

REPLACING GOD AND DEVALUING GOD

SERIES: LOVE GOD, LOVE PEOPLE



Catalog No. 20140713
Exodus 20:4-7
3rd Message
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July 13, 2014

As you'll recall, we recently started a summer series on the Ten Commandments, focusing on how they apply to us today as Christians. Two weeks ago, Steve Zeisler gave an introductory sermon on the subject. Last week, Nolan Sharp spoke on the First Commandment, *You shall have no other gods before me.*

As I was preparing for today's sermon, which has to do with the Second and Third Commandments, I came across a quote from Charles Spurgeon, the great 19th century preacher. Spurgeon said,

I believe that one reason why the church of God at this present moment has so little influence over the world is because the world has so much influence over the church.

The church is supposed to be influencing the world, but the truth is, the influence is often the other way around. The world often has a greater influence on the church than the church has on the world.

Connected with this, I've titled today's sermon "Replacing God and Devaluing God." The First Commandment, as Nolan told us last week, commands us to have an exclusive relationship with God. God is supposed to be the one ruling and reigning over our lives, the one governing and guiding us. The Second and Third Commandments recognize that this relationship will come under attack. The Second Commandment recognizes that the world is going to tempt us to replace God, and the Third Commandment recognizes that the world is going to tempt us to devalue God. These are the two central ways in which the world seeks to influence us—replacing God and devaluing God—and we need to be on constant alert that this influence isn't in fact occurring.

To begin with, let's talk about the Second Commandment, which has to do with replacing God.

Exodus 20:4-6—

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on earth beneath, or

that is in the water under the earth. 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 fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."

Now, at first reading, the Second Commandment may not appear to have any application for us as Christians. Probably none of us here today have purchased a block of wood or a hunk of stone, carved it into an image, and worshiped it. However, as I hope we'll quickly realize, the Second Commandment is addressing a deeper issue. It is addressing the issue of idolatry—the issue of substitute gods, counterfeit gods, replacement gods. The gods of this world are constantly seeking to take God's place, sometimes even masquerading as God himself, much the same way Satan masquerades as an angel of light.

Mark Driscoll, who recently did a series on the Ten Commandments—a series I recommend—made an interesting distinction that I found helpful in understanding how this might apply to us as Christians. He distinguishes between what he calls our 'Actual God' and our 'Functional god.' He distinguishes between the God we profess and the god we serve, which may or may not be the same.

Most of us here today would probably say that our actual God is God—that our actual God is the triune God of the Bible: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. However, the reality is, other things can sometimes become our functional god. Other things can become the overriding passion of our lives, stealing our hearts away from the Lord. They can, from a functional standpoint, begin ruling and reigning over us, orchestrating and prioritizing how we use our time, energy, and resources.

Our functional god is whatever is governing and controlling us. For example, when I was an alcoholic and a drug addict, alcohol and drugs were my functional god. They ruled and reigned over me. They

controlled me. All of my time, energy, and resources were devoted to those gods—gods I imagined would make me feel alive, or at least relieve my pain.

For Christians, the danger is that our actual God can be subtly replaced by a functional god that is really one of the world's idols. We can claim to believe in the Lord, but a subtle seduction can occur whereby our hearts are stolen without our immediately even noticing. We can be deceived into imagining that we are following the Lord, when the reality is, the overriding passion of our lives—what is genuinely orchestrating and prioritizing everything else in our lives—has shifted to something else.

Pornography

To list some of the idols that I believe are influencing Christians today—some of the replacement gods that are seducing Christians and reducing the church's ability to influence the world ... along with drugs and alcohol, there is the idol of pornography. Pornography—sexually explicit images—are of course rampant in our society, whether it's hardcore pornography that can be easily accessed on the internet or 'soft porn' that is constantly bombarding us from billboards, magazines, T.V. sets, and movie screens. The world's most attractive people are continually being paraded in front of us, usually provocatively clothed (or, more often, provocatively semi-clothed), and these images can exert a powerful influence. As Mark Driscoll observed, fertility gods and goddesses are alive and well today. They're just being re-branded. They're just being marketed somewhat differently.

