

20:4—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.

20:5—You shall not bow down to them or serve them, 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,

20:6—but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

### **Introduction**

Chinese General Secretary Xi Jinping and the Chinese government censoring of associating his picture with Winnie the Pooh. This was derogatory to him, to be caricatured by the corpulent cartoon bear. In the Second Commandment, God also does not desire to be degraded by any image, even those made with the best intentions of men.

### **Background**

Israel understood pagan worship of idols. They knew false gods and also the methods of worshipping the false gods. The Second Commandment specifically addresses the worship of the true and living God in the right way (forbidding any false ways). That right way is ONLY as God Himself has prescribed in His Word.

### **Proposition**

**In the Second Commandment, God forbids image worship or any way He has not prescribed and threatens judgment for disobedience.**

In the Second Commandment:

God forbids image worship or any way He has not prescribed and threatens judgment for disobedience.

God requires worship only as He prescribed in His Word and promises abundant blessings for obedience.

### **Sermon Points**

**I. The sins prohibited in the Second Commandment (v. 4-5a).**

**II. The judgments threatened in the Second Commandment (v. 5b-6).**

### **Sermon Outline**

**I. The sins prohibited in the Second Commandment (v. 4-5a).**

A. The distinction of the Second Commandment from the First.

1. Roman Catholics and some Lutherans combine the First and Second, then divide 10<sup>th</sup> into two.

a. Dividing the Ten Commandment into two is incorrect.

b. The Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 accounts of Ten Commandments have order reversed.

c. Exodus 20: You shall not covet your neighbor's house; neighbor's wife.

d. Deuteronomy 5: You shall not covet your neighbor's wife; neighbor's house.

2. In this regard, they make no distinction between the two different types of idolatry.

3. Idolatry of the First Commandment: worshipping the wrong God (WHO?).

4. Idolatry of the Second Commandment: worshipping the right God in the wrong way (HOW?).

5. The occasion of Israel and the Golden Calf (Exodus 32).

a. “He [Aaron] took this from their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool and made it into a molten calf; and they said, ‘This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt.’”—Exodus 32:4.

- b. God's words to Moses: "They have quickly turned aside from the way which I commanded them. They have made for themselves a molten calf, and have worshiped it and have sacrificed to it and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt!'"—Exodus 32:8.
  - c. This incident of the Golden Calf was not a violation of the First Commandment, but of the Second!
  - d. They were attempting to worship to God who brought them out of Egypt, not some other god.
- B. The seriousness of violations of the Second Commandment.
- 1. The example of Nadab and Abihu stricken dead for offering up strange fire to the Lord (Leviticus 10).
    - a. The main issue at hand: "...and offered strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them."—Leviticus 10:1.
    - b. "By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored."—Leviticus 10:4.
  - 2. The example of Uzzah stricken dead for touching the ark of the covenant (2 Samuel 6).
    - a. Bringing the ark back on new carts drawn by oxen (not carried on poles as God had commanded), the ark nearly fell off, so Uzzah reached out to stabilize it, and the Lord struck him dead.
    - b. Pragmatism: Uzzah attempted to preserve the ark from damage.
    - c. Pragmatism: for the church to make decisions based upon results and success rather than on what God has commanded.
- C. The principles of interpreting the Ten Commandments applied to the Second.
- 1. Principles:
    - a. For negative commands (thou shall not...) the opposite duty is required.
    - b. For positive commands, the opposite sin is forbidden.
    - c. Under each commandment is included all the sins of that kind.
  - 2. For the Second Commandment: the sins of that kind.
    - a. Not merely carved images, but painted ones. Not merely ones done by hand, but computer-generated images also.
    - b. → God is NOT to be worshipped by or through or with the assistance of images, or in any other way not prescribed by His Word (will-worship).
    - c. Illustration: a meat-fest (fatted calf, whole roast pig, whole roast lamb, etc.) for a vegan friend!
    - d. God is a spirit and does not have a body: "Then the LORD spoke to you from the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form -only a voice."—Deut. 4:12.
    - e. God is holy and as the Creator He is completely set apart from His creation, i.e., the creatures.
    - f. God is so far greater than the creature; any attempt to represent Him by an image will degrade Him.
    - g. "What profit is an idol when its maker has shaped it, a metal image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in his own creation when he makes speechless idols!"—Habakkuk 2:18.
    - h. → Broad category of sins: the worship of God in ANY way not prescribed in His Word (strange fire).
    - i. Which He had not commanded them.
  - 3. For the Second Commandment: the opposite duty required.
    - a. How then are you to worship God?
    - b. This is the topic for next Sunday, Lord willing.
    - c. We are to worship Him only as He has prescribed in His Word: by prayer, the singing of hymns and psalms, reading and preaching of His Word, by the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and by solemn oaths and vows.
- D. What are some false or wrong sources for ideas of how our God ought to be worshipped?
- 1. The methods of pagan worship.
    - a. "When the LORD your God cuts off before you the nations which you are going in to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, 30 beware that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How do these nations serve their gods, that I also may do likewise?' 31 "You shall not behave thus toward the LORD

your God, for every abominable act which the LORD hates they have done for their gods; for they even burn their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.”—Deuteronomy 12:29-31.

