



The Second Commandment

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Exodus 20:4-6

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

(Pastor Prays)

When you read the book of Exodus, there you find the gospel in the Old Testament. Exodus is a great book to read. It's an exciting book to read. It's a fun book to study. It's fun to get ready every week to preach from the book of Exodus. When you read it, it's the second book in the Old Testament. When you read it, there you find a template for the gospel. There you find God hearing the cries of his people. God going and saving his people, bringing them out. Remember that last night, the last plague is the Passover. God saving them out of slavery through that Passover event, through the blood of a lamb on the doorpost, and the angel of death passed over. God saves them by his power and adopts these slaves as his children. He brings them into the wilderness, shows them his power and now we're at Mount Sinai in chapter 20, and there God will give his people the law. If you keep looking forward, and we'll keep moving, in four more chapters after he's given the law, in Exodus chapter 24, the people will say to God, okay, we receive this law, we will do everything you told us to do. Then 10 chapters later, in chapter

34, that's when you have the tragic tale of Aaron fashioning the golden calf and saying, this is the Lord your God that brought you out of Egypt. The first command they break is the second command given. If the first command, we covered it last week, if the first command is to worship the one true God and worship him alone, Then the second command is to worship the one true God the right way. The first command has to do with the object of worship. Who or what do you worship? I am the Lord your God. You have no other gods before me. The second command has to do with the method, with the way we worship.

This is less about worshipping a false god, this is a bigger problem. This is a bigger problem than people worshipping a false god. This is worshipping the one true God in a false way. That's the kind of idolatry that the 2nd commandment addresses. And truthfully, it's one of the dangers that the modern church faces. Don Calvin was right when he famously said that the human heart is an idol factory. It creates idols. We could easily slip over into this kind of idolatry. Because the truth of the matter is, if you fall away from coming to Hickory Grove or to another Bible-believing church, if you stop doing that, chances are you weren't going out looking for another religion. It might be that you just want the God you believe in to be nicer or easier to please or more palpable to your taste or happier to see you when you walk in the door. You see this thing and the great lengths that many people have gone to somehow remake the image of God to fit the feel of the moment. If you have church friends, a lot of you have Christian friends that either go to church or they're friends of yours that consider themselves Christians, but maybe they are not involved in a church. Look around at your church friends. The world wants a God that desires for everybody to be healthy and prosperous and famous and beautiful and forgiving. And so in various ways, the image of the one true God is being shaped and reshaped to the degree that here in the South, people are gathering in so-called Christian churches and worshipping an imitation God and calling it the real thing.

Over the last several years, we've seen the rise of prominent atheists. Atheists have gotten a lot of the news. But atheism is not the biggest danger we have. The biggest danger we have is a false security and a false gospel that sends people to a very real hell. And in part, that's what this is here for. This second commandment is here to help us right that wrong, to lead us to the worship of the one true God.

One of my favorite preachers is a man named H.B. Charles. You can Google and watch him preach. H.B. Charles said that the world is not impressed with the church because the church is not impressed with God. And I hope this morning we can take a look at this good God. In fact, this is the theme of the sermon. Here it is.

Our Good God Deserves Informed Worship

Our good God deserves worship that is rightly ordered, to know him and to worship him. Okay, let's get to the text. I'm going to give you a couple of points. I have several points here. I tried to dress them up in the right way. You'll notice that the first and the second and the third one sound similar. The fourth, they start falling off, and the fifth, we just lost it all together. I don't know what happened. So here's the first one. It has to do with order, number one.

We do not make God, he makes us

It matters how you get that order right. I wish I had other sayings to give you that would go along with the colloquialisms. When I was preaching in Mississippi, at my first two churches in Mississippi, they had all kinds of sayings. And some of them I just did not understand. Mr. Wells might would say, preacher, if I tell you that a rooster dips snuff, you look under his wing. I don't know what that means. I know this one. If I tell you a rooster can hook, if I tell you a rooster can plow, you hook him up. Okay, great. I don't know what any of that means. So I wish I had more colloquialisms to tell you this, but what I'm trying to say from this passage is you don't make God. God has made you. Jeremiah says, come down to the potter's house. There's a potter and there's clay. God is the potter. You are the clay. What does the text say in verse 4? You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is in earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. You'll notice in verse 4, look at the comprehensive nature of it. Nothing up in heaven above, nothing on earth, nothing in the water. Don't try to get a visual on God.

