



Turning your back on God is always done before His face

2nd Commandment, conclusion

Ex. 20:4-6

Now we will finish our look at the 2nd Commandment. We have already studied what is commanded: how we are to worship God properly. We have also studied what God prohibits: idolatry. First, we may not *make* an idol – to set an idol before our eyes, and then, second, we may not *bow down or worship* an idol.

What could be the reason why He separately stresses both the *making* and then *worshipping*? He knows well the natural inclination of our sinful hearts - that what we make for ourselves we are prone to worship.

A Holy Jealousy?

Now I want to look briefly at the reason and explanation God attaches to this commandment.

*Do not make or worship idols ...
“For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God ... “.*

Now, we normally associate jealousy with sinful or weak characteristics – i.e.: fear, worry, over-possessiveness, insecurity, hatred, competitiveness. Those kinds of things are readily found in the sinful, human heart. But we certainly would not think of God that way. So if God calls himself a jealous God there must be another meaning to the word - a meaning that carries with it a holiness, an appropriateness, a justice.

That meaning is based on God’s rightful claim on his own people - a claim He is not willing to give up on even if they, from time to time, are. A man and woman who have given vows to one another in marriage have a similar right to this kind of jealousy – not to be suspicious or sinister towards one another, but to have a right to expect faithfulness from the other and together, protect the sanctity of the marriage covenant.

In Exodus 24:9-32:5, Moses and the elders ascend to meet with God. Then, Moses ascends further and meets with God alone for 40 days and nights. And during this time, when Moses and the elders are gone, the Israelites down below, standing before this terrible and holy God, begin to grow bored. They decide to construct an image of their own god and worship their own god the way they want to. They construct a bull calf out of gold they worship before it and they give themselves to eating and drinking and to orgies, and all in the name of this idol.

What could have motivated them to do such a thing? fear, impatience, doubt? What is significant about Aaron being the one leading them here? He had been the voice of God, but for now he gave in to the pressure of social demand and became, for this moment at least, the voice of compromise.

What is Idolatry?

What do we learn about idolatry here?

- Idolatry is self-serving. The heart of sinful man is not free from the Moral Law and the justice of God. Therefore, everything he does is to appease his conscience, his sense of coming dread, and his fear of the unknown future. Sinful man worships an idol for the sense of security it promises him.
- Idolatry is man-made. Idolatry is never a case of “comparative religions”. It is formed out of the rejection of the truth and the one, true God. Idolaters forsake the laws of God and invent their own which are only meant to suit them.
- Idolatry is costly. God had seen to it that the Egyptians “paid” the Israelites for the years of their slavery; and when the time came to build the tabernacle the people were called to share of their wealth according to their own desire and Moses had an over-abundance from such generosity. But the idol “required” the costliest of their possessions to be given to it! And if their treasures then surely also their hearts. Addictions are idolatry – drugs, gambling, food – none of these are ever satisfied – you always have to give more to the idol.
- Idolatry is immoral. Something is “moral” if it is right and correct according to an ethical standard. Idolatry is the rejection of that standard and a defiance of morality by nature. By its very nature, idolatry demands immorality – because there truly is no soul or true life in view, it focuses only on the body and the path of corruption and ruin.
- Idolatry is sensual. Idolatry attacks the body. It either regards the body as earthly and temporal, even evil, and, therefore, it is to be despised. Or, idolatry regards the body as the gateway of all sensual stimulation and pleasure for which there can be no reason for restraint.
- Idolatry is death. Because it always is done *Coram Deo*, God always sees idolatry and hates it. And he will judge it according to man’s deeds.

Truth or Consequences

There is so much similarity between adultery and idolatry in Scripture that God often calls the sin of idolatry as adultery and God regards sexual sin as a more heinous sin in his sight than other sins we are prone to commit because it is so analogous to idolatry in his sight.

And judgment began with the house of God.

There are 3 basic ways we can see this analogy in Scripture:

1) Promiscuity – actually engaging in sexual sin violates the holiness of the institution of marriage (whether or not you are presently married) in the same way that flagrant indulgence with an idol violates your relationship to God. Anything or anybody that you give yourself, your life or your affections to, that makes that thing, that person an idol to you because it steals those things from God.

2) Pornography – feasting your eyes on a sexual object is committing adultery in your heart. Jesus said “But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has

already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Mat 5:28) Anything that tempts and desires to capture your attention, imagination and lust violates your relationship to God in the same way. You don’t have to touch it to worship it. It is idolatry.

3) Priority - fixating your mind toward the object of your sinful desire. This is what happens when you forsake your devotion and obedience to God and give yourself, instead, to that which takes his place. When you purposefully expose yourself to temptation and sin -or when you prepare for it, dress for it, spend on it, plan, scheme and lie for it - when a husband deceives his wife or a son his mother - you make it your idol, that is idolatry.

When you prepare for it, dress for it, spend on it, plan, scheme and lie for it - that is idolatry.

An old rule of thumb I discovered long ago which exposes the sin of idolatry to your heart is when you defend and rationalize your motives by asking the question “What is wrong with it?” instead of the question “What is right about it?” Idolatry begins when you do not care what God thinks when you are only concerned with what you want.

Then, God says, as he is a jealous God, He is

“visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the 3rd and 4th generation of those who hate me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love me and keep my commandments.”

Sin carries with it consequences, damage, penalties and scars.

God gives out consequences as a form of his justice, for our rebellion deserves his condemnation. And the sins we commit we cannot contain - it does not just hurt us, it hurts everyone and the pain can be felt for generations.

Even so, God gives out consequences also out of his grace, for even the consequences of our actions are not the payment we deserve for our sins. Consequences in this life can be used of God to drive us to Christ.

But God also gives out consequences out of his judgment. Idolaters are judged by God now: they are the ones, He determines, who are driven not by foolishness or ignorance but, in reality, by their hatred for God.

But, because Christ has taken the condemnation of the law upon himself, even though you may receive the consequences of idolatry, you can be restored. You can be restored by the covenant commitment of God - His word is your salvation, His son your perfect sacrifice. You can be restored by a true repentance, faith and trust, for these are the actions of one who loves the Lord, even in the midst of his sinfulness. You can be restored by obedience to His Word, for only those who choose to obey him are the ones who truly love him.

From *Studies in the Book of Exodus*, by Pastor Dave Barker, January, 2001.

New Covenant Presbyterian Church
Preaching God's Sovereign Grace to a World of Need
128 St. Mary's Church Rd.
Abingdon, MD 231015
410-569-0289

www.ncpres.org www.ephesians515.com