

Third Presbyterian Church
Midweek Bible Study
Miracle Series – Golden Calf
Lesson 25 – High Price of Golden Calf Worship

Exodus 32:1-29 (NIV) When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him." [2] Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." [3] So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. [4] He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt." [5] When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord." [6] So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry. [7] Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. [8] They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' [9] "I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, "and they are a stiff-necked people. [10] Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation." [11] But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. "O Lord," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? [12] Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. [13] Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all this land I promised them, and it will be their inheritance forever.' " [14] Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. [15] Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands. They were inscribed on both sides, front and back. [16] The tablets were the work of God; the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. [17] When Joshua heard the noise of the people shouting, he said to Moses, "There is the sound of war in the camp." [18] Moses replied: "It is not the sound of victory, it is not the sound of defeat; it is the sound of singing that I hear." [19] When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. [20] And he took the calf they had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it. [21] He said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?" [22] "Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil. [23] They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.' [24] So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!" [25] Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies. [26] So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is for the Lord, come to me." And all the Levites rallied to him. [27] Then he said to them, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.' " [28] The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. [29] Then Moses said, "You have been set apart to the Lord today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day."

1. Explain the pros and cons of the following statement made in the sermon:
Human Beings were not created to be godless.
2. Why do people create golden calves in spite of being exposed to the true and living God?
3. The Israelites were definitely influenced by Egyptians that traveled with them.
 - a. How do you stand for God even when its unpopular?
 - b. How do you balance not being influenced by people around you vs. being a recluse? Remember Jesus walked among tax collectors, prostitutes and others who are considered low character people by society standards.
4. Why do we choose to make idol gods we can control?
 - a. What are the specific dangers in doing this?
 - b. What do idol gods require from people?
 - c. What do idol gods give people?
5. What type of emotions do you think Moses felt when he saw the calf?
6. How do we avoid Blessings amnesia in our walk with God?
7. In what ways did Aaron fail as a leader?
8. What are ways that people worship people or things they've made instead of Jesus Christ?
9. Share your main takeaway from the sermon and the lesson?

The Golden Calf—The Breaking of the Covenant Between God and Man: A Picture of Man's Corrupt Heart and Rebellion Against God, 32:1-35

(32:1-35) **Introduction:** man's heart is sinful, corrupt, depraved. No person is sinless; no person can keep from sinning. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23). This passage shows how wicked—desperately wicked—man's heart really is. This is not a pretty picture nor an enjoyable subject, but it is a true picture; therefore it must be faced. A terrible situation can be corrected only as it is seen and faced. This is the reason we must face the sinful, corrupt nature of our hearts, so that we can correct that part of our nature that is so destructive.

Keep in mind what Israel had just experienced within the previous few months. They had witnessed God miraculously delivering them...

- from Egyptians slavery
- through the Red Sea
- through hunger and thirst during the beginning of their desert journey

They had seen the glory and power of God descend upon Mt. Sinai in a cloud, and they had received the law of God from God Himself through His servant Moses, their leader. And not only this, they had made a covenant, a commitment to follow and obey God and His commandments with their whole heart. Moreover, they had made a commitment to build a portable worship center, the Tabernacle, where the very presence of God could abide with them as they journeyed to the promised land. The scene for the present Scripture is just this: over the past few months they had just experienced all of the above and much more, and now they were camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai waiting for Moses to return with God's design for the Tabernacle. Six weeks had passed—six long weeks—since Moses had climbed up the mountain into the cloud of God's glory and power. What now begins to take place vividly exposes what is stated above: the sinful, corrupt nature of man's heart. God's people broke their covenant, their agreement with God. They broke their commitment to follow and obey God. Breaking one's commitment to God is so serious that God drops all other work in order to deal with the situation. God broke off His consultation with Moses—abruptly broke off giving His instructions to build the Tabernacle. He had to stop in order to deal with the terrible sin of Israel. The situation was so serious that three complete chapters of Holy Scripture are given over to dealing with the terrible sin. This is the subject of the present chapter: *The Golden Calf and Moses' Great Intercession: The Breaking of the Covenant Between God and Man : A Picture of Man's Corrupt Heart and Rebellion Against God, Exodus 32:1-35*.

