

COMMANDMENTS

No Idols (Exodus 20:4-6)

Bottom Line: We must not only worship the right God, we must also worship Him the right way.

What is an example of doing the right thing the wrong way?

Read Exodus 20:4-6

Whereas the first commandment, “you shall have no other gods before me”, dealt with worshiping the right God, this second commandment deals with worshiping the right God the right way. At first glance, this commandment may not feel very relevant to us today. Sure, idolatry looks different in our culture that it did for Moses and the Israelites; we don’t bow before statues or make calves of gold. But we are no less guilty of idolatry than they were. In fact, the idols in our culture are much harder to recognize, because they take the shape of the everyday—relationships, possessions, job security, and so on. But the emphasis of this commandment is not so much on *what* we worship, that was the first commandment. This commandment has a greater emphasis on *how* we worship.

How do you expect your spouse, your family, your friends to love you? What does this love look like? How receptive would you be if someone tried to “love” you in a way that made you feel used or taken advantage of? Does God have the right to dictate how we should express our love and worship of Him? Why or why not?

We create an idol whenever we turn God into something that we can manipulate. The Egyptians created and worshiped idols because they believed that they could appease their gods *through* their idols. They thought they could control their gods by controlling their man-made idols. In a similar way, we can fall into the same trap. We sometimes think, “if I do this, then God will do that.” If I pray every day, then God will give me what I want; if I behave rightly, then God will bless me; if I raise my kids right, then God will not let them rebel, etc. When we do this, we are no different than the Egyptians—we have created our own user-friendly version of God that we can control and manipulate. “God is not served by human hands as if He needed anything” (Acts 17:25). By forbidding idols to be made, God is essentially saying that He is not a God that can be controlled or manipulated.

When are we tempted to try and manipulate God? In other words, what trials of life tempt us to try and manipulate God? Why is it a good thing that God cannot be manipulated? How does this affect the way we think about His faithfulness to us?

We also create an idol when we choose to worship some of God’s attributes but not others. We see this most often in the attributes of God’s love and His justice. Often-times these two attributes are pitted against one another, as if a God of love could not possibly also be a God of wrath. But God has revealed Himself to us as an all-loving God who will also enact perfect justice. When, in our worship of God, we emphasize certain attributes of Him over others, we are actually committing idolatry. We are worshiping God as we want Him to be, not as He has

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actually revealed Himself to be. There is no sin in God. He is holy, righteous, and pure. Therefore, there is no attribute of Him that should not be worshiped fully.

What are some attributes of God that you have seen minimized in our culture? What are some attributes of God that you have seen overly emphasized? How can we maintain a proper balance in our worship of God and ensure that we are worshiping God properly in all of His attributes?

Like the first commandment, and like all of God's commands, this prohibition against idolatry is for God's glory and our good. In regard to God's glory, the reason that God gives for prohibiting idolatry is because He is "a jealous God." Rob Schenck says, "Godly jealousy is not the insecure, insane, and possessive human jealousy that we so often interpret this word to mean. Rather, it is an intensely caring devotion to the objects of His love, like a mother's jealous protection of her children, a father's jealous guarding of his home."

How is God's love for us connected to His jealousy for His glory? If God were not jealous for our affection, what would that say about God? How does knowing that God is jealous for your worship affect the way you approach worship?

In regard to this commandment being for our good, verse 5 offers a severe warning and a powerful promise: "...visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." Because children imitate their parents in what they value and prioritize, when parents refuse to love God passionately and properly and instead choose to worship a manipulatable, personalized God, the consequences of this sin could last for generations. But when parents worship God rightly, truthfully, and supremely, it's more likely they will leave a legacy of godliness that will last for generations.

How have you seen this warning and/or promise play out in your life or the lives of others?

Reflection: Read these aloud, using your discretion about which questions should be pondered and which questions should be discussed.

Have you "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (1 Thess. 1:9)? Do you emphasize/minimize any of God's attributes over and against others? Are you worshiping God to try and get something out of Him? How can you make your worship more true and sincere?

What kind of life are you leading as an example for your children (or those around you)? How does your family see you engage in worship? What kind of legacy are you leaving? What kind of legacy do you *want* to leave? What will you do to impart to your family a proper understanding of God and how to worship Him?