

The Ten Commandments

The Second Commandment

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image...”
Exodus 20:4

The Foundation

- This commandment is rooted in the foundation statement of verse 2 on who God is and what He has done.
- It also builds on the first commandment by showing us, not just *Who* we are to worship exclusively, but *how* we are to worship Him.

The Commandment

- On the surface it is straightforward: do not make idols or worship them.
 - It is instinctive for mankind to worship something.
 - This instinctive need to worship has been corrupted by sin so that men worship things other than God – Romans 1:21-25
- However, there must be a deeper meaning because the worship of idols as separate gods from Jehovah was already banned in the first commandment.
 - Men may worship the idol as a god [idolatry] or worship a god *through* the idol [iconolatry].
 - An idol used as a proxy eventually becomes the object.
- In essence, this command is against replacing the true and infinite God with a faulty, imperfect image created and thus only worshipping or understanding God through His revelation and truth.
- We are given the reason for the command in vs. 5: God is jealous (“intolerant of rivalry or unfaithfulness”) – Isaiah 42:8, 48:11
- We are given a warning and blessing in vs. 5-6:
 - Those that refuse to give God His due honor will face His displeasure for all their earthly life and in their posterity (“fourth generation”)
 - Those that worship and obey God as He is due will be blessed along with their posterity for eternity (“thousands” of generations).
- We find another reason in Deuteronomy 4:15, that God had not revealed His image to them at Sinai.

Historical Application for Israel

- This second stipulation of God’s covenant with Israel is that they would not worship idols or use them in their worship.

- It is reiterated multiple times in the Law – Exodus 34:17; Leviticus 19:4, 26:1; Deuteronomy 4:15-25, 5:8, 27:15
- While many interpret this command, as many Jews traditionally have, to be a prohibition of *any* image of God or living being, there are many instances of artistic representations of angelic beings and animals in the art of the Tabernacle/Temple.
 - Cherubim (Exodus 26:31, 37:7-9; I Kings 6:23-29), lions and oxen (I Kings 7:28), the brazen serpent (Numbers 21:6-9), flowers/plants (Exodus 25:33-34, I Kings 6:18).
- This is the first command that Israel broke when they made a golden calf to be their object/vehicle of worshipping Jehovah – Exodus 32:1-5
- This continued to be an issue with Israel until after the Captivity – I Kings 12:26-28, Isaiah 44:9-20, Jeremiah 10:3-15, etc.

Practical Application for Today

- Paul, Peter, and John spoke against idol worship and worshippers – Acts 17:29, 19:26; I Peter 4:3; I John 5:21
- Idolatry as seen as something largely forgotten in modern societies and thus this command seems to have small effect on us.
- However, we must see that this commandment is truly concerned with how our understanding of God is shaped and how we ought to worship.
- Matthew Henry (1662-1714) wrote:
 - “The prohibition: we are here forbidden to worship even the true God by images, v. 4, 5... It is certain that it forbids making any image of God (for to whom can we liken him? Isa. 40:18, 15), or the image of any creature for a religious use. It is called the changing of the truth of God into a lie (Rom. 1:25), for an image is a teacher of lies; it insinuates to us that God has a body, whereas he is an infinite spirit, Hab. 2:18. It also forbids us to make images of God in our fancies, as if he were a man as we are. Our religious worship must be governed by the power of faith, not by the power of imagination. They must not make such images or pictures as the heathen worshipped, lest they also should be tempted to worship them. Those who would be kept from sin must keep themselves from the occasions of it.”
- This commandment does not prohibit art but does imply extreme caution to be used when art meets worship.
 - How many people today have had their understanding of Jesus shaped by Renaissance artists or modern media?