

UNEDITED DRAFT

Dear friends in Christ,

I'd like to start just by reading the 1st Commandment and the verses relating it from the Bible. And those of you who were here last week know which chapter of the Bible I'm opening to, right? Exodus 20. Those here last week got the context for the Commandments. God gave them to his people right after he freed them from slavery in Egypt. There was a spectacular display of God's power and might and holiness on Mt. Sinai. Then God speaks these Words. First he reminds them of his love in freeing them from slavery. Then he says this:

Exodus 20: 3-6 **"You shall have no other gods before me.**

4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

So the 1st Commandment we usually shorten to just the 3rd verse: "You shall have no other gods." The rest sort of explains that command and expounds on it. No other gods means not any kind of god anywhere. Don't even try to make an image of god and worship it. God will get mad if you do, and will be pleased with those who worship him alone.

It has been suggested, and I happen agree with the opinion, that the Commandments are listed in order of importance... or maybe a better way to say it is that they build off one another. At the base, as a foundation we have this basic command that you have no other gods.

For my catechism class students, I try to give a two word summary of each commandment so it is easier to remember. In each of the Commandments, God is protecting something important. And in the first commandment, God is protecting his glory. So if I asked, "what's the first commandment about?" You would answer: God's glory.

God is God, there is only one. He demands that the glory that is due him be given to him, and not to another person or thing, real or imagined.

I have had an atheist tell me that he just can't worship a God that must have all the glory... a God that is jealous. He said if God is a glory hound and that small, then he does not want anything to do with him. How utterly ridiculous and a gross misunderstanding of God's nature! The truth is, we have laws in the United States about robbing glory from another person. Imagine you are an artist. You walk into an art gallery and to your amazement, several of your paintings are hanging there. But as you look closer, someone else's name is by them. Someone else claimed this work as their own. And everyone who admires these pictures gives credit and glory to a different artist who didn't even paint them. Not only would you be right to be outraged, you could legally sue the person who stole your work.

Taking the credit for another person's writing is called plagiarism, and it's illegal. Robbing an idea or design from a patent holder is illegal. You'll be found guilty of patent infringement. We don't allow people to take credit for something another has done.

In the 1st Commandment, God establishes the same principle. He is the one, true and only God. He is the Creator of the Universe. All good things ultimately come from him. All beauty is ultimately attributable to him. The order of our universe was caused by him. Therefore, all glory

for all things ultimately must go to the one true God. If that glory goes to a god by another name, or to another person, or to created things, that is sin! That is wrong!

Now, we can certainly understand why God would give those Israelites this commandment and why it was so important to them. In the ancient world the nations worshiped multiple gods. The Egyptians from whom the Israelites fled worshiped multiple gods. They needed this Commandment so they wouldn't fall into the idolatry of the world around them. But we don't this Commandment much today, do we?

I think you will notice as we study each of the Commandments that when you give each a quick read, your inclination is usually to react with a bit of smugness. "You shall have no other gods." Great! I don't! It's been years since I've worshiped Zeus or Baal or Buddha. Oh, wait, I've never worshiped false gods! 1st Commandment – CHECK! Let's move on to the second."

Not so fast! As we really dig in to each of these Commandments, we will discover what kind of lawbreakers we really are. And what we see is downright scary.

Now, I'm going to get a little brutal here. I hope you won't mentally shut me down or dismiss my words as I demonstrate the idolatry that is in each of us. Listen carefully and take this to heart. This is God's call to repentance.

The truth is we are all idolaters by nature. We are inclined to give glory, honor, worship and obedience to false gods. In modern times, not the kind of gods made of wood or stone. Not pagan gods and deities. Our gods are different today, but they are no less gods that rob glory from the one true God.

In ancient times, they had gods for every need and desire.

- If you wanted children, there was what you needed, there was a god for that.
- If you wanted to be loved or be in love, there was a god for that.
- If you need crops to grow, there was a god for that.
- If you needed safe travel, there was a god for that.

