

Have No Idols



Bro. Ricky Cunningham
Exodus 20:4-6

If you have your Bibles and you are ready this morning, we are going to continue with our study on The Ten Commandments. We have been studying through the book of Exodus. We started this back in the spring and it is going to be about a one-year study. This summer we are going to be taking nine weeks and looking at The Ten Commandments and a couple of them we are going to put together. Last week, Kory brought us the first commandment. This morning we are going to be talking about the second commandment.

You know, yesterday morning as pastor of our church, I had the privilege of rising up early and coming down here to Hardin and see our Nicaragua team load into the vans and get ready to head to Nashville, fly from Nashville to Dallas, and then from Dallas to Nicaragua. I got to be here. Man, I cannot tell you how exciting it was to see those 28 youth, those 28 young people all excited about their mission trip. They had been here about 20 minutes when all of a sudden, Kory stood up, and if I can be honest with you, he barked out some commands to those kids and while he was barking out those commands, I was just watching as a pastor and I could see how they respected him, how they loved him, and how they fully understood that what he was saying to them was with their best intention

in mind. Never once in about 10 minutes did I hear Kory make any suggestions to them or give them any tips for travelling, but he just gave command after command after command after command. Man, by the time he got done, I was wishing I was going on the trip too, because he reminded them in his commands of who they were as young people in Christ, he reminded how they had been preparing for six months for this trip and how they were now ready to go, and he reminded them finally of what they were going to do once they got there. I thought revival was going to break out in the building as I heard Kory prepare them one final time for their mission trip to Nicaragua.

That is the setting this morning. When we open to Exodus chapter 20 and we read the second of The Ten Commandments, they are not suggestions. They are not helpful tips. They are commands. They are commands that God is giving to Israel to get them ready for what he is getting them ready for and that is to go into the land of promise and be his people. If you have your Bibles, let's stand together and open to Exodus chapter 20. We are going to be reading verses 4-6 and then we are going to turn to 1 John chapter 5 verse 21 and conclude our scripture reading this morning.

Scripture

Exodus 20:4-6 "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

1 John 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols.

Exodus chapter 20 beginning with verse 4 through 6, God is going to reveal to Moses the second of what we call The Ten Commandments. But, you will notice that this is the first commandment with commentary. God

has called the nation of Israel to be his people, he is entering into a covenant with them, they are accepting the covenant responsibilities, and he is now getting them ready to go into the land of promise and he wants them to know how to live as his people.

See, Israel has been in slavery for hundreds of years to the Egyptians and for the first time they are going to have their own land, they are going to have their own government, they are going to be their own people, and they are going to be God's people. But, they have been slaves for so long, they have served Pharaoh for so long. God has been bringing them through the wilderness, he has gotten them out of Egypt, but he is now getting Egypt out of them and when they go into the promise land he wants them to know how to live as a free people. So, he gives them his law.

Now, this is clearly the second time we come across the Ten Commandments in the Bible. I know you know this, but the Ten Commandments are actually stated in their entirety two times in the first five books of the Old Testament. Historically, chronologically, the first time when God gives the law to Israel on Mount Sinai. But, then years later, when the older generation who refused to go into the land has died out and Moses is addressing a young generation who is going to actually take the land, in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses' last sermon, his last words are recorded and, if you will remember in Deuteronomy chapter five, he actually restates the Ten Commandments again.

If you get time, read Deuteronomy chapter four because Deuteronomy chapter four gives you to context for the receiving of the Ten Commandments. And, here is the context, Moses reminds the children of Israel that he is not going to get to accompany them on the trip into the promise land like Kory got to go to Nicaragua. Because of their sin, they caused him to sin, and because of his sin, God will not let him go into the land. But, Joshua is actually going to take them into the land. And, what he is going to do in the fourth chapter is remind them that God has given

them the law so that when they get into the land they will know exactly how to live out a God life in a pagan society.

And, here is what Moses says... *listen to everything I am teaching you that God has said. Obey what God commands and you will live and you will go in and you will possess the land...* What he tells them, as they actually go into the land and possess it is that the nations in the land will notice that no nation has a God like they have who is so near to them as God is to them. Then, he actually says that the nations will marvel at the righteous laws that they have thus reflecting the nature of God.

