

Extremes of Idolatry

Adding to God's Word Sets Up a False God

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Given 22-Jul-06; Tape #785

As you are probably aware, e-mails provide me with a great deal of fodder for sermons—and today is no exception. The internet tends to expose us to all sorts of people with various beliefs and ideas. And I would have to say that the vast majority are not as interested in reading what we have to say as they are with finding out how much we agree with what *they* believe. Then, when they find something with which they do not agree, they tell us that we need to turn from our evil ways.

Perhaps my impression is overly cynical. Perhaps instead of the *vast* majority it should just be, "the plain old majority," that is like this. But I am convinced that only a slim number of visitors to our websites are actually seeking the truth. Most, I think, are seeking *agreement*. They are looking for a group, a church, or a ministry (whichever way you want to put it) who believe what they believe. Or maybe they are religious hobbyists—those who pursue religious ideas like people who collect stamps, butterflies, baseball cards, or model trains.

Our teachings intrigue these people because they are a bit different from the run-of-the-mill Christianity that is out there. And so many will ask questions, but that is about as far as it goes. They are only interested in being interested and are intrigued by new ideas. They do not want to be convinced at all, but rather they just like the excitement of hearing something new. (Where have we heard that before?) And soon they are off to some new sight, some new place—wherever some other interesting idea may appear.

But then there are those who try and convict us of error and will generally use one of three approaches. I will just call them approach 1, approach 2, and approach 3—very simple.

The first one (approach # 1) is the obnoxious and self-righteous, "you-are-wrong-and-headed-straight-to-hell," approach. These are blatant in their assertion that we will never "get to heaven" with the doctrines we espouse. This group is fortunate to be sent a response as I usually just hit the "delete" button. They do not warrant a reply.

Approach # 2 is the slick, salesman-like, "please-correct-your-doctrine-before-you-land-in-hell," approach. They have the same intent as the first group, but they are a little nicer about it. These e-mails are dripping with unctuous, pseudo-concern and deceptive reasoning. When I receive one of these I have a desire to say, "Get behind me, Satan!" I feel the need to take a shower after having read it. These will usually receive a response, but it is a rather terse reply because I do not necessarily want them to write back. They are not any more interested in hearing the truth than the first group.

Approach # 3 is the gentle, concerned "here-is-the-proof-you-are-wrong-and-going-to-hell," approach. This approach usually merits a counter-argument and is the easiest to take and deal with because they, at least, seem to be concerned about us and want to gently turn us from the

error of our ways.

I recently received a # 2 and a # 3 which I think are worth answering in a sermon. I combined them for this particular message because they are both fundamentally on the same subject. In both of these cases they take one of God's Ten Commandments to such an extreme that, for them, the commandment itself has become their idol!

The thinking goes something like this: If the truth is good, then following on to extreme terms must be better; if something is good, then a lot of it is REALLY GOOD! Despite showing a desire to please God in what they believe, such thinking contains elements of self-righteousness and Pharisaism and exposes a great deal of misunderstanding of God's intent with regard to these particular commandments.

These extreme views question our teaching of both the second and third commandments. And I want to show that such views are, in actuality, a form of that which these commandments were designed to avoid—IDOLATRY!

We will see that by taking these commandments to such an extent one is committing the very idolatry that God wants us to avoid!

What better place to begin than in Exodus 20 and the Ten Commandments? I will be responding to one woman's e-mail (and her approach # 3—the kind, gentle approach) concerning the second 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; you shall not bow down to them nor 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 fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

The e-mail I received from this woman was sincere. She wrote that she agreed with everything on our websites *except* our approach to the second commandment. She began with a spot-on re-stating of the second commandment, but from that point she immediately veered into the right-hand ditch. Her fundamental argument was that God, by virtue of this commandment, forbids ALL two and three-dimensional images or likenesses of anything and everything. She asserts that no one can draw a figure, paint, sculpt, carve, or in any way make an image or a likeness of *anything!* The first counter-point that popped into my mind was immediately disregarded and shot down as I continued reading through her argument. She writes, "And do not give me the usual line that God says that, '...only those images that one would worship.' That is 'bull,'" she says.

Right there my argument in response was dismissed even before I could answer her—because that IS the answer to her question! But she asserts that it does not matter whether or not one worships the image in question—NO IMAGES ARE ALLOWED—period! The message took a sad turn as she went on to make her argument and relate how she had to throw out pictures of her

children. She had thrown out every picture, every image, and had gotten rid of her television. She trashed every image she could find, arguing that God is a jealous God and that He would brook no rival. He will not contend with any kind of image. "Besides," she wrote, "nothing that man could carve, sculpt, paint, or draw approaches to God's perfection. So why tempt oneself?"

