

Slide 1

No Idols

EXODUS 20:4-6; DEUTERONOMY 5:8-10

Introduction

1. As we noticed from our study last week, the first commandment has to do with worshiping the right God.

Slide 2

2. The second commandment, which is one of the longest, reads as follows:
“You shall not make for yourself an idol [graven image], or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.
“You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” (Exodus 20:4–6, NASB95)
3. The commandment has to do with worshiping the right God in the right way.
4. *How* we worship matters just as much as *whom* we worship.
5. In this commandment, God is telling us that we may not worship Him any way we may choose, but only in the way He commanded.
6. Tonight, I would like for us to consider . . .
 - a. What that way looks like, in other words, understanding the commandment.
 - b. How it was responded to in the days of the early church.
 - c. Some ways in which we manufacture our own gods today.

Slide 3

I. Understanding The Commandment

A. THE RULE

“You shall not make for yourself an idol [graven image], or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them” (*Exodus 20:4-5a*)

1. Simply put, what God said is this: “Don’t make any idols or graven [carved] images.”
2. An idol was something crafted by a tool, whether it was fashioned from wood, stone or metal.
3. It was a man-made representation of some divine being.
4. When God gave this commandment, He wasn’t preventing the Israelites from producing any kind of artwork.
5. As a matter of fact, at Mount Sinai, after giving Moses the Ten Commandments, God also provided Moses with the design for the tabernacle which served as the place where the Israelites would worship the Lord during their wilderness sojourn.
6. God’s plan required a number of items with artistic designs in gold, silver and bronze, as well as the cutting of stone and carving of wood (*Exodus 31:4-5*).
7. For this, the Lord had filled a man named Bezalel with His Spirit “in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all kinds of craftsmanship” (*Exodus 31:2-3*) for this very purpose.
8. So, the second commandment did not forbid the making of things, but making things which would serve as objects of worship.
9. This is clarified by the second part of the rule: “You shall not bow down to them or serve them” (*Exodus 20:5a, ESV*).
10. This is also made clear by the kinds of idols which God forbids — “any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth” (*Exodus 20:4b, NASB95*).
11. Through this command, the Israelites were not allowed to represent God in the form of anything in all creation.
12. We can understand why when we consider the various idols to which the Israelites had been exposed during their stay in Egypt.

13. The gods and goddesses worshiped by the Egyptians often had the body of a human but the head of an animal:
 - a. Thoth — god of learning, writing and the moon — represented by an ibis or a baboon.
 - b. Bastet — goddess of motherhood, children and beauty — cat
 - c. Horus — god of the sun and sky — falcon
 - d. Solek — god of the Nile — crocodile
 - e. Apis — god who protected pharaoh — bull
 - f. Anubis — god of the afterlife — dog

Slide 4

B. THE REASON

“... for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God...” (*Exodus 20:5b*).

1. God forbids idolatry because of His jealousy.
2. When we think about jealousy in today’s world, our minds think about envy and the desire to get something which does not belong to us.
3. Godly jealousy, however, is not the insecure, insane, possessive human jealousy which we often encounter in the world.
4. Instead, it is an intensely caring devotion to the objects of our love — i.e., a mother’s jealous protection of her children or a father’s jealous guarding of his home.
5. When God speaks of being jealous, He is pointing to His total commitment to us — He is fiercely protective, unaccepting of any disloyalty.
6. So it is that God not only loves us, He desires our love in return.
7. This is why Jesus said the greatest commandment is that we love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our mind and with all our strength (*Mark 12:30*).
8. God has the right to tell us how He expects to be worshiped, and we must not spurn that love by turning to an idol.

Slide 5

B. THE WARNING

“visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth

generations of those who hate Me” (*Exodus 20:5c*).

1. The warning is that children will be punished for the sins of their fathers.
2. The word “iniquity” means “the reality of the act and its consequences” (HALOT).
3. Why is it so important that we recognize this?
 - a. Idolatry is a kind of perversion, a turning against God.
 - b. It is a way of showing hatred for Him.
4. For this reason, we should not find it surprising that God threatens to punish those who do such a thing.
5. You may be asking right about now, how is this just?
 - a. How can God judge a person for someone else’s sin?
 - b. Is it fair to punish the children for the sins of their father?

Slide 6

6. Our minds immediately turn to passages like . . .
 - a. Deuteronomy 24:16 **which states**, “Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.” (*Deuteronomy 24:16, NASB95*)

Slide 7

- b. Ezekial 18:20 **which declares**, “The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.” (*Ezekiel 18:20, NASB95*)
7. This is known as individual responsibility, in which God holds each of us accountable for our own sin.
8. However, there is something in the warning of the second commandment which we must not miss. Notice the warning again.

Slide 8

“visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me” (*Exodus 20:5c*).

9. God states that He will punish to “the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me” (*Exodus 20:5c*).
10. These are situations in which the children and grandchildren hate God as much as the fathers and grandfathers.
11. This would explain why God had Jehu kill all seventy of Ahab’s sons (*2 Kings 10:1-17*) — they were idolatrous.

