

**The Ten Commandments**  
**Lesson 6: No Idols (Part B)**  
**Loving And Obeying Only God**

**A. God's Continual Cry Against Idolatry**

We have seen that the people of Israel had to deal with the temptation to worship idols throughout their history. God continually spoke to prophets, causing them to warn against this idolatry and call His people back to a faithful and loving relationship with Him. Many of the people were slow to listen, some never listened, but some did hear the message calling them back to faithful following, and they turned back to the Lord.

In today's lesson, as we read what the prophets said, we will see revealed God's will about the kind of personal relationship He desires with His people.

1. To understand one incident in Hezekiah's day, it will help to summarize some background material from Numbers 21:4-9.
  - a. Seven hundred years before Hezekiah's reigned, when the people were journeying with Moses toward the Promised Land, the children of Israel had to avoid the land of Edom, because the land was allotted to Esau's descendants (Deut. 2:1-6).
  - b. They complained against God and against Moses because of the route they had taken and the conditions they had to endure, and God dealt with them swiftly with corrective judgment.
  - c. He sent fiery serpents that bit the people, and many of whom died. The people cried out to Moses acknowledging that they had sinned. When Moses interceded for them, God instructed him to make a serpent of bronze and place it on a pole. Anyone who had been bitten and obediently looked to the bronze serpent were saved from death.
  - d. In 2 Kings 18:1-4, especially verse 4, King Hezekiah broke the bronze serpent into pieces because the people began to burn incense to it.
    - i. Verses 5 and 6 state that Hezekiah trusted in the Lord God of Israel. There were none like him among all the kings of Judah. He clung to the Lord and did not depart from following Him, but he kept the commandments that the Lord gave Moses.
2. In Isaiah 44:9-20, we see that the Sovereign Lord is the King and Redeemer of Israel, the First and the Last, the only God. He alone can foretell what is to come. Can any idol ever do that? Never! The idols created by Old Testament people were useless, profitless, and fruitless. Their makers were mere humans who bowed before and prayed to their handmade idols. God described them as feeding on "ashes" and living with a deceived heart. The wood could have been used for fire to cook with or to keep the people warm.
3. In Isaiah 46, Isaiah focuses on Bel and Nebo, two of the idols of Babylon. They had to be carried by beasts of burden. In contrast, the Lord carried Israel from the womb, from birth to old age. He promised He would continue to carry them. A god of gold or silver is worthless and worship to it is useless. One can cry to it, but it cannot hear and certainly cannot deliver from any kind of distress, even the least distress. God on the other hand can carry Himself anywhere and do anything He pleases.
4. Jeremiah 10:1-16 reveals contrast between the true and living God and the dead and dumb idols.

The Lord God of Israel is full of life, full of care and concern for His people and always desires for them to follow Him in loving obedience. The Gentiles (the nations of the world) worship and serve many idols and are

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terrified by what they behold in the heavens. They take a simple tree, a piece of wood, and shape a figure to bow to, pray to, and worship. Though they cover it with gold and silver, it is still lifeless, breathless, blind, and dumb. It must be nailed down or propped up or it will fall. It must be carried, whereas, the true God never needs to be propped up or carried. He carries His people.

There is no need to fear an idol. It can do neither harm nor good; it is of no benefit whatsoever, a false hope, worthless in every way, futile and useless. The Lord, on the other hand is *“the true God,” “the living God and the everlasting King.”* The call of the Lord is for us to consider our worship and our walk. Are we guilty of idolatry or are we walking pleasing to Him?

We have seen much concerning idols in the Old Testament. It was a continual issue with Israel, but Commandment Two was not just for the Old Testament. The New Testament has clear revelation as well. God sends out a continual call for us to beware of idols and idolatry.

### **B. The Impossibility of Serving Two Masters**

When Jesus began speaking and leading others, His focus was on getting them to follow Him. He called others to believe in Him and His Father, entrusting their lives to the one true God, which meant loving Him with all of their heart, mind, soul, and strength. Any substitute was off-limits. Any added object of worship (serving or loving anything or anyone else in addition to God) would be a subtraction from love and adoration owed to God. How did Jesus express this in His life and teaching?

In modern terms, an idol can be understood as what seems most real in life, or as what seems most necessary to fulfill or satisfy our deepest longings. For example, some believe that wearing or owning or driving something with a certain brand name or monetary value will make life better, more satisfying.

Yet, it is very easy to become distracted by the desire for material things or the admiration of others. When we do, rather than worshiping and walking with God, we give our energy and attention to a false image: the image of some object, status, or relationship that we believe will bring us happiness.

An idol can be anything that directs the will away from the will of God—it could be a person, a team, material things, a hobby, anything. How can we keep our hearts free of idols that distort our view of God and His will?

1. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus dealt with the danger of idolatry. Read Matthew 6:19-24. What warning did Jesus give? \_\_\_\_\_

In Matthew 6:24, Jesus contrasts God and *mammon* (Aramaic word for “riches” or “treasures”), personifying it as a rival to the true God. We can love and serve God, or we can love and serve mammon, but no one can love both. Love for one will mean hatred for the other; loyalty and service to one means disloyalty to the other. The choice of which master to serve affects our eternal rewards—treasures in heaven forever or temporary treasures on earth. True treasures cannot be eaten by moths, corroded by rust, or taken by thieves.

