

Sermon Series: *The Ten Commandments*

The Second Commandment: You Shall Not Make A Carved Image

Exodus 20:4-6

4 *“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.*

5 *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,*

6 *but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

MEMORIZATION

The First Command: You shall have no other gods before Me.

The Second Command: You shall not make a carved image.

The Elders Retreat

Thanks you for praying for us as we were away this weekend on our annual elders retreat. We discussed many themes that we will continue to pray and seek the Lord about to be sure that they are from Him and we will share more details in the weeks to come. It was a pleasure to have Michael Bradford with us this year. His presence on the team as a potential candidate has been a blessing and is a direct answer to one of the areas in which we sensed last year that the Lord was leading us. Please continue to pray for him as he seeks the Lord’s will related to his elder candidacy. If he chooses to accept the invitation, then we will present him to you later this fall and ask for your vote.

A Unique Event

The giving of the Ten Commandments is an utterly unique event in the history of Israel and in the history of humanity. At no other point in recorded history has God let His voice be heard from heaven through flames of fire. At no other point in history has God spoken through flames to an entire nation and revealed His will for their lives. This was an incredible event. In recalling this event Moses asked,

Deuteronomy 4:32-36

32 *“For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of.*

33 *Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live?*

34 *Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?*

35 *To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him.*

36 *Out of heaven he let you hear his voice, that he might discipline you. And on earth he let you see his great fire, and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire.*

Nothing like this had ever happened in all of history nor has anything like it happened since.

Redeemed & Free: Carried On Eagle's Wings

God had just redeemed Israel out of the brutal circumstances of slavery in Egypt. He had freed Israel and brought them out of slavery so that they might worship the Lord. He carried them on eagles wings and brought them to Himself (Ex 19:4).

He promised them (through Moses) that they would be His treasured possession if they would they would obey His voice and keep His covenant (Ex 19:5). The newborn nation agreed and promised, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Ex 19:8). God then called them to consecrate themselves, to prepare themselves for He would meet them personally on the third day (Ex 19:16).

God Has Spoken

He then appeared to them through thunder, lightening, clouds, thick darkness and spoke to them out of the flames of fire. And what He spoke is what we now have as the Ten Commandments. **The fact that God has spoken means that He must be obeyed.** Where He has spoken most clearly, we are held all the more accountable.

God Has Written

And God did not want us to forget them so **He wrote them down with His own hand** on two tablets of stone and gave them to Moses (Ex 31:18). Paul says, "For Whatever was written in the former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope" (Rom 15:4).

The Two Tables of the Law

The 10 Commandments can be divided into two parts. The first four commands deal with our relationship to God and the last six deal with our relationship to each other. Jesus summarized these two sections of the Law. He summarized the first four commands as "Loving the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength" (Mark 12:30). He summarized the last six as "loving your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). Jesus said on these two commands hang all the "all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt 22:40). Theologians have called these the two tables of the law.

Three Purposes of the Law

The Lord used this law as the foundation of the covenant with the nation of Israel, yet what do they have to do with us? We are not Israel. So what purpose do they serve in our lives? There is some debate over how many uses of the law there are however, John Calvin has identified three that are helpful.

The First Purpose: A Mirror to Reveal God's Righteousness & Our Impotence

In Calvin's *The Institutes of Christian Religion*, he states that there are three purposes of the Law. The first is to reveal God's righteousness and our inability to attain to that righteousness. Calvin said,

The Law is a kind of mirror. As in a mirror we discover any stains upon our face, so in the Law we behold, first, our impotence; then, in consequence of it, our iniquity; and, finally, the curse, as the consequence of both.¹

¹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997) Book II, Chapter 7, Section 7.

As we behold the law we see revealed in it the high bar of God's perfect righteousness. **As we contemplate God's righteousness we are confronted with our own inability to attain to it.** This forces us to the knowledge that we are law breakers. It is as the apostle Paul said,

Romans 7:7

If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covent if the law had not said, "You shall not covent."

