



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond

V24 N27

July 3, 2022

TEN WORDS

"2/Image Control"

Exodus 20:4-6, 22-26

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Worship

I worship God for who he is and what he has done for me.

"Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the LORD our Maker; 7 for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care."

Psalms 95:6-7



Who alone
is to be
worshiped
and served?

Worship is rightly directed toward God. If there are many gods, then people get to pick and choose which ones or one to worship—some Hindus worship many gods (*polytheism*), others worship one god among many (*henotheism*). Scripture, however, limits worship to the One true God (*monotheism*), the God of the Patriarchs, namely, Yahweh, who redeemed the descendants of Abraham through Jacob from slavery in Egypt—neither the worship of “alongside gods” nor the worship of idols is permissible. The LORD’s first commandment reads, “You shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:3), and the second reads, “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” (vv. 4-5). These two commandments are repeated in the opening of the Book of the Covenant (20:22-23:33), which immediately follows the Decalogue. The LORD says to Moses, “Tell the Israelites this: ‘You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven: Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold’ (vv. 22-23). Now, if there is only one God, and if that true God is the God of the Exodus, then the God who redeemed the Israelites from Egypt is the one true God that all humanity should worship.

When most people think of the Ten Commandments, they think the first two only prohibit the worship of ancient Canaanite gods, e.g., Baal and Asherah, the gods of weather and fertility, the gods belonging to the Greek and Roman pantheons, e.g. Zeus and Jupiter, Aphrodite and Venus, or any idols. Since no one today worships these gods, let alone worships idols made of stone, most people think these commandments are irrelevant. Ironically, they remain just as, if not even more relevant today, because we have just as many if not more counterfeit gods than the ancients did.

Timothy Keller writes: “A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would hardly be worth living. An idol has such a controlling position in your heart that you can spend most of your passion and energy, your emotional and financial resources, on it without a second thought. It can be family and children, or career and making money, or achievement and critical acclaim, or saving ‘face’ and social standing. It can be a romantic relationship, peer approval, competence and skill, secure and comfortable circumstances, your beauty or your brains, a great political or social cause, your morality and virtue, or even success in the Christian ministry. When your meaning in life is to fix someone else’s life, we call it ‘co-dependency,’ but it is really idolatry. Idolatry is whatever you look at and say in your heart of hearts, ‘If I have that, then I’ll feel my life has meaning, then I’ll know I have value, then I’ll feel significant and secure.’ There are many ways to describe that kind of relationship to something, but perhaps the best one is *worship*.”

“The old pagans were not fanciful when they depicted virtually everything as a god. They had sex gods, work gods, war gods, money gods, nation gods—for the simple fact that anything can be a god that rules and serves as a deity in the heart of a person or the life of a people. For example, physical beauty is a pleasant thing but if you ‘deify’ it, if you make it the most important thing in a person’s life or a culture’s life, then you have Aphrodite, not just beauty. You have people, and an entire culture, constantly agonizing over appearance, spending inordinate amounts of time and money on it, and foolishly evaluating character on the basis of it. If anything becomes more fundamental than God to your happiness, meaning in life, and identity, then it is an idol . . . There are personal idols . . . cultural idols . . . intellectual idols . . . There are also idols, nonnegotiable absolute values . . . There are idols everywhere” (*Counterfeit Gods*, xxi-xxiii).



EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

Read Exodus 20:4-6, 22-26

4 "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. 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."

22 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites this: 'You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven: 23 Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold.

24 "'Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you. 25 If you make an altar of stones for me, do not build it with dressed stones, for you will defile it if you use a tool on it. 26 And do not go up to my altar on steps, or your private parts may be exposed.'"

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Underline "image" and "form" in v. 4.
- Circle "jealous" in v. 5.
- Circle "punishing" in v. 5.
- Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 6.
- Circle "hate" in v. 5 and "love" in v.6.
- Circle "alongside" in v. 23.
- Bracket vv. 24-26.