Slide 9

C. THE PROMISE

“but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.” (*Exodus 20:6, NASB95*)

1. Whereas the warning reached to the third and fourth generation, the promise of God’s lovingkindness extends to thousands, to those who love Him.

Slide 10

2. One such example is God’s promise to Abraham (*Genesis 17:17*).

“I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you.” (*Genesis 17:7, NASB95*)

3. When we men and women love God supremely, bow before Him in genuine worship and serve Him with true praise, we will see His blessing rest upon our posterity for generations to come.
4. This should make each of us stop and ask ourselves a few questions:
 - a. What kind of life am I living?
 - b. What kind of worship am I giving to God?
 - c. What kind of legacy will I leave for my descendants?

Slide 11

II. A Response To Idolatry In The New Testament

A. WHAT PAUL ENCOUNTERED IN ATHENS

1. Beginning in Acts 17:16 and continuing through to the end of the chapter, we find the account of Paul's visit to Athens on his second missionary journey.
2. Athens was a very large city.
3. It was a cultural center with a world famous university founded by the Greek philosopher, Plato.
4. According to Luke, "Now all the Athenians and the strangers visiting there used to spend their time in nothing other than telling or hearing something new." (Acts 17:21, NASB95)
5. Athens was also known for its temple to the goddess Athena, known as the Parthenon which stood high upon the Acropolis. The statue of Athena could be seen 40 miles away.
6. Athens was also full of idols, with images of all shapes and sizes, made from wood, stone, gold and silver.
7. When Paul saw all these idols, Luke says tells us that "his spirit was being provoked within him" (Acts 17:16b).

Slide 12**B. WHAT HE DID NOT DO**

1. Paul did not go up to the philosophers and tell them they were worshipping the wrong gods.
2. He did not quote the first commandment and tell them, God says, "You shall have not other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3).

Slide 13**C. WHAT HE DID**

1. He did go to the synagogue there in Athens where there were Jews and God-fearing Gentiles and reasoned with them from the Scriptures concerning the Christ (Acts 17:17).
2. When some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers heard his preaching about Jesus and the resurrection, they began to converse with him.
3. Because he was speaking about something they had never heard before, they took him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new

teaching is which you are proclaiming?” (Acts 17:19).

Slide 14

4. Paul began by establishing a point of contact (Acts 17:22b-23).

“So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, “Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. “For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, ‘TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.’ Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.” (Acts 17:22–23, NASB95)

Slide 15

5. He then pointed out that the Creator God is a living spirit who cannot be put in a box (Acts 17:24-25):

“The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; nor is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all people life and breath and all things;” (Acts 17:24–25, NASB95)

Slide 16

6. He then informed them that this God who is the Creator and Giver of Life cannot be confined to a man-made idol (Acts 17:29-30).

“Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man. “Therefore having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all people everywhere should repent,” (Acts 17:29–30, NASB95)

8. Here is the problem with idolatry:
 - a. It creates a false image of God which is inadequate to His deity and unworthy of His majesty.
 - b. God is . . .
 - 1) Infinite and invisible.
 - 2) Omnipotent and omnipresent.

- 3) A living spirit.
 - c. Seeking to confine Him to a carved image renders Him as finite, visible, impotent and dead.
9. In short, it makes Him the exact opposite of who and what He actually is.
10. "An idol is not the truth, but a lie. It is a god who cannot see, know, act, love or save."

Slide 17

III. How Do We Manufacture Our Own Idols Today

A. WE WORSHIP AN IMAGE RATHER THAN LISTENING TO GOD'S WORD

1. Physical images of God hinder us from hearing His voice.
2. This is why God did not reveal Himself in physical form on Mt. Sinai.

"So watch yourselves carefully, since you did not see any form on the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb from the midst of the fire, so that you do not act corruptly and make a graven image for yourselves in the form of any figure" (Deuteronomy 4:15–16a, NASB95)
3. God revealed Himself not through a visual image but through an audible Word.
4. God wants us to listen.

Slide 18

B. WE TURN GOD INTO SOMETHING WE CAN MANIPULATE

1. People today are always looking for a more user-friendly god, a god which they can adapt to suit their purposes.
 - a. "I need a god who can do this or that for me."
 - b. "If I say this prayer, then I will unlock His blessings in my life."
 - c. "As long as I approach Him in the right way, I will get what I want."
2. God will not be manipulated.

18a

C. WE WORSHIP GOD FOR SOME OF HIS ATTRIBUTES, BUT NOT OTHERS

1. Some want a God of love — others a God of justice.
2. Some want a God is more concerning with private morality or with social justice.
3. Such people emphasize the things they like about God while minimizing the things they dislike.
4. When we do this we end up with a god who is nothing like the God of Scripture.

Conclusion

1. Instead of trying to remake God in *our* image, we need to be remade into *His* image.
2. You and I were made in His image to reflect His glory.
3. However, the truth is you and I have been badly damaged by our sin.
4. The image of God in us is far from what it was meant to be.
5. This is why God sent His beloved Son into our world — in order to repair His image in us.

Slide 19

6. This is what Paul was referring to when in 2 Corinthians 3:18, he wrote, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18).