

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Seventh Sunday after Trinity, July 19, 2015**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 295, 287:1-2, 289, 447, 427:3.

Lessons: Exodus 32:1-20, Ephesians 6:10-17, Luke 12:13-34.

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 10:6-7.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In the Old Testament King David praised the Lord God as the people prepared to build a temple for the Lord God in Jerusalem. David himself had wanted to build this temple, but God prevented him from doing it. His son Solomon was the one who would have that responsibility and honor. David dedicated many gifts to God's temple, and notice the question he asks of the people of Israel:

***“King David said to the whole assembly: ‘My son Solomon, the one whom God has chosen, is young and inexperienced. The task is great, because this palatial structure is not for man but for the LORD God. With all my resources I have provided for the temple of my God--gold for the gold work, silver for the silver, bronze for the bronze, iron for the iron and wood for the wood, as well as onyx for the settings, turquoise, stones of various colors, and all kinds of fine stone and marble--all of these in large quantities. Besides, in my devotion to the temple of my God I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God, over and above everything I have provided for this holy temple: three thousand talents of gold (gold of Ophir) and seven thousand talents of refined silver, for the overlaying of the walls of the buildings, for the gold work and the silver work, and for all the work to be done by the craftsmen. Now, who is willing to consecrate himself today to the LORD?’”*** (1 Chronicles 29:1-5 NIV)

That's a great question, one we could ask again today and one we must ask every day.

Today again we have a stern warning from God:

**DO NOT LOVE THE WORLD OR ANYTHING THAT IS IN THE WORLD.**

- 1. We must fear, love, and trust in God above all things.**
- 2. God is the only one who can give us strength to begin doing this.**

You have all learned and probably memorized the First Commandment, along with Luther's explanation: **“You shall have no other gods.** *What does this mean?* We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things.”

This demands that we worship only the true God and nothing and no one else. To break this commandment is to commit idolatry, that is, worship of anything other than the true God.

The word idolatry appears in our sermon text. Just before that, Paul writes about the history of God's chosen people from the time of Abraham, the people from whom the Savior of all mankind would be born. ***“For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers, that our forefathers were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered over the desert. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.”*** (1 Corinthians 10:1-6 NIV)

We have abundant examples in the Holy Scriptures of the sin of idolatry and what happened to those claiming to be God's people who committed idolatry. Paul's first example here is from the time of the golden calf. When God told Moses to come up on Mount Sinai, he did not come down from the mountain for a long time,

and the people persuaded Aaron to make a statue of a calf – one of the gods of the Egyptians – out of their golden jewelry. Then they continued their worship of this false god by indulging in great immorality.

What is idolatry? When we study this commandment, we learn that there is open, or coarse idolatry. This is giving glory to idols as one's god. Open idolatry also includes trying to give glory to the Father without also giving equal glory to Jesus. This kind of thing happens in many public prayers. In order to please all religions today, one is not supposed to give glory to Jesus as the very Son of God who redeemed us from our sins. Muslims recognize Jesus only as a great prophet like Moses and Mohammed, not as God's only-begotten Son. Jews do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah, God's Son, but are still looking for a Messiah.

But we must also identify secret, or hidden idolatry. This happens when anyone or anything takes first place in one's heart instead of the true God.

Scripture itself gives many examples of secret idolatry, and we could add many more in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Bible warns against letting possessions, or riches becoming our god. The Bible warns against loving any human, including father, mother, son, or daughter more than Jesus. The Bible warns against letting our own wisdom and understanding, or any part of man's wisdom becoming our god. The Bible warns against trusting in man in any way instead of the true God.

Today we can add to that list, simply because the depravity of mankind seems to know no bounds. Think of all the activities that we can engage in at times when we have the opportunity to worship God. According to the Third Commandment, God's Old Testament people were demanded to make the entire Sabbath day a day of sacred assembly. We in the New Testament times, of course, have considerably more Christian liberty. But we must not let our Christian liberty become sinful license to do whatever we want. Many years ago a sports writer wrote about football's Super Bowl as a great temple of the god of sports. Many sports themselves, and celebrities in the sporting world can become what we worship, and want to emulate such celebrities. With the abundance of possessions, technology, spectacular places to live, flashy means of transportation, opportunities for education and the like, the opportunities for idolatry have exploded. Satan sure tempts us!

