



A Well-Defined FAITH

[fāth] (noun)

Biblical words used in church...
Discover what they really mean.



Sunday
June 21, 2026

Exodus 20:4; Colossians 3:5-11

Example Teaching Rhythm

Welcome and Connect: 10 Minutes

This helps people feel connected and more comfortable participating in the study and discussion.

Look Forward: 5-10 Minutes

Share any important church events, service opportunities, or upcoming group plans. Keep this brief but clear.

Look at Scripture: 25-35 Minutes

This is the main focus of Community Groups. Read the selected scripture together and guide the group through discussion questions and observations.

Prayer: 10 Minutes

Invite members to share prayer requests and praises, then pray together as a group. This is a time to support one another.

Explaining the H.E.A.R Method

The acronym **HEAR** stands for **Highlight, Explain, Apply, and Respond**. Each of these four steps aims to cultivate an atmosphere to hear God speak.

Highlight - After praying for the Holy Spirit's guidance, read the passage of scripture, and highlight each verse that speaks to you.

Explain - Explain what the text means. Ask questions like:

- Who wrote this, to whom, and why? What does this reveal about God? What do the key words actually mean? What did this call the original audience to, and what does that reveal for me?

By asking questions, with the help of God's Spirit, and by using helpful study resources, you can understand the meaning of a passage or verse.

Apply - This application is the heart of the process. Everything you have done so far culminates under this heading. As you have done before, work to uncover the significance of these verses and the implications they have. Ask questions like:

- What does this passage reveal about God, yourself, or the world that you need to embrace or sit with? Does this passage challenge an attitude, assumption, or habit that needs to change? Is there something to do? Is there someone to love?

Respond - Your response to the passage may take on many forms. Ask: Is there something to pray? - Let the passage shape your prayer, not just inform it. Use the "Five Daily Prayer Prompts" to guide you in your response.

“Idol” - When a Good Thing Becomes the Ultimate Thing

Introduction

The problem with idols is that they almost never look like idols.

The golden calf in Exodus was an exception – obvious, visible, something you could point to and name. Most idols don't work that way. They don't announce themselves. They arrive as things that are genuinely good – a relationship, a career, a reputation, a family, financial security, even a theological tradition – and somewhere in the ordinary accumulation of days, they quietly move into the center. Not by force. By degrees.

That is why Exodus 20:4 is not a command about religious statues. The Hebrew word *pesel* – often translated "idol" or "carved image" – describes anything shaped by human hands and placed in the position that belongs to God alone. The prohibition is not primarily about art or aesthetics. It is about where a thing is positioned in relation to everything else. An image doesn't have to be made of wood or stone. It can be made of ambition, or security, or approval. The material doesn't matter. The position does.

Paul, writing to Colossae, brings the same idea forward with more precision. He defines the members of the earthly nature not as exotic sins but as recognizable ones – sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires – and then pauses on the word that names their common structure: greed, which he calls idolatry. He is not being dramatic. He is being diagnostic. Greed is the habit of the heart that says: this thing, more than God, is what I need to be whole.

The honest question this passage presses is not whether you have idols. Everyone does. The question is whether you have named yours – and whether you are willing to let the passage do what it was written to do: not produce guilt, but reorient.

Before we go further: Is there something in your life that, if it were threatened or taken away, would destabilize you more than losing God's presence would? That is a diagnostic question worth sitting with honestly.

Discussion Questions + Illustration

Select a question or two below to open up discussion.

- What's something you would describe as a "good thing" in your life – and how do you know when it has started functioning as the ultimate thing?
- Is there something you are pursuing right now that, if you got it, you believe would finally make things feel okay? What does that reveal?
- When God feels distant, what do you instinctively reach for? What does that tell you about where your functional trust actually lives?
- Paul includes greed in a list with sexual immorality. Does that pairing surprise you? Why do you think he equates them?
- What would it look like for someone watching your life to identify what you most value – and how close would that be to what you say you believe?

In 1848, John Sutter tried to keep a discovery quiet. He couldn't. Word spread that gold had been found on his California land, and within a year his workers had abandoned him, his ranch had been overrun by strangers, and his life had unraveled. Sutter died in poverty – ruined by a web of causes that gold set in motion, but at the center of it: something good that had been asked to carry more than it could hold.

- That is the logic of idolatry. Good things have a weight they were never designed to bear. When they are asked to carry what only God can carry, they don't just fail – they take everything else down with them.

