

It had been a while since I'd last seen them—a month maybe. But here they were, just back from their travels to India. Without even opening their mouths, I could tell they were excited to tell me all about it. And tell me they did—all about the people, the food, the culture—their eyes were big and their hands were animated. Suddenly though, they got pretty serious. I guess the poverty they encountered everyday really made an impression—beggars came up to them everywhere they went. But what *really* got them was the idolatry.

They had visited these temples throughout their travels, dedicated to different Hindu gods. What surprised them so much was it was the kinda thing you hear about in the Old Testament, but wouldn't believe still exists in the world today. Yet, sure enough, there'd be this giant statue with a big monkey head. And it was all decorated with flowers and other ornamentation. But what was most shocking to these travelers, was how many of these people, who were already so poor, would sacrifice what little they had to these statutes. They'd set before them prepared dishes, or grains, or other gifts. It was obvious that these poor people hoped their offerings would win the idol's favor so they would help them in return.

This morning, when we hear the First Commandment, "You shall have no other gods," is that the sorta stuff that pops into your head? If it is, I understand—that's the first thing I think of too. And that's good, because it is what God's warning us against. That being said, it's easy to think we're doing a pretty good job of keeping the First Commandment. But Luther, well, he won't let us off so easy. He says, "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." And with that definition, we must admit, idolatry is much broader and, well, more incriminating.

So, what do *you* fear, love, and trust in above all things? Sure, we say, Why, God, of course! I mean, here we are today, right? But, as God's been known to say, "These people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." Yeah, we might be *here*, but are our hearts somewhere far away?

Think of it this way—when you leave this place, you're going to refocus on whatever it is you think is most important in life. Looking at your search history on your internet, what would you find is the #1 thing you're always looking up? How about in your free time; if you could, what would you spend most of your time doing? Or no matter where you are, no matter what you're doing, what is it that your mind keeps drifting back to, what can't you just get out of your head? *That* is your idol.

Many of us are obsessed with money—how to get it, how to manage it, how to spend it. Without money, after all, what do you have; but *with* money, there's nothing you can't have. And then just think of everything else that comes along with the almighty dollar. It's no wonder so many of us struggle with this one.

Others of us are obsessed with our looks—we want look beautiful, we want to be beautiful, we want to *feel* beautiful. We love the thought of all eyes being on us, proverbially stopping traffic. And this is a no brainer either, when you think of what that kind of attention gets you. It's not just women in LA getting Botox injections, many of us wrestle with this one too.

And then there's one obsession most of us Americans deal with—athletics. It can be football, basketball, baseball—even mountain unicycling or underwater hockey—but for a lot of us, these sports shape our lives. For example, I know a family that almost never sits down to dinner because every night the kids are getting shuttled in all different directions to whatever sports practice, and it's hurting their bond. I know people who have actually gotten into physical fights because they're fans of rival teams. I know people who plan their calendars—even *when* they go to church—around season schedules. I know people who get upset when their kids forget to turn out the lights when they leave the room, but have no problem dropping hundreds of dollars just to watch a three-hour game. I know people who get so moody when their team loses that they can barely function the next day, even having to take off work. Do you know how sports are running your life?

The list of idols, of course, goes on and on. You can fear, love, and trust in *anything* above all things. But don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that money in and of itself is bad, or that not wanting to look like a rat's nest is something to be ashamed of, or even enjoying sports for leisure is a no-no—that's not what I'm saying. All I am saying is that when these things become your life—what you eat, sleep, and breathe—then there's a problem.

You see, idols are cruel, demanding gods, which make you sacrifice *everything* to them. For example, when it comes to money, you will never have enough—no matter how much money you have, as long as there's more to get, you will always feel poor. When it comes to beauty, you will always be comparing yourself to others—seeing through the lenses of your impossible standards. You'll look down on anyone who you don't think meets those standards, and you'll loathe absolutely everybody who ever does because they make *you* feel ugly. And with sports, well, every team has a bad season—get over it! It really is just a *game*! The point is, we willingly offer up our whole lives—what we have and who we are—to these idols. And the more we give and give and give, the emptier we feel.

So what is it we're really after, anyway? Don't be fooled by thinking that money, or beauty, or sports, or you fill-in-the-blank is what we really want. We might have different idols, but if we dissected our every action we would come to find one common underlying motivation. Deep down at the heart of our behaviors, we find that the reason we do anything at all . . . is for love.

We don't really want money, but the respect and admiration—the *love*—we think it can buy us. It's not so much beauty, but it's the attention and acceptance—the *love*—that we want. And sports, even professional sports, the comradery between fans, feeling like somehow in some strange fantasy you're part of the team—their wins are your wins, their losses are your losses—it's all to feel a connection with others—it's *love*. It's *all* for love. Love is the reason for everything we do. Go home today and test out that theory—you just might be surprised. But, the trouble is, we're looking for love in all the wrong places.

See, inside each of us, is a God-shaped hole. Only God, Himself, can ever fill it. Everything else we try to stuff in there is like a round peg in a square hole. It can never work. None of those other gods have the love we need—they demand *your* love but won't ever give it. But God, our God, *is* love.

He is so much love even, that He condescended to us in Christ Jesus. While any other god would require that we bow down and worship them, to sacrifice everything—even our very lives—to them, Jesus, doesn't act like any god at all. Although He *is* God, He didn't count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied *Himself*, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. In fact, He doesn't even ask anything from us, but being found in human form, He humbled *Himself* by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross—*He's* the one making the sacrifice, even laying down *His own* life!

And I don't know about you, but I think I've found my God—the one and only God—who I ever want to fear, love, and trust in, above all things. Because such a God, actually treats you and me strangely as if *we're* the gods. He's the One who humbles Himself before *us*, puts *us* up on a pedestal. He's the one who sacrifices everything—even *Himself*—for *us*.

Well, that's just unheard of—show me any other god who would ever do that! But that's just the love we've been looking for. A perfect, noble, selfless love. A lavish, extravagant, boundless love. An undeserved, unconditional, unchanging love. Our search is over—you and I, we don't need to look for anything else, anywhere else. No matter how we feel, no matter what comes our way, we have everything we need—we have the love of God.

So, is that maybe why He gives us this First Commandment? We usually hear “You shall have no other gods” as some stern warning from an authoritarian deity, “Make sure you give Me My proper due.” But could it be instead a plea straight from the heart of a concerned, compassionate heavenly Father? It tears Him up to think we'd ever go killing ourselves to win an idol's love, when He knows how empty and sad it'll leave us in the end. He just can't stand to watch us get hurt. So, with love and tenderness, God shows us in this Commandment where we can always find what we need, so we can stop *giving* our all and start *getting* His all.

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First Commandment  
Philippians 2:5-11

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And here's where He gives us His all today. This statue we have up here is not an idol. We don't believe that this is our God nor do we think our God lives in this block of wood. No, this statue is here simply to remind us of the one true God we do have, who is unlike any other god—who instead treats *us* like gods, who sacrifices everything for *us*. In fact, He gives us another offering today—His true body and blood, given and shed for our forgiveness, and life, and salvation, but perhaps most of all, love. Eat your fill and drink deep of His love—a love so perfect it can only be divine. That's our God—a God we can fear, love, and trust in above all things!