Sadly, sexual images—sexual idols—are gaining control over an increasing number of Christians. They are becoming the functional god to many professing believers. According to Focus on the Family, 45% of Christians admit that pornography is a major problem in their homes, and 54% of pastors admit to viewing pornography in the last year. Furthermore, if you imagine that pornography is only a problem for men, 34% of female readers of *Today's Christian Woman* admit to intentionally accessing internet porn. These images are idols. They are replacement gods, and they violate the exclusive relationship we should have with the Lord.

Sadly, too, even though pornography is a growing problem within the Christian church, it tends to be a problem that remains largely in the shadows. It tends to be a subject that Christians don't talk about openly. In fact, they (or rather, we) generally don't talk about it at all. Left in the shadows, pornography is doing a tremendous

amount of damage to Christian marriages, families, and other relationships, and it is one of the major ways the world is exerting its influence on the church.

Entertainment

Although not evil in and of itself, entertainment is another potential idol threatening the church. As the title of Neil Postman's book asks, *Are We Amusing Ourselves to Death?* Like I said, entertainment is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, entertainment can be a wonderful thing—a wonderful way in which God provides us with the rest, relaxation, and refreshment that we need. So ... please don't leave here today saying that the pastor told you that entertainment is evil!

Rather, what I'm saying is, as with many things, entertainment can become an idol when it assumes a place in our lives that God never intended. It can become an idol when it turns into the overriding passion of our lives—when it morphs into our functional god, distracting us from our relationship with the Lord. The transition can happen gradually and almost invisibly. The images on television, Facebook, Twitter, video games, and cell phones can increasingly preoccupy us, while prayer, Bible study, Christian fellowship, and service recede into the background.

In his book *The Life You Always Wanted*, John Ortberg cites a Nielsen report revealing that television sets in America are on for an average of six hours a day. He also notes that a Detroit newspaper offered 120 people \$500 not to watch television for a month. 93 people turned the offer down, and of the 27 who accepted, all 27 said that their lives without television were an improvement. And yet, after the television-free month, all 27 participants returned to their former viewing habits. Ortberg observes:

*One irony in this is that many people watch television because they are tired and want rest for the mind and body. But how often do we hear someone at work say something like this: "I watched TV from the evening news to late-night talk shows, and I am feeling rejuvenated, renewed, revitalized, and refreshed! What a tremendous, memorable evening that was! I'm so grateful for the gift of television."*¹

As for the question, "How much electronic (and other) entertainment is godly and how much is ungodly?" The real question should be, "When is our heart being stolen and when is it not?" "When are we enjoying entertainment because of God and when are

we enjoying entertainment instead of God?” Because the transition can occur so imperceptibly, we need to remain prayerfully alert, asking God to show us when the potentially captivating images on the world’s screens may be luring us away from our relationship with him.

Money, Materialism, Comfort

Along with entertainment, there are the idols of money, materialism, and comfort. Like entertainment, none of these is evil in and of itself. Money is not evil. Rather, the biblical warning is against the love of money (1 Timothy 6:10). The Bible warns against worshipping the almighty dollar and allowing material wealth and comfort to govern our lives.

Again, the transition can be subtle. When does prudent financial planning become simply an attempt to lay up treasures on earth? When does wise stewardship become an attempt to serve two masters? When does our love of comfort cause us to avoid the risks that God might be calling us to take? These are heart-level questions that Christians need to seriously consider, especially here in the Silicon Valley where the idol of material wealth is continually seeking to influence us.

Power, Prestige, Achievement

In addition, the world wants us to replace God with the gods of power, prestige, and achievement. The patriarch Joseph was the second most important ruler in Egypt next to pharaoh, and Daniel was promoted over all the wise men in Babylon, so godly people can clearly hold positions of great prominence. And yet, the longings for power, prestige, and achievement—longings that appeal to our deep desires for respect, control, and approval—can be very enticing. Indeed, what starts off as a good thing, like a promotion at work, can eventually lead to intoxication with worldly prominence—a preoccupation later to be regretted. As Ray Stedman said, “Some people spend their whole lives climbing the ladder of success only to discover that the ladder has been leaning against the wrong wall.”

Human Praise

Often intertwined with the replacement gods of power, prestige, and achievement is the allurements of human praise. This has been a major struggle in my own life. I grew up feeling that I was never good enough—that I never passed inspection, never passed

quality control. I was like Woody Allen who said, “My only regret is that I wasn’t born as someone else.” This core-level feeling of self-rejection was the driving force behind much of my drug addiction and alcoholism. In fact, even today, I can still find myself looking for human praise—looking for people to pat me on the back—rather than looking to God for the praise that comes from him.

