

## NO STAND-INS FOR GOD

Exodus 20:4-6

April 26, 2009 Sunday pm

### INTRODUCTION

- A. I mentioned the proposed Oklahoma Legislature bill concerning the Ten Commandments Monument to be erected on the grounds of the State Capital. It had already passed the House, now last Monday it passed the Senate as well (Article attached).
- B. The first commandment forbids polytheism while the second forbids idolatry.
- C. This second is the one commandment most people feel less guilty of breaking, yet more is said about this one in the Bible than any other.

### I. WHY WAS THIS COMMANDMENT NECESSARY?

- A. It was necessary because Israel had come out of four hundred years of paganism and idolatry in Egypt and because the land of Canaan where they were going was also steeped in idolatry.
  1. Baal, the Canaanite god, was portrayed as a warrior with a thunderbolt as a spear. Anat, the sister of Baal, was represented in Egyptian reliefs as a naked female, standing on a lion. In Egypt, all the chief gods were conceived in human form, but all the others were depicted with the characteristics of animals. Horus with the head of a falcon, Anubis with the head of a jackal, Hathor with the horns of a cow.
  2. Israel revealed this idolatrous influence when Aaron, Moses' brother, fashioned a golden calf in the wilderness as a representation of God (Exodus 32:4).

**Ex 32:1-4**

**<sup>1</sup> When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."**

**<sup>2</sup> Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." <sup>3</sup> So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. <sup>4</sup> He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."**

- B. In order to counter their pagan and idolatrous background, God gave the prohibition in Exodus 20:4-5a.

**Ex 20:4-5**

**<sup>4</sup> "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,**

1. This prohibition does not forbid artwork, not even when it's in church. The tabernacle and Temple, for example, were filled with symbolic images "Cherubims", flowers, trees, pomegranates, bells, etc.
2. Instead, this prohibition forbids any representations for God.
3. Why?
  - a. Because God is a jealous God (5a). Jealous means "zealous" in this context. It focuses on action rather than emotion. It speaks to the fact that God will act zealously to prevent Israel's unfaithfulness. Idolatry is spiritual infidelity.
  - b. Because idolatry impacts future generations (v. 5b). Just as some diseases are hereditary, so are some vices. This doesn't mean our children are punished "for" our sins, but they are often punished "by" our sins. We have an awesome responsibility to instill in our children a proper concept of God.

- c. Because God expresses love to those who don't violate this prohibition (v. 6).  
**Ex 20:6**  
**<sup>6</sup> but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.**
- d. Because God is a spirit not a thing or an it (John 4:24). Anthropomorphism runs counter to God's essence.  
**John 4:24**  
**<sup>24</sup> God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth."**
- e. Because any image of God is inadequate. We can see a little of God in a majestic mountain, beautiful flower or golden sunset. But God is greater than all these. We cannot substitute an expression of God for the essence of God.

## II. WHY IS IDOLATRY SUCH A TEMPTATION?

- A. One reason is that idolatry conforms to our natural way of thinking.
  - 1. For example, think of an eagle and you see one in your imagination. Think of a pink elephant and again an image comes to mind. This is true even for God. Some visualize Him as "the man upstairs" or as a benevolent grandfather.
  - 2. The apostle Paul said all mankind is susceptible to this way of thinking that can result in idolatry (Romans 1:21-23).

### **Romans 1:21-23**

**<sup>21</sup> For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. <sup>22</sup> Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools <sup>23</sup> and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.**

- B. Another reason that idolatry is such a problem is because these personified gods can be controlled and owned. Man had power over the gods as much as those gods had power over man.
- C. Still another reason idolatry is so attractive is the human tendency to create God into our own image. It's much easier to make God like ourselves than it is for us to be like Him. It denies human responsibility to be like God and to obey Him (Ex. 20:6).

### **Ex 20:6**

**<sup>6</sup> but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.**

## III. CAN WE BE GUILTY OF IDOLATRY TODAY?

- A. What idols can we be guilty of worshiping today?
  - 1. Material possessions such as our home.
  - 2. Money (Matt. 6:24).

### **Matt 6:24**

**<sup>24</sup> "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.**

- 3. Vocation.
- 4. The Bible "bibliolatry". We worship God not the Bible.
- 5. Church buildings--God transcends any building.
- 6. Self (Eph. 5:5 and Col. 3:5)

### **Eph 5:4-5**

**<sup>5</sup> For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.**

B. What is the answer to idolatry?

1. God forbids any human images of Him. However, he gave us a divine image of Himself in His Son (John 1:14 and 2 Cor. 4:6).

**2 Cor 4:6<sup>6</sup> For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.**

2. Jesus is the only perfect image of God (John 14:8-9).

**John 14:8-9**

**<sup>8</sup> Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us."**

**<sup>9</sup> Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"**

## **CONCLUSION**

A. We won't be idolaters like the Israelites were at certain times throughout their history.

B. But we must be sure we keep a proper image and understanding of who God is.

C. If you have any questions about how to do that, just look to Jesus.