Then, he is going to remind them... *hey, what you have experienced coming out of Egypt, what you have experienced at Mount Sinai in receiving the law, make sure you do not ever forget it. Make sure you teach your children and make sure you teach your children's children of what I have done...*

Then, he warns them about the culture that they are going to embrace. It is going to be pagan and everywhere they go there is going to be carved images and they are warned against being drawn away from the true God by these false idols. So, he goes through verse after verse after verse after verse of telling them to keep themselves away from idols and whatever they do, do not try to fashion God into the image of an idol.

Then, he gives them a consequence of what is going to happen if they do. If they give into the temptation to worship idols they will actually be dispersed as a nation throughout the nations and they will lose their testimony because God is a jealous God and he will share his glory with no other. Wow!

Then, he tells them what he will do if they repent. If when they fall into the trap of idolatry, if they will repent, not only is he a jealous God, but he is a merciful God. Then he gives ten commandments.

Now, I do not know if you were raised in a church that was different from this church, but you do realize not all churches believe this is the second commandment, right? Some churches actually put verses four through six with verse three and make those verses the first commandment. So, you say... *well, does that mean they have nine commandments?...* No. They divide the last commandment of thou shall not covet into two commandments- thou shall not covet property and thou shall not covet your neighbor's wife. But, this church like most protestant churches believe this is actually the second commandment, but it is the first commandment with a promise.

See, the first commandment is just this: thou shall not have any other gods before me. Notice that is not suggestive language. Notice that is a command.

That same language is used in verse four, "you shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God.." Then, he talks about the two consequences that come to people who fall to idolatry and what happens to the person who does not succumb to idolatry. There is a curse for one group and there is a blessing to another group.

Now, I have known for a few weeks that this was going to be my commandment, that Kory was going to do last week, and that I had this week. I want to be honest with you. When I first started this study, I did not believe I had any idols in my life. I do not know about you, but it is easier to see idols in other people's life than it is to see the ones in your own life. Do you not agree?

When I was studying about this I thought... *boy, my wife is going to be in trouble when I preach this message because of the idols that she has in her life!...* Now, because of her surgery Monday, she is not going to be

here this morning to hear this message, but she knows I am telling this. Ok?

See, when I got to studying this and it said for us not to have any carved images with anything that is in heaven or on the earth or in the waters, I got convicted about her life because she has this little thing in her life and it is not really in wood or stone, but it is of cloth. It is a stuffed frog. Now, according to this you are not supposed to have stuffed frogs in your life, amen? If you have a rabbit's foot you need to burn the rabbit's foot. You need to get rid of the rabbit's foot.

I mean, if we are taking this literally, here is what the Bible says, we are not to have anything that resembles anything that is in the heavens, on the earth, or under the waters. Celisa has a frog in the bedroom. She has a frog in the living room. She has frogs out on the patio. As a matter of fact, she has so influenced me with her worship of idols that for her birthday I got her six frogs! I really did! Now, that was before I started preparing for this sermon, amen? I have since repented!

When we went to Nashville last Sunday night and she went into surgery Monday morning, guess what she carried in her bag? She carried her little frog! Now, you know I am teasing when I say this. See, that frog to Celisa is not an idol, it is not a carved image, it is a frog. It stands for **Fully Relying On God**. She uses the frog to remind her that in all of life she should rely totally on God.

But, you do know this, right? There are some of us in the church, some Christians that are so strict that they do not believe that you should have a stuffed animal in your child's toy box and you should not have a baby doll because of this command. Now, please hear me. I mean no disrespect, but that is not what this is talking about.

See, command one, when Israel goes into the land, God wants to make sure they are worshipping the right God. And, there is only one God, amen? God does not even give any commentary about that. Just do not

have any other gods in my presence! But, this second command, because he knew how culture was going to be, he actually gives commentary.

See, the second command is not only talking about worshipping the right God, it is talking about worshipping the right God the right way. Did you hear that? God was so concerned about his people that he not only wanted them to come into the land and worship him, but he was going to use their worship of him as a light and a testimony to the pagan nations around them. So, he wanted to make sure when they worshipped him they worshipped him correctly.

So, he forbids any graven images. He forbids them getting so involved in him being creator that they actually begin to worship creation instead of him as the creator. He wants to make sure that they never turn his gifts into gods. He wants to make sure that they never replace him, as the blessing, with the blessings he has given them because that is what their pagan neighbors were going to be doing. You do know this, right?

