

Modern Idols

Exodus 20:1-4

I. INTRODUCTION: I

1. 2 Idolatry plagued ancient Israel.

A. The northern kingdom (Israel) and southern kingdom (Judah) both were punished severely by God, and rightly so, for their adoption and worship of idols.

B. They both knew better!

(1) The very first two commandments of the ten commandments made it crystal clear God would not tolerate idolatry:

Ex. 20:1-5a: “And God spoke all these words, saying: 2 ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. 3 ‘You shall have no other gods before Me. 4 ‘You shall not make for yourself a carved image — any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; 5 you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God,”

(2) One of the primary messages of the Old Testament prophets was for Israel to forsake idolatry and return to single-minded service and worship of the LORD.

2. It is difficult for us today to understand the attraction of idolatry in the ancient world.

A. What was so compelling about worshiping an inanimate block of wood or chunk of stone?

B. To us this type of idolatry is about as appealing as bashing one’s thumb with a hammer.

C. It is so ludicrous to us that it is almost laughable.

D. We recognize idol worship is vain and futile; we fail to comprehend any logic to it at all.

3. 3 So, what was the appeal of idolatry in the ancient world?

A. Idolatry made a lot of sense in the ancient world.

B. If we had lived in that time it probably would have been tempting to each one of us.

C. Doug Stuart’s commentary on Exodus explains the attraction of ancient idolatry:

(1) Guaranteed:

(a) Idolatry’s formula was simple: Carve a god out of wood or stone and voila there is your god right in front of you at your beck and call.

(b) Now you have a god in your midst, you can get its attention quickly and easily.

(c) Your incantations, oaths, and offerings will always be noticed.

(2) Selfish:

(a) If you scratch your idol gods’ back, it will scratch yours.

(b) Idols crave food, drink, and sacrifices and you need blessings.

(c) So, if you give stuff to your idol, your idol will be obligated to give stuff to you.

(3) Easy:

(a) Ancient idolatry encouraged vain religious activity and profligate living.

(b) You could do what you like with your life with no worries.

(c) The only real requirement was to show up consistently with your sacrifices.

(d) As long as placated your idol(s), regardless of how badly you lived, you'd be in good shape.

(4) Convenient:

(a) Gods in the ancient world were not hard to come by; access was almost everywhere.

(b) Statues could be used in the home or on the go (recall silversmiths in Acts 19).

(5) Normal:

(a) Everyone did it; to practice idolatry didn't make you stand out in the crowd.

(b) It is how women got pregnant, how crops grew, how armies conquered.

(c) Idolatry was like oil to an engine: nothing ran in the ancient world without it.

(6) Logical:

(a) Nations and people are different; they have different needs and desires.

(b) So, there were different idols to meet those differing needs and desires.

(c) Different strokes for different folks; different idols to meet those different "strokes."

(d) How could one god cover all of life?

(e) You don't eat at only one restaurant do you?

(f) The more options the better; they can all be right at least some of the time.

(7) Pleasing to senses:

(a) If you are going to be religious, it helps to be able to see your god.

(b) It's harder to impress people with an invisible deity.

(8) Indulgent:

(a) Sacrificing to the gods often did not require a real sacrifice for the worshiper.

(b) You could offer leftover food that couldn't be eaten; could offer drink that you couldn't drink; animals you would cull from the herd anyway.

(c) And, your generosity to the gods meant feasting for you!

(9) Sensual:

(a) The whole system was marked by eroticism.

(b) Idolatrous rituals could turn into orgies (e.g., prostitutes in the Temple of Aphrodite in Corinth).

(c) Sex on earth often meant sex in heaven, and sex in heaven meant big rain, big harvests, multiplying herds, etc.

4. **4** Now, can you see the attraction of idolatry?

A. "Let's see I want a spirituality that gets me lots, costs me little, is easy to see, easy to do, has few ethical or doctrinal boundaries, guarantees me success, feels good, and doesn't offend those around me."

B. That will preach and attract a lot of people!

5. Think about it: We moderns basically want the same things the ancients wanted.

A. We just go after them in slightly different ways.

(I) Most people want a faith that gets them stuff and guarantees success (prosperity gospel).

