

Sermon Title: No Idols

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Exodus 20:4-6 (10 Commandments # 4 of 13)

Date: 3-13-11

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We are working our way through the Ten Commandments. Today, we are all the way to Number 2, and we will continue to give this watershed portion of God's Word the attention that is appropriately due it.

It's quite a setting, where this was delivered. We read in Chapter 19 of the Book of Exodus, starting at Verse 16—"So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound"—this was with Israel camped at the foot of Mount Sinai (16:1)—"so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. The Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up."

And God told him to get the people ready; he came back down, he gave them all of the instructions; and then it simply says, at the beginning of Chapter 20—"Then God spoke all these words." That was just the beginning. 58 chapters of the Bible were revealed during the 11 months that Israel was camped there, and the beginning of it all is these Ten Commandments—where, as I said, today we study Number 2 of the Ten Commandments: "You shall not make for yourself an idol" (Ex. 20:4; NASB-1995, and throughout, unless otherwise noted).

The First Commandment deals with the object of your worship: "You shall have no other gods before Me" (vs. 3). Nothing else can replace the rightful place that God should have in your life (Ex. 34:14; Deut. 6:13; Matt. 4:10).

This one deals not with the object of worship, but with the *mode* of worship—*How* do you worship God? The First Commandment forbids having any "other gods"; this commandment forbids reducing God to physical form; it forbids worshipping any physical representation of God—or anything in the Universe.

And so, in a sense, this is an echo of the First Commandment, because it requires that you worship only the true God. But it's also *distinct* from the First Commandment because it exposes the sin of claiming to worship the true God, but doing it *the wrong way* (see Deut. 12:2-4, 30).

In India, I have seen thousands and thousands of carved images which *supposedly* represent various deities. I've seen people perform all sorts of rituals to appease those alleged deities, because they think that the statues actually represent them, and maybe the statues have eyes, and they wouldn't want to offend one of the gods—he might do something bad to them.

In Brazil, I've seen, in modern cities, whiskey bottles and lit cigars left on street corners as animistic sacrifices to spirits that people wanted to appease.

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In Russia, I've visited Orthodox churches just *full* of idols—which they don't call "idols," they call them "icons"; because, after all, "icon" is a Greek word. I've watched people pray to them and bow to them and kiss them.

Now, here in America, I admit—there isn't as much blatant idolatry as in many other countries. But the Commandment is crystal-clear, and it *is not* without application for us today.

Let's read it, and then we'll look at it carefully: Exodus Chapter 20, Verses 4 through 6— "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

Pretty easy to break this one down: Do Not Make Or Worship Any Idols—that's the precept; and then, Do Not Provoke The Jealousy Of God—that's the penalty that comes with this one.

So, Do Not Make Or Worship Idols. The first part of the instruction is that you don't make something that you worship. When you think about it, that whole idea is absolutely *absurd!* For something to be a viable object of worship, it has to be *greater* than you—and nothing you can create is greater than you, by definition! (cf. Ps. 115:4-7; Rev. 9:20) Nevertheless man, in his spiritual blindness, continues, through the centuries, to do that very thing!

What is prohibited here is "making an idol." There are several descriptions here in the Pentateuch of what it means (e.g., Lev. 26:1; Deut. 27:15); there are many more descriptions elsewhere in the Old Testament (Is. 40:18-20; 41:7; Jer. 10:3-5, 8-9).

But what He says is: Don't make any representation "of what is in heaven above"—that means: Don't be fashioning representations of things that you know are in Heaven; that includes God the Father, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, angels, believers who have died; it also includes the throne of God—such as described in Isaiah or in Revelation—and any of the heavenly furnishings mentioned elsewhere in the Bible. He says: Don't make those things, and then worship them!

Or: Don't make a representation of anything "on the earth beneath." Romans 1 has that classic description of people who refuse to worship the true God, and how they wind up worshipping things that God has made—even to the *absurd* level of worshipping bugs and animals, or the sun or the moon.

And God says, also: Don't make a representation of anything "in the water under the earth." And you think, "Wait a minute! What's *that*? Worshipping something in my *well*?" Well, actually "the water under the earth" is a Hebrew idiom for the shoreline. Deuteronomy 4:18 mentions "any fish that is in the water below the earth."

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You put it all together and it's clear: This verse means, not to worship anything in the created Universe or in Heaven, in the form of a physical representation. Specifically, you must not worship such things in the form of an "idol" or a "likeness."