1. The causes of terrible sin (v.1-6).
2. The great intercession for terrible sinners (v.7-14).
3. The righteous anger against terrible sin (v.15-20).
4. The shameful excuses of terrible sin (v.21-24).
5. The righteous judgment of terrible sin (v.25-29).
6. The just plea for forgiveness of terrible sin (v.30-32).
7. The sure judgment of terrible sin: the sinner must be and will be blotted out of God's book (v.33-34).
8. The just chastisement of terrible sin (v.35).

1. (32:1-6) Calf, The Golden— Idolatry— Revelry— Indulgence— Sin— Worship, False— Immorality— Heart, Corrupt— Mob— Humanism— Gods, False: What causes terrible sin? The causes are clearly seen in what now happens to the Israelites: they lost faith in God, turned away from God, taking their lives and destiny into their own hands. They broke the Ten Commandments, the very commandments that had just been given to them by God Himself. Note the causes of their terrible sin. These are the very causes of terrible sin in any person's life.

1. Terrible sin is caused by impatience (Exodus 32:1). Remember the Israelites were on their way to the promised land of Canaan. They had stopped at Mt. Sinai so that Moses and their leaders, under the direction of

God, could formulate the laws that were to govern them as a nation. Moses had gone up on the mountain to pray and seek God's will, the very laws and commandments that were to govern God's people. But that had been six weeks ago—six long weeks—and Moses had not returned. Neither had he sent Joshua to bring them up to date on the progress, nor to inform them why there was such a long delay. Note the Scripture: Moses had been up on the mountain so long that the people did not know what had happened to him. The speculation was twofold:

⇒ Either Moses and Joshua had been killed...

⇒ or Moses had forsaken them and the cause of God, the seeking after the promised land. Some, no doubt, speculated that he had returned to his ranching business with his father-in-law, Jethro.

The people just had no idea what had happened to Moses. Six weeks is a long time to wait without any progress report. The people were speculating, surely Moses would have sent some report by now if he were still up on the mountain. The people were imagining, questioning, and becoming more and more restless until finally impatience gripped them; they jumped to the conclusion that something had happened to Moses, that he was not returning. Therefore they had to take matters into their own hands: they themselves would have to take charge and resume their journey to the promised land, and it was time to go. They had been at Mt. Sinai long enough. Their speculation, questioning, restlessness, and impatience led to the terrible sin they were about to commit.

2. Terrible sin is caused by pressure from a crowd (Exodus 32:1). Aaron had been left in charge of the people while Moses was up on the mountain. Scripture indicates that a crowd went to Aaron insisting that he take charge and that they make preparation to begin the journey to the promised land. Note, another man had been left in charge of the people along with Aaron, but there is no mention of him whatsoever. His name was Hur. Jewish tradition says he was killed by a mob of people because he stood against the terrible sin they were about to commit. Pressure, strong pressure, was being put upon Aaron to go along with the crowd. Pressure from a crowd can cause terrible sin.

3. Terrible sin is caused by suggesting evil to a weak leader (Exodus 32:1). Aaron was weak, tragically weak, throughout this whole episode. He did not have the backbone to stand up for God, to stand against the pressure of the crowd. He gave in; he crumbled. Note the Scripture: he made an idol to represent the LORD.

⇒ He made it from the gold of the people's earrings (Exodus 32:3).

⇒ He molded it into the shape of a golden calf (Exodus 32:4).

⇒ He presented the golden calf to the people as their god, and the people committed a terrible, terrible sin: they proclaimed the gold calf to be the god who had saved and delivered them (Exodus 32:4).

4. Terrible sin is caused by disobeying God's commandments (Exodus 32:1). Believing in false gods and worshipping idols are violations of the first two commandments of God. There is only one true and living God, and man is to believe Him and Him alone. Moreover, man is never to make an image or idol of God, neither follow after an image or idol in seeking the help of God. To do these things is a direct violation of the first two great commandments of God. Disobeying God's commandments causes terrible sin.

