

TEN | No Idols

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Introduction

Exodus 20:1–17

And God spoke all these words, saying: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image—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; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it. Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor’s.”

Last week we discussed the first commandment—“You shall have no other gods before Me.” This week we will discuss God’s second commandment, that we neither make idols nor bow down to them nor serve them.

- A **god** is something that you place your trust in to take care of you and protect you.
- An **idol** is anything that diminishes, competes with, or distracts you from the one true God.

**An idol is an attempt to reduce God
or to replace God
by placing something or someone
between yourself and God.**

Resist placing anyone or anything on too high of a pedestal or it will become an idol in your life.

Impatience and Idolatry

Background for our key passage: The Israelites have been freed from Egypt and have taken with them Egyptian plunder. God has led them faithfully to Mt. Sinai, where God speaks to the people and gives them the Law verbally. He makes a covenant with Israel, but the people are scared, so they send Moses to talk to God. Moses ascends Mt. Sinai and stays there with God for forty days and nights.

Exodus 32:1–4

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, “Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” And Aaron said to them, “Break off the golden earrings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” So all the people

broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, “This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!”

- The Israelites were idle and impatient. They could see the cloud of His Presence on Mt. Sinai, but because God wouldn’t make a move on their schedule, they decided to take matters into their own hands, and they made a golden calf.

Application—It is in stillness that we are exposed to our idols. If you can’t wait—if you don’t develop the practice of patience—your life is ripe for idolatry. As philosopher Dallas Willard said, “Hurry is the great enemy of spiritual life in our day.”¹ Practice patience and waiting on the Lord in all things and at all times.

Idolatry thrives when we are impatient.

Blessings and Idolatry

Exodus 32:7–10

And the Lord said to Moses, “Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!’” And the Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation.”

- The Israelites took blessings God had given them and turned them into an idol. They took the gold that came as a gift from God when they were freed from Egypt and turned it into an abomination.

Question—How often do we take gifts God has bestowed on us and worship those instead of the Giver Himself?

Even potential blessings—a dream job, a dream home, a dream of the perfect spouse and family—can be an idol. Anything that takes too high of a place in your heart will become a lesser thing of worship.

Blessings in your life—potential or realized—are not meant to take the place of God.

Restrain Evil

Exodus 32:11–14

Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, and said: “Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, ‘He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth’? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, ‘I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.’” So the Lord relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people.

- Moses is the picture of Jesus Christ—he stood between God’s wrath and the people of Israel, pleading and interceding for their salvation.

¹ John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, p. 18.

- Moses' prayer for the people impacted God, and He relented.

Exodus 32:19–24

So it was, as soon as he came near the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing. So Moses' anger became hot, and he cast the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. Then he took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder; and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it. And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?" So Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. For they said to me, 'Make us gods that shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' And I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them break it off.' So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out."

- By contrast, Aaron was an active participant in evil. When the people grew impatient and wanted to turn God's blessings into an idol, Aaron was the one who made it happen. What's more, he lied about it to Moses when Moses came down from Mt. Sinai.

Application—The Law was given in part to be a bulwark against the encroaching evil of the world. It was to keep Israel from participating in and with evil. Today it's the Holy Spirit in us that is the great Restrainer of evil in this world.

Leadership is simply influence. Moses was *the* leader, but Aaron was *a* leader. Moses interceded on behalf of the people while Aaron lead the people into evil. All of us are leaders of someone. With the Holy Spirit, we have the power to restrain evil, and we should use it. When we restrain the evil in our world, it benefits everyone around us.

Generational Consequences of Idolatry

Exodus 32:30–35

Now it came to pass on the next day that Moses said to the people, "You have committed a great sin. So now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin—but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written." And the Lord said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. Now therefore, go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin." So the Lord plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made.

- Consequences of sin like idolatry can last three or four generations (**Exodus 20:5**).
- There is a difference between a curse and a consequence. You are not cursed because of the sins of others, but those consequences are a reality you may have to deal with for a long time.
- Though consequences may be very real, if you are in Christ, you are a new creation. For those who love the Lord, He is merciful! How long does that mercy last? For thousands of generations! (**Exodus 20:6**)

**“For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God,
punishing the children for the sin of the parents
to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,
but showing love to a thousand generations
of those who love me and keep my commandments.”
(Exodus 20:5–6)**

Relational Consequences of Idolatry

Exodus 33:1–6

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way.” When the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn and no one put on any ornaments. For the Lord had said to Moses, “Tell the Israelites, ‘You are a stiff-necked people. If I were to go with you even for a moment, I might destroy you. Now take off your ornaments and I will decide what to do with you.’” So the Israelites stripped off their ornaments at Mount Horeb.

- God sends Israel on to the Promised Land, and He supports them and blesses them with an angel to drive out their enemies, but He says He will not go with them.
- The consequence of idolatry is broken relationship with God.
- These words grieved Israel so much, they immediately abandoned their ornaments—the same sorts of things they made the golden calf with.

Question—What ornaments do you need to immediately abandon?

Personal—One of my boys once asked me before bed if it was okay to love anything more than God. I said that you should love God more than anything and anyone. God comes first, everything else comes after. From that night forward and every night for years, he would say to me, “Good night, I love you, but not as much as God.”

Conclusion

What has the Holy Spirit revealed is an idol in your life? What do you need to cast off?

Three ways to cast off your idols:

1. Renew it—fast from it.
2. Restrain it—set times when it is unavailable to you.
3. Reject it—you may need to eliminate it from your life altogether.

Exodus 30:7, 11, 13–17

Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the “tent of meeting.” Anyone inquiring of the Lord would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. . . . The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent. so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people. . . . The Lord replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” Then Moses said to him, “If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?” And the Lord said to Moses, “I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.”

- Moses made a tabernacle and went before the Lord. This pleased the Lord and restored His Presence to Israel.

- The problem with idolatry is a breakdown in relationship with the Lord. First seek to be with God, and then let Him tell you how to deal with your idols.

**Before you start dealing with unholy idolatry in your life
make a place and a time to be *with* the Lord.
You need a place before a plan.
It's His presence—not your plan—
that is going to make the biggest difference in your life.**

Prayer

Lord, we want to trust You with the in-between times in our lives. We repent of trying to push ahead without You. Help us to see the influence and impact of our lives on those around us. Raise leaders of influence who will be a light in this dark world.

Lord, we repent of putting our trust in any man or woman we have lifted too high. Don't let us idolize pastors, politicians, celebrities, or anyone above You. Our souls find rest in You alone.

We commit this morning to make a place for You, to spend time with You, and to bring our thoughts back to You each day. We commit to tear down any idol, any "thing" that reduces You or replaces You in our lives. We lower that thing before You today, and we lift You up in its place. Diminish these idols in our lives. Help us, Lord, to release them, and please release us from their power over our lives.

We ask for Your blessings on our children to the thousandth generation. We long for You to be with us and to know us each of by name.

In Jesus's name we pray.

Amen.

Discussion Questions

1. Discuss the differences between a god and an idol. How can you distinguish between them in your life?
2. How can impatience lead to idolatry? Have you experienced this before? How can you guard against the dangers of impatience?
3. Have you ever considered that blessings can be turned into idols? What about potential blessings? How do you enjoy blessings now and hope for future blessings without allowing these things to become idols to you?
4. Discuss what it means to be a leader who restrains the encroaching evil of this world. What are some ways you can do this every day?
5. What is the difference between a curse and a consequence? How does Exodus 20:5–6 challenge you? How does it encourage you?
6. What is the most important thing you can do to begin casting off any idols you have?

NOTES