

**MAKING FRIENDS WITH THE BIBLE #4**  
**THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**  
By David Carlson

A person does not have to be Jewish or Christian to know the Ten Commandments. Even those who have never opened a Bible are familiar with the story of Moses receiving Ten Commandments from God on Mount Sinai.

Unfortunately, many people think of the Ten Commandments as the ten “thou shalt not’s.” Viewed in that way, God comes across in the Ten Commandments as limiting our freedom. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The Ten Commandments begin in this way. “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.”

Granted, there is a way to read these words as God saying, “I freed you from Egypt; now you owe me obedience to these rules.” But there is a better way to understand these opening words. “I am the God who freed you from slavery in Egypt. Now I am going to free you in another way. I am going to free you from getting lost in life.”

The Ten Commandments are like a map. What would we think of someone who said to us, “I am planning on driving to Denver, Colorado. I don’t want to be limited by any map or direction signs. I just want to be totally free to find my own way.”

If we cared about that person, we would surely warn them. “You won’t find Denver, Colorado, that way. You’ll simply get lost.”

Maps and signposts do not limit our freedom. Actually, they free us from a great deal of frustration and sorrow. The same is true of God’s commandments. Together, God’s commandments free us from the frustration and sorrow of trying to find a meaningful life on our own. Exodus 20: 1-17 is God’s way of saying “Follow these guidelines and you will be truly free.”

In this short lesson, we can see the truth of this perspective by focusing on this first commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me.”

We can grasp the freeing wisdom of this guideline by remembering how insecure people in the ancient world felt who worshipped many gods. How did they know when they had honored all the gods? As Saint Paul observed in the agora in Athens, the people there had constructed an additional altar, one dedicated to an unknown god in case they’d missed one (Acts 17:23).

Jesus brought this first guideline closer to home for us by warning that a person cannot worship both God and money (Luke 16:13). Jesus knew that a person who worships anything beside the One True God will live a life of confusion and uncertainty.

This is why regular worship in Church is so vital to our spiritual lives. In our sanctuary, we look up into the dome or toward the iconostasis to remind ourselves of this truth: only God deserves our worship. Whatever else we have in life is a gift of Our God and should never become a god that we bow down to. When we forget this, we become lost in confusion. When we remember this, we are truly free.