



The First Commandment

Exodus 20:1-20 Luke 18:18-27

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Most of us have been learning the Ten Commandments since we were children in Sunday School, a Lutheran School, and/or Confirmation classes! You probably had to memorize not only the Commandments, but also Martin Luther's meaning from the Small Catechism. Those meanings help us to put the Commandments into our everyday life and help us to live holy and godly lives. Even now in worship, we review the Ten Commandments and their meanings in our Small Catechism review.

Today we are starting a new series on the **Ten Commandments**. The Ten Commandments are taught in many and various ways in Scripture, and over the next few weeks, we will examine some of those teachings and apply them to our lives.

Here is the First Commandment and how we learn it in the Small Catechism:

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT *You shall have no other gods.*

What does this mean?

We should fear, love and trust in God above all things.

Martin Luther called this the **chief commandment** and of **first importance**: he said it was the commandment of your **HEAD**; *where if you have a "right head", then your whole life will be right.*

Large Catechism, #31

The First Commandment teaches us to **fear, love and trust** in God alone. We know the One, True and Only God as the **Holy Trinity**: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One God in three persons.

The Holy Trinity is Whom we look to for all good things, and Whom we turn to in times of trouble. We **trust** in His love, care, and protection over us. We **believe** that He knows us by name and cares about the details of our lives. We **know** that He has saved us from our sins through Jesus' death and resurrection. We **understand** that the Holy Spirit lives within us. We **recognize** that everything we have and everything we are are gifts from His good hands. The First Commandment teaches us to **cling** to God **for all things, through all things, and in all things.**

The danger, of course, is idolatry.

The First Commandment warns us to avoid all forms of idolatry. We are not to cling to anything like we cling to the Holy Trinity.

Therefore it is the intent of [the first] commandment to require true faith and trust of the heart which settles upon the only true God, and clings to Him alone. That is as much as to say: "**See to it that you let Me alone be your God, and never seek another,**" i.e.: *Whatever you lack of good things, expect it of Me, and look to Me for it, and whenever you suffer misfortune and distress, cling to Me. I, yes, I, will give you enough and help you out of every need; only let not your heart cleave to or rest in any other.* Large Catechism, #4

The temptation of idolatry that you face is not that you are going to convert to Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, or some other world religion. The chances of you bowing down and worshipping a statue are nil. The temptation to idolatry that you face everyday comes in the form of your money and possessions; your intellect or skill; your fame, power or honor. It could be your work, your hobbies, your family. **The temptation comes from the things that make you feel secure and “puff up” your pride.** The temptation is that you turn to worldly things for your **identify, satisfaction, comfort, and help.** You turn your back on God and abandon His Holy Word as you adopt the ways of the world. Your heart gets entangled with worldly things; and before you know it, you fear, love, and trust in them **more than** the One, True, and Only God: *Father, Son and Holy Spirit.*

In our culture, idolatry is a **heart issue**; it is not a piece of stone, a pillar of wood, a star in the sky, nor a statue of gold. Idolatry happens in your heart. It's what you really trust. **It is where you find your identify, satisfaction, comfort and help.**

The **simple test** for idolatry is this: **what are the things that interrupt your spiritual life with Christ?** Whatever those things are for you, they are the idols in your life. Is it your work? Your hobbies? Your freedom to come and go? Is it false teachings? Your busy schedule? Your family?

Someone once described idolatry as **"taking good things and making them the ultimate things".**

What is it that interferes with your spiritual life? What does it take to keep you from worshipping the Lord weekly? What stops you from praying? What keeps you away from Bible study? What makes you doubt God and not trust His Holy Word? **These are the kind of questions that you can ask yourself to look for idols in your life.**

Idolatry kills faith, so if you have something that is interfering with your spiritual life, then you must deal with it immediately. Identify it, repent of it, and make changes in your life! The one true and only God gave His life to lead you to repentance and the forgiveness of sins. In His death and resurrection, all of your sins are forgiven; even idolatry! Repent and believe that you are forgiven!

The forgiveness that you have in Christ Jesus empowers you to live for the Lord, and to shape your entire life around the Him. **Christ's death and resurrection leads you to repentance, forgiveness, and new life.** *Repentance that leads to new life is First Commandment living*; that is what Martin Luther meant when he said that **"if your head is right, then your whole life will be right"**.

The First Commandment calls you to look to God alone for all good things and to turn to Him in times of trouble.

- † It teaches us that our money and possessions are blessings from God; resources to support our lives, but never things to let interfere with our relationship with the Lord
- † It teaches us that everything we are and everything we have is a gift from God's good hands
- † It teaches us to expect God to satisfy us, to comfort us, to help us, to give us our identity.
- † It teaches us that we would abandon everything in the world before we would abandon the one, true, and only God
- † Faithfulness to God is more important than physical life

The First Commandment makes you fiercely loyal to the one, true, and only God. This is a commandment that you fight to maintain in your heart, in your mind and in your life. It is a commandment that permeates your life. The First Commandment gives you your identity. Your identity is found in the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit: your Creator, Your Savior and Your Sanctifier. The First Commandment teaches that ***YOU WILL NOT HAVE ANY GODS BEFORE HIM, because you are committed to fear, love, and trust in Him alone!***

The first commandment leads the way in the study of the Ten Commandments: Jesus called it the greatest commandment. The first commandment teaches that ***You belong to God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and you are determined not to let anything interfere with your relationship with Him!***

AMEN!