Fantasy

One of the other idols many Christians battle is the idol of fantasy—the idol of an inner fantasy world. I’m not talking about the godly use of imagination and creativity—composing beautiful songs, envisioning how to pursue your education or career, imagining how to remodel your home. Rather, I’m talking about constructing an inner world where you go in order to become the person you can’t seem to be in real life. You can’t find fulfillment in real life, so you attempt to find it in fantasy.

As Lynne Fox observes in her book *Grappling With Your Identity*, this was Walter Mitty’s problem—the problem of the fictional character in James Thurber’s story “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty.” Walter would spend most of his day fantasizing about being a great hero—a wartime pilot or an emergency room surgeon. He was a hero in his own mind, living in his make-believe adventures, usually until his wife would interrupt his fantasy at some critical point. I suspect that many Christians are like Walter, inhabiting a self-constructed inner world of ‘graven images’—images that are effectively idols without any connection to God’s plan or leading.

Self-idolatry

Perhaps the central idol promoted by the world is the idol of self. Self-idolatry is the deepest form of idolatry, next to idolizing Satan. We can be tempted to turn ourselves into our own idol—tempted to replace God with ourselves. Human beings were made in the image of God, but we can be tempted to worship the image rather than the Image-maker.

The temptation to self-idolization and self-deification, was the original temptation in the Garden of Eden. Satan told Eve that she would be like God if she ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:4). Satan himself had of course rebelled against God, proclaiming: *I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High* (Isaiah

14:14), and when Adam and Eve succumbed to Satan's temptation, they embarked down this same narcissistic pride-filled road. Ever since the Garden of Eden, the world system has sought to replace God with self, and this is still the primary way in which the world and Satan are seeking to tempt Christians today.

Religious Clothing

To further complicate matters, idols can dress in religious clothing. Satan can masquerade as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14) and idols can appear in various disguises. In fact, the injunction against worshipping a false image of God may be the main intention of the Second Commandment. This was the sin the Israelites committed when they worshipped the golden calf while Moses was on Mount Sinai. Referring to this self-manufactured idol, Aaron mistakenly proclaimed, *These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt* (Exodus 32:4b). Three thousand Israelites died as a result of this sin.

Disguising the unholy as the holy may also be what Jesus had in mind when he said in the Sermon on the Mount, *On that day [the final day of judgment] many will say to me 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of iniquity* (Matthew 7:22-23). People can do things in the name of Jesus, but if the motive isn't love, then something unholy is involved. Even a sermon, by the way, can be an idol. Even a sermon can be an attempt to gain personal praise rather than praise for God.

All of these idols can tempt us as Christians—pornography, entertainment, money, power, prestige, human praise, etc.. They can steal our hearts and, from a functional standpoint, replace God in our lives. They can be a way in which the world exerts its influences over us. When this occurs, there are consequences. Let me list five in particular.

Futility

The first consequence is futility. It says in Jeremiah 2:13:

**...my people have committed two evils:
they have forsaken me,
the fountain of living waters,
and hewed out cisterns for themselves,
broken cisterns that can hold no water.**

When we worship an idol, we are forsaking the spring of living water, the source of true thirst-quenching satisfaction. In addition, when we worship an idol, we are carving out a cistern, a broken cistern that can hold no water. In modern terms, we are placing our faith in a bucket with holes in it. Sooner or later, whenever God is replaced with an idol, the outcome will be emptiness and futility. Idols will not provide the satisfaction they promise, regardless of what we might initially imagine. As with the witches in Macbeth, idols “win us with honest trifles to betray us in deepest consequence.”

Unfaithfulness

Second, when we replace God with an idol, we will experience a sense of spiritual unfaithfulness. In God's eyes, idolatry is the equivalent of adultery. It is the equivalent of having a spiritual affair. This is the central message of the book of Hosea, where the prophet Hosea was commanded by God to marry Gomer, a woman who was repeatedly unfaithful to him. Hosea's relationship with Gomer pictured God's relationship with the nation of Israel. The nation repeatedly worshipped idols—went whoring after other gods, as the King James puts it—and God says this is effectively a form of adultery.

