

GOD'S TOP TEN – THE TEN COMMANDMENTS TODAY!
#1 NO OTHER GODS
or “Your One and Only”

This is the final week in our series “*God’s Top Ten*” where we’ve been looking at the Ten Commandments. Each week we’ve been asking the simple question, are these commandments still relevant today?

Now we’ve been studying the Commandments in reverse order, starting with number #1 and building up to today, when we’re looking at the first commandment, which is really the foundation of all the commandments. Exodus 20:1-3 (NIV).

‘And God spoke all these words: ² “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ³ “You shall have no other gods before me.”

The story is told about Ray Kroc, the founder of the McDonald’s restaurant chain. He was asked to list the three most important things in his life. This is what he said,

“God, my family and McDonald’s.”

Then his honesty took over.

“But when I get to the office, I reverse that order.”

I think a lot of us are guilty of the same thing. And this is the issue this first commandment addresses. It makes us ask a very important question. God wants to be first in my life, but is He?

If there is one thing that the Bible teaches clearly and consistently it is that there is only ONE TRUE God. Jeremiah 10:10 (NIV):

“But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King.”

John 17:3:

“Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”

The Bible is clear that all other gods are false gods, imposters and idols.

A false god is
whatever you love most,
seek out the most,
care about the most,
make the object of your worship,
or make the number one priority in your life.

It might be your career, your money, your possessions, power, influence, the way you look, or your own pleasure.

Anything or anyone that becomes the basis on which you make decisions, determine your values, set your priorities, and allow to define your own self-worth – that becomes your god.

That's why the God of the Bible, the God who revealed himself to us commands.

“You shall have no other gods before me.

That's the foundational commandment.

Here's why we've been looking at the commandments in reverse order. It's because I wanted you to see that this commandment underpins all the rest.

The other commandments build on, and revolve around, this commandment, because the one and only true God lies at the heart of all the commandments, and it is this central truth that holds them all in place.

It's important we understand that for two reasons. First, this commandment reminds us that we can't remove God from the commandments. Now follow me here.

It would be quite possible for us to argue that the commandments about not coveting, stealing, or committing murder are just good ideas because they create a more stable, honest and less violent society.

You could argue that the commandment to take a day of rest a week is just common sense for our physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

We could agree that not committing adultery, and honouring our parents are two basic ways to protect and enhance marriage and family life.

In other words, we could agree that these are Ten Suggestions and that they are all good, common sense ideas.

But the first commandment makes such an interpretation impossible. It affirms that the commandments are much more than a bunch of great suggestions, because the first commandment makes clear that they all come from God, and that they reflect His character and His relationship with us.

Let me illustrate that. Why is murder wrong? It's because it takes from someone the precious gift God gave to them – their life.

Why are lying, and bearing false witness, wrong? It's because God has revealed himself as the God of truth, and He calls on us to reflect his character.

Why is adultery wrong? Because God is a faithful God who is true to us, and who expects us to be true to one another.

Why is idol worship wrong? Because there is only one true God.

You see it is only possible to obey the commandments when we are in a proper relationship with the God who gave them to us. And that, in a nutshell, is what this first commandment is all about.

But this principle that God is at the center of the commandments is important for a second reason.

This is the one that confuses a lot of people. Many folk, Christians included, read the Ten Commandments and simply see a list of, "*You shall nots*".

So they think that Christianity is only about obeying a list of rules about life. So sometimes they'll reject Christianity because they don't like the rules!

But the commandments are about much more than about us having a moral code to live by. Yes, that is certainly part of it, but the Commandments point us to something beyond themselves.

They remind us that the Christian life is about having, and staying in, a right relationship with God. That's why the first commandment is first. It reminds us that our relationship with God is so important that it must come first in our lives.

If you read the Old Testament, you discover an amazing thing about God. Obeying him is never described as a duty. It is always described as the response of a grateful person to the unlimited love and grace of God.

Here's what we need to remember. The people of Israel, who originally received the Ten Commandments from God, were never asked to keep them so they could earn or win God's love. God already loved them, and had already chosen them to be his people. The opening words of the Ten Commandments affirm that, Exodus 20:1-2 (NIV):

"And God spoke all these words: ² 'I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.'"

God chose the people of Israel to be his people long before He ever gave them the Ten Commandments.

Like them, we are not invited to keep the Ten Commandments so we can earn brownie points with God, or so we can prove our commitment to him, or so that our law-keeping can save us from our sin.

We're invited to keep them because we have been chosen, called and loved by God. Do you remember what John wrote in First John 4:19 (NIV)?

"We love because God first loved us."

Romans 5:8 (NIV) makes the same point:

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

So God invites us to keep the commandments within the context of a right relationship with Him through an act of faith in Jesus Christ. And, of course, it was Jesus who underscored for us that Christianity is about a relationship with God. He even taught us to call God "Our Father" by using the name a child would lovingly call their father, "Abba".

It's because God wants such a personal relationship with us that He entered our humanity in the person of Jesus Christ, who is, Scripture testifies, the complete revelation of God to us. To know Jesus is to know God in all his fullness. As Jesus said in John 10:30 (NIV):

“I and the Father (God) am one”

John 14:6 (NIV):

“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

That’s why the first commandment is the foundation of all the others.

There is only one place for God in your life – and that is the first place. Now most of you know that. You have heard that all your life. But here’s the big issue. Is it only head knowledge to you? You may say that God is first in your life, but do your actions actually back that up? What would the people closest to you say?

The truth is, this commandment isn’t all that complicated. It’s just that we complicate it, because we’re not always sure why God wants to be first in our lives. And even if we do get it, we’re all a little like Ray Kroc:

“My priorities are God, my family and McDonald’s..... But when I get to the office, I reverse that order.”

But God says. “I must be *first*’. Why? Because he created us, and he knows that the only way for us to experience a fulfilled life, the only way for us to live up to our full potential as human beings, the only way for us to go through the tough times without being defeated by them, is for us to put him first.

James Emery White in his book “*An Authentic Life*” suggests that we all should do this exercise:

Choose one thing that will be the most important thing in the world to you.

You will order your life around it.

You will depend on it for everything that matters to you.

You will turn to it in time of tragedy, and go to it when you need answers to life’s most difficult questions.

And when you die, you will stake your eternity on it?

Now what will that one thing be?

What a great question, because it really brings out the importance of this first commandment.

“You shall have no other gods before me.”

And surely that question also proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Ten Commandments are just as relevant today, on this Sunday when we remember that God in Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, as they were when they were first given to us thousands of years ago.

Prayer

Almighty and Holy God,

We acknowledge your Lordship and Kingship over our lives.

You have made us for yourself,

and our spirits are restless apart from you.

You have made us just a little lower than the angels,

and crowned us with glory and honour.

How can we refuse to give you first place in our lives?

As we come now to the Lord’s Table,

we remember that in Jesus Christ

you are King of Kings, and Lord of Lords,

and so we bow down before you

and give you all honour and glory and praise. Now and forever. Amen.