She goes on to mention that God repeats His command in Deuteronomy 4, which takes pretty much the whole chapter addressing engraved and carved images. And she states that in Deuteronomy 4 and 5 (and more than 100 times throughout the Old Testament alone) God condemns bowing down to or even carving an image. All of these assertions are correct. Then she goes on to say that the Jews understand this. They allow no images except for what God allows by instruction. She then refers to the construction of the Tabernacle and to the Temple where God does allow various images.

I want to quickly go through these because I want us to see them—and there are many!

Exodus 36:35 And he made a veil of blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine woven linen; it was worked with an artistic design of cherubim.

Exodus 37:1, 6-9 Then Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood; two and a half cubits was its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height...He also made the mercy seat of pure gold; two and a half cubits was its length and a cubit and a half its width. He made two cherubim of beaten gold; he made them of one piece at the two ends of the mercy seat: one cherub at one end on this side, and the other cherub at the other end on that side. He made the cherubim at the two ends of one piece with the mercy seat. The cherubim spread out their wings above, and covered the mercy seat with their wings. They faced one another; the faces of the cherubim were toward the mercy seat.

Exodus 39:25-26 And they made bells of pure gold, and put the bells between the pomegranates on the hem of the robe all around between the pomegranates: a bell and a pomegranate, a bell and a pomegranate, all around the hem of the robe to minister in, as the LORD had commanded Moses. [This is obviously part of the priestly garments.]

We have seen woven cherubim; we have seen carved cherubim overlaid with gold; and now we have seen bells and pomegranates on the hem of this garment. And now let us take a look at the Temple.

I Kings 6:18 The inside of the temple was cedar, carved with ornamental buds and open flowers. All was cedar; there was no stone to be seen.

I Kings 6:23, 25 Inside the inner sanctuary he made two cherubim of olive wood, each ten cubits high. [Do you understand how large these

are—these images of cherubim at ten cubits high? (With each cubit being about eighteen inches—you do the math!) These are rather large statues being described!] The other cherub was ten cubits; both cherubs were of the same size and shape.

That is all we needed to know—that there were big cherubim for the Temple!

I Kings 6:29, 32, 35 Then he carved all the walls of the temple all around, both the inner and outer sanctuaries, with carved figures of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers...The two doors were of olive wood; and he carved on them figures of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers, and overlaid them with gold; and he spread gold on the cherubim and on the palm trees...Then he carved cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers on them, and overlaid them with gold applied evenly on the carved work.

I Kings 7:18-20 So he made the pillars, and two rows of pomegranates above the network all around to cover the capitals that were on top; and thus he did for the other capital. The capitals which were on top of the pillars in the hall were in the shape of lilies, four cubits. The capitals on the two pillars also had pomegranates above, by the convex surface which was next to the network; and there were two hundred such pomegranates in rows on each of the capitals all around. [And then the setting up of the pillars is described.]

In verses 24-26 we read of the brazen sea with the oxen—the sea of cast bronze it says in verse 23.

I Kings 7:24-29, 31, 36 Below its brim were ornamental buds encircling it all around, ten to a cubit, all the way around the Sea. [This was a huge laver—a big bowl of water is what is being described!] It stood on twelve oxen: three looking toward the north, three looking toward the west, three looking toward the south, and three looking toward the east; the Sea was set upon them, and all their back parts pointed inward. [So these bulls were looking outward.] It was a handbreadth thick [Wow!]; and its brim was shaped like the brim of a cup, like a lily blossom. It contained two thousand baths. [It could hold quite a bit of water!] He also made ten carts of bronze; four cubits was the length of each cart, four cubits its width, and three cubits its height. And this was the design of the carts: they had panels, and the panels were between frames; on the panels that were between the frames were lions, oxen, and cherubim. [And it goes on to describe more detail.] Its opening inside the crown at the top was one cubit in diameter; and the opening was round, shaped like a pedestal, one and

a half cubits in outside diameter; and also on the opening were engravings, but the panels were square, not round...On the plates of its flanges and on its panels he engraved cherubim, lions, and palm trees, wherever there was a clear space on each, with wreaths all around.

Do you understand how much ornamentation there was involved with the Temple and on the Tabernacle? There was a great deal of artistry involved in the construction of these places of worship and in the making of all their accouterments. The detail continues in II Chronicles 3.