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What is one thing you do not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Distinguish between the first (v. 3) and the second (v. 4) commandments. Aren't they both really the same?
2. The second commandment prohibits making images of false gods (i.e., idols), but does it prohibit making an image of the one true God? Explain why it does or does not (cf. Ex 32:2-6).
3. Does the second commandment prohibit the making of art or religious icons used in worship by some Christian traditions? Explain why you think it does or does not (cf. Ex 25:17-22; 31-36).
4. The LORD describes himself as "a *jealous* God." How can being jealous have a positive connotation?
5. God doesn't punish innocent people, does he? So in what sense does he punish children for the sin of their parents?
6. The words "love" (v. 5) and "hate" (v. 6) connote more than mere emotions. What distinguishes those who "love" God from those who "hate" him?
7. What does the *contrast* introduced in verse 6 reveal about God?
8. How does verse 23 clarify the meaning of the first two commandments?
9. Why only altars of earth or uncut stone, and why no steps?
10. **Discussion:** The second commandment prohibits idolatry, leaving it practically irrelevant today . . . right? Talk about it.

Commentary On The Text

Exodus 20:4-6 and Exodus 20:22-26 are linked by *repetition*. The first text contains the second commandment, “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” (vv. 4-5a), followed by the *reason* people are to obey it, “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” (vv. 5b-6). The second text *repeats* both the first and the second commandments, “Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold” (v. 23). The first text is part of the Decalogue, containing the Ten Commandments (20:1-21; cf. 34:28), the first part of the Law; the second text introduces the Book of the Covenant (20:22-24:11; cf. 24:7), containing applications of the commandments to specific situations. The Ten Commandments are examples of *apodictic laws*, namely, “You shall” and “You shall not” commands, employing categorical imperatives, in contrast to *casuistic laws*, namely, “If you . . .” or “Anyone who . . .” commands, employing qualifying circumstances.

The second commandment (vv. 4-5a) prohibits the making and worship of idols, that is, any “carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water below” (NET). “In other words, nothing from anywhere can be copied and used as an object of veneration” (Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC, 450). Clearly, the commandment *does not* prohibit the artistic production of images and likenesses. Otherwise, why would the LORD command the shaping of cherubs as part of the ark of the covenant (25:17-20) and of cups like almond flowers with buds and blossom as part of the lampstand (vv.31-34)? But clearly, the commandment *does* prohibit the making of any image intended to represent Yahweh, as the golden calf incident shows. One commentator writes: “According to the NIV in the narrative of Exodus 32, when the people set up the calf, they said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt’ (vv. 4, 8). The translation ‘your gods’ implies that the sin of the golden calf is understood to be *polytheism*, the worship of gods other than the Lord. The problem with translating this passage is that the Hebrew word translated as ‘gods’ [*elōhîm*] can be rendered either ‘gods’ (plural) or ‘god’ (singular). Furthermore, the same word is

rendered elsewhere in Scripture simply as ‘God.’ In each case the context must determine whether the plural ‘gods’ or the singular ‘god/God’ is intended. If in this passage the word is rendered in the singular, then the sin of the golden calf is intended to be understood as *idolatry*. In our judgment this appears to be the sense of the passage” (John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 284, italics added) – note, too, there was only *one* golden calf.

Verses 5b-6 gives the *reason* why the second commandment is to be obeyed, namely, the LORD is “a jealous God,” in the good sense of the word – being fiercely protective of one’s rights or possessions. One commentator remarks, “God demonstrates healthy jealousy in his zeal for his people. He cares for his particular possession. When this property is given to some other deity, he responds vigorously (1 Cor. 10:22; James 4:5)” (Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 417). What’s more, this trait is evident in the fact that disobedience and obedience to God’s commandments have long-term consequences. Children who continue in their parents’ sins are punished like their parents, who in turn live to regret the consequences of their sinful behavior on their sons and daughters. The fact that the children may have learned their ways from them is no excuse. Perhaps the saying is true, “What parents do in moderation, their children do in excess.” The influence of bad parents who “hate” God, that is, who disobey the commandment, extend to “the third and fourth generation.” But by way of *contrast*, the influence of good parents who “love” God, that is, who obey the commandment, extend to “a thousand generations.” God’s loyal love surpasses his retribution.

