

No Idols

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[0 : 00] Well, hey, good morning. My name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. You can always check us out more at FCCGreensburg.com or you can go to the FCC Greensburg Facebook page.

But hey, thank you so much for tuning in today. We pray that as we get into the Word, most importantly, the Word will get into us and transform these hearts more and more into the image of Jesus.

Now, I would be surprised if you know the name Kurt Steiner. And yet he's the best in the world at what he does. He's currently the world's greatest stone skipper.

He's the Michael Jordan of his sport. Now, I'm usually content if I can just get that smooth stone to skip two to three times on a pond, but this guy takes it to a whole new level.

In two decades of competition, he has won 17 major stone skipping tournaments. In fact, he pitched one that skipped so many times that it reportedly defied the laws of science.

[1 : 05] That's what people said. He's dedicated his entire life to this art, and he claims that it helps him deal with his depression and even achieve inner balance.

And yet, his obsession with stone skipping has cost him his marriage, and it's left him financially broke. And now this middle-aged man has plenty of aches and pains in his shoulder from years of wear and tear, but simply says that he continues to throw, not because he wants to, but because he has no choice.

Now, that's a pretty odd example of the second of the Ten Commandments called idolatry. And we may shake our heads and say, come on, Kurt Steiner, Jesus is your answer.

But we'll discover today, to paraphrase Kyle Eidelman, that while the majority think that they've kept this command to not make idols, it may be the one that we've broken the very most.

So welcome back to this series called Ten. Grab your Bibles and open up to the second book of the Old Testament. You got Genesis, and then comes Exodus. Exodus chapter 20.

[2 : 11] Here we are in week three. The first week, we simply kind of set the stage for the Ten Commandments by realizing that they're relevant today to show us just how far we've fallen from God's standards as they lead us to the cross.

Once we discover his grace, they teach us how to live for him. Last week, we looked at the first commandment to have no other gods. And we discovered that Jehovah, that Yahweh, is awesome in power, that he's full of grace.

And by the way, that begged the question, why would we dare even want to worship anything else? Because nothing else compares. So last week, we talked about kind of the who of our worship, some of his attributes.

And this week, we'll talk about the how, the manner, the reality that we can worship the right God in the wrong way. That we can aim to worship God by doing things that actually reduce him down.

We can become control freaks, and we can make tangible, physical idols, or even imagine them in our minds. And what we're doing, even unintentionally, is shaping God into our own image or what we want him to be.

[3 : 25] Trying to tame God. And he makes it clear. He's not okay with that. So, let's look at Exodus chapter 20. Let's start in verse 4. And here's what it says.

You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything, in heaven above, or on the earth beneath, or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them.

Now, I'm going to stop right there for now. Okay? So, we can sum up this commandment in two words. No idols. But this passage naturally kind of breaks itself up and honestly gives us a simple outline that has two directives that come out of this one commandment.

And then there's two reasons why. So, if you want to go to the YouVersion Bible app, that's where you can see our outline. If you go to the menu, go to events, go to First Christian Church of Greensburg, you can see it that way.

But here's the first point that I want you to see. Don't make idols. Very simple. Don't make idols. When we as Americans in 2024, when we first hear that we're not supposed to make idols out of wood or stone or whatever, I think our first inclination is to be like, well, I have some struggles, that's for sure.

[4 : 41] But man, this ain't one of them. Do people really struggle with making idols? And you know what? The answer is yes. All around the world, you can find people, even nations, who make or buy statues or items that they adore and kiss, pray to, touch, bow down to, put in their homes to protect them, to even ward off evil spirits.

Even think about Christianity and what some people do. They take a cross and they put it around their neck because they see it as some cloak of invincibility. So let me give us some context here into the story of the Israelites before they left Egypt in pursuit of the promised land.

So for 400 years, generation after generation knew nothing but slavery. Although they were supposed to worship the one true God, they were surrounded by an Egyptian culture that worshiped 1,500 different little g gods.

When they wandered in the desert, they were influenced by the Canaanite gods. And listen, these made-up gods, they weren't innocent. They were vile, wicked, perverted.

There was nothing holy or righteous about them. Child sacrifice was even a part of their worship.

This was not innocent because idolatry never is. And here they are immersed in a world telling them to worship all these multiple wicked gods and what that looks like.

[6 : 10] And then they come to Mount Sinai. And listen, for 11 months, camped at this location, God teaches them to worship him alone in spirit and in truth.

Surrounded by a thick cloud with lightning and thunder, the power of God was on full display. He spoke the Ten Commandments to them.

Moses went up on the mountain to meet with him and get them in the written form. And you would think that they would be on their best behavior after seeing God save them through these plagues. After the Red Sea has parted in two. After experiencing God's provision of food, water, protection, even GPS. And then after receiving these commands as the power and majesty of God was on full display before their eyes.