Today, we look disdainfully at those primitive, insecure and superstitious people. We are so much more rational, reasonable, intelligent, informed and enlightened today! We know there is just one God.

Or are we really that different? I would suggest to that we today are just as idolatrous as the ancient cultures. The ancient cultures had so many gods not because they loved the gods, but because they desired the things that they thought the gods would give. The desires of our hearts are no different. We desire the gifts of God more than we desire God. We desire and essential worship the created instead of the Creator. We continue to look at God as if he is a divine butler. Through prayer we ring a bell and expect him to come running fulfill the current need or desire that we have... not because we love him but because he's useful to me. Now tell me... if a person gives a command and another fulfills it, who is the master? The one giving the command. We give commands to God, and in so doing we are revealing that in our hearts, we believe we are master, and he is servant. Idolatry!

In fact, we don't have fewer gods today, we have more gods... because there are more people. The main problem is that we are worshipers of self. We are inherently selfish. Our world revolves around us. We ask the question of every relationship and every decision: "What's in it for me?" So just in the United States today, how many false gods are there? Current estimates put the number at 318 million people... because that's how many people there are and each one tends to make themselves god of their world, life and heart.

Is this convicting yet? I'm not done. I only say these things because I love you. I think we need to be more specific. We need to be honest and identify all the counterfeit gods in our life.

Because we tend to think of ourselves as god, we crave, desire and seek that which brings glory to us, and that which affirms our "divinity." And so while we place ourselves as the chief god of our own lives, we have a pantheon of lesser gods that we seek and desire as well. To identify your counterfeit gods, consider the following questions. And please, you're not allowed to think of anyone else as I ask these questions and the false gods you think others might have. These questions are for you and your consideration.

1) Where do you seek identity, meaning and purpose?

Who are you? (Your answer may help reveal your idols.) What would crush you if you lost it?

God is the only legitimate source for your identity, meaning and purpose. If we had no other gods, the only thing that would absolutely crush us if we lost it is God. Yet people find identity, meaning and purpose in all sorts of things. It might be another person: Spouse, your children, a mentor you *idolize*. It might be your career. You could believe your profession is who you are. (False!) Some find it in a hobby or skill, especially one you may be very good at. It can become your identity, meaning or purpose. Some find it in their wealth or social status.

A question to help you identify your false god is: What would crush you if you lost it? Are you seeking your identity in that thing. It defines who you are. Is your meaning from life derived from it? Those things in other gods.

2) What controls you? Or... what is it that enslaves you? Or... what are you addicted to? If something controls you, you are the slave and it is your master.

- a. Some are controlled by alcohol.
- b. Some are controlled by drugs... prescription or illicit.
- c. Some are controlled by another person.
- d. Some are controlled by pornography.
- e. Some are controlled by gambling.

We tend to call these addictions. The Bible would say you are enslaved by these things and they are your masters and therefore your false gods.

3) Where do you seek comfort and security? When you seek comfort or safety, where do you find release from stress? After a long hard day at work, do you have a few drinks, or do you pray? When the pressure is on and you are stressed out, what takes the edge off for you? For some it's comfort foods. For others buying stuff gives them the relief they seek.

4) What impassions you... that is, makes you ecstatic... or makes you furious? That which strongly stirs your emotions may be a false god for you. If you get absolutely ecstatic when your teams wins, or it totally ruins your day when they lose, is that your god? If interrupts you when you're doing a certain hobby or activity, do you get furious? Is that your god?

5) What drives you / motivates you? Is it achieving a certain GPA? Is it advancing in your career? Is it buying a certain item that you just have to have? ... or just getting more money or stuff in general? Is it a desire for external beauty? Is it a desire for glory and praise and recognition? What drives you? You likely have uncovered more false gods.

6) Who do you copy or imitate? Certainly the Bible tells us to imitate godly people, but do we idolize someone so want to look like them, and talk like them, and act like them? Don't we even have the phrase "He/she is my idol!" Don't we even have a show called "American Idol"? False gods.

