**WHO'S NUMBER ONE**

Exodus 20:3

A dad was trying to have devotions with his two little girls. He decided to teach them one of the Ten Commandments each week. Night after night he would go over the Exodus story with the girls, and try to teach them the what he called “God’s Rules.” After a few weeks he thought he'd test how well they were learning the lessons.

The five year old did all right, and the father was feeling pretty confident about his teaching until his three year old took her turn.

“Mogan” he said, “what rules do you remember?”

Morgan thought about it long and hard, then said, “Don't chew on tings. “

“Okay,” he said, “That's a pretty good rule, but can you remember any of God's Rules.”

She pondered the question again, and replied, “Don't wite on de walls.”

Humbled but not defeated, the father put his teacher's ego on the line once more and said, “Those are both good rules, honey, but can you think of any of God's rules, the ones we've been talking about?”

Morgan scrunched up her face deep in thought. Suddenly, a light came on! Hello! Contact. She pulled herself up to her full thirty-six inches of stature and announced proudly, “Put your gum in de twash!”

Since then, the father has made some progress with his little girl, and now when asked, the first one she always names is “No udder gods.”

Though there are many things in life little Morgan has yet to learn, and though she is brand new to the world of morals and ethics, she has grasped the most fundamental truth anyone could ever understand, that absolutely nothing in our lives is to take priority over God. We are to have “No udder gods,” as Morgan puts it. The first commandment is that our Creator demands first place. He alone deserves it. He will accept no other position. Exodus 20:2-3 declare:

“*I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me*.”

As God said through the prophet Isaiah, “*I am the Lord, that is my name. I will not give my glory to another*.”

Why does God insist on being number one in your life? Why does God begin his series of the most basic rules of a free and civilized society with this principle of having no other gods before Him? Let me unpack this for you.

**I. We Will Have Gods**

The first thing we must understand is that we will have gods. We will have gods. Notice the first command doesn't say, “You must believe in God.” The wording of the commandment assumes that we already believe in some god. It's not a question of whether you believe in something or not, but it is a question of what god you believe in. The fact is that every single human being has a god or gods. Every person, by nature, must place their trust and allegiance in something outside of themselves. We were created with this dependency. We have this void and we will fill it with something.

Roddy Bullock points out that everyone believes in something unbelievable. Both Christians and atheists. Whether you believe in creation or abiogenesis. Is it not more incredible to believe that the universe sprang into existence all by itself from nothing than it is to believe an eternal God created it?

We all believe in something that provides some sort of guiding principle for our life. No one lives their life as though life doesn’t matter. Everyone believes their words and their action have some sort of meaning or purpose. If there is truly no god, then nothing you say or do will make the slightest difference to anyone on any level ever. If there is no god, no ultimate source of right and wrong, of there is no sense of oughtness to this universe, then there is not functional equivalent to eating a chocolate bar or going on a killing spree. After all, we are just one random group of molecules interacting with other random group of molecules without meaning or purpose.

But if you believe love means something, that kindness matters, that splendid sunsets should be enjoyed, that good coffee should be savored, that life should be treasured, that colors arranged just so on a canvas or that three chords played in a certain order can move you, then why? What gives those things meaning? Why does any of it matter at all?

Theologian G. Campbell Morgan says this:

*It is as impossible for a man to live without having an object of worship as it is for a bird to fly if it is taken out of the air. The very composition of human life, the mystery of man's being, demands a center of worship as a necessity of existence. All of life is worship... The question is whether the life and powers of man are devoted to the worship of the true God or to that of a false one.*

If you’re thinking, “Of course, he thinks that. He’s a Christian.” How about this quote from musician Frank Zappa, “Everybody believes in something, and everybody, by virtue of the fact that they believe in something, uses that something to support their own existence.”

This worship may or may not be religious. It doesn't matter. Each life will have something around which everything else revolves. Thus, even atheists worship a god. They may not engage in religious rituals, but they worship a god, whether be self, human progress, education, politics, or pleasure. Your god is whatever has first place in your life. Every heart has a throne, that's a given. Who or what is on your throne? That's the million dollar question. God is saying, “Only I, and no one else, should be on that throne” Why should it only be God on that throne? This brings us to our second point.

**II. Your God Determines the Direction of Your Life**

Your God determines the direction of your life. The truth is we will have a god, and the course our entire lives is determined by that god. Everything in our lives flows from whatever is on the throne of our hearts. Our decisions, our goals, our desires, our motives flow from whatever has first place in our hearts.

Character begins with belief. We've been trying real hard the last few decades to deny this reality. We’ve been living with the illusion that we can have good morals and ethics without God. The problem is that when we erase God from the picture, we will put a false god on the throne, often without even realizing that we have done so. Whatever that false god may be, will then determine our ethics and morality.

Consider lying. If our God is self, then lying will often be justified, because it protects self. But if our god is the true God, the absolute Supreme Being, Creator of all things, and He says I want you to be a person of truth and integrity, then we have a motivation for truth and honesty. If our god is material possessions, then we will covet, because coveting our neighbors things will feed that god. If our hearts are ruled by greed, then we will not object to stealing, because by it greed is, if only for a moment, satisfied. If sexual pleasure is number one in our lives. then obviously we will lust after our neighbor's wives and commit adultery, to please that god.