2. There are other passages in the New Testament that touch about idolatry. After Jesus was crucified and resurrected, He called a man named Paul to be an apostle to both the Gentiles and the Jews. This calling meant confronting idolatry in many places—such as the city of Ephesus.

- a. Read Acts 19:23-27. What problem was Paul causing for a few craftsmen, according to Demetrius? \_\_\_\_\_  
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  - b. What was Paul preaching (verse 26)? How was his message affecting others?  
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\_\_\_\_\_
  - c. Read Acts 19:28. How did the Ephesian businessmen react to the warning given by Demetrius?  
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  - d. Read Acts 19:28-41. How did the Ephesian businessmen and others react to the warning given by Demetrius? What does this incident reveal about the idolatry of Ephesus and the power of the message of Christ?
3. John closes out the book of 1 John with these words in 1 John 5:21, *“Little children keep yourselves from idols.”* John wrote to the intended recipients of this epistle that they were: children of God, marked by the Spirit of God, changed in heart and lifestyle, cleansed by the blood of Jesus, knowing God’s forgiveness and cleansing from sin, marked by love for God and love for their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, looking out for the needs of others, and looking forward to Jesus’ return.

He assures them not only of Jesus’s victory over the world and the devil, but also of their victory in Him through their faith in Him. They could know that their prayers were answered, and they could carry His message to others.

- John concluded this small letter with one sentence of great magnitude, six words that give any believer cause for caution: “Little children, guard yourselves from idols.”
- John warned that these Christians must be on guard against idols because any person—even someone who truly knows God—can be trapped by the snare of idolatry.
- All of us have a weak point and each of us must stay on guard against the subtle and deceptive images of the world, whether from past idols or new ones.

John instructs us to “Stay on the alert; watch out for the dangers of idolatry.” This is a personal warning for each believer to set a distance between oneself and any suspected idol, any “image” that distracts or draws one away from Jesus. We must watch out for anything that begins to capture our hearts so that we give more **adoration, affection, attention, or allegiance** to that than to Jesus our Lord.

### C. For Me to Follow God

God warned His people about idols and graven images because He knew they would be tempted to worship things that were not Him. They would be tempted to put their faith in what they could see. Our God cannot be contained in a statue or temple or any tangible object, and that is why His second commandment is so important.

Remember, God sent serpents to attack the people of Israel because of their grumbling. After He had their attention, He commanded Moses to make a bronze serpent, and all who obediently looked to that serpent were healed of their snakebites. Jesus even spoke of that incident in His conversation with Nicodemus, saying that we must look to Him, the Son of Man, for our salvations, just as the Israelites once looked to that serpent (John 3:14-15).

But many years after Moses made the bronze serpent, the Israelites began to treat it as a god, offer incense to it. The very thing God had commanded to heal the people became a stumbling block to future generations, not because of anything God had done but because the human heart is so easily deceived.

- Anything, any place, any person can become an idol, an object of adoration, a substitute for the one true God. Even people or groups that God has used in His work can become idols.
- Any of the blessings that God gives can be distractions if we focus on the gifts rather than the Giver.

Look at the list of possible idols today (thousand more could be added to the list). As you look at this list, understand that the word “worship” is related to the word “worthy”. On what or on whom do you place great worth or value?

Bank account	Alcohol or drugs	Athletic ability	Gambling
Business success	Food or drink	Public personality	Fun or entertainment
Education	Vehicle	Music	Physical beauty
Famous musician or band	Mental ability	Sports team	Knowledge
Philosopher	Hobby or talent	Video games	Travel
Career	Taking it easy	Skill	Fishing or hunting
Art collection	Sex or romance	House or furnishings	Good works
Shopping	Accomplishments/awards	Clothes and fashions	Those whom you know
Politicians or Government leaders	Church or ministry	Book (ancient or modern)	Spiritual or Bible knowledge
Spiritual leader	Spiritual accomplishments	Educator or philosopher	Self

Pause and talk to the Lord about this matter. Has he shown you some idols that have made you stumble? Turn to the Lord as your one and only Lord and God. Confess your idolatry as sin. Give up the idol or idols—all of them. Thank the Lord for His cleansing and delivering you from them. Focus on following Him with a whole heart, not isolated pieces of yourself.

**In the following exercise, consider the Scripture given for the five areas listed below then write your prayer or a journal entry in light of this truth about God.**

1. **Sovereign—Isaiah 40:12-31**
2. **Savior and Deliverer—Titus 3:3-8**
3. **Sufficient—Philippians 4:10-13**
4. **Satisfaction—Psalm 34:8-10**
5. **Significance—2 Timothy 2:20-21**

**Homework:** Read Exodus 20:7; Exodus 22:28; Leviticus 18:21, 19:12.

**Next Week’s Lesson: Honoring God’s Name Commandment Three**