

Text: Exod. 20:4-6

Title: "No man-made worship of Me"

Time: 4/25/2021 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: On my way home from Hazzard, KY last week, I stopped overnight at my son-in-law and daughter's house in Emmitsburg, MD. Prior to heading out on Wednesday morning for home, Matt and I had a chance to play nine holes of golf at a course he frequents in Gettysburg, PA. As we drove to the course, a church sign caught my eye that, providentially I believe, will help us understand this morning the importance of the Second of the Ten Commandments.

The sign gave the name of the church as Intersection Church, and it explained that the church was named this because their ministry goal was to allow for the intersection of faith and creativity. Their website mentions, in part, that they want to be "a place for individuals to find renewed creativity." They also explain their desire to "encourage individuality and expression in our services" [www.intersection.church; accessed 4/23/2021].

You may have noticed at New Boston Baptist Church that we do not major on creativity and individual expression when it comes to our worship of the Lord together. I believe that the difference between the stated goals of a church like the one in Gettysburg and our own worship goals this morning has a lot to do with the Second Commandment.

I want us to note a few things about this commandment by way of introduction:

1. The commandment focuses on man-made artwork. The word for *graven image* comes from a verb meaning *to cut out stone* or *to carve out wood*. This kind of object is often coupled

with molten pieces of artwork as well in Scripture (Deut. 27:15). So, God is concerned about man-made artwork here.

2. The commandment focuses on a specific use of man-made artwork. This Second Commandment is different than the First Commandment, and Moses explains that difference in Deut. 4:15-18. The issue here is our inability to see the likeness of the God we worship, to experience Him with our physical senses (v. 15). God desires to be worshipped in spirit and in truth (John 4:24), and the man who worships the true God must avoid dependance on man-made creations to experience God in a physical way. Moses experienced God this way (Num. 12:6-8), but that makes him different from the rest of us. For you and I, we must wait for the morning we awaken in the Lord's presence to physically experience His likeness (Ps. 17:14-15). No man-made artwork can give us this experience.

3. The commandment applies to any kind of man-made artwork. The Lord is not saying, "Do not use sculptures to experience my likeness physically, but using paintings or music is ok." No, that is not the point. Instead, He is saying that His likeness or physical presence is not to be invoked through any kind of man-made artwork. Calvin: "The sum is, that the worship of God must be spiritual, in order that it may correspond with His nature. For although Moses only speaks of idolatry, yet there is no doubt but that by synecdoche, as in all the rest of the Law, he condemns all fictitious services which men in their ingenuity have invented" (2.107).

So, we can summarize the Second Commandment as God's telling each of us this morning: "No man-made worship of Me." In other words, "Do not let human creativity intersect with the faith when you worship Me." If we need some kind of man-made artwork to better experience in a physical or emotional way the likeness of God when we worship, our worship is in violation of this command. We have made our worship of the Lord dependent on a graven image.

I want us to see three things we are taught about this man-made worship this morning from these verses that give us the Second Commandment.

I. Man-made worship seeks alternatives to the written Word of God (v. 4).

Illustration: You will remember from John 4 that the conversation that Jesus had with the Samaritan woman at the well diverted to the topic of worship. Jesus wanted to speak to the woman about her own need for salvation, she did not want to do so, and so she started talking about how the Samaritans worshipped differently than the Jews worshipped. Her point was basically that when it comes to worship, God allows different strokes for different folks.

Application: Jesus corrected her false view of worship variety with a simple concept – *true worship*. He went on to speak of *true worshippers*. And then He explained to the woman that because God is a Spirit, the true worship of true worshippers is worship *in spirit and in truth*. The connection between the true worship of the true God and His truth revealed through His Spirit was made very clear to her by our Lord.

Moses explains the same thing about true worship in his comments on the Second Commandment in Deut. 4:12-18. Notice how Moses says that God wanted the focus to be on what God had written, His commandments and statutes and judgments, not on experiencing physically or emotionally God's likeness through man-made artwork. False worship always substitutes a distracting focus on man-made artwork for a focus on the preaching and hearing of the Word of God.

In Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, worshippers are encouraged to have mystical experiences of the Lord's likeness, power, and presence while gazing at a statue or an icon. Some have even seen stigmata miraculously appear on a

crucifix or some other depiction of Christ. Also in these traditions, a certain kind of chanting is viewed as necessary for a greater emotional experience of the Lord in worship.

In charismatic churches theologians are explicit about the drama of the charismatic gifts being essential to physically seeing the Lord in a way that is inaccessible without that drama. One popular author called it experiencing “God in His gifts.” The idea is that unless we have had the drama of revelatory gifts, we have not experienced God’s likeness as we should.

For many in otherwise sound churches, the physical beat of rock-n-roll music becomes necessary to experiencing the Lord in a way that words alone simply cannot help with, so unless a church service has this kind of music, the worshipper cannot feel God’s presence the way he wants to, and he has to find a church where he can.

All of these are examples of making man-made artforms necessary to the authentic worship of God. As such, they are violations of true worship, because they look for a physical experience of the God who desires to be worshipped in spirit, not physicality, and in truth. The regulative principle of worship emphasized historically by Protestants recognizes God’s desire in this regard, that the preaching and the hearing of the Word of God, as outlined by Moses, must be at the center of all our modes of worship. The Bible is the one indispensable tool of worshipping the true God. Without His Word, we do not worship Him. With His Word, we have all we need.

