

“THE ONE AND ONLY” The First Commandment

INTRODUCTION

How do we keep this commandment? John Stott writes, “For us to keep this first commandment would be, as Jesus said, to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our mind (Mt 22:37); to see all things from his point of view and do nothing without reference to him; to make his will our guide and his glory our goal; to put him first in thought, word and deed; in business and leisure; in friendships and career; in the use of money, time and talents; at work and at home...No man has ever kept this commandment except Jesus of Nazareth.

-John Stott, Basic Christianity

Anyone who has ever witnessed the pathetic sight of human beings bowing down before idols knows why God gave the first commandment in such absolute terms. I once visited a missionary friend in the South American nation of Paraguay. In a little tribal village not far from the capital city of Asuncion, we watched as diseased, poverty-stricken villagers fell face down on their knees and paid homage to a statue made of chiseled stone. The hopelessness of that scene was indelibly printed on my mind.

I wanted to shout, “Don’t waste your worship on that stone! What will it ever do for you?” The first commandment tells us that no other being in the universe is worthy of our worship. Only Jehovah, the true God of the bible, deserves our reverence. Why?

Out of all the beings in this universe, only Jehovah God has intrinsic worth. Intrinsic means “belonging to the essence of a thing” or “inherent.” In other words, only God has value totally in and of Himself. All else derives its value from association with Him.

That’s why we worship Him alone—because of His intrinsic worthship, His creative power, and His redeeming works. In God’s prelude to the Law, He identified Himself with these words: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex 20:2).

Before He gave His Law, He wanted to remind the people who He was. “Just a short time ago, you were slaves. You were oppressed. You were humiliated and beaten and deprived. So I sent Moses to lead you to freedom. Then I sent the plagues to assure your release. Then I parted the Red Sea. Then I drowned the Egyptian host. Yes, it was I who delivered you.

“Then I sustained you in the desert. I led you with a fiery cloud when you needed direction. I provided manna and quail when you were hungry. I caused water to flow from the rock when you were thirsty.”

“Did Baal do that for you? Did the foreign god, Molech, do that for you? Did any other gods do that for you? Could they have done it for you? No! I alone had the power to create you, and I alone have the power to sustain you against that which would destroy you. Why would you waste your time worshipping another god?”

When we recognize God’s intrinsic worth, we realize how important it is to worship Him, and Him alone. It is not simply for His honor that He demands our worship. He also requires it for our good. He knows that no other being can satisfy the needs and yearning of our hearts.

During times of grief or disappointment, when it’s easy to slip into doubt and confusion, we need a living God, one who can speak to us. We need a God who can give us a word of truth or encouragement or challenge or chastisement. That’s the kind of God Jehovah is.

-Bill Hybels, Engraved On Your Heart

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Almost anything can be a “god.” What are some “gods” that we tend to follow in our culture today?
2. Read Exodus 12:31-42. With all that has happened, how would you think and feel if you were hearing this commandment that day as an Israelite? How would this commandment be applied in the life of Israel?
3. How does Jesus affirm and realize this commandment for us in the New Testament? (Matthew 22:37) What does this commandment mean practically in the day-to-day Christian life?
4. In Exodus 3:14, God refers says of himself, I AM WHO I AM”. Spend some time making a list of attributes that describe God. (i.e. He is without a beginning and an end)
5. Whether for the Israelites or for the believer today, what are some reasons that we so easily are prone to chase after other “gods”?
6. List and examine the categories of life given by John Stott in the introduction. Share about some areas in your life in which you are wasting your worship.
7. Spend some time praying as a family group for an undivided heart that would chase and pursue after none other than the one true God who is worthy of all our worship and has redeemed our souls.