- (2) We want discipleship that is always convenient (virtual church).
 - (3) We want a religion that is ritualistic (nominal Christianity).
 - (4) We want spirituality that does not interfere with sexual expression (condones adultery, homosexuality, etc.).
 - (5) We all want to follow God in a way that makes sense to others, doesn't offend others, feels good to us, and is easy to see and understand.
- B. From the garden of Eden to the Asherah pole to the imperial Roman feasts, idolatry was the greatest temptation for God's people in both testaments.
6. **5** Idolatry is alive and well today!
- A. It is destroying this world.
 - B. It is destroying this country.
 - C. It is destroying this state.
 - D. It is destroying our schools.
 - E. It is destroying our communities.
 - F. It is destroying our families.
 - G. It is hindering the gospel and the Lord's church.
7. It is doing its best to draw us away from God; "Christians" are falling for it hook, line, and sinker.
- A. 2000 years ago Paul described the idolatry of the day.
 - B. He saw the city of Athens was given over to idolatry, so many so that one author of the time wrote "It is easier to find a god than a man in Athens."
 - C. Things have not improved much; true men of God are still hard to find.
 - (1) Those claiming to be "Christians" in the denominations have wholly given themselves over to modern idolatry.
 - (2) So have our liberal/institutional brethren.
 - (3) Sadly, some members of the Lord's church have also given themselves over to idolatry; but they would not recognize it, and they certainly would never admit it.
 - (4) And while the idols may look different today, they are just as abundant and they have the very same effect of separating us from the one true and living God.
8. **6** Let's take a brief look at some of today's modern idols.
- A. As we look at them, we all need to perform a penetrating self-examination (2 Cor. 13:5).
 - B. "Am I a modern idolater?" **7**

II. DISCUSSION:

Many Christians have given themselves over to the idol of...

I. **** Politics:**

- A. In today's America, this idol comes in either blue or red.
 - (1) The denominations have given themselves over so completely to the idol of politics that they give over their pulpits to political candidates of all stripes.
 - (2) Even members of the church can become so immersed in politics that is all they want to talk about, because it has such dominance over their day-to-day thinking.
- B. Whether one is talking about denominationalists or politically overactive members of the church the idol of politics can easily lead us away from God!

- (1) I receive “Christian political” e-mails daily.
- (2) According to them, if a certain politician is not elected or a certain bill before Congress is passed, or not passed, life as we know it will end! Certainly so if you don’t donate \$\$!
- (3) Where’s their faith in God? God is in control! **Psalm 2**
- C. How do people treat their idols?
 - (1) People bow down to their respective idol!
 - (2) People lift them up as the messiah of the people and nation!
 - (3) People look on them as their benefactor, the giver of all blessings!
- D. You know it is true (That’s why I cancelled my satellite TV!).
 - (1) Many are consumed with the idol of politics.
 - (2) They let politics mold their faith.
 - (3) They let politics lead them; they let politics define them.
- E. Don’t let yourself bow down to the idol of politics; Paul didn’t!
 - (1) What did Paul do when he went to Rome?
 - (2) Did he lobby the Roman senate for better treatment of slaves? NO!
 - (3) Did he protest Rome’s conquest of weaker nations? NO!

Acts 28:30-31: *“Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, 31 preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.”*

Many Christians have given themselves over to the idol of...

2. **** Sports:**

- A. People in our society, even some Christians, are literally “sports crazy”; it is all some people really get passionate about.
 - (1) They miss services to watch their favorite team on TV; their mood depends on their favorite team’s success or failure.
 - (2) They spend inordinate amounts of money to see their teams play, buy their “gear,” etc.
 - (3) They even give their children to this idol just as assuredly as Israel gave their children to the idol Molech and the outcome is the same: their children are consumed.

Jer. 32:35: *“And they built the high places of Baal which are in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech, which I did not command them, nor did it come into My mind that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.”*

 - (a) Their children’s sports games take precedence over attendance at services.
 - (b) Their children’s sports practices are more important than getting their Bible lesson.
 - (c) Competition and winning take precedence over sportsmanship.
- B. They burn for their idol; they sacrifice to it.
 - (1) They have a zeal for sports that takes priority over all else; and certainly over God.
 - (2) Their lives revolve around this god of the world.

C. Sports are fine if we don't give them first place.

- (1) Remember: Whatever glory sports may bring is fleeting and temporal (Who will remember who won this year's Superbowl 100 years from now?).
- (2) This is especially important as it concerns our children!
- (3) By our loyalties, what "crown" are we encouraging our children to strive for?!

1 Cor. 9:24-27: *"Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. 25 And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. 26 Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. 27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."*

Many Christians have given themselves over to the idol of...