By the way, this is why the Second Commandment says that God is a jealous God. God wants his relationship with us to be an exclusive relationship, like that of a husband and wife. He doesn't want us having spiritual affairs, having other lovers. Again, to cite Mark Driscoll, imagine the jealousy of a groom seeing his bride walking down the aisle with a lover on either arm. The church is the bride of Christ, and we are to remain faithful to him. We are not to walk down the aisle toward the marriage supper of the Lamb accompanied by various worldly lovers.

As the Second Commandment also declares, spiritual adultery will impact not just our own life but the lives of others. We don't live in a vacuum but in relationships, most importantly relationships with family members. These relationships will be affected by our actions and by whatever is functioning as god in our lives. Alcoholism, for example, will not only affect the life of the person who becomes addicted, it affects the person's spouse, children, and potentially grandchildren and great-grandchildren. It's the same with all idols—with all functional gods. Conversely, God promises that our faithfulness to him will impact thousands, meaning thousands of generations. Indeed, the Lord wants our faithful relationship with him to stand as something glorious and beautiful for all eternity.

Slavery

Third, when we become influenced by the idols of this world, we will eventually become enslaved. As it says in 2 Peter 2:19, *For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved.* God delivered the Israelites out of Egypt, out of slavery, in order that they might freely serve him. And yet, when we worship idols, we will ultimately become enslaved—enslaved to harsh and uncaring masters. Metaphorically, we will return to Egypt. We will return to a place of bondage and suffering.

Evil

Fourth, idolatry is fundamentally evil. It says in 1 Corinthians 10:19-20, *What do I imply then? Do I imply that food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God.* When we depart from God, we are heading in the direction of evil, heading in the direction of the demonic. As Paul tells us in Ephesians, we are in the midst of a spiritual war against powerful unseen forces—a war that involves wrestling *against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places* (Ephesians 6:12). This warfare includes wrestling against Satan's attempts to lure us away from God. When we actually are lured away, Satan, at least temporarily, is gaining the advantage.

Death

Finally, fifth, when we turn to idols, it will lead to death. As it says in Romans 6:23, *For the wages of sin is death.* The fruit of the Holy Spirit is *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control* (Galatians 5:22-23). These are signs of life, signs of the deep and satisfying life God longs for us to have. Signs of death—signs that we are receiving the wages of sin—include the absence of such things. They include the absence of love, the absence of joy, the absence of peace, the absence of patience, the absence of kindness, the absence of goodness, the absence of faithfulness, the absence of gentleness, and the absence of self-control. When we worship idols—when something other than God takes the place of God—the signs of death will increasingly become part of our day-to-day experience.

Well ... as I said, this morning we're going to be looking at both the Second and the Third Commandments. We're looking at the temptation to replace God and the temptation to devalue God, which

are the two main ways the world is continually seeking to influence us.

The Third Commandment, which has to do with devaluing God says: *You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.* (Exodus 20:7). This commandment forbids us from taking the Lord's name in vain. It forbids us from taking the Lord's name in a way that devalues, reduces, trivializes, or desecrates who he genuinely is. Even when we're not seeking to replace God—even when we're not actively engaged in outright idolatry—we can find ways of speaking about God that greatly reduce or negate his importance. When we lessen God's importance in our lives, we will inevitably lessen his authority over our lives. When we see God as small and insignificant, we will attempt to relegate him to a small and insignificant corner of our hearts and minds.

The Lord's Prayer begins with the famous words, *Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name*—holy is your name. Psalm 8 starts with the words, *O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!* Psalm 148 says, *Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.* God's name, which is a revelation of who he is, is holy, majestic, exalted, and full of splendor. His name demands that we view him with reverence and awe. If we don't, it is dishonoring, disrespectful, and disobedient. Furthermore, the Lord will hold us accountable. He will not hold us guiltless.

How might people take the Lord's name in vain? How might people devalue God and speak about him in a manner that fails to recognize who he truly is? Let me briefly mention five ways.

Frivolous

First, people can talk about God frivolously. They can, for example, say things like (and please forgive me for even citing the examples), "Oh my God, that's such a nice car!" or "Jesus, that was the best dinner I've ever eaten!" or "God Almighty, I had a hard day at work!" Such casual and frivolous ways of referring to God can seem to add emphasis to what a person is saying. And yet, clearly, what is being said has nothing to do with God. It treats God as nothing. It treats him as simply a means of intensifying or dramatizing whatever is being said.

Sometimes, when I'm talking with people, they'll take the Lord's name in vain in one of these frivolous ways.

