

2nd Commandment – first part. (taken from commentary by Thomas Boston and a sermon by Phil Johnson of Grace Community Church)

Ex 20, vs 4-6: “**You shall not make for yourself a *carved 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. 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 the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

The 1st Commandment rules out worship of false gods, the 2nd Commandment rules out false worship of the True God. The prohibition is grounded in the fact that the Lord is a jealous God – He doesn’t allow competition – and that the Lord has no physical form, and should not be thought to be localized in one (read Deut. 4:15–19). This reason justifies the first two commandments – God’s holy wrath is aroused when we worship false gods and when we worship Him according to our own ways and sinful devising. This is an example of the Regulative Principle, as God forbids all worship other than how He has described He is to be worshiped – because all worship of and with graven images is the product of man’s imagination, falling short of His purity as delivered to us in the Law. This is in keeping with the “thick” reading of the Commandments we’ve been learning about. This week, we look at the Commandment; next week the reason for it.

The 2nd, 4th, and 10th Commandments have significant amounts of text explaining the commands and prohibitions, while the other 7 are mostly simple proscriptions:

- You shall have no other gods before me.
- You shall not murder.
- You shall not commit adultery.
- You shall not steal.
- You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

RCC omits 2nd Commandment; they include it in the 1st and subdivide the 10th into two commands. In this way they reduce scrutiny on this 2nd commandment – because of their love of graven images. Rome labors to eliminate this commandment, as their cult is based on the use of all sorts of images – sculptures, paintings, architectural features (Scala Sancta – sacred staircase – in Rome), the Pope’s ring, and venerated relics.

Eastern Orthodoxy considers 3 dimensional images “graven”, leaving them free to venerate 2 dimensional images – which they consider permissible. How that squares with the prohibition against making “any likeness”, I do not know.

It is common in formal religions of all types to use images of various sorts as objects of worship. Shrines abound in Hindi, Buddhism, and many others. It is a common tendency in fallen human hearts, focusing on mechanical, external, earthbound, materialistic objects.

Proof of this weakness to image idolatry is found in Exodus – when the Commandments were first given and before Moses could get off the mountain, Aaron made golden calves – [Ex 32:1 - 6]. The people were unwilling to do without a visible image of God – they were not making a false god. It was a feast to Jehovah! They intended to worship the true God in a manner He had explicitly forbidden. This is the tendency in every human heart – hence the universal practice of this wickedness.

Adoration of an image, images made as sacred objects, images to be worshiped, or images of God – this is what is forbidden and is detestable in the sight of Holy God. It is not a small thing to be winked at.

The command is a prohibition and two things are expressly forbidden.

First, the making of images for religious use and service is forbidden, Lev. 26.1. This commandment is in the first tablet, pertaining to our relationship with God, thus the use of images is not herein forbidden to civil or political uses. The art of cutting, carving, and painting is a gift of God (Exod. 31.2-5) and has had God's allowance for the exercise of it (Solomon's house: 1 Kings 6.29). Further, God commanded certain images created for use in the tabernacle, lid of the Ark had 2 angels – and Ex 25:17-20 details how they were to be made. God commanded a bronze serpent be put on a pole to save the Israelites from snake bites. Yet, several hundred years later, 2 Kings 18:4 reveals how Hezekiah destroyed it because Israelites had begun worshiping it. It was something made by Moses, a part of their history – and God commended Hezekiah for destroying it.

Graven images are specifically forbidden, that is, images cut or carved in wood, stone, or the like - statues. These are called out specifically, not only because they were the chief among idolaters, but because they accurately represent men and beasts, so that nothing seems to be lacking in them but life; and so people are most easily deceived by them. But we will see there are other images that are abominable to our God.

a.) No graven image, nor any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, must be made for religious worship. “In heaven above” refers to the air and the starry heavens, and the seat or dwelling place of the blessed. In the visible heavens are the birds, sun, moon, and stars. In the seat of the blessed are God himself, angels, and saints, i.e. the spirits of just men made perfect, all invisible. No likeness of these is to be made; and therefore, though Christ is a man, yet he is God too, no image can nor may represent him. Indeed, what image can there be of his body now, as he is now glorified, and cannot be pictured as he is even in his human nature. Likewise, to portray the Holy Spirit as a dove is idolatrous, it is impiety and madness for man to create images of them – those which are unseen and unseeable. That the Spirit is portrayed as dove in the gospels no more give man warrant to do so than if we were to make an image of God the Father because we find Scripture telling us of His hands, arms, wings, and the like. Calvary Chapel uses a dove as its logo.

