4 commands that tell us how we are to relate to Him. The first commandment reads, “You shall have no other gods before me.” This commandment has to come first because none of the others find their true meaning if we do not understand that God is the creator of all life.

The Hebrew word translated “before me” can actually be expressed several ways as seen in various translations. The NIV translated it “before me” with a footnote that says it can also be translated “besides me.” “Before me” implies “in front of or ahead of Him.” Translated “beside me” implies nothing is to be placed alongside Him. The Hebrew word can also be translated “besides me” with the implication that no one or nothing is to be given a place instead of Him. It is also translated “over against me” which implies in confrontation with Him. Other translations express it as “in my presence” and “but me.” The Message translation says “No other gods, only me.” Put it all together and you have the Hebrew saying “You shall have no other gods but me, in front of me, alongside of me, in place of me or against me.”

The phrase “shall not” is emphatic leaving no room for any exceptions or alternative considerations regardless of what our current generation says about what really matters is being sincere.

The Commandment also has “no other gods” as plural implying that there are multiple options available to us. 80% of Americans claim that they only worship one God. That is probably because as Christians we would not admit to worshipping more than the God of the Bible. We worship Jehovah, not Buddha or Vishnu, or Allah etc. That, however, is a misunderstanding of what it means to worship someone or something instead of or in addition to God. When anything less than the true God becomes the object of our worship or trust we have another god and that is forbidden.

All around us are other gods that vie for our time and commitment. Read Philippians 3:19 and Romans 16:18. Paul was referring to more than eating but that was certainly included. Some people do not go to church because they want to go to the Sunday Brunch or be at the restaurant before the crowd. Some people put \$10 in the offering Sunday morning and then spend \$100 on lunch. What does that say about what is really important to them?

In another area R. Kent Hughes notes that while our coins say “In God we trust” for many it should say “In *this* (that is in money) god we trust. Read Job 31:24, 25 and 28 and Matthew 6:24. In a culture that tells us our future depends on the size of our retirement account and the more we earn the more secure we will be, it is easy to shift our trust from God to those things. There is nothing wrong with having wealth unless it is that which we depend upon rather than the creator God who has promised to supply all of our needs. Read Matthew 6:19 where Jesus talked about how foolish it is to trust in possessions. Jesus went on from there to talk about treasures in heaven and noted that where our treasure is our heart will be also. Read Mark 10:17-27. It tells of

an encounter Jesus had with a rich man. The incident ends with the note that the rich man “went away sad, because he had great wealth.”

Another god for many Americans is sex and that which is associated with it. Watch any evening of the popular TV shows and see what the emphasis is. Consider the billions spent each year on beauty aids in American so we will look sexy or attractive. What is their god? Is it not self, pleasure, self-gratification?

The reality is that here are many “gods” that vie for our time. For many Americans another “god” is popularity. Even the disciples argued over who would be first or most important in the kingdom. Many Christians struggle with how to be popular and still remain Christian. God says we are to live one way and the world says another way. We have to decide whether Jehovah or culture will be our “god.” It is often a struggle with how far to go to fit in so we can be followers of both Jehovah and the world. In the end we cannot follow both, which is why we have to decide what or who is our God.

There are multiple challenges for all of us as we seek to make God our one and only God in a world that tempts us to go in so many other directions.

The commandments are given as negatives with “do not” but there is a positive side to each. Read Deuteronomy 13:4, Deuteronomy 6:4-5 and Mark 12:29. The command of God in Deuteronomy repeated by Jesus is about total commitment of the total person to Jehovah, and Jehovah alone, so long as one lives.

There are some Christians who believe that as long as they attend church regularly and give a reasonable offering to God they have fulfilled their commitments and demonstrated their commitment to God alone. The rest of their time and resources are theirs to do with as they want. The truth is that total commitment expressed by God and Jesus involves far more than attending and giving. Putting God first in our “**mind**” means that we put as much effort into studying God’s Word as we do into memorizing the plays on our favorite sports team. Putting God first in our “**mind**” means spending as much time reading God’s Word as we do reading the latest novels etc.

Being as totally committed to God as He requires when we put Him first in our life means we have a commitment of our time to Him also. Let’s assume that God asks a tithe of our time as He did one’s income in the Old Testament. That would mean God expects 16 hours a week in service to Him, visiting the hurting, sharing Jesus with the lost, inviting folks to church etc. That 16 hours a week minimum belonging to God certainly includes worship time, prayer time and study time. I don’t think God keeps a stopwatch on us, but having no other gods before means He is first in every area of our being, including our time. Obviously we have responsibilities such as family and work and He wants us to have fun and relax. But how much actual time we spend even on essential things may say a great deal about what we worship.

We all face the same challenge. On Sunday we come to church and therefore God is on our mind but as soon as we leave the real world comes into play and seeks to be our god until the next Sunday. There are meals to get, work to do, family to be with and of course games to watch. Unless we are intentional about it the next time we seriously think about God is Saturday evening when we plan for church on Sunday. Read Deuteronomy 6:12. God was not saying they would deliberately forget Him, although there were times when as a nation they did, but that they had to guard against the risk of getting so busy doing what is important that we forget what is truly important. How in a world that places legitimate demands on us do we maintain the priority God deserves? Read Colossians 3:17. If do even the mundane acts to God's glory then He is truly the one being worshipped by us.

One of the interesting events associated with the giving of the 10 Commandments is that, while Moses was on the mountain receiving the commandments, the people persuaded Aaron to make a golden calf to be worshipped. The golden calf was the god of Egypt where they had been slaves. How could anyone who had seen God work so miraculously in taking them out of Egypt ever think about worshipping the god of those slave owners? The answer is simple. It is a lot easier to get the Israelites out of Egypt than it is to get Egypt out of the Israelites. Given our sinful nature we are prone to put our trust in things other than God. We need to continually on guard.

The first commandment reads, "You shall have no other gods before me." If we assume that is simply a call to worship Jehovah as opposed to one of the gods of the other world religions then we all pass. But if, as the Bible teachers, there are multiple other gods in our culture that vie for our attention then we are challenged to continually review that which is important to us to be sure we have not inadvertently placed it ahead of God and the place He deserves. God deserves every area of life.