They may not even be aware of it. It may simply be part of the rhythm of how they speak. And yet, occasionally, they'll realize what they've said, and (usually with some degree of embarrassment) they'll say something like, "I'm sorry. I forgot you were a pastor. I didn't mean to offend you." To which I usually gently reply, "That does offend me, but you know, it's really the Lord you should be offering an apology."

I would also suggest that Christians can potentially use the Lord's name in a frivolous way when they end their prayers by saying "in Jesus name, Amen." Again, please don't misunderstand me. I believe that ending prayers with the words "in Jesus name, Amen" can be the absolutely right to do. However, if the words are simply being mumbled as a kind of ritual closing—if the mouth is uttering the correct words but the heart and mind are disengaged—then the words have become simply an empty phrase, a vain repetition. They have become something we're merely doing on spiritual autopilot. When we say, "in Jesus name, Amen" it needs to be an earnest and sincere recognition of the one in whose name we are praying, not just some religious formality.

Profanity

Second, God's name can be used in a way that is essentially a form of profanity. For example, when people hit their finger with a hammer, the name of Jesus sometimes comes out of their mouths, followed by a string of four letter expletives. Strangely, they never seem to scream the name of other biblical figures or the name of figures from some other religion. When they hit their finger with a hammer, people never seem to yell, "Hezekiah!" or "Buddha!" or "Hari Krishna!" The world wants to devalue the name of Jesus until it's just another vulgar word. It wants God to occupy a place in our hearts and minds associated with the most vile and offensive vocabulary.

In writing on this subject, Robert Schenck tells the story of a preacher who sat next to a man on an airplane—a man who used the words God, damn, hell, and Jesus Christ all in one sentence. To which the preacher responded, "I'm impressed with your communication skills. I can't get all of that into a whole sermon!" Obviously, the preacher was speaking with a bit of loving sarcasm, and hopefully it caused the man to reflect on what he'd said.

Improper Oaths

Third (and this may require some explanation), God's name is frequently devalued in what might be called

improper oaths. When someone begins a sentence with "I swear to God" or "As God is my witness" or "I swear on a stack of Bibles"—"Mom, I swear on a stack of Bibles, I don't know how that marijuana got in my backpack!"—it's generally an example of this. In such cases, people are acting as if God somehow supports whatever they're saying. They're acting as if the Lord is on their side and that anyone who disagrees with them is essentially disagreeing with God himself. In reality, these kinds of oaths are typically self-serving and often a cover-up for dishonesty. They're simply forging God's name on a document he never actually signed.

This is what Jesus was talking about in the Sermon on the Mount when he said, *But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more comes from evil* (Matthew 5:34-37). Similarly, James says, *But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your 'yes' be yes and your 'no' be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation* (James 5:12).

Inevitably, this leads to the question, what is the difference between a proper and an improper oath? Can a Christian, for example, go into a court of law, place his or her hand on a Bible and answer "Yes" to the question, "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?" Can a Christian at a wedding ceremony make a vow such as, "Before God and these witnesses, I take you to be my wife or husband"?

The short answer is, yes. There is such a thing as a proper oath. It says in Deuteronomy 6:13, *It is the Lord your God you shall fear. Him you shall serve and by his name you shall swear.* Again, in Leviticus 19:12, it says, *You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.* In addition, according to John MacArthur, it is important to understand that in Jesus' day oath-taking had become a practice whereby some oaths were more binding than others. An oath made to God was the most binding, an oath made 'by heaven' was somewhat less binding, followed by an oath made 'by earth,' 'by Jerusalem,' and finally 'by your head,' which was the least binding of all. In effect, this complicated system of oaths had become a means of sanctioning partial truths or even complete lies, and it was this improper use of oaths that Jesus was addressing, rather than the overall concept of oath-taking.

If oaths are being used as a vehicle for falsehood or deceit, or if they are merely a self-serving attempt to make God co-sign on our own agenda, they are examples of taking the Lord's name in vain. They are examples of devaluing God. Rather, the Old Testament's intention of proper oath-taking appears to be this: sometimes, especially in serious situations, it is important to acknowledge that we making promises in the sight of God. It is important to acknowledge that we are consciously and intentionally making promises with God in view and are making those promises honestly, solemnly, and sincerely. We are also acknowledging that God will not hold us guiltless if we break such oaths.

