

No False Worship

Exodus 20:4-6

4 “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. 5 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, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

I. Introduction

- A. Why do we need this commandment?
 1. The Lord cares not only about whom we worship, but how we worship Him. How we worship Him, not only that we worship Him, is very important.
 2. This commandment guides us into a deeper understanding of God, expressed in the care and instruction of how we worship Him.
 3. Worship is significantly shaped by its missional function, that is, not only by our personal and corporate experience of God, but by what and how it proclaims His existence to surrounding nations.
- B. Thesis: God has graciously shown us how to learn of Him through proper worship. Therefore, worship Him in spirit and truth, that the surrounding nations may truly learn the uniqueness of our God.

II. This commandment forbids false worship.

- A. God forbids the use of idolatrous images in worship
 1. Every image will fail at some point to adequately represent God.
 2. Even worse, every image provokes our very nature. Rom 1:24-26.
 - a. We eventually will substitute worship of creation for worship of God.
- B. God forbids the use of idolatrous methods of worship in our Christian worship
- C. We often stumble with this command in a couple of ways.
 1. Worship as barter or negotiation.
 2. Worship as entertainment or an intellectual religious experience to be consumed or experienced.

III. This commandment commands true worship.

- A. Explain the principle: The New Testament teaches us that the commandments stated negatively (Thou shalt not...) also include the opposite positive command.
- B. We are commanded to worship God in spirit and in truth. John 4:23-24
 1. Worshiping God in spirit, that is, from our heart, eliminates the bartering concept of worship.
 2. Worshiping God in truth eliminates the entertainment/consumer concept of worship.
- C. Worship God as He has prescribed, making full use of the beautiful music and intentional liturgy.

IV. This commandment reveals God to the surrounding nations.

- A. The Egyptian and Roman worlds were not impressed with Israel's image-less worship.
- B. Our world today is moving to post-modern forms of pre-modern worship.
 1. We perhaps have not fully owned the issues of Christendom in a post-Christendom society.
- C. What does image-less worship teach us about God?
 1. The invisible God is truly present, made visible to the world through His body.
 2. God, as Creator, is infinitely greater than any created thing, or any collection or configuration of elements of Creation, and thus alone worthy of our worship.

.....

D. However, there is one image we are to make liberal use of in worship.

V. **We worship Jesus, the image of the invisible God.**

A. Jesus is a shocking disruption in the natural world order that announces that our supernatural, invisible God is real.

1. God is present, and He is infinitely greater, both in beauty and in authority, of anything we have dreamed of or desired in this world.

2. He displaces and causes to be trivial any and all rivals.

B. Thus, we can neither use those rivals as part of our worship, or worship Him in the same way other nations worship their gods.

Discussion Questions

1. The commandment both forbids idols and idolatrous forms of worship. How do we sometimes use worldly (idolatrous) methods in our Christian worship?
2. When do you view worship as barter or negotiation with God?
3. When do you tend to “consume” worship as religious experience, rather than as authentic worship?
4. What does it mean to you to worship God in spirit? In truth?
5. Describe a time when you felt you were most faithful and engaged in worshipping God in spirit or in truth?
6. Our church has a developed and intentional order of worship. How has that aided you in your personal worship of God?
7. What did Israel’s worship, without images, look like to the surrounding nations in the ancient world? How is our worship confusing or unimpressive to people in our world today?
8. How might God use our worship to testify to His character and mission to the nation that surrounds us today?