

True worship: What does the 2nd commandment teach us? Ex.20:4-6 21/6/20

Today we come to the second commandment...but first I just want to remind ourselves again about the 10 commandments. The 10 commandments, the law of God, was given to reveal sin, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. By the law we understand what transgression is. The law condemns us when it says, "You shall not"... for as we examine our lives in the light of the law we realise that many times we have broken it. The law says: "Honour your father and your mother"... how many times we've broken this law? And God says, "You shall not bear false testimony" and we have been guilty of lying. And this morning as we look at "You shall make no graven images", the command also exposes how prone we are to make idols. You see through the law is the knowledge of sin. By it we understand the exceedingly sinful nature of sin. Now as the Holy Spirit works in our lives this conviction of our sinfulness drives us to Jesus Christ to plead with God for mercy. This then is the primary purpose of the 10 commandments, namely to drive us to Jesus. They show a standard that we cannot keep, a standard which only Jesus kept. And he who kept the law also died for us and rose from the dead. It is at his cross that we ask for mercy, and we find forgiveness. God who is slow to anger, full of loving kindness and mercy is the one who abounds in loving kindness and mercy forgiving iniquities, transgressions, and sins (Ex. 34:6-7). He does this for thousands of generations, to all who call upon him. What good news this is for transgressors! So the law shows our sin and drives us to Christ where we find forgiveness. But it doesn't stop there. The law is also used by God in the believer's sanctification. The righteous requirements of the law, by God's grace, are being fulfilled in us through the work of the Holy Spirit. By it we are conformed to the character of Christ. So the law is not only a ministry of condemnation but by God's grace, it is used to conform the believer into the very character of Christ. It is a law then, not only to convict the unbeliever, but to sanctify for the redeemed.

Now let us turn to the second commandment. "You shall not make graven images" (verse four of Exodus chapter 20). This sounds quite basic. But let's read right from verse one to verse six, and we'll look at the context of this commandment to get a better understanding. *"And God spoke all these words, saying: ² "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of ¹bondage. ³ "You shall have no other gods before Me. ⁴ "You shall not make for yourself a carved image—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 nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, ⁶ but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments".*

The 2nd commandment is a command of prohibition. We can't make a sculpture or a statue; we can't make any image of God: no paintings, no icons, and no representations of God. This is very clear. But as we consider this and the wider context of the Scripture we are reminded that is not just a prohibition of things that we shouldn't do. As we reflect upon the teaching of Christ and the wider context of Scripture we realise that this commandment is not just about what you can't do. Rather behind the command it is all about what we should do in worship. You see verses five and six that remind us of the character of God and at the end of verse six we are reminded that God is a merciful God to all those who love Him, to those who keep His commandments. You see this negative prohibition is set in a wider context of those who worship truly before him by loving him and keeping His commandments. But before this in verse five we also have a warning: We not only have the promise of mercy to those who keep His commandments, but we have the warning of God visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation. So God is saying, be very careful about me. Be very careful about how you worship me. So this morning we're looking at what is true worship. **The first commandment that Henry dealt with last week was dealing with the object of worship**, "You shall have no other gods before me... You shall have no other gods before my presence and before my face"... You shall worship *me Alone*. The first command is all about him as the object of worship. **The second commandment** is like it, but there's a difference. It's not primarily about the object of worship. But **it's about the manner in which we worship God**, no graven images with a backdrop of who God is in his

total character. We have two aspects represented in verses five and six: The aspect of His Holiness, His righteousness, and His justice (verse five) and the aspect of His love and His mercy and His kindness (verse six). It is in the light of this balanced view of God: of His Holiness, and His love; of His justice, and His mercy... in the light of the character of God that this command is given: not to ever make a graven image, but rather to worship Him in spirit and in truth. So this morning we will look at "true worship" and we will consider:

- 1) What is prohibited.
- 2) What is commanded.
- 3) What should be our response.

