

RIGHT WORSHIP

EXODUS 20:1-6

And God spoke all these words, saying: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

You shall have no other gods before Me.

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; 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 on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

This morning I brought with me a list composed by Dan Briody entitled, "The Cell Phone Ten Commandments". Here are ten absolutes for cell phone users...

1. Thou shall not subject defenseless onlookers to cell phone conversations.

2. Thou shall not set thy ringer to play "La Cucaracha" every time thy phone rings. Or Beethoven's Fifth, or the Bee Gees, or any other annoying melody.

3. Thou shall turn thy cell phone off during public performances (*especially church... I added that... especially church*)

4. Thou shall not wear more than two wireless devices on thy belt. This is not a problem yet, but as their popularity increases, Batman-like utility belts are next.

5. (This one is serious) Thou shall not dial while driving.

6. Thou shall not wear thy earpiece in the presence of thy friends. (A bit rude)

7. Thou shall not speak louder on thy cell phone than thou would

on any other phone. If your signal goes out, speaking louder doesn't help.

8. Thou shall not grow too attached to they cell phone. Dependency on constant communication is not healthy. At work, go nuts. At home, give it a rest.

9. Thou shall not attempt to impress others with the style of thy cell phone.

10. When you enter a restaurant and sit down at thy table do not slap your cell phone down on the table top just in case it rings. Could you please be a little less conspicuous? You'll hear it just as well if it's in your pocket or clipped to your belt.

A quick search on the internet will turn up not just the Cell Phone Ten Commandments, but various sets of other Ten Commandments...

There's *the Ten Commandments for Computer Programmers*, *Baseball's Ten Commandments*, *the Ten Commandments for Good Historical Writing*, *the Ten Commandments for Stress Management*, *The Ten Commandments of Golf Etiquette*, *the Ten Commandments of Firearm Safety* - and what I needed after my time on the computer... *the Ten Commandments of Internet Searching*...

But not only are there different sets of Ten Commandments, even the Ten God gave to Moses get divided in various ways. Jews and Protestants consider verse 3 the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before Me." Then the second starts in verse 4, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image"

Thus, the first two commandments are... *no other gods*, and *no graven images*.

Whereas, Roman Catholics clump verses 3-6 together as one command, and then get a total number of ten by dividing the last commandment, "Thou shall not covet..." into two commands. Roman Catholics consider the first commandment as simply a

prohibition against idolatry... *I believe there's more to it than that...*

The first commandment in verse 3 focuses on the *object of our worship*.

God says to us, “**No other gods, only Me.**” The first commandment eliminates all rivals. It excludes from our lives anything that competes with our affection for God, or our devotion to God. *Only one God...* it's a non-negotiable.

But in verses 4-6 the subject changes... Here the focus is on the *observance of our worship*. Not just *who we're to worship*, but *how we're to worship Him*.

The second commandment is not just a prohibition against idolatry... It's a lesson on how the one true God wants to be worshipped. God is a jealous God and there are methods of worship that please Him - and practices that don't.

Here's the premise behind the second commandment. It's not enough to love and worship God... *if your love is sincere you will love and worship God in the way He wants to be loved and worshipped*. This is a principle basic to all relationships.

Believe me, the breakthrough in my marital life occurred when I realized that if I really loved Kathy, I'd love her in the way that she wants and needs to be loved... *not just in the way that's convenient or easy for me*. That's not real love at all.

When Kathy is tired of losing kids in the backyard because the grass is waist high – when the dog goes outside and disappears - me bringing her home candy and daisies is not what she wants! *It just doesn't cut it, literally!* I could buy my wife a Russell Stover's franchise, and she wouldn't care! But if I mow the lawn, or make Mack mow it (it has the same effect) - she falls in love with me all over again!

This is a non-negotiable in relationships. If you love anyone - your wife, or parents, or kids, or God – you'll love them in a way they

desire to be loved.

And this is a principle that's been all but forgotten by many Christians...