Highlight | Read Ex 20:4; Col 3:5-11

The command in Exodus 20 sits inside the Ten Commandments, immediately following the declaration that the Lord alone is God. The sequence is not accidental. Verse 3 establishes who occupies the center. Verse 4 describes the temptation: to place something visible and manageable in the position that belongs to the invisible God who cannot be managed or shaped.

Colossians 3 addresses the practical interior of that same problem. Paul has established in chapters 1-2 that Christ is supreme over all things. Chapter 3 draws the implication: the ordering of your desires must reflect it. The vices he lists each describe a pattern of the heart that has placed something else in the position that belongs to Christ.

Worth noticing is what Paul does not do: rank them. He does not say greed resembles idolatry, or tends toward it. He says it is idolatry – which means the spiritual problem lives in the structure of the desire, not in where it eventually leads. The heart that says more of this will finally be enough has already placed something in God's position. That precision moves the diagnosis past behavior and into the structure of desire – which is exactly where both passages locate the problem. The climax is verse 11: Christ is all, and is in all. Not a devotional sentiment. A description of reality that idolatry contradicts and repentance restores.

- What does it mean that the command against idols follows immediately after the declaration that God alone is Lord? What is the connection?
- If the problem lives in the desire itself and not just its consequences, what does that change about how you would diagnose your own heart – and what would you be looking for?

Explain | Consider the Context

Exodus was written to a people who had spent four hundred years in Egypt, where divine power was constantly visible, constantly housed in objects and images. Egypt's gods were comprehensible – depicted, appealed to with the right ritual. The invisible God who'd just parted the sea made entirely different demands: trust without sight, relationship without an image to anchor it.

The prohibition against idols was not moralism. It was a description of what the relationship required. You cannot be fully present to an invisible God while managing a visible substitute. The substitute always wins – not because it is more powerful, but because it is more legible.

Paul writes to Colossae into a parallel problem. His readers were not being tempted to abandon Christ dramatically but to accommodate Him – to let Christ be one priority among several. The vices Paul names are the fruit of that accommodation.

Both texts assume that idolatry is never a replacement of God. It is always an addition – something placed alongside Him that gradually displaces Him.

- The Israelites didn't stop believing in God when they made the golden calf – they said it represented the God who brought them out of Egypt. How does that make idolatry harder to identify, not easier?
- Where in your own life have you tried to hold both God and something else at the center – not replacing God, but crowding Him?

Apply | Discuss as a Group

Identifying an idol is rarely dramatic. The diagnostic question is not: What have I replaced God with? It is: What do I arrange my life around? What does your calendar protect? What does your anxiety circle back to? What would you be most reluctant to surrender if God asked for it? Those answers are more reliable than any list you might write.

The Colossians passage does not stop at diagnosis. Paul tells his readers to put to death what belongs to their earthly nature – and then to put on the new self. The metaphor is deliberate. Idolatry is not primarily a belief problem. It is a clothing problem – a question of what you have wrapped your identity around. The solution is not guilt. It is a replacement.

That reordering is not accomplished by trying harder to want God more. It happens the same way every other movement in this series has described: by receiving something – the reality of who God is and what He has done – and letting that reorder everything else. The man who finds buried treasure doesn't fight his attachment to his other possessions. He sells them easily, because he has seen something worth more.

- Is there a good thing in your life – family, work, health, comfort, reputation – that is functioning like the ultimate thing? What would it cost you to name it honestly before God?
- Paul's list includes things that feel very different in social acceptability. What does it reveal that God does not rank them?
- What does it look like to "put on the new self" – not as moral performance, but as a reorientation toward Christ as the actual center?

Respond | How should I live/pray?

Exodus 20:4 is a prohibition. But it arrives inside a relationship – a God who has already acted, already rescued, already identified Himself as the one who brought them out of Egypt. The command against idols is not a restriction imposed on a people who don't know any better. It is the description of what it looks like to live in light of what they already know.

That is the frame for Colossians 3 as well. Paul does not begin the chapter with the command to put things to death. He begins it with the resurrection: you have been raised with Christ. Everything that follows – the putting off, the putting on, the reordering of desire – flows from a reality already established. The posture isn't effort. It is alignment with what is already true.

Which means the response to idolatry is not primarily a breaking. It is a returning. Not the white-knuckled surrender of something you have decided you can live without – but the kind of reorientation that happens when you have seen clearly, perhaps for the first time in a while, what is actually there. God has not moved. The question is where your attention has drifted, and whether you are willing to turn it back.

That turning does not require a dramatic act. It requires honesty – naming the thing, bringing it into the open before God, and asking not just for the strength to hold it more loosely, but for the vision to see what you already have in Christ so clearly that holding it loosely becomes the natural response.

