

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash.
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“The Ten Commandments” series

Exodus 20:3-6

You Shall Have No Other Gods

1. Why we do this
2. How we do this

Hymns: 195 – 753 – 304 – 309

All Scripture quotations from the NIV.

Exodus 20:3-6 –

You shall have no other gods before me. 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. 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, but showing love to a thousand {generations} of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Rules, rules, rules! Our lives are governed by rules. When we are young, we are told: No running, no shouting, no pushing, no hitting, no butting in line, no roughhousing, no eating with your hat on, no drawing on the walls, and go to bed at such-and-such a time!

We go to school and we are told: No talking, no daydreaming, no cheating, no passing notes, no being late, bring your form, and stay in your seat!

Even when we're older there are rules: No speeding, no stealing, stay off the grass, no jaywalking, no parking, no checks accepted, and put your seatbelt on!

We have so many rules, it seems! Since rules might overwhelm us at times, we might come away with the feeling that rules are a negative thing. But we need rules. They give us structure, and a world without rules would be very frustrating. How would you like to drive your car out on our highways if there were no driving rules for anyone?

As we begin this sermon series on the Ten Commandments, we must realize that we will be taking about rules for the next weeks. But these are different than rules of our world. These are the commandments of the Lord God Almighty, not suggestions he thinks we might find helpful. He has given them to us for our good and for order in our world. **Today we will briefly look at our Lord's 1st Commandment, “You shall have no other gods.” Today we will learn:**

1. Why we do this
2. How we do this.

Our text today is from Exodus 20:4-6: *“You shall have no other gods before me. 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. 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, but showing love to a thousand {generations} of those who love me and keep my commandments.”*

1 – Why would we worship the God who said that? There are three reasons. We see the first reason in Isaiah 43 and 45: *“Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior. I have revealed and saved and proclaimed – I, and not some foreign god among you... I am the LORD, and there is no other. I have not spoken in secret, from somewhere in a land of darkness; I have not said to Jacob's descendants, ‘Seek me in vain.’ I, the LORD, speak the truth; I declare what is right.”*

The first reason we worship only one God is because there are no other Gods! None of the other gods that mankind has made up are real and true. At the time Isaiah wrote those words, many gods had been made up by the nations around them. The Philistines worshiped Dagon, the god of grain. The Egyptians worshiped many things, including cats and the sun. The Phoenicians and Canaanites worshiped Baal and Ashtoreth, which were forms of human reproductive organs. Other countries had made up names for “supreme beings” in the sky.

How do we know that the God of the Bible and the Ten Commandments is the true God? It is true that this will be a matter of faith, yet not a faith based on uncertain things. God has told us clearly who he is! People's opinions on what he says don't change the truth. It would be like you telling someone you meet your name. You tell them, "I am _____, and I was born in _____, ___," and let's assume you are telling them the truth. That fact is a fact whether they believe it or not. The Lord has simply told us, and very clearly, who he is and that there are no other gods besides him.

Reason number two is found in verse 6, where the Lord tells us he is "*showing mercy to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*" **We will worship no other gods because of the tremendous blessings that God has for his believers.** How far-reaching these blessings are! They go to "*a thousand generations*" of those who fear the Lord! And how wonderful these blessings are! God tells them that:

- He will save them from their sins by sending them a Messiah
- He will be their God and protect them
- He will give them the land they are headed to under the leadership of Moses
- He will bless them with all they need and more

Reason number three is found in verse 5 of our reading: "*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.*" **This is God's threat to the disobedient.** This will not be the main motivation for us obeying the Lord, but it is a legitimate motivation when we go our own way in our lives. Unfortunately, there is the sinful nature side of us that needs to hear this. This is like the little 4 year old child that is told by his parent, "If you go into the street, you will be punished." No questions asked. Children (and we are spiritual children of God) need to hear that. But is this fair that God would punish children for the sin of their fathers? Please don't miss the words, "*Of those who hate me.*" There is forgiveness for the children of an unbelieving father; the Bible is clear on that! Yet for the generations that consistently hate the Lord

and his commands, their punishment will be greater. Why? Because the children should learn from the mistakes of their father and those consequences. When generations of Israelites saw the threats and misfortunes of their forefathers in the OT, they should have known better. May God cause all generations of people come to faith and avoid this punishment!

Who in their right mind would not want to follow the true God?! This is like the Lord coming to his OT people and telling them, "There are two doors here that have 90-story dropoffs. I have built a bridge out of this one door which will safely take you to heaven. I'm going to send a Savior into the world for you! But the other door I haven't built anything. Here is your escort, the Holy Spirit, who will take you by the hand and lead you through this safe door." Who in their right mind at Moses' time would forsake God?

God speaks these same words to us today. This is an invitation! This is an offer of love from a God that doesn't want you to perish, as he gives you his commandments! God has:

- Made the beautiful world you live in
- Created you
- Preserved you in your life
- Sent you a Savior, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross for your sins
- Converted your heart and blessed you with spiritual knowledge
- Blessed you with family and friends
- Blessed you with material things that you need
- And much more!

To worship another god would be spiritual adultery! God, as he says in the OT, has come to his people like a husband making wedding vows to his wife. He has promised to care for you and provide for you. Is it unreasonable for a husband to ask his wife on their wedding day to be faithful to him? May we stay faithful to the God who has given us such wonderful blessings!

