


END-TIMES ISSUES



#45 Commandment #1 – Beware of "God-substitutes"!

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THE TEN COMMANDMENTS ARE RARELY QUOTED IN SCRIPTURE.
Yet they form the basis for many of the commands, instructions and principles we find in both Old and New Testaments.

- These commands, instructions and principles teach us God's will, applied to life. From them we learn the nature of righteousness, the difference between good and evil, how to live in a way that glorifies God, etc.
- Because of their connection to the Ten Commandments, we can often group them into categories, based on those commandments.
- Recognizing this can help us to grow in our *understanding* of how to follow Jesus in areas of uncertainty.
- However, there's no need to *force* a connection to the Ten Commandments, if we don't see one. It's still God's Word, and we can base our lives on what it teaches!

HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF APPLICATIONS OF THE FIRST COMMANDMENT.

These applications can occur in a variety of ways.
(Some of the other commands may also be related to these verses.)

- AN INSTRUCTION** You **cannot serve both** God and money.
Matthew 6:24b (BSB)
- A COMMAND** So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, **do it all to the glory of God.**
1 Corinthians 10:31 (BSB)
- AN EXAMPLE** (Here, they weren't obeying the command.) For **they loved praise from men** more than praise from God.
John 12:43 (BSB)
- A DESIRE** The apostles said to the Lord, "**Increase our faith!**"
Luke 17:5 (NIV)

COMMANDMENT #1.

"You shall have **no other gods** before Me."
Exodus 20:3 (BSB); also Deuteronomy 5:7.

IT DOES APPLY TO THIS
(and the god it represents).

★ But it also can refer to *anything* that controls our lives, or becomes a substitute for the God who created us. **THIS INCLUDES:**

- Anything we put our trust in.
- Attitudes and actions – things we would *never* claim were "gods."

WE BOW DOWN TO YOU, YOU ARE OUR GOD!!

THE GOD OF THIS COMMANDMENT IS "THE GOD OF ISRAEL."

- Even though Israel (the nation) has walked away from this God, he *remains* the God who created all things. (This fact is impossible to change.)

Concerning all other nations: Their gods are worthless substitutes – gods (demons) or human pretensions, often represented by idols.

Sing to **the Lord**, praise his name;
proclaim his salvation day after day.

Declare his glory among the **nations**,
his marvelous deeds among all **peoples**.

For great is **the Lord** and most worthy of praise;
he is to be feared above all gods.

**For all the gods of the nations are idols,
but the Lord made the heavens.**

Psalms 96:2-5 (NIV)

THE BASIC FOCUS OF THIS FIRST COMMANDMENT IS:

IT MUST AFFECT HOW WE THINK. WE MUST:

- ✓ RECOGNIZE God for who he is.
 - Based on the truth of Scripture
 - Not modifying Scripture to make it agree with what we want to believe.
- ✓ ACCEPT him as the *only* Creator God.
 - And as our God, the one we are willing to trust and obey.

IT MUST AFFECT HOW WE LIVE. WE MUST:

- ✓ GIVE him the honor, glory and worship that is due him.
- ✓ BE WILLING to remain faithful, when the world wants us to do otherwise (whether it wants us to actively sin, or passively avoid obedience).

ALL FORMS OF IDOLATRY VIOLATE THIS COMMAND!

IdOLS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT:

There are *hundreds* of verses we can learn from. These verses:

- ✓ Describe idolatry; give **examples** of people *doing* it, as well as examples of God's people *opposing* it. (Many of these verses focus on the *idols* that represented the gods of the nations.)
- ✓ Tell us about the nature of **those who do it**. (Much of this can apply to idolatry that does not involve *physical* objects.)
- ✓ Give us many **warnings** about it (condemning it), and show us *its incompatibility with worship of the Creator God*.

Some verses focus on **heart attitudes and actions** that do not involve objects. For instance:

... their **hearts** are far from Me.
Their worship of Me is but **rules** taught by men.
Isaiah 29:13b (BSB); also quoted by Jesus.

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IdOLS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament affirms the Old Testament message. At times, there is a greater focus on the *invisible* expressions of idolatry.

- ✓ We are told to **learn** from the bad example of Old Testament Israel... and *don't do what they did!* (1 Corinthians 10).
- ✓ We are **reminded** that there are expressions of idolatry that do not involve actual bowing down before an object. In fact, the idol itself isn't the real issue!

Therefore, my beloved, **flee from idolatry**. ...

Am I suggesting, then, that **food sacrificed to an idol** is anything, or that an **idol** is anything? No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God. And I do not want you to be **participants with demons**.

1 Corinthians 10:14, 19-20 (BSB)

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IdOLS TODAY: FALSE GODS ARE NOT ALWAYS REPRESENTED BY IDOLS.

The Good News about Jesus has been proclaimed all over the earth.

This has resulted in many nations having *less* emphasis on the worship of *objects* (idols).