1)What is prohibited. It's very clear isn't it? Verse four. "*You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above.*" We know that sadly there are many people who worship the sun and the stars and the moon, and there have even been people who have worshipped birds. And we are told this that we're not to make a representation of any of these objects for worship. Neither should we make a carved image "*of things on the earth beneath the heavens*", of any animals or reptiles. "*Nor things in the water under the earth*", nor of fish (the Egyptians were guilty of this). You see none of these things, none of these created things; nothing in all nature, no trees, no birds, no stars, no fish, no animals... None of these can represent God. None can depict the holy Almighty God. In fact each representation brings him down and is insulting. So what's prohibited? No form or representation of God. Nothing in all creation can be used to represent him, whether it's through sculpture or a picture or an icon. At the same time there must be no idol *worship*. Verse five "*You shall not **bow down** to them.*" This is not saying that for example you can't paint a picture of a landscape and put it on your mantle-piece, but it is saying that you shall not use a painting or sculpture for worship. You shall not bow down to a statue, or kiss it or venerate it. You shall not use it as a vehicle for worshipping God.

Now when we were in Brazil there were many Roman Catholics who had statues of saints or statues of Jesus and Mary in their homes. It was a very real thing to them: people would pray towards the statue, bow down before it, touch it or kiss it as part of their worship. But wonderfully a number of Roman Catholics were converted and some as they got rid of their idols. For example, a man in our first church in the interior said it was this truth about not making a graven image that made him give up the Catholic Church. And then he began to seek God and was converted. I remember also in our little tiny town called Alvarães (in the West Amazon) the Padre of the Roman Catholic Church coming to the belief that he had to get rid of all the statues in the church and he did just that because he saw the practice wasn't according to the 10 commandments !! But the mayor threw the padre out of town such was the dominance of Roman Catholicism. And sadly in many countries idol worship still prevails. There are many religions where this idea, that we can make a representation of God and use it in worship, is common. This is in direct contradiction to the Scriptures...

But you know the command goes wider than making physical statues. You see we can make a representation of God in our minds and in our imaginations. And we can think of God in a distorted way which is not according to what is written in Scripture, but rather according to our vain thoughts about God. When we conjure up an idea of who we think God ought to be that's breaking this command. But then as we go wider than that the New Testament says things like this, "covetousness is idolatry." In fact anything that takes the place of God and steals our affections from him is idolatry. Anything that robs God of his rightful place in our lives as Lord and Master is idolatry: whether it's the love of money, whether it's the love of our job which becomes all-consuming and puts God in the background... Whatever the idol is: if it's possessions, if it's pleasure, if it's sex, if it's entertainment, and even if it's a hobby that dominates... anything that takes the place of God in our lives, then this is idolatry.

Now we're looking at what's prohibited and later we're going to look at what's commanded. But before we do this we need to ask why are these representations of God wrong? Why is the carving of an idol with a tool prohibited? Well, think of the being of God. God is "utterly

other." God is not like us. God is eternal. He has no beginning and no end. He's immortal. And he's also invisible. God is Spirit. God has no parts and has no body. God is so unlike us. He is the high and the lofty one that inhabits eternity. He looks upon the earth, and the nations are like a drop in the bucket. The inhabitants are like grasshoppers. How can we reduce God to a little statue? Do we think that we can depict the being of God in such puny ways as statues? This is an insult to him. We can never localise God. How could we ever reduce Him to something that is limited? Our God is the living God. Why would we want to reduce God to something that cannot speak, hear or act? Our God is a God who acts. He is active in this earth. He speaks. He is the living God. Why would we reduce him to a dumb idol? So through the prophet Isaiah God says: *"To whom will you liken Me?"* His glory he will not give to another. All representations of God are demeaning and bring him down. So as we consider the being of God we realise that all representations of him just cannot do justice to who He is. He is the ever present, Eternal God. How can he be contracted to a little statue?

But then we think about the character of God. Some people argue that a statue or a painting helps the worshiper to contemplate something about the divine character of God. So some people say that a statue of Jesus helps them to contemplate the love of God. They say that as we look at him and we look into his eyes, and we see representations of bloodstains on his hands it just reminds us of the love of God, and it helps us to worship God. But I would say the absolute opposite is true. The character of God is actually distorted by that image. The image says nothing about the true and complete character of God and distorts the very love of God into something sentimental. The complete character of God as written down in the Scriptures speaks about His eternal wisdom, His faithfulness, His absolute holiness and purity, His eternal love who loved sinners before the foundation of the earth. How can a statue speak of all these things? You see the statue bypasses the word of God and distorts God's character. It is only God's word that reveals the true character of God.

