

Title: **LESSONS FROM THE GOLDEN CALF**

Text: Exodus 32:1-35

Introduction:

“The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked!” — How we prove those words day by day! How deceitful, how fickle is the heart of man! — *“Who can know it?”*

When Moses read the book of God’s law to the children of Israel upon Mt. Sinai in Exodus 24:7, the congregation spoke immediately, with unanimous voice, saying, — *“All that the LORD hath said, will we do, and be obedient.”* Less than six weeks later, while Moses was in the mount receiving the heavenly pattern of God’s salvation and grace in Christ as portrayed and typified in the tabernacle, we find those very same men and women dancing naked around a golden calf, calling their golden calf their gods and their naked revelry in idolatry the worship of Jehovah! What would God the Holy Ghost have us learn from the record of Israel’s idolatry in worshipping the golden calf their hands had made?

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I've titled this message — **LESSONS FROM THE GOLDEN CALF**. Our text is Exodus 32.

We know that even this sad, sad portion of Israel's history came to pass according to the will of our God, that Israel might stand before us as a beacon, as an example, lest we should follow them in the pursuit of our own hearts lusts. We know this because the Holy Spirit specifically points to this event and warns us not to follow their example (1 Corinthians 10).

(1 Corinthians 10:6-7) “Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted. (7) Neither be ye idolaters, as *were* some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.”

(1 Corinthians 10:11-12) “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. (12) Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

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Hold your Bible open on your lap at Exodus 32, as I endeavor to show you from the Book of God the lessons God the Holy Spirit teaches us in these thirty-five verses.

IDOLATRY

1st — The first thing we are taught here is the fact that **we are all superstitious idolaters at heart**. The Egyptians had among their many gods the image of an ox and worshipped it. It must have been a very impressive image of strength, because the Jews remembered it, made a replica of it as an image of Jehovah and worshipped it!

(Exodus 32:1-2) “And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for *as for* this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. (2)

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And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which *are* in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring *them* unto me.”

Aaron was a good orator, but he wasn't a leader. As God's priest he was responsible to be a leader, but he failed in his responsibility. He lacked backbone and was apparently one whose heart craved approval. I say that is obvious because the children of Israel knew they could manipulate him. They knew he would obey their whims. They did not ask him for his counsel. They simply said, “Get up and make us some gods.” Immediately, Aaron complied. They spared no expense; and Aaron willingly complied with their desire. — “*The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe*” (Proverbs 29:25).

(Exodus 32:3-4) “And all the people brake off the golden earrings which *were* in their ears, and brought *them* unto Aaron. (4) And he received *them* at their hand, and fashioned it with a

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graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These *be* thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.”

“They made a calf in Horeb, and worshipped the molten image. (20) Thus they changed their glory into the similitude of an ox that eateth grass. (2) They forgat God their saviour, which had done great things in Egypt” (Psalms 106:19-21).

(Exodus 32:5-6) “And when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said, Tomorrow *is* a feast to the LORD. (6) And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play.”

Robert Hawker observed that “At the very moment the LORD, in the mount, was ordaining Aaron with peculiar honors to the priesthood, Aaron was aiding the Israelites to idolatry. Well might the Apostle say, the law maketh men high priests which have

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infirmity.” But, blessed be our God for his great grace! We have a Priest without infirmity (Hebrews 7:26-28).

(Hebrews 7:26-28) “For such an high priest became us, *who is* holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; (27) Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people’s: for this he did once, when he offered up himself. (28) For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, *maketh* the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.”

Adding insult to insult and blasphemy to blasphemy, Aaron and the children of Israel called their sin the worship of Jehovah! The Spirit of God describes their religious ceremony with these words, “*they sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play!*” **Lascivious foolishness always accompanies idolatry!** Idolatry is filth and always

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leads to the practice of filth. — “Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry” (1 Corinthians 10:14).”

- Every form of religious imagery is idolatry — (Icons, Crosses, Angels, etc).
- Every addition to the worship of God is idolatry.
- Every mixture of false religion with the worship of God is idolatry.
- Every effort of man to mix the work of his own hands with the glory of God is idolatry.

What was it that these people did that cost the lives of three thousand of them? What was their crime? They kept their feast unto the Lord. They offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. They used the strongest of images to represent Jehovah’s might and power. They spared no expense. They ascribed their deliverance from Egypt to Jehovah — their golden calf! What did they do that was so terrible?