There is only one legitimate ultimate source for identity, meaning, purpose, control, comfort, security, emotions, motivation, drive, and imitation. GOD. All others are false gods, and God says, “You shall have no other gods!” You are not the center of the universe... not even to be the center of your own life. God is!

God does not want to be on the side. God does not tolerate second place or 5th place or any other place. In reality, he doesn't even want to be first of many things. He wants to be THE thing. The only center of your life. In the first commandment God forces us to reconsider who is at the center... what is at the center. God says he belongs in the center and your life revolves around him. His glory. His majesty. His awesomeness. His greatness. His love. His goodness. You and all that you have are in orbit around God. All glory and purpose in your life goes to him and is drawn from him.

Okay, I'm going to stop yelling at you now. I hope and pray you feel convicted in some way. Have you been able to pick out your false gods? Can you admit you have them?

God gave us this 1st Commandment so we will see clearly that we are idolaters. We have failed in this way. We have not lived up to his holy expectations. He doesn't want us to understand this because he loves it when we feel guilty and small and worthless. He wants us to feel this way so we will turn to him with our pockets empty and inside out, and with no excuses confess to him our sins against the 1st Commandment. Can you confess this to God? God, I have a false god in my life, and it is alcohol... or a shopping addiction... or my career, or GPA... or spouse or children... or my bank account... or my hobby... or an obsession over personal beauty... and ultimately, your worship of the great god of self.

Confess your sins. Pull them out of the dark closet and lay them before God.

Now here's some good news. God knows your situation and he has loved you enough to do something about it. God sent into our world his one and only Son, Jesus Christ, true God and true man. And in the 33 or so years that Jesus lived here, he did keep the 1st Commandment perfectly. Jesus gave glory to God always. The Father and his will was always first for Jesus. The Gospels record it for us. Here are some examples after a quick search:

- At the age of 12, he assumed they would know he would be at the temple... his Father's house.
- Jesus taught that our good deeds are intended to bring glory and praise to our Father in heaven... not to us.
- Pray should be directed to “Our Father in heaven”
- He taught to rely on your heavenly Father for your daily needs.
- We shouldn't even love father or mother more than God
- He confessed that his identity and purpose came from the Father. He repeated states he was sent from the Father and came to do his Father's will.
- Whenever Jesus ate or drank, he first thanks the heavenly Father.
- In raising Lazarus, he first gave all glory to the Father
- In the Garden of Gethsemane he desired only that the Father's will be done.

Jesus perfectly kept the 1st Commandment always loving, honoring, serving and obeying his heavenly Father.

That obedience of Jesus is credited to you. All who trust in him become possessors of his holiness and perfection. The Bible is just as clear that your sins of idolatry and your worship of false gods, as offensive as they are to God, has been atoned for. Jesus not only lived a perfect life for you, but he died on the cross. For what? For your selfishness, for seeking the most important things like identity, meaning, purpose, control, comfort, security, emotions, motivation, drive, and imitation... in false gods. All of this placed on Jesus, causing him to suffer, to cry out in agony, forsaken by the Father, and die... the just punishment for sin... our sins.

In Christ, you are set free. These false gods are eradicated from your life. Your guilt is gone. You are fully and freely forgiven! God has brought you into his love and under his care and protection. He IS your God. And you are his child. He has set you free.

So go today and live a changed life... one that acknowledges God as the one and only God. Look to him alone for all you need for body and life now and forever. Worship him and praise him as the only one who is worthy. We'll do just that in the rest of this service. We'll give him all glory and honor as we sing praises to him in the hymns / and as we give offerings which honor him as the Good Giver / and as we pray to him / and as we receive the very body and blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God sent by the Father to forgive our sins. But our worship of God and giving him all glory and honor and service does not end when this service ends. We will continue live with him at the center of lives. And everything will revolve around him. Our will, our energy, our time, our abilities, our resources, our relationships... everything in our lives today and going forward will revolve around HIM and HIM alone! For he alone is worthy. Do you agree? Everyone say yes. Praise be to God. Amen.