

# Xplore Australian Idol

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Date: 28 March 2004

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[ 0 : 00 ]      Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your word and we pray that you'd help us to make sense out of it and apply it to our lives tonight.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. What is the most heinous crime that you can commit? Anybody like to venture the worst crime?

No, I'm sure you're thinking of something. What is the worst sin you can commit? Okay, you don't have to speak from experience, you can just think about something that somebody else has done.

Or what offends God the most? Okay, perhaps you could be thinking about those questions. What offends God the most?

Well, I think if we're going to try and answer those questions, I'd want to think about what God had actually said. So I'm very grateful for having that passage from the Ten Commandments read to us at the beginning of the service.

[ 1 : 10 ]      The first two commandments were read, I guess if I was going to make a list of rules, I'd probably put the most important ones at the top.

The most important ones for God are those ones about having no other gods and not having idols. God did not want his people behaving in any way which suggested that there was some other power in the universe that would rival his, capable of supplying the needs of the people.

There is only one God. He alone is the source of all power in the universe. Therefore, worship him and him alone. Now, it sounds reasonable enough to me and logical.

If there is only one God, then it makes sense to worship him alone. There's no point worshipping something that isn't there. But the trouble with people is that our propensity, our habit is to doubt that God has our best interests at heart, that he is real, that he is actively involved in our lives.

And if you know the story of when God gave those commandments to Moses, you'll know that even as God was delivering those commandments to Moses, the Hebrew people, God's chosen nation, his very special tribe, were already breaking the first two commandments.

[ 2 : 57 ]      They were already forming the statue of a bull made out of gold. And I think that's simply because they were being human.

Humans constantly want to see before we believe. And somehow we think that a statue or something like it will help us do that. But I think that God is too amazing to depict in any way, shape or form.

And if we try, we will only achieve imperfection. We can't even get close to imagining what God is like. And so in the Bible, what we find all the time is picture language to describe what God is like.

And often we describe him with the features of humans, just to try and get a handle on what God is like. But we never get a description in the Bible that says God is exactly like this.

And of course, in the Bible, the best picture of what God is like is Jesus. But even then we know that that's not exactly all that God is like. Anyway, the Israelites were notorious for stuffing up in this regard.

[ 4 : 08 ] They were notorious for worshipping things other than God. And it was hard for them because all the surrounding nations worshipped little false gods or big false gods even.

But they were statues made out of wood or metal. And they had altars all over the countryside so that they could worship what they didn't know and understand.

They were very superstitious. But God called his people not to be sucked in by all that. Sometimes they were good at it.

Sometimes they were bad. One of the chief players in the downfall of the kingdom of Israel was a queen by the name of Jezebel. Even the name sounds treacherous.

But she was a bad person in that when she married one of the kings of Israel, his name was Ahab, she brought with her into the palace statues and gods to be worshipped.

[ 5 : 07 ] And she enticed her husband, the king, the king of all Israel, the country that was supposed to be a representative to all other nations of how you should worship God and how you should live.

The king of this country did likewise. And he broke the first and second commandment over and over again. Not just accidentally, but regularly and every day.

To the point where they were praying to these lumps of wood or pottery for help with the weather, crops and prosperity generally. Now in the end, Israel's constant failing led to their being punished and sent into exile, away from their promised land, the place where they knew God to be, where God had promised everything would be right for them.

They were sent away from there because they continued to worship false gods and idols. They were warned time and again. And one of those to do the warning was the prophet Jeremiah from whom the reading came out tonight.

And it's comical really. I don't know if you got the sense as we were reading that passage that God through Jeremiah is really hanging a lot of muck on people who put their faith in lumps of wood.

[ 6 : 24 ] Did you notice verse 8 of our reading? It says, they are all senseless and foolish. This is not the sort of doughy, gentle, kind, loving God we're talking about here.

This is the ridiculing God. He says, you idiots. Can't you see that you're worshipping things made by humans?

It's not the only one. Isaiah does it as well. He talks about a carpenter in Isaiah 44. And in effect what he says is this.

In the one hand he cuts down a tree and he uses the tree to make a fire so that he can cook his food. And then he says, he does this with his left hand but on his right hand he carves what's left of the wood into an idol.