- Where have you been treating a good thing as though it were the ultimate thing – and what would it look like to name that specifically before God this week, not as confession of failure, but as an act of reorientation?
- If Christ is all and in all, as Paul says, what would change about the way you hold the things you most love – not by wanting them less, but by wanting Him more?

Response Tool: Five Daily Prayer Prompts

As you leave today, let these five questions carry the weight of your response into the week ahead – not as a checklist, but as an ongoing conversation with God. Introduce the five daily questions as a simple spiritual practice that can help us intentionally live out our faith in our workplaces, homes, families, and communities.

- God, where do you want me to go?
- God, who do you want me to see?
- God, what do you want me to say?
- God, what do you want me to pray?
- God, how do you want me to serve?

After this time of reflection, transition into a time of prayer requests. Allow time for members to share and, if appropriate, allow others in the class to pray for each other.

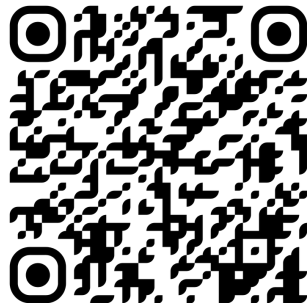
Additional Commentary

- On pesel (Exodus 20:4) – "idol/carved image": The Hebrew root means to cut or hew – something shaped by a craftsman's hand. The prohibition is not about the object itself but about shaping something to serve a function that belongs to God alone. An idol is any representation of ultimate reality that a human being can manufacture, manage, and control. The invisible God of Exodus resists all such manufacturing.
- On "bow down to them or worship them" (Exodus 20:5): The two verbs describe the full range of what idolatry involves – the physical posture of submission and the internal orientation of devotion. Idolatry is not primarily an intellectual error. It is a posture of the whole person directed toward the wrong object.
- On pleonexia (Colossians 3:5) – "greed": The word describes not an action but an orientation – the posture of a heart convinced that more of this will finally make life secure and complete. Paul does not place it at the end of his list because it is the worst offense. He places it there because it is the engine underneath the others. Every vice he names is, at its root, a version of this: the belief that something other than God is what I need to be whole. That is not a consequence of idolatry. It is its definition.
- On "put to death" (Colossians 3:5) – nekroō: A surgical term meaning to render inoperative, to cut off the life supply. Paul is not asking for behavior modification but describing a decisive interior act: the refusal to keep drawing identity from whatever has been occupying the center.
- On "the new self" (Colossians 3:10) – neos anthrōpos: Not improvement but replacement – a different person oriented around a different center. The new self is being renewed – a continuous process. Idolatry is a persistent gravity. The renewal that counters it is equally persistent.
- On "Christ is all, and is in all" (Colossians 3:11): Not a slogan – the theological ground for everything the passage demands. If Christ is genuinely all, then every competing ultimate is not merely wrong. It is simply small. The person who has seen this clearly does not fight their idols. They find them unpersuasive.

Community Group Resource Page

Visit our website to view our **leadership resources**.

From Community Group training and resources to Discipleship Group starter guides, we want to equip you to make disciples.



Additional Study

Watch/Listen

Bible Project - Colossians



See a collection of videos, classes, and articles that dive into **Colossians**.

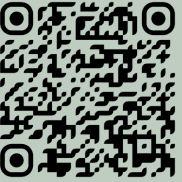
Bible Project - No Idols



In this guide, we explore the 2nd Commandment to have **No Idols**.

Overview

Enduring Word - Colossians 3



Text commentary, written materials, and audio/video recordings over **Colossians 3**.

Got Questions - Modern Idols



Biblical Q&A, articles, translations, audios, videos, apps, podcasts and more on **Modern Idols**.

Expand

Bible Reference - Exodus 20



Explore chapter and verse commentaries to deepen your understanding of **Exodus 20:4**.

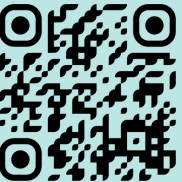
Bible Hub - Colossians 3:5-11



Parallel translations, language tools, commentaries, and much more on **Colossians 3:5-11**.

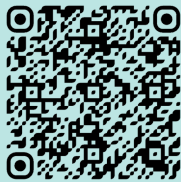
Deepen

Logos Factbook - Idolatry



Logos Factbook shares information resources and articles about **Idolatry**.

Blue Letter Bible - Idols



Original texts, Translations, Cross-Refs, Commentaries, Dictionaries + more on **Idols**.

