

The First Word

“You shall have no other gods before me.” – Exodus 20:3

(1) Are these “other gods” real?

Is the God of Israel just one among many gods?

Psalm 115:2-7

² Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?” ³ Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases. ⁴ Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. ⁵ They have mouths, but do not speak; eyes, but do not see. ⁶ They have ears, but do not hear; noses, but do not smell. ⁷ They have hands, but do not feel; feet, but do not walk; and they do not make a sound in their throat.

1 Corinthians 8:4

We know that an idol has no real existence and that there is no God but one.

(2) And yet, there are “other gods”

Psalm 95:3

For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

Psalm 97:9

For you, O LORD, are most high over all the earth; you are exalted far above all gods.

1 Chronicles 16:23-27

²³ Sing to the LORD, all the earth! Tell of his salvation from day to day. ²⁴ Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! ²⁵ For great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and he is to be held in awe above all gods.

²⁶ For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made

the heavens. ²⁷ Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy are in his place.

(3) So the First Commandment tells us there are “other gods.” How are they gods? Where do they get their power?

Matthew 6:24-25

²⁴ No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money. ²⁵ Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing?

(4) What is positively commanded in First Command?

Deuteronomy 6:4-5

⁴ Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵ You shall **love** the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

Psalm 37:4-7

⁴ Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart. ⁵ Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act. ⁶ He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday. ⁷ Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him.

1 Corinthians 10:31

So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

Habakkuk 3:17-19

¹⁷ Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the

stalls, ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. ¹⁹ GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places.

(5) Idolatry is spiritual adultery | deep betrayal

Jeremiah 3:6-9

⁶ Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and there played the whore? ⁷ And I thought, 'After she has done all this she will return to me,' but she did not return. ⁸ For all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. ⁹ Because she took her whoredom lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree.

(6) Gospel hope

Hosea 3:1

And the LORD said to me, "Go again, love a woman who is loved by another man and is an adulteress, even as the LORD loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love cakes of raisins."

Notes:

**(1) Are these “other gods” real?
Is the God of Israel just one among many gods?**

Is this saying:

- not to worship other gods? (but there are other gods)
- or there are no other gods?

This an unambiguous statement of *Monotheism* (not *Henotheism*)

- there are no other gods
- all other “gods” are idols without true substance or reality

***Psalms 115* mocks these idols – they are mute, deaf and powerless**

***Paul* affirms clearly that an idol is *not a real thing* | 1 Cor. 8**

- for there is only one God, the creator of all things

(2) And yet, there are “other gods.”

While “gods” not real, Bible nevertheless speaks of them as *rivals*

- God is spoken of as being “greater” than these lesser gods
- not rivals because they compete with God in power
- but in affections of his people

This is why commandment says, “no other gods *before me*”

- “before me” means God’s presence
- Israel is not to bring other gods along when before presence of God

- God demands *exclusive* devotion and worship

Answer to question – it’s both!

- the gods are not real and they are rivals

***1 Chronicles 16* shows us this balance**

- v. 25 – God is above all other gods
- v. 26 – but these other gods are mere worthless idols

**(3) So the First Commandment tells us there are “other gods.”
How are they *gods*? Where do they get their power?**

The other gods are not actual gods, but *functional gods*

- doesn’t have to be statues or figurines
- but these are things like money, sex, power
- we make them gods when we give them love, worship, hope

Whatever you *make central* in your life

- that is your functional god, your idol
- “god,” in this sense, is whatever is ultimate in your life

***All of us*, to one degree or another, have idols in our life**

- we look to this idol to give us significance, life, joy
- these are the rivals to God in our life

Example: *Money* in Matthew 6

- Jesus calls Money (“Mammon”) a rival god
- money is a God-substitute | gives you
- security – you don’t have trust God when you have it
- significance – your worth is measured by it | “net worth”
- joy – money can buy you happiness
- so that you’re not worshipping God, you’re worshipping money

Good test – are there overly strong emotions?

- emotional reactions that are just disproportionate to situation?

(4) What is positively commanded in First Commandment?

Not simply prohibiting, but *positively commanding*

- we must love God with all our being (Deut. 6)
- passion for God | sold-out for God

Not enough to simply abstain from idolatry

- if we don't cherish and worship God with all heart
- we have broken the First Commandment

How do we “love” God? | *we delight in him* (Psalm 37)

- means to make God the source of your happiness
- happiness is a test of what is ultimate
- because whatever you do for happiness, that's your end goal
- question – do you love God for himself or for something else?

God is *ultimate end of all activity*

- this gets to your real motivation
- what's your true motive? | is God or something else?

Illustration

- young, ambitious employee dates daughter of CEO
- what is his underlying motivation?
- versus man dates poor girl who can give him nothing

1 Corinthians | First Commandment permeates all of life

- all decisions, activities need to put God central, not secondary

Habakkuk 3 is ultimate test

- first test: what do happiness? | second test: what do sadness?
- can you delight in God when all else fails, in midst pain/failure?
- if not, something else is your final source of happiness
- if God takes everything away except himself, is still deep joy?

If you give in to despair (inordinate sadness)

- whatever you lost was, all along, your true god

Illustration

- woman marries man who very wealthy
- one day, “I lost everything, but we have each other”
- woman – “I don't think this is going to work”

(5) Idolatry is spiritual adultery | deep betrayal

Jeremiah speaks about idol worship as “*playing whore*”

- giving our love and adoration to rival gods is spiritual adultery
- meaning, this is a marriage metaphor

We get a glimpse into *deep pain* this causes God

- imagine discovering your spouse cheating on you
- this raw emotion is closest analogy we have understanding God
- God wants us to be faithful to him

Therefore, do we understand heinousness of this sin?

- we treat sin so lightly | we think of it as mere law-breaking
- consequence is legal punishment from Divine Enforcer
- but God is the wounded, betrayed lover

(6) Gospel Hope

One most amazing and shocking passages in Bible | Hosea 3:1

- God commands Hosea to take Gomer back, even after affair

This is the *promise of grace in Christ*

- we broken First Commandment, but God will bring us back