

Accept No Substitutes! Sunday, July 15, 2001

Exodus 20:4-6 (NLT) ⁴ Do not make idols of any kind, whether in the shape of birds or animals or fish. ⁵ You must never worship or bow down to them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not share your affection with any other god! I do not leave unpunished the sins of those who hate me, but I punish the children for the sins of their parents to the third and fourth generations. ⁶ But I lavish my love on those who love me and obey my commands, even for a thousand generations.

WHAT IS AN IDOL?

- Archaeologists have found evidence of idols in every culture throughout history, statues of gods and goddesses. Man has a misguided desire to turn things, people or ideas into objects of worship.
- But God says, "Don't!" Out of the 613 laws recorded in the Torah, more than 50 of them are prohibitions against idolatry.
- The Hebrew word "pecel" (graven image) means "something carved or fashioned with the hands," but bowing down in front of a statue is only one expression of idolatry. There are many types of idolatry!
- An idol is anything that takes the focus off God and puts it on something else. When anything besides God is first in my life it is an idol – even if it is good! God doesn't want us to value anything more than we value Him.
- In Canada, the worship of images is rare, although it does happen. It is more common to find those that worship ideologies that are against the God of the Bible. This is just as much idolatry as statue worship!

THREE IDOLS

- In Bible times, there were three primary idols: (1) Baal, the god of sex, (2) Mammon, the god of money, and (3) Molech, the god of violence.
- The baser human desires for unrestricted sex, selfishness, and violence are reflected in these ancient idols.
- Today we don't worship objects as much as we worship ideas and images – and all of these images of sensuality, greed and violence are reflected on television!
- The task of teaching our children what values are important is made much more difficult because of the "idols" they are bombarded with.

- God's commandment against idolatry is aimed directly at the human tendency to take matters of right and wrong into our own hands. THIS IS IDOLATRY IN ITS PUREST FORM! When a person chooses a lifestyle that violates the moral will of God, they are erecting an idol "fashioned by their own hands" and making God over in their own image so that they won't feel condemned by His commandments.
- The second commandment is simply a reiteration of the directive God gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden:
- **Genesis 2:16-17** ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, *Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: ¹⁷But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*
- God was prohibiting man from meddling with morality – they were not to change in any way what God had declared to be right and wrong. Mankind's moral code is off-limits to us, according to God!
- The devil tries to portray God as the TAKER when He is really the GIVER. Notice that before God gave Adam and Eve a PROHIBITION, He first gave them PERMISSION. He was saying, "Enjoy everything I have created, just don't usurp my rightful place and moral authority."
- **James 1:17** *Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.*
- The "alternate lifestyle" people are sure that if the Bible restricts us from any pleasure, then it must restrict all pleasure. But this is not so! Song of Solomon celebrates sexual pleasure, but only inside the moral parameters God designed – in a marriage between a man and woman.
- Eve was tempted to become "like God" because if she was a god, she could make her own rules!
- The second commandment says that God is "jealous" – He will allow no substitutes for Himself. WHY? Not because He is insecure, insane or possessive, but because He is intensely devoted to us!
- If God allowed us to engage in idol worship, He would be willfully abandoning us to harmful counterfeits that inflict cruel disappointment and disillusionment on humanity every day.
- **Deuteronomy 4:15-16 (GN)** *For your own good ... don't sin by making an idol in any form at all.*
- **ACCEPT NO SUBSTITUTES!**

WHAT IDOLS DO TO ME

1. Idols will DISAPPOINT me

- ***Jeremiah 10:14 (GN)*** *Those who make idols are disillusioned because the gods they make are false and lifeless.*
- They always promise more than they can deliver
- Any time you expect anyone to solve all your problems or guarantee all your happiness, you're going to be disappointed

2. Idols will DOMINATE me

- ***1 Corinthians 12:2 (GN)*** *[Before you knew Christ] you were controlled by dead idols, who always led you astray.*
- There are two inevitable effects when you love something more than you love God:
 - It begins to CONTROL you. The modern word for idol is "addiction." Eventually, the idol runs your life! If you can "give it up any time I want" then why don't you? The idol is dominating and distracting your life!
 - It causes you to be LED ASTRAY. Idols always make you lose your perspective, and cause you to set aside your values or compromise your convictions. If you let another person control your life by their approval or disapproval, psychologists call it codependency. The Bible calls it idolatry! You can break codependency by restoring God to first place in your life.

3. Idols will DEFORM me

- ***Psalms 115:8 (GN)*** *Those who make idols will become like them, and so will those who trust in them.*
- Idols change and warp you, causing you to lose the uniqueness that God gave you as you become like what you value most.
- We shape an idol and it ends up shaping us. Since we become like whatever is first in our lives, we'd better reserve that spot for God!
- When the rich young ruler (Matthew 19) asked, "What must I do to have eternal life?" Jesus said, "Sell everything you have and give it to the poor." Jesus never said that to anyone else – WHY? Because He knew what the idol was in the young ruler's life!
- What do YOU need to give up? What is it that you're holding on to that's keeping you from being all God wants you to be? An activity? A possession? A career? A relationship? A habit? It's an idol!

