



**The Ten Commandments – Part 5**  
**Exodus 20:4-6**  
**GCSP – 08/01/2009**

I don't know if all of you are aware of this or not, but I love my wife. I really do. We've been married for over 29 years now and I love her more deeply and more passionately than I even knew I had the capacity to love on the day I said "I do." She is not only an unbelievable gift from God to me she is proof that God loves me to give such a gift.

No suppose one day my wife saw my wallet lying on my desk and right next to her picture was a picture of another attractive woman. Do you think Connie would shrug her shoulders and think to herself, "Oh, she's pretty" and then put it out of her mind? Or is it more likely she would demand to know who this other woman was and why I had a picture of her in my wallet?

And how do you think Connie would react if she learned I had somewhat of a relationship with this other woman, and that I turned to her for encouragement and support? Do you think that would bother her at all? Do you think Connie would believe me when I told her I loved her with all my heart? Would Connie have a right to look at that image of the other woman in my wallet with disdain and revulsion? Could you blame her if she wanted to destroy that image? Could you fault her for feeling jealousy, hurt or anger for having to share my love and devotion with another?

Pretty dumb questions, right? She's my wife! She has every right to expect and insist that I keep myself for her and her alone. When we took those vows over 29 years ago before God and a host of witnesses, it was not a trifle matter. God takes vows seriously and we must do the same. And once you do take a vow you must commit yourself to the keeping of that vow.

I take precautions to not only ensure I keep my vow but to also ensure that there is no opportunity for others to even think I have been unfaithful. Most of you know that I will not counsel a woman alone. It either has to be with my wife in the room or with door open and others around. When the new church building goes up my office will be windows and not walls.

While I was the associate pastor at my brother-in-law's church down in Highlands Ranch I would drive the hour and forty-five minutes to teach the Wednesday evening Bible study. I usually spent the night at their house and did some work with my brother-in-law on Thursday morning and afternoon before heading back up the mountain. On occasion my brother-in-law would have business out of town and sometimes this would include being gone on Wednesday. Even though my brother-in-law and my sister-in-law and my wife were okay with me staying the night on these occasions I drove home on those Wednesday nights and drove back on Thursday morning when needed. None of the parties involved were worried about anything happening between me and my sister-in-law, but I didn't even want any of the neighbors or the people in the church to have any fleeting thought that something could be going on.

Because of my love for my wife and the vows I made to her, I am and always will be a one-woman man.

This is the spirit of the second commandment God has left for us.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Exodus**.

**Exodus 20:4-6**

Let's pray.

Here is the sense of what God is saying to us: "I am your God. I am your Redeemer. I have saved you and bought you for Myself with a terrible price. Please do not put anything in the place that belongs to Me. I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have cared for you, protected you, provided for you, and blessed you. Now, because I love you I am asking you to have no other gods in your life; that I would be the only One."

Does that strike you as a little too restrictive? - Too legalistic? - Too much for the Lord to expect or require? Of course not! He is your God! Instead of expecting us to not carry a picture of another man or woman in your wallet, God is expecting that we do not carry another god in our hearts. He is expecting that we do not turn to another god for comfort or support or encouragement or satisfaction.

It is an issue of love. It's an issue of relationship. My wife does not want any rivals for my love, and neither does God.

I have read how one pastor conducts premarital counseling before he agrees to conduct the marriage ceremony. He relates the accounts this way:

*It's very typical for a couple to come into my office all lovey-dovey and wrapped around each other like two vines of ivy. They can't seem to keep their hands and eyes off of each other; and I'm not sure they are hearing much of what I have to say. So I make them sit on opposite sides of the room from each other. I want them to understand this business of pledging your life to another is no dance through the daisies; it is very serious.*

*Once I get them untwisted and separated, I turn to the young man, look him straight in the eyes and say, "Will you love this woman and serve her and care for her for the rest of your life? Are you prepared right now to say that the only thing you want out of this relationship is to fulfill her, build her up, and satisfy her? Are you ready to say that the whole reason you are marrying this woman is because you believe with all your heart that you are God's gift to her in order to bless her and care for her?"*

*This is not what the young man was expecting. Some of the color drains from his face as the realization and the weight of what he is doing begins to sink in.*

*Typically the young man will swallow hard and meekly respond with a shaky, "Yes pastor."*

*But I'm not done with him yet. I then say, "Now, if you know that this is the will of God, and that you're entering this relationship not to receive anything but to give everything, then I want you to remember this day. I don't want you coming to me five years from now telling me you don't love her anymore. Because you certainly did love her, and love isn't something you can junk and trade in after five years or fifty thousand miles. And I don't want you ever coming to me to say this isn't the will of God, because we know for certain today that it definitely is the will of God."*

*It is a very sobering moment for these young couples; they simply are not prepared for that kind of direct language. But I want them to understand that the marriage relationship is for life.*

I'm thinking about using this same approach when a young couple comes to me to get married.