3. ** Sex:

A. Like sports, our modern society is saturated with S-E-X.

- (1) Most advertising has sex at its root.
- (2) Our television programs have sex as their main theme.
- (3) Pornography is available at the click of a mouse.
 - (a) Every second 28,258 people are watching pornography on the internet.
 - (b) Every minute >\$3,075 is being spent on pornography on the internet.
 - (c) 20% of men admit to accessing porn at work.
 - (d) 40 million U.S. adults regularly visit internet pornography websites.
 - (e) 47% of "Christians" report pornography is a major problem in their home.
 - (f) 10% of U.S. adults admit to having an internet sexual addiction.
 - (g) I've heard of preachers and elders in the Lord's church being swept up in porn!

B. Sexual infidelity is rampant in our society:

- (1) 16% of married people in the U.S. admit to spousal infidelity.
- (2) 20% of married men and 13% of married women admit to adultery.
- (3) Mainly due to adultery, only 15% of children grow up with both birth parents.
- (4) About 40% of children today in the U.S. are born out of wedlock.

C. Sex as an idol is nothing new; saints in the first century faced it; hence, God's word teaches us not to make sex our idol:

1 Thess. 4:3-5: *"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God."*

Many Christians have given themselves over to the idol of...

4. ** Recreation: includes travel and hobbies!

A. We all need recreation from time to time.

- (1) However, we must keep it from dominating our lives and becoming an idol (\$\$).

- (2) I once knew a Christian couple who owned a ski boat.
 - (a) As far as I know, they never missed a Sunday service.
 - (b) In fact, in the summer they usually brought their boat to services!
 - (c) As soon as they had partaken of the Lord's Supper they slipped out the door and off they went to the lake.

B. Remember Exodus 20?

Ex. 20:3,5: *"You shall have no other gods before Me. ...5 ...For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God..."*

- (1) What do you suppose the Lord thought about them skipping out after the Lord's Supper?
- (2) I guess you could give some credit for at least sticking around that long.
- (3) Some Christians are so caught up with the "god of recreation" they simply don't bother coming to services at all (\$\$).

C. Imagine replacing service to God with a game or fishing at the lake; now square that with:

Matt. 5:6: *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled."*

Matt. 6:33: *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness..."*

Many Christians have given themselves over to the idol of...

5. **** Education:**

- A. I would be a hypocrite to criticize education.
 - (1) Education is a wonderful thing; in fact, I highly recommend it.
 - (2) But that does not mean it cannot be dangerous.
- B. Our society elevates human knowledge above God's knowledge.
 - (1) If you believe the Bible is the truth; you had better not admit it in the classroom unless you are willing to be ridiculed and ostracized.
 - (2) If you believe in Creation and reject evolution you are placed in the same intellectual category as those believing the earth is flat or the Loch Ness monster is real.
- C. This places great peer pressure on Christians, especially on our young people.
 - (1) It can prove a severe challenge to the faith of some.
 - (2) So much so that they cave and reject God and the Bible; their faith is shattered forever.
 - (3) They succumb to the god of science, the god of evolution, the god of materialism.
 - (4) The philosophy where man becomes his own god is the philosophy that attempted to build the tower of Babel:

Gen. 10:25: *"And they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves..."*
- D. It is critical for us to teach on evidences to all Christians, but especially to our young people.
 - (1) There is no need to apologize to the educated elite for believing in God; for believing the Bible is true; for believing the Earth and the Universe is less than 10,000 years old.
 - (2) There is sound scientific evidence that bears out the truth of Divine Creation.
 - (3) The Bible is completely accurate when it comes to the source and age of the Universe.

- (4) The educated elite claim the “scientific high ground”; but they are wrong! Psa. 19; Rom. 1:20

Psa. 14:1: *“The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt...”*

2 Pet. 3:3-4: *“...scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, 4 and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation.’”*

- (5) But we must prepare ourselves and prepare our children!

1 Pet. 3:15: *“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;”*

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6. 8 Money:

A. Money (and material things) is perhaps the most obvious modern idol.

- (1) Money (and material things) as an idol is nothing new; the Old Testament recognized it.

Eccl. 5:10: *“He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. This also is vanity.”*

- (2) So does the New Testament:

1 Tim. 6:10: *“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.”*

B. Riches are a very deceptive thing.

- (1) Riches fool people into believing they don’t need God (many of Israel’s worst problems came when they prospered; see the book of Malachi.).

- (2) We deceive ourselves into thinking we are not rich when we are! American’s are wealthier than 90% of the people in the world.

- (3) Also, our wealth easily becomes our most deceptive idol.