So why is the making of statue prohibited? Firstly, because it does not do justice to the being of God. Secondly, because it cannot represent the character of God. And thirdly, because our God is a jealous God. What do we read in Exodus chapter 34 Verse 14? *"For you shall worship no other God for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."* His very name is jealous. He's jealous for his own glory. He will not share His glory with another. And he's jealous for his people. He is in covenant relationship with them. He has betrothed himself to his people. And he will not have them go after other gods. He will not have them commit spiritual adultery. You see, a loving husband, a human husband, is jealous for the affections of his wife. He will not have a third party intervene. He will not have a third party, this other man, steal her affections. He's jealous for her. So our God is jealous not only for His glory, but he's jealous for the love of his people. So he will not have them worship something which is so small and insignificant like a statue. And he will not tolerate any allegiance to any other god. Joshua challenged God's people to make a choice: *"And if it seems evil to you to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."* (Josh 24:15) God is a jealous God. He will not accept a divided heart. You cannot serve Him as well as foreign gods. So "Joshua said to the people, *"You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good."* (Josh 24:19-20) And so it is true for us, you can't just say yes I'll serve God and continue loving this world. You cannot love God and love this world. The lust of the eyes, the pride of life, the lust of the flesh are all abhorrent to God. You cannot indulge in these things and say you love God, you cannot have an undivided heart. Elijah too challenged the people of God: "If the Lord is God, follow him. But if you think Baal is God follow him." And our Lord Jesus Christ called us to make a choice. He said, *"No man can*

serve two masters he will either hate the one and will love the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." You cannot serve God and money. You cannot serve God and the system in this world.

So we've seen that the second commandment is a very serious command prohibiting all forms of idolatry. Why? Because God is a jealous God and He will not share His glory with another. He commands that we worship him with the whole heart and complete devotion. Now at the very time when this command was being given, and when Moses was on Mount Sinai for 40 days and 40 nights, at that very time, the people of God were breaking the commandment. You know the story well of how Moses' own brother, Aaron, fashioned a golden calf and the people of God worshipped it. They danced around it. And they thought that their worship was acceptable to Jehovah saying that this was their god who had brought them out of Egypt. But the Lord brought judgement upon the people for their sin. When Moses came down the mountain and saw the idolatry he was so angry with the people and smashed the 10 commandments. Then he called them to make a decision. 'Will you worship the true God? If so, come this way. But if not, God's anger will fall upon you.' God is a jealous God and the second commandment forbids any idol worship.

But now, what does the command positively say about true worship?

2) What is commanded The command is all about true worship. Jesus positively interpreted the 10 commandments. The "You shall not" he interpreted by looking at the converse; the "You shall"... *"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength and you shall love your neighbour as yourself."* Now before we look at this I just want to remind us that the 2nd commandment is not a prohibition of any form of art, not even of religious art, it doesn't mean that we have to destroy for example a Rembrandt of Jesus. It's not saying that because the command is not about art per se, but it's about worship. It's about not bowing down or worshipping an idol or using any image to evoke, stimulate or help you in worship. Now the word "Worship" is interesting. The word "Worship" in the Greek language comes from two Greek words: The first word means "towards," the second word means "kiss". In other words, the Greek language as used in Holy Scripture is saying the worship is "towards an object with affection" towards God for the purpose of fellowship and communion. It is about the heart and it's about love. That's the Greek usage of this word "Worship." The Hebrew rendering means "to prostrate oneself." Over and over that's the repeated usage in Scripture. Look at verse eight of Exodus 34. *"So Moses ... bowed his head toward the earth and worshipped."* So often in Scripture, we see people upon their faces before God. "Worship" in the Bibles has to do with prostrating oneself in awe before the living God. Think of Revelation chapter four verse 10. Here we have a picture of heaven: *"The twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne."* But let's now consider the English rendering of the word. In the 1611 King James Version of the Bible the word was translated in this way, "worthyship." Then later the word was contracted to "worthship" and finally became "worship." Do you see the word is to do with the one who is "Worthy."? So in heaven the elders proclaim *"You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; For You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created."* (Rev. 4:11) He is worthy, worthy of all adoration, and praise because of who he is. He is our Sovereign Lord and King. Worship with only our lips is not enough. He demands our lives. Jesus rebuked people who worshipped with their lips but their hearts were far from Him. Worship is about falling down before the living God with a sincere and humble heart. When Satan sought to tempt Jesus to fall down to worship him, Jesus rebuked Satan, and said, "It is written 'You shall worship the Lord your God and Him only **you shall serve.**'" What then does the second commandment mean when it speaks about worship? What it is saying is that to love God with a true heart must be matched by real service of God. Paul says this. *"I beseech you therefore, by the mercies of God, that you present your your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable before God, which is your reasonable service, which is your spiritual worship."* (Rom. 12:1) So to present yourself as a living sacrifice before God is your reasonable worship. And then Paul goes onto say *"And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the*