5. Terrible sin is caused by believing deliverance is of man not God (Exodus 32:1). Note, the people credited Moses with having delivered and saved them from Egyptian slavery. How quickly they had forgotten the glorious deliverance of the LORD God Himself, the glorious salvation of the only living and true God:

⇒ His glorious deliverance through the terrifying plagues of Egypt

⇒ His glorious deliverance from Egyptian slavery

⇒ His glorious deliverance through the Red Sea

⇒ His glorious provision of water through their wilderness journey in the desert

⇒ His glorious provision of manna (bread) and quail day by day

⇒ His wonderful guidance by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night

⇒ His wonderful demonstration of glory and power in the awesome, terrifying cloud that settled upon Mt Sinai

Again, how quickly the Israelites had forgotten the deliverance and salvation of the LORD God Himself. Here they were attributing their deliverance and salvation to a mere man, even if that man was Moses. How typical of the humanistic philosophy of every generation, believing that deliverance and salvation rest in the hands of man himself. This belief causes terrible sin.

6. Terrible sin is caused by believing in false gods (Exodus 32:1). Note what the people requested of Aaron: that he make them an image of some god who would guide them to the promised land of Canaan. Remember, the majority of people in that day believed in many gods just as the majority of people today believe in many gods. They wanted the help of God, His strength and power as they resumed their journey to the promised land. And they felt that the image, the representation of some strong, powerful animal, would help them secure and focus upon the help and guidance of God. Therefore they asked Aaron to mold them an image representing the power and strength of God, an idol strong and powerful enough to get them to the promised land. Believing in false gods leads to terrible sin.

7. Terrible sin is caused by giving in to and fearing the crowd (Exodus 32:2). Aaron gave in to the crowd and caused a terrible, terrible sin. Note that the crowd began to proclaim that the idols were the very gods who had delivered and saved them from Egyptian slavery (Exodus 32:4). There were over three thousand of the Israelites who were leading this rebellion against God and His commandments (cp. Exodus 32:28). Some of the ringleaders were, most likely, Egyptian converts who had left with the Israelites when they fled Egypt. The point to see is this: Aaron had given in to the pressure of the crowd, and now a terrible sin was being committed. Over three thousand people were rebelling against God and His commandments: they were following false gods and proclaiming those gods to be the savior of Israel. All this because Aaron had given in to the crowd, failed to stand up for God and His commandments. Now, there was the threat that thousands upon thousands of God's people could be misled about His glorious deliverance from Egyptian slavery. Giving in to the crowd can lead to terrible sin.

8. Terrible sin is caused by false worship (Exodus 32:5-6). When Aaron saw so many people following and turning to the false god as their savior and guide, he apparently knew he was in trouble. This is clearly seen in what he did next: he built an altar and announced throughout the whole nation that there would be a festival held to the LORD the next day. Note that this festival was to be in the name of the LORD God Himself, Jehovah - Yahweh. Aaron was obviously being severely convicted by God's Spirit for the terrible sin he had committed. Apparently, he himself had built the altar to make sacrifices to the LORD and was planning to use the festival to try to focus the people's attention back upon the LORD.

But it was too late: the golden calf had already been built and the terrible sin had already been committed in the hearts of the people. Note that the people rose early and sacrificed both burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the LORD. But in the eyes of the LORD the offerings were not to Him but to the golden calf. The offerings of the sacrifices were unacceptable to the LORD, for the people's attention was focused upon the golden calf, the false god to whom they were looking as their savior. Their offerings and sacrifices were profession only, false professions. False worship causes a terrible sin.

9. Terrible sin is caused by indulging in food, drink, partying, and illicit sex (Exodus 32:6). The festival got out of hand. The Hebrew word for play or revelry (tsachaq) has the idea of loose conduct, the kind of loose behavior that happens when a person has been drinking or taking drugs. The word has the idea of crude language and laughter, of playing around, of sexual misconduct, of engaging in a wild dancing party or a wild drinking party. The picture is that of a festival breaking out into wild drinking, lewd dancing, and immoral behavior (cp. Exodus 32:25). Indulgence in food, drink, and dancing leads to loose behavior and terrible sin.

Thought 1. God warns us against terrible sin.

"For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness.... Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that

they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them" (Romans 1:18, 29-32).

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:19-21).

"For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you: Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead" (1 Peter 4:3-5).

"For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:20).

2. (32:7-14) Intercession— Prayer— Judgment: there is the picture of great intercession for terrible sin.

