

## Worship God, and God Alone

Exodus 20:3 • The First Commandment

The Commandments are not merely do's and don'ts. They reveal who God *is*. His commandments flow from his authority and his character. Let's not miss that as we work through particularly the first four. Today, in the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment, we see that he is the one true and living God, eternal, uncreated. Just that basic truth is tremendously important to know in the confusion of the last week. Many Mormons now declare that they are Christian. But the God they serve is not the God revealed in this commandment. They serve a created god who is no God at all.

The God of the commandment demands worship alone because he is God, alone; there are no gods besides him. His power and authority, his mercy and love are seen in the **safety** he provides through the commandments. His love is seen in his law. It is life for us to know God, who is the author of life. It is loving for us to know what is good and right and the source of life. Without God establishing himself as the ultimate authority, we would make stuff up to our demise. We don't have to turn the clock back even 100 years to see the death that self-determined morality produces. Deaths by the millions came from Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, Hirohito, Polpot, and Muslim mullahs who in their sinful minds rewrite who has ultimate authority. In the preface we examined last week, God draws near to his people; he *is* their life, providing all they need. He reveals himself— his eternal, self-existent power and authority, his pursuing salvation. And out of all of that he gives this first grace-filled commandment. Recite the command with me, and we'll pray for help.

**Exodus 20:3 — You shall have no other gods before me.**

### PRAY

#### **The First Commandment reveals God, and the priority of God.**

We are to worship God and God alone. Indeed he is the only source of life, the only true God. We go into error if we think there are many gods, but our God is better or stronger

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than the others. False gods are actually nothing at all — they have no ontological being because there is only one Creator and Sustainer. Everything else is dependent on, and subservient to him.

God alone is uncreated. Consider both all of time and all of creation for a moment. In all that we can know, and in what remains unknown to us, there is only one being, one person who has the power of being in himself — only one who has always been, and is, and is to come. Everything else is created, and is dependent on God to continue to exist. Life is in him, alone. Anything we chase and grasp at to satisfy our souls or provide meaning in life is incapable of ultimate satisfaction or provision because it is created and passing away just like we are. What help is that? To be satisfied in life requires **connection**, if you will, to the source of life — God. False gods only pose and pretend to offer life and fulfillment. Consider the clarity through the prophet Isaiah as how God graciously reminds his people of the futility of looking for help and strength anywhere but in him.

- I am YHWH, the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God. Isaiah 45:5
- Is there a God besides me? There is no Rock; I know not any. Isaiah 44:8
- Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the Lord, and besides me there is no savior. —Isaiah 43:10–11

He alone is God. He alone saves. He alone sustains. He alone is to be worshiped, for he alone is worthy of worship. We are to know and acknowledge this. We are to believe this. We are to live in light of this, and arrange our lives in accord with this.

We must continually instruct our hearts about these truths. Temptation to prioritize something other than God is not merely an **external temptation** from false gods. Sinful corruption and rebellion against God that resides in every sinner's heart makes us crave selfish desires and provide fuel for the factory of idols that is the human heart, as Calvin said. Expression of self-will and attempts to be satisfied by what God forbids is the **internal temptation** for violating the commandment.

**Consider the danger of failing to be continually oriented to the exclusive priority and worship of God alone.** 2 Chronicles 28 records the reign of Ahaz, king of Judah, the southern kingdom. Ahaz did not prioritize God or worship him in the way God commanded, but engaged in idolatry before the face of God as the kings of Israel had done. (No other gods before also carries the meaning that God's eyes everything, and we dare not carry on spiritual infidelity since he sees and judges.) Now, to humble Ahaz and the people, God sent righteous judgements against them through military defeats— first to Syria, who took a number of people captive to Damascus. Then to the northern kingdom of Israel, who slaughtered 120,000 men in a day because they had forsaken the Lord. Then Ahaz decides he needs help — but still he did not prioritize and worship God. Instead he reached out to the king of Assyria in a disoriented attempt to thwart God's judgments. God sent still more judgments, giving victory to the Edomites who took more Judean captives. Then the Philistines invaded and settled on captured land. But Ahaz would not set aside his false gods. He continued in unfaithfulness to the Lord, refusing to obey the command to have no other gods before YHWH, who was calling him to return, to worship, and to live.

**2 Chronicles 28:20–23** — <sup>20</sup> So Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came against him and afflicted him instead of strengthening him. <sup>21</sup> For Ahaz took a portion from the house of the Lord and the house of the king and of the princes, and gave tribute to the king of Assyria, but it did not help him. <sup>22</sup> In the time of his distress he became yet more faithless to the Lord—this same King Ahaz. <sup>23</sup> For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus that had defeated him and said, “Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me.” But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel.

Ahaz not only failed to keep the commandment, he failed to know the God of the commandment, he refused to worship the God of the commandment, and he was therefore totally disoriented to the God of commandment, thinking that the righteous judicial actions that God sent against them in overwhelming power were actually signs of weakness on God's part. He is utterly disoriented to who God is, and therefore does not worship him as he ought. Disoriented to truth, he said to himself, “I've got lousy, weak God, and I'm going

after more idols. And God ruined him. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God where he proves who he is. Better that we heed the commandment and live.