II Chronicles 3:5-7 The larger room he paneled with cypress which he overlaid with fine gold, and he carved palm trees and chainwork on it. And he decorated the house with precious stones for beauty, and the gold was gold from Parvaim. He also overlaid the house--the beams and doorposts, its walls and doors--with gold; and he carved cherubim on the walls.

And it does not end there—as we shall see concerning the artistry for the millennial Temple which is described in Ezekiel 41.

Ezekiel 41:20, 25 From the floor to the space above the door, and on the wall of the sanctuary, cherubim and palm trees were carved...Cherubim and palm trees were carved on the doors of the temple just as they were carved on the walls.

The ornamentation that God commanded be done on the Tabernacle, Solomon's Temple, and the Millennial Temple was extremely ornate and extensive. In the one instance we saw that wherever there was an open space there was some image or design that was carved.

Is God a hypocrite? Does God allow ornamentation only on His place and no other? When the Shekinah glory came and entered the Tabernacle and the Temple it showed God's approval on both. So He obviously felt that artistry was good. But did He condemn "freelance" artistry? I do not think so.

We will go back to the book of Numbers and the example I had previously skipped over. But I did want to mention this because it was something God had commanded.

Numbers 21:6-9 So the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and many of the people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, "We have sinned, for we have spoken against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD that He take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. Then the LORD said to Moses, "Make a fiery serpent, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and

so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.

Now, of a truth, this later became an object of worship in Israel—idolatry! Be that as it may, it was God who had ordered this bronze serpent to be made in the first place. It was an image of a living creature—an image (supposedly) forbidden in the Second Commandment—but it was *not* forbidden in the Second Commandment, as we will see.

In I Kings 10 we read an account of the events surrounding the visit of the Queen of Sheba and we, of course, are still in the reign of Solomon. We read of the conversations she had with Solomon and the gifts that she brought. And then the end of the chapter talks about Solomon's wealth. But what I want us to observe is in verse 18:

I Kings 10:18-20 Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold. The throne had six steps, and the top of the throne was round at the back; there were armrests on either side of the place of the seat, and two lions stood beside the armrests. [These were not real lions. These were *carved* lions, *statues* of lions.] Twelve lions stood there, one on each side of the six steps; nothing like this had been made for any other kingdom.

This was a huge throne! It was a terrific edifice in and of itself and was made of ivory and gold and ornamented with these great statues of lions! I get the impression that these were life-sized lions. But they were carved work and not something that God had commanded. They were not something to be used for Temple worship or for the Tabernacle. This was something Solomon did for his own throne. And there was no word of condemnation. As a matter of fact, this whole chapter (from verse 14 on) has an almost bragging or boastful tone. The writer here (ultimately God) is saying, "Look how great Solomon is!" God had given him all this wealth and he was able to do all these things. But hidden in this historic account is just a small detail showing that God did not mind that there were carved lions displayed on either side of this throne.

Now for an example during the life of Jesus Christ—this is where the Pharisees came and asked whether or not it was lawful to pay taxes to Caesar.

Matthew 22:18-21 But Jesus perceived their wickedness, and said, "Why do you test Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the tax money." So they brought Him a denarius [a coin]. And He said to them, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

There was an image on that coin and, evidently, Jesus handled it. He probably handled a great deal of money during His physical life. If He knew He had given a commandment saying there

were to be no images of any kind—ever—would He have even looked upon that money? None of the gospel writers took this occasion to condemn images like this. It is clear that the image that was on this coin—this tiny piece of metal—was for non-religious use. It simply *identified* the coin. It was Caesar's coin. No one was going to bow down to the little picture of this Latin man on a coin. There are, of course, a great many people who do worship money, but they are not worshipping the little images on it. We do not worship George Washington when we pull a quarter out of our change purse. The image is simply a means of identification and perfectly acceptable in God's sight. This same incident is recorded in both Mark and Luke and nothing further is added. Jesus used this as an illustration.

Paul, in Acts 17, had a perfect opportunity to condemn artwork, but does not take it.

Acts 17:22-23 Then Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, "Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you.

So he goes on, then, to make quite a point out of this altar—a place of pagan worship.

Acts 17:29 Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.

What does he do? He links these carved images, particularly the one TO THE UNKNOWN GOD, to their paganism. But the point he is making is that they do not know the TRUE God. And in a way this altar pointed them in the direction of the true God. But does he condemn "art and man's devising?" No, he really does not condemn it. The only thing he condemns is art and man's devising in making an image to represent deity.