So much so that they were so scared they begged him to stop. But in less than 40 days, as Moses is gone and they don't know what happened, watch what happens.

[7 : 17] So if you got your Bibles open to Exodus 20, go ahead and flip like 12 chapters later to Exodus 32. Moses has been up on that mountain meeting with God for what seems like way too long.

They're thinking that he probably died. And here's what it says, starting in Exodus 32 verse 1. 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 out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him. So have you noticed when we get fearful, when life turns in all kinds of unexpected ways, we as people have this natural tendency to make for ourselves gods that are comfortable in the images that we want them to be.

That's exactly what they're doing. Look at verse 2. Aaron answered them, Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons, your daughters are wearing and bring them to me. So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron.

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, Israel.

[8 : 32] You can also interpret that. This is your God, Israel, who brought you out of Egypt. I can't imagine the rage that God the Father should have had in this moment when they give credit to a golden baby cow instead of to the all-powerful God of the universe.

Now look at verse 5. When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord. And so look, they give the Lord God Jehovah credit and worship the right God, at least they think they are, worship the right God in the wrong way.

Verse 6. So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward, they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry, another word for all kinds of immorality.

And I bet you can imagine what that might have looked like. So Chip Ingram, I think, gave a pretty good illustration of this. His ministry for years was in Santa Cruz, California.

He was a megachurch pastor, just a fantastic teacher of God's word. And when family would come to visit them, they would often take them to see the giant redwood trees in California.

[9 : 54] So I have never seen these trees. I've never been there before. But I would love to go see these trees that reach 280 to 300 foot high.

Some that have been hit by lightning and burn out. You could actually get like 10 to 15 people inside of the base of a tree. What an awesome picture of God's power and majesty through his creation.

But Chip said, imagine. He said, imagine I take you to see these trees. You're in all. And then I give you a box of toothpicks, Elmer's glue, some paper and some paint.

And I told you to make this into an image. He said, it wouldn't do it justice, would it? And you know what? The same thing is true when we want to fashion God into an idol. You know, I used to think this way before I came to know Jesus, that I'd be good if I just wore a cross around my neck.

Or if I put one in each room of my house. No, that's not true. It's making Jesus the Lord of your life with the Holy Spirit living inside of you that makes you good to go.

[10 : 57] It's seeking the Lord's heart. Living out those famous words from the book of Joshua that say, as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. When you make that commitment, that brings his blessings.

So don't think you can capture the all-powerful, holy, majestic, sovereign, righteous God with something fashioned with human hands.

He's greater than that box that we try to put him in. And then, second, don't worship idols. Don't worship idols.

Going back to Exodus 20, verse 5, after being told not to make these idols, God's word puts it like this. It says, you shall not bow down to them or worship them.

See, this is the problem with what seems like innocent statues or images or paintings or whatever form an idol can take. And to fast forward to the New Testament, we actually see just the progression of when we start off what appears innocently to some, this is often where our hearts will go when idols are welcomed in.

[12 : 12] So here's what Romans chapter 1, starting in verse 20, says. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made so that people are without excuse.

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. Although they claimed to be wise, look at this, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God, look at what they do, for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles.

See, I'll never forget being at a church and the decision was made to redo the nursery in the preschool area. Just two classes with a bathroom in the middle. It had been something like 20 years since it was done.

The carpet was old and stained, looked rough. The paint was dull. There was even a mural on the wall that had been definitely seen its better days. So the children's ministry team makes the decision to just take that space and just make it really nice so parents feel good about leaving their children there.

They painted it. They changed the carpet, new decorations, and it really did look nice and clean.

And then the person who painted the original mural got word, and it was not good.

[13 : 33] Almost left the church over it. And to be honest, I really got along great with this person. I really like this person, but I couldn't help but think to myself, man, I'm not God, and I can't see the true intention of people's hearts, and maybe there's something I don't understand, but man, this seems like an idol that we've taken a gift that we've been given and we've used it to honor God, but then we've made that kind of a prerequisite to our worship.

Now, let me deal with kind of a sensitive topic here, and I want to do it in love, hopefully gently. One of my biggest pet peeves, and I'm not telling you to go burn these if you have them, okay?

This is not for me to judge anyone else, but one of my biggest pet peeves are pictures of Jesus, especially when they're not anything near an accurate description or depiction.

Usually in America, Jesus is made to look very European, right? Light brown with a touch of blonde hair, blue eyes. But listen, I have it on really good authority that Jesus was Jewish and would have looked Jewish, right?

That's in God's Word, and if you look back at kind of the history of the pictures of Jesus in this country, if you go back to the 60s, Jesus was often portrayed as this kind of very meek and mild, hippie-looking dude, very pasty white figure with long brown hair.

