

The 10 Commandments Explained



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1st Commandment
I am the Lord
your God;
you shall not have
other gods besides me.

Who is God?

God is the one who makes
himself found when I search
for him. When I call him, God
answers. He remains near to
me at all times. My steps are
directed toward you, O Lord.
Teach me how to be truly free.
Take your rightful place, God,
at the center of my life.



The first place



God knows that we can be happy only if we are free. That is why he chose to create us as free persons with the ability to make our own choices. Unfortunately, we often forget that **freedom is God's precious gift** to us, one that we must guard and protect. Our freedom is fragile, just as we are fragile. At times, we put our liberty in danger by looking for happiness in things that don't last.



The Bible describes God as a “jealous” and “passionate” God. That is, God’s “heart” **beats** with love for us, and he wants our hearts to beat for him.

God gives us the first commandment because he loves us and wants us to be free. The first commandment reminds us that a heart that puts God in first place is a heart that is truly free. When we recognize the importance of something, we can give it the proper significance. Then we will know how to make wise choices.



Liberator

Before even giving Moses the Tablets of the Law, the Ten Commandments, God presents himself to the Hebrew people and says, “I am the Lord, your God, who has brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex 20:2).

The God who speaks in the Ten Commandments has listened to the cries of his people enslaved in Egypt. He has seen their suffering and has sent Moses in order to set them free.

God does not give us a law we cannot understand, nor does he demand what is unfair. God wants us to live **freely**. He says to us, “Listen! I have come to liberate you; I will show you how to no longer be slaves!” Before pronouncing the Ten Commandments, God wants us to remember that he is **a God who frees us to do what is good, saves us from sin and death, and loves us**. Those who have confidence in this truth can begin to walk the way of the Commandments.

1st

You will NOT have other gods. . . . What does that mean?

The first commandment forbids superstition, magic, witchcraft, Satanism, and other things that could take the place of God in our hearts.

But what are idols? The word “idol” comes from the Greek language and means “image,” “figure,” or “representation.” An idol is not what it appears to be; it is a deception!

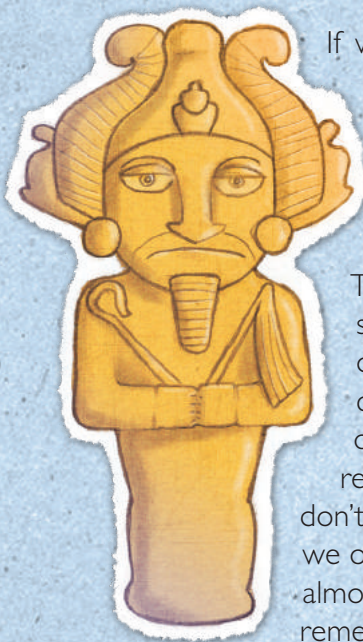
It is important for each one of us to reflect on any “idols” in our lives and on their **influence** over us. Money, power, our appearance, having certain kinds of clothes or material goods, winning at all costs in sports, not missing a single episode of a certain TV program, playing video games every day—so many things can take God’s place in our heart. Sometimes we even start to believe that it would be impossible to live without these things.

Jesus and the 1st Commandment

One day a scribe questioned Jesus about this commandment. He asked, “What is **the first of all the commandments?**” Jesus responded, “The first is: Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one Lord; you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength” (Mk 12:28–30).

Another time, Jesus wanted to help us understand how important it is to reserve the first place in our lives for





If we entrust our happiness to any idol, we become “slaves” without even realizing it. God teaches us to open our eyes and distance ourselves from idols so that we can be free! Recognizing that God is our only Lord places us on the right path.

The Old Testament words help us understand the first commandment even more deeply. In fact, we can also translate the commandment this way: “You will not have other gods near me.” We do not usually replace God with an idol, such as saying, “I don’t have room for God, only for sports!” But we often do put something else “next to” God, almost as if it were his equal! God asks us to remember that the first place in our hearts **is**

reserved only for him. All the rest comes after him. Put in their proper place of importance, other things can be part of our lives in a way that is good for us.

God, especially when it comes to money. Jesus first told a story as an example and then said, “No one can serve two masters, because he will hate the one and love the other, or love the one and hate the other. You cannot serve God and riches” (Lk 16:13).

The prophets taught the Israelites to be careful not to have “**divided**” **hearts**. At times, we too divide our hearts between God and something else. We may pretend that we have given our whole hearts to God, when we really have only given him part!

When we place God at the center of our whole heart, we give our lives deep roots. In that way, we are able to **grow like strong trees** do, and resist the storms that come our way.

