

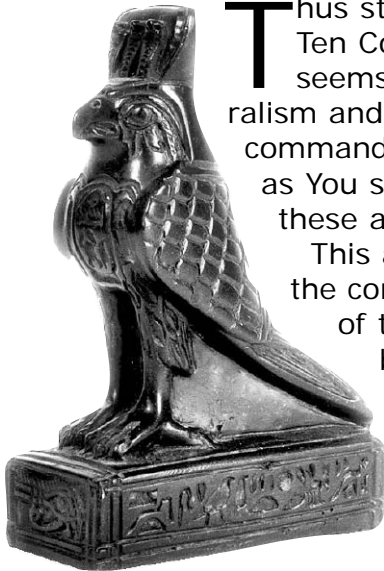
Carved in Stone

Embracing God's Value System

Adult Lesson Three

No Other Gods!

"I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:2-3, NRSV).



Thus starts one of the most recognizable portions of the Old Testament—the Ten Commandments. "You shall have no other gods before me." It almost seems simplistic in our 21st century world. Although there is increased pluralism and acceptance of other religions in all parts of the U.S., this particular commandment doesn't seem nearly as problematic as some of the others, such as You shall not commit adultery; You shall not covet; You shall not lie. Surely these are the sticky commandments, the ones we see broken daily.

This attitude of "of course, the LORD is the only god I serve; let's get on to the commandments that still mean something" stems from a misunderstanding of the nature of this commandment. It is not the first of ten commands, but *the* command with the next nine delineating aspects of what it means to have no other gods before YHWH. In other words, as Jesus points out some 1400 years later, all the law and the prophets are summed up in this command. So when we covet, murder, or lie, we break this commandment as well. Those who faithfully serve this God do not lie. They do not commit adultery. They do not make graven images.

Every person must answer whether or not the LORD is placed first.

With this in mind, studying the first commandment becomes valuable to those who wish to make God Lord. The main thrust of this lesson will be to take a close look at what exactly God is demanding in this first commandment and asking the class members to decide whether or not they will place the LORD first in their lives.

OBJECTIVES

- Identify what God has done for class members.
- Identify what class members value.
- Identify how they are tempted to act on these values.
- Decide if the LORD will be first in their lives.

SCRIPTURE

- Exodus 20:2-3
- Luke 4:5-7
- Mark 12:28-34

WHAT YOU NEED

- Copies of Handout #3.1 for everyone in the class
- Three copies of Handout #3.2
- Chalk/chalkboard; marker/dry erase board; or something else to write on
- Pencils/pens

Part 1 - Does he deserve it?

Ask these questions: **What has God done for you in your life? What has he given to you? When has he proven faithful to you?** Write these answers on the chalkboard. Encourage the class to think in broad categories such as happiness, peace, love, and safety. Then ask this follow-up question: **What does God expect in return for these gifts?** Take a few answers to this question.

People in our society commonly think that God simply loves them and expects nothing in return. We're tempted to believe God's gifts, such as life and salvation, are unqualified, but this is not what the scriptures tell us. God gave the Ten Commandments precisely because of all that he had done for the Children of Israel. The first commandment reads, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me." Because of what he had done for the Israelites-leading them out of Egypt and slavery-he demanded that they serve him. He loves us, and expects us to put him first. He makes an exclusive demand-he is not to be one of many gods. He will be our ONLY God. Ask: Do you think he has the right to demand we put our faith completely and only in him? If so, why? (Yes. Just as he was the only God that could rescue the Israelites, giving him the right to demand their loyalty, he is the only God that offers salvation and life. Since he is the only true God, he is right to expect that we recognize His redemption and serve him only.)

Part 2 - What matters most?

Divide the class into groups of four or five. If the class is smaller than six or seven, do this exercise individually. Distribute Handout #3.1. First, ask the groups to **Write down the five things that are important to you.** (For example, family, the future, retirement, church, recreation.) Give them three or four minutes to work on this. Ask them **Write down how you plan for these things.** Again, give them three or four minutes to do this. Encourage them to share what they have written. Write their answers on a chalkboard. Place what was most important on the left side and how they planned for it on the right.

These things probably aren't that different from the concerns in Moses' day. They, too, wanted to provide for their families. They wanted to have something for when they were older. They wanted to have some leisure time to enjoy life. We know the name of Ba'al, the primary god the Israelites were tempted to serve. What types of god was this? (Fertility.) **Why do you suppose the Israelites were tempted to serve this god?** (Because they lived in an agrarian society. They had not been farmers in Egypt-they were servants and brick makers-so, when they got to Canaan, they learned how to farm from those who were already there. Key to the Canaanites understanding of farming, however, was the worship of fertility gods and goddesses. The Canaanites had survived by farming for hundreds of years. So in drought years there was a natural tendency for the Israelites to try what the Canaanites were doing.)