Going into Athens, where he was, there was art everywhere. Some of the world's most sought after museum pieces, even today, are ones that were probably standing within Paul's sight at this particular time. But he did not condemn them. He walked among them, studied them, considered them, and used them, then, to make a spiritual point. He, indeed, condemns idolatry, but he does not condemn carving, sculpting, painting, or drawing.

This is the same principle found in Romans 1:23. Condemnation stems from people's attempt to worship God through animals and other created things, not the making of artistic carvings, sculptures, paintings, or drawings. It is when these works of art and man's devising are linked with idolatry that is the bad part—when it is linked with idolatry!

Another point along these same lines is found back in Exodus 31.

Exodus 31:2-6 [God is speaking] See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled

him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship. And I, indeed I, have appointed with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have put wisdom in the hearts of all who are gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have commanded you:

It was God who had placed special skills within these men. And He even gave them extra of His Spirit to enhance the skills they may have already had. They were given talents in the fields of making, carving, creating, designing, drawing, and, as we saw in the one example, weaving. But they made artistic works.

If we go to chapter 35 we find that this is repeated.

Exodus 35:30-36:1 And Moses said to the children of Israel, "See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and He has filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom and understanding, in knowledge and all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of artistic workmanship. And He has put in his heart the ability to teach, [not only to DO these things, but to TEACH, as well] in him and Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan. He has filled them with skill to do all manner of work of the engraver and the designer and the tapestry maker, in blue, purple, and scarlet thread, and fine linen, and of the weaver—those who do every work and those who design artistic works. And Bezalel and Aholiab, and every gifted artisan in whom the LORD has put wisdom and understanding, to know how to do all manner of work for the service of the sanctuary, shall do according to all that the LORD has commanded."

This expands upon the account given in chapter 31. God gave these men creative abilities—and then He enhanced them in order to accomplish the work on the Tabernacle with as high a quality of craftsmanship as possible. And He also gave them the ability to teach others to do such things.

My question is, "Why would God give a man such talent for a specific work, in this case it was the Tabernacle, and then forbid him to use it for anything else?" If his grandson would want a little carved horse or some other toy carved out of wood, would he have to say, "No, I cannot do that; I can only use my gift in service to God and to carve and overlay with gold so they may be used in the Tabernacle?"

Let us use music as an example—which is also a fine art. Would God give someone the ability to sing and then forbid them to sing anything but hymns? They could not even sing "Row, Row

Your Boat!" As a writer or a speaker am I, or anyone who does such a thing, to use these talents just for church activities? It does not make any sense. Certainly they should be used properly, but there are multitudes of secular uses for such talents that are not ungodly in themselves.

Let us take this woman's reasoning one step further. Were she to rid her entire life of all images (as she so wants to do) she could not even use the computer on which she sent the e-mail. All Windows and Apple computers have interfaces based on images—and they are called ICONS! If she were to click on one would she be committing idolatry? According to her reasoning she would be! It is that silly!

She could not buy any products with a picture on them. She could not even go in the store! That would be an assault on her beliefs, an insult and an offense because of all the images that she would see there. Our entire society is based on advertising—which uses images. She would have to get the generic stuff all the time, the knock-offs. She could not drive because many of the signs have images on them—people walking, deer crossings, all kinds of stuff. She could barely do anything. She would have to even stop reading because words are made up of inscribed symbols to which we have attached both sound and meaning. The little letters we see in our Bibles are images. Everything we SEE is an image.

God is not dumb. Do we realize how dull life would be without images, likenesses, art, or pictures? It is just a ridiculous concept when you take it just a little bit further and show the ultimate effort she would have to make. If she has already gone that far, she is going to have to eventually get rid of every image. That is what she is, in effect, saying, "God allows NO IMAGES, no likenesses of anything that is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters under the earth—NOTHING—not a fish, not a bird, not a lion, not a star, not a mountain, not a flower—NOTHING!" Silly, is it not?

We will read Leviticus 26:1 again, without the extraneous matter, and we will see what God meant with this second commandment. It is very simple.

Leviticus 26:1 You shall not make idols for yourselves; neither a carved image nor a sacred pillar shall you rear up for yourselves; nor shall you set up an engraved stone in your land, to bow down to it; for I am the LORD your God.

She got turned around because, in Exodus 20, verse 4 is separate from verse 5. This must be, I think, the way it was because verse 4 says that "you shall not make unto yourselves any graven image of any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or the earth beneath, or the waters under the earth—semicolon. Verse 5 says, "you shall not bow down to them nor serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God," etc.