Since we know what God's law is, we are then painfully aware that we have broken His law. Paul also wrote that it is *"through the law that knowledge of sin comes"* (Rom 3:20). This leaves us in the desperate place of being rightly & justly under God's wrath with no hope of improvement. Augustine said, *"If the Spirit of grace be absent, the law is present only to convict and slay us."*² Therefore, knowing our own inability we are then pointed to the merciful hand of God to seek grace from Him.

Romans 5:20

Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.

That grace has been demonstrated as God put forth His own Son in subjection to the curse of the Law in order that all those who have faith in Him might be saved.

Philippians 3:9

... not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

The Law Reveals God's Righteousness & Our Need of Grace

So then the first purpose of the Law is to reveal the righteousness of God and at the same time, to reveal our own inability to attain that perfect righteousness. Thus we are compelled to cry out for grace. This is what Paul meant when he wrote in Galatians that the law was like a "schoolmaster," or a "guardian" that leads us to Christ (Gal 3:24). The law points out that we cannot obey it's demands. Therefore we must flee to the One who did obey it's every demand - Jesus. Therefore, the Law points us to Christ.

The Second Purpose of the Law: To Restrain Evil

The second purpose of the law is to restrain evil. Even among those who deny God, nearly all would agree to the majority of these laws. I think it is safe to say that people in every culture recognize that it is wrong to lie, steal, murder, dishonor parents, and commit adultery. These things may not be illegal, but do any of those things to any person in any culture and I'm pretty sure you'll know by their reaction that something very wrong has taken place.

The second table laws forms the foundation of nearly all the laws of every nation in the world. These laws serve to restrain evil in the heart of all people even those who reject the first four commandments.

² Ibid.

The Third Purpose of the Law: A Rule of Life

The third purpose of the law is particularly directed toward believers. Since God has written His law upon the heart of His people, the 10 Commandments serve as **a rule of life**. The serves as a means of sanctification not as a means of earning salvation. By obeying God's law, we know that we are pleasing the Lord. And when we please Him we are blessed by Him in our relationship with Him. Calvin writes about the Law,

by frequently meditating upon it, he will be excited to obedience, and confirmed in it, and so drawn away from the slippery paths of sin. In this way, the saints press onward, since... they hasten toward righteousness...³

We know this to be true if we but for a moment consider the words of David.

Psalm 1:1-2

*Blessed is the man
who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
nor stands in the way of sinners,
nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
2 but his delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law he meditates day and night.*

Psalm 19:7-11

*7 The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;
8 the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
9 the fear of the LORD is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.
10 More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.
11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.*

The **Lord quite unashamedly promises reward and blessing to all who would obey Him**. The Scriptures are filled with inducements to obedience. Why? Because God's wants us to obey Him. Because it is

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997) Book II, Chapter 7, Section 12.

good to obey Him. Because He is pleased when we obey Him just as any parent is pleased when he or she is obeyed. **In keeping God's commandments, there is great reward!**

Good Commands To Be Pursued By Faith

These commands are good for us. God's word is good, and right and true and blessed you will be if you pursue them by faith (Rom 9:32). The law is a curse if you pursue it by works, but if you pursue the law by faith, then blessed are you for the law is a tutor to point you to Jesus who never failed to obey God's law in any point.

Jesus Did Not Eliminate the Law, He Extended the Law

And Jesus did by no means eliminate the law. He extended it! He did by no means loosen the demands of the law. He lengthened them! Jesus said,

"You know the law says that the murderer will be judged, but I tell you that if you are even angry at your brother, you deserve the same judgment as the murderer" (**Matt 5:21-23**, my own translation).

"You know the law says you shall not commit adultery, but I tell you if you even imagine the act then you are already guilty of committing adultery with her in your heart" (**Matt 5:27-28**, author's translation).

Jesus also said,

Matthew 5:17-19

17 *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*

18 *For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.*

19 *Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.*

This passage calls for serious reflection about what we teach related to God's commandments. I'm a teaching elder. The major portion of my job is teaching and all of us who teach better beware of what we teach about God's commands. We know that we will be held to a stricter judgment (James 3:1-2).