- They worshipped the work of their own hands and called it the worship of God!

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- They worshipped themselves, and called it worshipping Jehovah!

So it is with the idolatry of our age! **God save us from the religious idolatry that runs deep in every depraved heart!**

- Self-righteousness!
- Will Worship!
- Legalism!
- Works Religion!

(Philippians 3:1-3) “Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed *is* not grievous, but for you *it is* safe. (2) Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. (3) For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.”

There is no worship of God except the worship of Jesus Christ the Lord as our only Savior! If you would worship God, you must trust his Son (1 Corinthians 1:30-31). He alone is...

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- Righteousness.
- Redemption.
- Sanctification.

MOSES' INTERCESSION

2nd — Israel's sin was horrible and inexcusable. Their idolatry cannot be justified or lessened by any consideration, but in verses 7-14 we see that Israel was spared because **Israel had a mighty intercessor with God.** So, the second lesson to be learned from this chapter is this — **The wrath of God we deserve has been turned away by one God has ordained, one God has raised up for us, one God himself accepts as our Representative and Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ.**

(Exodus 32:7-10) “And the LORD said unto Moses, Go, get thee down; for thy people, which thou broughtest out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted *themselves*: (8) They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf, and

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have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These *be* thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. (9) And the LORD said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and, behold, it *is* a stiffnecked people: (10) Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them: and I will make of thee a great nation.”

These Jews fully deserved God’s wrath. They were more corrupt and wicked than the Egyptians God destroyed at the Red Sea. They were a people like you and me, far more deserving of God’s wrath than many who have gone to hell before us!

- They corrupted themselves (v. 7).
- They turned aside quickly out of the way (v. 8).
- They made a molten calf (v.8).
- They worshipped the calf they made (v. 8).
- They called their hand-made god, Jehovah our Savior (v. 8).
- They were a stiff-necked people (v. 9).

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The Lord God said to Moses, “Get out of my way, and I will kill them all and raise up from your loins a great nation.” But Moses interceded for the children of Israel as no mortal man ever interceded of other men. He said, “Lord destroy me and spare them! Take me in their stead!”

(Exodus 32:11-14) “And Moses besought the LORD his God, and said, LORD, why doth thy wrath wax hot against thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt with great power, and with a mighty hand? (12) Wherefore should the Egyptians speak, and say, For mischief did he bring them out, to slay them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth? Turn from thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. (13) Remember Abraham, Isaac, **and Israel (Not Jacob, but Israel!)**, thy servants, to whom thou swarest by thine own self, and saidst unto them, I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have spoken of will I give unto your seed, and they shall inherit *it* forever.

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(14) And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.”

Surely, it is the Holy Spirit’s intent that we should lose sight of Moses in this place in order to behold him whom Moses typified, our Lord Jesus Christ, our mighty Intercessor. — *“He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him”* (Isaiah 49:16).

Notice the arguments Moses urged before the throne of God, giving him reasons why these sinful people should be spared.

1. These are *“Thy people.”*
2. You redeemed them, *“Thy people, which thou hast brought forth out of the land of Egypt.”*
3. Your name is at stake here. Your honor is pinned to the salvation of these people (v. 12).
4. Remember your covenant (v. 13).

“And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people” (v. 14). **How we thank God**

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for our all-glorious Christ who, like Moses, stands in the breach for us!

(Psalms 106:8) “Nevertheless he saved them for his name’s sake, that he might make his mighty power to be known.”

(Psalms 106:23) “Therefore he said that he would destroy them, had not Moses his chosen stood before him in the breach, to turn away his wrath, lest he should destroy *them*.”

(Psalms 106:45) “And he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies.”

SATISFACTION DEMANDED

3rd — In verses 15-19 we see in vivid, clear symbolism that God’s broken law demands satisfaction.

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(Exodus 32:15-19) “And Moses turned, and went down from the mount, and the two tables of the testimony *were* in his hand: the tables *were* written on both their sides; on the one side and on the other *were* they written. (16) And the tables *were* the work of God, and the writing *was* the writing of God, graven upon the tables. (17) And when Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said unto Moses, *There is a noise of war in the camp. (18)* And he said, *It is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear. (19)* And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses’ anger waxed hot, and he cast the tables out of his hands, and brake them beneath the mount.”