Paul is actually going to teach in Romans chapter one that there is enough revelation in nature that everybody is without excuse in not knowing there is a God. Here is what scripture says, not Brother Ricky, if you do not know or believe there is a God, you will have no excuse on the day of judgment because you ought to be able to look into nature itself and know that there is a creator. But, here is what man has a tendency to do. Romans chapter one actually teaches that instead of people wanting to worship God as creator, instead of realizing that they have been made in the image of God, actually now try to make God in their image and they exchange the glory of this eternal God into an image. And, ultimately, they bow down and worship the image and ultimately God turns them over to a sinful lifestyle.

Here is what I want us to remember. The reason this second commandment is given in scripture is because of this: idolatry always leads to immorality. What starts out as a creation, man begins to worship. Once he begins to worship, he begins to serve what he worships and ultimately serving a false god, an idol, leads you to immorality. That is why God

wants to make sure that when his people come into the land they worship him the way he says he is to be worshipped.

See, if you will go back to Deuteronomy chapter four, here is what Moses reminded them of, you never saw God's form when he gave the law to Moses, but you heard his voice. And, here is what Moses is trying to say to his people, you worship God based on what he has revealed to you through his word. So, in Exodus chapter 19 when they are standing at the foot of the mountain and they look upon the mountain and they see the smoke, they see the fire, they see the mountain shake, and they hear the audible voice of God, here is what they understand: Moses did not make any of this up. This is not his imagination running wild. God is not a figment of his imagination, but what he is receiving is actually the very words of God and God wants his people to go into the land and basically do this: live their life by his word. You understand that, right?

So, God says no carved images. Do not make me look like a frog. Do not make me look like a goat. Do not make me look like a calf. Do not make me look like a fish. I am not part of creation. I am creator. Do not bow down to a carved image once you come into that land.

See, the thought would be this: if they heed Moses' word, God's word, and do not make an idol then there is no way they will bow down to it. But, here is the problem. Even if they do not make any, they will be surrounded by them. You do understand that, right? We cannot live in society without facing temptation. It is not possible.

So, here is what God says: do not ever bow down. Do not ever worship an idol. Do not ever give weight to, do not ever give value to, do not ever give worth to a false image of god because if you ever worship a false image, guess what you will find yourself doing? You will find yourself serving that idol. Now, what is going on here? Here is what is going on: we do not worship God based on what we reason about him. We worship God based on his revelation of himself to us through his word. Amen?

So, can you all just hear me say this? Get this out of your mind that worship is about you and what you like or what you do not like! Worship is about what God likes and God wants us to worship him the right way. Does that make sense?

We live by his word to prevent idolatry in our life. Why? Why is God so obsessed with this? Because he is a jealous God. Now, if you are like me, when I was a kid growing up and I read those passages about God being a jealous God, I struggled with that. If I can be totally honest with you, I was not raised in an environment where I heard jealousy being used in a positive way. Jealous was always used in a negative way.

I can remember being a teenager, I can remember being a young man, and I can remember overhearing girls talk about their boyfriend being jealous. Then, I remember young girls who were married talking to other girls who were either single or married, and they would describe their husband and they would always talk about him being jealous. When they would describe him being jealous it just did not sound good.

So, when I would read about God being a jealous God, I had that image! But, as I got older and more mature, here is what I now know: what those ladies were talking about was not jealousy in their husbands. What those ladies were talking about was insecurity in their husbands. Did you hear that? If what is going on in you is causing a negative reaction, that is an insecurity. Jealousy is not negative; jealousy is positive. There is no insecurity in God, amen? But, he is jealous.

Do you know what that means? Here is what it means: when Israel became his, he expected them to be loyal to him and faithful to him. And, if I can use this language, not to mess around on him because when he entered into a covenant relationship with Israel they became his wife and he became their husband. And, here is what they expected of them, when they went into the land of Canaan, he expected them to be a one God nation. Amen?

Can I say this? You may not have ever heard Celisa say this to you, but Brother Ricky is jealous. I am a jealous husband. Not an insecure husband, a jealous husband. When Celisa and I got married I am just going to be honest with you, I expected her to be a one-man woman and I am her man. Amen? I am just like God in this respect.

God knew Israel was going to get into a mess if they messed around with another god. And, here is what I know, my wife will never be who God designed her to be unless she stays loyal to her man because I am the only man for her. I am good for her. Now, you are saying... *boy, he is arrogant*. No, I am just a jealous husband. And, can I be honest with you? Celisa is a jealous wife! She expects me to be a one-woman man and you know there is no other woman in my life but that one woman. Amen? And, her name is Celisa!

