

## Am I An Idolater? – Exodus 20:4-6

**INTRODUCTION** – Idolatry is such a common global sin that we do not think much about it anymore. The revulsion believers need to have against the sin of idolatry has disappeared completely. This internet society has erased all nationalities and borders including the believer's deep sense of worshipping only the one living and true God. This dilution of holiness and devotion to God Almighty through Jesus Christ has resulted in an acceptance and tolerance of what is regarded as a grievous sin before God.

Idolatry, simply stated, is a regard for someone or something other than God as God. This sin is committed only by man (angels excluded). Man, who is made in the image of God, is supposed to worship and acknowledge the one living and true God as his God and no one else! After the fall and all mankind were plunged into sin and depravity from the time of Adam, man has been worshipping idols all his existence. If God did not intervene and deliver man out of this sin of idolatry, man will die in this sin and find himself in Hell as a just punishment from God. This is a very serious sin that man must be wary off. This doctrine is based upon the revelation that there is no other God in this universe but only the God of the Bible. He is the One who revealed Himself to us and He only must be worshipped by us. To worship another who is no god is like saying to your own father "you are not my father and I will call your most hated enemy my father!" God gave life to us and protected and provided all the days of our lives. He gave us this world to live in with all its resources to enjoy. After enjoying all the resources we turn around and say to Him there is another god who provided and protected! This is the sin of idolatry!

True believers of Jesus Christ must sincerely examine their hearts and be honest with their own souls regarding this Second Commandment.

**I. COMMANDMENT # 2** -- This is the Second Commandment verbatim, *"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments."* (Exo 20:4-6; cf. Deu 5:8-10) This passage of Scripture must be understood in its entirety and context or else it will be misunderstood. The prohibition is emphatic. Israel was absolutely forbidden by God to make any kind of image at all.

Making an image is not an issue or else Christians cannot be illustrators, artists or sculptors or use a camera of any kind. These are all ways and means that men make "images" today! Those who argue that we cannot use a children's Bible that has "images of Christ" or depicts Christ in any manner are wrong. Painting portraits of Christ whether as a baby or an adult is wrong because no one knows what Christ looked like when He was on earth. Also, a portrait does not depict an event or what Christ was doing. Portraits of loved ones or the head of state are fine when they are accurately represented. But to say that using a children's Bible with pictures depicting the miracles of Christ is wrong has no biblical basis. Furthermore, the second commandment is not just against having a picture of Christ but also images of all kinds. The scope is *"is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth."* It is all creatures and things created by God whether celestial or terrestrial.

What is forbidden is not only about making an image per se; it is to BOW DOWN TO and SERVE them! Israel was also absolutely forbidden to bow down and serve the images that she made. When we bow down to such images it is considered worship. The act of bowing is not wrong when it is done for practical reasons like fixing a leaking pipe or digging a hole in the ground or playing with our toddlers. The act of bowing as used here refers to worship! There are cultures like the Korean and Japanese wherein bowing is a form of greeting their family members and guests. The other person returns the greeting by bowing back. This kind of cultural bowing is not forbidden in Scriptures. However, in the Chinese culture or any other culture that involves bowing to the dead or to idols or going down on the knees in front of an elderly relative at a wedding, such kinds of bowing are expressly forbidden as the Second Commandment warns. These kinds of bowing would also include serving whereby these idols would be "cared for, looked after and fed" as if they are alive and able to protect and answer prayers.

The Roman Catholic Bible does not have this 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment.<sup>1</sup> [<http://www.beginningcatholic.com/catholic-ten-commandments.html>]

The Catholic Error	The King James Bible
<b>First Commandment</b>  I, the LORD, am your God...You shall not have other gods besides me.	<b>First Commandment</b>  I am the LORD thy God...Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

**<sup>1</sup>The Roman Catholic Bible version of The Commandments From Moses -- Exodus Chapter 20**

1 Then God delivered all these commandments:

2 "I, the LORD, am your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that place of slavery.

