

Words from the Fire: Word 2.

6.27.2021

Exodus 20:4–6 (CSB)

⁴Do not make an idol for yourself, whether in the shape of anything in the heavens above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. ⁵Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, ⁶but showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commands.

1. Context of the Passage.

A. God is teaching these former slaves how to live in freedom.

1. Part of the freedom God had in store from them was freedom from idols and polytheism.

2. Up until this point, all of the world's religions were polytheistic.

a. What God is announcing here was revolutionary truth:

b. There is only one God, and that was YHWH.

3. The only way forward for Israel was to devote themselves to the One, True God.

B. This God had standards that were unique.

1. The gods of Egypt allowed for multiple gods and multiple forms of worship.

2. The gods of Canaan provided multiple gods with unique purposes and roles.

- a. You had gods of fertility.
- b. Gods of war.
- c. Gods of seasons, and the sun, and the moon.

3. Israel was called to worship ONE God, and He alone.

C. How we worship matters to God.

1. The last half of Exodus and Leviticus are intensely concerned with how people approach and worship God.
2. In fact, the Psalms provide practical guidance for worship and the Prophets correct the false worship of Israel.
3. Even Jesus told New Testament believers that we will worship "In Spirit and In Truth".
 - a. The Second Word, the Second Commandment, provides insight into how God does not want us to worship.
 - b. You were created to worship someone much greater than a man-made idol.

KJV. 4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of *any thing* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth.

2. What does God mean by graven image or likeness?

A. For the Israelites, God was concerned with the temptation of physical idols.

1. They were prone to build something with their hands and then to attribute to it supernatural properties.
2. They created idols of wood, stone, and costly metals in the hope that these false-gods would provide the false-security and false-blessings they were looking for.

B. What is an idol?

1. "Anything that attracts the eyes to seduce the soul." (Mohler, 48).

a. **Idols and graven images seduce us to give wrong worship.**

b. Anything that leads me to take worship away from God and to give it to someone or something else is an idol.

2. This imagery of idolatry is consistently reinforced with the theme of adultery in Scripture.

a. **Idolatry is the equivalent of spiritual-adultery.**

b. Adultery is to give to someone what belongs to another. (this theme will come up more and more in the weeks to come.

3. Idolatry is extremely dangerous because it makes the "infinite" into something "finite".

C. We see in Exodus that God revealed Himself through His word.

1. The New Testament demands that we come to God in and through faith, not by sight.

2. Jesus declared blessings upon those who would believe and NOT see Him.

3. God could have revealed Himself as any image or thing, but that would have robbed God of His eternal nature.

a. If God would have revealed himself as a fire, we would worship fire.

b. If God would have revealed himself as a bird, we would worship a bird.

c. But instead, God reveals Himself by His word and declares that we shall not create God in our image.

d. Anything that we can dream up or create will fall short of God's greatness.

B. Because Israel was prone to idolatry, God refused to show them an image and refused any images to be made.

1. Even when God led them to create an Ark, the Ark was not God or to be worshipped as God.
2. When God showed himself to Elijah, He used a mighty wind and an earthquake to get his attention but revealed Himself in a still small voice.
3. When God reveals Himself to people today, the primary method is through the revelation of His Word.

C. There is a line of thinking today that says, "If you can picture it, you can create it; and if you can create it, you can control it."

1. This is exactly what God wanted Israel, and us, to avoid.
2. You CANNOT create God in your own image for your image is twisted.
3. You CANNOT imagine God because your imagination has been twisted and perverted by sin.
4. You CANNOT control God because He is not under your control or authority.
5. THOU Shalt not create any image, because you will be tempted to worship what you create.

D. Notice the strategy of the enemy in Revelation 13:

1. Revelation 13:11–15 (ESV)

¹¹ Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. ¹² It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. ¹³ It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, ¹⁴ and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast *it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make **an image** for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived.* ¹⁵ And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even

speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain.

2. Satan has always tempted humanity with the allure of an image.

3. Israel longed for physical images and idols to represent God.

4. In the last days, Satan will offer the world the opportunity to worship "an image of the beast", setting itself up against this very command of God.

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5. When it comes to worshipping God, I find value in the wise words of the great theologian, Buzz Lightyear: To Infinite and Beyond.

3. What does this teach us about God?

A. God says He is Jealous.

1. God is jealous for them because it was He who delivered them from the bondage to sin.

2. It was not an idol or another god that delivered them.

3. True love involves a measure of jealousy.

a. No spouse should be happy if their partner is sharing with other people what is exclusively theirs.

b. Do not equate jealousy with insecurity.

c. Often we confuse the two.

d. God is not insecure about us, but He is sure jealous.

