

Walking with Jesus Through Sinai:

Seeking Moral Clarity in an Age of Chaos with the 10 Commandments

CPC Adult Sunday Studies Fall 2024

7 - Second Commandment, part 2

## **Worshipping God as Other than Who He is & Breaking the Second Commandment**

**Review** - from treating God as God most basically in the 1st Commandment, we moved into worshipping God as God alone has directed in the 2nd. Last week was all the ways God has instituted us to worship him. This week is all the ways we violate that.

**2nd Commandment** - *“Exodus 20:4-6 - “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. 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.”*

### **Major Assumptions Underlying this Commandment**

#### **1. Only God has the right to make an image of Himself!**

1. Gen. 1 - *“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.”*
2. So the temptation in the Garden - *“your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God”* (Gen. 3.5) - was so heinous because they ALREADY were like God! Sin is an attempt to not be content in being an image, derived from God, and wanting to be fully independent of God.

#### **2. Jesus better be more than human for Jews to worship Him!**

1. *“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. . . . in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell . . . in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.”* (Col. 1.15, 19, 2.9).
2. The Incarnation is a “scandal” just as Christ crucified is, in the sense that Jews were uniquely and passionately monotheistic, yet they worshipped Jesus!

## Sins Forbidden

### **Q. 109. What are the sins forbidden in the second commandment?**

A. The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, counselling, commanding, using, and anywise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself; tolerating a false religion; the making any representation of God, of all, or of any of the three Persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever; all worshipping of it, or God in it or by it; the making of any representation of feigned deities, and all worship of them, or service belonging to them; all superstitious devices, corrupting the worship of God, adding to it, or taking from it, whether invented and taken up of ourselves, or received by tradition from others, though under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretence whatsoever; simony; sacrilege; all neglect, contempt, hindering, and opposing the worship and ordinances which God hath appointed.

#### **1. Improper Worship**

1. See last week on what God instituted for worship
2. Notice the assumption of our sinful nature to worship God in all sorts of ways that he does not want or deserve. We are **constantly imagining God is like us, and that's always worse for us!**
3. Compare Romans 1.18-32. Also, "all neglect, contempt, hindering..."

#### **2. Any Representation**

1. Traditionally, this was understood to mean the Father only, but see below on Jesus. The incarnation of Jesus is the invisible made visible, without any loss.
2. Israel did not see a form at Mt. Sinai, they only heard a voice. Seeing God as God sees himself would destroy them.
  1. Again, we must consider the wonder of the incarnation, which reveals God to us *fully*, yet in a way that humans can handle (Phil. 2.6).

#### **3. Any Superstition**

1. "corrupting the worship of God, adding to it, or taking from it, whether invented and taken up of ourselves, or received by tradition from others, though under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretence whatsoever"

2. This includes attempted **manipulation** of God for other purposes - "Simony", named for Simon in Acts 8 - *"he offered them money, saying, 'Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'"*

## On Images of Jesus

### 1. Danger in worship

1. We have exactly **zero** physical descriptions of what Jesus looked like (other than Isa. 53.2, which basically says he was ugly! *"he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him"*). That cannot be accidental.
2. Our sinful nature wants to make God in our image, so we tend to depict Jesus as looking like us. Historically, this has done incredible damage in implying that some cultures are closer to Jesus than others. Consider the famous scene in "Malcolm X" when the preacher points to a blue-eyed, blonde-haired picture of Jesus to exclude Malcolm.
  1. *"Body of Christ"* - and yet, theologically, you could also say that Jesus does look like *all* of us, since we're mystically united to Him as the body of Christ.

### 2. Danger with no depictions at all => Docetic heresy

1. We must always remember that Jesus Christ is fully human and fully God.
  1. The opposite extreme of never having portraits or images of Jesus can lead to forgetting that Jesus the human is at the same time the full revelation of God. Eastern Orthodoxy would argue that to deny images of Jesus is to deny the incarnation. It's also hard to read all the depictions of Jesus in the New Testament without also thinking about what the man Jesus looked like doing those things.
  1. We would simply say that no image is an accurate or trustworthy depiction, and since they're riddled with dangers and mistakes, without any authority from Scripture, we ought not to include them in worship. Their use, especially in children's literature, can be very important in making Jesus feel real, always with the caveat that this is not meant to portray what Jesus looked like.

**On Worshipping IN Jesus** (from last week's handout)

**The only way to uphold the 2nd commandment is to worship Jesus - in, with, and through his worship of the Father.**

*"We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a minister in the holy places, in the true tent that the Lord set up, not man. . . . For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. . . . Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water." (Hebrews 8.1-2, 9.24, 10.19, cf. 12.22-24)*

- James Torrance comments, "The worship and mission of the church are the gift of **participating** through the Holy Spirit in the incarnate Son's **communion with the Father** and the Son's mission from the Father to the world . . . There is only one true Priest through whom and with whom we draw near to God our Father. . . That is why the Reformers, in their critique of certain medieval concepts of priesthood, stressed the sole priesthood of Christ, and reinterpreted the church as a **royal priesthood participating in the priesthood of Christ**. . . . Christ is presented to us as the Son living a life of union and communion with the Father in the Spirit, presenting himself in our humanity through the Spirit to the Father on behalf of humankind. . . . He receives the Spirit from the Father for us, vicariously, in his humanity, that out of his fullness he might baptize the church by the Spirit at Pentecost into a life of shared communion, mission, and service." (Torrance, *Worship, Community and the Triune God of Grace*)
  - Notice the so-called "**priesthood of all believers**" does NOT emphasize the individual believer as much as the fact that there is only one priest, in whom all believers participate, and which also implies there's only one mediator, Jesus Christ.
- Christian, Trinitarian worship is not simply our duty, our offering, our prayers, with a sermon that motivates us, rather it is a **double movement** of God to humans and humans to God; or, in other words, from the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit **and** to the Father, through the Son, in the Spirit.