II. Man-made worship misunderstands the nature of God’s love (v. 5a).

Illustration: In March of this past year *The New Yorker* published an article titled, “How Polyamorists and Polygamists Are Challenging Family Norms.” The subtitle of the article said: “From opposite sides of the culture, parallel campaigns

for legal recognition may soon make multiple-partner marriages as unremarkable as same-sex marriages" [<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2021/03/22/how-polyamorists-and-polygamists-are-challenging-family-norms>; accessed 4/23/2021].

Application: What makes this plan for the further destruction of biblical family norms in our society a false form of marital love? According to our text, the God of biblical love is the God of jealous love. Marriage was designed by God to be a picture of God's love for His covenanted people. The love of monogamous marriage is monogamous because it is a jealous love, like God's love for His people. The monogamous norm of my marriage to my wife will not be challenged by polyamory and polygamy, because my love for Maureen is a jealous love, and her love for me is a jealous love. To love without this jealousy is not real marital love at all.

So is it with our Lord's love for us, His people (Exod. 34:14, "For thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God"). We are all familiar with the truth of 1 John 4:8, "God is love." But do we often think that this love of our God is a jealous love?

I love other people and things besides my wife, but not in the same way that I love my wife, with a jealous love. When I give the love due my wife to someone or something else, that is adultery. As worshippers, when we give the love due the Lord alone to some form of man-made artwork, that too is adultery. And when that happens in our worship, it is normally because deeper down in our hearts we have an adulterous love for the things of this world (James 4:4-5, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God. Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?"). The Holy Spirit is jealous. The Lord Jesus Christ is jealous. The

love of the Triune God is a jealous love. Especially when we worship Him, our worship must never reflect a love for man-made artwork found in the world instead of Him.

III. Worshippers of man-made worship invite God's judgment and need His salvation (vv. 5b-6).

Application: Volumes have been written on the interpretation of these sentences, but Keil and Delitzsch clear a lot of things up by pointing out that the ones hating and the ones loving include the children of the fathers (2.117). So, these verses state four simple facts about God's dealings with worshippers:

1. God does either a work of judgment or a work of salvation in the life of every worshipper. There is no third option.
2. The work of judgment includes holding children responsible for the iniquity of their fathers; and the work of salvation consists of eliminating this judgment through mercy or covenantal love. Dad's can do a lot of damage, but it is avoidable.
3. This aspect of God's judgment is limited in its reach, whereas God's work of salvation knows no limits. The contrast between *thousands* and *third or fourth* is the difference between the measure of God's gracious salvation and His judgment.
4. God judges those who hate him, but God saves those who love Him and keep His commandments. Daniel knew the consequences of his fathers' sins, but he also knew the covenantal love of his Lord as one who loved Him back and kept His commandments, at times in face of great danger.

Conclusion: So, we see again that these commandments are all about our loving the Lord with love that obeys. I want us to conclude our thoughts of the Second Commandment this morning with help again from the Westminster Larger Catechism.

"Q. 108 What are the duties required in the second commandment?"

A. The duties required in the second commandment are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in his Word; particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ; the reading, preaching, and hearing of the Word; the administration and receiving of the sacraments; church government and discipline; the ministry and maintainance [*sic*] thereof; religious fasting; swearing by the name of God, and vowing unto him: as also the disapproving, detesting, opposing all false worship; and, according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry."

"Q. 109. What are the sins forbidden in the second commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, counseling, commanding, using, and anywise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself; the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever; all worshipping of it, or God in it or by it; the making of any representation of feigned deities, and all worship of them, or service belonging to them; all superstitious devices, corrupting the worship of God, adding to it, or taking from it, whether invented and taken up of ourselves, or received by tradition from others, though under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretense whatsoever; simony [purchasing God's blessing with money – cp. the Word of Faith movement]; sacrilege; all neglect, contempt, hindering, and opposing the worship and ordinances which God hath appointed."

Let me say finally, after reading that, that you have a breaker of the Second Commandment preaching to you this morning. But praise God, the gospel we preach tells us of the One whose jealousy for right worship in the house of the Lord was equal to that of God Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ. Remem-

ber how He zealously cleared away the moneychangers from the Lord's house of prayer. No tickets were to be sold that evening at the place of worship. Remember how faithful he was to the feast days ordained by the Lord. Remember His love for the Word of God in the synagogue on the Sabbath.

And praise the Lord, because He took my place of judgment and my sin, and has given me His place of blessing and His righteousness, before God I stand in Christ, justified rather than condemned before this Second Commandment.

Do you stand there with me? If not, and you find that you too have broken the Second Commandment, you must be saved and you can be through the Lord's mercy mentioned here. You can become one of the thousands. Salvation is a gift of gracious, covenantal, jealous love we can receive from the Lord freely by faith. Repent of your sins, your aberrant forms of and neglect of worship included, and ask to be found righteous in Christ today, who died and rose again to save you.

“A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction—the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching