

The First & Great Commandment

Q. What does the first commandment forbid?

A. The first commandment forbids denying God or not worshipping and glorifying Him as the true God and our God. It also forbids giving worship and glory, which He alone deserves, to anyone or anything else.

(Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A #47)

“You shall have no other gods before Me.”

(Exodus 20:3)

Recently my brother in law, after years of study, hard work and preparation, passed his final architecture exams, making him an officially licensed architect. For years he worked as an architectural intern, and he served as a design consultant on various projects. But now, after passing all his tests, he works as a project architect at a fantastic firm out in Southern California. Needless to say, my brother in law knows quite a bit about architecture. I on the other hand, no very little. In fact, the last time that I tried to build something was all the way back in elementary school when I attempted to construct a model car. And while trying to paint it, I inadvertently spilled model paint in my eye, which led to our entire family making a late-night trip to the emergency room. And that trip resulted in my having to wear an eye patch for over a week as a daily reminder that architecture and building things just doesn't seem to be in my DNA. I am far from having any kind of proficiency in architecture. But there is one thing that I know for sure: that before a building is constructed, it is vital to be sure that you are building on a solid foundation. The reality is, you can have a beautifully designed high-rise or building, but if it is constructed on a bad foundation, that building will not stand. All one has to do is look at the Leaning Tower of Pisa in Italy to see the result of building on a bad foundation. The now tilted tower began to slant and tip immediately due to the foundation being inadequate being placed upon soft soil which couldn't handle the weight of that tower!

Foundations are very important. And it's with this in mind that we come now to the first of the 10 commandments which is found in **Exodus 20:3** where God speaks these words, *“You shall have no other gods before Me.”* You see, it doesn't get any more foundational than this! You'll remember that in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus is approached by a lawyer who asked Him the question, *“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?”* (**Matthew 22:36**). And what was Jesus' response? In **Matthew 22:37** we read that, *“Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment.”*. According to Jesus, loving God is the first and the greatest of all the commandments. In fact, before we can truly love others, we must first and foremost love God. All love for others flows first from our love for the Lord. So how do we fulfill the first and greatest commandment? How do we love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength? Well, it all begins with the most foundational commandment found in God's moral law: we are to have no other gods before the Lord. But what does that mean?

The Westminster Shorter Catechism, one of the great reformed confessions of the protestant reformation helps us to understand what this first and great commandment means when it asks in **Q&A #46**, *“What does the first commandment require?”* And the answer it gives is twofold, first our catechism writes, *“The first commandment **requires** us to know and recognize God as the only true God and our God, and to worship and glorify Him accordingly...and it forbids denying God or not worshipping and glorifying Him as the true God and our God. It also **forbids** giving worship and glory, which He alone deserves, to anyone or anything else.”* In essence, this first and great commandment reveals to us who the true OBJECT of our worship is to be. In this foundational command we learn those things that are unacceptable to God. Atheism or agnosticism, which is nothing more than the denial of God is forbidden in this commandment. The worship of any and all false or pagan deities whether that be the false god of Islam or the gods and goddesses of Hinduism or any other religious system that doesn't confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord are expressly forbidden by the first commandment. The worship of any other deity apart from the Triune God of the Bible: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is nothing more than idolatry.

This first and great commandment reveals to us that if we desire to love God, we must forsake all other idols and images, effigy's and totems that distract us and pull us away from the worship of the one true God who is revealed to us in the pages of the Bible. Because in reality, contrary to public opinion, there is no other God but the Lord. In **Isaiah 45:5** we read these words, *“I am the Lord, and there is no other; There is no God besides Me.”* That is a very controversial verse in our world today. In an age of relativity, it is not a popular thing to speak of the exclusivity of God. But that is what the Bible teaches. **Psalms 96:5** drives this point home when God says, *“For all the gods of the peoples are idols, But the Lord made the heavens.”* You see, the Bible teaches us that there is no hope outside of the one true God of the Bible. There is no possibility of salvation apart from Jesus Christ. God's Word makes that perfectly clear in **Isaiah 43:11** when God says, *“I, even I, am the Lord, And besides Me there is no savior.”* The Apostle Peter reminded us of this same truth in regards to Jesus when He said in **Acts 4:12**, *“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”*

Do you want to live a life that is pleasing to God? Then it all starts with wrapping our minds around this foundational commandment. We are to have no other gods before the Lord. What about you? What idols have you constructed in your life that you have placed before the God of the universe? What do you spend the majority of your time, money, energy and thoughts on? Is it God? Or is it something else? Have you been building your life on a sure and stable foundation? Or have you been building your life on that which will one day come tumbling down?

Dig Even Deeper into God's Word!

Deuteronomy 30:17-18

Psalms 14:1

Psalms 44:20-21