

NO OTHER GODS

Adapted from a sermon by the Rev. Kurt Horigan Asplundh

*“You shall have no other gods before Me.
You shall not make for yourself any carved image...
you shall not bow down to them nor serve them” (Exodus 20:4,5).*

The first commandment tells us that we should worship the one true God and have no other Gods before Him. This sounds simple enough. Who would bow before a carved image or worship an idol? The fact is, we all do. The First Commandment is as important for us today as it ever was.

In ancient times the worship of idols was common. The Children of Israel were surrounded by nations worshipping false gods such as Baal. Time and again, they had to be warned not to fall into this practice themselves.

Today, we may wonder how people could be so superstitious. Did they believe that these images of stone, wood, or metal had real power? The prophet Jeremiah said, “Every metalsmith is put to shame by the graven image; for his molded image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them” (10:14). What possible attraction could these lifeless idols have had?

Yet, if the truth be known, our longing for false gods is just as strong. We, too, are willing to forsake the true God to worship images of our own making. We are willing to put our trust in them to achieve our goals of imagined wealth and happiness. These images are not in our house or yard but in our heart and mind. Yet they are just as real as any statue of wood or gold.

The Heavenly Doctrine of the New Church teaches that “Everyone’s god is that which he loves above all things” (*Apocalypse Explained* 935). So, there are as many “gods” as there are human loves. Our god could be a leader or a cause to which we are devoted; it could be a personal passion; or success, power and wealth. When any one of these loves rules our life, it becomes our god. It has more power over us than anything else, including our religious beliefs. We hold it in our mind continually, and it affects everything we do.

This “worship” or obsession leads to anxiety, stress, confusion and unhappiness. This is because we are trusting in ourselves, or in some worldly thing, instead of in the Lord. For the “carved images” that we are not to worship represent ideas made from our own intelligence or other human intelligence instead of from the Lord’s truth.

This does not mean that all human thought is worthless. We have a God-given ability to understand truth and the responsibility to apply our understanding to how we live. But it is foolish to believe that human intelligence is better than Divine intelligence or truth. We should not put ourselves above our Creator. This is the essence of keeping the first commandment.

So let us worship the Lord alone, acknowledging His Divine power and love. For the Lord Jesus Christ is the one God of heaven and earth, and you shall have no other gods before Him!