You see there is no way that we can separate our morality from our worship. This is why God included both our duty to God and our duty to others in the same set of commandments. This is also why our duty to Him comes first. We don't choose our God based upon our morals. We don't say to ourselves, “I'm going to live my life in such and such a way, I'm going to go out and find a god that fits with these convictions.” Rather, we determine our moral convictions by whatever our god is. So, you can begin to see why God begins with, “*You shall have no other gods before me*.”

Contrary to popular belief, any workable moral code will have to begin at this point, or it will be worthless. Several years ago a group of college professors gave their students copies of the Ten Commandments and asked them to arrange them in order of importance. Ninety percent of the students reversed the order, putting the principles concerning human relations first, and putting the commands about how we are to relate to God last. This is reflective of our culture's belief that what's really important in character is how we treat others. Our faith is only an ethical side dish. But this is a lie. Our faith is the most central component of who we are.

We cannot leave God out of the moral picture. If we do, everything will begin to fall apart. Satan loves to convince us that we are the moral centers, and too often he succeeds. Consider for a moment how we often teach sexual morality to our young people. We have tried to convince our youth to remain sexually pure for marriage. This certainly is a part of God's plan, but look at the reasons we give 1.) You might get a bad reputation, 2.) You might get a disease, and 3.) You might cause a pregnancy.

However, since our world has a different god sitting on the throne, they have tried to completely throw those things out of the window. No longer does sexual promiscuity bring a bad reputation. It is accepted thing. You are not normal if you don't. We now have all sorts of varieties of contraception to prevent pregnancy, and if that doesn't work you can always have an abortion. We have amazing drugs that treat many of the common STIs. When you leave God out of the picture, solid morals cannot take hold. The highest motive for sexual purity is that there is a holy and righteous God who calls us to purity.

Imagine all of the commandments as a stone archway. The first commandment is the top of the arch. It is the stone that keeps all of the others in place. The other stones all descend and find stability from it. This is why God's moral code begins here. Out of all the competitors for the love of our hearts, God must insist on being number one. He alone must be on the throne.

**III. Thrones Are Made For Only One**

Thirdly is this. Thrones are made for only one. If you have ever toured an ancient castle in Europe one of the highlights of the tour is the throne room. Thrones come in all shapes, sizes, and style. Some are quite extravagant, laced in jewels, covered in gold, and sprawling with intricate designs. Others are much simpler shaped out of wood or stone, but there is one thing that is common to all. Thrones are all made for one occupant. There is no such thing as a throne “pew.”

The same is true of the throne of our hearts. It is designed for only one. The one for whom it is designed for the Lord God Himself. Mankind for centuries has been placing many other things on that throne, but they don't fit. It is shaped for Jehovah alone Everything else is like trying to put a square peg into a round hole. One thing we must remember about all of these commandments is that God has made them for our benefit. In these rules God is providing for and protecting us.

In prohibiting all other God's to us, He offering us the greatest gift of all, Himself. When we read “*You shall have no other gods*” there is an implied, “You shall have me! I will be your God. I will have an intimate relationship with you. I will love you. I will receive your love. I will look out for you. I will care for you.”

This is a tremendous grace. God forbids other gods to us, because he is offering Himself. It is like a king who went out into the streets and sought out all the beggars. He reaches his hand down to them, lifts up their chin, looks into their eyes, and says, “No longer do I want you to eat from the crumbs that fall into the gutters of the street. Come. Feast from my banquet table. Satisfy yourself on the finest meats, the most exquisite pastries, the choicest wine. The best that I have is yours to enjoy.” It is no loss to give up crumbs for a feast.

Before God ever gives this first command, he introduces himself, “***I*** *am the Lord your God*.” “I” not “it.” God is a personal being. He is alive. He is not an impersonal force, an inanimate principle, on an inert idea. As a personal being God can care. He can love and be loved.

“*I* ***AM THE LORD*** *your God*.” The word “LORD” here in Hebrew is *Yahweh*, the personal name God that he has revealed himself. This is the name God revealed to Moses in the burning bush. It means “I am.” He is the God who always is. Wherever and whenever we are He is! God is never outdated or out of touch. He is a contemporary God. He was of the Hebrews in the 13th Century BC. He is the God of the 21st century and beyond. I am is still I am. He will never be He Was.

“*I am the Lord* ***YOUR*** *God*.” The word “your” in the Hebrew is in the singular. He is our God intimately and personally. He is our God face to face and heart to heart. He knows us individually. He cares for us individually, and He wants us to love Him individually. We must approach God in an personal relationship. It means nothing to say that He was the national God of Israel, or that America was founded on Christian principles, or that that you were raised in a Christian family, or that your spouse is a follower of Jesus: He wants to be **YOUR** God.