Idolatry was a *huge* issue for Israel because of the kinds of worship in all the nations surrounding them; that subject is *all over* the Old Testament (e.g., Gen. 31:19; 35:2, 4; Ex. 23:31-33; 34:15-16; Deut. 29:16-17; Jos. 23:7; 24:23; 1 Kings 11:2; 2 Ki. 17:7-8). As a matter of fact, there are 14 different Hebrew words and expressions for idols and forbidden images in the Old Testament. The concept includes any image that is carved or molded or cast—whether made of gold or silver, stone or wood, or anything *possible* that we can think of in our minds and create with our hands (Acts 17:29). It doesn't matter what the shape or the form of the idol is; all a person has to do in order to violate this command is even to *imagine* that such a thing represents some kind of god (Acts 19:26).

Now, here we need to make a distinction. Notice the command in Verse 5—"You shall not *worship* them or *serve* them." That's the crucial question. It is *not* a sin to paint a picture—maybe a portrayal of the three crosses on the hill at Calvary, or a wooden cross, or something like that. It's not a sin to even make a three-dimensional representation of something. This command is *not* about stifling artistic expression (see Ex. 31:1-5). Consider what God Himself did when He told them how to make the Tabernacle, and the Temple that came later. Above the "mercy seat" in the Tabernacle were the two golden "cherubim" (Ex. 25:18). A "cherub" is a heavenly angel (Gen. 3:24; Ps. 80:1; Ezek. 28:14)—so the representations of the cherubim were images of something in Heaven. Obviously, God didn't violate *His own commandment*, or He would be contradicting Himself. What *would* violate the commandment is *bowing down before* the cherubim, *praying to* the cherubim, *offering sacrifices to* the cherubim (cf. 2 Ki. 18:4). It's not a sin to paint or carve your conception of something represented in the Bible—but *as soon as you bow down to it*, as soon as you genuflect to it, you have sinned!

Do not "*worship* them or *serve* them"—there are two Hebrew words; I checked them out through a whole bunch of translations; they all mean the same thing: Don't offer worship to that physical thing!

Now, why is this such a big deal to God? I mean, hasn't God ever heard, "All publicity is good publicity, as long as your name is out there"? Why is it so wrong to make something you can see and touch *to help you*, maybe, in your sense of knowing God? I'll talk about that in a moment.

A couple of suggestions of *why* this is so big of a deal. Number 1: To make a true image of God is impossible; God is a spiritual Being, and He is invisible (e.g., Deut. 4:12, 15-19; Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17). As Jesus put it when He spoke to the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well, in John 4:24—"God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth," not by an idol and a ritual. So any physical representation of God is automatically inadequate (Jer. 23:24b); and to try to represent God *physically* would be to demean Him (Is. 40:18, 21-26); and then to *worship* that thing would be, basically, putting God into a box way too small to contain Him (Jb. 26:14; Ps. 50:21).

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A second reason is that, to worship God in the form of a manmade image is *completely absurd!* Hebrews Chapter 3, Verse 3, says: "He"—referring to Christ—"has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as"—and here's the phrase with the concept—"the builder of the house has more honor than the house." (cf. Is. 66:1-2) Wouldn't it be absurd to bow down to the picture of the king *when the king is in the room?* How ridiculous to bow down to an image of God when God Himself is omnipresent! (Acts 17:28) What an insult to Him!

I suppose it's impossible to say which of the Ten Commandments is most often violated—they're *all* pretty popular for violations in our world—but you might make a good case that, in Old Testament Israel—the life of Israel in the Old Testament era—this may have been the one most often violated, or the one *least* obeyed (cf. Acts 7:42-43).

Idolatry was *so prevalent* around Israel. The people who occupied Canaan before Israel were *so deeply* into *so many* polytheistic idolatrous practices that the issue was around them *all the time!* Egypt was full of idols—all ten of those plagues assault specific gods that the Egyptians worshipped (see Ex. 12:12). And you couple that with Israel's failure to fully obey God by ridding the land of its inhabitants and its worship (Jdg. 2:1-3, 10-11), and idolatry was like a chronic disease in the bloodstream of Israel's life for centuries.

I mean, if you keep reading in Exodus: While God was giving Moses the Law up on the mountain, the people thought it was too long, and what did they do? *They made an idol,* and then they bowed down and worshipped it! (Ex. 32:4-6) Just take a look at how God dealt with *that one,* and see what you think of idolatry!