She got spooked by the incremental number change of the verses. But it goes right on through. As a matter of fact, the Hebrew is constructed such that every part of that commandment is supposed to be read straight through. And the intent is that each of the verbs be added to the previous one. So we are not to carve an image—AND—we are not to bow down and worship it!

These ideas are linked together in this command, the intent of which forbids anyone from carving an image with the aim of bowing down in worship to it. Simple!

The basic understanding of the second commandment is that we are not to use our imaginations and skill in an attempt to depict GOD in any way—as it would either be a lie or, at the very least, terribly inadequate. Nor are we to create an idolatrous image of anything else to worship. We are to understand both things: We are not supposed to make an image of what we conceive of God (As in the incident of the golden calf, where Israel made an image of a bull to represent God.) Nor are we to do as the pagans and come up with something of our own creative devising and worship it as a god. But God does not forbid artistic representations of people, plants, animals, mountains, sunsets, stars, planets, galaxies, or whatever. It is only as they are used in an act of worship.

As a summary, this command deals with the WAY in which we worship. God will not be worshiped with man-made objects. That is not how He has set things up. He wants to be worshiped, "in spirit and in truth" (John 4: 24), not through an idol or some sort of icon or representation of Himself. It is not the way He wants to do it—and so He FORBIDS idols or icons of any form or shape. He wants to be worshiped as we are commanded—and we cannot humanly represent God's form. Any other way, He says, is idolatry. But images used otherwise, likenesses otherwise created and appreciated, are perfectly fine!

Let us now look at this other e-mail I received concerning the *third* commandment.

Exodus 20:7 You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.

This commandment undergirds supposedly the argument that many people who adhere to the "Sacred Name" doctrine have. Simply stated, this doctrine holds that one can only address God by the Hebrew name YHWH—and that Jesus can only be addressed by the Hebrew *Yeshua*. This is the gist of the Sacred Names doctrine. They will not use "God;" they will not use "LORD;" they will not use anything but *Yah*, *Yahweh*, or *Yeshua*. They will use *Messiah* because it is Hebrew, but they will not use *Christ* because it is from the Greek. They do not address "God the Father." They do not address "Jesus Christ the Son." They will not use "Theos" or "Iesous" because they are Greek words and not Hebrew. They use *Yeshua* and *Yeshua Messiah* and *Yah* and *Elohim*.

God will not, according to them, respond to any name but the Hebrew ones—especially since the other names are names of "pagan" gods! This is the reasoning behind the doctrine. Leviticus 19: 12 gives a restatement of the third commandment, what I would call the "dual sense" of the third commandment, and it is simply written.

Leviticus 19:12 And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.

This could very well be called a commentary on the third commandment. It expands things out

to help us better understand what is meant by it. The dual sense, then, is that we are not to use God's name when swearing in a way that we do not mean. We often see, in the Old Testament, God's name being used in vows and swearing, but they were sincere and God upheld that, and that was fine. We also know that in the New Testament Jesus tells us to "swear not at all." So this has been changed somewhat and He does not want us to swear at all. He wants our "yes to be yes and our no to be no." There is no need for swearing because we can have the character of God in us and mean what we say.

The other sense of this commandment is the profaning of His name through speech and/or conduct. We are not to use God's name lightly in our speech. We are not to use it in any way that is going to bring dishonor to Him. And it also includes, then, our conduct. We are not to call ourselves "Christian" or "God's people" and then do things that are going to bring some sort of dishonor or infamy, by association, upon God. We are not to carry the name of Christ, we are not to carry the name of God, as part of our own identity, in a way that will dishonor God.

This commandment does, indeed, cover such untoward behavior as profanity and euphemisms for God's names. These are profane uses of His name. But, if you notice the wording, neither one of these (Leviticus 19: 12 or Exodus 20: 7) says anything about *which name* of God to use nor the *correct pronunciation* of His name, or names. It only says to not take it in vain. Frankly, by saying that this commandment covers these things is ADDING to the Word of God! This commandment does not cover the pronunciation of His name nor does it identify a particular name—it only says, "the LORD *your* God."

