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## THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

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**You shall have no other gods.**

*What does this mean?*

We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.



You shall have no other gods.

What this means: You shall have Me alone as your God. What is the meaning of this, and how is it to be understood? What does it mean to have a god? Or, what is God? Answer: A god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress. So, to have a God is nothing other than trusting and believing Him with the heart. I have often said that the confidence and faith of the heart alone make both God and an idol. If your faith and trust is right, then your god is also true. On the other hand, if your trust is false and wrong, then you do not have the true God. For these two belong together, faith and God [Hebrews 11:6]. Now, I say that whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in is truly your god.

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*What does it mean to have a god? Answer: A god means that from which we are to expect all good and in which we are to take refuge in all distress.*

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The purpose of this commandment is to require true faith and trust of the heart, which settles upon the only true God and clings to Him alone. It is like saying, "See to it that you let Me alone be your God, and never seek another." In other words, "Whatever you lack of good things, expect it from Me. Look to Me for it. And whenever you suffer misfortune and distress, crawl and cling to Me. I, yes, I, will give you enough and help you out of every need. Only do not let your heart cleave to or rest on any other...

So you can easily understand what and how much this commandment requires. A person's entire heart and all his confidence

must be placed in God alone and in no one else. For to “have” God, you can easily see, is not to take hold of Him with our hands or to put Him in a bag like money or to lock Him in a chest like silver vessels. Instead, to “have” Him means that the heart takes hold of Him and clings to Him. To cling to Him with the heart is nothing else than to trust in Him entirely. For this reason God wishes to turn us away from everything else that exists outside of Him and to draw us to Himself [John 6:44]. For He is the only eternal good [Matthew 19:17]. It is as though He would say, “Whatever you have previously sought from the saints, or for whatever things you have trusted in money or anything else, expect it all from Me. Think of Me as the one who will help you and pour out upon you richly all good things.”

Let the following point be made to the simple; then they may well note and remember the meaning of this commandment: We are to trust in God alone and look to Him and expect from Him nothing but good, as from one who gives us body, life, food, drink, nourishment, health, protection, peace, and all necessities of both temporal and eternal things. He also preserves us from misfortune. And if any evil befall us, He delivers and rescues us. So it is God alone from whom we receive all good and by whom we are delivered from all evil. So I think, we Germans from ancient times name *God* from the word *Good*. It is as though He were an eternal fountain that gushes forth abundantly nothing but what is good. And from that fountain flows forth all that is and is called good...

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Let everyone, then see to it that he values this commandment great and high above all things. Do not regard it as a joke! Ask and examine your heart diligently [2 Corinthians 13:5], and you will find out whether it clings to God alone or not. If you have a heart that can expect of Him nothing but what is good—especially in need and distress—and a heart that also renounces and forsakes everything that is not God, then you have the only true God. If, on the contrary, your heart clings to anything else from which it expects more good and help than from God, and if your heart does not take refuge in Him but flees from Him when in trouble, then you have an idol, another god.

*Large Catechism, I:1-4, 13-15, 24-25, 28*

## *Questions for the Week*

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1. What does it mean to “have a god”?
2. In the context of this commandment, what does it mean to “fear”?
3. What does it mean to “love”? How do we demonstrate love to God?
4. What does it mean to “trust”? How does worry demonstrate a lack of trust?
5. Idolatry is the worship of a false god. “Open idolatry” happens when people openly worship someone or something other than the triune God. Give examples of people who practice open idolatry today, and, if possible, explain what those people confess.
6. “Secret idolatry” takes place in a person’s heart—when a person secretly gives someone or something, rather than God, first place in his heart. Give examples of things that might lead a person to commit secret idolatry?

7. At times people may think that it's allowable to love something in this world as much as they love God. Jesus said: "*No one can serve two masters*" (Matthew 6:24). Apply his words to your money, the members of your family, your job, your possessions.
  
8. *Agree or disagree:* If we could keep the First Commandment, we would be sinless.
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
9. Luther calls work-righteousness (also called self-righteousness) the "height of idolatry." Explain Luther's words.

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*Family Prayer*

Lord God, give us the strength to avoid every form of idolatry. Lead us to worship you alone, to love what you command, to trust in your promises, and, with our whole hearts and entire lives, to give you glory. Amen.

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