When Moses came down from the Mount and saw the children of Israel dancing naked around their golden calf, he threw the tables of the law down on the ground, the tablets written by the finger of God,

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the work of God and the writing of God, and broke them; but he was never reproved for doing so. Symbolically, this action displays God's demands and God's work.

- His broken law demands satisfaction.
- But God alone can repair the law we have broken.

JUSTIFY GOD

4th — I'll come back to this business of satisfaction in just a minute; but for now, look at verses 20-26 and learn a fourth lesson. — **There is no reconciliation to God in our hearts until we justify God against ourselves.**

(Exodus 32:20-26) “And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt *it* in the fire, and ground *it* to powder, and strowed *it* upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink *of it*. (21) And Moses said unto Aaron, What did this people unto thee, that thou hast brought so great a sin upon them? (22) And Aaron said, Let not

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the anger of my lord wax hot: thou knowest the people, that they *are set* on mischief. (23) For they said unto me, Make us gods, which shall go before us: for *as for* this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him. (24) And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break *it* off. So they gave *it* me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf. (25) And when Moses saw that the people *were* naked; (for Aaron had made them naked unto *their* shame among their enemies:) (26) Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who *is* on the LORD'S side? *Let him come* unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him.”

Israel had to drink their golden calf. They had to take their corruption and sin to themselves (Psalm 51:1-5).

(Psalms 51:1-5) “To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came

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unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba. (1) Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. (2) Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. (3) For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin *is* ever before me. (4) Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done *this* evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, *and* be clear when thou judgest. (5) Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

SATISFACTION MADE

5th — In verses 27-35, we learn that **the children of Israel were spared because satisfaction was made by legal atonement.**

(Exodus 32:27-35) “And he said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, *and* go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay

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every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. (28) And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. (29) For Moses had said, Consecrate yourselves today to the LORD, even every man upon his son, and upon his brother; that he may bestow upon you a blessing this day. (30) And it came to pass on the morrow, that Moses said unto the people, Ye have sinned a great sin: and now I will go up unto the LORD; peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin. (31) And Moses returned unto the LORD, and said, Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. (32) Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written. (33) And the LORD said unto Moses, **Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book.** (34) Therefore now go, lead the people unto *the place* of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, mine Angel shall go before thee:

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nevertheless in the day when I visit I will visit their sin upon them. (35) And the LORD plagued the people, because they made the calf, which Aaron made.”

- **None were spared except those for whom intercession was made; and all were spared for whom intercession was made.** — Israel and Aaron (Deuteronomy 9:17-21).

(Deuteronomy 9:17-21) “And I took the two tables, and cast them out of my two hands, and brake them before your eyes. (18) And I fell down before the LORD, as at the first, forty days and forty nights: I did neither eat bread, nor drink water, because of all your sins which ye sinned, in doing wickedly in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger. (19) For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure, wherewith the LORD was wroth against you to destroy you. But the LORD hearkened unto me at that time also. (20) And the LORD was very angry with Aaron to have destroyed him: and I

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prayed for Aaron also the same time. (21) And I took your sin, the calf which ye had made, and burnt it with fire, and stamped it, *and* ground it very small, *even* until it was as small as dust: and I cast the dust thereof into the brook that descended out of the mount.”

How sweet are the waters of forgiveness, flowing from a satisfied God! As we are reminded of and acknowledge our sin, we are refreshed and revived by God’s great forgiveness!

- **A great multitude was slain, that the severity as well as the goodness of God be demonstrated.**
- **But all who were spared were spared by atonement, atonement made by a substitute** (vv. 30-34). — “*Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book*” (v. 33).

Moses made symbolic, typical atonement; but atonement could only be made by One great Substitute, our Lord Jesus Christ, who fulfilled

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these very words when he was made sin for us
(Proverbs 17:15; 2 Corinthians 5:20-21; Galatians 3:13-14).

(Proverbs 17:15) “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both *are* abomination to the LORD.”

(2 Corinthians 5:20-21) “Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. (21) For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

(Galatians 3:13-14) “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed *is* every one that hangeth on a tree: (14) That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”

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Amen.

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¹ East Hendersonville Baptist Church, Hendersonville, North Carolina — (FRI – 05/25/18)
Hurricane Road Grace Church, Ashland, Kentucky — (WED – 06/27/18)