Verses 22-26 introduce the Book of the Covenant. The first and second commandments are repeated, followed by instructions regarding the building of altars – simple altars of earth are acceptable as are altars of stone, while altars made with dressed stones are not, neither are altars with steps. Why? The worship of Yahweh is to be easily distinguished from Canaanite worship. By building their altars this way, the Israelites are making a definitive statement that the worship of their God is different from the practices of their future neighbors.

The second commandment prohibits idolatry. When *idol* is narrowly defined, the commandment is unlike the first but less relevant today, since few people actually make graven images and worship them. But when *idol* is more broadly defined, the commandment is like the first and more relevant today, since many people idolize a variety of “counterfeit gods.”

Word Studies/Notes

v. 4 *image, form*

The NET takes the Hebrew conjunction “and” in a *coordinating* sense, linking two distinct injunctions. “You shall not make for yourself a carved image *or* any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water below” (NET). The NIV takes it in an *explanatory* sense, the second injunction clarifying the first (see Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 416). “The NIV renders this portion of the commandment rather loosely; a more precise translation would be: ‘You must not make for yourself an idol, *or* any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water beneath the earth.’ Two common words for ‘idol’ appear: *pesel* (here ‘idol’) and *tēmûnāh* (here ‘likeness’), the use of the two synonyms suggesting ‘any sort of idol.’ Similarly, ‘any sort of thing’ is prohibited from being depicted—thus the somewhat elaborate and obviously comprehensive delineation of prohibited sources for copying: ‘heaven above, earth beneath, waters below.’ In other words, nothing from anywhere can be copied and used as an object of veneration” (Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC, 450).

v. 5 *jealous*

“The word for ‘jealous’ has two meanings in the Old Testament, ‘zeal for one’s personal property’ or ‘zeal for another’s property.’ The former is appropriate and healthy; the latter is wrong” (Waltke, 417). “A *jealous God*: ‘zealous’ might be a better translation in modern English, since ‘jealousy’ has acquired an exclusively bad meaning. Like ‘love’ and ‘hate’ in the Old Testament (Mal. 1:2,3), ‘jealousy’ does not refer to an emotion so much as to an activity . . . This is not therefore to be seen as intolerance but exclusiveness, and it springs forth from the uniqueness of God (who is not one among many) and the uniqueness of His relationship to Israel” (R. Alan Cole, *Exodus*, TOTC, 156).

v. 5 *punishing*

Verse 5 does not mean that God will punish innocent generations for the sins of previous generations (cf. Dt 24:16; Eze 18). “Rather, this oft-repeated theme speaks of God’s determination to punish successive generations for committing the same sins they learned from their parents. In other words, God will not say, ‘I won’t punish this generation for what they are doing to break my covenant because, after all, they merely learned it from their parents who did it too.’ Instead, God will indeed punish generation after generation (‘to the third and fourth generation’) if they keep doing the same sorts of sins that prior generations did. If the children continue to do the sins their parents did, they will receive the same punishments as their parents” (Stuart, 454). “The point of this is that the punishment is directed at the father who lives to see how his sin is worked out among his descendants . . . God’s punishment is on the line that con-

tinues the sin of the father. It is visited upon the children both for their sin as well as to show the father the consequences of his actions . . . An example of this is Eli, who lived just long enough to see God’s punishment upon his sons before his own death (Waltke, 418-19). Disobedience has far-reaching implications for the nation, so does obedience (v. 6). If the people disobey, the effects of their disobedience will be felt for a long time.

v. 6 *hate, love*

These two terms are defined not with respect to emotions, but with respect to keeping God’s commandments. In this case, “love” connotes *loyalty* to God evident in obedience to him.

