

Is Wearing a Cross considered Idolatry?

I had a young man tell me that Christians were not supposed to wear crosses on their necks and doing so was a form of idolatry which was prohibited in the bible. He quoted Exodus 20:4 to make his point.

Does Exodus 20:4 teach that we should not wear crosses around our necks? If so, then we should take them off immediately and obey the word of God. Let's take a look...

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven 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."
Exodus 20:4

Well there it is plain as day right... a cross is a graven image. To go even further, since we're not to make an image of anything in the heavens, the earth, or sea, then we're also participating in idolatry when we create replicas of the sun, moon, or stars (Christian scientist beware). We should also not be making images of animals or sea creatures, (parents throw out your kids' Play-Doh right now). Even some forms of art would be prohibited and forbidden seeing as though sculptures are often made of animals, people, and other things. Seems a bit much don't you think? I think we need to back up for a moment and look at the scripture in context to make sure that's what God is telling us to do.

In reading and interpreting the bible, there are some rules that are important to follow as with any piece of literature you might read.

1. We should make sure we understand the words being used in a sentence right; otherwise the meaning can be lost. My question becomes what's a "graven image"? Well the word in the original language, Hebrew is Pesel. Pesel means a carved idol or image. Okay, so what's an idol? An idol is defined as an image or other material object representing a deity to which religious worship is addressed. Oh, okay... now were getting somewhere. An image carved for the purpose of worship.
2. Another rule is to make sure you interpret a scripture in the context in which it was intended. That means looking at the scriptures above it and the scriptures beneath it. Sometimes it involves interpreting it in the context of not just the surrounding verses, but the chapter itself, and even the book itself. Who was speaking, who was being spoken to, what date was it, what was going on at the time, etc. Let's start by looking at the verses above and below that 4th verse.

Exodus chapter 20 begins with Moses receiving the Ten Commandments. We find the 1st commandment in verse three

3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

In the next verse we find the verse we've been discussing.

4 Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven 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.

But we can't stop there, the second commandment is not complete. It continues in verse 5

5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.

Aww... now it's even clearer. Is it to you? Let's see... first, we found out that a graven image or idol is an image that is often carved for the purpose of worship. Idol worship would include one or more of the following.

1. Prostrating oneself before an idol (in adoration or reverential fear)
2. Offering sacrifices to idols
3. Eating before idols (partaking of meat offered to them)
4. Drinking before idols (performing any libation or drinking to them)

Second, we can see this definition fits the context of the preceding verse

*5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to “**them**”, nor serve “**them**”.*

Neither bow down to them nor serve them. Who is the them? The graven images right, the ones that by definition were carved for the purpose of worship as a deity.

Let's go even further, and allow the scriptures again to clarify what God is saying here. Later, a couple chapters down in Exodus 32 we read...

Exodus 32 – The Golden Calf

Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” 2 Aaron said to them, “Tear off the gold rings which are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” 3 Then all the people tore off the gold rings which were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. 4 He took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a **graving tool** and made it into a **molten calf**; and they said, “**This is your god**, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.” 5 Now when Aaron saw this, **he built an altar before it**; and Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a **feast to the Lord**.” 6 So the next day they rose early and **offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings**; and the people sat down to **eat and to drink**, and rose up to play.

7 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, “Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. 8 **They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them.** They have made for themselves a **molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it** and said, ‘**This is your god, O Israel**, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!’” 9 The Lord said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. 10 Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation.”

Now ask yourself, do Christians worship crosses? Do they bow to them? Do they offer sacrifices to them, eat sacrifices to them, or make drink offerings to them? Of course not. There's nothing wrong with Christians wearing crosses for the purpose of representation of whom they are or who they love. My only problem is when people wear the crosses on their necks, but not their hearts.