1. God saw the terrible sin and was angry, very angry (Exodus 32:7). God is not blind; He sees everything that a person does, and He saw the terrible sin being committed by the Israelites.
 - a. God abruptly stopped the conference He was having with Moses. He shut the meeting down. God abruptly faced Moses and shocked him to the core: He told Moses to go to "his [Moses'] people." God was disowning the people. He changed the pronoun: He did not call them "My people" as He had done in the past (Exodus 3:7-10; Exodus 5:1; Exodus 7:4; Exodus 7:16; Exodus 8:1; Exodus 8:20-23; Exodus 9:1; Exodus 9:13; Exodus 9:17; Exodus 10:3-4). From the first they had been called God's people, but not now. Their terrible sin had separated them from the LORD. And their sin was so terrible God was ready to disown them.
 - b. Note the charge God brought against the people.
 - ⇒ God charged them with being "corrupt" (sihet) (Exodus 32:7). The word means running to destruction, ruin, waste, perishing. This is the same destructive word used to describe the terrible sin of the people in Noah's day. (See note— Genesis 6:11-12 for more discussion.)
 - ⇒ God charged the people with being quick to turn away from His commandments (Exodus 32:8). God had just given them His commandments. Moreover, they had made a covenant, an agreement with God: they had committed themselves to obey God, to keep His commandments. But here they were, quickly turning away. The picture is that of walking in one direction then quickly whipping around and running in the opposite direction.
 - ⇒ God charged the people with false worship (Exodus 32:8). He saw the idol they had made. But even more tragic, He saw the people bow before the idol and sacrifice to it.

- ⇒ God charged the people with proclaiming a false message: that deliverance and salvation are of man not God (Exodus 32:8). God saw the crowd of three thousand plus declaring that it was the false gods who had delivered them (represented by the strength and power of the golden calf). He saw their rebellion, apostasy, unbelief.
- ⇒ God charged the people with being stiff-necked: a stubborn, hard, stiff, impudent, obstinate people; a people unwilling to hear the commandments of God; a people unwilling to turn away from the lusts of the flesh and from the pride of life (cp. 1 John 2:15-16).

2. God had no choice: He had to deal with the people. God threatened judgment (Exodus 32:10).

- a. Note what He said to Moses: "Moses, leave me alone so that my anger may burn...[and] destroy them." But observe: Moses was not bothering God, not speaking to God. Moses was standing there shocked at the abrupt ending to the conference with God and the severe charges of terrible sin against the people. Why then did God pronounce His judgment with the words, "Moses, leave me alone"?

God was doing two things: God was drawing Moses into prayer, into intercessory prayer for the people. Only intercession could save them. Thereby God was teaching the awesome importance of intercessory prayer.

- ⇒ God was placing the intercession of Moses between the people and Himself. Moses stood as the intercessor between God and the people. Thereby Moses was to picture (symbolize) the great Intercessor, the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Romans 8:34).

"Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17; cp. Hebrews 2:14-15).

"Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Hebrews 7:25).

- b. God then utterly shocked Moses: He threatened to fulfill His covenant promised to Abraham in a different way. (See outline—' Genesis 12:1-3 and note—' Genesis 12:1-3 for more discussion.) God would build a nation of people through Moses' descendants not through Abraham's (Exodus 32:10).

This was all it took: Moses was in shock, utterly dumbfounded, but he could remain silent no longer. God's purpose to move Moses into intercessory prayer had worked.

- ⇒ Moses did not want the people to face the terrifying judgment of God, did not want the people destroyed.
- ⇒ Moses did not want the covenant of God altered. He wanted the promise to Abraham to be fulfilled through Abraham's descendants.

3. Moses went to prayer. He began to intercede, to ask—seek—knock at the door of God's heart (Exodus 32:11-14). Moses made four strong pleas.

- a. Moses asked God to remember that He had saved and delivered His people, that He had a special relationship with them, a covenant relationship (Exodus 32:11). Note that Moses declared that the people were "Your [God's] people." He cried out, "You, O God, are the One who brought them out of slavery: You, O God, saved and delivered them. Remember all You did—the mighty works—for them."