Notebook

✓ What do you consider an idol that should be avoided, or something you've allowed to influence your choices too much? Write them down here.

✓ Have you ever experienced the freedom that comes from turning away from "idols"? If so, when?

✓ Ask God for the grace to remember Jesus's words and turn your life toward God, putting him in first place!

The Lord our God
is the only Lord;
you will love the
Lord your God
with all your heart
and all your soul,
with all your mind
and all your
strength.

My heart is the deepest
part of who I am and
where my ability to make
choices is found.

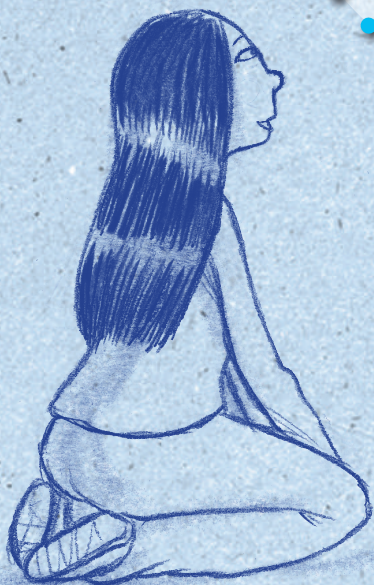
My soul is my very life.
It includes all my feelings.

My mind is home to my
thoughts and intelligence.

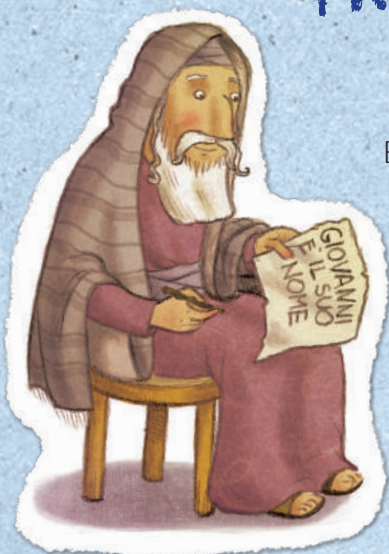
My strength includes
my body and my health.

2nd Commandment
You shall not take
the name of the
Lord your God
in vain.

Let me know your name,
Lord, and help me to understand
who you are and who I truly
am. Show me how to treat your
name with reverence. Help me
to understand that I am like
a letter you have written and
signed: whenever I keep your
commandments, I bring your
name to others.

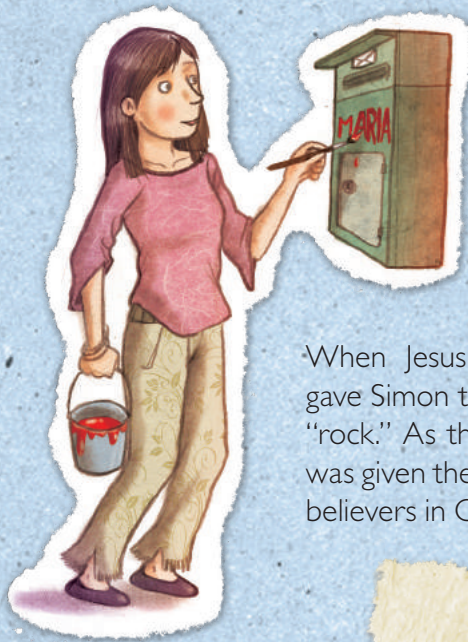


The importance of a name



Each person's name has special importance. Our names identify who we are. From the perspective of the Bible, however, a name is something even more: it reveals the person who carries it, and announces his or her **role** or mission.





In a way, a person's name "is" the person. It reveals to others the deepest "self" of the one who bears it. Because of this, certain people we read about in the Bible received a **new** name at the moment in which their life changed.

When Jesus called Simon to discipleship, he gave Simon the new name "Peter," which means "rock." As the first "rock" of the Church, Peter was given the mission to provide a foundation for believers in Christ and guidance in living the faith.

The name of God is . . .

What is God's name? Before the time of Moses, the Hebrews did not have a name for God. Instead, they referred to him as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When Moses came, God revealed his name out of the burning bush as "**YHWH**." This name is not pronounced by the Jewish people out of reverence. The words "Lord," "Almighty," "Holy One," and other expressions are substituted for the sacred name of God. The name that God revealed to Moses means "**I am who I am**" (Ex 3:14). What does this name tell us? That God is present in our lives, attentive to our prayer, and ready to save us.

In his preaching, Jesus revealed something new to his disciples, telling them, "When you pray say, 'Our Father. . .'" If you stop to think about it, it is amazing that we call God "**Father**"! This relationship expresses who God is, his nature. As Father, God has given us life; he provides for us, **he knows us, and he loves and forgives us**. We are called to act as brothers and sisters, and to think of ourselves as being under the gaze of the same Father.