God's Law reaches to into the human heart and claims authority over even what we desire. God's law does not merely apply to our actions. It applies to even the unseen desires of our hearts.

The Second Commandment

Exodus 20:4

4 *"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.*

The Who of Worship & The How of Worship

The first command has to do with the **"who"** of worship - "I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before Me." This second command has to do with the **"how"** of worship.

The Lord first commands that we must worship Him and Him only. He is Yahweh God, the “I am” who met Moses in the burning bush and is now meeting with the entire nation in the burning flame on the mountain. His people are to worship Him only in the specific way in which He commands. Yahweh is not only concerned **that** He is worshiped, but He is also concerned **how** He is to be worshipped.

We Were Created To Worship: The Fact of Worship Is Assumed

Notice that His assumption is that we will indeed worship. He does not have to command us to worship. The fact is that we **will** worship. We were created to worship. Every culture that has ever been discovered has had something it worshipped, whether it was the sun (Alaska?) or moon or a bird or a beetle or one of it’s ancestors - every culture worships something. The question is not will we worship? The real question is whom we will worship and how will we do it?

Richard Dawkins: Summer Camp for Atheists



Every single human being on this planet worships something, even atheists. We send our kids to summer camp to teach them how to worship God, well now Richard Dawkins has started his own summer camp to teach kids how to worship another god.

The London Telegraph⁴ reports:

Camp-goers (children ages 8 - 17) will be given lessons in rational scepticism, as well as sessions in moral philosophy and evolutionary

biology.

There will be more familiar camp activities such as trekking, tug-of-war, canoeing and swimming but children will also be taught... that religious belief and doctrines can prevent ethical and moral behaviour.

The camp is part of a campaign, backed by Dawkins and Professor AC Grayling, the philosopher and writer, designed to challenge Christian societies, collective worship and religious education.

The emphasis on critical thinking is epitomised by a test called the Invisible Unicorn Challenge. Children will be told by camp leaders that the area around their tents is inhabited by two unicorns.

The activities of these creatures, of which there will be no physical evidence, will be regularly discussed by organisers, yet the children will be asked to prove that the unicorns do not exist.

Anyone who manages to prove this will win a £10 note - which features an image of Charles Darwin, the father of evolutionary theory - signed by Dawkins.

⁴ Source <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstoppers/religion/5674934/Richard-Dawkins-launches-childrens-summer-camp-for-atheists.html> accessed 11 July 2010.

The Image of Darwin

Notice the language. The **image** of Darwin will be given as a reward to these children. Whom and what are they being taught to worship? Darwin is the father of Dawkin's faith and the father of the faith which nearly all of academia now worships. All of humanity worships something and by our very nature we want to represent it in some image.

It is exactly this that the Lord prohibits. The Lord prohibits the making of any image of anything **in heaven, on earth, or in the waters under the earth.**

Are All Images & Art Prohibited?

Are all images prohibited? Are we to have no images whatsoever? Is all sculpture prohibited? Are we idolators when we walk into a museum? No. Verse 5 is clear. The kinds of images that are prohibited are the ones we are prone to worship as God.

Images In the Temple

The use of images was permitted. Even the ark of the covenant had the images of two seraphim on the lid. When king Solomon built the temple there were all kinds of images inside. There were two massive golden cherubim (15 ft. high with wingspan of 15 ft. 1 Kg 6:23, 28). There were images of palm trees (1 Kg 6:32), open flowers (1 Kg 6:18), pomegranates (200 on each pillar 1 Kg 7:18-20), gourds (1 Kg 7:24), 12 oxen (1 Kg 7:25), and lions (1 Kg 7:29). So not all images are prohibited. **What is prohibited is the making of an image that is intended to represent God Himself.**

Why does the Lord prohibit the making of images that are intended to represent Him? There are two reasons. One is because of who we are and the second is because of who He is.