b.) No graven image or likeness of anything that is *in the earth* beneath is to be made for religious service, whether they be on the surface, or in the bowels of the earth. Now, in the earth are men, beasts, trees, plants, and the dead bodies of men. No likeness of these is to be made for religious worship, as is done in many places with the Mexican custom of El Día de los Muertos — the Day of the Dead. This pagan practice just ended and has its roots in Aztec religion, and involves making of elaborate altars to welcome departed spirits home. Vigils are held, and families often go to cemeteries to fix up the graves of their departed relatives. Let no man deceive you into thinking El Día de los Muertos is a harmless cultural expression.

c.) No graven image, or likeness of anything that *is in the water under the earth*, is to be made. These are fishes and myriad other creature found in the rivers and seas. But no likeness of these is to be made for religious service. Dagon, the fish god, may be the best example of this and much research indicates the two-pointed mitre hat worn by the Pope is fashioned after the fish-hat worn by priests to Dagon.

There is a special tendency in the depraved nature of man to corrupt the worship and ordinances of God. In ancient times, the worship of God was corrupted with vile idolatries and superstitions all the world over, including the Jews. You will often read of the Jews falling in with the worship of the nations; but of any nation falling in with theirs, never, (Jer. 2:11). No man is immune from this temptation to conform to the world.

Secondly, the worshipping of them is forbidden.

The full meaning of the negative part of this command goes beyond the prohibition of making and worshipping of images. Remember the rule taught by Christ in His Sermon on the Mount, that where the worst sort of sin is expressed in a command, all others of that kind are included. When the seventh command forbids adultery, all manner of uncleanness is forbidden, though only one of the grossest sort is named. So here, when the corrupting of the worship of God by images is forbidden, all other corruptions of God's worship are included. All holy ordinances and parts of worship God has reserved to himself; He says to us, with respect to these, “Thou shalt not make them to thyself.”

Next, by the same rule, whereas this command forbids not only the making of images, but bowing to them, and serving them, though they be made by others; that is not all that is included in that. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them nor serve them. But the meaning of it further is, whatever anyone makes without the Word of God, in the matter of God's worship and ordinances, thou shalt not comply with it, approve of it, or use it. So that to you they must be as if they were not made at all, regardless of who made them, under whatever pretence, seeing God has not made them.

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The positive part of the Commandment is implied, according to the rule, that every negative implies an affirmative part. It consists in these two things.

1. Thou shalt worship the Lord, and him you shall serve; worship him with external worship. This is implied in that you shall not bow down yourself to idols nor serve them. This says, but you shall bow down to me, and serve me – as an expression of the soul that delights in the Lord. Even as due benevolence between married persons is implied in that, you shall not commit adultery.

2. Outward worship is not only a sign of the inward, but it is a help and furtherance to it. Prayer is a blessed means to increase our love to God, sorrow for sin, faith, hope, and other parts of genuine worship. So, the partaking of the Lord's supper, another part of external worship, is not only a means appointed, whereby we publicly profess ourselves engaged to the Lord, but is the means to strengthen faith, and confirm our union and communion with him.

Further, not all worship is noble – the sincere worship of the American Indian, worshipping the creation is just as much a sin as is abortion. The same with those who worship God in man's way, ignoring the Word of God – false, hypocritical religion is more offensive to God than the unpretentious sin of god haters. Examine the words of Jesus when he rebuked the religious leaders of the Jewish people in His day. No sinner is more lost than the religious sinner – he thinks his religion has gained him a right standing, failing to consider himself as a sinner. This boils down to self righteousness, a bondage that is stronger than a lack of conscious rebellion or simple ignorance.

So we see the reason for Creator God to be so specific in describing how we are *not* to worship Him. It is because we are so hard-wired to worship and so adept at finding ways of doing so that satisfy our flesh. The Bible makes it very clear that the Lord God of Heaven knows us – our frame, our weaknesses, our outright depravity and self-worship tendencies. Because of this human tendency and His own legitimate jealousy for His name, God is very detailed in telling us how not to worship Him – leaving us without excuse when we make up our own golden calves.

As we looked at three categories of images that are wicked to use, next we look at three reasons making images of God is wicked.