- ✓ This does not mean everyone repented. It's often just a matter of being *restrained* by the positive effects of the Good News!

The devil is **still at work**, but for now, he has changed his methods. He has a greater focus on:

- ✓ False gods and religions that are *not* represented by objects.
- ✓ Attitudes and actions that crowd out God.
- ✓ Denial of God's existence (perhaps even denying the devil).

Hostility to the Good News and Jesus is **increasing**, so it's quite possible that the nations will revert to the worship of objects.

- ✓ Those who are zealous in rejecting the Creator God may pursue substitutes... or may simply deny God's existence.

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The New Testament **warnings** about idols are *still* relevant.

- ✓ They warn us to *not* go that way.
- ✓ Since we know that idolatry includes "non-object" *attitudes* and *actions*, these warnings serve as a *visual* reminder to oppose the *invisible* things in this category.
- ✓ It's a *warning* to people in the end-times, who (it seems) will again pursue visible objects (or even human "saviors") as idols.

IdOLS IN THE FUTURE: THE FOCUS ON OBJECTS WILL APPARENTLY INCREASE.

... they did not stop worshiping demons, and **idols** of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—**idols** that cannot see or hear or walk.

Revelation 9:20b (NIV)

[The man of lawlessness] ... will seat himself in the temple of God, **proclaiming himself to be God**.

2 Thessalonians 2:4b (BSB)

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WHAT ARE SOME OF THE "NON-IDOL" WAYS THAT PEOPLE VIOLATE COMMANDMENT #1?

"You shall have **no other gods** before Me."

Exodus 20:3 (BSB); also Deuteronomy 5:7.

WE GOT RID OF THE STATUE!
THAT MEANS WE NO LONGER
VIOLATE THIS COMMAND!

ANY SUBSTITUTE FOR THE
CREATOR GOD,
AND ANY DETRACTION,
IS IDOLATRY —

even if it doesn't include
the words "idol" or "god."

BE CAREFUL! THAT COMMAND
INCLUDES A LOT MORE THAN
YOU THINK IT DOES!

[THE IDOL IS GONE!!]

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ACTUAL IDOLATRY can be done in secret — in the heart.

- ✓ People might not bow down to an actual statue or object; it can be a *heart attitude*.
- ✓ They could still wear ornaments or symbols that quietly expressed their devotion — jewelry, tattoos, etc.

... these men have set up **idols in their hearts** and put wicked stumbling blocks before their faces.

Ezekiel 14:3b (NIV)

- ✓ Even when Israel was on their journey to Canaan — and though they had *clearly* seen the power of God being displayed — *their hearts were turning back to Egypt*.

But our fathers refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and **in their hearts turned back to Egypt**.

Acts 7:39 (BSB)

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SUBSTITUTES – good or bad – can be done *in place of obeying this command*. When this happens, even good things can become sinful.

- ✓ A common example is replacing obedience and faithfulness to God with religious activities.

"Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord?"

**To obey is better than sacrifice,
and to heed is better than the fat of rams."**

1 Samuel 15:22b (NIV)

- ✓ Another popular substitute is to trust in humans and human ability, more than (or instead of) trusting God. God uses people, but not in place of him – 1 Corinthians 3:5. (This will get worse in the end times: Many people will claim to be "the answer" to the world's problems.)

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OMISSION – Not obeying this command. We may have avoided "substitutes," by doing "nothing" – *but that isn't enough!*

- ✓ Omission can be active or passive, deliberate or done without thinking about it.
- ✓ We become guilty of this each time we don't trust God or we don't honor him in what we do. Or when we choose to ignore God's commands.

WELL, AT LEAST I
DIDN'T BOW DOWN
TO AN IDOL!

BUT YOU FAILED
TO BOW DOWN
TO GOD!

Anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do,
yet **fails to do it**, is **guilty of sin**.

James 4:17 (BSB)

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ADDITION – bowing down to God AND to something else.

- ✓ Many people think they are "enhancing" their "spirituality," by adopting various practices that they learn from the world's religions.
 - In the early church, there were people who wanted to make Jewish rites a requirement for Gentiles. Others promoted gnostic beliefs, or various "spiritual disciplines" that they adopted from the world.
- ✓ Today, many people claim to follow Jesus; yet (at the same time) they live by the world's standards.
 - Ultimately, this "competition" fails, because the Creator God will not share his glory with substitutes.

Therefore, whoever chooses to be a **friend of the world** renders himself **an enemy of God**.

James 4:4b (BSB)

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SUBTRACTION – when a person believes that God belongs in some parts of life, but not in others.

- ✓ We live in a day when people separate God from daily life. Yet God claims that *all of life* belongs to him!

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

1 Corinthians 10:31 (BSB)

- ✓ **Ask yourself:** To what extent is God a part of your work activities? ... your leisure activities? ... everything else that is a part of your life?
- ✓ Do you do these things in a way that *honors* God... or do you *ignore* him?