John Calvin writes in his commentary on Exodus 20: 7,

"It is silly and childish to restrict this to the name "Jehovah" (or Yahweh) as if God's majesty were confined to letters or syllables. But, whereas His essence is invisible, His name is set before us as an image insofar as God manifests Himself to us, and is distinctly made known to us, by His own marks, just as men are, each by his own name. On this ground, Christ teaches that God's name is comprehended in the heavens, the earth, the Temple, the altar [he cites Matthew 5: 33-37] because His glory is conspicuous in them. Consequently, God's name is profaned whenever any detraction is made from His supreme wisdom, infinite power, justice, truth, clemency, and rectitude. If a short definition be preferred, let us say that His name is what Paul calls 'gnostos' or 'ginosko,' or 'that which may be known of Him.'" [He cites Romans 1: 19]

What Calvin is saying is that God's name encompasses all that has been revealed about Him through His word and that, when we become aware of it, we should not profane what we have come to know about Him. He makes this extremely broad and elevates this commandment to a much higher spiritual level than, I think, the Sacred Name people do. This commandment extends to the point of our imitating God in anything and everything we do. And we should do nothing that will bring any kind of detriment or blasphemy to what God is—simply stated: God's

name represents what He is. There are no biblical commands that restrict God's name to *Yahweh* or *Yah*.

Some use Psalm 68: 4 in support of their argument.

Psalm 68: 4 Sing to God, sing praises to His name; extol Him who rides on the clouds, by His name YAH, and rejoice before Him.

Is this a command to use only the name, "Yah?" It only says to "extol Him by His name, Yah." We can give Him praise through His name, Yah, but it does not say that we can *only* praise Him through that name.

Psalm 83: 18 is another scripture used in support of the Sacred Names doctrine

Psalm 83:18 That they may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth.

They use this to teach that His *only* name is Yahweh, but this is really not what it says. This scripture is basically saying that, "men may know that You *alone*, whose name is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth." The word "alone" has actually been placed in the wrong position. It does not refer to His name, but to Him being the only one of that name. So this verse does not work in support of the doctrine either.

It is interesting to see those who believe in the Sacred Names tie themselves in knots over such scriptures as Isaiah 7: 14

Isaiah 7: 14 Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name [Yeshua? Yah? Yahweh? No.] Immanuel [God with us].

I suppose this name is okay and we can add it to the list. How about chapter 63 and verse 16?

Isaiah 63:16 Doubtless You are our Father, though Abraham was ignorant of us, and Israel does not acknowledge us. You, O LORD, are our Father; our Redeemer from Everlasting is Your name.

So let us call Him "Our Redeemer from Everlasting." This is what He says His name is. So let us add this to the list of names we can call Him. And how about Zechariah 6: 12 which says:

Zechariah 6:12 Then speak to him, saying, ` Thus says the LORD of hosts, saying: "Behold, the Man whose name is the BRANCH!

I suppose we can add 'the BRANCH' to the list of acceptable names. I am being somewhat facetious, but what I am getting at from these examples is that God says His name is many

things: the LORD, the LORD God, the LORD God of Hosts, El Shaddai (the Almighty), He is "the LORD who does this" and "the LORD who does that:" the LORD who heals, the LORD who is there (I have a list in the back of my Bible of all these names of God and those are just His names. He has hundreds of titles beyond His names).

Each one of these names and titles says something about Him. They tell us what He is like. They help us to better understand Him. And we can use these names in prayer. Jesus directs us to pray, "Our Father, who art in heaven, *hallowed by your name!*" To which name is He referring? He has dozens, scores, upon which we can meditate and hallow. The language in which we utter these names makes no difference whatsoever. It is the meaning of the name that is important for us to understand.

I do agree, however, that LORD (as it is in most of our Old Testaments) is not the best translation of YHWH (the tetragrammaton). And if you want to know a good translation of this it was Mr. Armstrong's use of "Eternal." That is far better than the word LORD.

Lord, to us, brings to mind one who is part of the aristocracy or one who is a master. And that is not wrong because God calls Himself our Lord and Master in other ways. There is the Hebrew "adon" which means lord. The word "baal" also means lord or master. It says in Hosea that "no longer will they call me Baali, but they will call me Ishi"—they will not call me 'lord,' they will call me 'husband.' But, like I said, it is "Eternal" that is probably the best interpretation of the YHWH in the English. That word in the Hebrew basically means "I am" or "I always exist" or "I have always existed," "I am the Eternal one." Mr. Armstrong's understanding of that was correct.

By the way, God is not only called LORD in Hebrew (I used the word 'Adon'), but also in Greek. The Lord Jesus Christ is "kurios" and means "lord" or "master." God is also called "deity," that is "God," in both the Hebrew (the word, El, or in the plural, Elohim) and in the Greek (Theos).

If there is no condemnation in the New Testament for using "Theos" in place of "El" then what is the problem? Why can we not use "god" in place of "Theos?" We are just changing the word from Hebrew to Greek to English. They all mean the same thing—Deity, the Supreme Deity. But for some reason the Sacred Name people condemn such a thing. "No, we cannot use 'god.' That is pagan. We cannot even use 'Theos.'