- b. Moses asked God to preserve God's own honor and trust in the eyes of the world (the Egyptians): that God keep His name from being slandered, falsely charged with evil (Exodus 32:12). If God wiped the people out after saving and delivering them, what would the world say? They would declare that the God of the Israelites is weak, vengeful, and evil.
 - c. Moses asked God to turn from His fierce anger and not destroy the people (Exodus 32:12).
- d. Moses asked God to remember His great promises to the ancient patriarchs, to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel (Jacob) (Exodus 32:13). What were the promises?
 - ⇒ That God would cause Abraham's descendants to number as the stars in the sky.
 - ⇒ That God would give the promised land to His people, give it to them as an inheritance forever.
- e. Note that Moses' intercessory prayer was answered. God relented, withdrew His threat to destroy all the people (Exodus 32:14).

Thought 1. Prayer—intercessory prayer—is an absolute essential for the salvation and deliverance of people. There is no question, the lack of intercessory prayer is the reason more people...

- are not reached for Christ
- are not making decisions for Christ
- are not saved from judgment
- are not delivered from temptation and sin

We must intercede for our loved ones and for the lost of the world. We must constantly go before the LORD and ask— seek— knock— cry— beg— plead.

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matthew 7:7).

"Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months" (James 5:17).

"But if from thence thou shalt seek the LORD thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul" (Deut. 4:29).

"And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

"For thus saith the LORD unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live" (Amos 5:4).

"Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment; seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger" (Zeph. 2:3).

3. (32:15-20) Anger— Calf, The Golden: there is the picture of righteous anger against terrible sin.

1. After his intercessory prayer, Moses turned and went down the mountain. Note that he carried the two tablets of God's testimony, the Ten Commandments, with him (Exodus 32:15-16). This is the only passage that tells us the tablets were written on both sides (Exodus 32:15) and that they were the work of God (Exodus 32:16). Another passage tells us they were written by the finger of God (Exodus 31:18); however another passage says that Moses himself wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments

(Exodus 34:28). This simply means that God inspired Moses to write the commandments: the Author of the commandments is the LORD God Himself.

2. The noise of the partying and revelry was so loud that it could be heard up on the mountain (Exodus 32:17-18). Note that Joshua thought it was the cry of battle, but Moses informed him that it was the noise of singing and partying. Remember, God had just informed Moses about the terrible sin the people were committing (Exodus 32:7-8).

3. The sight of the wickedness, of seeing the false worship and partying, hotly angered Moses (Exodus 32:19-20). As he approached the camp, Moses saw it all: the calf, the dancing, the drinking, the intoxication of some, and the unclean, immoral misconduct of all. Note what Moses did.

- a. Moses cast the tablets down and broke them (Exodus 32:19). This was obviously done in anger, hot anger. But it was also a deliberate act, symbolizing that the people were undeserving of God's holy commandments. They had broken God's covenant, their agreement and commitment to obey God's Holy Word. They therefore would not receive the written copy of it.
- b. Moses burned the golden calf (Exodus 32:20). He ground it to powder, scattered it on the water, and note: he made the people drink the water. This was most likely a deliberate act to symbolize that the people's disobedience, immorality, and idolatry had made them unclean, corrupting and contaminating their whole being.

Thought 1. There is a justified anger, a righteous anger, that strikes out against sin. Such an anger against the sin and evil of this world should be aroused within all of us more and more. We should be angry against the sin and evil that destroys our loved ones, friends, and the other people of the world created by the very hand of God Himself.

"Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (Ephes. 4:26).

"And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (John 2:14-17).

"For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloke" (Isaiah 59:17).

4. (32:21-24) Excuses— Shame— Embarrassment— Sin: there were the shameful excuses of terrible sin.

1. Moses confronted Aaron and asked him to explain his behavior (Exodus 32:21). Remember Aaron had been left in charge of the people. He was therefore the first to give an account for the terrible sin. Initially Aaron was not one of the ringleaders of the crowd, but he became *the leader* once he had given in to the pressure from the crowd. Aaron deserved to be cut off from God, severely chastised and disciplined, perhaps even destroyed because of his part in the terrible sin. Note that Moses accused him of having led the people into such great sin (Exodus 32:21). Only one thing saved him: a very special time of intercession. At some point, Moses got alone with God and interceded just for Aaron (Deut. 9:20).