A carved image is something you can hold in your hand. It can stand up like a statue made by the hand of man and not by God's hand. It's a reversal. You see, if you go back to Genesis 1, there you have a picture of God creating man in his image. Instead, what happens in the modern church is, we end up making God in our image. He says here, the danger is not that

you're going to go get a false God. The danger is you're going to look at the one true God and make him like you think he ought to be. A carved image of a little idol is powerless, it's impersonal, it's deaf and dumb and dead. Our God is not seen, but he is heard. Our God is not to be seen where you can conceptualize what he is like, but he has revealed himself in his word.

One preacher told us, I can't remember who said it by the way, but if you're a pastor, that's how you get away with quoting things. You start off with, I heard someone say one time, and then you're off the hook. You're not plagiarizing. So I heard a preacher say that God created us in his image and ever since, we have been trying to return the favor. But the God of the Bible cannot be controlled. It cannot be manipulated. So often in churches the God of the Bible has been hollowed out. They put a cross outside and open a Bible and hollow it out. It is not presented as the one true God. And then what happens is oftentimes in churches, he becomes the God of my politics, the God of my sexuality, the God of my race, the God of my music style, the God of my country, the God of my experience, the God of my own morality. This happens when we end up valuing compassion over what is right. This happens when we hollow out the one true God. It's misguided.

We've got to be careful here because we are people that care. The Christian impulse is to care. We've got to be careful with misguided sincerity. Misguided sincerity creates an enjoyable, hollowed out, false worship. The temptation we have is to serve a God that we want to make in our image instead of the way God has revealed himself to us.

Be careful that the God you worship is not the God that you have conceived, but you worship the God who is. Be careful when your God agrees with you on everything. Be careful when your God agrees with every impulse that you have. Usually a God that is made in your image is going to be very tolerant of your lifestyle. I find that to be true even in the Christian church where a young couple comes up in the church and decide they love each other but are not sure if they're ready for marriage, so they decide to live together outside of marriage, having sex outside of marriage. And then when the time comes, they finally decide, yeah, I think we're going to get married, they come to the preacher and say, will you marry us? And then I will say to you, have you been living together? And they say, yes. And I said, well, you know, you're living in sin. And they're going to be offended at that. They're probably still Christians. I'm not

saying they're not saved, but what's happened is they've so manipulated who God is that somehow he is okay with that.

It happens oftentimes with moms and dads that come up in the church and maybe leading in the church and love the Bible, love the church, and their children grow up and at the cusp of adulthood decide that they are same-sex attracted. Mom and dad oftentimes are not sure what to do with that, so they start to, because they love their children, they'll bend what they know to be true to somehow make that okay.

Or even something as simple as there are Christians that at one time were involved in the church, but have fallen away, and COVID did something to the mindset, and so they quit coming to church altogether. They are staying at home to watch church. Now, we put our services online for all to see. We do that for those that can't make it here, if they have gone out of town, or if people are providentially hindered, if they're sick, or just can't get to church. We want people to still be involved, but that is not how you're involved in a church. Let me just go ahead and say that there is no such thing as an online congregation. It doesn't exist. You're sitting at home on the couch so you're not in the congregation. What's going to happen if you need to get baptized? Are you going to the bathtub to do it yourself? It's a whole manipulation of what has been actually given to us. This is a God that we love so much because he requires so little. This is a God that always understands, always agrees, always permits. But then you open this up and you have this God of the Bible. The God of the Bible is the one that cannot be domesticated. It cannot be seen. You can't get close to the mountain he's descending on. He can't be captured. He can't be tamed. He can't be mollified. And this God has revealed Himself to us in Christ. What Paul's saying in Colossians 1 is, ¹⁵ *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by^[f] him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. 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.* The God of the Bible, who cannot be contained or seen, has revealed Himself to us in Jesus and made a promise to any person here that if you

will turn from your sin and by faith, if you will trust that Jesus lived and died in your place, you will be saved. In other words, we don't make God. He makes us. Okay, that's the first point. There's the second one, number two.