[14:58] And then in the 70s, he looked like a campus radical with a scruffy beard who was ready to start a revolution. And then you go to the 80s, and all of a sudden, he switches to become supermodel Jesus, which definitely contradicts the Bible's teachings about his appearance.

And someone might say, well, Ray, who cares? You're making a big deal about nothing. Let people imagine Jesus how they want. But tell me, what happens when we take these false depictions and we make them near and dear to our hearts?

Suddenly, we start seeing Jesus as this wimpy, meek, mild, when Scripture is very clear that, yes, while he is humble and full of grace, he's also the lion of the tribe of Judah.

He's awesome in power. He will be over judgment. And as time goes, we build a doctrine around these images, these statues, and true biblical doctrine can fade further and further away.

And we usually always land in a place where the power, majesty, grace, sufficiency, love, or even judgment of Christ are compromised from what the Word teaches because we start to fashion Jesus into the image that we want him to be.

[16:10] Now, let me take you even deeper here. Here's some things we can do and we can make idols. We can make our churches into idols. And my prayer is that you will love your church and that FCC will be home, that you'll be proud of how intentionally, as a family, we live out our purpose to love God, love people, and make disciples.

I hope you'll always feel good and feel comfortable inviting your friends and your neighbors to worship services because you know that God's Word is our guide in everything. And yet, this wonderful thing that you should love can become an idol when it becomes before God on the throne of your heart.

We can become so focused on things like church size, on attendance, and church staffs are really bad about this, by the way. This is something we have to guard all the time.

And these things can become intoxicating. More pastors, more buildings, and we start to define success by worldly standards instead of simply being obedient to the Lord's call on each of our lives as we seek to love people to Christ and help them grow as a disciple.

Listen, I'm thankful that God is growing this church what seems like every single week. But my prayer is that I will never, ever define my calling by how many bottoms we can put in on a Sunday.

[17:32] Kingdom success is us being faithful to our biblical mission that God has given us knowing that He's the one that brings results. And if He chooses to grow us, then praise Him.

May we be faithful to the flock He entrusts to us. Now, did you know that pastors can also be idols? We live in an American culture that loves to take big church pastors and make them into rock stars.

And boy, have we seen the moral implications of this way too many times. We've seen many pastors start believing their own press, and then Satan gets a foot in the door.

Next thing you know, there's a scandal of power, sex, theft, whatever. And the church suffers because of it, right? We've all seen this. And people say, well, I belong to so-and-so's church.

Well, listen, I can assure you that so-and-so doesn't have a church, at least not biblically. It's always been Jesus' church. And I hate to burst anyone's bubble, but your favorite preacher is a sinner saved by grace who daily struggles with the same things that you probably do.

[18:38] And they stand up on the platform, and they preach their hearts out, knowing that they have their own insecurities, hoping and praying that God will use them as a broken vessel.

They're not a rock star. They're a broken vessel that God has called for such a time as this that shows how good He is and not how special we are in our talents or that we are above everyone else.

Wow. Man, I didn't realize all that was packed into this one commandment. And guys, we can keep going. Some people make their church ministry into an idol where my identity is defined by my role, by my title at church, and we hover over it, and no new person's going to come in here and take my

place.

Others make a church building into an idol. I mean, I've seen people even make their denomination, their church brotherhood into an idol, and they think they'll be the only ones in heaven because they're the only ones who have pure doctrine.

Pure sarcasm there, right? Legalism can even be an idol where we're defined more by what we don't do. We don't drink, smoke, chew, or go with women who do. Perfectionism can become an idol.

[19 : 53] And I struggle with this, where we can have this false view of a disappointed God every time that we don't do something perfectly, and that can become an idol impossible to satisfy.

Guys, we could talk about people-pleasing, chasing after worldly success, always having to have the biggest and the best of everything to show everybody how important and special I am, that desire to be seen, to be known, to be important, thinking that the next vacation will satisfy my heart. And listen, if you've been listening closely today, a lot of these idols that we've talked about, they're not necessarily bad things. And yet, even gifts from God, anything we put on the throne of our hearts before Jesus, that's an idol.

It's our attempt to tame the Almighty and to grab for control over my life. So, for just a few minutes here, let's go back to Exodus chapter 20, and let's see the two reasons we're told not to make and bow down to idols.

And here's the first thing. You have a jealous God. You have a jealous God. Here's what the first part of Exodus 20 verse 5 says.

[21 : 09] You shall not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. Listen, jealousy has always been explained to us as something bad, right?

And I think it's easy to struggle with this. But think about it this way. For those of us men who are married, imagine your wife says, you can even reverse the roles here.