Also, we are baptized "in the **name** of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." We recall this whenever we say the name of the **Trinity** and make the Sign of the Cross.

Do NOT take God's name in vain. . . . What does that mean?



The second commandment forbids saying God's name in vain. This includes cursing, using vulgar language associated with the name of God, speaking about God disrespectfully, or making a false oath or a false promise.

But the second commandment also teaches us to guard against using God's **name** in a thoughtless way or for no reason. And there is the possibility of using God's name to make people feel guilty and do something that **you**—not God—want them to do. Deceiving others in this way is using God's name for one's own selfish interest.

Sometimes we abuse God's name by treating it as if it were some kind of **good luck charm**. Maybe we remember God only when there is an important event, school assignment, game, or something we want to go well for us. When we call on God in order to escape our responsibility, we use God's name in vain.

Jesus and the 2nd Commandment

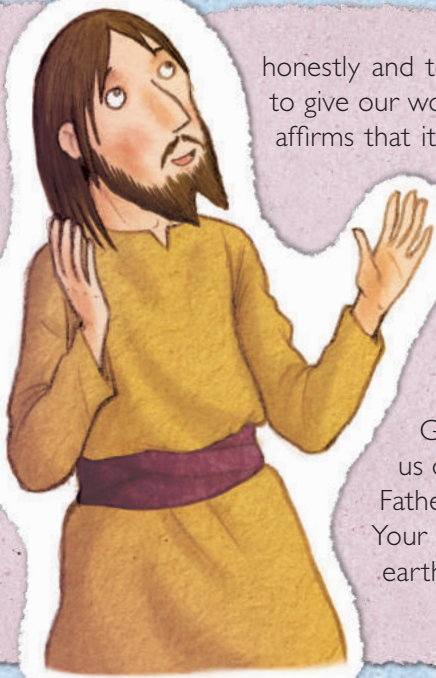
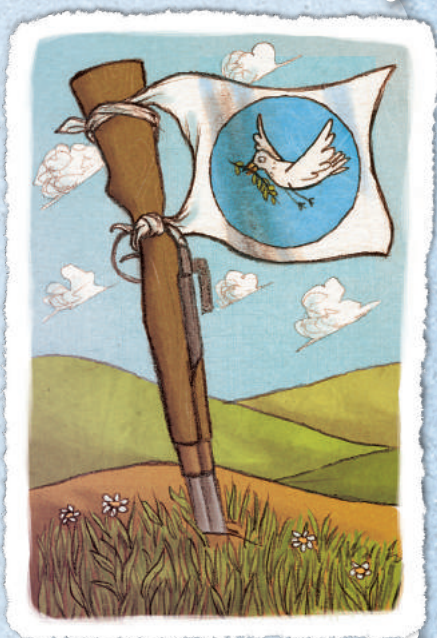
Jesus himself speaks about this commandment and warns, "You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not swear falsely. . . . But I say to you, Do not swear at all. . . . Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No'" (Mt 5:33, 34, 37). We must not make use of God's name to make ourselves look important. We must only speak

Words to think about

And finally, there is a truly misguided way of using God's name in vain: that is, to justify war in the name of God. No act of aggression or violence can be made right by claiming that it is the will of God, though many nations throughout history have tried to do so.

"No more violence! No more war! No more terrorism! May every religion bring justice and peace, forgiveness and life upon the earth. Love."

Saint John Paul II in Assisi in 2002



honestly and tell what we know without using God to give our words greater importance. Besides, Jesus affirms that it is not enough to "talk" about God if our actions don't reflect our words:

"Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Mt 7:21).

The best way to "speak" the name of God is to **do his will**. Jesus reminds us of this in the prayer he taught us, "Our Father in heaven, **hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done**, on earth as it is in heaven." (Mt 6:9–10).

Notebook

- ✓ Do you remember God throughout the day?
- ✓ Have there been occasions in which you felt closer to God?

Do you know the Prayer of the **Name of Jesus**? It is a way of prayer that is dear to Christians who belong to the Eastern Churches. The prayer is very simple: Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Try the prayer yourself or turn to Jesus with a brief phrase (for example: "Jesus, stay with me," or even, "Jesus, I believe in you"). While reciting the prayer, remain seated, stay still, and close your eyes. Repeat the words several times, slowly and softly, allowing them to **touch the depths of your heart**. Jesus's name means "the one who saves"!

- ✓ Try turning to Jesus with the Prayer of the Name, and then write or share about your experience of this prayer.