God doesn't serve us, we serve him

We don't say our prayers at night or in the morning, whenever you say your prayers, and here's the list, God, I would like to have, and you come and get this done, please. He doesn't serve us. Look at the words in verse 5. ⁵ *You shall not bow down to them or serve them.* You're going to make this carved image and you're not going to bow down and serve. Those two words are almost synonyms. They have to do with worship. Bowing down, is this physical worship, reminding us how we worship matters. And then you won't serve them, that is a spiritual worship. Why we worship matters. You see in verse 5, the prohibitive language, you shall not bow down to them, you shall not serve them. By the way, both of these are wrapped up in the actual congregational worship event. That's why we don't take how we worship here lightly. The old Puritans, they developed something called the regulative principle out of commandment #2. The Puritans, all they do is sit around and think about the Bible and think about God all the time. They come up with stuff. So they came up with the regulative principle that says, congregational worship should be guided by everything you see in the Bible and nothing outside of the Bible. So that's partly why we do what we do. We open with the Word of God. You have to preach the Word of God. You have the praying. We pray the word of God. We even sing it. We sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs. So we do all of those things according to the Bible.

That's why I would be so upset, why I'm so irritated with such an amusement-driven approach that churches take. It's entertainment or an experience. I think church should be engaging. Like when we sing, it should take all we have. We sing to the Lord. We are emotive about it. We feel it deeply. I think it's a sin for a preacher to be boring. Drink a Red Bull or something, son, but don't be boring. Anything, but don't be boring. But those are not the primary things that drive us. What drives us is the right worship of this one true God. That's why I get so irritated. I don't know if it's my voice, maybe that's is what's got me so mad today. But what makes me so irritated is to see churches do things like summer at the movies. So we're going to go to church and here's the movie, go watch this movie, then we'll talk about how that tells us about God.

That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. Or a convenience approach to church. Or to have a church that is so culturally aware and driven that you lose the gospel. And what this commandment says is. Look, it's one thing to know and worship the one true God, worship him, you have no other gods before him. But we need to make sure we worship the one true God rightly through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, singing unto the Lord, with confidence in our hearts because of what Christ has done for us. God doesn't worship us, we worship him on his terms. That's the gospel. That's God's terms to get to him; through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. We don't know God except through what Christ has done but you can know God through what Christ has done. His perfect life, his death on the cross, his resurrection, and you can be God's child through that. We worship as God's people. There's a certain day we gather together, the Lord's Day. We do it on Sundays for a reason. because God raised Jesus from the dead on a Sunday. All of that to say, God doesn't worship us, we worship him. Okay, that's two. Let me give you a third point. It's going to start going downhill here, number three.

God's jealousy is good, ours is destructive

When I see the word jealous, I think, what? Jealous? It's in verse 5? Do you see it? You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. When I hear the word jealous, man, I'm thinking about an episode of Cops or something. I'm thinking about rage, mad, finding somebody in an affair, breaking windows. That's what jealousy is, and our form of jealousy is not good. God's is, you see, God's jealousy, his supremacy is highlighted here. How has God revealed himself? Look up in verse two, he says, I am the Lord your God and then in verse five he says, I am a jealous God. If you keep reading in Exodus, you'll get to Exodus 34:14, when the Lord says, you shall worship no other gods, for I am the Lord whose name is jealous. His name is jealous. Why does he use this terminology? Because to not worship the one true God in the right way is a form of spiritual adultery. It's unfaithfulness so in a lower, lesser, darker level, think of the rage that comes when adultery is exposed. On a higher, holier, pure level, think of God. Our covenant-keeping God sees us as if he is the bridegroom and we're the bride. He's jealous. In fact, you can see a picture of it if you go to the Old Testament, flip over to the book of Hosea. Hosea is a prophet and he's told by God to go and marry a woman named Gomer, which you should have known you're going to have trouble since her name is Gomer.

