



"I am the Lord your God,
who brought you out of the
land of Egypt, out of the
house of slavery. You shall
have no other gods before
Me."

Exodus 20:2-3

THE JEALOUS SOLITAIRE



WE LIVE IN A TIME OF SMALL GODS. As man has reconstructed the universe to place himself at the center, he has lowered his deities to a station more comfortable for his own inadequacies. Today people seem to prefer gods who are as flawed as themselves. And the most prominent god of this age is, indeed, self—the most flawed god of all.



It really doesn't matter whether one's god is wealth, possessions, sex, gambling, the latest NBA star, Minister Farrakhan or Mickey Mouse. All objects of worship that are not the Lord are little more than stand-ins for the worship of self.

The worship of self is the fine art of self-destruction. When we become the most important thing in our universe, when we delude ourselves into thinking we alone are important, self-sustaining, self-pleasuring, the tragic implosion of such a life is inevitable. The worship of money feeds our greed; the worship of sex feeds our baser pleasures; the worship of celebrities feeds our desire to emulate their public veneer. All represent the glorification of our lower, selfish desires.

In the Old Testament, *Yahweh* (the LORD) declared to Israel that He was the one and only, that He was a jealous God who would countenance no pretenders. Jesus, in the New Testament, confirms this foundational command.

One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that He had answered them well, asked Him, "What commandment is the foremost of all?" Jesus answered, "The foremost is, 'Hear, O Israel! the Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'"

Mark 12:28-30

From the beginning of God's covenant, He emphasized the well-being of His people centering their adoration on Him rather than on themselves. Only the Lord God is capable of handling such worship. His command is not the result of an ever-expanding ego, but of a well-ordered universe with Himself—not man—at the center.

We are a people designed by God to look beyond and above ourselves for the object of our worship, and the Creator of the universe says that He is that one. When we lower our sights, we lower our expectations and, hence, the results. The commandments by God are issued out of love for His people, for their own good. Our adherence to—or rejection of—His sound counsel changes *Him* not one iota, but can have a dramatic impact on our much smaller lives.

God says, *I am the one who has saved you; based on that, I alone am worthy of your trust and devotion.*



The Christian, like Israel at Sinai, faces the exclusive claim of the first commandment. He puts it to Israel as an issue not of theology but of loyalty; a matter not of the mind simply, but of the heart. Elsewhere in Scripture, notably in the Psalms and Isaiah, we find Him telling His people explicitly that to worship pagan gods is madness, because they are in fact no gods; but He is not making that point here. For the moment He leaves open the question whether other gods have any existence or not. He frames the first commandment not to settle that issue but to settle the question of loyalty. God does not say, "There are no other gods beside me for you to have"; He simply says, "You shall have no other gods but me." And He grounds His claim on the fact that He is their God who brought them out of Egypt. It is as if He said, "By saving you from Pharaoh and his hosts by my mighty hand and stretched-out arm, by signs and wonders, by the Passover and the crossing of the Red Sea, I gave you a sample of what I can do for you, and showed you clearly enough that anywhere, at any time, against any foe, under any privation whatsoever, I can protect you, provide for you, and give you all that makes up true life. You need no god but me; therefore you are not to be betrayed into looking for any god but me; you are to serve me, and me alone." If you are a Christian, you know that you, too, are being claimed in the same way.

J.I. Packer

*Eternal Power, whose high abode
Becomes the grandeur of a God:
Infinite lengths beyond the bounds
Where stars revolve their little rounds:*

*Thee while the first archangel sings,
He hides his face behind his wings:
And ranks of shining thrones around
Fall worshipping, and spread the ground.*

*Lord, what shall earth and ashes do?
We would adore our Maker too;
From sin and dust to Thee we cry,
The Great, the Holy, and the High.*

*Earth, from afar, hath heard Thy fame,
And worms have learn'd to lisp Thy Name;
But Oh! the glories of Thy mind
Leave all our soaring thoughts behind.*

*God is in heaven, and men below:
Be short our tunes; our words be few:
A solemn reverence checks our songs,
And praise sits silent on our tongues.*

Isaac Watts