2. What then happened was tragic: Aaron made excuse after excuse, blaming the people and Moses for the terrible sin (Exodus 32:22-24). He did what is so common among people: he blamed others for his misbehavior and failure. He attempted to lay the fault at the feet of others, to transfer his own guilt upon others. (See note—Genesis 3:10-13 for Adam blaming Eve and Eve blaming the serpent for their terrible sin.) Note the four excuses used by Aaron.

- a. Aaron accused the people of being set and prone to do evil (Exodus 32:22).
- b. Aaron accused the people of forcing him to sin and commit the evil (Exodus 32:23).
- c. Aaron accused Moses of being gone too long (Exodus 32:23). He related how the people became uneasy, wondering and questioning what had happened to Moses, why he had been gone so long without at least some report being sent to them informing them of Moses' delay.
- d. Aaron suggested that a miracle had happened in molding the golden calf or most likely, he was mocking Moses, rebelling against his leadership (Exodus 32:24). The thought of a miracle happening in the way described here seems very far-fetched, in particular thinking that a person would believe this. Moreover, when a person is facing an accuser, it is *most unlikely* that he would offer such a ridiculous idea, expecting Moses to believe it. Remember, Aaron's life had just been threatened. (See note, pt.2—Exodus 32:1-6 for more discussion.) In his mind, he was probably thinking he had done the best he could under such circumstances. Therefore, he was fed up with Moses' questioning and misunderstanding of the situation. Thus, he mocked Moses to end the conversation.

Thought 1. We must not make excuses for our sin. We must confess and repent of them. God has provided salvation—the forgiveness of our sins—but we must be honest and quit blaming others. We must do exactly what Scripture says: repent and confess our sins.

"And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2).

"I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3).

"Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

"Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord" (Acts 3:19).

"Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee" (Acts 8:22).

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

"If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14).

"Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:7).

"But if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die" (Ezekiel 18:21).

5. (32:25-29) Judgment—Sin— Levites: there was the righteous judgment of terrible sin. The leader, Aaron, had just been dealt with. Now it was time for the people to be confronted.

1. Moses had seen that the people had cast off all restraint, that they had been running wild, totally out of control morally (Exodus 32:25). And tragically they had become a joke to their enemies. The Hebrew word for *naked* or *out of control* (para) means to expose, uncover, and loosen all restraints; to get out of control. The people, at least some of the people, had apparently stripped themselves and were engaging in immoral and sexual misconduct—all due to the wild partying, drinking, and dancing.

2. Moses took a position at the entrance to the camp and shouted out to the partying crowd, shouted out for all to take a stand for the LORD (Exodus 32:26). Decisive action was needed, and Moses challenged the people to take this decisive action. Tragically, only the Levites from among the partying crowd rallied to him.

3. Moses then declared the judgment upon the people. But note: it was the judgment that God had pronounced not Moses. The guilty were to be executed (Exodus 32:27). Moses called upon the Levites themselves to execute every evil person, even their own family members. Note that the Levites obeyed, and three thousand evil, rebellious people were executed (Exodus 32:28).

Thought 1. God is holy, pure, and righteous. Therefore, He executes justice upon people.

"Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work" (Psalm 62:12).

"I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 17:10).

"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matthew 16:27).

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth [his] sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.... Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:31-33, 41).

"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" (John 5:28-29).

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

"And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Rev. 20:12).

"And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12).

4. Moses then declared that the obedience of the Levites had set them apart to the LORD for His service (Exodus 32:29). Some of the Levites were apparently forced to execute family members. In the words of The Expositor's Bible Commentary:

"A necessary part of consecration is being obedient to the Lord's command, which always results in his blessings (Exodus 32:29). The Levites wholeheartedly followed God (Joshua 14:8) and counted other ties of kinship as nothing in comparison (Deut. 33:9)."

Thought 1. God demands first place in our lives. The true follower of God will put God first, even above family members. No person can truly follow God who does not put Him first in his life.

"Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee" (Mark 10:28).

"And he said to [them] all, If any [man] will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23).

"If any [man] come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26-27).

"So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33).

"Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3:8).