v. 23 *alongside*

Cf. “You shall have no other gods before me” (v. 3). “By using ‘along with me’ (*’ittî*) as a synonym for the earlier *’al-pānāy* [i.e., ‘before me’], it helps define the earlier term as a way of demanding monotheism [i.e., belief in only one God, that is, *exclusivity*] rather than simply henotheism [i.e., belief in a supreme God among many, that is, *hierarchy*]” (Stuart, 471).

vv. 24-26 *altar*

Why only altars of earth or uncut stone, and why no steps? The instructions serve to distinguish the worship of Yahweh from the worship of the gods of the Canaanites and to ensure the priests’ “private parts” (v. 26) will not be exposed. The latter may also serve as a polemic against Canaanite religious practices that sometimes included sexual rituals. “The altar could not be something of which humans could take ownership because they shaped it and finished it with the same sorts of tools they might use for any mundane masonry project. Likewise, it must not be fancy enough to become like or to function as an idol, a thing that human hands had made yet was revered as possessing divine qualities. This altar must be so simple, made of natural elements that were simply assembled, that no one would make the mistake of identifying it as having in itself, intrinsically, numinous or theophoric character. The altar must be of the minimal sort of construction that would make it functional without becoming an object of appreciation or veneration in itself, something that in the mind of a worshiper might somehow rival or substitute for God . . . Moreover, it could not even have steps (v. 26). In ancient times most people did not wear what we could call underwear; so even though the priest eventually wore undergarments (28:42), there would always be the risk, at this early state particularly, that a worshiper’s or a priest’s genital-defecatory area would be ‘exposed’ to the altar, insulting God” (Stuart, 472, 73).



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Don't violate the second commandment by turning anything
in your life into a counterfeit idol.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The "Living Questions" are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

I've always loved to travel. As a little girl I loved the magical feeling of being in a faraway land, even when that faraway land was Lubbock to visit one of my dad's restaurants. The bar was set really low back then. I don't know why, but even the gas stations in other cities seemed to hold mystery. My favorite thing to do when traveling was to explore the local gift shops. The cheap silver rings, gimmicky glasses with the name of the city, ugly Christmas ornaments and tacky jars of sand all had an appeal stronger than gold to this little girl! It never failed that within a few days after returning home that carefully chosen travel trinket would be shoved aside and forgotten. What was supposed to hold eternal value and represent a playback of memories was soon thrown in the trash as unnecessary and unimportant. Trinkets seem fun and valuable in the moment but fail in comparison to the bigger picture. God's second command piggybacks off His first: He alone is God, and He will not tolerate the worship of idols made in His image. The first command deals the object of our worship, God alone, while the second addresses the manner in which we worship Him. The culture of the day was filled with idol worship, small trinkets meant to represent a bigger deity. I doubt you're bowing down to a bobblehead Jesus on your desk but we all inevitably diminish God so He fits in our finite brains. How we worship God matters. Let's break our mold and worship God in awe this week.

What Does The Bible Say?

Read Exodus 20:4-6, 22-26.

1. What is the second commandment?
2. What is an idol or image of God?
3. How were the Israelites to worship God (Ex 20:22-26)?

What Do You Think?

How are the first two commandments different?

What Do You Do?

Experience true worship this week by taking a nature walk, serving or singing His songs of praise as a family. How does this help you understand God's true character?

CORE COMPETENCY: Worship

I celebrate God for who He is and what He has done for me.

MEMORY VERSE: Galatians 5:1

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free."

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- ☐ I completed my Bible Study
- ☐ I memorized this week's verse
- ☐ I brought my Bible to church
- ☐ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)
I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)
I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)
I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)
I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)
I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)
I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)
I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)
I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)
I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)
I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)
I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)
I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)
I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)
I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)
I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)
I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)
I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)
I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)
I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)
I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)
I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)
I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)
I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)
I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)
I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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