

### The Law of God, Part Three: Accept No Substitutes

**Exodus 20:1 ESV (Pg. 35)** And God spoke all these words, saying, **2** “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. **3** “You shall have no other gods before me. **4** “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.

- I. The process of writing this sermon was difficult for one predominant reason. I did not know how to clearly distinguish between the first commandment, “You shall have no other gods before me” from the second, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image...You shall not bow down to them or serve them”.
  - A. When I preached to you two weeks ago about the first commandment, I talked to you about the danger of having other gods by serving “internal idols”. I was thinking primarily of things like our attitudes, desires, habits, etc. It seemed clear to me that even in 2019, these can become objects of our misplaced reverence.
  - B. But now we come to the second commandment. It is **clearly** forbidding the worship of idols and images, focusing on them, and even defining them (“**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**”). So to the best of my understanding, one of at least three things must be true that has convoluted the distinction between the first two commandments (at least for me!) :
    1. First, maybe I just did a lousy job of preaching the first message. (That’s always a real possibility!) Maybe I didn’t know what the first commandment was all about, and won’t know what the second refers to either (we’ll see!).
    2. Or maybe they are not two commandments after all, but one. Maybe what we call the second commandment is only a commentary on, or expansion of the first. This is highly unlikely, however, since Jews and Christians have considered these the “10 Commandments” for millennia, so if you remove the 2nd Commandment, then you would no longer have 10 Commandments!
    3. Third option: perhaps there is something deeper for us to discover that helps us better understand the nature of each commandment on its own. That is the assumption that we will be working with. Let’s see what we find...
  - C. The first thing I will propose is that the first commandment applies to the outer reaches of our universal tendency toward worship. **We are all worshippers.**
    1. This is the easiest theological truth to prove conclusively. Everyone worships someone or something, everywhere and at all times. While some people worship the true God, yet some worship themselves by their pursuit of things like money, beauty, power, fame, success; or a host of other things.
    2. In truth, all of these things (and many more) are constantly demanding worship from us. You are constantly being seduced in one way or another to bow your knee in worship by pursuing something that is less than God.
  - D. This happened to Jesus. When the devil tempted him, he cut to the chase...
    1. **Matthew 4:8 ESV** Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. **9** And he said to

- him, “All these I will give you, **if you will fall down and worship me.**” Jesus was promised he would be given everything he needed for satisfaction and sustenance simply by redirecting his worship (thereby violating the 1st commandment.) Notice where that offer came from!
- a) Every day you will hear voices that make promises of what you will receive for the seemingly low cost of your worship; from advertising, social media, the demands of culture, and the expectations of others.
  - b) Don’t be deceived! The cost is unspeakably high! Both in this life, and in the one to come, misplaced worship will cost you everything of value.
2. But Jesus demonstrated for us the position that all believers must take when he said: **Matthew 4:10b ESV** “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “**You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.**”
- E. So you could say the first commandment applies to our “passive worship”. How we give in to the temptation to find satisfaction in anything else but God. We are told that we shall have no other gods before him, and that has nothing to do with God’s ego, but his worth, and his love for and protection of his children.
1. When you think about it, all sin begins with misplaced worship. We were created for the express purpose of bringing God glory. So when we bring glory **to** other things, or center our own glory **in** other things, we are rejecting our created purpose, and committing a heinous sin against our creator.
  2. **James 1:14 ESV** But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own **desire**. **15** Then **desire** when it has conceived gives birth to **sin**, and **sin** when it is fully grown brings forth **death**. James is saying that temptation is always focused on our own desires (the devil didn’t make you do it!). That desire if conceived, it will produce sin, which will result in death.
- II. But if the first commandment applies to our **passive** worship, the second commandment seems to me to apply to our **active** worship. “**You shall not make for yourself a carved image...**” “Making for yourself” is an intentional act.
- A. While the first commandment speaks of **who** we worship, stating that our worship is to be given to God exclusively; the second commandment speaks of **how** we worship, and helps define the parameters of our worship.
1. We said idols can be formed for the benefit of latent desires that result in misplaced worship. That process can seem subtle because we are all sinners by default, so we don’t always recognize without light from the scriptures, and the help of the Holy Spirit, when an idol has been erected.
  2. But the second commandment is violated when we consciously, actively, designate something tangible for our object of worship. It happens when we look at something and either say, “that is my god”, or when we treat it like our god, though we may even deny with our words that it what it is.
- B. In other words, it matters very little what we say a thing (person, ambition, etc.,) is; but the place it holds in our hearts is critical. This is a conscious decision, not a subconscious one. You have chosen to treat the substitute as a god.
1. So how do we know what we’re treating like a god? By realizing what God alone deserves, and what God alone can give to us.

