

# The 2nd Commandment: Worship

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[ 0 : 00 ] I heard a story recently about a little girl in her drawing lesson at school. She was six and she was at the back of the class drawing away. And the teacher thought that the little girl normally paid no attention to anything that was going on in the classroom.

But this time she was fully engaged in the picture she was drawing. And the teacher was fascinated. And so she went over to the girl and asked her, what are you drawing? The girl said, I'm drawing a picture of God. And the teacher said, but nobody knows what God looks like. And the girl replied, well, he will in a minute.

Now, I tell this because when it comes to God, there is a lot of confusion around today. And there are lots of questions about God. So is there a God or are there many gods?

If there is a God, then what is he like? And if he is there, then how can we as human beings relate to him? But the Ten Commandments really help us navigate our way through all the confusion when it comes to God.

[ 1 : 05 ] And we just started this new series looking at the Ten Commandments in church. And so today we're going to look at the second commandment, which we find in Exodus chapter 20. And it is about the way to worship God.

The first commandment, which we looked at last week, says you shall have no other gods before me. So the first commandment commands who we must worship by forbidding the worship of other gods.

So we should worship the right God, the one true and living God, and not any other false gods. And then next, the second commandment tells us that we must worship the right God in the right way. So verse 4 and into verse 5 we read, You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

You shall not bow down to them or worship them. So the first commandment addresses the object of our worship. And then the second commandment addresses the method of our worship, the object of our worship, and then the method of our worship.

[ 2 : 12 ] So the first commandment forbids false gods, and then the second commandment forbids false worship. And so we are commanded in these two commandments to worship the right God in the right way.

In other words, we should worship God as he really is. Worship God as he has revealed himself to us, and not as we would like to imagine him to be.

And this really matters whether you'd call yourself a Christian or not, because if we get God wrong, then clearly we will get our worship of God wrong.

And if our worship of God is wrong, then we'll be wasting our lives and our time. So let's think about this under three headings. They're on the screen. First of all, what God forbids.

Second, why God commands. And third, how we obey. What God forbids. Why God commands.

And how we obey. So first of all, what God forbids.

[ 3 : 09 ] Let me read verse four again. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above, or on the earth beneath, or in the waters below.

So God forbids people making images of him. Because images or idols that are meant to represent God aren't really God, are they?

They will demean God. They will diminish God. And they will be false. And they will be misleading. Because whenever an image is created, it is going to be less than the creator God.

If God is the creator of all things, then created things can't represent him. So an image in the form of anything, in heaven above, or on the earth beneath, or in the waters below, could never do God justice.

Now, Rembrandt is one of my favorite artists. The Dutch master, you may have seen his paintings. And he's probably most famous for all of his self-portraits. He quite liked to paint himself on pictures.

[ 4 : 16 ] And they're brilliant. But they are only images of him. And so any one of his self-portraits can't adequately represent him.

Of course, he is dead now. But even when he was alive, there was so much more to Rembrandt than any one or even all of his self-portraits. And so it is a shocking insult to God to suggest that something that's made can ever compare to him.

And that's why God forbids any kind of image that wrongly represents him. Now, it says in Isaiah chapter 40, With whom then will you compare God?

To what image will you liken him? So it's saying that a mere image can't compare to the true and living God. And it's not that God is against images, because later on in Exodus, God commands very ornate and beautiful art for the tabernacle, which was the place of worship.

So God is for beauty and art and image. But God is against anything that is used to reimagine him, to retell what he is really like.

[ 5 : 34 ] Because an image is an idol. And idolatry is one of the shocking sins against God in the Bible. And so the Old Testament is full of examples of God's people worshipping man-made idols as God.

And then what's famous actually comes shortly after the Ten Commandments. And Laura read of the incident of the golden calf in Exodus chapter 32. So while Moses was away up on the mountain, talking with God, his brother Aaron made this golden calf, an idol.

And then the people started to worship the golden calf. And they even said, these are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt. But they weren't worshipping other gods.

That would be breaking the first commandment. Because Aaron said that with the calf, there will be a festival to the Lord. So they were using the golden calf as an image to worship God.

And that's breaking the second commandment. And so God's anger burned against his people. And there are plenty of other examples later in Israel's history. And so God forbids making any kind of idol to aid our worship.

[ 6 : 50 ] And of course, we never think that we would be so stupid as to form some kind of metal image and worship it as God.

But before we think this doesn't apply to us or this isn't relevant for us, it was only for people away back then. Well, the essence of the Ten Commandments, sorry, the essence of the second commandment, it forbids more than metal images like gold or silver or bronze.

It actually forbids mental images like gold or gold or gold or gold or gold or gold or gold. It actually forbids mental images of God. Not just metal images, but mental images. In other words, the images that we create of God in our minds that get God wrong.

And that's the place and the source, actually, of any metal idol that comes from our minds. So, yes, we must not make metal images of God, but neither should we make up mental images of God.

Because imagining God in our heads is just as wrong as imaging God with our hands in something that we make. So we probably don't have a big idol in the corner of our lounge that we worship as God.