If you're a woman, you can say this about the man. But imagine your wife says, honey, there's no reason for you to be jealous because you're number one in my life.

And then Martin's number two, and Antonio's number three, and Frankie's number four. And I'm over here like, say what? As I get my gun ready, right? Where Marty at? He's going down.

Why? Because when you stood before God and you made those vows on your wedding day, it was an exclusive thing both ways. And I'm going to be a jealous husband for my wife.

[22 : 07] And that's not a bad thing. And I like how Kyle Eidelman put this in his book. He said, God is jealous for your heart, not because he's petty or insecure, but because he loves you.

The reason why God has such a huge problem with idolatry is that his love for you is all-consuming. He loves you too much, he says, to share you.

And when you make that decision to repent of your sins, to surrender your life to the Lordship of Christ, to get baptized into him like the word teaches, you are making a vow to say, Jesus, you have all of me.

He's not one of many. He's the one and only. And then listen, the second reason focuses a little more on those of us who are or who someday will be parents.

Your children see your example. Look at Exodus 20, the second part of verse five. Actually, we'll just read all of verse five here, even what we just touched on, and then through verse six.

[23 : 12] But this one needs some explanation because it would be really easy to misunderstand. Here's what it says. You shall not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. Now listen to this.

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.

Now, the best way to work through a difficult passage is to study it in context with other scriptures. And Ezekiel 18, verse 20, makes it very clear that God will not hold the sin of the parents against the children.

We see several examples of this in God's word where a parent may have been wicked, but the child walks faithfully with the Lord. For example, in 2 Kings, we're introduced to a king named Josiah who becomes king at the age of eight when his father is assassinated.

And Josiah grows up to be a godly king. But listen, his dad, Amon, and his grandfather, Manasseh, were evil and wicked and did terrible things. And so that right there shows you that someone does

not have to follow in that path.

[24 : 23] So what's this passage saying to us then? Honestly, it's a loud and clear message to us parents, maybe even adding grandparents, but especially to us parents, that our walk and our example is so important because those little feet behind you will often go where you go.

Now, does that mean that you're perfect? No, and you're not gonna be, but you need to be sincere. Jesus has to be number one, and your kids will know the difference.

Enough studies have been done to analyze people who grew up in Christian homes and why some stayed faithful to Jesus while others walked away. And while ultimately it's always gonna be a choice that each person makes, it's also amazing the difference between families that just kind of went to church on Sunday and sort of ignored Jesus the rest of the week.

It's like they check their religious duty box, and Jesus was just kind of a Sunday thing. And then you look at families that actually went to church on Sunday and sought Jesus the rest of the week.

Parents who ran after the heart of God, who lived it out in front of their kids, who when they made mistakes, apologized and talked about it, and even tried to guide their children in the truth for the rest of the six days a week.

[25 : 38] Those kids walked, didn't walk away near as much, didn't walk away near as much because they saw such a powerful example and the difference it made in their parents' lives.

So let me kind of put a bow on all this today. This is probably one of the toughest passages that I've wrestled with in a while, but I'd explain it this way. We don't need to bow down to pictures, to statues, to icons, or even worldly treasures because Christ is the ultimate icon, and Colossians 1.15 puts it this way.

The sun, so Jesus, is the image of the invisible God. So when you and I are tempted to run to other things to try to fill that void, realize that nothing compares to Jesus, and yeah, he's not tame.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, thank you for your word today. Thank you for how you have just spoken this truth over us.

And Lord, I just pray that you take my imperfect words, that I just pray that you have led me through the Holy Spirit to speak. Lord, I pray that you take them and that you just stir our hearts and you make us more and more into the image of Christ.

[27 : 03] Jesus, we need you. We are so tempted to run after idols, to try to condense you down into smaller forms that can be managed, and yet you are so much greater than our minds can even comprehend, and we need to unleash you to be the God that you are.

So help us to never make idols, but to put you where you belong on the throne of our hearts. So Lord, do what you need to do this week.

Stir our hearts, work on us, and make us more like Jesus, we pray. We pray this in his precious and holy name. Amen and amen.

Hey, thank you so much for tuning in today. Once again, my name is Ray Sweet from First Christian Church in Greensburg, Indiana. But hey, I want to give you this invitation. If you're listening and God is just kind of stirring your heart and you'd like to have a faith conversation, maybe you want to talk about what it means to follow Jesus, we'd love to just sit down with you and just walk through the scriptures with you.

Here's a couple ways that you can connect with us and we can start that journey. You can first call us in the office Monday through Thursday, 8 to 430. You can call us at 812, area code 812-663-8488.

[28 : 22] That's 663-8488. Or you can email me at ray at FCCgreensburg.com. Hey, thank you for tuning in today. God bless you and have a great week.