

Biblical Topics

Ten Commandments - First Commandment

You shall have no others gods

What does this mean?

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

Strictly speaking, there are no “other gods” beside the Triune God. There are many things which people regard and worship as gods. In this commandment God forbids us to have anything or anyone as our god instead of Him or beside Him. Idol worshipers and also Atheists, who refuse Him His honor, sin against this commandment.

- Isaiah 45:5: I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me.
- 1 Corinthians 8:4: ⁴ So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one.

When do men have other gods?

When they regard and worship any creature as God. Idolatry is image worship. Such idols may be nature as a whole, an individual creature (ancient Egyptians worshiped sacred animals, ancient Arabs worshiped the sun) or an image (the Golden Calf of the Israelites - Exodus 32, Dagan of the Philistines - Judges 16:23-2, Baal of the Phoenicians - 1 Kings 18:18-29, the silver shrines of Diana - Acts 19:24).

- Psalm 115:3-4: ³Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him. ⁴But their idols are silver and gold, made by the hands of men.

When they believe in a god who is not the Triune God. This may be an imaginary being such as Allah or the Great Spirit of Native Americans. There are religions that believe in God but leave one of the Divinity out. Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons fall into this category because they do not recognize Jesus as true God.

- John 5:23: that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him.

When they fear, love, or trust in any person or thing when they should fear, love, and trust in God alone. We do this when we love others more than, or as much as God. We do this when we love good living and pleasures of this world more than God (The rich man - Luke 16:19). We do this when we place money and wealth ahead of God (The rich young man - Matthew 19:22). We do this when we trust in our own wisdom or strength (Goliath) more than the Lord. We do this when we love and trust other people more than we do the Lord.

- Matthew 10:28: Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

- Matthew 10:37: Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me;
- Proverbs 3:5: Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;
- Ephesians 5:5: For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.
- Mark 10:24: But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!
- Philippians 3:19: Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things.
- Psalm 14:1: he fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good.

What does God require of us in the First Commandment?

There are two things to know before going into this part of each commandment:

First, one of the best ways to move away from wrong behavior or habits is to do the very opposite actions. Each of the commandments asks the question: What does this mean? Following that question and near the end of the explanation, Luther offers positive behaviors that would aid in doing a better task of following God’s direction in this commandment. Work at practicing these.

Second, right after the question comes the statement, “we should fear and love God.” In the commandments to “fear God” means to “stand in awe of Him,” to revere, respect, esteem, and honor Him. We are NOT to shake in our boots from fright.

We fear God above all things when with our whole heart we revere Him as the highest Being, honor Him with our lives, and avoid what displeases Him.

- Psalm 33:8: Let all the earth fear the LORD; let all the people of the world revere him.
- Genesis 17:1: When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to him and said, “I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless.
- Genesis 39:9: How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?
- Proverbs 8:13: To fear the LORD is to hate evil.
- Daniel 3: Three men in the fiery furnace feared God more than the king.

We love God above all things when with our whole heart we cling to Him as our God and gladly devote our lives to His service.

- Matthew 22:37: Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”
- Psalm 73:25-26: ²⁵Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. ²⁶ My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.

We trust in God above all things when with our whole heart we commit our lives to His keeping and rely upon Him for help in every need. To “trust” is the very opposite of to “doubt.” To “trust in God” means that in our hearts we firmly believe that all He tells us in the Bible is true. It means that we believe that His promises are absolutely dependable. AND, it means that in all our troubles we confidently look to Him for help.

- Psalm 118:8: It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to trust in man.
- Proverbs 3:5: Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding;

The above information is taken from: “Luther’s Small Catechism” annotated by Edward W. A. Koehler.