[ 8 : 07 ] And yet we can have a mental image of God in our head. And it can be wrong. So reimagining God is always dangerous.

And it happens when we say things like, well, I like to think of God like this. Or I don't like to think of God like that. And it tends to be, I like the God of love and compassion and mercy and grace.

But I don't like the God of justice or wrath or anger or judgment. And yet, can you see what happens? Because if we emphasize the parts of God we like and we ignore the parts of God we don't like, then we get this distorted picture of God.

And it's like taking a pair of scissors to the Bible and making up the God we want for ourselves rather than the God who is.

Let me try to illustrate. You may have heard of a novel by William P. Young called The Shack. And it was made into a film in 2017 because the novel was so popular.

[ 9 : 17 ] And The Shack was an effort to explain why God allows suffering. And the book was a New York Times bestseller. So obviously, a New York Times bestseller is going to influence people and how they think or imagine God.

And it paints a picture of God in narrative form. So let me just give you the plot. Spoiler alert. I will be telling you what happens. There's a man called Mac.

And Mac gets a letter from God. And God asks Mac to meet him at the shack. So Mac goes to the shack and he spends a weekend with God. Not making this up.

In the book and then in the movie, God the Father is portrayed as a middle-aged, slightly overweight African-American woman who loves to cook called Papa.

Jesus is a man of Middle Eastern appearance. And God the Holy Spirit is portrayed as a slight Asian woman who is quite hard to see and is called Sarayu.

[10:20] So the God of the shack clearly isn't the biblical God or the real God. But the images in the book can cause people to think that God is like this when he isn't like that.

Because the God of the shack or any image of God essentially presents a false God, a God of the imagination.

But a reimagined God is no God at all. And so we'll never worship God in the right way if we mistake his identity.

Okay, so that's the first thing, what God forbids. The second thing is why God commands. And this is in verse 5 and 6. God says that he forbids the making of images.

So let me read verse 5 and 6. So God commands no bowing down to or worship of images because he is a jealous God.

[11:39] Now we might think of jealousy as being a negative thing or a bad thing. And sometimes it is. But God's jealousy essentially describes his burning passion, his love for his people.

So jealousy can be a good thing and a healthy thing and a right thing. Just think of a husband and wife. A wife who loves her husband could not bear her husband being with another woman. It would make her intensely jealous and rightly so it should. Because she doesn't want her husband choosing another over her. And similarly, God is a jealous God.

And so his burning love means that he will not tolerate any rivals for his people's love. He wants his people to be devoted to him as he really is.

And so the jealousy of God leads here to a warning and to a promise. A warning and a promise. God warns his people what will happen if they break the commandment.

[12:45] And then he promises what will happen if they keep it. So firstly, God's warning. In verse 5, it's about punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.

So the failure to let God be God and worship God as God indicates hatred for God instead of love for God.

So breaking the second commandment brings God's punishment. And the punishment consequence of this is the children are punished down to the third and fourth generation.

And that doesn't sound very fair, does it? It sounds like God is going to punish children for the sin of their parents. So what is this warning saying? Well, the key phrase here is of those who hate me.

Verse 5. Because if later generations are to grow up hating God, then it's because they have followed the sinful ways of their parents.

[13:47] Because parents do influence their children. I'm a parent. I know that. Children copy our attitudes and our actions because they watch us.

And so that's the sense in which the future generations here will face God's punishment. And so this should be a healthy reminder for those of us who are parents.

Our sinful attitudes, our sinful actions will have consequences for our children. And so will our love for God and our worship of God, our obedience to God.

That will also influence how our children relate to God. And so this is a serious warning that God gives to his people. But there's also a promise.

There's the warning and then there's the promise. And God's promise is about showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. So God is promising his steadfast love to those who keep his commandments, to those who obey him.

[14:52] And so the warning of punishment for those who hate me contrasts with the promise of love for those who keep my commandments. But see how the promise of love far outweighs the warning of punishment.

The punishment, if you notice, it goes on to the third and fourth generation. And yet God's love extends way beyond to a thousand generations.

So God's mercy is more than his judgment. God's promise overflows with grace. And so God commands that we get him right and we worship him in the right way because he is a jealous God. And he wants us to know him as he really is. I heard the story of a man who was separated from his fiancée for months at a time.

And so his fiancée gave him a small china rabbit that winked. And it was meant to be a reminder of her. And the little rabbit became one of his most prized possessions during their times of separation.

[16:05] But can you imagine if she came back one day and he had become so fond of the rabbit that he ignored her, because he preferred the rabbit in her place?

It would be crazy. And yet that is what we can do with God. We can be so taken with our images of God, the God we like to imagine, that we fail to know him as he really is and relate to him as he really is.

And yet God is a jealous God who will not tolerate being treated in this way. He will not tolerate us mistaking his identity. That's why God commands we worship him as he really is on his terms, not our terms.

Okay, so how do we obey? First, what God forbids. Second, why God commands. And third, how we obey. So God has spoken to forbid people making an image of him and worshipping it.