2 – Now, how do we do this? Perhaps the easiest way to look at this first is in how we don't do this. God told his people, “*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.*” They were to make none of these! We mentioned some of these foreign gods before. Of course, the people that worshiped them built countless statues and temples to these gods. We have dug many up out of the sand. Ever since OT times there have been cultures of the world that have continued to worship created things, down to the American Indians who worshiped the buffalo and the sun and aborigine tribes that worship idols today. This is called “open idolatry.”

But surely we would never be guilty of this, would we? We wouldn't make statues and worship some false god as people of past times did, would we?

We certainly can sin in this area. **Perhaps we won't be found in a pagan temple worshiping openly, but might there be a temptation to acknowledge that some world religions are legitimate?** Some people like to believe that gods of other religions with different names can simply be called “God” by us and that we are speaking about the same deity – Allah, Buddha, or Krishna. It's not politically correct to criticize the false gods of world religions today, and perhaps we're swept up in that political correctness in our conversations.

Others believe that a religion like Mormonism or the Jehovah's Witnesses, who deny Jesus is true God from eternity and the One to be honored as equal to the Father are worshiping the same God as the God of the Bible. Don't be fooled! Jesus said, “*He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.*” (John 5:23) We cannot acknowledge that such cults worship the same God as the God of the Scriptures.

Another type of idolatry is a danger to us. Moses writes, “*Do not bow down to them or worship them.*” Are there things that we can worship besides God that doesn't include physically bowing with our bodies but happens in our heart? Most certainly! The term for this type

of idolatry is “secret idolatry.” The Scriptures are very clear on what things might be worshiped secretly in the heart:

- 1 Timothy 6 says, “*Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*” Scripture warns us clearly about letting the love of money take the place of God in our hearts.
- 1 Kings 11 says, “*King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter – Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. They were from nations about which the LORD had told the Israelites, 'You must not intermarry with them, because they will surely turn your hearts after their gods.' Nevertheless, Solomon held fast to them in love... and his wives led him astray... His wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD.*” Sexual temptation has been the downfall of many!
- Jesus even said, “*Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.*” When a family member might oppose the Lord and his plan, God forbid, he tells us that our loyalties come with him.

Secret idolatry is a trap into which many people fall today. What are your personal traps? Fame, food, other people, nature, sports, entertainment (it's not hard to notice where the “TV shrine” is in many homes), property, knowledge, sex, cars, alcohol/drugs, family, and perhaps most of all, THEMSELVES.

There is an effective way to trap monkeys in Africa. People can drill a hole in a tree that is just narrow enough for a monkey's arm, put some food deep in the hole smells very good, and hide. The unsuspecting monkey will come along, smell the food, and reach deep in the hole to get it. But when he makes a fist, his fist is too wide to pull it out. A hunter can walk slowly up to the monkey, and the monkey will begin pulling frantically, trying to pull his arm out, but he will not let go of what he has. He cannot. And he will die for it. What are you holding on to? What is your particular temptation in life? You need to recognize this and let go! Let nothing come between you and your Lord!

Speaking positively, how do we do this? Martin Luther's explanation helps us quite a bit here. Martin Luther wrote, "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." Those are three very vivid words.

First, "fear" God. Fear, of course, can be used in the bad sense of being frightened. This does have a role in a relationship with God at times! Jesus said, "*Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*" Once again, our sinful nature needs that, but that is not the only definition of that word. "Fear" can also be used in the sense of Psalm 33:8, which says, "*Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him,*" or Psalm 147:11, which says, "*The LORD delights in those who fear him, who put their hope in his unfailing love.*" This other sense of the word is to "respect" God. May we respect him in all we do!

Then there's the word "love." The book of Deuteronomy, which Jesus quoted, says, "*Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.*" In fact, Jesus called this the first and greatest commandment. Our motivation for this is found in 1 John, which tells us, "*We love him because he first loved us.*" This is where we have to search our hearts and see what our truest love is for.

Today, you may or may not know, is the opening day for the Packers and the rest of professional football. There is nothing wrong with enjoying football season, but is this the season of

many people's true love? I don't mean to rain on anyone's parade who doesn't worship pro football, but isn't it interesting that:

- There are people who will be able to watch their football team play no matter what time or day it is – Sunday, Monday night, Thursday night – but can't make it even regularly to worship that is held the same time all year?
- There are people who could tell you the next 3 or 4 opponents their team will play (or maybe even the whole year!) but couldn't tell you what the Epiphany or Pentecost season of the church year is about?
- There are people who will be able to tell you all the numbers of their football team's players, but couldn't list the Ten Commandments?
- There are people who can tell you the colleges that all their favorite pro players attended but couldn't recite the books of the Bible?

May we love our Lord with all our heart!

Finally, there's the word "trust." We don't need to look far to see that there is nothing as trustworthy in this world as our heavenly Father. Not your nest egg, your stockbroker, your insurance man, the weatherman, your favorite talk show host, or that psychic that you saw on an infomercial. Trust only in your God!

Finally, dear brothers and sisters, as we look at more commandments in this series in future weeks, God willing, recognize that when this first one is observed, the rest naturally follow. This is where it all starts! May we re-evaluate our loyalties and place them in the true God! May we fear, love, and trust in him above all things! And may we serve him in all we do! Amen.