

## ***God Is Supreme***

*Basis Scripture resources: Exodus 20:3  
Matthew 6:24-34, James 4:7, 8*

Each of the Ten Commandments is an ethical application of a general doctrinal truth. The first Commandment is "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." The general principle that underlies it is the absolute and exclusive lordship of God.

The goal of this chapter is to explore the meaning and implications of the first Commandment. What does it mean to let God be supreme in one's life? What attitudes and practices are ruled out for those who truly have no others before God?

### ***I. Ultimate Authority***

It is no accident that the command, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," is first among the Ten Commandments. This is the command that deals with ultimate authority, and this is the question that must be settled first of all. Who is going to have the final say, the final word in our lives? Who is going to determine what is truth? Who is going to make the decisions concerning right and wrong? Who is going to determine how we spend our time and money? This Commandment requires that it be God. It is useless to consider any of the other claims and commandments of Scripture unless we grant that God and God alone has this kind of authority over us.

Everyone must answer these questions. Many people do so quite unconsciously, not realizing the nature of their commitment to a particular god. But it is much better to face these questions deliberately.

### ***Having a God***

The question of ultimate authority is bound up in the idea of "having a god." What does it mean to "have a god"? Is it like having a mother? Not exactly. It is more like having a wife or husband. To have a wife or husband, one must make an active and personal choice, and he must yield absolute, exclusive commitment to that individual.

"Having a god" involves such a choice and such a commitment. One yields himself in total submission by personal choice to some person, thing, or idea. Lip-service is not decisive. One's god is that to which he gives supreme devotion, that which ultimately determines his decisions.

### ***One God at a Time***

It is impossible to have more than one god at any given time. There can be only one ultimate, one supreme authority. Thus "having a god" is necessarily exclusive, again like having a wife or a husband. Polytheism technically is a belief in more than one god. But even a "polytheist" must have a single supreme principle that rules his life. There will always be one thing that is chosen first and surrendered last, one thing that is the supreme value in a person's life. This is one's god.

Jesus teaches us this truth when He declares that "no man can serve two masters"

(Matthew 6:24). Paul reaffirms it when he says, "Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils" (1 Corinthians 10:21).

## ***II. False Gods***

Once we understand what it means to have a god, it should be clear that it is impossible not to have a god. Everyone's life is ultimately determined by some supreme value or source of authority, whether he is conscious of it or not. It may not be the true God, the God of the Bible; but nevertheless it is a god.

Many false gods clamor for man's allegiance. These may be easily recognized when they are a part of a formal religion such as Hinduism. The gods that entice twentieth-century western man are much more subtle, however. A father can become so devoted to his family that his sole purpose in life is to give them every possible pleasure and comfort and benefit. On the other hand, a person can become so engrossed with his job or profession that he neglects his responsibility to both God and his family. Many people make science their god when they count it as the supreme authority in the area of truth and knowledge. Anthony Standen has analyzed this false religion in his book, *Science Is a Sacred Cow*.

### ***The Occult***

More and more people seem to be turning to occult practices, and those who do are surrendering themselves to false gods. Witchcraft and the "black arts" in general rely upon the power of Satan and are a deliberate renunciation of the true God. Satanism likewise honors the devil as god. Anton LaVey, founder of the Church of Satan of San Francisco, wrote *The Satanic Bible*, in which he pictures Satan as saying, "I am the Lord, your God" (p. 180). (Mr. LaVey himself does not believe there is a real devil; for him "Satan" is merely a personification of what he feels is man's true nature.)

Astrology also exalts a false and alien power above the power of God and is therefore a violation of the first Commandment. The horoscope is a substitute for God and His Word. As one writer has truly observed, astrology is idolatry.

### ***Drug Addiction***

The person who has become addicted to a drug has made that drug his god. He has one great desire: to acquire that drug. The drug is supreme. Research indicates that even marijuana creates a psychological addiction that takes control of the user. Every cigarette smoker who has tried to break the habit, whether he has been successful or not, will testify to the addicting power of tobacco. Every alcoholic will confirm the same for alcoholic beverages.

In other words, whenever a person becomes addicted, whether physically or psychologically, to one of these drugs, it becomes a false deity. The first of the Ten Commandments tells us to avoid this.