My dad was telling me that someone had e-mailed him on this question asking him, "How do you know that is what the original says? The original could have been in all Hebrew." That is ridiculous! As far as we know only one of the books of the New Testament was originally written in a non-Greek tongue and that was the book of Matthew. Other than that everything else was written in Greek. Paul, the other apostles, and Luke all used Theos, Kurios, and all the other Greek equivalents of the Hebrew.

Some argue that "Jesus" and "God" are both names of pagan gods. The word, "god," was used by the Germanic peoples in the general sense of deity and they obviously applied it to pagan gods since—THEY WERE PAGANS! But that was the word for deity—god—"Gott." And, since English is predominantly a Germanic language, it has come down to us as our word for deity. It has the same meaning as Theos and El. The fact that the word has been used for pagan deities does not taint it in the least. In fact, we still use the word in this manner. We use it in reference to the true God and capitalize the "G." When referring to any other god (whether it be

someone's Mustang convertible in the parking lot or whether we are talking about Thor) we use the same word with a lower case "g." But it is the same word. We just differentiate in this way and there is nothing wrong with that. If you go into both the Old and New Testaments you will find that God does the same thing there—Theos and El/Elohim will be used for both the true God and in reference to idols. Human language is imperfect at best. It is the meaning of the communication which is important.

As for the name of Jesus, no etymologist worth his salt would say that it is derived from the name of Zeus as is carelessly assumed (Zeus being, of course, the chief god of the Greek pantheon). As far as I know (and perhaps Dr. Maas will correct me on this if I am wrong), as language has evolved, "z" (as in Zeus) never changes to "y" (as in Yeshua) or "I" (as in the Greek Iesous).

The accepted etymology of "Jesus" is that of Yehoshua being transliterated from the Hebrew, or Aramaic, into Greek as Iesous (ee-a-soos). This, then, has been contracted to the way in which most pronounce it (ya-soos) giving the "i" a "y" sound. As this word came down through the Latin and, then, in contact with the Germanic languages, it became "Jesu"—as in the Bach composition, "Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring." And, over the course of time, this further evolved into the English "Jesus." It is the same word, but has only morphed as it has been transmitted from the Greek to the Latin through our Germanic languages and, finally, into the English itself (which, too, has changed a great deal over the last 600 to 800 years). And so we now have, in the modern English, JESUS.

To say that "Jesus" is a pagan name is linguistic ignorance. The apostles to whom we refer as "John" and "James" would probably not respond were we to call them by those names. The pronunciation of their names has changed, too, over the past two thousand years. John was "Yochanan" and James was "Yachob" (Jacob). Their names by which we refer to them are totally different from what they were used to hearing and this is only because language changes over time. And this does not make Yochanan and Yachob any better than John and James (or Jacob)—it is simply changed!

What I am trying to arrive at through all of this is that these people have, in actuality, set up an idol for themselves.

We will look at an example in Jeremiah 7 and see how the Jews did this with the Temple. And then we will use this as an analogy for what the Sacred Names people have done.

Jeremiah 7:1-7 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Stand in the gate of the LORD'S house, and proclaim there this word, and say, ` Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah who enter in at these gates to worship the LORD!" [These people were doing something *right* in a sense—they were trying to worship God. But they had *added* something to the worship of God.] Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. [Something was wrong. Even though they were trying to worship God, they were not doing it properly.] Do

not trust in these lying words, saying, `The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these.' [What did God want?] For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor, if you do not oppress the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place, or walk after other gods to your hurt, then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.

They had placed their trust in the Temple as referenced in verse 4: "The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD are these." They were saying, in effect, "It does not necessarily matter what we do because the temple of the LORD is right here and He is not going to let anything happen to us because He will not destroy His Temple. We are the chosen people and it does not matter what we do. God *loves* us. We will just come in and worship God like we normally do and He will be okay with that. This is the Temple!"

God says, however, "Thoroughly amend your ways and your doings." He was interested in something entirely different. But they had made the Temple into their idol. They thought that the Temple was going to save them and that the temple was going to give them a place in the world and that the temple was going to shield them from destruction. And what they did on the other six days of the week did not seem to matter. But it did matter to God!

So they elevated the Temple, but did nothing about what God had actually commanded—which was for them to change their ways and their doings, to love Him and to love their neighbor. And so He tells them in verse 8, "Do not trust in lying words that cannot profit." He gets right to the heart of the problem—they had *deceived* themselves, or been deceived. They had come up with an idea that was not going to profit them. And this idea was that the temple, not God, was, in fact, their savior.