People today like being Christians, as long as they don't have to be like Christ - as long as they can make up their own rules, and fashion a likeable, comfortable god. A god who makes no demands - never imposes His will - agrees with their decisions - fits in with their lifestyle - and overlooks, or even justifies their sin.

America is supposedly a Christian nation, but a recent a Barna Research poll highlighted our disintegrating morality... 61% of Americans consider gambling to be a morally accepted activity – 60% believe it's okay for a man and woman to live together before marriage – 59% see nothing wrong with lust and sexual fantasies (including pornography) – 45% see nothing wrong with abortion – 42% no longer consider adultery a sin – and 30% feel the same way about homosexuality.

Here are folks who have ignored, or chosen to disagree with important biblical teachings - yet, if asked, many of them would still call themselves Christians.

This is why the second commandment is vital. It reiterates that it's not enough to just worship God – to sing His praise, or say we love Him. For our worship to be meaningful we have to accept God for who He is...play by His rules...submit to His notions of right and wrong...worship God in the way He desires to be worshipped.

On the sixth day of creation God created man in his image and likeness, and every since, rebellious men has been trying to make a god in man's image and likeness. We want to fashion a god who agrees with us – that we can control.

Here is the non-negotiable at the heart of the Second Commandment... There are ways God wants to be worshipped, and there are ways that He does not want to be worshipped. *And a sincere love for God will acknowledge the differences.*

Guys, the first commandment assures *accuracy in our worship* – be sure you worship the *right God*. While the second commandment assures *the integrity of our worship* – for it challenges us to worship God in the *right way*.

Last week I quoted Joshua's words to the sons and daughters of the Hebrews who exited Egypt. Joshua 24:14 commands the next generation to "**put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the River and in Egypt.**"

While *in Egypt* the Hebrews worshipped the gods *of Egypt*... Egyptians deified the Nile River, various animals, the sun and the moon, even the Pharaoh. Sadly, the Hebrews joined in that worship until God revealed Himself through Moses.

But not only did the Hebrews worship the gods of Egypt, they worshipped those gods in the way the Egyptians were accustomed to worship. The Hebrews not only adopted the Egyptians gods, but they mimicked the Egyptian style of worship...

Egypt was into idols. Egyptians represented their gods with physical images made from metal, wood, stone, and ivory. And they paid homage to their idols in lewd, cruel, and immoral ways. Temple prostitution and wild, drunken orgies were common practices in pagan worship. Human sacrifice – even child sacrifice – was practice. The Hebrews not only worshipped idols, they did so through evil means.

This is what happened when Moses was on the mountain for forty days and nights receiving the law from God. The multitudes at base camp grew restless...

God had worked miracles by the hand of Moses to deliver the Hebrews from the clutches of Pharaoh. In the process, each of the miracles God worked was designed to attack and mock a specific Egyptian deity. Through the ten plagues God proved conclusively that He was supreme - that He was the one true God.

And the Hebrews understood that truth!

But Moses was their tangible link with this one true God, and now Moses was somewhere, on the mountain. They weren't sure if he was alive or dead.

That's when someone suggested they fashion a replacement – a gold calf.

When Aaron took their gold earrings and melted them down, and turned them into a calf he wasn't creating another god – a false god – he was creating a physical representation of the one, true God. Something tangible they could grab and hold that would remind them of God - *a replacement for Moses, not God.*

Exodus 32:4-5 tell us, “(Aaron) received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, "This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" So when Aaron saw it, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow is a feast to the LORD." And the word he uses, “LORD”, is the word “Jehovah” – which was the covenant name the Hebrews used for the true God.

Why he chose to represent God with a calf we're not sure. In Revelation 4 the living creatures that surround the throne of God in heaven – the cherubim – are said to have the face of a calf. Perhaps he was drawing on that connection.

Certainly though, Aaron wasn't trying to create a false god - in his mind at least, he was fashioning a graven image of the one, true God. Rather than a violation of the first command, the golden calf was a breach of the second commandment.

