

To Whom Will Man Liken God

Text : **Exodus 20: 1-17 (Esp. 4-6)**

INTRODUCTION :

A. In America people do not think of themselves as being idolatrous.

1. There are many countries that are primarily idolatrous.
 - a. There are idols of all descriptions in India.
 - b. Bangkok, Thailand has thousands of images of the Buddha. (**largest in world, gold**)
2. Few Americans believe in idols. (**Attitude = “This command is not for us.”**)
 - a. Some immigrants bring idolatry with them, but most lose it within two generations.
 - b. Americans feel too sophisticated to believe in anything spiritual, but especially idols.
3. Even so, there is one large denomination of “Christianity” still uses idols in worship.
 - a. So, one may see plastic idols of Jesus or of Mary on the dashboard of cars & in yards.
 - b. They say they don’t worship the idols, that they’re just aids to focus one’s devotions.
 - 1) However, when they pray they go to holy places and bow before them.
 - 2) In fact, the bronze idol of St. Peter in Rome has had to have its feet replaced repeatedly because they’ve been worn off by worshippers lips kissing them.
 - c. We’ll see that idolatry is not only practiced in America, but also by some Christians.

B. When Americans hear the word “idol” most probably think about “American Idol.”

1. Idolatry is more than statues. **Anything other than God that is revered or worshipped.**
2. People make idols of all sorts of things :
 - a. Entertainers , Athletes , Politicians , etc.
 - b. Jobs & Possessions (House , Car , Toys , 401K , etc.)
 - c. Things that give them pleasure (Family < esp. grand kids > , recreation , sex , TV)

C. Everywhere Israel went they were confronted with idols.

1. Egypt had hundreds of gods and idols wherever one looked.
2. All the nation round about had an abundance of idols. (**Idolatry seemed normal to them.**)
3. Men made idols for all the forces beyond their control.
 - a. Sun god
 - b. Rain , Thunder, etc.
 - c. There was a god of the River Nile.

4. They created a god for everything they needed, but could not control.
 - a. Fertility
 - b. Death
 - c. War

Idols have their appeal, especially to the naïve and to the unsophisticated.

1. **People like things they can see. (worship that appeals to the senses)**
2. **When one makes a god, he defines that god's job description.
(People like to be in control, not just awestruck and compliant.)**

**I. Israel clearly understood the meaning of this command and so should we,
“Don't make any representation of God.”**

- A. Exodus 20: 4-** “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. **5-** “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, **6-** but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

1. All of the nations around Israel worshipped idols, but they were to be different.
 - a. Even today, many find it difficult to be different from the world around them.
 - b. The nations round Israel worshipped the creature, not the creator.
 - 1) **Read ... Rom. 1: 18-25**
 - 2) The need for God is part of God's nature.
 - c. The absence of idols set Israel apart from other nations.
2. There were times in Israel's history when they were proud of not having idols.
 - a. They ridiculed those who worshipped idols.
 - b. They wouldn't even allow Roman coins in the temple because of the image.

B. Though the demand was both clear and simple, Israel violated it many times.

1. The story repeated itself all through the Old Testament. (**starting with golden calf**)
2. Israel knew that God was superior to any of the idols.
 - a. God had demonstrated His superiority over the idols of Egypt.
 - 1) Each of the plagues demonstrated God's superiority over the gods of Egypt.
 - 2) God's destruction of Egypt's army proved His power over them.
 - b. God had proven His power in the desert.
 - 1) He gave the more than 5 million gallons of water every day.

2) He fed them for 40 years. (Would require covey of quail 10 miles X 5 feet thick)

C. How would it even be possible to make a representation of such an awesome God.

1. What does the creator and sustainer of the universe look like ? (**golden calf** ?)
2. **John 4:24** ... God is a spirit.
 - a. What does a spirit look like ?
 - b. We use anthropomorphisms to try to explain God, but a spirit has no form.
3. Any attempt to represent God would prove futile. (**ill.- church that worshipped light**)

II. Why would God forbid people to honor Him with any kind of representation ?

A. READ ... Exod. 19: 3-6

B. Israel was called out to be a special people. (“.. special treasure to Me above all ..”)

1. Called **BY** God **FOR** God. Vs. 4 (Remember ... **Col. 1: 16** **by & for**)
2. Their special relationship / position was contingent upon their acceptance / obedience.
3. God wanted Israel to be :
 - a. Exclusively HIS people (**He would not share loyalty with other gods. Faithful spouse**)
 - b. A holy people (**To reflect His character and attributes, FAMILY RESEMBLANCE**)
 - c. To function as priests to the rest of the world (**to represent Him on the earth**)
4. This required that Israel be very different from other nations. (**against human nature**)
5. God has always wanted His people to shine above others on the earth.
 - a. God said, “**Have you seen my servant Job** ?”
 - b. God wanted to say, “**Have you seen my nation Israel** ?”
6. Today, the church is God’s “**special treasure.**”
 - a. **I Pet. 2: 9-** But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;
 - b. **Matt. 5: 16** ... “**Let your light so shine that they may see ..**”
 - c. God wants to be able to say of YOU (and me) , “**Have you seen my servant _____ ?**”

*** If Israel had only obeyed God what a glorious and happy nation they would’ve been.**

C. (2ndly) It’s impossible to adequately represent God.

1. READ ... Isa. 40 : 18-26

- a. How can one make an image to represent one who is enthroned above the earth ?
- b. How can one make an image to represent one more powerful than all rulers combined ?