Jeremiah 7:12 But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it because of the wickedness of My people Israel.

He said, "Do you really think that I am not going to destroy you just because the Temple is there? I have done it once already! The Tabernacle was in Shiloh—and I ruined the place! It is *rubble* now!" It did not save those people. The idea that the Temple was going to save them was the "lying words" in which they were trusting.

Dropping down to verses 23 and 24 we will continue right after the part where God said that He did not speak with Israel about burnt offerings and sacrifices:

Jeremiah 7:23-24 But this is what I commanded them, saying, `Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you that it may be well with you.' Yet they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in the

counsels and the imaginations of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward.

They had *interpreted* what God had said or, perhaps, *misinterpreted*. Other things they completely ignored and some things were added, but they followed that which they themselves had decided and what they themselves had thought up. These were the counsels and imaginations of their evil heart—not the counsel of God!

This is how I perceive these extremes concerning the second and third commandments: They are false devotions which puff up the believer as, "holier-than-thou" (self-righteousness), while it obscures their personal sins and faults. They create an idea that there should be NO IMAGES as the main teaching and concentrate all of their efforts on it. Sacred Names people do the same thing. They take the one idea—that you can pronounce God's name only one way in order for Him to listen to you and it becomes "the teaching." And everything else falls by the wayside. The only thing that is important is how to say that name, or the only thing that is important is that we have no images. And this becomes a god in their eyes.

Jesus says something similar in Matthew 7.

Matthew 7:21-23 Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

They had missed it! They had gotten something and they made it into a god. God says to them, "You are worshiping something else, not Me! You are worshiping this *idea* you have. It may have been based on something I said, but then you took it off into this extreme and made it into your own idol. You worship it and did not amend your ways. You did not change.

We could go to Mark 7 and see that he said this about the Jews.

Mark 7:6-13 He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do." He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition. "For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' [But we see that the Jews decided to take this in another direction.] "But you say, 'If a man says to his father or mother, "Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban"—' (that

is, a gift to God), "then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother, "making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do."

Their extremism virtually does away with the true intent of the commandment: the second commandment, the third commandment, the fifth commandment. Some do it, too, with the fourth commandment. They take the keeping of the Sabbath to such an extreme that it becomes a burden to them and a burden to everybody that they convert to their way. They totally miss the idea of what the Sabbath is all about because it becomes so restrictive and it binds them and makes it a cruel burden. The Jews did that—and some people in the church today are heading in that direction, as well. They are taking something that is good and then going to an extreme and missing what God intended for the commandment to tell them and teach them. In the end they exalt their understanding over God and they create an idol.

We will begin to wrap this up in Deuteronomy 12. The entire chapter of Deuteronomy 12 and on into chapter 13 is all about idolatry and I want us to notice the placement of these particular verses, especially verse 32. The New King James Version subtitles this section, beginning in verse 29, *Beware of False Gods*.

Deuteronomy 12:29-31 When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. [Now look at this. Right next to these instructions we are told...] Whatever I command you, *be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.* ["Do not go putting your own 'spin' on what I say. Do not add your own ideas to this. Do not try and minimize what I say and say that such a thing should not be done. Learn to follow my commandments as is—as I gave them."]

Adding to or taking away from what God has revealed is a form of idolatry and that is why this injunction is right here. It is interesting to me that God places the same warning in the very last chapter of the book. "Do not add to the prophecy of this book. Do not take away from the prophecy of this book. Because you want to be in God's Kingdom, do you not?"

Revelation 22:18-19 For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things

which are written in this book.

And so we must ask ourselves whether we are, indeed, worshiping in spirit and truth as God wants or have we made our own religion by adding to or subtracting from God's Word? Have we, in effect, carved our own idol by following what it is that we think instead of striving to understand and obey what God thinks?

I am sure that there are many things we have subtracted from God's revealed way of life. I think it is a natural tendency for us to try and back-peddle on what God tells us to do. Instead of doing things we should be doing we make excuses for not doing it.

But my emphasis today has been on things we may have *added* to God's way of life—bits of self-righteousness—maybe even things we do well and that come easy to us and we, therefore, make them an idol and expect others to come up to our standards. These are bits of our own tradition that we have elevated to holy writ—when they are not in holy writ at all!

Jesus said, "MANY such things you do!" We need to examine ourselves from time to time and make certain we are not taking God's instructions beyond His intentions—and thereby making an idol of our own ideas.