renewing of your mind so that you might prove what is that good and perfect and acceptable will of God.” (v.2) This is worship. It is laying our lives before Him in true devotion.

Now this requirement of God to worship him with the whole of our lives is not just for Sundays. He desires lives of holiness throughout the week. If people continue in sin and if they reject God as their master and Lord; if they hate Him and turn to idols, whatever those idols may be, God has said that there'll be consequences for their children, and for their grandchildren, even to the third and the fourth generation (Exodus 20:5). If we imbibe the culture of this world; if we love money more than God; if we love possessions; if we have a life centred on self - a life for my entertainment for my pleasure, THEN we will not only suffer but our children will suffer and our grandchildren. Generations afterwards us will suffer, as we reap what we sow. This of course is not saying that if a child is repentant and righteous before God that they will suffer for the sins of their fathers. No, Ezekiel 18 clearly says that if my father sins he's responsible for his sin, and if I please and honour God I will not be judged for my Father's sins. This is seen in the Biblical character Hezekiah. He was a godly man and his father was a wicked man. He did not suffer for his father's sins. But we are saying that where there is this unrepentant wickedness in the heart of man, then that will have a downward spiral effect upon future generations. So you see in families where fathers have been lazy and drunkards or drug addicts this lifestyle is often followed by the children and sometimes followed by their grandchildren. There can be vicious cycles and patterns of sin created by our parents. Now our text in verse 5 says that God "*visits the iniquity of the fathers upon third and the fourth generation to those who hate Him.*" It is a text directed to unbelievers. But we realise as well that when believers fall into gross sin, it may have awful consequences upon their family. We think of David in his sin of adultery with Bathsheba and the effect that had upon his children. We must take this commandment very seriously.

But then in verse six there is a promise. It says that God shows mercy to thousands of those who love Him and keep His commands. The comparison between the three or four generations suffering for disobedience is with the thousands (of generations) blessed for righteousness. God is extraordinarily kind to all who call upon him. You see within this covenant of law; within this administration of death and condemnation, we see the promises of grace. Remember these 10 commandments began by addressing the redeemed people of God. So we have promises of grace to all who love him and all who keep His commandments. For such it is mercy upon mercy upon mercy. So what does this command positively mean? It means that God will show kindness and mercy to all who love and obey Him and worship Him sacrificially from the heart.

What is true worship? Let us consider the New Testament, and the wider context of Scripture. Jesus says that true worshippers "*worship God in spirit and in truth*". Worship is not about the physical, it's not about the paraphernalia of sacred places and sacred items. It is spiritual. When Jesus met the Samaritan woman (John 4) the woman was worried about which mountain they should worship upon... should it be Jerusalem or should it be on her mountain? Jesus said is not to do with the physical. It's not to do with the place, temple or the mountain as true worship is "in spirit". It is spiritual worship and it is from the heart. It primarily inward and not outward. Now the Pharisees were concerned with the outward. They were concerned with being seen by men. It was about clothes and Jesus condemned them for their long tassels. Their religion was about a "show," about long prayers and externals. Jesus condemned their self-righteousness. True worship is in the spirit and by the Holy Spirit.