3 You shall not have other gods besides me.

4 You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth;

5 2 you shall not bow down before them or worship them. For I, the LORD, your God, am a jealous God, inflicting punishment for their fathers' wickedness on the children of those who hate me, down to the third and fourth generation; 6 but bestowing mercy down to the thousandth generation, on the children of those who love me and keep my commandments.


7 "You shall not take the name of the LORD, your God, in vain. For the LORD will not leave unpunished him who takes his name in vain.

8 "Remember to keep holy the sabbath day.

9 Six days you may labor and do all your work,

10 but the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD, your God. No work may be done then either by you, or your son or daughter, or your male or female slave, or your beast, or by the alien who lives with you.

11 In six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them; but on the seventh day he rested. That is why the LORD has blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.

12 "Honor your father and your mother, that you may have a long life in the land which the LORD, your God, is giving  you.

13 "You shall not kill.

14 "You shall not commit adultery.

15 "You shall not steal.

16 "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male or female slave, nor his ox or ass, nor anything else that belongs to him."

[taken from <http://www.10commandments.biz/biz/Catholic-version-Ten-Commandments.html>] It appears that some Catholic Bibles have the second commandment and some do not.

<p><b>Second Commandment</b></p> <p>You shall not take the name of the LORD, your God, in vain.</p>	<p><b>Second Commandment</b></p> <p><b>Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.</b> Thou shalt not <b>bow down</b> thyself to them, nor serve them.</p>
<p><b>Third Commandment</b></p> <p>Remember to keep holy the sabbath day.</p>	<p><b>Third Commandment</b></p> <p>Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain.</p>
<p><b>Fourth Commandment</b></p> <p>Honor your father and your mother.</p>	<p><b>Fourth Commandment</b></p> <p>Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.</p>
<p><b>Fifth Commandment</b></p> <p>You shall not kill.</p>	<p><b>Fifth Commandment</b></p> <p>Honor thy father and thy mother.</p>
<p><b>Sixth Commandment</b></p> <p>You shall not commit adultery.</p>	<p><b>Sixth Commandment</b></p> <p>Thou shalt not kill.</p>
<p><b>Seventh Commandment</b></p> <p>You shall not steal.</p>	<p><b>Seventh Commandment</b></p> <p>Thou shalt not commit adultery.</p>
<p><b>Eighth Commandment</b></p> <p>You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.</p>	<p><b>Eighth Commandment</b></p> <p>Thou shalt not steal.</p>
<p><b>Ninth Commandment</b></p> <p>You shall not covet your neighbor's wife.</p>	<p><b>Ninth Commandment</b></p> <p>Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.</p>
<p><b>Tenth Commandment</b></p> <p>You shall not covet your neighbor's house.</p>	<p><b>Tenth Commandment</b></p> <p>Thou shalt not covet.</p>

Commandment #2 is disastrous for the Roman Catholics because the commandment is extremely clear on its teaching against bowing down to idols. They castigated the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment by removing it completely from the Scriptures.

**II. The Basis for this command** – The basis for this commandment is stated by God Himself. God says that, *"for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God."* This reason is not negotiable because it is based upon God's character. God's ways of dealing with mankind and His people changes as He sees fit. But His nature and character remains the same forever. He does not change in His attributes of holiness and purity. God addresses Himself here as "the LORD." This emphasizes the covenantal relationship He has with Israel. Once a covenant has been made, God holds the covenantal relationship very sacredly. God's Name and His holy Word are on the line. He will not fail and will also not allow the party who makes the covenant with Him, in this case Israel, to fail. God's Name is at stake. The covenant means that Israel will bear the Name of God, i.e. called "Israel" which means "the Prince of God." This means that Israel was to reflect the nature and character of God by the way she existed. Israel was not to live and be a nation like the Gentiles. She had a spiritual duty to God and to the world to bear a godly witness for God. In this manner, the world that is in spiritual darkness would be able to see Christ in Israel and come to be saved from their sins.