### ***Mammon***

In Matthew 6:24 Jesus singles out mammon as a chief rival for God's throne. *Mammon* is a term that means money or riches. In the latter part of Matthew 6 Jesus condemns those whose main concern in life is to acquire money, or more specifically, the things that money can buy. They serve a false god.

### ***The Self***

Perhaps the most sinister of all the false gods is the self. A man is guilty of self-worship when he lets the course of his life be determined by his own desires and preferences, when he sets himself up as the final authority for what is right and wrong, true and false. Modern man calls this *freedom* and demands it: the Bible calls it *idolatry* and condemns it. Philippians 3:19 speaks against those "whose god is their belly," namely, those for whom personal pleasure or happiness is the highest goal.

### ***III. The One True God***

The God that we worship must be the true and living God, the God revealed to us in the Bible. Our God rightfully demands exclusive devotion. All His rivals are truly "nothings," or false gods devoid of inherent power and authority and being. (Psalm 96:5 says that "all the gods of the nations are idols," a word that means "nothings.")

#### ***No Other Gods***

God says we must have no other gods "before" Him. A better translation of this last phrase is "besides" Him: we must have no other gods besides Him or in addition to Him. Jesus repeats this timeless requirement in Matthew 4:10, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." The first and greatest commandment likewise guards the absolute and exclusive lordship of God: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matthew 22:37). When Jesus says God is to be loved with *all* the heart and soul and mind, this leaves room for not a single iota of devotion towards another god.

Jesus also says, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). Here again He is saying that we must make God the supreme authority in our lives.

#### ***A Rightful Claim***

When God first made this demand of Israel following the exodus from Egypt, He reminded them of who He is and what He had done: "I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:2). He had just demonstrated to the world His absolute and exclusive lordship by marvelously delivering His people from slavery.

The ten plagues that preceded the exodus were calculated to show that God is supreme and that the Egyptian deities were indeed "nothings." Each plague was directed against an area or object that was considered sacred by the Egyptians, such as the Nile River, cattle, the sun, and Pharaoh himself.

It was the Lord God who unmasked these false gods! It was the Lord God who opened the Red Sea for Israel's escape! It was the Lord God who brought them out of the land of Egypt! No wonder He can rightfully demand, "Thou shalt have no other gods besides me."

#### ***Surrender to Christ***

The God who spoke to Israel following the exodus is the same God who has revealed himself more fully in the New Testament age as God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit (see Matthew 28:19 and 2 Corinthians 13:14). In view of this New Testament revelation we cannot obey the first of the Ten Commandments unless our worship is consciously directed to "God in three persons."

More specifically the first Commandment, when applied in the New Testament age, lays down the absolute requirement for being a Christian. We cannot ignore the claims of Jesus Christ

and be fully submitted to the true God at the same time. Jesus said, "He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father which hath sent him" (John 5:23). Paul says that "every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:11). How can one hope to glorify God if he refuses to accept Jesus as his Lord?

There are many people who say, "I don't need to be a Christian. I keep the Ten Commandments, and that's all God expects of me." But the point is that a person cannot keep even the first of the Ten Commandments unless he is in fact a Christian. (Of course, we accept Christ as Savior and Lord not just because we are required to do so, but more vitally because we *need* to do so. No one keeps all of God's commandments. All have sinned [Romans 3:23], and we receive forgiveness of sins only through Jesus.)

### ***The Authority of Scripture***

The first of the Ten Commandments truly establishes the Lord God of the Bible, God in three persons, as the ultimate authority for our lives. Consequently this means that the Bible must be for us the absolute and final authority in all matters of which it speaks, for the Bible is the word and the will of the God revealed therein.

There can be no reservations in our surrender to the authority of the Bible. One cannot say, "I will obey it only up to a point," and still be fully submitted to the God whose Word it is. The point at which one begins to resist the authority of Scripture is the point at which he yields to another god.

### ***You Must Choose***

The first Commandment forces a decision upon every person. This inescapable decision is well put by Joshua: "Choose you this day whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15). What will be the ultimate authority in your life? Who will be supreme, who will reign as lord in your heart? May we prayerfully echo the words of Joshua: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15).