



SESSION 2

NO OTHER GODS

The Ten Commandments that sum up the Old Testament law begin with a Commandment that sums up the other nine. Breaking the First Commandment is what inevitably leads us to breaking the others. Keeping the First Commandment is what will lead to keeping the others. When our hearts turn away from God, we crave other things to take His place, which leads us to act in ways that are contrary to His good design for our lives.

The First Commandment is of great importance because breaking it leads to breaking the others. In fact, we could say that the other Commandments are the expression of breaking the first—of putting other gods before the one true God.

The First Commandment...



Shows God's Love

When God says He wants first place in the lives of His people, He is not like a child demanding attention for His own sake. He is a loving Father who has redeemed and adopted His people, and as their Savior, He wants what is best for them. He both demands and deserves their affection.

The passage begins with Moses reminding the people that God made a covenant with them (v. 2-3). This is a God who makes promises... personal promises. He is not a distant deity hurling thunderbolts from afar, but a God of holy and righteous love who wants the best for the people He has made and redeemed.

God was under no obligation to give the law to His people. He could have left them to figure out the best way to live on their own. But, in love, God revealed Himself and His character.

Deuteronomy 5:1

Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, "Israel, listen to the statutes and ordinances I am proclaiming as you hear them today. Learn and follow them carefully."

► When was a time you felt you had to work to earn God's favor? How does God's love for you change how you seek to be obedient to His Word?

Redeemed Through Love

Before I became a believer, I often saw God as a person I had to please or else He would be angry with me and life might not go how I wanted. Even though I was not saved, I still experienced guilt over my sin and often tried to make up for it by doing good and trying to behave “rightly.” Have you ever felt this way?

Perhaps you too have viewed the Lord as a distant “Santa Claus” in the sky that was checking to see who had been naughty or nice. This belief is held by many people who do not have a correct understanding of God’s love for them nor His grace. And instead of living a life of gracious obedience toward a loving Father, they try to live a “good” life so as to not anger God.

On the contrary though, our obedience toward the Lord does not stem from fear but rather from the inexpressible gratitude we have for a gracious Father who loved us enough to save us from our sin through Jesus. Even in the passage above, we see the loving hand of a Father who desires to save the rebellious nation of Israel because He loves them—not because they deserve His grace. Even in His law, God’s love is demonstrated by providing a way for Israel to make Himself their first love, both for God’s glory and their joy.

God’s love for us is so great that He sent His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins. This redeeming love brings with it joy unimaginable.

► What attributes did God display when He rescued the children of Israel?

Places Him First

Sounds like a simple Command, right? The Hebrew, often translated as “besides Me” or “before Me” means “in my presence.” The point is that nothing else can qualify as god in your life. The true God is not only to be number one, but the only One.

What is an idol? It is anything we put in the place of God in our lives. An idol is anything you consider so central, so fundamental, so essential to your life that you couldn’t imagine life without it. An idol is anything you love more than God, trust more than God, or obey more than God.

The First Commandment tells us that God expects to be number one. He should be the One we love more than anything else. He is the only One we need to face the future. He is the only One who commands our obedience. God is not content to be merely important to us or an influence on us; He must be our only God, the God who consumes our hearts and commands our obedience.

- **Why is it appropriate for God to demand first place in our lives? Is it appropriate for us to demand this kind of allegiance from those around us? Why or why not?**



- **In your own words, define idolatry. Here are some diagnostic questions to discover what you worship: What do you feel you need in order for life to be “good”? What makes life worth living? What do you dream of having in the future? Where do you go for comfort?**

Deuteronomy 5:7

Do not have other gods besides Me.

Keeping God First

In Sichuan, China, the largest Buddha statue has been carved into the face of a cliff. It was completed in 803 A.D. and stands 233 feet high. Millions of people from around the world come to see the gigantic site—some out of curiosity, others for religious reasons. As Christians, we would acknowledge that this statue is a false god made of stone. Yet, Buddhists worship such idols. Though we may not bow down to carved images, we too struggle with idolatry.¹

Have you ever become jealous over another's popularity or possessions? It may seem like its own separate sin, but idolatry is at the root of jealousy. Or perhaps you have lied to make yourself look better. Again, idolatry is at the root of that as well.

