

#2: You Must Not Make for Yourself an Idol

You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected — even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me. But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands. (Exodus 20:4-6 NLT)

Dear children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:21 NIV)

Why is the worship of idols so strictly prohibited?

1) It denies the true nature and character of God

- You saw no form of any kind the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore watch yourselves very carefully, so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol... (Deuteronomy 4:15-16 NIV)
- God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth. (John 4:24 NIV)

2) The object of our worship is not man-made, but divinely-appointed

- [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God...For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him. (Colossians 1:15, 19 NIV)
 - Greek, *eikon* = “image, representation, picture” (cf. icon)
- Keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:21 NIV)
- Flee from the worship of idols. (1 Corinthians 10:14 NLT)
 - Greek, *eidolon* = “phantom, shadow”
- We know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true by being in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. (1 John 5:20 NIV)
- Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him. (John 14:6-7 NIV)

“An idol is anything or anyone that occupies the place of the one true God in our hearts”

What may become idols in our lives?

1) Things

- Is there anything you'd be unwilling to give up if God asked you to?

2) Ideas

- An idol can be either concrete or abstract; a physical or a mental representation

3) Elements of the Christian Faith

- e.g. the bronze serpent in Numbers 21:4-9; cf. Hezekiah in 2 Kings 18:4
- Augustine: "Idolatry is worshiping anything that ought to be used and using anything that ought to be worshiped."

4) False Views of God

- Golden calf incident in Exodus 32 (referenced in 1 Corinthians 10)
- When the people saw it, they exclaimed, "O Israel, these are the gods who brought you out of the land of Egypt!" Aaron saw how excited the people were, so he built an altar in front of the calf. Then he announced, "Tomorrow will be a festival to the Lord!" The people got up early the next morning to sacrifice burnt offerings and peace offerings. (Exodus 33:4b-6a NLT)
- "We want a serviceable God and moderate expressions of religion...Idols are manageable, and we are always looking for a manageable god."
(Ellsworth Kalas)

Discussion Questions

- 1) When you hear the word "idol" what images come to mind? Have you ever seen a physical idol being worshiped? Describe what happened and how you felt about it.
- 2) What role do symbols and objects play in the Christian faith? Are they okay? When do they become "idols?"
- 3) When you think of God what images come to mind? How are we to conceive of a God that is a spiritual being?
- 4) What are some things that become idols in people's lives? What ideas or concepts do Americans idolize?
- 5) Have you ever witnessed idolatry in the church? Who or what was idolized or elevated to a place that only God should occupy?
- 6) What are some misconceptions about God that are prevalent today, both in the church and in society at large?
- 7) How might you have violated this second commandment and made an idol of any kind? Repent, ask for forgiveness, then go and worship God in spirit and in truth.