Now, listen to me. God expects you to be a one God person because you are a part of his bride if you are a child of God. And, when you mess around with an idol, when you flirt with an idol, when you become friends with the world, do you know what God calls you? He calls you an adulterer, he calls you an adulteress, he calls you a whore, and he calls you a prostitute. Now, I am just quoting the Bible!

See, God views his relationship with his covenant people as him being the husband and them being the bride and he will not stand for an affair. Here is what he knows, if his people ever start flirting with an idol and they become friends with an idol, the next thing you know, they will have feelings for the idol. Then, the next thing you know, they will have a spiritual affair on him. And, he said he will not stand for that. Wow!

Do you realize what that says about God when his people mess around with idols? So, he is just right up front- do not do it because you are mine! You belong to me and I am a jealous God. I have brought you into this land for one purpose and that is to be my people and to show all the people around you how a person looks if they live for the true God. Wow!

Then, he closes out the command with this. He says there is a consequence. Boy, you dads listen up! He tells the fathers of Israel that if you mess around with idols, then guess what? I will visit your iniquity to your third and fourth generation. Here is what he is saying: Dad, this will not only effect you, it will affect your children, it will affect your grandchildren, and it will affect your great grandchildren.

Those who hate me I will not withhold my wrath from them and I will let you basically be as sinful as you want to be. And, when you become as sinful as you want to be, it will have a lasting effect, not just on you, but it will affect your kids, your grandkids, and your great grandkids.

Did everybody hear that? See, Romans chapter one is going to clearly teach that the wrath of God is already being revealed. God lets people be as sinful as they want to be who do not know him, who hate him. You do not have to answer that question why bad things happen in the world. Let me tell you why bad things happen! It is because God lets sinful people be as sinful as they want to be and in letting people be as sinful as they want to be, it is the righteous judgement of God. It reveals that they have turned away from a true God to an idol in their life.

But, man, if you love him and keep his commandments, guess what? You will not bear his wrath. You will get his steadfast love. You will get a love that will always be there for you, a love that will always see you through, a love that will always draw you unto himself so God takes this seriously!

Please! The next time you think about worship, do not just think about serving and worshipping the right God. Think about this- am I worshipping God, am I living my life the way he has designed for me to live my life because ultimately life is not about myself, my life is about him.

I have to be totally honest with you, when I started this study months ago I just kind of thought this was an Old Testament problem, but then I kind of remembered my New Testament. Did you know the writers to the letter of Corinth, to the church at Corinth, Ephesus, Galatia, Colossae, and

Thessalonica all mention idolatry? John the apostle ends his first letter by telling us to keep ourselves away from idols. See, this was not only an Old Testament problem; this is a New Testament problem.

You say... *but Brother Ricky, we do not live in the New Testament days.* I think we still have an idol problem.

Now, first of all, let me define for you what I believe an idol is. An idol is something or someone that we give ultimate worth or value or significance to and ultimately we draw our worth, significance, and identity from that person or thing. That is an idol. So, if you have something or someone in your life that you draw your identity from, your ultimate significance from, your ultimate value from, or your ultimate worth from, you are worshipping an idol.

What happens in idolatry is this, we trade the value and worth of our eternal God for the temporary value of an earthly thing or person. We turn the gift of God into a god. Instead of having the blesser we have the blessing. Instead of having the creator we have the creation. Ultimately, that idolatry leads to immorality because it ultimately draws you away from God.

Boy, this starts so simple! You have a need, you have a desire, or you have a want and then you find a god who can meet that desire, want, or need. Then, once you find that god, once you find that idol, if you do not find it in THE God, you will worship that.

By worship, here is what I mean- you will give worth to it, you will give value to it, and you will draw your worth or significance from it. You will not be able to live without it because you will start serving it. The more you serve it, the more it gratifies your desire, your need, and wants. Then, the next thing you know, you will find yourself sacrificing your all to your idol.

We do not normally do this, I do not know why we did this last night, but I think it is because Celisa has been recovering from surgery and she is under pain medications and she is still half loopy if I can say that. I got home yesterday afternoon and she had been watching TV. We never turn the TV off.

Finally, this show came on that we had never watched called "American Ninja Warrior." Have any of you ever seen that show? Crazy people doing crazy things! But, in that show they have a breakaway where they showed a person who was a man who almost lost everything in his life. Now, the program did not call his problem an idol, but scripture would.

