

Exodus 20:4-6 p.61

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.

Romans 1:18–2:1 p.939

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. **19** For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. **20** For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. **21** For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. **22** Claiming to be wise, they became fools, **23** and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. **24** Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, **25** because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen. **26** For this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; **27** and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. **28** And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. **29** They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, **30** slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, **31** foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. **32** Though they know God's decree that those who practise such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practise them. **2:1** Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgement on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practise the very same things.

Matthew 6:25-33 p.811

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? **26** Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? **27** And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? **28** And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, **29** yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. **30** But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? **31** Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ **32** For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. **33** But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

I Renounce all other gods, all idols...

Dear God, holy and victorious ■ 2 Trinity, **you alone** are worthy of all my ■ 3 worship, my heart's devotion, all my praise and all my trust and all the glory of my life. I worship you, bow to you and give myself over to you in my heart's search for life. You alone are Life, and you have become my life. ■ 4 **I renounce all other gods, all idols... and I give you the place in my heart and in my life that you truly deserve.** I confess here and now that it is all about you, God, and not about me. You are the Hero of this story, and I belong to you.

J John says:

A Christian could make the following statements:

- God gives purpose, meaning, and fulfilment to my life
- God governs the way I act
- God is the focal point around which my existence hangs
- God is often in my thoughts, and I get enthusiastic about God
- Thoughts of God comfort me when I'm down
- I read about God, I talk about God, and make friends with those who are also committed to God
- I desire more of God

Now *idolatry* is where something – anything – takes the place of God in the central position. An idol is anything that you could put in place of the word God in statements like those above.

Try it:

Money, possessions, career, holidays, sport, music, sex, relationships family, religious activity, clothing, appearance, children, parents, friends, pets... iPhone. Brand names. Celebrities. TV Shows.

Leeds United. Heroin. Church. Conflict. Family, Security.

- An idol is what people live for.
- An idol is what fills our minds when we lie awake at night.
- Idolatry occurs when we hold any value, idea, or activity higher than God.

At its lowest, we cling to idols for a sense of identity, for a sense of worth, even for a sense of being alive.

Created things are *good* – until they become idols.

God created things good. The things which become our idols are not necessarily evil; it's what we make of them, the status we give them.

As things they have a good and proper place:

Leeds United. Church. Family Even the substances heroin comes from when used appropriately under medical direction and necessity.

What's the difference between medical heroin and addiction? Idolatry! Instead of limited use in medical necessity, we end up looking to a drug to make us feel alive all the time - for purpose, meaning fulfilment, the focal point around which our existence hangs, and so on.

Well let's take a look at Romans 1 - it discusses the roots of all this, and reveals the big problem we have as human beings, what lies at the heart of the mess we've made of our world and our own lives.

Romans 1:18–2:1

18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

God is angry – and that's good: we need his good, holy, dependable anger against suffering and injustice and hatred and violence. It's actually part of his love for his.

19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them.

We can know about God – he has revealed himself in lots of ways.

20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

God has *revealed himself in Creation* - the heavens and the earth declare the glory of the Lord.

He's *powerful* – that's the reality. Think how big the universe is – and then think how big the God who created it.

He's *divine* – not human, not like an attention-seeker. It makes perfect sense that we should honour and praise him.

21 For although they knew God, they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.

We know God exists – but we choose to pretend he doesn't, or we refuse or forget to give him praise and glory and thanks. And that's where the trouble begins.

22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

GK Chesterton: When people stop believing in God, they don't believe in nothing, they believe in anything.

OT full of stories of people creating golden calves and idols of various sorts. Still happens today – little statues with “religious” significance – buddas for example. Or we idolize people - the images we see on tv and in papers. Film stars or sports stars – Celebrities. Images which, truth be told, can't do much for us.

24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen

The more we forget about God and the more we focus on things, the worse it gets.

What it all hinges on is this: things go wrong when **we worship and idolise what's created rather than the Creator.**

“Sun and moon bow down before him” – figurative way of saying *worship the creator not the created.*

Use and Enjoy created things - love and enjoy others – give thanks for them - *do not let them become idols..*

Don't steal, don't covet, don't commit adultery - all these things happen because we idolize the created, believing it will bring happiness, satisfaction, identity. it doesn't. Why? **Because true love and security come from the Creator – love him back properly and everything else falls into place.**

26 For this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; 27 and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

The results of our bad choices are many – including sexual brokenness. Broken sexuality is just one symptom of many. Remember the seventh commandment – don't commit adultery – we're all sexually broken.

God lets us have our own way:

28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. 29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. 32 Though they know God's decree that those who practise such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practise them.

What a list! Frightening. Not one of us can claim to be ok in our Holy God's eyes. And as a result, no one can claim to judge and condemn someone else.

2:1 Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges. For in passing judgement on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practise the very same things.

We're not to judge and condemn, because we ourselves are guilty too.

So what to do? There is another way of life open to us. Jesus talks about it, and demonstrates it a lot. Here's an excerpt:

The Truth about the Kingdom

Matthew 6:25-33

25 “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? 26 Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? 27 And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? 28 And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, 29 yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. 30 But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? 31 Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ 32 For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that

you need them all. **33** But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Don't be anxious about things, Jesus says.

The birds get enough to eat even though they aren't involved in the farming industry.