1. It is wicked to represent God as an image because the only True God is a spirit. If He were visible to our human eye, it might be OK to represent Him. Yet 1 Tim (1:17 & 6:15b-16a) calls Him invisible and John (in ch 1:18 of his gospel and in I John 4:12) tells us nobody has seen Him. Not only beyond our earthly vision, He is far beyond our imagination. Making any images to represent Him is the product of our imagination. Scripture relies on poetic language that reinforces this concept – **Ezekiel 10:9 - 14** focuses on incomprehensible creatures that we cannot understand – how could we expect to comprehend how God might look? We are told much about His character – His grandeur and glory and holiness – but nothing about his appearance. It is the height of human arrogance to believe that the creature can properly and adequately portray

attributes of sovereign, creator God that He has not revealed to us. In 2 Cor 12:4 – Paul “heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter” about describing Heaven. How much less can we describe the creator and ruler thereof? God is Spirit – beyond our mental ability. Contrary to Kenneth Copeland's theology (“The Bible says [God] measured out the heavens with a nine-inch span. Well...my span is eight and three-quarter inches long. So God's span is a quarter of an inch longer than mine. So you see... God...stands somewhere around 6'2",6'3", weighs somewhere in the neighborhood of a couple hundred pounds, little better.”), the Scriptural descriptions of God with arms, wings, etc. are not there to tell us the physical attributes of the Lord God. These descriptions of God are there so we might relate to Him, Creator God condescends to use language we understand - not as a literal, physical description of Him Who is Spirit.

2. It is wicked to represent God as an image because the only true worship is spiritual worship. Pertaining to that which is heavenly, concerned with the soul's response to God, an internal response then an external. See Romans 12:1 – 2. Physical service is the result of the spiritual reality of worshiping God with our minds and souls – one cannot put this in reverse order; as do Jews at the Wailing Wall. True worshipers worship God in Spirit and in Truth, not man-made traditions. Even as OT circumcision was merely a physical sign of the spiritual covenant, so baptism is today. The physical images in the Jewish Temple were hidden from view of the masses – being behind the veil and seen only by the high priest once a year. These were shadows of what was to come, “weak and beggarly elements” [Gal 4:9]. Even then, in the days of the Tabernacle and Levitical priesthood, true worship was spiritual, not physical. Evidence of the danger of idols: [Gen 31:19] Rachael stole pagan household idols from her father, Laban. 1 Kings 12, when the kingdom was split, Jeroboam erected golden calves which symbolized the idolatry which brought God's judgment upon the northern kingdom. God's Word declares obedience is better than sacrifice – the inner work of the Spirit that moves one to want to obey God is better than outward works of sacrifice and service. In Isaiah 1:1 – 17, God is fed up with religious sacrifice. We must worship God in spirit and in Truth – not in the vain imaginations of our minds.
3. It is wicked to represent God as an image because the only legitimate religion is that which is concerned with Truth, not images, not rituals, not emotion. Truest worship is that soul which responds to God's Truth. Ritual and emotion have their places – in our response to His Truth. But worship directed by emotions is false, it was called “will worship” by the Puritans – wherein a man creates rituals, images, and worship as substitutes for the living God and His Truth. [read Galatians 4:8-10] Human religion may give an appearance that fools men into thinking it is legitimate, but is the religion of hypocrisy because it is not grounded in God's Word. If we are to worship God in truth, we must engage our minds – when we sing or pray, our minds must be actively engaged, this is the message of Romans 12:1 & 2. Ritualistic religions encourage mindless singing, rote prayer, flat reading without teaching. Examine yourself – how often do you think of other things when you sing, when you pray, when you listen to the sermon? It is a common

weakness, to allow our minds and imaginations to drag our focus away from the spiritual worship of the True God.

God is a Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in Truth. The woman at the well was used to physical worship – needing to be at a certain place at a certain time – John 4:19 & 20. Spurgeon: “The carnal heart dreads the contact with spiritual truth and finds a most convenient way of avoiding it by running to questions of holy places, holy customs, and holy times.” This is why people gravitate to images – it is rebellion to God – and people are by nature at war with God. It is impossible for an unregenerate person to worship God as He commands it, such people will recite the Rosary or the Prayer of Jabez because these do not convict of sin. When we approach God on His terms, our hearts will be broken as we realize our sin and God's holiness. Only the Spirit of the Living God can bring this about. Anything short of what God has commanded is no better than those who joined with Aaron in falling down before the golden calf. As He said to the woman at the well, He says to us; [John 4:21 – 26].