Do you know what he did? Here was a man who drew his significance from his career. He put his significance, worth, and value into his work and then, the next thing you know, he was serving his job working 80-90 hours a week and was never at home. Ultimately, he sacrificed all to it and was ready to lose his family when his wife said, "you have to make a choice." He made the right choice.

See, that is what some of us are doing. You know, God wants us to work, but he does not want us to draw our significance from our work. He does not want that to be the ultimate priority of our life. He does not want that to be our ultimate worth! But, that is what some of you are doing. And, do you know what is sad about this? When you started down the road you started down you actually thought God gave you the job, gave you the career, and called you to do it and you turned it into an idol.

Yeah! You, an idol worshipper. You just cannot live without your career. You just cannot live without your job. Now, when it comes down to a decision, you choose the job just about every time over God and over your family. You can call yourself a workaholic if you want to, but you are an idol worshipper.

Boy, where have we went with pleasure! We live in a culture that no longer prizes holiness, but a culture that prizes happiness. And, man! We finally

go it, did we not? We got that house, we got that lifestyle, and look at what it has done to us!

Do you remember when you said if you ever had a house like you have you would use it for God? You never use it for God now because you cannot keep it clean. You cannot have anybody come over unless everything is where it is supposed to be. It has become an idol. We bow down to it, we serve it, and we sacrifice our all for it.

Guys, it can be hunting, it can be fishing, or it can be camping. It can be sports. Without it we just cannot make it! We just cannot survive! It can be your child. It can be your spouse. When you think you cannot live without it, when you have the shakes when you think about not doing it, you have a problem.

Do you know what is amazing about this? Work is good, sports are good, camping is good, relationships are good, but when we take them and make idols out of them and we sacrifice all we have to them, the next thing you know, at work, at school, and at the ballfield, we forget all about our mission to be light, to reveal the righteous holiness of God and his love for humanity. Instead, it becomes about something else and that is our significance.

Then, the next thing you know, instead of us influencing the culture, the culture influences us. How many of you have lost your cool? How many of you have said things when there are about five unbelievers watching? It is called idolatry!

Now, I want you to hear this. This is not Brother Ricky; this is the New Testament. The New Testament says that idolators will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Now, if you think an idolator is the person with the frog bowing down and worshipping the frog then you have missed it. It is about you and I taking the things of creation and giving them a priority in our life that they should not have. That priority to that thing or person actually draws away from following the true God!

Idolatry almost comes to the point that we do not even think about our witness for Christ. We never even ask the question why the people we hunt with, fish with, camp with, or travel with never ask us any questions that are anywhere remotely related to spiritual things. It is because there is nothing in our life that has prompted them to even believe we would have an answer to their question because we are so into the idol.

Please hear this! Do not, thou shall not make for yourself. See, this has nothing to do with God. It is about you doing what you need because each one of us has been designed by God to worship. Saved or lost you will worship something or someone and when that worship is not given to the true God it will find its way toward an idol. Wow!

I have to be honest with you. As I preach this morning, my eyes are not on Celisa's frog anymore. My eyes are not even on you; they are on me. You see, idols are not a work of our hands. Idols are a work of our heart and there is not a one of us in here that cannot fall to an idol.

It just starts by flirting. Then, becoming friends. Then, we develop feelings. Then, there is a full-blown affair and you have stepped out on God. How many of you know you have stepped out on God?

How many of you actually know that your ultimate worth, your ultimate significance is coming from Christ? How many of you actually know that the reason that God ultimately does not want us to make an image of him is because he designed us to be his image and we blew that in the garden, but God's whole plan with Israel was to bring forth a Messiah that would reveal the very image of God and we would not only hear his word, but we would see his word. And, by knowing his word, Jesus, we can now be empowered to live in a world with idols all around us and us not fall prey so that we can live in a culture that worships idols.

Yes, we can still camp, we can still fish, we can still hunt, and we can still go to ballgames. We can still because we understand God has ordained

those things in our life not to give us significance, but to give us a platform. And, that platform is not about us, but it is about him.

So, we do not draw our significance from our ability, our achievement, our pleasures, our career, or our relationships. We ultimately draw it from Christ and ultimately that leads us to worship him in the right way. In the end, being used for him.

I am going to ask you right now to clean out the closet of your heart. Clean out the drawers. We are not going to take our idols and go have a yard sale. No! We are not going to make them a source of temptation for someone else. We are going to get rid of them. We are going to trash them. We are going to break them for his honor and his glory.

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