



continuous conversion

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more little gods

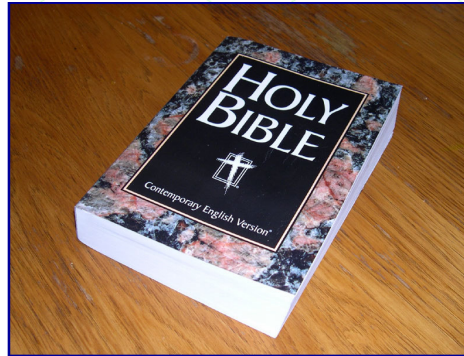
by Sara Tusek

I am your God

Exodus 20:1 says this:

"God spoke all these words, saying: 'I am the LORD your God... 'You shall have no other gods before Me.'

In the first of the Ten Commandments, God makes it very clear that He (and He alone) must be the object of our worship.



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But living with God as our one and only God is not as easy as it might appear. In the April 2009 issue of *continuous conversion* I wrote about the little gods people often revere. Those little gods were family; pastors, ministers and teachers; and the concept of our own personal calling by God.

Please bear in mind that I'm not saying that it's wrong to care about these parts of life; the problem only begins when we make little gods of them, fastening on them as if they could save us from our sinful selves or as if they were worthy of our primary devotion.

With that said, here are a few more little gods.

the Bible

The Bible is the Word of God. The Gospel of John states that in the beginning, the Word was with God and the Word was God. Therefore it's clear that the Bible is, in a sense, God—it is His Word.

The key words here, though, are "in a sense." The Bible is the inspired Word of God, it's true, but a Bible is also a physical object created by man. It is a book, or a CD, or a DVD—however the Bible may be packaged, it is an object that was made by humans and can be sold, given away or even destroyed.

Obviously man cannot destroy God, so the physical Bible which can be destroyed is not God.

This may not seem like a difficult concept, but somehow people have a tendency to confuse the literal with both the symbolic and the spiritual. God is present in the Bible, no doubt. He is present, through His Holy Spirit, in the spiritual impact of the words of the Bible. He is also present in the object itself, but no more than He is present in every part of the life of the believer. If you lose a copy of Bible, you aren't losing God; you are insulting Him, perhaps, through your carelessness with His Word, but you are not causing Him to be lost.

Imagine this: in a hurricane, your ship goes down. You manage to get into a lifeboat and are saved, but your Bible goes down with the ship. You are sad, but you don't believe that God has gone down, too.

Paying attention to the words of the Bible is a vital part of being a Christian; the Bible is a special book in which God speaks to man. But you cannot say that the Bible and God are identical and equal. You can damage a Bible, but you can't damage God.

Sometimes Evangelical Christians, in their fervor, forget that God is greater than the Bible. He created the Bible—the Bible did not create Him. He gave us the Bible as a gift, not as an object of worship. We can't use Bible verses for guidance in place of talking with God Himself in prayer. We can't pick and choose Bible verses to defend attitudes and actions that are not from God.

We can't substitute the Bible for God. When we do that, we've made it into a little god.

little gods

from p. 1

continuous conversion

icons and images

Throughout the Middle Ages in Europe, the Catholic Church built magnificent cathedrals with glorious stained glass windows, intricately carved wooden altars and church furniture, and chalices of gold and silver inlaid with precious gems. The intention was to honor God by dedicating objects of great beauty to Him.

But the desire to make little gods infected many of the Christians who worshipped in these awesome houses of God. Imagining the unseen God is a struggle; looking at a delicately-fashioned representation of Him in a window is much easier. From there it's only a step to preferring the image of God over the real God.

The Protestant Reformation tackled this abuse with gusto, “destroying images, stained glass windows, paintings, altars, and statues, with ferocious zeal. Zwingli, Knox, and Calvin were especially zealous in this kind of iconoclasm, throwing all ‘aesthetic aids to worship’ out of the churches, demolishing musical instruments and choirs and ornaments” (<http://www.pbministries.org>).

But, not surprisingly, soon enough the Protestant churches adopted their own icons. The severely plain altar, the clear glass windows, the bare wooden pew—all these became icons themselves, symbols of their particular (virtuous) version of the Church. The little god, once again, triumphs.

the prosperity Gospel

The New England Puritans of the 17th and 18th century had a number of physical challenges as they tried to live in the wilds of North America. On the spiritual side, they were also challenged by their own belief in predesti-



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nation, which led to mental acrobatics when it came to deciding who was predestined for salvation and who was not.

We know that God blesses those whom He has foreordained to live with Him eternally. Romans 8 discusses the blessings that he will bestow—He will make His chosen people right with Him and give them eternal life. But somehow the Puritans moved a bit beyond the non-tangible blessings of righteousness and salvation to the more visible blessings of wealth and prosperity. They reasoned that those predestined to eternal life were known to God already, and that He would, quite naturally, show them His special favor.

Favor for a starving man is food and security; from this idea it's a short distance to the idea that we can evaluate how much of God's favor rests on a particular Christian by measuring his prosperity. The more wealth and social status a man has, the more God must love that man.

This idea is so obviously wrong that it's hard to imagine that any Christian would fall for this “prosperity Gospel,” that God wants His children to be materially rich. Jesus was God's own Son, and He was not rich in earthly terms of possessions and money. How, then, can we equate wealth with God's blessing? We are once again led astray by a little god, the god of wealth and security.

God is great

Psalm 71:19 says, “Your righteousness reaches to the skies, O God, you who have done great things. Who, O God, is like you?” Psalm 86:10 says, “For you are great and do marvelous deeds; you alone are God.” Our little gods are not evil in themselves, but they are evil when they become obstacles that keep us from seeing the magnificent and awesome greatness of God. He alone is worthy of our praise and worship.



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