So, you say, "We are not Israel. This isn't the Old Testament time. Is this relevant today?" Well, maybe not in the *same* way that it was relevant for Israel in the Old Testament times—but believe me, *it's relevant!* This problem still goes on! Around the world, there are *millions* of people—literally *millions* of people—who *believe* they are Christians, and who *call themselves* Christians, but they are *deeply* involved in idolatry!

And we have a movement in America: this "Emerging Church" movement, which is wanting to bring into Evangelicalism—where the Bible is *supposed* to be in its rightful place as the defining document for *all* that we do (Is. 8:20; 2 Tim. 3:16-17)—and they want to bring in ancient rituals and traditions. What they are doing is *importing idolatry into the Church!* It's *going on,* and it's going on right around *us!*

Do you know any groups who make statues of dead believers, and then believe that those dead "saints" help them with their prayers? Have you ever heard of that? Do you know of any groups who believe that you can *light candles* to somehow help your prayers be heard and answered? If you know anyone who does any of those things, *you know a Twenty-first Century idolater!* It's here! If you know any churches like that, *you know an idol temple!* I've shown you those pictures of churches in Russia, *full* of "icons"—which is their euphemism for pseudo-Christian idols. If you ask them the story of those things, they'll tell you what thing in Heaven or on Earth they represent, and they'll invite you to kiss the idol.

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To act as if there is any spiritual power resident in anything other than God Himself—and in the angels and demons that act only according to "His will" (Ps. 103:21; cf. Jb. 1:12; 2:6; Lk. 8:30-33)—to do that is to *blaspheme* God; it's to insult Him.

You don't need any of those things to help you with your prayers—you have something *way better than that!* Romans Chapter 8, Verse 26—"In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words." If God the Holy Spirit Himself, personally, helps you with your prayers, how *absurd* is it to ask some dead believer to help you?—or think that a piece of wood or a piece of marble or a piece of rock or a picture can help you with your prayers? It's just not logical.

And rubbing a rabbit's foot—do it if you want to. Nailing a horseshoe over the door, wearing your lucky socks, crossing your fingers, avoiding black cats or walking under ladders, believing that a mirror brings bad luck, throwing spilled salt over your shoulder, not having a room or a floor numbered "13" in your building—or *anything* like that, that a person *acts upon*, is nothing more than a *modern form of idolatry*—believing that there is spiritual power that you need to tap into, other than God (Ps. 62:11; Matt. 6:13).

The men who fought the battles of the Protestant Reformation—which is largely being forgotten in our era, but we want to make sure we *don't* forget—when they saw firsthand the grip of the subtle but very powerful idolatry of the Roman Catholic Church, they realized that in their world, in their day, this commandment was at stake; they said and wrote some powerful words.

I ran across one from Thomas Watson, who wrote a very good book on the Ten Commandments. Do you get this fired up when you see true worship corrupted? Listen to what he wrote; he was commenting on Exodus 20, Verses 4 through 6: "The Church of Rome is reproved and condemned, which, from the Alpha of its religion to the Omega, is wholly idolatrous. Romanists make images of God the Father, painting Him in their church windows as an old man, and an image of Christ from the crucifix; and because it is against the letter of this commandment, they sacrilegiously blot it out of their catechism and divide the Tenth Commandment into two." What he means by that is, they count the Commandments differently; they call this one a sub-point of Number 1, because it *would* bother their religion—their worship—and then they make the Tenth Commandment into two Commandments, so they still get ten...but they don't pay attention to the grammar.

Back to Watson; he says: " 'But,' say the Papists' "—these guys weren't really gentle about calling names, like "the Papists"—"Images are "laymen's books," and they are good to put them in mind of God.' One of the Popish councils affirmed that we might learn more by an image than by long study of the Scriptures! Is an image a 'layman's book'? Then, see what lessons this book teaches! It teaches *lies!* It represents God in a visible shape, who is 'invisible.' For Papists to say they make use of an image to put them in mind of God is as if a woman should say she keeps company with another man to put her in mind of her husband!"

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Now, I'm not here to trash your Catholic friends, who maybe don't know any better. But I'm here to say: Idolatry is idolatry, and we *never* do anybody a favor by watering down what God says! You worship the *true God the way He says to!* Ask "Nadab and Abihu" (Lev. 10:1-2; Num. 3:4).

