

INTRODUCTION.

- A. Scripture text: [Psalm 135:15-21](#).
- B. We continue our series, and talk about the second commandment, “have no other gods before me.”

I. EMPTY IMAGES.

- A. I believe this to be the very spirit of the second commandment. Here’s my sense of what the Lord is saying: “I am your God. I am your Redeemer. I have saved you and bought you for Myself at a terrible price. Please... don’t ever put anything in the place that belongs to Me. I love you with all My heart, and I’ve always wanted to care for you. protect you, provide for you, and bless you. Now-- because I love you more than any other--let me ask something very important to Me. I’m asking that you have no other gods in your life... that I would be the only One.”
- B. Isn’t He saying something like this to you and me? “Listen, do you have any idea how much I love you, and how much you mean to Me? Please... don’t put any other pictures in your billfold alongside Mine. Don’t carry any other images in your heart. Don’t turn to any false god for comfort, stimulation, or heart satisfaction. Here I am! I am able to meet your every need.”
- C. Matthew Henry explains: “*Since you know the true God, and are in Him, let your light and love guard you against all that is advanced in opposition to Him, or competition with Him.... Cleave to Him in faith, and love, and constant obedience, in opposition to all things that would alienate your mind and heart from God.*” See 1Jn. 5:21.
[Little children, guard yourselves from idols.](#)
- D. What then are those “images” in our world today that would rise up to challenge our love relationship with the Son of God? Material things, maybe? (Mt. 6:24; Col. 3:5). Power? Pleasure? Fame? Status?
[\(Mt 6:24\) "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will hold to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.](#)
[\(Col 3:5\) Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.](#)
- E. When it becomes the whole purpose of my life to chase one of those images, I have already slipped into idolatry. I have given it the best of my times, my talents, my treasures, and my energies. My very life is *invested* in it. That what a god is; when you worship a god, you basically surrender your life to it. See Psa. 135:15-18.
- F. In other words, I will become just like that image I pursue (Jer. 2:5). *The clear fact is, we become like that which we worship.*
[Thus says the LORD, "What injustice did your fathers find in Me, That they went far from Me And walked after emptiness and became empty?"](#)
- G. Not long ago I watched a commercial on television that brought it all home to me. It is the *Bugle Boy* jeans commercial where the good looking woman in a sports car pulls up to supposedly pick up a man who is hitch-hiking. She asks, “Are those *Bugle Boy* jeans?” When he says “yes” she nods, “Thank you” and drives away.
When I first saw that commercial, I thought, what a tremendous (although perhaps unintended) illustration of the image makers of the world. They say, “Wear our stuff, Listen to our music. Talk like us. Look like us. Dance to our dance.” And while you’re investing your time and spending your resources and trying so very hard to achieve the elusive “right look,” the world is going to leave you standing alone alongside the road with nothing.
- H. Scripture tells us that the gods of this world will lead us astray. They will lead us where God really doesn’t want us to go. They will use us up, drain us dry and then discard us. What did that verse say?

The gods of this world:

1. Have feet... but they can't come to you when you are in need.
 2. Have hands... but they won't lift a finger to help you when you're struggling.
 3. Have eyes... but they don't see your heart or what's going on in your life.
 4. Have ears... but don't hear you cry when you are lonely, frightened or in despair.
- I. Following empty images can be likened to a back lot at Paramount Studios. On your tour you can see the street of some little western town with stores, courthouse, and shops and churches. But they are only false fronts. They look great in a movie but if you tried to go into any of those buildings you would walk right through door into sand and weeds. There's nothing there. No store, No dry goods, No people. There's no place to live, stay, or worship. It's empty.

The world's false images set up the same kind of deception. They promise one thing, they call to the emotions, they look so desirable, they weave a beautiful dream, but when you get into them, you end up with a big handful of nothing.

II. SOME IMAGES OF GOD.

- A. Before we ever have metal images of God, we have mental ones. Even if we haven't translated our mental image into silver or gold, it's idolatry nonetheless. Let's list some images of God we might have that actually serve us, but dishonor Him.
- B. Six images:
1. God: Uncle Sam.
This image says that if you are a good American you are a good Christian. This God endorses anything the US wants to buy, sell, and fight for. This image is heavily influenced by a concept of national security and reputation than by purity or justice.
 2. God: George Burns in *Oh, God*.
This motto (image) is "let's be buddies." If this is your god, all he wants from you is for you to be a good ol' boy, and he'll be happy to help you through the rough times. Sure, you've got a few bad habits. Who hasn't? Just be better than most of the people around you, and you'll be okay.
 3. God: You can have it all (the god of materialism).
This view was popular in the 1980s with the likes of a Donald Trump and the televangelists. This message says: You can have it all. God wants you to have everything. Just send some money and it will come back to you 20-, 50-, or even 100-fold. This god never wants Xians to be sick, sad, or suffering. And if you are experiencing any of these things it must be your lack of faith (or contributions). If you worship this god, you don't have to give a moment's thought to the poor, the hungry, or the suffering, because they wouldn't be poor, hungry, or suffering unless they deserved it. And what's more you can get was wrapped up in material things as you want, because God wouldn't have given them to you if you didn't deserve them.
 4. God: The Vending Machine in the Sky.
We put our quarter in (by saying our prayers and doing our good deeds) and then wait for God to send us our candy bar. After all, we paid for it didn't we? You can hate whomever you please, resent others' taking advantage of you, feel superior to anyone not doing as much as you are and it won't matter at all to God. As long as you keep inserting those quarters, he HAS to give you something in return.
 5. God: Santa Claus.
His motto is, "Now what can I bring you next?"
 6. God: Monte Hall in *Let's Make a Deal*.
His motto is, "Let's make a deal." If you worship him, you can do whatever you like until you get in a jam, then he'll negotiate how much good behavior it will take to get you out of trouble.

