

You shall have no other gods. What does this mean? We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things. (Luther's Small Catechism)

Dear Friends,

I met a couple who came back from living in Japan. While they were there, they had collected souvenirs including a set of Japanese household gods. These were displayed in their living room. Was having these Japanese gods in their home idolatry?

What about the show that has been on T.V. for years, *American Idol*? Is watching the show engaging in idolatry?

My guess is that we would get different answers from people, perhaps even from pastors.

Therefore, it is important that you know what the Bible says about the First Commandment. It tells us that we should: **Trust in the LORD God Above All Else.**

Today we will review the meaning of the First Commandment and work at understanding how it applies to our lives. Along the way we will answer some of the questions you may have.

1. Who is the true God?

Martin Luther defines having a god, “...to have a god means to have something on which one’s heart depends entirely.” (*Large Catechism*) We do this with the Lord God. We need to know who he is. So, I ask the question, “**Who is the true God?**”

A. The Bible describes God as the triune God, the Trinity.

1. The Triune God gave life to the first humans our ancestors, Adam and Eve. It says in the first book of the Bible, Genesis 1, “**Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness...’ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.**” (26a, 27)

2. Notice it says in Genesis 1, “**LET US make...**” More than one person is talking. The Bible speaks of three persons in one divine being. At the commissioning of his disciples Jesus said, “**go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...**” (Matthew 28:19) Are these three persons, three gods?

No. In 1 Corinthians St. Paul writes, **“There is no God but one.”** (8:4) Based on these and other passages we say our God is one God in three persons. How he is one and three at the same time is a mystery.

B. In the Bible the Triune God is referred to as **“the LORD God.”** The title “the LORD” reminds us that this God is our Savior.

1. God gave the original *10 Commandments* to Moses and the people of Israel. They had experienced the Lord’s saving hand when he had brought them out slavery in Egypt with powerful miracles. They also knew that God had promised them that all people on earth would be blessed through their nation. From the Israelites, the Savior of the world would be born.

2. Why does the world need a Savior? There very basic answer is that we do not always trust our Creator the way he commands. People turn to idols. They turn to material things. They turn to other people. In St. Paul’s letter to the Romans it says, **“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people... they became fools 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.”**

(1:18a,23)

3. Although God was angry over sin, in his mercy he promised to work out our salvation. So, the true God is also the one and only Savior. It says in Acts 4:12, **“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”** What God has done that no one else could do is to send his Son into the world to take away our sins. Jesus, God’s Son, tells us, **“God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** (3:16) God’s wrath is gone because of Jesus.

Through Jesus, we call God our “Father.” Now, we have a sincere desire to keep the First Commandment.

Trans: We may ask ourselves, “How should I do that?”

2. How do we put him first?

Our God wants to be first in our lives. How do we put him first? In Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism, he gives negative and positive examples and I will do that now.

A. We don’t dishonor him by letting other things take his place.

1. The Children of Israel had entered the land of Canaan where there were many idol gods. So the Lord tells them in connection with the First Commandment, **“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them...”** (20:4,5a) There is renewed interest today in the classic idols like Zeus, Jupiter, Oden and Thor. There are exotic eastern gods Brahma and Vishnu. Others don't worship idols, but they worship spirits.

I mentioned the couple who returned from Japan had the idols as souvenirs, they assured me they had no interest in worshipping them. Could those “gods” have created confusion or offense? It is possible. Today you and I are more and more likely to run into people having idols.

Trans: Idols may not be a problem for us, but there are other issues.

2. There are groups who deny the teaching of the Triune God. Most often it involves honoring Jesus as a prophet, but not confessing him as the Son of God. Jesus tells us in John5:22,23, **“Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son, 23 that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Whoever does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.”** If a person doesn't honor Jesus as being equal with the Father, then that person does not honor God and is not saved. This applies to religious Jews, but also to Muslims, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses and others.

3. Americans are blessed with great wealth. Someone once said that our poor people are rich compared to people in other countries. The danger is that we see our money, technology and possessions as the answer to all our problems.

I don't know if you know who *Sandra West* is. She was very wealthy and loved her life. She expressed this sentiment by being buried in her Ferrari, May 19, 1997. Her expensive car will never free her from the grave, only Jesus can do that. This why we need to keep focused on him, even while we use the money, the cars, the cell phones that he gives us.

B. Focusing in Jesus is going to him in his word. What do we learn of him?

1. Jesus kept the First Commandment perfectly for us. The Gospel reading demonstrates this. Can you imagine going day and night without food? As our body struggles with pain and weakness, we would probably quickly give in to anxiety and then to grumbling. Even in this severe temptation, Jesus calmly told the devil that he would wait for his heavenly Father to provide as we are instructed to do in the Bible. Jesus never stumbled even once.

2. His perfect keeping of God's commands means we are saved. St. Paul writes of Jesus in Romans, **"For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous."** (5:19) For this reason we also say that when arrive to stand before God's throne, God isn't going to question or criticize us for all our failings. We have perfection in Jesus and it is the end of the story. We live in perfect heaven forever because of our perfect Savior.

C. So Luther says we live out our lives, **"fearing, loving and trusting"** in him. One of the classic examples of faith in Jesus is when young **David**, the shepherd boy faced the cursing giant of a man named Goliath. Everyone else was afraid. David recognized that he did not have to be afraid because God would deliver him to victory on earth or safety in heaven. He trusted and loved God more than anything and was able to take on a giant.

Circumstances will be different for each of us. Our giants will be different. Sometimes its health. Sometimes it a lack of money or work. Sometimes it is Satan and his temptations. No matter what the obstacle is, we are to trust like David and do whatever God wants us to do. Sometimes it's doing nothing, being patient. As we love and trust, he will deliver us one way or another. We either overcome here on earth or we live in the safety of heaven. With this in mind we join the Apostle Paul in saying, **"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."** (1 Cor 10:31) Conclusion: So, is watching *American Idol* having other gods? I could also ask, "Is watching football all day, or shopping all day or playing videogames all day idolatry?" The answer with these things or anything else is the same. If these activities take your focus off Jesus, then that is idolatry. You don't have to be doing something all day for that to be the case.

One of the best things you can do is go about your normal life, but every so often measure what you think, say and do against the First Commandment. When you realize that you have sinned, ask for forgiveness. Know that you are forgiven in Jesus who has kept the Commandments. Then make plans to change your life, to do better. We do it because we fear, love and trust in him who loved us first. Amen.