No Images Because of Who We Are

Through the sin of Adam, death entered this world. As a result of the Fall, the entire race of humanity has been separated from God. We are born spiritually dead because we are born under the curse of Adam. This is why Jesus told Nicodemus, "**Unless you are born again, you will not see the kingdom of heaven**" (John 3:3).

John 3:6

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.

When we are born we are physically alive but spiritually dead. Therefore, our natural (though fallen) tendency is to worship that which is physical rather than that which is spiritual. We cannot worship spiritual things because we are spiritually dead. This is what Paul spoke of.

1 Corinthians 2:14

The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

The worship of our hearts follows our line of sight. Our hearts always go after our eyes (Job 31:7). This is why it is so crucial to guard what we set before our eyes. We only worship the physical things that we can see because the eyes of our hearts are spiritually darkened. **We would rather worship what we can see rather than what we can hear.** The spiritually dead cannot see spiritual things therefore they only worship what they can see, which are physical things.

God prohibits the making of images to be worshipped because of our own fallen, sinful nature.

No Images Because of Who He Is

Second, God prohibits image worship because of who He is. Yahweh did not come to Israel in a physical form. He came to them as a voice speaking to them out of the fire.

Deuteronomy 4:12

Then the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but you saw no form; there was only a voice.

This is the first clue that God is spirit. We need spiritual life in order to worship God because God is Spirit (**John 4:24**).

Remember what Jesus said.

John 6:62

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is of no avail. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.

So physical images, no matter of what kind they are, will always fail to fully reveal who God is. And the most basic fact about God is that He is Spirit and not flesh.

The Problem with Idols

So what is the harm in having a physical representation of God? What is the harm in having an image of God to help us worship Him?

1) Images are physical. God is not.

God is spiritual and not physical. Jesus told us God is spirit not flesh (**John 4:24**). If we had an image of God we would naturally think that we must go to the place where that image is in order to speak to God. However, this is not true. He can hear us wherever we are. We do not have to go to a certain place in order to meet Him.

2) Idols (carved images) are limited. God is not limited.

Idols are limited to the confines of their own physical form. God has no such limitation. An idol can only be here and not there at the same time. God does not have this problem. He can be everywhere at once. There is no place that we can flee from His presence.

Psalm 139:7-10

*7 Where shall I go from your Spirit?
Or where shall I flee from your presence?
8 If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
9 If I take the wings of the morning
and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,
10 even there your hand shall lead me,
and your right hand shall hold me.*

3) Idols are created. God is not.

He is the ancient of days. The uncreated one. He has always existed from everlasting to everlasting. His days know no end. He is the first and the last and besides Him there is no other. He is the one who was and is and is to come. (See Is 44:9-20).

4) Idols can be controlled. God cannot.

We can move idols around here or there and control what they do. We cannot control what God does. He is absolutely free!

Psalms 115:3

Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

5) Idols cannot see, but God can.

We can set up idols here or there and they can not see us when we leave there presence. God is not like that. We can throw a blanket over the head of an idol if we don't want him to see us (A student told me she did this once), but we cannot do this to God . He sees everything.

6) Idols are needy. God is not.

Idols have to be carried anywhere they "want" to go. They need lots of help. If they fall over, they need help getting back up. God is not like idols in any way.

Acts 17:25 *nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mankind life and breath and everything.*

7) Idols are powerless. God is not.

Idols can do nothing. They cannot see. They cannot hear. They cannot smell. They cannot speak. They cannot touch. They cannot do anything in and of themselves. They are impotent. God is none of these things.

The implication is that God is in His true essence so far above and beyond all created things that to try to capture in an image any aspect of who He is would by the very nature of the act improperly distort the manifold perfection of His nature and character.

He is so much more glorious than even the most glorious created thing, that any attempt on our part to create an image of His glory would be so demeaning of His glory that by comparison, the result would be an abomination.

Nothing in all of creation can even come close to accurately portraying the fullness of who God is. The essence of who God is cannot be appropriately communicated through matter or physical images.

God Is A Jealous God

God gives another reason why images of Him are not be created.