If we think that God is unrelated or unconnected to what happens in the world, it will be very easy to accept the world's views.

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"REDEFINED IDOLATRY" – doing idolatrous practices, but changing them enough (or redefining or renaming them) so that they look "good" (or at least "neutral").

- ✓ Those doing this may deny that it has any connection to God/god, religion, idols, etc. They may claim that the activities are "non-religious" or even "scientific."
- ✓ They may claim that there are positive physical, mental or emotional benefits from doing the practice – as though the activity was important for maintaining one's well-being.
- ✓ If they admit the connection with idolatry, they may excuse it by claiming that they do it "just for fun," or "to me, it's a 'neutral' activity," or "I omit the religious parts."
 - Yet some of these "neutral" practices go directly against God's commands! Examples – fortune telling, horoscopes, praying to the dead, witchcraft, the world's version of "meditation," etc.

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WHY IS OBEYING THIS COMMAND SO DIFFICULT?

It's NOT because obedience is "optional" (because it *isn't* optional).

★ It's because of the influences of sin in us. ★

⇒ **Our duty** is to trust God (who empowers us to obey him) and to pursue perfection. If we have a *desire* and *willingness* to do this, *we will grow in that direction*.

⇒ **When Jesus returns, he will complete the change that we have desired and pursued!**

But we know that when Christ appears, **we shall be like him**, for we shall see him as he is.

All who have this hope in him **purify** themselves, just as he is pure.

1 John 3:2b-3 (NIV)

AN ONGOING PROCESS.

TO BE COMPLETED BY JESUS.

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? HOW CAN WE KNOW ⇒ If we are obeying this command?
⇒ If we are violating this command?

"You shall have **no other gods** before Me."
Exodus 20:3 (BSB); also Deuteronomy 5:7.

ONE WAY IS TO LOOK AT THE CONSEQUENCES OF WHAT WE DO:

- ✓ Does it *DETRACT* from obeying the command? (Then it's sin.)
- ✓ Does it *CONTROL* me (Then it's sin.)
- ✓ Does it *ACCOMPLISH* the *opposite* of these? (Then we are obeying it.)
- ✓ Is it *INCREASING* my love for God, my trust, and my obedience to his will? (Then we are obeying it.)

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"You shall have **no other gods** before Me."

Exodus 20:3 (BSB); also Deuteronomy 5:7.

THINGS TO DO:

- ✓ Be *AWARE* of the command. (Don't ignore it!)
- ✓ Learn to *RECOGNIZE* issues that involve love for God (guided by the Bible).
- ✓ *THINK* of ways to apply this command... *then do it*.
- ✓ *EXPECT* it to take effort. (To just "go with the flow" is to follow the ways of the world.)

As we explore Scripture, we can learn from:

- ✓ Many *EXAMPLES* of this being done (or *not* being done).
- ✓ Many *COMMANDS* that point us in the right direction.

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF OUR WEAKNESS:

- ✓ If we attempt to do these things, we will probably end up asking ourselves if success will ever be possible... we are too weak!
- ✓ The Law requires 100% obedience... and *we all fail*. Attempting to reach this 100% can quickly become an unbearable "burden" – a "yoke" on our necks, that we *cannot* successfully bear. Peter describes it as:

"a **yoke** that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear"
Acts 15:10b (BSB)

- ✓ We need a *heart* change (which Jesus offers us). The Law itself does not contain the power we need. In this sense, Paul describes it as:

"weak and worthless principles"
Galatians 4:9b (BSB)

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Is there an answer? **YES!!**

- ✓ Jesus tells us to *learn from him*. He helps us, *changing* us and empowering us! The burden is so much lighter, when God's power is at work in us!

"Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My **yoke** upon you and learn from Me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My **yoke** is easy and My burden is light."

Matthew 11:28-30 (BSB)

- ✓ But we find ourselves in a perplexing situation: We *want* to grow stronger, but we *still* find ourselves to be weak! We are like children wanting to grow up and become adults... but it's taking longer than we want!



★ Surprisingly, this situation leads us to **OUR MISSION** for this week!! ★

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OUR MISSION!

Can *anything* good come out of our weakness? **YES!!**

- ✓ Our *on-going* pursuit of this change (trusting *God* for it) is *proof* that we want it (and that God is at work in us). In the end, God promises:

... He who began a good work in you will **carry it on to completion** until the day of Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1:6b (BSB)

- ✓ In the meantime, Jesus can use every weak attempt on our part to reveal his grace and his power!

"**My grace** is sufficient for you, for **My power** is **perfected in weakness**."

2 Corinthians 12:9b (BSB)

TO GLORIFY GOD IN OUR WEAKNESS, AND TRUST HIM TO ACCOMPLISH THE FINAL VICTORY!

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Credits

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