Most people's understanding of love and commitment is so flawed today. I have heard that some states are trying to pass laws now that make marriage a five-year contract that may or may not be renewed just like a driver's license. Divorce will not be necessary anymore; just wait until the contract runs out and go your separate ways if either party chooses not to renew.

Just as God designed the marriage relationship to be for life, so too is our relationship with Him; actually it is beyond life. Your commitment and relationship with God is for eternity. God has committed His love and Himself to you for eternity and He expects the same in return.

Near the end of his life on this earth, the Apostle John wrote, "**Little children, guard yourselves from idols**" (**1 John 5:21**). What was he talking about? Did John mean to not have any statues or hunks of metal or stone or wood in our homes? Or was he talking about something more than just a literal idol or image?

The great Puritan pastor and commentator, Matthew Henry, has this to say on that verse: "*Since you know the true God, and are in Him, let your light and love guard against all that is advanced in opposition to Him, or in competition with Him. Cleave to Him in faith, and love, and constant obedience; (and stand) in opposition to all things that would alienate your mind and heart from God.*"

So what are these idols, or likenesses, or images of God that we create in our lives, and then worship and serve? What do we do that causes the jealousy of God to rile up? What are the pictures in our "wallets" that anger the Lord?

Material things are a good place to begin. Jesus tells us we cannot serve both God and mammon – an old English term that encompasses all of our wealth and possessions (**Matthew 6:24**). Materialism will grip your soul and demand your energies and devotion. In **Colossians 3:5**, the Apostle Paul goes so far as to call greediness, idolatry.

You do not have to have much to be greedy. Being greedy has nothing to do with how much you have. I've seen the poor and the wealthy with a spirit of greediness, and I've seen the poor and the wealthy with extremely generous spirits. Greediness is an idol of

the heart. Greediness is allowing the desire to want and have more, to take away your satisfaction with God.

Other idols or images we pursue, and thus set up in the place of God are power and pleasure, and leisure, and fame, and status; and I am leaving out a host of others. But briefly, allow me to comment on just these few.

### Power

Power is an idol to many in our world today. The lust for power is also immune to your place in society. You don't have to be a big-wig politician to lust after power. You can be a person sitting in the pews trying to impose your views and your beliefs on the others in the church. Power is a desire to have your way; power is a desire for others to conform to your thinking and your beliefs. The lust for power desires that everyone worship like you worship, give like you give, pray like you pray, dress like you dress, etc. And this lust for power is an idol set up before, or at least alongside, God.

And it is not a stretch by any means to say the lust for power is truly a lust to be like or above God – the same sin Lucifer was guilty of.

### Pleasure

Pleasure and leisure are closely connected, and this American culture in which we live is obsessed with pleasure and leisure. Our desire to be entertained has so permeated our way of life that it has infiltrated the church. It's no longer in vogue to have a platform and a podium, we now have to have a stage complete with professional lighting, props, and backdrops. You can't get by with just a song-leader, you have to have full rock band if you want to attract people to your church.

But let me get back to where pleasure and leisure hit home on a personal level, and how they become an idol in your life. How much time do you commit each day to prayer and the study of God's Word? If you are a typical Christian, you may get in a 2-3 minute prayer at some point during the day listing everything you want from God, and on a good day you might read a chapter or two in your Bible. How much time do you commit each day to television, the Internet, relaxing on the deck, etc.?

God is not opposed to pleasure and He is not opposed to leisure. Quite honestly I believe God desires that we experience both on a daily basis. But when you've got your butt parked on that couch for hours on end and you haven't spent any significant time in prayer and study of the Bible, isn't that putting pleasure and leisure ahead of God? Isn't that creating an idol or an image that you are worshipping and serving before God?

### Fame

For the sake of time, let me also combine fame and status. Far too many prominent Christians have led the way in this regard. God blesses their ministry beyond measure, they start having books on the best-seller lists, they make appearances on Good Morning America and Letterman, and suddenly churches and ministries all over the world are clamoring for them to come speak at their conference or revival meeting; and they are willing to pay a nifty sum for them to do so. And then churches all across the land try to copy everything they do to duplicate this success.

But again, let's ratchet this down several notches lest we fail to see how this can become an idol in our lives. Fame and status doesn't have to be on a national, regional, or even local level to become an idol or image that is worshipped and served above God. Let me ratchet it all the way down to some examples we need to be careful about in our little church.

We are in the midst of a building project. Some people can get swept away by the situation when they are in any capacity of leadership with a visible project such as this. Egos can get elevated and self-imposed levels of authority can be grasped. You need to be in prayer for your leadership at Grace Church, that none of us get too big for our britches; that any desire for fame and status never enter into our thoughts and hearts; that we deflect any praise and attribute it only to God; that we accept constructive criticism with all humility.

Another example that can be a problem in our little church is in our motivation to share during our times of testimony. One of the great things about being a small church is the wonderful opportunity we have to share with each other in the middle of our worship time. I have been so inspired and encouraged by the many things you have shared through the years. But if we are not careful, we can cross the line into bragging on ourselves and promoting ourselves instead of sharing only the things God has laid on our hearts. Testimony time can degenerate into "Look at me, look at what I did" in an attempt to grab hold of a little piece of fame or status in the eyes of our brothers and sisters. When that happens, we have just created an idol, and we have just violated the second commandment of God.