- a) **God alone deserves glory.** Upon what or whom do you lavish glory in your life? A romantic relationship? A car, house or other possession? Athletic or musical talent you have? Some intellectual achievement? Some sports team, band, or movie franchise? Your “perfect” children?
  - b) **God alone can give salvation.** What are you looking to for salvation? A great job? Perfect health? A stellar reputation? The praise of others? The acquisition of power? Marriage? Divorce? A political party or position?
2. Both those living in ancient pagan cultures, and in today’s false religions would create carved images and painted representations to conceptualize to whom they should give glory, and to whom they were looking for salvation.
- a) The ancient Egyptians had gods resembling baboons, falcons, cats and crocodiles (to name a few). The Canaanites had many gods in human form, as well as animal ones. The ancient Israelites were constantly adopting the gods of other cultures and worshipping them.
  - b) Today, Catholics beatify people like Mary and other deceased people, make images of them, and then pray to the images (which is a violation of several biblical commandments). Similarly, Mormons revere angels.
- C. The prophet Jeremiah spoke of the folly and impotence of all such worship: **Jeremiah 10:3b ESV** A tree from the forest is cut down and worked with an axe by the hands of a craftsman. **4** They decorate it with silver and gold; they fasten it with hammer and nails so that it **cannot move**. **5** Their idols are like scarecrows in a cucumber field, and they **cannot speak**; they have to be carried, for they **cannot walk**. Do not be afraid of them, for they **cannot do evil, neither is it in them to do good.**”
- 1. Jeremiah, with a mocking tone, points out that these statues, no matter how ornately decorated, are **powerless**; they can’t move, speak, do evil or good!
  - 2. Later in the chapter, he says that the images aren’t a representation of any one, true god, but rather they reflect the image of their own inventors. **Jeremiah 10:14 ESV** Every man is **stupid** and **without knowledge**; every goldsmith is **put to shame** by his idols, for his images are **false**, and there is **no breath in them**. **15** They are **worthless**, a **work of delusion**; at the time of their punishment **they shall perish**.
- D. But Jeremiah is not simply making the point that the work of a craftsman’s hands can never be a god; he also compares the one true God of Israel to these silly, homemade delusions: **Jeremiah 10:6 ESV** There is **none like you**, O Lord; **you are great**, and **your name is great in might**. **7** Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For **this is your due**; for among all the wise ones of the nations and in all their kingdoms there is **none like you**...**10** But the Lord is the **true God**; he is the **living God** and the **everlasting King**. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation. **11** Thus shall you say to them: “The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens.” **12 It is he who made the earth by his power, who established the world by his wisdom, and by his understanding stretched out the heavens**. **13** When he utters his voice, there is a tumult of

waters in the heavens, and he makes the mist rise from the ends of the earth. He makes lightning for the rain, and he brings forth the wind from his storehouses...**16** Not like these (idols) is he who is the portion of Jacob, for **he is the one who formed all things**, and Israel is the tribe of his inheritance; the Lord of hosts is his name.

1. Idols are powerless. But the wrath of God can make the earth quake. The utterance of his word keeps the rain falling, the lightning flashing, and the wind blowing. He is the architect and builder of everything we see.
  2. By an act of his judgement, the day is coming when all the deceptions of idols will cease forever, and all craftsmen and worshippers of idols will be damned. This is reality, and it's a far cry from the empty threats and promises of figurines of wood, stone and clay that can't do anything.
- III. Likely none of you disagree with anything I've said so far, but our problem is that inherent human nature **never** changes...not even all the way in 2019!
- A. You may laugh at the thought of a rain god providing for your family, while you place all of your hope and confidence in the "god" of the American economy; as long as it's strong, you have a job and the bills are paid, you feel safe.
1. You may not sacrifice to some stone monkey, asking it to provide health, but you worship the "god" of health clubs and protein shakes, thinking you're somehow going to sculpt the perfect body and thereby cheat death; not believing that your final day has already been pre-determined by God.
  2. You may not be chanting before the moon in some fertility rite, but you have placed all confidence in match.com or Tinder to help you find romantic bliss.
- B. Of course, there are 1,000 other examples (some stronger) that I could give, and I'm certainly not suggesting that it's wrong invest wisely, or take care of your body, or to experience the love of Mr. or Miss Right. The issue is one of where our confidence lies. Who do you trust? Where do we really place our trust?
1. Someone once asked me why I thought we didn't see miraculous healings on the scale of Jesus' earthly ministry, or that of the Apostle's in the book of Acts anymore. I responded that I thought it was because we didn't need them anymore. Why cry out for healing when you have health insurance?
  2. The people in the Bible who experienced miracles were generally people out of options, who had no choice but to place all of their hopes on Jesus. But we don't have to do that because we're financially secure, fully insured, and not persecuted. What we **do** have is options...and they are killing our faith.
- C. So it's not hard to see how even the best of things can become idols, little gods that we look to to save us; and because we think they can save us, we're willing to give them a way too prominent place in our lives - to glorify them! So if all this is true and we've drifted from the one and only God, and worshipped other things, calling them our gods, what should true worship look like?
1. Jesus was once talking to a Samaritan woman in John 4 and the question of how to rightly worship God came up. Samaritans did it differently than Jews.
  2. **John 4:23 ESV** "But the hour is coming, and is **now here**, when the **true worshipers** will worship the Father in **spirit** and **truth**, for the Father is