These fertility gods and goddesses were believed to control plant life as well as the ability of humans to conceive. In a society in which children took care of their parents in old age, lots of kids (especially boys) were the only retirement plan. So these deities were believed to be responsible for putting food on the table, creating families, and sustaining people into old age. Is it any wonder that there might be a tendency to put faith in these gods and the LORD? It wasn't that the Israelites were tempted to quit serving the LORD, they were just hedging their bets a bit. In a time when a year of famine or crop failure meant certain death for children, they just wanted to make sure they, and those they cared about, were taken care of. The question for us becomes, in what do we ultimately put our trust?

In America we have the same problem the Israelites had. Over 90% of

Americans claim to "believe in God"-but are the majority merely hedging their bets? If we aren't careful might these things (motion to the list on the left side of the chalk-board) come before God? Ask your class these questions: If it came down to it, which do we act like we have faith in the most-the LORD or the stock market or economy? The church or our jobs? Where do we entrust our money? Where do we entrust our families? Where do we entrust our time?

Part 3 - What are they offering?

Read or ask someone to read Luke 4:5-7. **What is the devil offering Jesus?** (To be the ruler of all the world.) **Is this a bad thing?** (No. In fact, it was the traditional understanding of what the Messiah was to be-a ruler for all nations. The Devil was basically offering to let Jesus be exactly what he thought God wanted him to be.) **What is Jesus response to the devil?** ("It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God and serve only him'.") This is basically a rewording of the first two commandments.

What does this world offer us if we bow down to its systems (economics, politics, etc.)? (Money, power, prestige, health, power, comfort, happiness, respect.) **Are these things bad?** (No, but there is something wrong with putting the world's means of gaining these things before God.) **The basic question we must ask ourselves is, "In light of what God has done for us, can we trust him to provide these things for us? Are we going to hedge our bets with these other systems?"**

Part #4 - Jesus says...

Prior to class, give three people Handout #3.2, assigning each one a part. Have them stand and read this choral reading of Mark 12:28-34. After they are done, ask this question, **How does Jesus re-interpret the first commandment?** (He moves from a negative, "have no other gods before me," to a positive, "love God.")

Divide into the same groups you had earlier. Have them discuss and come up with answers to these two questions: **What does it mean to love God with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength?** Suggest they answer these four aspects separately: "What does it mean to love God with all you strength? Heart? Mind? Strength?" **In light of the other commandments and what we know from the Bible, What would change in our church and our personal lives if we all truly followed this command?** Give them about seven or eight minutes to answer these questions, then have one member of each group share what they came up with.

Complete love for God is the apex of spiritual life and the aim of biblical religion. Beyond the scribe's realization that Jesus had answered correctly, we don't know how the scribe responded to the commandment. The question for us is, how will we respond? Will we love God with all that we are? Has what he has done for us in the past been enough for us to trust him and place him before any other "god" that we might be tempted to serve?


End in prayer. During the prayer time, include a minute or two of quiet meditation in which the class members are given an opportunity to put God first, with all that means for their lives. The prayer might sound something like this, **Our Heavenly Father, we want to thank you for all you have done for us. We have been challenged today by the first of your Ten Commandments. We each must come to a place of deciding whether to put you first in our lives. We choose to love you with all of our hearts, souls, minds, and strength. (Let's each confirm with God our personal commitment. Deal with any other issues related to this commitment in the next minute or two to silent prayer.)** End the prayer with any other particular needs you want to address.

Planning for Life

What are five important life issues for which you plan? (Family, recreation, retirement, the future, the church, etc.)

How do you plan for these things, that is, what do you do to make them come about? (For instance, use a 401(k) to plan for retirement, etc.)

<u>IMPORTANT LIFE ISSUE</u>	<u>PLAN</u>
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	



The Greatest Commandment? Mark 12:28-34

CHARACTERS

- Narrator
- Jesus
- Scribe

Narrator: One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that Jesus answered them well, he asked him:

Scribe: Which commandment is first of all?

Jesus: The first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." There is no other commandment greater than these.

Scribe: You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that "He is one, and besides him there is no other"; and "to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength." This is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Jesus: I see that you answer wisely. You are not far from the kingdom of God.

Narrator: After that no one dared to ask him any questions.