

No God Images: 2nd Commandment Exodus 20:4-6 Genesis 22 Colossians 3:1-17

On our vacation we had the wonderful privilege to be with our grand children. Let me indulge you with a few pictures. Someone has said “the soul is healed by being with children.” I find that so true when I’m with JJ and Anna and Micah. They are a joy and a true gift of God. I’m sure the children in your life too have a special meaning and bring special joy. At least I hope they do.

In the book I’m reading by Tim Keller he tells the story of an older single woman who desperately wanted this joy of children. So she married. But her sadness was she could not conceive. After many years of longing, doctor’s visits and prayers she did have two children. But her dreams and hopes for her and them did not come true. Her overpowering drive to give her children a perfect life made it impossible for her to actually enjoy them. Her overprotectiveness, fears and anxieties, and her need to control every detail of her children’s lives made the family miserable. Getting her heart’s deepest desire may end up being the worst thing that ever happened to her, says the author.

In China and in other places, they are experiencing that misery on a society level. The gift of children has become a problem "so acute that it's changing how society functions. The one child policy and its Little Emperor effect has grown into a "behavioral time-bomb" according to wikipedia

In a Chinese Blog we read the following entry about this time bomb. quote

“In urban China – on the streets, in trains, and in restaurants – the scene is played out often: kids in control, parents on a leash. Any parental hesitation, and a child’s lip quivered, small cries turned to tantrums and parents went running for that missing toy or that extra cookie. On a train from Beijing to Shanghai, a three-year-old girl sent her mother up and down the aisles chasing thrown toys and tossed pieces of food. The mother looked worn, but each attempt to stop her daughter’s behavior was met with cries; and mom ran again. The center of attention, the center of the universe: the one child, the only child.” unquote

Children are a joy and a true gift of God. A source of healing for the soul. But they can also become a source of our greatest pain and our deepest sorrow, and the wedge that separates us from God and darkens the sunshine of God’s face.

God said if you want to live in a love relationship with me, and enjoy the blessings of eternal life with me “you cannot and will not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath. You cannot and will not bow down to them or serve them or worship them, for I, YHWH, your covenant God am a jealous God. It’s like a marriage relationship. The devastating effects of creating an idol will destroy life and harm life even into the third and fourth generation.

Someone has said that the human heart is an idol factory. Our fallen nature and tendency is to take something good and valuable like a career, or love, or wealth, or even family – children and turn them into ultimate things. To place our hopes and our longing for significance, and love, and security, and safety and fulfillment in something on earth. Something God created, something God gave.

The Catechism says Idolatry is having or inventing something in which one trusts [for happiness, comfort, or meaning] in place of or along side of the only true God. Idolatry is finding our happiness and our value in something other than God. A counterfeit god according to Tim Keller in his book of the same name.

Living in an exclusive love relationship with God. Loving YHWH with all our heart, all our soul, all our mind and all our strength is the glue, the heart orientation that keeps us in the sunshine of God's love and God's blessings. When we go after things, and long for things, and seek our happiness in things that only God can give and seek them in the things of earth they can become a time bomb destroying everything we ever hoped for, especially our relationship with God.

And that is the issue in the story of Abraham sacrificing his son Isaac. Isaac means laughter, joy. Isaac was Sarah and Abraham's joy. After decades of longing, and crying, and hoping and praying for a child, that child of promise, God finally when Abraham is 100 and Sarah 95 gives them a child. The environment for the Little Emperor effect is powerful and strong. Even though Sarah and Abraham loved God with all their hearts, Isaac was beginning to and could easily become the wedge that would separate the bond between God and his beloved friends. And so YHWH, our covenant God, I'm sure with tears in his eyes, says to Abraham. "Take you son, you only son, whom you love and even called your joy, and go sacrifice him to me."

It was a test of Abraham and Sarah's love for God. A test to have no other gods in their relationship with YHWH. It was a test to have no idols, no earthly substitutes for God. NO earthly sources of purpose, happiness, or value. Take your only son, the one whom you love, the one you are placing so much hope in, the one on whom you are banking on for the future - sacrifice him to me. You shall have no other gods before my face, you shall not make in your heart anything on earth so important and so significant you give him center of the universe power.

Modern psychology and addiction counselors are only now discovering the truth about the devastating effects of idols in our lives and our families. Economists are studying the effects of idols with desperate furor in our global financial melt down. They are discovering what Paul says in Col 3:5 that greed is idolatry and money is our idol. The idols of our times and the idols of our hearts although they seem powerful and able to bring peace and happiness and satisfy the deepest longings of our heart always disappoint and devastate life to the third and fourth generation. Our idols are weak, most often totally silent and unresponsive to our cries and our prayer for help. Idols are harmful. They hurt us spiritually and emotionally and even physically. (think bulimia) Idols are good

things made ultimate, good things given the power and control and the authority in place of or alongside of the true God.

Our hearts are idol factories. We try to meet our human needs and the longings of our hearts in improper ways and it explodes the blessings and the joys and gifts God gives us.

It is impossible for us to live without other gods. It is almost impossible for us to live without some kind of images and idols and creational crutches to help us. We want a god we can see and feel. In Ezekiel 14 this is the what God says is the history of Israel, going after other gods and making idols and as result of the idols of their heart they have experienced the darkness of sin and the explosion of time bombs again and again. But in Ezekiel God say, and this is the amazing Grace of the Bible, The Covenant God YHWH who stays true to his marriage vows to us say, I YHWH will heal their hearts. Verse 5 I will recapture the hearts of my people, the people who have deserted me.”

And that is what God did in Jesus. Jesus is the only authorized image of God. We want to know to really love him. And Jesus is the way to this truth and this life with God. Jesus is the whoewing power of God to draw us back to himself. To recapture our hearts. Jesus is the one who disarms the earthly powers and the addictive controls in our lives. He undoes the leash that enslaves us to the things of this earth. Through the power of the spirit, even though our heart are idol factories, the Spirit helps us love God above all, and helps us see Jesus as the true image of God. Our fallen nature and our tendency is to give our hearts to something earthly and real and physical. Well in Jesus God compromises and gives us himself in an earthly form.

So how do we deal with our hearts and our minds that so tend to wander to other gods and attach themselves to the things of this earth for significance and meaning and value? Paul says in Colossians 3. By focusing our hearts and our minds and our souls and our strength on the cross of Jesus and the empty tomb. That’s where we see the heart and the face of God. Set your hearts, he says in verse 1, set your hearts on things above where Christ is at the right hand of God. . Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now attached to Jesus who is in God. When Christ is the delight of your life, and your joy, and you comfort and your hope, then you will discover and experience the sunshine of God love, the glory of his face. That’s what Abraham and Sarah discovered. It is only God YHWH who is the Provider of what we really need to experience eternal life with God.

So the second commandment; you shall have no Idols teaches us about our sin, turns our hearts and minds to Jesus and helps us surrender to him, and helps us to live a life of thanksgiving and worship and service to God. Paul says put to death the idols of your hearts. Be renewed in the image of your creator and Savior, put on compassion and humility and forgiveness. And let the peace of Christ rule you hearts. Let the word of Christ dwell in your heart and your minds as you teach and sing and worship God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you d, do it in the name and power of Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him, the true image and only son of God.