seeking such people to worship him. **24** God is spirit, and those who worship him **must** worship in spirit and truth.”

- D. Because God is Spirit, we worship him in spirit. To say that he is spirit means that he is unseen and therefore imperceptible to human senses. We should not call anything our god because we have such a limited idea of the vastness, awesomeness and majesty of God that anything we imagine, or assign that high honor to would be pitifully inaccurate and insufficient.
1. This is true of carved pagan figures that are called “gods”; but it’s equally true of the modern American Gods of security and political power.
  2. This means that we don’t need something to symbolize him; we don’t need a special place to worship him; we aren’t ever allowed to either overtly or covertly call anything god besides the one true God of the Bible.
- E. But we are also told to worship God in truth. This means that we worship God as he has revealed himself, and not as we imagine him to be. Often I will hear people say, “**To me**, God is like...” Who cares what God is to you, or to me for that matter? I need to know God as he truly is! **Psalm 50:21b ESV** “**you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you.**”
1. If you need an image of God, as he really is, there is only one image provided for you. You don’t have to carve one out for yourself with a hammer and chisel. You don’t have to imagine what God is like. You can know!
    - a) **Colossians 1:15 ESV** He (Christ Jesus) is the **image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.** He is not a flawed “graven image” birthed out of the polluted mind of a sinful silversmith. He is the exact image of God, straight from the royal courts of heaven.
    - b) **Hebrews 1:3a ESV** He is the **radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.**
  2. You don’t need a statue, or a great imagination - You have been given the image of God, the exact imprint (not a flawed facsimile!) of his nature in Jesus Christ who took on flesh and dwelt among us.
    - a) If you want to know what the power of God is like, look at Jesus! Sickness, disease, demons, death and all the forces of nature are obedient to his every word!
    - b) If you want to know what the wisdom of God is like, look at Jesus! He teaches the simple-minded, and also confounds the wisest among us!
    - c) If you want to know what the love of God looks like, look at Jesus! See him hanging there, innocent, dying on a cross for ungrateful sinners. See as his blood flows down and washes away all the sin of those who would dare place their faith in him! Herein is the love of God on vivid display!
- IV. There is no need for icons or images; statues or frescoes, imaginations or inventions. We purify our worship by beholding the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. We do this every week at the communion table.
- A. Every week I read to you the words of Paul, where he instructs the Corinthians about the Lord’s Supper and tells them that Christ instructed the church to take

the bread and wine, symbolizing Christ's broken body and spilled blood, and doing so "in remembrance" of Christ.

1. But "in remembrance" of Christ is not the same as "in memoriam" of Christ. Sometimes people will give some money to the church as a memorial to someone who has died, or a community will erect a statue to some great civic leader or war hero as a memorial to their service or sacrifice.
  2. But communion shows us clearly why we don't need idols of either the ancient or modern variety. We are not memorializing our fallen savior around these tables. That is not what we are being told to remember. We don't memorialize him because (guess what?) he's not dead!
- B. This morning we are remembering his presence; not from 2,000 years ago, but right here, right now! We are stirring our memory so we can say, "Oh yeah! The risen Lord is right here with me with all his power at work!" We are remembering his victory over sin and death that has caused his resurrection power to course through our mortal bodies. We are not simply "remembering" his death!
- C. It is these truths that allows us to tear down all of our most beloved idols and worship the Lord our God in spirit and in truth! We do not need to accept substitutes, because unlike ancient pagans, or modern power-grasping, self worshippers, we have the real Lord living within us and speaking to us through his word everyday! Let us come and "remember" him that way!
- V. **1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV** For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.