False Prophecy

The fourth way in which the name of the Lord can be taken in vain is through false prophecy—through falsely claiming to be speaking for God. As already noted, the unholy can masquerade as the holy. The counterfeit can closely approximate the original, or at least appear to. God takes it very seriously when people falsely claim to speak for him—falsely claim to speak in his name. In fact, in the Old Testament the punishment for false prophets was death. As it says in Deuteronomy 19:20, *... a prophet who presumes to speak in my name anything I have not commanded him to say, or a prophet who speaks in the name of other gods, must be put to death.*

Scripture commands us not be gullible and naïve, instantly believing anyone who claims to be speaking for God or 'to have a word from the Lord.' As it says in 1 John, *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world* (1 John 4:1). When people claim to speak for God—claim to speak prophetically—we should carefully weigh and test their words in light of Scripture. When there is no clear Scripture to validate or invalidate what has been said, we should pray, asking God to bring the truth to light. If people are using the Lord's name in vain—pretending to convey his words and purposes—God will deal with them. Sometimes the truth will come to light quickly, sometimes slowly, but it will come to light.

Blasphemy

Finally, the world in which we live sometimes takes the Lord's name in vain by uttering blasphemy. Blasphemy is a direct attack on the name and person of God. Some have suggested that John Lennon's famous quote in the 1960's verged on this. Lennon said, "Christianity will go. It will vanish and shrink. I needn't

argue about that. I'm right and I'll be proved right. We're more popular than Jesus now." It was the final sentence—"We [namely the Beatles] are more popular than Jesus now"—that upset many people, since it appeared to place the Beatles above God.

The ultimate blasphemy—the ultimate unforgiveable sin—is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. As Jesus said in Mark 3:29 *... whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.* The people to whom Jesus was speaking were attributing his miracles to Satan, so they were evidently very close to committing this sin. The sin itself, however—the unpardonable sin—is connected with a rejection of the work of the Holy Spirit. And what is that work? What is the central work of the Holy Spirit? Jesus himself tells us: *The Spirit of truth, who goes out from the Father, will testify about me* (John 15:26). The Holy Spirit is seeking to make Jesus known. In other words, the unpardonable sin—the unpardonable blasphemy—is to reject Jesus in some final and unalterable way. It is to step over some eternal point of no return in one's decision about Jesus, devaluing his name and person to the point of utter worthlessness.

The world is continually attempting to influence people to make this final and unalterable decision to reject Jesus. The church, on the other hand, led and empowered by the Holy Spirit, should be attempting to influence people to make a final and unalterable decision to accept Jesus. This is the central issue being decided in this present world—whether to accept or reject Jesus. This is the great spiritual battle taking place here at the crossroads of eternity, where the eternal destinies of men and women are being decided.

According to Spurgeon, the world is currently influencing the church more than the church is influencing the world. The world is seeking to influence Christians by tempting them to replace God and devalue God, It is seeking to reduce the church's effectiveness in reaching a lost, broken, and hurting world for Christ. To the extent that God is being replaced or devalued in our own lives, my prayer this morning is for God to first reveal it to us. And second, I pray, if need be, that we would repent—that we would return to God, ask him to forgive us, and ask him to once again become the overriding passion of our lives, ruling and reigning over us.

To end the morning, I would simply like to read a few of the words the Bible uses to describe God. May they remind us of the One we serve.

The Bible declares that God is:

Creator, Abba Father, King of kings, Lord of lords, the Alpha and the Omega, Advocate, Our Rock, Our Refuge, Our Deliverer, Our Fortress, Our Strong Tower, Our Shield, the Lord of Hosts, the Prince of Peace, Name above all names, the Bright and Morning Star, Healer, Provider, Shepherd, God of Mercy, Redeemer, Comforter, Counselor, Savior, the Almighty, the One Who Alone Has Immortality, the One who Dwells in Light Unapproachable, the Blessed and Only Sovereign, and the Judge of the Living and the Dead.

Prayer: God, help us to see you as you truly are. Forgive us if we've allowed the world to influence us. Forgive us if we've allowed other things to steal our hearts. Forgive us if we've taken your name in vain. Restore our relationship with you and help us to reach out to a world that so desperately needs you. In Jesus name. Amen.

NOTES

¹John Ortberg, *The Life You Always Wanted* (Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 2002) 71-72.