- C. Why do we try to reshape God? Because shaping Him into our image is easier than being shaped into His. It fits our purposes to reshape God, for a divine power who endorses everything that we already want can come in very handy.

III. WHAT'S WRONG WITH IDOLATRY?

- A. First, we don't want an "off-the -rack" deity.
We want a custom-tailored God—one who will stand for the things we think are important, condemn the things that don't cramp our style, and wink at our little idiosyncrasies. What do you want to do? What do you want to be? What do you want to have? Then shape God so that He thinks all of it's okay. THAT'S IDOLATRY! It is using the One who ought to be worshipped. This is what we do time and time again, change God so we don't have to change. Anytime we try to reshape our perfect God, all we do is distort Him. And if we worship a distorted God, we will be a distorted people.
- B. Second, we like to "image" God so that He will "stay put."
The woman in Jn. 4 didn't know where to go to worship God. Should she go to the temple in Jerusalem or on the mountain according to the Samaritans. Jesus reply was that you can't put God in box! See Jn. 4:24. If God is assigned to one location--the temple or church building--then the only thing we have to worry about is keeping our appointment with Him there. Regular church attendance would be more important than the right character! Jesus spent a great deal of time and energy trying to explain this concept during His earthly ministry (Mt. 23:23-26). You can't build a box for God and tell Him to stay there.
- C. Third, God refuses to be imaged because He refuses to be manipulated.
Our frustration with God's elusive nature helps explain our tendency to look for formulas, plans, or 1-2-3 steps that give us the inside track on how to control God. It is much more comfortable for us to believe when we have Him "pegged." We want to shape God into something our minds can handle so that we can know who He is and where He is, and accurately predict what He will do in a given situation. But God is too big for that kind of manipulation. We are designed to meet His purposes, not for Him to meet ours. He is the potter, we are the clay.

IV. WHY IS GOD JEALOUS?

- A. A particular truth of Scripture that we don't study or talk about much is that fact that behind every idol, behind every false image, behind every counterfeit Xian cult, there is a demon—an agent of Satan to deceive, mislead, and eventually destroy its worshippers (1Cor. 10:20,21).
No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. [21] You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.
- B. But the Lord is in the image business too. The desire of His heart is to raise men and women up to the level of intimate fellowship with Himself. Think of the following texts:
1. Gen. 1:26; "let Us make man in Our image."
 2. Rom. 8:29; we are to "be conformed to the image of His Son."
 3. 1Cor. 15:49; "so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven."
 4. Rom. 12:2; "do not be conformed to the pattern of the world, but be transformed...."
- C. But notice the serious implications of the second commandment! This passage says that they way you and I respond to this command will not simply affect us, it will mark the lives of those who follow after us--to the 3rd and 4th generations!
- D. No, this doesn't mean that because of my sins, my kids and grandkids will be punished. The emphasis of Scripture is always on personal responsibility (Ezek. 18:20). But for good or for ill, you will be affected by their life decisions! The generations that come after you will be affected by the decisions you make!

- E. This is why God said not to “make any graven images.” God knew that if we put the thing of the world first, then everybody we love will be affected. What kinds of image do you want to leave? What are the elements of the image you are currently making? If your image is idolatrous, it is something that will cause others to take their focus off of God.
- F. God is jealous of you because He loves you.
1. That is the reason He always keeps His eye on me, and why he concerns Himself about my every decision. *He loves me.* He doesn’t watch me because He’s just waiting for me to make a mistake or catch me in some fault, but because He wants what’s best for me.
 2. God watches us closely because He knows what is before us. He knows the issues of our lives better than we do. He understands the long-range implications of our every thought and every action (Eph. 5:15-17).
Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, [16] making the most of your time, because the days are evil. [17] So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.
- G. Ernest Hemingway was a man who had fame and fortune, yet he committed suicide. He just couldn’t go on. Entertainers like Elvis Presley, Janis Joplin, Jimi Hendrix, and John Belushi all became involved in drug addictions and burned themselves out. They died young. They never found the greener pastures and still waters. They never found the paths of righteousness that would restore and renew their weary souls. They missed it! They missed *life*.

CONCLUSION AND INVITATION.

- A. God says to us, “The reason I’m asking you not to place anything ahead of Me is because I don’t want you to wake up one day with a broken heart (Jer. 2:12,13).
“Be appalled, O heavens, at this, And shudder, be very desolate,” declares the LORD. [13] “For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, The fountain of living waters, To hew for themselves cisterns, Broken cisterns, That can hold no water.”
- B. I wish that I could turn to a passage in the Bible that defines God. But the Bible is like a picture album. You have to look at the whole thing to get the complete picture.
- C. But the truth is that we are to be formed into His image (Rom. 8:29; 2Cor. 3:17,18). Not He into ours (that’s idolatry).
(Rom 8:29) For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren;...
(2Cor 3:17,18) Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, *there* is liberty. [18] But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.
- D. Let’s come back to the principles of the Ten(der) Commandments.
- E. Plan of salvation for non-Xians; erring Xians.