You got trouble coming. So you go marry a woman named Gomer and she's going to be unfaithful to you. She will be an adulterous. She will have children by other people. But you go and pursue her and do that as a picture of how God looks at his people. My people will be adulterous and they will be duplicitous and I'll pursue them. But he will not tolerate a rival. He will not tolerate a rival in your life. What is it? What rivals Jesus for your affections? What rivals Jesus for your time? What rivals the Lord for how you spend your money in giving? What rivals the Lord for your attention? Is it scrolling? I read an article this week that social media is no longer social media. Social media is no longer for socializing, going back and forth, putting something out, somebody comments and y'all have a nice little conversation. That's not what social media does anymore. Social media now has become short videos that people scroll through. Video after video. Reels. You can watch one after the other. What has threatened to rival Jesus for your attention? Our good God in the Bible, our good God deserves right worship. He's a jealous God. We don't make God. He's made us. He's made us for himself. God doesn't serve us. We serve Him according to what He has laid out for us. And God's jealousy is good, ours is destructive. Don't go and say, I'm jealous because God's jealous. It doesn't work like that. Our jealousy is destructive, but God's is good because he loves and owns and pursues you. Okay, that's three. Let me give you a fourth, number four.

God is not on trial, we are

We don't sit in the seat of judgment to judge whether or not God is good enough and maybe we'll follow Him. It's the other way around. He sits on the throne of judgment, and beckons us into his presence. And the only way we can know him is through what Christ has done for us. Look what the text says. Let me read it. 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 fourth generation of those who hate me.* This is not saying that if your dad or your grandfather sinned, you are paying for his sins. That's not how it works. I mean, in fact, later on in Deuteronomy 24:16, the Lord will say, 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.* So this is not saying your grandfather was a terrible sinner and you're paying for it. This is saying there are generational consequences. That you don't sin in a vacuum. If a child comes up in a home where you have an alcoholic father, abusing alcohol,

that's going to stay with him. He's not being punished for that sin, but that has affected him. When kids come up in a home where parents yell and scream at one another and it breaks out into abuse, that's going to affect them and will affect the next generation. When a child watches mom and dad go through a terrible divorce and it affects him. He won't be punished for their sin, but it will stay with him. This is a reminder that our sin ripples. That's not judgment. That's just the effects. Who is judged though? In verse 5, notice who's judged. The ones that will be judged in verse 5 are generations of those who hate me. The ones who have said, I don't want that gospel. That's where the judgment is. Let me give you one last point, number five.

We stand in need of mercy

You know what mercy is, right? Mercy is God not giving us what we deserve. We deserve death, hell, punishment, all of that, and God not giving it to us. That's mercy. I'm going to show where I get that in verse 6. Look at the contrast. You have to read verses 5 and 6 together. What's interesting in verses 5 and 6, is that it's the greatest numerical contrast in the whole Bible. Let me read it together. 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 fourth generation of those who hate me,* ⁶ *but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.* Look, so you see the extent of God's judgment in verse 5, it stops in the third and fourth generation. But then you see the extent in verse 6, the extent of God's mercy, it's hard to define the steadfast love of the Lord. You see it extending to thousands and thousands. It's the first mention of loving God in the whole Bible, for those that love me. And loving God is going to be foundational to everything else we do. Everything in our lives is a spillover from our hearts loving God. In verse 6, you see the extent and the power of God's love for us. It's the same thing you find in Lamentations. Remember what Jeremiah wrote in Lamentations 3, that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercy never comes to an end. Those mercies are new every morning. Great is the Lord's faithfulness. The judgment of God is limited and mercy overruns judgment. And that is our gospel hope. That there at the cross of Jesus, God's judgment is satisfied, it's poured out on Jesus, and God's mercy is applied to us. So my encouragement to you, when you read the second commandment, take joy and refuge in the one true God, revealed to us in the Bible, the God that has loved you and pursued

you in Jesus. The God who will receive you and forgive you through faith in what Christ has done for you on the cross. The second commandment calls us today, come to Jesus and be saved.

(Pastor prays)