Well, as I said, these are just a few of the many I could have chosen to illustrate the idols and images we create and worship and serve above, or alongside of, God; which brings it all down to a few questions for us to consider.

Are you completely satisfied with God? Are you content with His provision? Or have you allowed your mind and heart to stray from Him? Are you in essence flirting with the delicacies the world has to offer by allowing these and other issues to have a place in your life?

Do you know what God compares idolatry with the most in Scripture? – Harlotry, or in our modern English, prostitution. When we follow after the world and the things of the world we are committing spiritual adultery. We are cheating on God. We are having an affair with the world. The Bible is clear that any form of sex outside of the marriage is adultery. Sex before marriage is adultery and sex with anyone other than your husband or wife after marriage is adultery, and God compares this sin of adultery with having idols in your life; anything we pursue as much as or more than Him.

When we choose to give the best of our time, our talents, our treasures, and our energies to any of the images or idols we have talked about, or any number of other pursuits we haven't talked about, we are guilty of creating and worshipping and serving these images and idols. Your life is in essence invested in these other images and they are your gods.

The gods of materialism, power, pleasure, leisure, fame, status, sexual desire, and more are all around us. They fill the airwaves in our radios and television screens. They are a few keystrokes away on our computers. The magazines, newspapers, and books we read depict these gods on almost every page. We are surrounded by these gods probably more so than at any time in history. They seductively call to you and promise to give you your best life right now. They whisper in your ear and take your breath away. They capture your heart, your attention, your interest, your time, your money, and your commitment.

And in their proper place, most of the things we have talked about are not inherently wrong or evil. But when any of them, and hundreds more, have any measure of control over your thoughts and desires they have become an idol in your life.

And how do these images and idols affect us over the long haul?

Turn with me in your Bibles to the **Psalms**.

### **Psalms 135:15-18**

Did you catch that? Do you see the profound truth in what God is warning us about? God is promising that you will become just like the images and idols you pursue.

If you pursue power, power will consume you; your life will become a never-ending pursuit of power. And it will indeed be never-ending because you will never have as much power as God. If you pursue pleasure your appetite for pleasure will never be satiated. You will always be looking for the next bigger and better high, so to speak. If you pursue the material things of this world and wealth, you will never have enough. There will always be another dress, or shirt, or pair of shoes, or car, or computer, or television, or house that will capture your fancy.

Jeremiah says we follow worthless idols and become worthless ourselves (**Jeremiah 2:5** – my paraphrase); we walk after emptiness and become empty.

The curse of creating and worshipping and serving images and idols is that you will be deceived into believing that these things can fulfill you and satisfy you. It's a lie from the pits of hell and it is a lie we believe just about every day of our lives!

God knows the end result of pursuing any image or idol is a hollow despair. It is an emptiness, a depression, and an unsatisfied thirst and hunger that will follow you all the days of your life. God knows that none of these things can ever satisfy the longings of your heart. No amount of money, possessions, power, pleasure, leisure, fame, or status will even come close to filling the emptiness in your heart and soul.

Jesus told the woman at the well that if she drank of the living water He could provide she would never thirst again. If she continued to drink of the water from the well, she would have to keep coming back and keep coming back to draw again and again. What a picture of us when we pursue anything above God. Yes, there may indeed be pleasure for a season, but that pleasure is elusive and you will have to keep coming back and drawing over and over to vainly attempt to capture that pleasure again.

Years ago there was a commercial on television. A young man was standing by the side of the road in a remote location looking for a ride. His shirt was unbuttoned and he was ruggedly handsome. A red sports car with a blond bombshell speeds by but then screeches to a halt and then backs up to where this young man stands. The passenger window glides down and the woman asks, "Excuse me, but are those Bugle Boy jeans?" He responds, "Why, yes they are" and reaches for the door handle. She says "Thank you", rolls the window back up and speeds off, leaving the young man on the side of the road in a cloud of dust.

I'm sure the advertisers did not intend to prove a Biblical principle, but the message comes through loud and clear. The world calls for us to wear our stuff, use our deodorant, listen to our music, watch our movies and television shows, drink our beer, and dance to our tune. And while you are out spending resources and investing your time, trying so very hard to achieve that elusive right look, the world leaves you standing on the side of the road in a cloud of dust with nothing.

Beloved, our God is a jealous God when we go off whoring with the world. But He is also a loving and kind and compassionate God when we keep Him first in our lives; and there's more to say about that next time.

But before you leave tonight, consider your life. Invest a moment to examine and take stock of your life. Is your life fulfilled or empty? Do you experienced tremendous joy or does discontent abound? Has the world lived up to its promises or have you been left on the side of the road?

Come to Jesus. Put your faith and trust in Him. His promises never fail and He has promised to never leave you or forsake you.

Let's pray.