When we seek ultimate joy, satisfaction, or approval in things other than God, we are creating idols in our hearts. Jealousy reveals that we desire something more than God. Lying showcases our need to have the approval of others more than the approval of God. In essence, we are saying that God alone is not enough and we must have something else to fill what is lacking in our souls. But the truth is that God is enough. He is all that we need, and substituting the created things for the Creator only brings heartache.

The Lord alone should be worshiped. Only He is worthy of praise and honor because only He has the power to redeem us from our rebellion against Him. He alone can satisfy the deepest longings, needs, and desires of our hearts. As C.S. Lewis once wrote, "God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there."¹

1. *Touropia* [online], 4 July 2012 [cited 19 November 2013]. Available from the Internet: www.touropia.com/famous-buddha-statues/

Protects Us From Idols

Read Deuteronomy 5:22-31.

This passage is interesting in that it shows how the people of Israel, upon receiving this First Commandment, immediately wanted to obey. Their obedience was connected to their fear of the Lord, and their fear of the Lord was connected to the awesome display of God's power they'd just witnessed. God descended upon Mount Sinai and revealed His majesty, power, and holiness.



Deuteronomy 5:22

The LORD spoke these commands in a loud voice to your entire assembly from the fire, cloud, and thick darkness on the mountain; He added nothing more.

Most Christians struggle to obey the Commandments and to not chase after idols because they suffer from a severely diminished view of God. They don't see or feel the weight of His glory. That's why it's not enough to simply say, "Stop being an idolater!" Instead, we must say, "Behold your God!" It's only when we sense the weight of His glory and the goodness of His redeeming work that we are freed from idolatry.


God Is Most Valuable

Imagine a jeweler sold you a cubic zirconia ring for the same price as a stately diamond ring. At first glance the ring may appear to be expensive. However, after closer examination you discover that it looks cloudy and does not reflect light very well. Even its shape isn't quite right. Eventually you discover that you were sold a fake. There is no real diamond. Instead, you have a cheap replacement meant to look like the real thing.

Anyone with common sense would demand the jeweler give them the real diamond ring. And when the two rings are side by side, the difference in quality and authenticity would be seen. The cubic zirconia is not worthy of such adoration as the diamond because the beauty is not there.

So it is when we seek after the lesser things of this world rather than the Lord. God is most supremely valuable. When created things are contrasted against Him, they look just as cheap as the cubic zirconia ring. When we see God for all He is, His worth becomes infinite and everything else becomes finite. We are no longer attracted to the things that first caught our attention. Now we desire God alone and all of Him.

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- If breaking free of idolatry comes from gaining a proper vision of God's glory and grace, then the church should display God's glory and grace before a lost world. What are some practical ways students can show others that God is glorious and good?



The mission of the Christian is to lead others to behold God. We don't take to the world a list of Commandments to follow. We take a gospel of redeeming love through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

- What are some things that seek to replace God as most valuable in your life? How might you strive to recognize the “fakes” when they try to steal your attention away from God?

GOD'S STORY, YOUR STORY

The First Commandment clearly demonstrates that God is central and primary in all things. This is extremely important since it is the tendency of every person to view themselves as the center of the universe. The selfish attitude within our hearts is always on display, whether as a toddler or as a high school student. Yet, the great thing about the First Commandment is that it overturns our selfish mindset and gives us a proper ordering of the universe, helping us recognize that we do not come first—God does.

What are some areas where you particularly struggle with an attitude of selfishness?

This session gets to a heart issue that everyone deals with—idols. It reminds us that we have placed other “gods” before us, no matter how long we have been a believer. Those other “gods” may be popularity, praise of man, material possessions, etc. Those idols, which can never truly satisfy, lure us away from finding complete joy and satisfaction in God alone.

What are some things that seek to replace God as most valuable in your life? How might you strive to recognize the “fakes” when they try to steal your attention away from God?