It is also "in Truth." It is "according to God's word" that we must worship. We cannot do anything forbidden by God's Word whether in public worship, family worship, or private worship. It must all be ruled by the word of God. For example in public worship we should pray, we should sing, we should read God's word, we should preach and we should uphold the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. All of this is ordained for public worship. And so we worship God according to the rule of his word. When churches compromise and add to His word God warns them of impending judgment. We read about this in the letter to the seven churches found in Revelation chapters 3 & 4. We read about the church of Thyatira.

Sadly, it was compromised by allowing the people to offer to idols and by tolerating sexual immorality. We also read of impure worship in Pergamos. There the people took on board the doctrine of the Nicolaitians, and also offered sacrifices to idols. When God's people compromise and don't do things according to God's word judgement comes. So Jesus would have us worship in spirit and **in truth**.

And then lastly, what is true worship? Well the New Testament tells us that we need to worship God through Jesus Christ. We're not to make images. But there is one image that we can worship!... and that is Jesus Christ. He is the express image of the Father, the exact representation of Him (Heb, 1:3). "*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.*" (Col 1:15) And we are called to worship Him and worship the Father through him. 'Angels and men before him fall.' It is our greatest joy and our greatest pleasure to worship God through Jesus Christ. There is only one mediator between God and man. No relic, no statue, no sculpture could ever help us or be a mediator between us and God. But there is one, the man Christ Jesus, who reveals God to us and enables us to come to God. He said, "*If you've seen me you've seen the Father.*" Jesus reflects the very character of God because He is God ! He is one with the Father. How shall we worship? We will worship God through His Son, Jesus Christ. And then lastly and briefly what is our response?

3) Our response Well, it's been a serious message, hasn't it? So we must be very careful in our worship. All worship that involves depictions of Jesus Christ, or of God the Father, or of God the Holy Spirit must be avoided. There may be books about Jesus and drawings of him for children, and we're not saying that all these are wrong. We're not "docetists" and want to give the impression that Jesus was some sort of Phantom. It is not wrong to have a picture of say Jesus riding to Jerusalem on a donkey. But when it comes to worshipping God we have to be very careful. And even when it's not worship nothing must be done to detract from him. There must be no cartoons, and no misrepresentations. We must be very careful with films. Jesus wasn't a white man with fair hair or blue eyes. Caution must be our watchword

Now the first and second commandments have something to say about pluralism. Pluralism is the belief that all religions are valid and are just different ways of getting to the same God. However the Bible teaches that there is only Lord Jesus Christ and one Holy Spirit, and one God and Father of all. Other religions are not worshipping the same God. There's only one God, we must not distort Him in any way. Now if we expect loyalty: loyalty from your friends; loyalty from a family member; loyalty in church; should not God expect loyalty from us? He does expect this but demands even more. He requires absolute allegiance. The most terrible thing that a person can do is to turn their back on God, and betray Him. Judas did that. He betrayed the Lord Jesus for the love of money. Now the Apostle Paul who once blasphemed Jesus Christ found grace and he gave his loyalty and allegiance to Jesus. Now Paul had a jealousy for God's people. He says this in 2 Corinthians chapter 11 verse two. "*For I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy, for I have betrothed you to one husband that I might present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.*" that was Paul's concern...He says, 'I've got a godly jealousy over you, and I have a godly jealousy for the church.. that you would truly be a pure virgin before him.' Now if this was the concern of an earthly man, a sinner... How much more is God concerned for our purity? Oh that we would worship God for who he is and never follow idols. Oh that we would never worship him according to an imagination that we have of him. But may we worship him according to Holy Scripture; according God's revealed truth. And may He have all the glory in our lives. And may we enjoy Him and delight in His Word. You see for the believer His law is not only a prohibition but it is a law of freedom and a law of liberty. We are now glad to obey it. We understand that it is a law of love to God and love to your neighbour. So, may this second commandment lead us to truly worship our God in spirit and in truth. May God bless this word to your heart this day. AMEN