

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

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Worship This Week Aug. 31, 2025

SCRIPTURE INTRO – When we read the 10 Commandments, we see the face of God. When we study the 10 Commandments, we get to know the person of God the Father. When we know God personally, then we can live in faith. We will be spending the better part of the next three months hearing what God has to say to us about each of the 10 – each will get its own message. Today, we begin with the first commandment, followed by verses which support this commandment.

SCRIPTURES –

“I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. 3 “You must not have any other god but me” (Exodus 20:2-3).

“Listen, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. 5 And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. 6 And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. 7 Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. 8 Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. 9 Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:4-9).

“Their gods are like helpless scarecrows in a cucumber field! They cannot speak, and they need to be carried because they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of such gods, for they can neither harm you nor do you any good” (Jeremiah 10:5).

MESSAGE – When this first commandment was handed down from God to Moses, they took it literally; it was understood as referring to specific manmade gods. Contrary to popular belief Israel acknowledged and even worshipped other gods, even though Yahweh was prime. What's new about the 10 commandments is that God said “enough!”

Scripture refers to many of these fake gods. Although Israel was commanded in Deuteronomy 12:3 to “completely erase the names” of the false gods, those names still appeared in scripture – but not as objects of worship, rather for awareness. (Satan's biggest lie is that he doesn't exist. On the contrary, we need to be aware of him and alert.)

For the record, here are the name of the false gods mentioned in the Bible: Adrammelech, Artemis/Diana, Ashima, Asherah, Astarte/Ashtoreth, Baal, Beelzebub, Bel, Castor & Pollux, Chemosh, Dagon, Tammuz, Milcom, Nebo/Nabu, Bel, Hermes/Mercury, Kaiwan, Marduk, Molech/Moloch, Nergal, Queen of Heaven/Ishtar, Rephan, Rimmon, Sakkuth, Zeus/Jupiter.

The world was more superstitious 3,500 years ago. It was a pre-technological and pre-scientific era. Rather than understand the physical reasons behind natural phenomena, they came up with emotions. Thunder, for example. We understand it as an explosion when a bolt of lightning heats the air to extreme temperatures causing it to expand. Ancient cultures explained it as noise from angry gods or Zeus throwing lightning bolts.

It's one thing to use mythical gods to explain natural phenomena and quite another to worship them. God knew that it would take many centuries for the human race to develop scientific understanding. But it was futile to rely on those gods for help and guidance. "Their gods are like helpless scarecrows in a cucumber field! They cannot speak, and they need to be carried because they cannot walk. Do not be afraid of such gods, for they can neither harm you nor do you any good" (Jeremiah 10:5). They are more than just a waste of time. Because they exist only in the imagination, which is innately sinful and open to temptation from Satan, they can be dangerous. One example is Molech, whose worship included child sacrifice. Hence, the God of Israel commanded the people to get rid of them and show no mercy. "Break down their altars and smash their sacred pillars. Burn their Asherah poles and cut down their carved idols. Completely erase the names of their gods!" (Deut 12:3)

Because the human race is under the spell of Satan – always has been – we operate more by our gut and our desires than by faith. God knew this when He stated the first commandment with such clarity. Like a teacher on the first day of school, He had to establish His authority or else there would be anarchy. Given our rebellious nature and short memories, the teacher rarely has 100 per cent control and obedience. Same with God. As we will see later in Exodus, it took less than 40 days for Israel to forget about Moses and create a golden calf to worship.

The story of God and humankind is a back and forth battle between faith in God and Satan. The prophets described it as prostitution – people sold themselves to false promises. ("Israel did not listen to the judges but prostituted themselves by

worshiping other gods” (Judges 2:17). It’s also described as adultery. “Look at the shrines on every hilltop. Is there any place you have not been defiled by your adultery with other gods? You sit like a prostitute beside the road waiting for a customer. You sit alone like a nomad in the desert. You have polluted the land with your prostitution and your wickedness” – Jeremiah 3:2).

We live in a much different era. We don’t rely on mythical gods to explain the natural world. Rather, we have secular gods. We sell ourselves out to them. They can be defined as any system or philosophy which attempts to describe and understand/make sense of the world in which we live (humanism, atheism, agnosticism, pluralism, scientism or hedonism) OR anything which provides fulfillment or makes us feel good (pursuit of wealth, power, pleasure, status, the self, politics, work, relationships and family). Take family for example. This is among the top false idols today. Parents spend a lot of time and money on sports, games, toys and activities in the belief that this will help their children grow up to be well rounded, strong, healthy, responsible and ultimately successful in life. There is nothing wrong with that. However, the idea of a perfect family can become a false idol, as it places an unattainable standard. It becomes unhealthy and sinful if God is absent, if little or no effort is made to introduce children to the Son of God and bring them up in a home which prays, reads the Bible and is an active part of a church community. See Deuteronomy 6 – know the commands and repeat them over and over again to your children.” There are more people at the arena on Sunday morning than there are in church. That’s just one of many examples.

Fashion and beauty is a big one. Again, nothing new. Think back to high school. Some folks never grow out of maintaining a certain image in life and the betrayals and compromising that go with it. It’s good to set high standards and take care of oneself – it crosses the line when that’s the source of your self esteem and what makes you feel good. Here’s a touchy one: church folk who believe in a god who aligns with their own desires and morality rather than God’s true nature. They pick what to believe in the Bible and disregard or reinterpret what we don’t like. It’s a worship of self, not God.

False idols are anything which we elevate to a place of ultimate importance, providing a sense of fulfillment or purpose that ideally should only come from a relationship with God. The sobering reality is that all of us, to some degree, worship other gods. All of us follow some sort of system or philosophy which attempts to dictate what we shall believe and how we shall live. Even those who

profess Christ – who have a disciplined prayer life, who read scripture and have a hunger and thirst to understand God of the Old and New testaments and to live a life in submission to Him – even those people possess some additional guiding philosophy or something which provides fulfillment and purpose. Allow me to get personal and point to a few of mine. I’m a bit of a slave to fashion and have too many clothes in my wardrobe. I like to rack up credentials, things that look good on a resume: at last count, I have two degrees, two certificates and I’m close to finishing a third degree and professional designation. In the Kingdom, none of that means a thing – it’s all human achievement. But I get a kick out of it, which is idolatry.

Make attempts to erase the false gods, philosophies and vices – but realize that you are only one sinful person and cannot completely achieve this in a fallen world. No sense beating ourselves up for the simple reason that we cannot escape it. All we can do is recognize it and accept that it has the power to corrupt our true faith. And manage it – don’t allow it to take over your life. Deliberately go out of your way to place God in the driver’s seat. Thank those philosophies and vices for what they are trying to do. Do not condemn them, for they are only trying to help. Do not attempt to completely remove them, otherwise you will drive yourself mad. Again, control. Jesus, who understood human nature because he once resided within a human body, understands our struggle to put Him and his Father and the Holy Spirit first and foremost. Ask Him and He will assist.

We are wise to take the high road. The really good news is that the people in life who are the wisest and most at peace with themselves and the world are those who take that first commandment to heart. I mean really seriously believe in it. They truly place God at the top of the heap; He has the greatest importance. They take their faith life seriously. They care about learning, but don’t get hung up on letters after the name. They are mindful of how they present and take care of themselves, not to show off but to take care of the earthly vessel which God gave them. They care about family and fun. However, rarely are Sunday morning in church, midweek Bible study or personal prayer times sacrificed if something “better” comes along. Practising the first commandment is not easy. We will never perfect it. All God asks is that we take it seriously. Amen.