And then worships it. As though somehow the same bit of wood can just be fuel for a fire and thrown away as ash later on but also have supernatural powers and affect their lives.

[ 7 : 32 ] God ridicules people who behave like that. But the people of God, the people of Israel rather are not alone in their foolishness.

Some of the early Christians were also succumbing to local gods as well. And I can't go there tonight but you can look up in Revelations chapter 2 there's a letter to the church at Thyatira and the name of Queen Jezebel is mentioned there because they too were succumbing to the need to worship foreign gods and idols, worthless bits of wood and metal.

So it seems to be a pretty big trap for humans to worship what we see something that we can rely on other than trusting in the God who is unseen.

And I think we do exactly the same thing. We look for things we can touch and feel, be logical about that will make us feel secure. But trusting in God as you'll know through reading the Bible and through your own experience is actually about having faith in the one who's always been there for us, sent his son to show us how to live and then die to make up for all the mistakes that we make.

It's about believing without seeing. And we're not too bad at that, otherwise what would we be doing here on a Sunday night? But still we can fall into sneaky habits of worshipping idols.

[ 9 : 10 ] Now the practice of worshipping idols is called idolatry. Excuse me. And that's about worshipping or valuing something more than God.

Anything that is treasured more than God is an idol. Anything that is treasured more than God is an idol. An idolater is someone who is a slave to whatever has taken the place of God.

Okay, so God calls us in the commandments to have him as number one. We become idolaters when we don't have him as number one, when we have something else as number one.

Now it can be all sorts of things and often it's easier to recognise in other people than in ourselves. And so that's a good opportunity for us to hold each other accountable with our Christian friends and get them to ask, what's the most important thing in your life?

But for example, and we've had a good example of that tonight with the football and other sports. Some people you'll know football dominates their whole life and you really wonder what actually comes first in their life.

[ 10 : 23 ] I actually know a vicar who wears a stole in football colours. I mean, if you're going to wear a stole, that's one thing, but to wear it in football colours, surely that's getting things mixed up.

But you can become so obsessed that nothing else even matters. Now, as you heard, I do support Geelong and I grew up in Geelong and so I know for a fact that when Geelong wins on a weekend, the prosperity in the town increases during the week following because people love their team and get confident and happy and so they spend their money.

When Geelong loses, the town becomes depressed. Now, somebody once said to me that the God of Australians is sport.

Now, when you see a town like that or a city like that, perhaps that's right. How can we possibly be putting our faith in a bunch of guys who run around in tight shorts and who really can only deliver the good six months of the year if that?

Of course they're not going to have any effect on the rest of our lives. But people are stupid. I know some people for whom shopping seems to be a regular means of escaping the drudgery of life.

[ 11 : 52 ] Consumer therapy, it's even given a title and it's indulged into excess and nothing else eases the anxieties of life. So, if you've got a problem, you go out and you spend some money and you feel good about yourself.

Well, that only lasts as long as the thing you've bought until it breaks or until the next thing gets you down and you've got to spend some more money. How stupid.

Some people, it can be work. You have to make a living after all. You can't let the next deal slip by. So, you know, if that means working seven days a week, you do it just so you can make a quid.

I've known people who've come to weddings because I've worked as a vicar in the past.

People who've come to weddings with their mobile phone switched on. This is the groom just in case he gets a call for a job. People are stupid.

[ 12 : 54 ] What does that say to his wife? And yet he thinks it's perfectly normal. He can't see it. Family's another one.

It's a tough one. Nothing is too good for my family. I'll drop whatever it is I was doing in order to meet their needs. It doesn't matter how selfish or inappropriate those needs might be.

I'll put my family as number one. You must all know people who live like that. And you see, people think that's fine. That family should be number one.

There are those who like doing their houses up or other hobbies. There are all kinds of hobbies you can have and you get excited about doing it and you just move on from project to project. Each one waiting for a little bit of a hit, an adrenaline hit or a positive affirmation from somebody who likes what you've done.

People value their health above all other things. Do you know that HBA ad where this guy just gets the sack and then he says, well at least I've still got my health.

