

Worship Wars - Exodus 20:3–6

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This morning we begin a closer look into each of God's 10 commandments and see their relevance and application for us today. We begin with the first commandment as recorded in Exodus 20:3-6. If you would like to follow along as I read it begins on the bottom of page 77 in the pew Bible.

Exodus 20:3-6 - "You shall no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or 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. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."

And here's the First Commandment and its explanation as given by Martin Luther in his Small Catechism: "You shall have no other gods. *What does this mean?* We should fear, love, and trust God above all things." So the question for us today is "Who will you worship and serve?"

But, I begin with another question...

What Will Lead to America's Downfall?

Will it be hatred and violence, the Democrats or Republicans, global warming, materialism, illegal immigration, etc? The Bible makes it very clear what will lead to America's downfall—*idolatry*. This has always been the cause of the downfall of a nation, because it is the downfall of Man because of sin as we heard in Rom. 1:18–25. "Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things."

At its very core idolatry is a worship issue. (As we heard in the special song today) we were created to worship. The question is, who do we worship? And then our answer begs the question, "What do we believe about the one we worship?"

1. Idolatry is worshipping the wrong God.

Every man has a god or believes in a god. Blaise Pascal (French mathematician, philosopher, and physicist, 1623–1662) said, "There is a God-shaped vacuum in the heart of every man." The problem with the God-shaped vacuum is that we can fill it with any number of gods.

Idolatry, then, is giving our worship to any god other than the God of Scripture revealed in Jesus Christ.

America is rampant with idolatry. I will go a step further and say that even within the Christian church idolatry is rampant. It comes in many forms.

a. Religious idolatry happens when a person worships a declared deity, as in Hinduism or Islam.
b. Secular idolatry occurs when people search for or find meaning, success, happiness, security, peace, or wholeness in anything other than the God of Scripture revealed in Jesus Christ.

- It can be addictions, such as gambling, overeating, pornography, alcoholism, etc.
- It can take the form of family. A 2007 study by the Barna Group found that seven out of ten adults choose their earthly family over their heavenly Father when asked to choose the most important relationship to them. Of the 1,004 adults over the age of eighteen that were surveyed, one-third said their entire nuclear family is more important than God.
- It can be a career.
- It can be a relationship.

- It can be material stuff .
I could go on and on.

2. **Idolatry is worshipping God the wrong way.**

This is the main focus of this passage. In the first commandment the Father made clear which God; in the third commandment He made clear how they were to worship Him. God was commanding His people not to pervert their worship of God.

3. **Idolatry is the perversion of the true God.**

a. When we distort God, we are guilty of idolatry.

During his long career as pastor of New York's Riverside Church, the late H. E. Fosdick spent many hours counseling students from nearby Columbia University. One evening a distraught young man burst into Fosdick's study and announced, "I have decided that I cannot and do not believe in God!"

Fosdick said, "All right, but describe for me the God you don't believe in." The student sketched out in words his idea of God. When he was finished, Fosdick said to him, "Well, we're in the same boat. I don't believe in that god either."

b. When we dethrone God, we are guilty of idolatry.

How do we dethrone God? We dethrone God when we trust something or someone more than Him; when we fail to obey Him; when we enjoy anything more than God.

c. When we dishonor God, we are guilty of idolatry.

d. When we denigrate God, we are guilty of idolatry.

To *denigrate* means to treat God with little respect or importance. We denigrate God when we fail to engage in worship or listen to the preaching. We also do it when we treat God glibly.

We are just as guilty of idolatry today, if not more, than Israel of breaking the first command. Tim Keller, author and founding pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, says, "Sin isn't only doing bad things; it is more fundamentally making good things into ultimate things. Sin is building your life and meaning on anything, even a very good thing, more than on God. Whatever we build our life on will drive us and enslave us. Sin is primarily idolatry."

God's View of Idolatry (20:5)

What is God's view of idolatry? He hates it and will judge it. It just doesn't get any clearer than that. Verse 5 read "You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God..."

Take an Inventory

- Are you worshipping the one true God?
- Are you worshipping God in the right way?
- Is there anything or anyone more important to you than God?
- Is there anything that consumes you?
- Is there anything you choose over God?
- Is there anything that you allow to interfere with your relationship with God?
- Is there anyone or anything that keeps you from worshipping God?

If honest, we all know we have all sinned against this commandment. What to do then? Own it and confess it to the God who forgives. That's why Jesus came. He came to take our place, accept our sin and guilt, and died for our sins, once for all. When He rose He brought us forgiveness and life. And now, by His Spirit, we can worship His way.

True Worship

So how do we worship God in a way that pleases Him? Jesus gave us great insight in John 4:19–26 as he talks to a woman at a well in Samaria.\

1. **We worship Him in spirit** (4:24). That means we do not get caught up in external conformity to religious rituals. Worship is a matter of the heart.
2. **We worship Him in truth as revealed in Scripture** (4:23).
3. **We worship Him in Christ** (4:25, 26).

If any athlete was known for focus, it was Michael Jordan. In Jordan's book, *Driven from Within*, Fred Whitfield, president and chief operating officer of the NBA's Charlotte Bobcats basketball team, tells a fascinating story about something Jordan did while getting ready to go out one evening. When Jordan asked if he could borrow a jacket from Whitfield, he found that Whitfield's closet was filled with both Nike and Puma products. The Nike outfits had been given to Whitfield because of his relationship with Jordan, who had a lucrative contract with the company. The Puma outfits had been given to Whitfield because of his relationship with ex-basketball player and Puma representative Ralph Sampson. Whitfield recalls that Jordan walked into the living room, laid all the Puma gear on the floor, and went into the kitchen to grab a butcher knife. When Jordan returned to the living room, he proceeded to cut all of the Puma clothes to shreds. He then picked up the scraps and carried everything to the dumpster. Once Jordan came back inside, he turned to Fred and said, "Don't ever let me see you in anything other than Nike. You can't ride the fence!"

It's time to take the knife to all the false gods in our closet!

Fear, love, and trust God above all things!

Amen.