Apparently, Aaron tried to worship the Hebrew God the Egyptian way. He made an idol, and the people paraded around it in a lewd and immoral manner.

Exodus 32:6 tells us, “the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. And the LORD said to Moses, “Go, get down! For

your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves.” The Hebrews partied hearty and worshipped God in a worldly way... It was *unholy worship* for a *holy God*.

And in God’s eyes it was all a bunch of bull.

Five hundred years later when King Solomon died a similar mistake was made. Solomon left his kingdom to his son, Rehoboam. But Rehoboam was not as wise as his father. He made the cardinal mistake for politicians – *he raised taxes*.

And it provoked a revolt. The northern 10 tribes led by a man named Jeroboam split from Judah and formed their own kingdom... But Jeroboam had a problem...

God stipulated in the Old Testament Law that all Hebrews should come to the temple in Jerusalem to worship Him. But Jerusalem was in Rehoboam’s borders, and Jeroboam didn’t want his citizens vacationing in his rival’s back yard.

So Jeroboam established a religion of his own.

Again, it was the worship of God, but it was not the way God wanted to be worshipped. He sat up two representations of God in the northern cities of Bethel and Dan – *and guess what he used as representations?* Two golden calves.

Here’s what Jeroboam said to the Hebrews, in 1 Kings 12, “*It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!*” (...the exact words Aaron used 500 years earlier) *And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. Now this thing became a sin...*”

Notice those last words... “*Now this thing became a sin...*” Here is the problem when you employ a graven image in your worship... it eventually becomes a sin.

I don’t care how sincere you are... it might be rosary beads, or a crucifix, or a painting, or an icon, or a little grotto, or a cross on the

wall – but whenever you use a physical image as a *help* in your worship it will eventually become a *hindrance*.

Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholics stress the use of icons and emblems and symbols in their worship - statues and carvings of the Virgin Mary, or paintings of the Apostles or saints of old. *And I think they do so at great peril*. God knows that what starts out so innocently can eventually lead us astray. Often good intentions turn sour. That's why God gives us the second commandment.

Jim Caviezel was the actor who played Jesus in the film, "*The Passion of the Christ*". In my opinion there was nothing wrong with the making of that film, and Jim portraying the role of Christ... as long as it was viewed as a dramatization.

But on a recent trip to Latin America, Jim was mobbed by movie-goers. People begged Jim to work miracles, or to pray for them. I believe their Roman Catholic training – their attachment to visible, tangible aids in worship – made it difficult for them to distinguish between the actor and the actual Savior he portrayed.

When God is constantly represented in material form, in the end the worshipper will mistake the *symbol* for the *substance*. The *relic* will come to replace the *reality*.

Did you hear of the brash, little first grader who was busy drawing. His mom asked, "What are you working on?" He said, "I'm drawing a picture of God."

She gently scolded him, "Son, it's impossible to draw God. No one knows what He looks like!" The boy fired back, "They will when I get through with my picture!"

Don't you know that if we had a literal photograph of God – or of God in the flesh, Jesus Christ - before long we would end up worshipping the photograph. It would end up encased in some shrine. People would bow before it and pray to it.

And in doing so they would neglect the God the picture represented.

Exodus 20:4 tells us, “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; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.”

Over the years, certain Puritan groups - and the Amish - have interpreted this injunction as a prohibition against all expressions of art and illustration.

These groups say a painting, a photo, a sculpture, a tapestry, a movie about Jesus is a graven image - and forbidden by the second commandment.

On a trip to Israel we walked through Mea Sherim, one of the Orthodox Jewish neighborhoods and I carried my camera. Just before we entered our guide told us the residents would frown on us if we tried to take their picture. They might even throw rocks, or try to take our camera. To the ultra-Orthodox Jews a photograph – or any work of art, for that matter – is a violation of the second commandment.

I think these kinds of extreme positions are a misinterpretation of verse 4... The key to this verse is the last line, “you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.”

