

## GOD'S TOP TEN – THE TEN COMMANDMENTS TODAY!

### #2 DON'T MAKE ANY IDOLS or "Idol Worship is Idle Worship"

Exodus 20:4-6: Psalm 115:3-8:

This is week nine in our series "God's Top Ten" where we're looking at the Ten Commandments which are now over 3,500 years old. We've been asking the simple question, are the commandments still relevant today? We've been studying them in reverse order so this morning we're going to look at the second commandment. It's found in Exodus 20:4-6 (NIV). It's one of the longest commandments and for good reason. **4 "You shall not make for yourself an image (idol) in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. 5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them; 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, 6 but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.**

**4 "You shall not make for yourself an image (idol)...5 You shall not bow down to them or worship them."** The dictionary defines an idol three different ways: The first definition is that, "An idol is an image used as an object of worship, a false God." Think of the golden calf the people of Israel fashioned when they thought God had abandoned them, and they wanted a physical God that they could actually see. In our day and age, the idol could be power, or money, or the idea of capitalism or communism.

The second definition of an idol is "something that is adored, often blindly or excessively". Isn't this what we do with certain music, television, or movie stars? We hang on their every word. We read magazine articles about them. We design T.V. reality shows around them. We become obsessed by them. And, of course, it's also possible for someone, under this definition, to adore their work excessively, and to sacrifice their marriage, and their family, or their health, on the altar of success.

The third definition of an idol is that it is something, "that is visible but without substance". The Old Testament Psalmist in Psalm 115:3-8 (Msg) describes these kinds of idol.

**"Our God is in heaven  
doing whatever he wants to do.  
Their gods are metal and wood,  
handmade in a basement shop:  
Carved mouths that can't talk,  
painted eyes that can't see,  
Tin ears that can't hear,  
molded noses that can't smell,  
Hands that can't grasp,  
feet that can't walk or run,**

***throats that never utter a sound.***

***Those who make them have become just like them,  
have become just like the gods they trust.”***

I wonder, is that why there is so much shallow faith out there in our culture today?

So based on those definitions here’s the issue with idol worship. It creates in us a false understanding about who God is, and what God is really about it for first we create our idols, and then we become just like them. A couple of examples. We have made a god in our society out of money and material things. We believe that if we just win the lottery all our problems will go away. We still build places of worship, except we call them Super Walmart’s and Hockey Arena’s. We’ve made gods out of celebrities. We want our hair cut just like them. We buy their designer clothes, and wear the perfume that carries their name. We go to pay homage at places like Graceland, and Dollywood. And underlying all of this is the idea that you can custom design God to be who you want him to be for you. You can mould God in your own image. You don’t need to bother with how God really revealed himself to us in the Bible.

Now part of the confusion about God today may be that we now live in a multicultural society where we are exposed to other religious beliefs and traditions in a way that previous generations were not. We also live in a society where, by and large, Christendom has broken up and people feel free to explore other faiths. So you can choose a little meditation here, some reincarnation there, a drop of astrology, some incense and candles, add a few crystals, read tarot cards, pick some verses you like from Jesus, from Buddha, from the Quran, throw in some thoughts from our culture, and fashion your own unique religion. You can create your own designer god. One that isn’t too demanding. One that doesn’t make you face too many hard choices. One that you can reconstruct if you don’t like him or her or “it”. But remember the warning of Psalm 15:8, ***“Those who make them have become just like them, have become just like the gods they trust.”*** That’s why this second commandment is so important. ***“You shall not make for yourself an image (idol) . . . You shall not bow down to them or worship them...”***

This commandment is actually counter-cultural. You’ll often hear people say, *“I’ll believe what I want’*. Notice that the stress here is on “what “I” want’. It’s not on what God says, or on the authority of the Bible as God’s revealed word. It clearly places *“me”* on the throne of my own life. It’s the original sin of rebelling against God. Or they will say, *“I believe in God”*. The vast majority of Canadians still say that they believe in God, but when you ask them to actually describe the God they believe in, you quickly discover, that he doesn’t look very much like the God who has revealed Himself to us in the pages of the Bible, and supremely in the person of Jesus Christ. The God they believe in is one of their own making.

Many today say, *“I am a spiritual person”*. Did you know that the fastest growing religious group in Canada are those who say, *“I am spiritual but not religious”*? What that usually means is, *“I am a spiritual being”*, but I basically reject the idea of the Christian God, the place of the

Church in God's plans, and the authority of the Scriptures over how I live my life. Which then makes me wonder on what basis they have determined what "a spiritual being" is?