The same is true of many other branches of so-called "Christian" churches, including all the Eastern Orthodox denominations. Whenever I go to Russia, a *part* of me likes going by myself, so I can take it in and be focused; but I *really* like to take other people there, to let me see things afresh through their eyes. Of course, we always take them and show them the culture of Russia, which is so tied to the Russian Orthodox Church. When you show most American Evangelicals a Russian Orthodox Church, it's breathtaking—the visible representation is so *appalling!*

Larry Howell was there with us last month when we were in the Russian Orthodox Church—where they welcomed us visitors by throwing us out, because our translators were explaining to us what was going on, and they thought we were making too much noise, even though nobody was being disturbed. And I whispered to Larry and asked him, "Are you ready to leave?" and his quote—I'll never forget it—"Yep! *I've* had enough baloney for *two* sandwiches!" He gets the Second Commandment; he *understands*.

Do Not Make Or Worship Idols. It's not hard, is it? Not hard to grasp. Why? Do Not Provoke The Jealousy Of God. Come back with me to our text; look at Verse 5—God speaking: "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me."

Now, most people don't use the word "jealous" very often, when talking about God. How is God "jealous"? We kind of have a problem comprehending that idea, because *we* think of jealousy primarily as a bad thing—and it usually *is* a bad thing—but the *concept itself* isn't bad (e.g., Num. 25:11; Deut. 29:19-20; Nah. 1:2; Zeph. 1:18).

There *is* a wicked, sinful, carnal jealousy that we all know about (e.g., Jb. 5:2; Prov. 6:34; Acts 5:17; 1 Cor. 3:3; 13:4; Gal. 5:19-20; Jas. 3:14-16); but the idea doesn't have to include being suspicious or distrustful or wrongly envious of someone else.

In a very positive sense, I am "jealous" for what happens at this pulpit here at Heritage Bible Church (see 2 Cor. 11:2; cf. Ezek. 39:25). The Bible is clear about the spiritual requirements of those who preach (1 Tim. 3:2-7; Titus 1:6-9); and as much as is possible in me and our Elders, we will honor that about anybody who stands behind this pulpit and proclaims God's Word—*not because we worship the box*, but because it *represents* the place of the proclamation of truth (Neh. 8:2-8).

The Scriptures are equally clear about the necessity of maintaining "sound doctrine" (Titus 1:9; 2:1; cf. 1 Tim. 1:3; 4:16); and so I, without apology, *jealously* guard the content of what is said from this place.

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That's a legitimate, positive sense of being "jealous," and that's just a *glimmer* of the significance of what it means that God says, "I am a jealous God." God is "jealous" to protect His people (Zech. 1:14; 8:2). God is "jealous" in that He properly requires that His people be *devoted to Him*, exclusively and totally (Matt. 4:10; cf. Ex. 34:14; Deut. 6:14-15; 10:20; 13:4). God is "jealous" in that He rightfully has anger against those who oppose Him (Ezek. 36:5; Nah. 1:2). He is "jealous" in His care and His concern for His people (Zech. 2:8; Jn. 16:27), whom He has redeemed at the cost of "His only begotten Son" (Jn. 3:16; cf. Rom. 8:32).

So it's only proper to understand that one of the reasons for scrupulously avoiding idolatry is that you don't want to be on the wrong side of the jealousy of God! Would you rather have God as your *bodyguard* or your enemy? (1 Cor. 10:21-22) Idolatry, true worship—take your pick. Either way, you would see His jealousy manifested: one would be very favorable; the other one, very *unfavorable*.

So in this context, there is terminology that describes some of what happens to those who worship wrongly, and how God treats them. But some of this is misunderstood and misapplied concerning this jealous nature of God. He says: "I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God," and then He says, "visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children..."

Let's stop at that word "visiting." What does that mean? What does it mean for God to "visit" something? Well, go ahead and trace it through your Bible, if you like; you will come to the conclusion that what it means is that it's a demonstration of God's power—either of blessing or of punishment. "In the day of visitation," Peter says (1 Pet. 2:12), people who have been faithful will be rewarded; people who have been unfaithful will be condemned.

"Visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children" means that things get passed down; they get "handed on," if you will (1 Pet. 1:18; cf. Acts 7:51). "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children" has been taken by some people to mean that God punishes one generation for the sins of its ancestors (Jer. 31:29; Ezek. 18:2)—and that, my friends, is *absolutely not true* (Deut. 24:16; Jer. 31:30; Ezek. 18:20). What God is saying here is: Idolatry is *contagious*, so *quarantine* yourself from it (Ex. 23:31-33)—because idolaters tend to pass along idolatry (2 Ki. 15:9), so don't get involved.