C. We need to realize the words of Jesus and Paul really do apply to us!

Lk. 18:24-25: *“And when Jesus saw that he became very sorrowful, He said, ‘How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! 25 For it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’”*

1 Tim. 6:17-19: *“Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. 18 Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, 19 storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.”*

- (1) Let’s not make the same mistake the rich fool made in Luke 12!

Lk. 12:15, 21: *“‘Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.’ 21 ‘So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.’”*

- (2) The rich fool’s real problem wasn’t money, it was covetousness! Col. 3:5

- (3) We can’t “take it with us”! I fear more Christians will be lost due to this idol than all others! Lk. 12:21

Many Christians have given themselves over to the idol of...

7. ** Career:

- A. This is often the first cousin of the idol of money (and possessions) and also related to the idols of power, prestige and ego.
- B. We have the God-given responsibility to earn a living to support our family (1 Tim. 5:8).
- C. But we must keep our jobs and careers in the proper perspective and keep them in the proper priority.
 - (1) We work to please the Lord, not men:
Col. 3:22-24: *“Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. 23 And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.”*
 - (2) We work to not only to provide for our own, but to share with those in need:
Eph. 4:28: *“Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.”*
- D. Let us exercise care our priorities don’t get out of whack and we make our job into our idol!
 - (1) A job that causes inordinate missing of services.
 - (2) A job that involves us in sinful, unethical situations.

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8. ** Religion:

- A. It may seem strange to you that I cite “religion” as a potential idol.
- B. How can “religion” become an idol? When we and serve God according to our own likes and desires rather than His!
 - (1) The Israelites and Jews did this “big time”!
 - (a) When they worshiped the “golden calves”; the calves were meant to represent Jehovah, but they were still an idol!
Ex. 32:4: *“This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!”*
 - (b) The Jews also made their traditions an idol:
Matt. 15:9: *“And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”*
 - (2) The denominations turn their false doctrines into idols because these false doctrines replace God; replace the truth! Gal. 1:6-9
 - (3) Our liberal/institutional brethren do the same w/fellowship halls, social gospel, etc.
 - (4) Even some formerly sound brethren make idols of the “PMA” gospel (positive mental attitude).
- C. Anytime anyone; denominations, liberal/institutional brethren, or us; put error in the place of truth we have done nothing different than when Israel worshiped the golden calves.
Matt. 7:21-23: *“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in*

Your name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’”

Many Christians have given themselves over to the idol of...

9. **** Family:**

- A. Turning our family into an idol is much easier than you would think.
- B. Recall the words of our Lord and Savior:

Matt. 10:34-37: *“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. 35 For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; 36 and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.’ 37 He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.”*

- (1) Some won’t obey the gospel because doing so would condemn a loved one who did not obey and has passed on.
- (2) Some will allow the wants and wishes of family members to keep them from faithfully attending services.
- (3) Some are timid to subscribe to sound doctrine because a relative (e.g., husband, father, mother, etc.) does not or did not.
- C. Jesus was very, very clear. If we allow family to get between Him and us, then we are not “worthy” of Him! Matt. 10:37

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10. **** Self:**

- A. This is by far the most common and most popular idol.
 - (1) It is also the most deceptive idol.
 - (2) It is also the ugliest and most destructive idol.
- B. When we put our own wants/desires ahead of God, we’ve made **ourselves** into an idol!
 - (1) “I’m going to do what I want to do!”
 - (2) “I don’t have to listen to anybody else but me!”
 - (3) “Nobody is going to tell me what to do!”
 - (4) “I’m going to do this, because God wants me to be happy.”

- C. After talking about the danger of putting family relationships ahead of Him, Jesus said,

Matt. 10:38-39: *“And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. 39 He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.”*

- D. Have you given your life completely, totally and absolutely to God?

Rom. 12:1-2: *“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”*

Matt. 5:6: *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.”*

Matt. 6:33: *“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness...”*

Lk. 9:23: *“If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”*

E. Anything short of this and we are guilty of “self-idolatry.”

III. CONCLUSION: 9

1. Do you have any idols in your life?

A. They are more common than you think!

B. They are easy for us to let them slip into our lives!

2. Let us imitate the good king Josiah:

2 Kgs. 23:24-25: *“Moreover Josiah put away those who consulted mediums and spiritists, the household gods and idols, all the abominations that were seen in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, that he might perform the words of the law...there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might...”*

3. In the end, what is an idol? It is worthless and empty and it separates us from God.

4. Don’t let idols enter your life, and if an idol is there, throw it out...NOW! **10**

Adapted from two articles: 1) *Idolatry Alive and Well*, by John Hines
and 2) *Why Idolatry Was (and Is) Attractive*, by Kevin DeYoung.