- b. But people don't burn their sons and daughters anymore.
- c. What about abortion, at the altar of the god of money and education and career?
2. The suggestions of Satan.
  - a. “...the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God”—1 Cor. 10:20.
3. Man-made tradition.
  - a. “BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.”—Matthew 15:9.
  - b. There is an awe or deference shown to antiquity, especially in religion.
  - c. But, an act or practice of worship does not go from wrong to right because the church has done it for 2000 years (i.e., tradition).
  - d. Poor example: the bronze serpent of Numbers 21, which was God's idea. But over the years, the meaning of it had changed, so Hezekiah had it destroyed because the people burned incense to it and called it Nehushtan (2 Kings 18:4).
  - e. Application: the tendency for man to fall into a pattern, doing things for tradition's sake. Asking WHY.
  - f. Children ask: “What does this rite (Passover) mean to you?”
4. Your own imagination.
  - a. “Being then the children of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man.”—Acts 17:29.
  - b. “You thought that I was just like you.”—Psalm 50:21. Man imagines God to no better than him.
  - c. In the matter of worship, man's creativity becomes a vice rather than a boon.
5. Your good intentions/sincere desires.
  - a. Why? To do something to secure the favor of God.
  - b. Why? A desire to be similar to and so be accepted by the world.
- E. Applications.
  1. What about pictures of Jesus?
    - a. Jesus has a body, even now in heaven. → True, but God has specifically forbidden the worship of Him by images, even if we had an accurate picture of Him.
    - b. Pictures of Jesus just for the instruction of our children? → Particular note: judgment on children!
  2. May we make the images but consciously decide not to worship them?
    - a. The whole point is that if you make them, you will worship them.
    - b. Besides, the commandment forbids making them, bowing down, and serving them.
  3. The desire for novelty in the worship of God.
    - a. Just as Israel was bored with the manna in the desert, so also God's people may become bored with His worship.
    - b. Manna: God sent food to His people from heaven for FORTY years!
    - c. God sent His Son: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities -all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.”—Colossians 1:15-20.

## II. The judgments threatened in the Second Commandment (v. 5b-6).

- A. Who the Lord is.
  1. I the Lord your God.
  2. God is the one who delivered Israel out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

3. God is the one who delivers you from the bondage to sin and death through Jesus Christ His Son.
  4. → Pulling rank and file.
    - a. This is annoying when done too often by men.
    - b. But at times, we who are as sinners defiant towards all authority need to hear it.
    - c. Especially from the Almighty God, who possesses all power and authority, and rightfully OWNS you!
- B. Our God is a jealous God.**
1. God is jealous for His name and His glory.
  2. His honor is desecrated any time a person represents Him with an image.
  3. His honor is despised any time a person says, I will worship God however I please, and He should be willing to accept whatever I'm willing to give Him.
  4. Will worship is all about YOU and ME then, so let's not fool ourselves; it is NOT about God at all!!!
- C. Our God visits the sins of the father on their children to the third and fourth generation.**
1. The first (and sinful) tendency is to impugn God for injustice for punishing children for parents' sins.
  2. But not so: the children come to share in the sins of their parents by their own choice.
  3. CHANGE or GROWTH is a required part of the Christian life.
    - a. "But this is the way I have always done it" is not a valid answer to end a conversation. "I'm too stupid to learn and too stubborn to improve."
    - b. "But this is the way I was raised" explains the principle of "to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> generation. My parents disobeyed God and so will I!
    - c. Sin is stupid and selfish.
    - d. Repentance says that you desire to please God, and better for you AND your descendants after you.
    - e. You need not continue of this pattern to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> generation: repent and worship the Lord!
  4. Application: what a blessing it is to have parents who worship the Lord and turn away from idolatry!
- D. Disobedience is HATRED of God (true for all commandments, but specific to Second Commandment).**
1. All who love me demonstrate their love by obeying God's commandments.
  2. All who hate me demonstrate their hate by disobeying God's commandments.
  3. God desires to be known by His love to His people more than His judgment.
  4. Instead of thinking of God's severity, why not acknowledge how great a sin that idolatry is, respond in faith that God desires to spare you of the deplorable consequences of this sin, and so worship Him as He has commanded?