If Israel were to bow down and serve images made by their hands, then she would reveal to a world that is dying in sin that these "idols" are the exact representation of the one living and true God. This is a gross and grievous deception because it is a lie of the devil. The one living and true God is not and cannot be represented by any image at all. To call the idols "God" when in reality they are not at all is like a wife who commits adultery. The use of the word "God" here means that the power of God is emphasized. God is to be feared and when Israel insulted God in this manner she would surely be punished. God will not allow Israel to deceive the world. God will not allow Israel to misrepresent Him. Based upon the covenantal relationship God used the word "jealous" to describe Himself. Like a husband who has every right to be jealous over his wife when she commits adultery, the LORD God reveals to Israel that He would be too. This is a right kind of jealousy that stems from genuine love. God loves Israel and that is why when Israel turns to other gods God says He is jealous for Israel.

**III. Dealing with idols**-- If one were to make an image of any one thing or anyone on earth and worship or serve it, this 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment forbids it. Not only must God's people not bow or serve them, they must be destroyed from their lives. **Exodus 23:24-25**, *"Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images. And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee."* They must be gotten rid of immediately. In the case of idols of the heart such as children, family members, the love of money, the believer must repent of this sin and turn back to God and put Him first. To make sure that God is first in his life, the believer must regard his relationship with family and his money according to God's Word as taught by Christ through the Sermon on the Mount.

The negative, which is to destroy the idols, must be done first before one is allowed to serve the LORD and be acceptable by Him. Those who worship idols and God at the same time are sinning against God. The reason is that God is a jealous God (cf Exo 20:5 and Deu 4:24, *“For the LORD thy God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God.”*). Israel cannot serve both God and mammon.

**IV. The Severe Penalty** – The penalty imposed by God when one breaks this 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment is found in **Deuteronomy 13:1-18**. The idolater must be stoned to death. If he is not killed, idolatry will spread to the entire family. When that happens then the entire family must be killed. If the family is not killed then it will spread to the whole village or city. If the village or city is not destroyed, then it will spread to the whole tribe. If the tribe is not destroyed then it will spread to the whole nation and the whole nation will be destroyed. This was exactly what happened to the nation of Israel before it went into exile for 70 years (cf. 2 Kings 17:5-23; 21:3-9).

**V. Idolatry passes on** -- Idolatrous worship does not stop with the present generation. The danger and serious problem is that it passes on to the next generation. This is also true in the idolatrous worship of other religions, not just the Canaanites of the Jews. Passing on to the next generation is due to much superstition and fear. It enslaves the worshipper. The bondage is kept tight due to the worshipper's love for the deceased parent or family member. The warning is that it can pass down to the third and fourth generations. This includes the generation of the great grandfathers!

But, on the other hand, the obedient child of God will experience God's *“mercy unto thousands of them that love me [Him], and keep my [His] commandments.”* This is the greatness of God's mercy!

## **APPLICATION**

- It is an easy commandment for all believers to break. A conscious effort with God's help is the way to not break the Second Commandment;
- Love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind and your neighbour as yourself is the best way to protect the heart from breaking this commandment;
- It is never too late to stop sinning and return back to the LORD and plead for His mercy that this sin will not be carried on into the next generation. This is true for all sins.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Is it OK to have a cross inside the sanctuary of the church? What about having a cross on the roof of the church building or outside the flat or house? What about wearing one around one's neck or hanging it on the rearview mirror of a car?
2. You are the only son in your family and you have become a Christian. Your parents want you to bow down at the grave site of your grandparents during the "cheng ming." What would you do as a Christian? Do you honour your parents or break the Second Commandment?
3. Your only daughter who grew up in church now wants to marry a Roman Catholic regardless of all the advice given to her to break off the relationship. Will you attend your only daughter's wedding held in the Roman Catholic Church? Give reasons for your answer.
4. You work in a secular company where you are placed in charge of an outstation branch located in mainland China. For the opening ceremony of the new company, they have invited a lion dance troupe to kick off the ceremony. You are "asked" by your CEO from HQ to head this opening and to do whatever it takes to get the job done which includes welcoming the leader of the lion dance troupe by offering to an idol. What would you do as a Christian?
5. The church wants to place Christmas trees and hand bells and doves outside the sanctuary and around the compound of the church during the coming Christmas season. The reasoning is that this provides a warm and welcoming environment for invited unsaved loved ones to the church to hear the gospel message. Would you approve or disapprove of this gesture?