Now, in some Evangelical circles, this text is misapplied to teach that many Christians—they say—are actually infested with demons because they have parents or other relatives who have been involved in occultic things; or perhaps that they have been infiltrated with some sort of occultic idolatry because something was done in the house that they live, before they moved in—as if there is such a thing as "spiritual cooties" to be caught out there. And *that's not true!*

Do your own observation from this verse. *Does it say*, "God punishes children for the sins of their parents"? *No!* It does not say that. It says that He "visits *the iniquity*"—the *sin*—"of the [parents] on the children." It doesn't say anything about *punishment* for the sin; it says *the sin* can get passed on!

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It's *quite serious enough* that you are responsible for *your own sin*, let alone saying you're responsible for the sins of all of your ancestors for four generations!

The idea is this: It was God who designed the principle into the natural order of things that you "reap" what you "sow." Galatians , Verses 7 and 8—"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." If you grew up with people sowing to the flesh, if you grew up with people who set the pattern of idolatry for you, it's probably going to be passed on through your generation to the next one (Ps. 78:8, 17).

Now, that's *not unclear*. But let me ask you: Will a person who sows spiritual things by believing and repenting and obeying God reap *punishment* from God? *No!* Not if Romans 8:1 is true: "There is...no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." Will a person who loves God be *punished* for his sins? *No*. If that's true, God is a liar (Jn. 3:18).

So, *what does* Exodus Chapter 20, Verse 5 mean? Unless it contradicts the rest of the Bible, it doesn't mean that one generation is *punished* for the sins of another; it means that each generation's sins *have a powerful influence* on the next generation! God made it so that we learn from examples (Ps. 106:6, 35; Prov. 14:7; 22:24-25; Jn. 13:15; 1 Cor. 10:11; 15:33; 2 Thess. 3:7-9).

Patterns tend to repeat and echo from generation to generation (1 Ki. 14:22; 2 Ki. 21:15; Neh. 1:6; 9:2). Sinful patterns tend to run in families (1 Ki. 15:3, 26; 22:52; 2 Ki. 15:9), even throughout whole cultures—sexual promiscuity, molestation, physical battery, lying, laziness, greed. Need I say more? Need I just keep listing and listing? You get the point! You know what I'm talking about!

But two things affect this overall tendency for sins to be copied and carried on from one generation to the next: repentance (2 Ki. 22:2, 11-13) and the gracious faithfulness of God (Dt. 30:6; 1 Ki. 18:37). It's described in a passage that warns Israel *not* to go into idolatry, not to fall back into it, and to know that God would scatter them into captivity if they do. But look what God told Moses to tell Israel would happen *if they would repent* from their idolatry—it's in Deuteronomy Chapter 4, Verse 29; it's talking about "after you have been chastened for your idolatry," and He says this: "But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days you will return to the Lord your God and listen to His voice. For the Lord your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them." God will be faithful to the promises He made to your fathers, if you'll just be faithful to Him.

And so, before we go any further, notice this very crucial qualifying phrase at the end of Verse 5—"You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations *of those who hate Me...*" This applies to those who "hate" Him!



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In the context, what would it mean to hate God? Well, to "love" Him is to worship Him with your "heart...soul...mind...and strength" (Mk. 12:30). To "hate" Him would be, in this context, to worship an idol. So, if one generation *stops* worshipping idols, the pattern is broken (cf. Ezek. 18:14-17).

That's why I get so righteously indignant at the modern Christian writers and speakers—probably the two best-known names are Neil Anderson and C. Fred Dickason—who have written *horrible* books that have influenced *tens of thousands* of Christians in the wrong way! They go around telling Christians that they probably have demons in them because of their parents or grandparents or great-grandparents. So they would apparently believe that there is such a thing as a *child* of God who *hates* God—what an absurd thought (see 1 Cor. 16:22; cf. Jn. 5:40, 42).

One time I was doing a daily radio program, and the producer booked somebody on there who had coauthored a book with this guy Neil Anderson, who has books about how to break the bondage of all the demons; and one of his coauthors had written a book about that for children. He gave me the book and he said, "This guy is going to be on your program Thursday." So I read the book—wrong guy to give this book to, being an adoptive father. He explained how adopted children are almost certainly "demonized" because they, for the most part, were conceived through fornication—and that's a point at which demons enter.

And I remember the conversation I had; I said [to the Producer], "You can invite him on, but I will tell people *not* to read this book, *not* to buy this book, to *burn* this book if they have it, to *boycott* the publisher of this book until they retract it—because they are teaching *contrary* to God's Word, and they are putting fear among people, and they're basically setting up an *idolatrous system* of rigmarole and ritual to deal with problems that *they* have created through their own mishandling of Scripture! And *I will rebuke this guy in public...or, you can cancel.*" We didn't have the interview.