- c. How can one make an image of one who speaks universes into existence ?
2. Through the prophet, God ridicules those who make idols.
 - a. **READ ... Isa. 44 : 9-17** (*can tell story instead of reading*)
 - b. Nothing a man makes can save him. **Idolatry is foolish.**
3. In fact, we are warned that demons sometimes inhabit idols.

I Cor. 10: 19- What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20- No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons.
4. God is so awesome, He's beyond human comprehension.
 - a. He cannot be pictured with anything. (**Israel tried with the golden calf.**)
 - b. "Metal images are a result of mental images." (G.I. Packard)
 - c. How do we picture God in our hearts ? Teach our children to imagine Him ?

D. (3rdly) We can't make an image because of who we are and who God is. **SPIRIT**

1. We are spiritual people created in the image of the spiritual God.
 - a. Our spirit is not just our brain.
 - b. The brain is a tool controlled by the real you. (**by your spirit.**)
 - c. We each decide how and when to use our brains. (**Sometimes we wish we used it more.**)
2. When we die, we leave the brain behind, but the essence which is us goes back to God.
 - a. **Eccl. 12: 7- then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.**
 - b. After death we can still ... Think ... Will .. and .. Worship.
3. When we make an image of metal, stone or plastic, we attempt to make God physical instead of spiritual.
 - a. When we put our faith in people, in our having the correct doctrine, in the church or anything else we make them gods, **idols, we make our god physical.**
 - b. We are spiritual and we must relate to God in spiritual ways.
 - c. We must join our hearts (our spirits) with His heart. Not seek to bring him to our level.
4. The very nature of worship is spiritual. (**Humbling our hearts / spirits before God.**)
 - a. It's not something that's supposed to be a sensual experience. (i.e, **appeal to senses**)
 - * **The desire for sensual worship demonstrates a lack of understanding of the spiritual nature of God and of worship.**
 - b. Christians MUST worship from the heart.
 - 1) Worship is Not performing acts of worship

- 2) It is also Not just a mental exercise.
- c. Worship must never be tied to :
 - 1) An assembly of people
 - 2) A building (place)
 - 3) An idol
- * **It is absolutely essential that we learn that God wants our hearts completely devoted to Him. Love is the command that summarizes the law.**
 - a. We must learn to express our love for God.
 - b. Adoration is sometimes hard for us to verbalize, but God longs for it.
 - c. Outward actions (acts of worship) mean nothing apart from one's heart.
5. It behooves each of us to examine our own hearts.
 - a. Do I worship God from the depths of my soul ?
 - b. Do I put God above everything else in my life ?

*** ANYTHING we put above God has become our idol.**

Col. 3: 5- Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

THUS, idolatry is a condition of heart, NOT just bowing before an image.

God's purpose for the law was to teach man to have a sanctified heart.

... To lust in one's heart is adultery

... To hate in one's heart is murder.

... To adore something in one's heart above God is idolatry.

III. Some New Testament applications.

A. God has provided us with a perfect image of Himself.

It's as if God said, **"Don't make images of Me, I'll provide one."**

B. READ ... Heb. 1: 1-4

1. Jesus is the exact image of God's nature.
 - a. **II Cor. 4: 3-** And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, **4-** in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.
 - b. **Col. 1:15-** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.
2. Jesus explains God to us.

John 1: 18- No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the

bosom of the Father, He has explained *Him*.

- a. What does God do when He is angry ? ... Cleanse the temple.
- b. How does God react to sinners ? ... Woman caught in adultery.
- c. Does God care about us ? ... Death of Lazarus, Looking down on Jerusalem
- d. **How does God love us ? ... Jesus healing, feeding, with children, ON CROSS**

C. By sending Jesus, God has accomplished what no idol could possibly have done.

CONCLUSION :**A. Therefore :**

- 1. We must learn to honor God for who and what He is. **Spirit who created and sustains**
- 2. We must get rid of our idols.
 - a. People (whether heroes or loved ones ... spouse, children, grandchildren)
 - b. Things (Jobs, houses, cars, whatever consumes our hearts and minds)
 - c. Things we don't think of become idols.
 - 1) Many make an idol of themselves. (Live for "happiness", pleasure, success)
 - 2) TV (Many spend more time bowed before it than bowed before the true God.)
 - 3) Church, the bible, doctrine, etc. can become idols

*** Purging everything we love more than God can be traumatic.**

Objection : "*There's nothing I love more than God.*"

Challenge : Monitor this week / month.

- **Who or what gets the majority of our time and attention ?**
- **Who or what gets the majority of our money ?**

(OBJECTION : I'm only obligated to give 10%.

TRUE, But Love doesn't start until after duty ends.)

- **Look at your will. When you don't need it any more, who gets the bulk of what you've accumulated on this earth ?**

- 3. We must worship God in "Spirit and in Truth" (not acts and doctrine)
 - a. **John 4: 24** ... The only worship God accepts comes from the heart.
 - b. Worship is only possible when one has given his heart to God.

B. Col. 1:13- When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, 14- having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.

- 1. The Law stands as our accuser ... condemning all who violate it ... ALL violate all 10

2. Jesus frees us from the Law. **Which Do You Choose : Law or Grace**