4. The word used for “jealous” is used only 6 times in the Hebrew and each time refers to God¹.

5. It speaks of an exclusive relationship.

B. Believers must be careful not to attribute the blessings of God to other things.

1. When we trust God to get us to heaven, but trust other things to get us through this life, that is idolatry.

2. God calls this iniquity or sin.

3. Thankfully, God knows we are prone to idolatry and He forgives us through the sacrifice of Jesus.

4. However, too often we do not realize we are prone to idolatry and we walk through life serving different gods and different idols.

C. God is not only jealous but He has a Long-memory

1. God stated that he would pass on the sins of the fathers down multiple generations.

2. This tells us something about God and something about sin.

3. God does have a long-memory.

a. He keeps great records and only the blood of Jesus can cleanse us from unrighteousness.

b. Only through Jesus can we experience freedom from idolatry.

D. This also teaches us that Sin has a long payback.

1. When parents worship idols, their children learn to worship them too.

¹ נָאִיִּץ *qannā* 6× jealous; an adjective or title used exclusively of God, focusing on his desire for exclusive relationships [7067]¹

2. When parents sacrifice God's blessings on drugs, gambling, and chasing of lesser things, the children often pay the price for their parent's example.

3. When a parent's priority is making a living, the kids will pick up that idol also.

4. There is a lot of discussion in the Christian realm about generational-curses.

a. What is true is that the sins of the parents are often passed down and paid for the by children.

b. The sins of a nation are passed down and paid for by the children.

c. A generation of idol worshippers should not be surprised to find that they have raised a generation of idol worshippers.

E. Not only is sin passed down, but so is victory.

⁵Do not bow in worship to them, and do not serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate me, ⁶but showing faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commands.

1. I want to remind you that the initiative here is not on you but God.

a. It is God's prerogative to pass on the results of the father's sin to 3 or 4 generations.

b. It is also God's prerogative to pass on the results of faithful love to a thousand generations of those who love and keep God's commands.

2. What is up to us is what we worship:

a. Worship idols, and experience the consequences upon yourself and the household.

b. Worship God and experience the blessings of God upon yourself and your household.

3. Growing up, there was a strong push in my public school about victimless crimes.

a. These were crimes that hurt no one but yourself.

b. They were crimes like gambling and prostitution.

c. Whatever government officer that came up with that had no idea what they were talking about.

d. Sin ALWAYS affects more than yourself.

4. The nature of the Ten Words is to demonstrate that sin effects everyone.

a. It affects You, God, and other people.

b. If you are out gambling your paycheck away, your sin is damaging you and your family.

c. If you are drinking your life away, you are always hurting the people around you.

5. But when you live in victory, you are making it easier for your kids to live in victory.

a. When you choose righteousness over easy living, you are making it possible for God to bless your family through you.

b. You cannot guarantee that your kids will follow God.

c. But you certainly should not erect any idols that will get in their way.

4. What does this teach about humanity?

A. We are natural-born idolators.

1. We are created beings who love to create.

2. And in creating, we love to worship what we create.

B. What we create, we can control.

1. Our temptation is to create a god that must respond to our will and demand.
2. The world has done this through science.
3. The church has done this through the twisting of Scripture.
4. Jesus knew our temptation towards idolatry.
 - a. That is why there are no physical descriptions of Jesus in all of Scripture or history.
 - b. That is why Jesus sent the Holy Spirit, and called us to be His temples here on earth.
 - c. That is why we are called to walk by Faith, not by what we can see with our own eyes.
5. God knew our propensity for idols, therefore we are called to create nothing that will seduce our worship.

Application: How to check for idols?

#1. What has my attention has my worship.

- a. What has my attention and infatuation?
- b. Think past interests, hobbies, or things you are excited about.
- c. What are your obsessions, both positive and negative.
 1. Ask the Lord "is there something deeper this obsession points to?"
 2. **Our obsessions point to our idols.**

#2. What are my "worship leaches".

- a. I would read my Bible more, but...
- b. I would tithe, but...
- c. I would attend church regularly, but...

d. I would pray, but...

e. Some worship leaches are intentional.

1. Most worship leaches are by default.

2. These are those behaviors that we just "fall into".

3. And we have no idea how much time we actually devote to them, like facebook and youtube.

#3. What would I hate to give up if Jesus asked me to?

a. Anything that tempts me to tell God "no" is an idol.

b. This morning, God is calling all of us to cast aside our idols so that we may serve Him alone.

c. We start this process through prayer.