Putting God First

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Thousands of years ago, God gave us "the Ten Commandments." They are not the ten fads. The first and foremost commandment God gives us is about worship. Exodus 20:3 says, "You shall have no other gods before me." Whenever God says, "do not" in the Bible, it is for a positive purpose. When He says, "Do not have any other gods before me," that is for our benefit.

If we ignore God's warnings, we will be hurt. When we say to a child "Do not touch that hot stove," is that for our benefit or the child's? It is for the benefit of both of us. We say it because we do not want the child to get hurt. That is the way it is with God.

The very first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before me," is for our benefit. I have found that a lot of Christians today do not think the first commandment really applies to them. They think, "Well, "I don't have any wooden idols. I don't bow down to any golden calves or statues at home, so this does not apply to me."

A "god" is anything that has priority over the one true God in your life. It could be a person, food or sex. It could be shopping, a career, a recreation. Even golf and money can be "gods" in our lives.

The principle behind this first commandment can be summed up this way: put God first. God wants us to put Him first in every single area of our lives. As we do that, we are obeying the first commandment.

He deserves to be put first. He created you and me. We exist because God decided that He wanted us to exist. Everything we have in our lives, we have because God has given it to us.

God says, "Put me first in every single area." When we do that, that is the essence of worship. Jesus reiterated this in the New Testament in Matthew 6:33 when He says, "But seek ye first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you."

The Benefits. There are great benefits when we put God first in our lives. Most of you know that the divorce rate in America today shows that one out of two marriages end in divorce. Harvard University did a study recently and found that in marriages that began with a church wedding, the divorce rate went from one out of every two to one out of every 50.

They also found that in marriages that began with a Christian ceremony, and in which the couple attends church every week, reads the Bible and prays on a regular basis, the divorce rate was one out of every 1,105. As you can see, when we put God first, we benefit.

Family. This leads us to the question, "How do I put God first?" Personally, I put God first by giving Him priority in each of the following six areas.

First of all, I put God first in my family. One way I do this is by treating each family member the way God tells me to in His Word. As I do this, I am worshipping God, following His ways, and putting Him first.

Ephesians 5:25 says, "Husbands, love your wives just as Christ also loves the church and gave Himself up for her." The way that I put God first in my family is that I put my wife and her needs before mine. I sacrifice

for her and for the children. It is my job to lead them with humility, kindness and gentleness. How do I do that? I wash the dishes, I clean, I offer to watch the children more often, and so forth. In ways such as these, I am looking out for their best interests. That is worship.

Work. My work is the second area that requires me to put God first. Colossians 3:23 says, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily as for the Lord rather than for men." So when God is first in our lives, we are working for Him.

We are not really working for our bosses, our companies, our managers, or our corporations. We are really working for God. This means that I must honor Him in the way I work.

One of the ways this is "walked out" in daily life is that I don't take advantage of my workplace. I don't take supplies from the offices. I don't pad my expense account. I don't take long breaks and lunches, even though I know I could get away with it. I come to work on time and don't leave early, even though I know my boss wouldn't know. I honor the fine print in a contract. I make only necessary repairs. Why? Because I am working for the Lord rather than for men, I am putting God first in my work, and as I do that, I am worshipping.

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Relationships. If I want God to be first in my life, I also have to choose my friends carefully. We become like the people we spend the most time with. If we spend huge portions of time with the people who take God lightly, then it is easy to become lukewarm as a Christian. It says in I Corinthians 15:33, "*Do not be deceived. Bad company corrupts good morals.*"

Dr. Timothy Woodruff did a study of sexual behavior of freshmen at Christian universities. He found that, "The number one predictor of sexual behavior was the behavior of that person's peers." It says in Proverbs 13:20, "He who walks with wise men, will be wise. But the companion of fools will suffer harm." We need to evaluate with whom we are walking.

I want to challenge singles to put God first in your dating relationships. It says in 2 Corinthians 6:14, "Do not be bound together with an unbeliever. For what partnership has righteousness and lawlessness or what fellowship has light with darkness?"

As a pastor over the years, I have seen many dynamic Christians wooed away from Christ by the person they are dating who has a different value system than they have. Because singles are often so desperately wanting to be married, they end up lowering their standards and their Christian walks suffer. Put God first in your dating relationships.

Schedule. Ephesians 5:15-16 says, "Therefore, be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, making the most of your time because the days are evil." I put God first in the area of time management as the fourth way to worship Him.

Ask God's help to use your time wisely. Obviously, the most important time commitment we can make on a regular basis is an appointment with God. I am talking about having a daily quiet time. Everybody's life is so busy in the 90's. If we do not schedule a daily time with God, it probably won't happen. The main way I can put God first in my schedule is by making sure that I have time with Him every day to pray, to read His Word, and to worship Him.

Finances. God must be first in our finances as well. Proverbs 3:9-10 says, "Honor the Lord from your wealth and from the first of all your produce, so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine."

God says to give Him the first part of our earnings and He will bless the rest. Money is the number one test of our priorities. Our checkbooks reveal what is really important to us. There is a good chance that if I were able to examine your checkbook, I could tell a lot about you just by seeing how you spend your money. The way we spend our money indicates what is first in our lives.

Most of you know that in the Bible, God commands us to tithe. To tithe means to give the first ten percent of our income to God. Have you ever wondered why

God invented tithing? The primary purpose of tithing is to teach us to put God first in our finances.

The truth is, if I am not tithing, God is not first in my finances. If He is not first in my finances, He is not first in my life, Jesus said this in Matthew 6:19-21," Do not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal. But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal, for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

God does not need our money. He wants what our money represents. He wants our hearts.

Troubles. When I have unexpected troubles, problems, or crises, to whom do I turn? God says, "Turn to me first when you have a problem." Psalm 50:15 says, "And call upon me in the day of trouble. I shall rescue you and you will honor me."

I have found that many people turn to God as a last possible hope instead of their first option. They first do everything they can in the natural to fix the problem and when they can't, they say, "Well all we can do now is pray." It is almost like if I have to pray about a situation, then it must be really hopeless!

The reality is that God should be the first option in our lives and not the last resort. God always wants us to turn to Him. Peter tells us in I Peter 5:7, "Cast your cares upon Him because He cares for you."

How Do I Know God is First? As we put God first in these six areas, we are fulfilling the first commandment, and we are worshipping God. Yet, you may ask yourself, "How do I know when God is first in my life?"

The answer to this questions is to notice when He isn't first in your life. Worry is the warning light. If God is not first in any one of these six areas, I notice that I am usually worrying about some aspect of them.

I have found that putting God first in every area of my life is really the antidote to worry. Look back over these six areas in your life, and do a little self-evaluation. Is God really first?



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