[ 14 : 06 ] And then as he's walking out, the door flattens him. I don't know if you, I watch the television. But people do anything to stay healthy because they think that's number one.

The most important thing is that I'm healthy. Some people even get ministry wrong. Supposedly serving God, that can become an idol if it rules out our lives without proper consideration of God himself.

We busy ourselves with the task of helping without actually thinking what God's up to. Well the thing is that none of those things are wrong in themselves until they take over the place of first importance.

So when we make them number one instead of God, that's when they become idols. Now have you got any idols in your life?

Are there times when you take God off the throne of your life so to speak? Take him off number one peg and put him down there somewhere. Has there ever been a time where you've thought to yourself or maybe even said to a friend, if only I had this or won that or lived here or drove that then life would finally be good.

[ 15 : 34 ] If only I had a million dollars. Think of all I could do with it. Think of how much money I could give to the church. And that's why they call Australian Idol like that because they think that by someone getting instant fame and the wealth and attention that their life is set up and people will idolise them and they're right, people will.

But that's passing. If we forget that God is actually the one who controls the universe and the only one who can do anything about changing our situation, no matter what it is, then we have dethroned him and put something else in his place.

So I ask you tonight, are you 100% devoted to God? Jesus was asked, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

And he answered, love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your mind, with all your soul and with all your strength. Love God with everything you have is what he was saying.

And he said, this is the greatest commandment. In other words, we are to give God all of ourselves.

[ 16 : 55 ] 50% isn't enough. 75% isn't enough. 95% is not enough. Only 100% will do. We give ourselves totally to God by making him number one in our lives.

So how is your life looking? Do you give yourself totally to God? In everything you do, do you consider what God wants before what you want yourself or what others are expecting of you?

Do you consider God first? How's this week looking? Are you going to read the scriptures? That is, fill your mind with God's stuff as well as all the other stuff.

Are you going to pray? That is, depend on him, ask him for help and guidance in all that you do. Are God's words going to season your speech?

That is, by listening to you, will people get the impression that you are a child of God and that he's worth knowing? And is your week going to stand out from the crowd by containing acts of sacrificial service?

[ 18 : 18 ] Enough that people think to themselves, whoa, very cool. This person's different. The fact is, simply, that none of us are perfect and none of us will get it right all the time, not even this week, not even in the next hour.

That is why Jesus had to come and die for us. Sometime in the next week, hour or month, whatever, we will let God down by putting something else number one.

As it happens, I blew it last night when I went to the footy. I placed my desires ahead of someone else's needs and feelings. When I went to the footy, somebody had been saving, see it wasn't Steve, it was another friend from Geelong.

They'd been saving seats for over an hour and a half. I got there late. When I got to the ticket box, the people in the ticket box offered me front row seats down the ground level. I had my kids with me.

I thought, that's so cool and so I took those instead of sitting with my friend who'd been waiting there saving a seat. Now you might think to yourself, well, that's not that big a deal.

[ 19 : 31 ] But as a result of that, I didn't get to build on my relationship with that person and as a consequence, I wasn't able to have any salty conversations, you know, conversations that might have introduced him to Jesus.

And it happened so fast, I barely even realised what was happening. But when I look back now, I know that I put myself way before the other person and therefore certainly above what God would have wanted.

So I'm ashamed about that. So it could be today that God is trying to tell you that there's something in your life that's taking his place.

There's only one way to change and that's to pray that God will help you reset your priorities. Pray that God will show you how much any of those things like football is important in your life.

Football, phones, clothes, shopping, work, school, whatever it is. Have you got your priorities right? Well, you can only find out by examining yourself with God and as I said before, perhaps asking a friend, a trusted friend to help you think about that as well.

[ 20 : 48 ] So what I thought it would be good to do right now is just to pray and ask God to help us think about our lives. Let's just take a couple of minutes to do that. Lord, please show us if there is anything in our lives that threatens to dominate us.

We ask your forgiveness for allowing that thing to take too big a place in our lives. Please fill us with your spirit again so that we can regain your perspective and have you as number one in our lives.

In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Thank you.