Lilies in the field are more wonderfully dressed than the biggest and most important notable person, whether it's celebrity or royalty or sports star or whoever – anyone you could think of

Seek first the kingdom of God, Jesus says, and everything you really need will come to you.

It's in God we're truly and fully loved and accepted.

We're invited to live with him and his love living and working in us.

We're made children – sons and daughters – in his family.

God will love us fully and deeply. God will provide many good things for us as we trust him.

Betel food – literally their finest food often turns up in quantities which can't be handled!

Is Jesus saying it's wrong to eat and drink good things, or to have and enjoy clothing? That somehow we don't need oxygen or food or shelter?

No! He's saying get your priorities right: Seek first the kingdom, and then all these things come to you. Put God first, and everything falls into place.

We're to *repent and believe the good news*. God comes not to control and condemn us, not spoil our fun and put us down. He comes, humbly and faithfully, to rescue and save us, and give us life to the full.

No one need be lost or condemned – we can be saved to live a new, Godly life, through Jesus who loved us and gave himself for us.

Repent and believe the good news: worship the Creator, not the created. Trust Jesus above all else.

The Daily Prayer allows us to make a habit of identifying and renouncing things which are idols to us, and worship him instead.

Doing this daily helps keep us alert to the dangers and – more importantly – focused on God and his love and provision for us.

So for the rest of this time, it seems a good idea to spend some time thinking about our current batch of idols, and choosing to turn to God with them.

Tim Keller says this:

Christianity is a message that if believed creates a new way of life, and generosity is part of that. There is a message that is life-changing; there is a message that creates the heart which sings "My chains fell off, my heart was free".

And before you get this deep grounding in God, money is part of your self-esteem, and how much you have and where you live is a big part of what makes you feel valuable, gives you an identity, where you stand in the pecking order, gives you security.

And if your identity gets rooted in God and believing this gospel-grace message, and you're grounded in God, then what happens is that money becomes just money

[While] money used to be the current of [people's] source of security and self-esteem, it then becomes something else – something much easier to give away.

This is a gospel matter

Sin is trusting or loving anything or anyone more than you trust sort love God.

Sin is taking a good thing and turning it into an ultimate thing

For example, if you love your reputation too much you'll lie to save your reputation, it will blow up your life at some point

If you love making money more than your family and relationships, then at some point it will blow up your family and relationships.

Sin isn't just doing things wrong, but sin is putting anything in the place of God in the centre of your life. If there's anything you live for more than God, love more than God, put at the centre of you life – it will destroy you, it will drive you, it will eat you alive because you'll never be able to satisfy it.

And then quotes the writer David Foster Wallace...

"In the day-to day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship. And the compelling reason for maybe choosing some sort of god or spiritual-type thing to worship ... is that pretty much anything else you worship will eat you alive.

If you worship money and things, if they are where you tap real meaning in life, then you will never have enough, never feel you have enough. ...

Worship your body and beauty and sexual allure and you will always feel ugly. And when time and age start showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally grieve you.

Worship power — you will feel weak and afraid, and you will need ever more power over others to keep the fear at bay.

Worship your intellect, being seen as smart — you will end up feeling stupid, a fraud, always on the verge of being found out.

Look, the insidious thing about these forms of worship is not that they're evil or sinful; it is that they are unconscious. They are default-settings. They're the kind of worship you just gradually slip into, day after day

Praying this part of the daily prayer, and being honest and open about our idols means we get to clear out our hearts and minds to makes space for God, for Jesus. Rather than gradually slipping into idol worship, day by day, we can put Gd first and confidently name and renounce the idols which might trap us.

When we look to the cross, and can get rid of our rubbish, and be set free to live in love and truth.

Some of our idols are so toxic that we really need to renounce them and never touch them again: addictive substances, pornography, illicit relationships. We usually need ongoing help and accountability, and to work on our underlying stuff to grow in God to overcome these.

Some things we need to enjoy in perspective – loving God first and foremost frees us from idolatry and helps us to hold good things lightly as we trust him fully and deeply

What are the big idols which really need to be destroyed completely out of your life?

What are those things which if you lost them, were deprived of them, would bring your world crashing down, physically emotionally.

What, as Tim Keller asks, do you live for more than God, love more than God, put at the centre of your life? What is it that is eating you alive, perhaps even right now? You can be free!

The only thing which will not let us down is **God** - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Let him speak and heal now

...Pause for quiet

So let's pray it now – and when we come to *I renounce all other gods, all idols...* talk and listen to God. Renounce them, one by one. Decide how you're going to get help to stay clean and deal with the underlying issues in addictions and life-controlling sin habits.

And for other stuff, keep them in their place: Seek for the Creator, and let created things be what God meant them to be – blessings from him to be enjoyed appropriately.

Dear God, holy and victorious ■ 2 Trinity, **you alone** are worthy of all my ■ 3 worship, my heart's devotion, all my praise and all my trust and all the glory of my life. I worship you, bow to you and give myself over to you in my heart's search for life. You alone are Life, and you have become my life. ■ 4 **I renounce all other gods, all idols... and I give you the place in my heart and in my life that you truly deserve.** I confess here and now that it is all about you, God, and not about me. You are the Hero of this story, and I belong to you.

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

Christianity is a message that if believed creates a new way of life, and generosity is part of that. There is a message that is life-changing; there is a message that creates the heart which sings "My chains fell off, my heart was free".