6. (32:30-32) Prayer— Intercession: there was the plea, the great intercession for forgiveness of terrible sin. This is one of the most descriptive pictures of intercession for sinners in all of Scripture. (See outline—' Genesis 18:16-33 and note—' Genesis 18:16-33 for Abraham's great intercession on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrha.)

1. Note that all of the people were guilty of the terrible sin, even those who had not actually taken part in the revelry and partying. God had spared them because they had not been actively involved; nevertheless, they were guilty of the sin. Why? Because they had failed to stop the sinful, rebellious crowd (Exodus 32:30). The citizens of any nation are responsible for stopping the rampage of sinful, evil people. Sin and evil can be restrained only when good people step forth, taking a stand for God and righteousness.

2. The people stood in great need, that of atonement for their sins (Exodus 32:30). Note what Moses announced to the people: he was going to become their intercessor; he was going to go before the LORD and seek His face, begging God to forgive the people. The people needed atonement (reconciliation), and the servant of God was going to seek the face of the LORD...

- for reconciliation between the people and God
- for forgiveness of sins

3. Now, note the great intercession of Moses (Exodus 32:31-32).

- a. Moses confessed the terrible sin of the people (Exodus 32:31). He spelled out their sin before the LORD, confessing that they had committed the terrible sin of idolatry, of creating man-made gods.
- b. Moses pleaded for the forgiveness of their sin (Exodus 32:32).
- c. Moses cried out for the people: If God would not forgive their sin, then blot him out of God's book (Exodus 32:32). Scripture teaches that God records the names of believers in a book that is kept in heaven. The book is called...
 - the Book of the Living

"Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous" (Psalms 69:28).

"And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem" (Isaiah 4:3).

- the Book of Life

"He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels" (Rev. 3:5).

"And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Rev. 20:12, cp. Rev. 21:27; Rev. 22:19).

Thought 1. The love of Moses for his people is a dynamic example to us. His love for the Israelites was as great as Paul's love.

"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Romans 9:1-3).

Again, what an unbelievable example for us. When we are gripped with a passion for the lost—for our family, friends, and neighbors—then we will go before God and seek His face in intercessory prayer. We will pray as never before for others, pleading for their atonement (reconciliation), crying out for God to forgive their sins.

"And I say unto you, Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Luke 11:9).

"Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints" (Ephes. 6:18).

"He shall call upon me, and I will answer him: I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him" (Psalms 91:15).

"And it shall come to pass, that before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear" (Isaiah 65:24).

"And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13).

7. (32:33) Judgment— Responsibility, Personal: there is the picture of the sure judgment of terrible sin. Note exactly what God replied to Moses: every person pays for his own sin. Each person is responsible and accountable for what he alone has done. No person is responsible for what someone else has done.

God declares: **"Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book" (Exodus 32:33).**

"Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work" (Psalm 62:12).

"I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" (Jeremiah 17:10).

"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matthew 16:27).

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

"And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear" (1 Peter 1:17).

"And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12).

8. (32:34-35) Chastisement— Judgment: there was the chastisement of terrible sin.

1. God charged Moses to go, lead the people to the promised land (Exodus 32:34).

2. God gave a great promise to Moses, the promise that God's very own angel would guide them as they journeyed to the promised land (Exodus 32:34). In the past the Lord Himself had led the people, but now Moses and an angel were to lead them (cp. Exodus 12:42, 51; Exodus 13:17; Exodus 15:13, 22). The Lord would, however, chastise the people for their terrible sin (Exodus 32:34-35). Note that He announced the chastisement and that the chastisement took place sometime later (Exodus 32:35). The chastisement was executed in the form of some plague.

Thought 1. God chastises and disciplines His people when they sin. God loves us; therefore He sets out to correct us when we go astray. Chastisement is always for the believer's good: to keep us from harming, damaging, injuring ourselves; to keep us from bringing shame and embarrassment upon ourselves, our family, our friends, our neighbors, and God.

"Thou shalt also consider in thine heart, that, as a man chasteneth his son, so the LORD thy God chasteneth thee" (Deut. 8:5).

"Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest, O LORD, and teachest him out of thy law" (Psalm 94:12).

Preacher's Outline and Sermon Bible - Commentary - The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible – Exodus II.