- If God's Word tells you to give something up and you can't let go of it, YOU DON'T OWN IT, IT OWNS YOU! (Ever thought about how small \$50 looks in a grocery store and how big it looks in church?)
- Human FEELINGS are one of the biggest idols today. Psychology gives "feelings" a respectability and significance beyond their due.
- Your feelings can be irrational, changeable, unpredictable, and even incomprehensible. They can be confused with moods, which are sometimes merely the product of indigestion, insufficient sleep, or a bad hair day.
- When major decisions and actions are based primarily on feelings, much damage is generally the result!
- The idolatry of "feelings" becomes evident when we bow to them as facts, as though feeling something actually made it so! People who "marinate" in their feelings are idol worshippers!
- When anything but God becomes the "endpoint" of your attentions and activities, that is idolatry! This COUNTERFEIT will damage you!
- Many marriages are broken up today simply because one partner has decided that they are "not happy" or "not fulfilled," as if this negated their wedding vows. The children involved are then exposed to the hypererotic dating patterns of their parents, which statistically puts them at risk to be sexually active at an early age.
- Like every sin of idolatry, this sin visits "the iniquity of the [parents] upon the children" through succeeding generations.
- Once we seek stimulation as an endpoint in life, when it fails we can medicate ourselves to achieve greater stimulation, or to survive our disappointment or feeling of meaninglessness – that's where addictions happen!
- ADDICTIONS ARE SHORT-TERM ANSWERS TO TIMELESS PROBLEMS. Laws, morals, commitments, obligations, values, relationships and love are sacrificed to create that "feeling."

WHY WE WORSHIP IDOLS

1. We are attempting to limit God's LOCATION.

- If I can put God in a statue – or in a church building! – then I can just leave Him behind when I don't want Him to be around.
- I don't want God going everywhere I go or seeing everything I do – but He does anyway. God is everywhere!

2. We are attempting to reduce God's POWER.
 - If I can put God in a statue – or in a church building! – then He's less imposing and threatening, more convenient and manageable.
 - We have reversed Genesis 1:27 that says, "Let us make man in our image" to read, "Let us make God in our image"!
 - People say, "My idea of God is ..." Who made you the authority?! It's a whole lot easier for me to just change my image of God than to let God change me into His image!
 - A lot of people change their theology because they can't justify their lifestyle any other way. We want to make God like us. We want God in our lives in small, premeasured doses. I want God to bless me, but I don't want Him to run my life. God calls that idolatry!
3. We are attempting to CONTROL God.
 - If I can put God in a statue – or in a church building! – then I can manipulate God. With an idol, the worshipper has more control than the thing being worshipped.
 - Illustration: Little boy wanting a new bike, hides statue of Mary, writes letter to God – "If you ever want to see your mother again..."
 - Many adults also try to demand things of God! But we don't manipulate God, we worship Him!

THE BENEFITS OF WORSHIPPING ONLY GOD

1. It will DELIGHT me.
 - ***Proverbs 37:4 (GN)*** *Seek your happiness in the Lord and He will give you your heart's desire.*
 - When I put God first, I experience the fulfillment in life that I looked for in so many other places.
 - Avoid the counterfeits! Don't settle for an image of God – that's just a shadow of the real thing.
2. It will DELIVER me.
 - ***John 8:36 (GN)*** *If the Son sets you free, you will be really free.*
 - The Bible promises that you will experience freedom like you've never felt if you will put God first in your life.
 - You no longer have to worry about the expectations and approval of others, because you're only focused on pleasing God.

- LIVE YOUR LIFE FOR AN AUDIENCE OF ONE!
 - God will set you free from your PAST (regrets), your PRESENT (habits), and your FUTURE (worries). That is real freedom!
3. It will DEVELOP me.
 - ***2 Corinthians 3:18 (LB)*** *As the Spirit of the Lord works with us, we become more and more like Him.*
 - When I put God first, I become the unique person God meant for me to be in the first place. YOU BECOME LIKE WHAT YOU LOVE!
 - Your family can't reach its full potential without putting God first.
 - It's not easy building a life on God's values when everyone else in society is saying "These are the values you ought to idolize."
 - Some people have an image of God as an angry, unappeasable parent who is never pleased with them; others have an image of God as a feeble grandparent that lets them get away with murder because they can't stop them. All of these are false images of God – IDOLS!
 - God wants you to know Him as He really is! And how do we get to know what God is really like? Get to know Jesus Christ!
 - ***Colossians 1:5 (NLT)*** *Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.*
 - We can only put God first in our lives if we are willing to live by His Word and follow His plan of salvation that delivers us from the "counterfeits."
 - ***1 John 5:21*** *Little children, keep yourselves from idols.*
 - **ACCEPT NO SUBSTITUTES!**