**The fact that the command had to be given reveals our naturally idolatrous hearts.**

Our propensity to false god worship exposed by the very existence of the commandment. If we were by nature those who seek God alone, no commandment would be required to tell us to worship him alone. But God is gracious to call us from what does not, and cannot save and satisfy to himself. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" says Isaiah 55.

You will recall from Ephesians 2 that apart from God's intervention in our hearts, we are children of wrath because we are rebellious and sinful. We hate God and his ways by fallen nature, but our DNA still drives us to worship — we just don't worship God.

**Consider Old Testament Israel.** They repeatedly ran to false gods. Why was this their repeating default in light of what God had done for them? A number of reasons could be given, but here are 4:

- First, false gods offer a convenient *quid pro quo* arrangement. I'll do something for you; you do something for me. YHWH demands worship because he is worthy of it, not as a tit-for-tat arrangement. Self-seeking pride and self-love are exactly prohibited by the commandment — he alone is God, and he alone is worthy. But false gods feed those very self-centered sins if you go through the motions and bring them offerings. You scratch their back with some food offering, and they will help you win the war, your crops will succeed, you'll have some financial success.
- Second, false gods have no moral or ethical standards for you to live by. You do whatever you want, live as you please if you just follow through with some prescribed religious deeds.
- Third, false did not require love. They only required minimal reshaping of priorities to accomplish rote religious duties on occasion. Who or what you love was your business.

- Fourth, worship of false gods was normal — everybody does it, so it must be right. It fit the spirit of the age. And it still does.

**Do we see these same violations of the commandment in our day?** In Roman Catholicism you can make a significant contribution and have time shaved off your purgatory sentence. The spirit of Tetzl is alive and well, so that you can still purchase indulgences to get a pass on particular sins.

In the Baptist Church, you can serve on committees, be faithful in Sunday School, even lead worship, and imagine God is pleased with you for that, even though your heart only pursues what it wants and you the thought of denying yourself is foreign. Jesus said there would be many such deceived worshipers who come to in the Great Day with a list of all the things they thought were the quid for the Lord's pro quo: did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you.

Idolators who imagine and serve a false god whose moral standards match and confirm their own will hear the same words. The approving and affirming false god of sexual revolutionaries has no power to save, but only to further condemn, which is the case with every false god. Those who pursue the gods of their imagination will receive no life, but will hear from the Lord Jesus, "I never knew you. Depart from me you workers of lawlessness." Knowing God as he reveals himself and obeying him as he commands is life and adoption into his Kingdom.

### **The Commandment reveals our need.**

We are made to worship God and have our souls satisfied in forever. Worship is as eternal as God is. Hence, so is satisfaction in God. He commands us to worship, and even graciously calls us to test him, if you will: Taste and see that the Lord is good. **He gives life** — abundant life to the full. In **Isaiah 55**: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and

delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live!

In **Matthew 11**: Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Our quid pro quo efforts end in Jesus. He needs nothing. There is nothing we can offer to a perfect God. But as we worship God alone, God alone binds up the brokenhearted, proclaims liberty to the captives, opens prison of those who are bound, proclaims his favor and his vengeance; he comforts all who mourn; he gives the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise instead of a faint spirit; that those who come to Jesus may be called oaks of righteousness.

### **God always gets what He wants.**

The God who righteously requires worship is the God who assures it through the rescue mission of the Son, the Savior. The son of man came to seek and save that which was lost in order to make them worshipers, for the Father is seeking worshipers who will worship him in spirit and in truth. God reveals himself in the written word in Exodus. But in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

The greatest miracle God the Son performs is the giving of a new heart to hardened sinners. He removes dead, stony hearts that do not love God's law and God's way, and gives a new heart to that loves and prioritizes God. He came in human flesh to redeem whosoever comes to him in faith, turning to Christ from sin and self to worship the only true God. Jesus, who is very God and very man, has made God known as he took on human flesh to perfectly fulfill the Law on our behalf, and pay the penalty for sin on our behalf. In his redemptive work the righteousness and justice of Holy God is satisfied, and the pursuing mercy and love of Holy God is poured out.

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And God the Father gives God the Son those who fulfill the command to worship God alone. Every believer in Christ is headed to this perfect fulfillment of the command, recorded in Revelation 5:

And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. <sup>7</sup> And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. <sup>8</sup> And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. <sup>9</sup> And they sang a new song, saying,

“Worthy are you to take the scroll

and to open its seals,

for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God

from every tribe and language and people and nation,

<sup>10</sup> and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,

and they shall reign on the earth.”

<sup>11</sup> Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of

thousands, <sup>12</sup> saying with a loud voice,

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain,

to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might

and honor and glory and blessing!”

<sup>13</sup> And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying,

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb

be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

<sup>14</sup> And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

You shall have no other gods before this Conquering King.