

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

Excerpted and adapted from *The Child's True Christian Religion*
by Thomas Hitchcock, 1868

YOU SHALL HAVE NO OTHER GODS BEFORE ME.

The first commandment teaches us that we must not worship images or idols of wood, stone, brass, or anything of the kind. It says, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them" (Exodus 20:4-5). A carved image is something that is cut out with a knife or chisel, or some such tool, and shaped into the likeness of a human being or an animal. At one time, nearly the whole world used to worship such images.

But we can disobey this commandment in other ways than by worshiping physical idols. We can make idols of ourselves by always trying to do what pleases us, instead of what pleases the Lord or what will make others happy.

Someone who is always thinking of himself and how to get everything *he* wants, and is never willing to let anyone else enjoy his things, is really making himself a god and worshiping himself. He thinks that he is the most important person in the world and that everything must give way to him, and this is really setting himself up to be worshiped. So a child who tries to avoid learning his schoolwork, or doing what his parents tell him, is really worshiping himself and not the Lord, for the Lord tells us to honor our fathers and mothers and do as they say.

And, indeed, someone who does what the Lord tells him *not* to do, is really denying that the Lord is God, and making himself a god in His place. Such a person thinks that he knows what he ought to do better than the Lord does, and that he is wiser than the Lord is. For instance, the Lord, says, "You shall not steal." So, when someone steals something because he wants it, he is saying to himself, "I don't care if the Lord has told me not to steal. I don't need to obey Him. I know better what is good for me than He does, and I want this thing, and I will take it." If this person really worshiped the Lord as God, he would say, "The Lord is God, and He tells me not to take what does not belong to me without permission. He knows best, and I will do as He says." So you see that this commandment, by being put first, teaches us that we should obey all the rest *because* the Lord has given them to us and because disobeying them is setting ourselves up above the Lord.

Family Talk

Besides setting up ourselves as gods in place of the Lord and worshiping ourselves instead of Him, we may also disobey this first commandment by thinking of and loving things in this world more than we do the Lord. Having no other God than the Lord means having nothing which we care more for than we do for Him. When you become so interested in your games or toys that you think of nothing else from morning to night, you are making a god of something besides the Lord. Or you may make a god of new clothes, or jewelry by thinking more of them than you do of anything else.

It is fine to play games, and have nice things, and to do well in school. But take time to remember that the Lord is God, and that He made you and everything around you. He keeps you alive and well, so that you can enjoy what you do. We should spend some time each day thinking of the Lord and His goodness and trying to do what we know He wants. When we do this, we are putting Him in the highest place in our minds, where He ought to be, as God over all.

It will help us to remember that the Lord whom we are to worship as God is the Lord Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament He is called Jehovah, which means "He that was, and is, and is to be." Jehovah took upon Himself flesh and blood, by being born on earth. He is called "Jesus", which means "Savior", and "Christ", which means "anointed" or "king". In ancient times, when kings were crowned, oil or ointment was poured upon their heads, and they were then said to be "anointed." Jesus Christ, then, is a name for the Lord which reminds us that He is both our Savior and our King. He is "the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, who is and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty" (Revelation 1:8).

Whenever you read or think of this First Commandment, therefore, think of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Person to be worshiped, prayed to, and loved. Think of Him as your Savior and your King. Think of Him as the One who made you and keeps you alive, and from whom comes everything that can make you happy. Try your hardest to do what you know He wants you to do, for that is the way to show that you really believe in Him and that you love and worship Him as your God.