The human body itself and all it can do can become a god. Health itself and beautiful, muscular, or smooth bodies are presented as an ideal. They, too, can become idols. Then there is the danger of decorating the human body in the latest fashions of clothes and jewelry and letting that become our god.

Celebrities can become idols. "I want to be like so and so" ... and you fill in the blank! Even the producers of television shows to select a "best singer" named their program 'American Idol', suggesting the way people often idolize singers, or bands, or celebrities.

If we study so-called "primitive" people who are sometimes isolated from other people, their idolatry seems pretty simple. They might worship as gods things found in nature, or make up things or beings that they might think control nature. We are perhaps familiar with the gods and goddesses of Greek and Roman mythology, from Zeus and Jupiter on down to gods any individual household might honor. We may be less familiar with some of the false gods of pagans and unbelievers, including household gods worshiped by many followers of Indian, Asian, and even American Native religions. And our society is told that it must respect and honor everyone's religion. Even among those who are considered Christians, there is a danger of worshiping or venerating humans, such as the mother of Jesus, or any other of the "holy" men and women designated as "saints" by some churches. Remember, the Scriptural definition of a "saint" is simply one who believes in Jesus, having been made holy by the blood of Jesus.

So in our lives, every day, there is the temptation to place things and people before God. In fact, some of you may have originally memorized the First Commandment in these words: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," meaning not to put anything or anyone before, or in front of, or in the place of the true God.

So there is a great temptation even in our lives to commit idolatry.

So how can we fight it? We must look to God and his Word and prayer for weapons and strength. We read in John's first letter: "***Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world--the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does--comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever.***" (1 John 2:15-17 NIV)

And how strong are we against idolatry? Not very. We sin daily and much. We need God's help to fight sin in our lives every day. The deception of the devil and the temptations of the world are all around us. And don't forget what is within you: your flesh, our old man, your original sin, that is, the tendency to sin and only to sin. The tendency to place anything ahead of God.

There will always be those people and things which tempt us to idolatry, to put something else before God and to set aside our beliefs and convictions.

But we must fight against sin and wickedness, even in our own hearts. Paul exhorts Timothy with the words ***"Fight the good fight of faith."*** (KJV) He writes: ***"For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses."*** (1 Timothy 6:10-12 NIV) Stand firm in the faith into which God has called you!

We must fear, love, and trust in God above all things. Luther's explanation of every commandment begins with the words "we must fear and love God", demanding that God be first in our lives in everything.

To fear, as Luther uses the word, is to honor and respect. It is to regard with holy awe and honor. It is giving glory to God which leads to obedience. It is hard to find one English word which translates all the power and emotion Luther put into the word that is translated "fear". If we honor and respect and glorify God above all things, we will also love and put all our trust in him.

We give glory to God above all things by placing his word and command above the word and command of anyone else. We read in Proverbs: ***"To fear the LORD is to hate evil"***. (Proverbs 8:13 NIV)

To love is to regard as our highest treasure. We give glory to God above all things by considering him more dear to us than anyone or anything else.

We give glory to God above all things by relying on him for help more than on anyone or anything else. This is trust, putting all our confidence in him.

God has called us to be his children. As his beloved children, he must always be first in our lives. Scripture is filled with examples of faithful followers of God. He commands us to avoid idolatry, and he has given us abundant encouragement for our lives. May we be privileged to follow him. Listen to the words following our text: ***"Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: 'The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in pagan revelry.' We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did--and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. We should not test the Lord, as some of them did--and were killed by snakes. And do not grumble, as some of them did--and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."*** (1 Corinthians 10:6-13 NIV) God grant all this! Amen.