“*I am the Lord your* ***GOD***.” This final word is the title Jews used to identify God in his supreme power. He is Ruler. He is the one with absolute authority. He deserves our worship and devotion. He is worthy of our service. We rightfully belong to Him and owe all to Him God is not asking anything that isn't rightfully His He is our creator, our designer, our protector, our helper. He is no impostor or wannabe. He is God!

**IV. The Competitors for our Heart**

Though there is only one true God who deserves to sit on the throne of our hearts, there are many would be kings who would be more than happy to sit on the throne. No. we don't have idols carved out of wood, metal, and stone today, but we do have our cars fabricated out of aluminum and steel. We have our houses built out brick and board, and they can certainly sit in the same spot any idol ever held.

I don't know of anyone who worships Mars, the god of war, but there are those who place their highest trust in the military might of the United States. Their god is America's ability to outgun every other military force in the world.

You can drive all over town and never find a temple for Aphrodite, the sex goddess, but there are many who worship sex and the pursuit of the latest sensual thrill. Our coins which say, “In God we trust” should more honestly say, “In this god we trust.”

The truth is that there are many competitors for our hearts. Our gods range from family to career, cars to houses, golf to football. We even have false gods in the church. Some worship a particular speaker or author. Some worship a particular style of worship or order of service. How do we keep God number one in our lives? How do we know for sure if we have given Him first place? We can find help from the Acronym F-I-R-S-T.

**Focus** F is for focus. Where is the focus of your life? Most people don't start out by denying God's existence, they just slowly lose sight of him over time. It's easy to lose our focus.

It's like the lady who was leaving church one Sunday and saw her friend. She asked the friend, “Did you notice that hat Myrtle was wearing?”

“No, I didn't notice,” her friend replied

“Well,” the first woman tried again, “what about the coat that Hazel had on?”

“Sorry, I didn't notice that either.”

“Well,” the first woman harrumphed, “a lot of good it does you to go to church.”

But having the focus involves much more than what we think about while we are at church. What occupies our thoughts at other times during the week? Do you realize who you are today is a product of your thinking yesterday. As we think, so we become. This, right up here, between your ears, is the greatest spiritual battlefield.

Where and how we focus our mind is of utmost importance. Paul writes in Php. 4:8,

*Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is anything excellence or anything worthy of praise, let you mind dwell on these things*.

**Income**. I is Income. One of the best ways to measure your character is to see how you measure your money. Your bank account and credit card statements are probably the greatest indicator of what is truly on the throne of your heart. Your money finds its way to whatever is most important to you. Jesus made this very point in the Sermon on the Mount, “*Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. You cannot serve both God and Money*.”

**Relationships** R is for Relationships. How we love others says a lot about how we love god. 1 John 4:7-8 says, “*Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love*.”

Our relationships can reveal what’s on the throne of our hearts. You can tell much about a person by the company they keep. If God is in first place in our lives, all of our relationships will fall into one of two categories 1) the people we choose to be around because they will bring us closer to God, or 2) the people we choose to be around because we can bring them closer to God. If your life is filled with relationships that pull you further from God, there is something not right in your heart. It’s a warning sign. There is another God sitting on the throne.

**Security** S is for security**.** What is your source of security?Where do you go when you need help? What do you lean on for support? Where do you turn first? Remember Linus in Peanuts. He had is security blanket. It was always with him. Linus was probably the smartest of the peanuts gang, but he still had to hang on to his security blanket.

We all have our security blankets. Your security blanket might be burying yourself in your work. You run from home, you run from relationships, you run from God and just become all-consumed with work. Your security blanket might be shopping. When the anxiety level in your life gets cranked up to eleven, you whip out the credit card and head to the store for a little retail therapy. Your security blanket might be food. It might be drink. It might be a hobby.

When it comes to security, too often we go to God as a last resort.

We are like the man lying in the hospital bed as the doctor comes in to give him the test results, “I'm afraid all we can do now is pray,” the Doctor said.

“Oh dear,” responded the patient, “has it come to that?

When God is our first priority rather than our last resort, we will be able to follow the words of 1 Pt. 5:7, “*Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you*.”

**Time**. The T in First is for Time. Perhaps as revealing as our bank account is our calendars. What do we make time for and what do we schedule out? If it’s important to us, we will find time for it. We can make it to work every day on time. We can make to all of our practices, games, and activities.

But church only makes it on the schedule when nothing else’s planned. When I was growing up my parents laid down a rule. I could be involved in whatever sports and school activities I wanted so long as they did not interfere with church activities. If they did, it was the school thing that had to lose. Folks, let me be bluntly honest with you. Far too many Christian families are giving first place to school sports and activities, and church comes only when convenient. And our education system right now is more than willing to set itself up as a god and monopolize our time and energy, let us not cooperate by bowing in worship to it.

But time for God is more than one or two days a week. We must give Him time every day. Suppose I said to Teresa one night, “Honey, I want you to know that I am going to be absolutely, totally faithful to you one day every week. No, I mean it; that day is yours. I promise. I will not be with any other women on that day.” Do you think that she'd be pleased with that arrangement? How about God? Does He have first place in your life? Is he number one, or have you put other gods before him? He alone is worthy.