

Devotion 5:

Our Father Wants To Be Our Only God

Exodus 16—40

In this section we learn a bit more about our heavenly Father. Take a look:

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| 1. He is patient with whiny children. | 16:2, 8; 17:2-3 |
| 2. He has chosen children set apart to do His will. | 19:5-6 |
| 3. He comes down to us. | 19:20 |
| 4. He sets people and things apart as holy. | 19:23; 22:31 |
| 5. He gives commands. | 20:1-17 |
| 6. He is concerned with how we treat others. | 21:1—23:13 |
| 7. He is compassionate. | 22:27 |
| 8. He is concerned with how we treat our enemies. | 23:4-5 |
| 9. He will not acquit the guilty. | 23:7 |
| 10. He gives precise directions in making holy things. | 25:10—31:11 |
| 11. He gives wisdom. | 28:3 |
| 12. He gives skills and abilities. | 31:3, 6; 35:31—36:1 |
| 13. He punishes for sin. | 32:35 |

Again these are observations that can be made about Him by looking for what He does, when He does it, how He does it, and why He does it. Yet again we discover something that is repeated and emphasized more than any other characteristic: our Father wants to be our only God.

12 times it is mentioned. The first time is seen in Exodus 20:3 on Mt. Sinai when God gives Moses the 10 Commandments: *“You shall have no other gods before me.”* Shortly thereafter in verse 23 it is repeated to Moses so he tells the Israelites: *“Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold.”*

To drive home the point, He commands the Israelites to kill anyone who sacrifices to another god (22:20), not to invoke the names of other gods (23:13), to celebrate festivals to Him three times a year (23:14), not to bow down before neighbors’ gods or worship them or follow their practices (23:24), not to make a covenant with neighbors’ gods (23:32), to give Him offerings from their heart (25:2), and finally to make a sanctuary for Him (25:8). This might appear to be rather selfish and clingy but God does everything out of His love that endures forever. He is thinking of the good of His children as we see in 23:33: *“the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you.”* A further reason is noticed in 25:8: *“I will dwell among them.”* This thought is mentioned again strongly in 29:45-46.

One of the most memorable, yet saddest, stories that come from these chapters is the golden calf made by the Israelites when they tired of waiting for Moses to return from speaking with our Father. (32:23, 31) It is all the more tragic when set in the context of these repeated admonitions to worship God alone. However, following shortly thereafter

is the scene where God shows His back and His glory to Moses. The next morning, after Moses had chiseled two new tablets of commandments (he broke the ones God had written when he saw the golden calf), the Lord passes in front of Moses again and proclaims this about Himself:

“The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.” 34:6-7

Isaiah gives another reason why our Father wants to be our only God: “...*apart from me there is no savior.*” (Is. 43:11) Micah amplifies this thought: “*Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do not stay angry but delight to show mercy. You will again have compassion on us; you will tread our sins underfoot and hurl all our iniquities into the depths of the sea.*” (Mic. 7:18-19)

Other gods, idols, are demanding taskmasters that lead ultimately to death. They are the opposite of what is described above by God Himself. Pause and consider what the idols in your life do to you. They are selfish, conditional, quick to punish, abounding in self-centeredness and faithlessness, maintaining hatred to thousands, and unforgiving. Our Father, like earthly fathers, wants the best for His children. And He is the best.

But there is another side to this theme of God’s wanting to be our only God. What kind of God do we *need*? We know what kind of God the flesh wants. The flesh desires whatever pleases itself in the short term. It wants a genie in a bottle to grant every self-centered wish to make life more pleasant. It is selfish and self-absorbed. Larry Crabb in *The Papa Prayer* says what we need plainly: “*Because we intuitively sense that something about us is difficult to accept, something worse than what we do, something terrible that defines who we are, we intuitively sense our need to relate with someone who can forgive us and envision who we could become.*” That is the God we need, and, thankfully, that is the Father God we have. One who will forgive us our wickedness, rebellion, and sin...continually. It is for our sake and for the glory of His holy name that He wants to be our only God.