Or you will hear this. *"All roads lead to God, not just Christianity"*. Now let me ask you a question. Do all roads in Canada lead to Newmarket? Do all newspaper editorials lead to the same conclusion? Are all Muslims terrorists? The trouble with the *"All road leads to God"* idea is that it means all faiths, all idea, and all truths, are equally true, even if they absolutely disagree on key things. Some of you will know the writings of G.K. Chesterton who died in 1936. He once said this, *"When people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing, they believe in everything."* That's the age we now live in. And Scripture is clear that when you believe in everything, you are guilty of idolatry and breaking this second commandment.

Saint Augustine, one of the early fathers of the Christian Church, lived from 354-430AD, and was the Bishop of Hippo in North Africa. He once wrote this prayer. It's at the heart of the second commandment. *"You have made us for yourself alone, O God, and our hearts are restless until they find our rest in you."* In other words, we were made for fellowship with God our Creator, and only with him. So when we turn away from God, we become restless, and are easily misled and that's when we become prisoners to idol worship. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah said, Jeremiah 10:14 (GNB), ***"Those who make idols are disillusioned, because the gods they make are false and lifeless"*** Let me suggest to you that disillusionment is a huge issue in our culture, and one reason there is so much social, economic and political unrest. Why is that? Could it be that the idols we have created, and bow down to, can't deliver what they promise?

Let's not forget that only the God of the Bible, not any idol we have fashioned, has taken on our flesh and lived among us. Jesus was very clear about that in John 14:9 (NIV), ***"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father (God)"***. And Colossians 2:9 (NIV) says, ***"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form."*** Only the God of the Bible has given us an accurate picture of Himself. Why? Because He wanted us to know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, where to find fullness of life. That's why Jesus, Emmanuel - God with us -, said in John 10:10 (NIV), ***"I have come that they may have life and have it to the full"***. No idol can give us life. Now remember. As a Christian, an idol is anyone, or anything, that takes the place of the one true God in your life.

In one of his books Author J. John illustrates that by making a series of statements about what Christians believe about God. He points out that in all of these statements it is quite possible to substitute the word God, and that's a key to understanding the power of idol worship. Here are J. John's seven statements:

God (money, possessions, career, spirituality, "I") gives purpose, meaning and fulfillment to life.

God (money, possessions, career, spirituality, "I") governs the way I act.

God (money, possessions, career, spirituality, “I”) is the focal point around which my existence hangs.

God (money, possessions, career, spirituality, “I”) is often in my thoughts and motivates me in life.

God (money, possessions, career, spirituality, “I”) comforts me when I am down, troubled, sick, or confused.

God (money, possessions, career, spirituality, “I”) is what I read about, talk about, center my spiritual life on.

God (money, possessions, career, spirituality, “I”) is what I desire more of in my life.

Now let’ no forget that this second commandment has a serious warning within it. It warns us that when we are guilty of idol worship, it has generational consequences. **“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.”** When we make our career, or money, or possessions, or recreation, or someone else, our idol we are pointing our children, by default, to that idol. We’re teaching them that their fulfillment and happiness can be found by worshipping that idol. We are reinforcing that idol as our family god. And when we are confused about what we believe, when we do not take our Christian faith seriously, when we do not obey Scripture, then that confusion is communicated, and by default, we’re giving our children permission to believe anything they want about God. There’s a lot at stake here, folks! Breaking this commandment has generational consequences and maybe that’s one reason why the church in Canada is in trouble today.

Do you remember the story of Jonah? He was the reluctant prophet who ran away from God and got swallowed by a great fish. Inside the belly of that fish he really had to come to terms with what he believed about God. This is part of his reflection. Jonah 2:7-8 (Msg), **“Those who worship hollow gods, god-frauds, walk away from their only true love.”** I don’t want to do that, and I suspect neither do you. You don’t want you children, or grandchildren, to do that either. So what do we do? We make a renewed commitment to get to know the God of the Bible personally. To read and to get to know his Word. To live by it. To cultivate a genuine prayer life. That’s the only way we will ever know the true God from all the fake ones out there. And that’s why this second commandment is as relevant today as it has ever been!

### **Pastoral Prayer**

Almighty God,  
there is so much for us to confess  
when it comes to idol worship;  
all the times

when we have put other things before you;  
when we have got our priorities mixed up;  
when we have paid lip service to our faith;  
when we have failed to be concerned above everything else  
with your Kingdom and with what you require of us.  
Forgive us, we pray, and save us from idol worship.

We pray for our world  
which is filled with so much disillusionment;  
disillusionment about the political process  
and with our leaders;  
disillusionment about breaking out of a cycle of poverty  
to create a better future;  
disillusionment with a spouse, or family member, or an employer,  
who have left a trail of broken promises;  
disillusionment fueled by shallow faith,  
or by faith in the wrong things.

God of eternal hope,  
help us to live as people who,  
through our words and actions as Christians,  
bear witness that there is only one true God  
whom to know is life eternal,  
and whom to serve is joy and peace,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.