This is *God's Word*, my friend! This is *important*, and it's important that we *understand it*, and then that we not *violate it* by how we misrepresent it! (2 Tim. 2:15)

Now, put that together with the *final* verse of this commandment. So He talks about how the sins will be passed along to "the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, *but*"—here's the other description of Me; Verse 6—"showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

Do you see the contrast? You fall into one of two camps: You hate God, or you love God. Those are the only two choices (Jn. 14:23-24). If you hate God, sin will keep its death-grip on you (Prov. 5:22; Jn. 8:34; cf. Ps. 81:15); the sins of previous generations will tend to maintain their grip upon you (2 Ki. 3:3). But if you love God, you will experience His "lovingkindness" (1 Ki. 8:23; Neh. 1:5; Ps. 23:6; 32:10); you will bask in His "grace" (2 Jn. 3); you will be forgiven (Col. 2:13); you will be cleansed (Ezek. 36:25; 1 Jn. 1:9); you will receive "grace" and "eternal life" (Rom. 5:21). Go with the flow of what you're learned (Acts 7:51), or you can break the pattern and be set free (1 Pet. 1:18).

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Two boys grew up—twin brothers, same family—with an alcoholic father, a *terrible* alcoholic father. They went from their own home, and one of them was found basically on skid row; and they said, "You know, you were actually raised in a very nice neighborhood! How did you end up here?" And he said, "Well, it was my father's influence! He was a drunk; I became a drunk—I had no other choice!" They found his twin brother thriving, walking with God, raising a wonderful family—a teetotaler; and they said, "Well, how did you get to be here, when you grew up with an alcoholic father?" And he said, "Well, it was my father's influence—I had no choice! I wouldn't want to be like *that!*"

See the dichotomy? You love Him or you hate Him! If you don't break the pattern of sin, *sin tends to repeat itself*—it tends to rumble through the generations and be passed on!

And notice one more thing in Verse 6, and we're done: There is a dual description of one half of the contrast. Among those who love God, they're described two ways: "love Me *and* keep My commandments." If you love God, you will also love His Word (Jn. 8:47; 14:15); you will *want* to keep His commandments (Ps. 119:97; Rom. 7:22; 1 Jn. 5:3). You *wouldn't think* of worshipping Him in an improper or demeaning or flippant or arrogant way! (cf. Rev. 4:10; 7:11)

Think about the truth of this—how profound it is, how *real* it is. Even within the Bible, you see it illustrated so many times: In the context of the dismal failure of the ten of the twelve spies who Moses sent in to scout the land when Israel was ready to enter it, Moses pleads for mercy for Israel, and he recites some of God's own words to Him; and then, look at the request that Moses makes in Numbers 14, Verses 18 and 19—"The Lord is slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, forgiving iniquity and transgression; but He will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generations." So, Moses says, "Pardon, I pray, the iniquity of this people according to the greatness of Your lovingkindness, just as You also have forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."

And yet, what happened? A whole generation died (1 Cor. 10:5; Heb. 3:17)—those who failed to believe and obey God (Heb. 3:19). And the merciful, gracious salvation of the next generation, which entered the Promised Land, was *missed* by those who would not obey. Deuteronomy Chapter 24, Verse 16—"Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin."

You can't get around it! The Ten Commandments say: "Don't do this, but do this." Black and white, right or wrong, in or out, love or hate—and they call us to repentance. If you are not openly worshipping idols—well, we're good. But please don't disregard the commandments. Remember: They're designed to deal with your "heart" (Deut. 30:10; cf. Ps. 37:31; Jer. 31:33), not *just* with your behavior (Eph. 6:6).

You know, you could actually come to something like the Communion Table and be worshipping *that thing*, and putting your trust in that *symbol*, rather than in the real thing (Phil. 3:3).

Sermon Title: No Idols

Speaker: Jim Harris

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Check your heart before the Lord. Let Him do as He needs to do, and let's go from here as those who "love" Him and are "called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

And let's pray:

*Our Father, as always, You know the prayer of my heart for this precious place—this church, these people—that You would do whatever You need to do in our hearts, to make us as useful as possible for Your name's sake. And so, Father, bring Your conviction upon us. As painful as it can be, we know that it ultimately is a good thing; it teaches us of Your reaction to our sins. Teach us to love our Lord Jesus Christ, and to hate those things that water down our true worship. Do as You will with us; and use us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.*