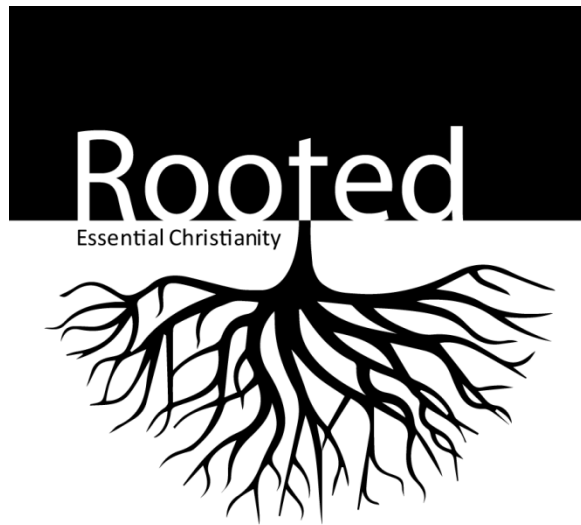




The Ten Commandments

Part 4 – “The Right Way to Worship the Right God”

Exodus 20:1-6

The Second Commandment is closely related to the First. Whereas in the First Commandment, the worship of any other god is forbidden, the Second Commandment forbids the making of any images for worship. It forbids us from worshiping God with images. In other words, it is a prohibition against worshipping the right God in the wrong way.

So, the First Commandment establishes that only God may be worshiped. The Second Commandment addresses how the right God is to be worshiped. God forbids his people from worshiping him in ways that the pagans worship their gods. God is holy and therefore the worship of his people must be holy as well.

Main Idea: God has determined how his people are to worship him.

1. Our worship is to be free from the use of idols.

Vv. 4-5a – “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 or serve them...”

- This prohibition against making any images for worship applies obviously to making images of false gods. But it must also be understood as a prohibition against making images of the LORD. God forbids his people from making images of him.
- This is not a command against artwork. It is not a prohibition against painting or drawing or sculpting. Indeed, there were times when God specifically commanded his people to carve, sculpt, and embroider various artistic furnishings for the tabernacle. The Ark of the Covenant for example was topped with the mercy seat and two golden cherubim symbolizing God's covenant presence with his people.
- The command is clear that the worship of God's people must be free of the use of any images that are or represent the object of worship.

2. Our worship of God is to be dominated by his self-revelation.

Vv. 4-5a

- Like all of the Commandments, the Second Commandment is both a prohibition and a call to positive action. In this way the Second Commandment is a call to worship God in the ways that he has prescribed. God cares about *how* his people worship nearly as much as he cares about *who* they worship.
- Verse five references “the iniquity of the fathers.” This is a reference to the practice of idolatry among God's people. During the Exodus they were perpetually enticed by the idolatry of the surrounding nations. This would continue to be the spiritual Achilles Heel of God's people. The Hebrews desired the highly experiential and physically tactile worship of the nations. Worship that subsisted upon the word of God was comparatively boring.

Their rebellion with the golden calf was an attempt to worship the LORD in ways that he had forbidden. This was the sin of golden calf described in Exodus 32. The people demanded that Aaron make them a visual representation of the LORD. They were seeking to worship the right God. But they went about it in a way that was forbidden. The consequences of such vile worship practices were severe.

- It is always wrong to depict God through images because:

A) God is spirit

- God is not possessed of or confined by a physical body. He possesses the qualities of personhood. That is, God is not some vague universal intelligence. But physical bodies are qualities of his creatures. “God is spirit” (Jn. 4:24). So, any attempt to depict God will without exception misrepresent him.

B) God is sovereign

- Images are not sovereign. Once an image is made it may be moved about at the whim of the maker. Interestingly, in his message to the pagan philosophers in Athens Paul makes the very point that it is God who is sovereign over the lives and movements of the earth’s inhabitants (Acts 17:26).

C) God is holy

- God is unique in his perfections and moral purity. The way his people worship him must therefore pay careful respect to his “otherness.” The LORD is not like the gods of the nations which are depicted variously as men and women, bulls, crocodiles, and various vulgar images.

3. A warning and a promise.

Vv. 5b-6 – “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, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”

A) God is jealous.

- “For I the LORD your god am a jealous God...”
- God’s jealousy for his people (bride) is just and holy. Indifference within marriage to adultery is a sin just as surely as the adultery. God’s holiness and his love for his people make indifference impossible.

B) God is just.

- “...visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.”
- This is not to say that children are punished for their father’s sins. But the consequences of one generation’s sins are often passed along to the next. God will not excuse the children who adopt their father’s hatred of God and his laws.

C) God is gracious.

- “...but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.”
- God’s grace toward his people is overwhelming. The “thousands of those” is a reference to the generations preserved through the covenant of grace. Despite their sinful struggles and wandering hearts, God will not lose his people.