Exodus 20:5-6

5 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, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

God is a jealous God. We usually think of jealousy in a negative way. We tend to think of a jealous people as insecure people who lack self-confidence. However, does this describe Yahweh? Does this describe the LORD our God? No.

If it is true that we were created to worship (see Isaiah 43:7) and that Yahweh is the One True God and besides Him there is no other, then it would be unloving for Him to allow us to attempt to worship anything other god since there really is no other god. Therefore, God's jealousy that we worship Him and Him alone is incredibly good news for us.

To get an understanding of the kind of jealousy that is spoken of here, we need to turn to the story of Phinehas found in Numbers 25. I'll briefly summarize.

The Moabite women enticed the Hebrew men and the Hebrew men gave in to sexual temptation and joined the pornographic cult worship of Baal which included temple prostitution. The Israelite men joined in the pagan idol worship by bowing down and worshipping their idols and even sacrificing to them. Thus they "*yoked themselves to Baal of Peor*" (Num. 25:3).

A Public Sin With a Plague In Progress

Moses and many of the people were standing in the entrance of the tent of meeting (i.e. the tabernacle, the place where Moses met with God) weeping over the sin that was taking place. Then right before their eyes, Moses and the whole congregation, an Israelite man comes running in with a cute daughter of one of the Moabite chiefs (Num 25:16) and goes into his families tent with impure intentions. Everyone is utterly stunned at the brazen disregard for God and the highhanded rebellion that has been publicly demonstrated. In fact of *plague of God's judgment was already in progress* and yet this man is still intent on sinning in God's face.

Phinehas, Aaron's grandson, had seen enough. He knew exactly what had to be done. He picked up a spear and followed them into the tent and pierced the both of them through the belly. His action stopped the plague, yet 24,000 people died. And this is what God says about what Phinehas did.

Numbers 25:10-13

10 *And the LORD said to Moses,*

11 *Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy.*

12 *Therefore say, Behold, I give to him my covenant of peace,*

13 *and it shall be to him and to his descendants after him the covenant of a perpetual priesthood, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel.*

Phinehas wanted the death of the people of Israel to stop. He acted against the idolatry and stopped the plague. He stood up to obey this second command and to turn Israel away from the futile worship of impotent idols. This is the kind of jealousy that is commended by God. He is jealous in that He will not allow His people to worship that which is unprofitable. And ***what we worship has a lasting effect.***

What we worship has its effect on subsequent generations whether for good or for ill, for blessing or for cursing. What the parents worship at home will not go unnoticed by the children. *What we as parents worship will have its effect on our children.* The effect of hating God can last to the third and fourth generation, while the effect of loving God can bring blessing to thousands who come after us.

God's law is clear,

Deut 24:16

Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin. (conf. Ezekiel 18)

However, we all know sin effects more than the person sinning. My father smoked all my life. Being around him and breathing in 2nd hand smoke had some effect on me. The children of alcoholics are not unaffected by their parents habits.

Freedom From the Curse

The effect of hating God may have some effect to the third or fourth generation, however the effects of loving God bring blessings to thousands. We need not be burdened by fears of family curses, for as Psalm one says, *“Blessed is the man who meditates on the law day and night.”*

Furthermore, the apostle Paul writes,

Galatians 3:13

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.

Romans 8:1

There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

The Lord would have us keep away from all images because He is not contained in any image. Though I would leave you with one image in your mind.

Colossians 1:15-20

15 [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God

19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

When God decided that it was time to **fully** reveal Himself to this world, He sent Jesus and in Him the fullness of God dwells. The fullness of God does not dwell in idols made by human hands. The fullness of God dwells in Jesus. If you want to know God, you must draw near to Him through Jesus.

Be careful what you set before your eyes. The creator God who created all that exists is not to be found in images of created things. Created things are simply sign posts pointing you beyond them to the voice who spoke them into existence.

He is a jealous God, a consuming fire. He will not allow our wayward hearts to fall in love with dead things that cannot satisfy the thirst of our souls. Only He can satisfy our souls, therefore we are to love and worship only Him. If we will love and worship Him, then we can join God in causing His name to be blessed by subsequent generations.