And he commands this because he's a jealous God. So how do we obey the second commandment? How do we worship the right God in the right way?

[17:14] Well, it starts by discovering who the real God is. Because God hasn't been hiding himself from us. He's never made it difficult for us to know what he is like.

God has revealed himself to us. Which means we don't need to make an image of him. Instead, we need to pay attention to what he has revealed about himself.

How do we do this? Well, we do it by listening to what God says. So what's the best way for somebody to get to know you as a person?

Well, maybe look at a picture. Maybe look at your Instagram account. And then the other person can kind of figure out who you are, what you're like. Perhaps you could have a friend to describe you to this other person.

But far better for you, yourself, to introduce yourself to this person. Because you are the best at expressing the real you. And that is what God has done, hasn't he?

[18:19] That's why God cannot tolerate us misrepresenting him. Because he can speak for himself. He can reveal himself to us. He's the living God who wants to enter into a relationship with the people he has made.

And so he speaks. He spoke the Ten Commandments to the Israelites, to the people he had rescued out of slavery in Egypt, so that they could enjoy a relationship with him.

And so whether it's the Israelites who first heard these words, or whether it's us today, the fact is, God has spoken. And we can hear what God says about himself in his word, the Bible.

That is the source of all our knowledge of God. It's what should shape our understanding of God, not our thoughts or our imaginations or any other strange ideas about him that come from the culture or media or wherever.

Because God has spoken for himself. He has revealed what he is like. And so we should worship him as we ought. So somebody might ask, well, what's the problem with images helping us worship God?

[19:35] Does that mean we should just burn all the classic religious artwork that we see? Does it mean that we should just smash all the beautiful architecture inside lovely church buildings?

Does it mean that you should throw out your nativity set? Well, no. But if we think that these things will help us understand the real God, know him and worship him, then we're deluding ourselves.

When it was our 10th wedding anniversary, we spent some days in Rome. And my favorite place to visit in Rome was the Vatican Museum. Which is part of a tour of St. Peter's Basilica and then around the museum.

And inside St. Peter's, there was a massive long queue. I didn't want to wait in the queue, so I walked up to the front just to see what was at the end of this queue. And people were queuing up to get to a stone statue of St. Peter.

And then when whoever it was got to the front of the queue, they would either kiss or touch or rub St. Peter's feet. And so much so that his toes were gone because the stone had been rubbed so

much.

[ 20 : 46 ] It was all worn away. And yet no matter how spiritual it seems or how it makes people feel when they touch a statue like this, it's the kind of thing that the second commandment is warning against.

Kissing, touching, revering any kind of image or statue doesn't help us worship the right God in the right way. So how do we worship God in the right way?

Well, the answer is we worship God in the right way through Jesus Christ. Because God has revealed himself to us in the Bible and supremely in the person of his son, Jesus Christ.

God has revealed himself to us in his written word and also in the living word, Jesus. So in John chapter 1, we read this. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only son who came from the father, full of grace and truth. Then later in John chapter 1, no one has ever seen God, but God, the one and only who is at the father's side, has made him known.

[ 21 : 58 ] And then later in John's gospel, Jesus said, anyone who has seen me has seen the father. So in the second commandment, God told Israel not to make an image of him because God had planned to make an image of himself in Jesus.

And that's why we shouldn't make an image of God, because all our attempts to picture God will be wrong. Instead, we need to let God show himself to us.

And he has in Jesus Christ. And so there's no excuse for getting God wrong. All the guessing games about God, all the confusion about God is over in Jesus Christ.

Because we've got an image in Jesus that has been displayed in human history for all the world to see. So in Colossians, we read that he is the image of the invisible God.

So when we look at Jesus, we see God. Jesus is the true image of God. In Hebrews chapter 1, we read that the sun is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.

[ 23 : 14 ] Which then raises the question, well, why has God taken the initiative to reveal himself to us? Well, God has done this not just so we can know what he is like, but so that we can know him for who he is.

And so that we can be brought back into a relationship with him, because that is why we were created. Way back at the beginning of the Bible, in Genesis chapter 1, we read that God created male and female in his own image.

And so we were supposed to reflect God's image in the world. And yet we know that we have spoiled his image by trying to live life without him.

And so our sinful rebellion means we don't reflect God's image as we should. And that's why we deserve God's punishment. And yet the good news is that God sent his son, Jesus, into the world to repair his image in us.

And Jesus does this through his perfect life of loving obedience, through his death on the cross for our sin, and through his resurrection from the dead.

[ 24 : 28 ] And so we will never worship the right God in the right way unless we do it through Jesus. And when we come to God through Jesus Christ, then God comes to live in us by his Holy Spirit.

And then when his spirit is within us, he works to recreate us after his image so that we might then reflect him. And that is what it means to be truly human.

That is what it means to be alive. It's to reflect our creator God, the God who loves us, the God who made us, the God who saves us through his son, Jesus Christ.

Because we were made to know him, to love him, to worship him, and to reflect him in this world.

And we do it through his son, Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

Savior. Savior. Savior.

[ 25 : 46 ] Savior. Savior.