The prohibition is not against producing or enjoying art - photos, or paintings, or movies. It's against using them in worship... “you shall not bow down to them”

If the Amish or Orthodox Jews are right in their interpretation of the Second Command - and all forms of art are sinful - then God breaks His own law later in Exodus. When He constructs the Tabernacle God equips men with artistic skill.

Exodus 35 tells us, God “filled (Bezalel) with the Spirit of God, in wisdom and understanding, in knowledge and all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to

work in all manner of artistic workmanship. And He has put in his heart the ability to teach..." God adorned the Tabernacle with artistic works.

He instructed the craftsmen to embroider angels into the sacred curtain.

In fact, the two tablets of the Ten Commandments were kept in the Ark of Covenant, and on its lid sat two golden angels - another example of artistry.

Guys, there is certainly nothing wrong with a painting or snapshot – or any visual, tangible image... as long as that image is not relied upon in worship.

There are three points that make the Second Commandment so important...

First, is **humanity's tendency**. Second, is **God's Transcendence**. And third, is **worship's transference**. *Tendency... Transcendence... Transference...*

The first reason the 2nd commandment is so vital is **humanity's tendency**.

God knows we are fleshly, physical, tangible, visual people. We like to see and grab and touch to believe, but that's not how God wants us to relate to Him.

Thomas said He would believe in the risen Christ if he could only touch His scars. But when Jesus appeared, He told Thomas, "Because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." God wants us to relate to Him, and worship Him, by faith - not by feeling or sight.

Paul closes his first letter to Timothy with a doxology, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible..." Unlike the idols of Egypt the one, true God is an invisible God. He can't be seen with the naked eye, or touched by flesh and bone.

As one author put it, "God is not an aspect of nature, but a reality

greater than the universe. He admonishes us not to drop our eyes down to nature for an “easy fix”...” God wants us to rise to another level, and learn to relate to Him spiritually.

God is a Spirit. And according to Jesus in John 4:24, “those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” The worship of God should always be spiritual.

When we employ carved images in our worship we stunt our spiritual growth.

Rather than cultivate a heart connection with God we create an attachment to the physical, material world – to stuff and things. *Rather than develop a spiritual awareness - rather than stretch out our faith...* we become more earthbound.

This is why it bothers me to find a person whose worship of God is dependent on a mood, or a specific environment... I get concerned when people say, “Well, I can’t worship God unless I’m outside, under a tree.” Or “I can’t worship God unless I’m at a church.” Or “I can’t worship God unless the church has stained glass windows.” Or “I can’t worship unless there’s candles and incense.” Or “I can’t worship God unless I’m wearing my blue jeans, and I’m singing praise songs.”

Certainly, the atmosphere we’re in can cut down on distractions, and perhaps add to our appreciation of God – but it should never dictate our worship.

Guys, if we learned to worship God in spirit, then we can worship God anywhere, at anytime, under any circumstances. We should be able to come into this room some Sundays, and never say or sing a word, and worship God.

Another reason the 2nd commandment is so vital is **God’s transcendence.**

Any time I rely on a finite symbol to conceptualize the infinite God, in essence I diminish Him. I put Him in a box. The symbol might

help me understand one aspect of God's character and nature, but invariably it'll confuse another.

Central to today's culture, is what postmodern thinkers calls *reductionism*. It's the notion that if we keep breaking life and nature down into smaller and smaller components eventually we'll discover the mysteries behind the universe.

It's a petrie dish, and microscope, and DNA approach to life.

But worship is the opposite of reductionism. Rather than break things down into understandable portions – worship focuses on the holiness and grandness and mystery of God. Rather than dissect God, it admires His transcendence.

Take for example this jar of sand...

What if I traveled to the Oregon Coast and collected this sand from its famous dunes. (*I didn't. It's actually from the volleyball pit.*) But what if this was sand from the Oregon dunes - I held it up and said, "I've got the Oregon Coast in this jar."

Would I be telling you the truth? Of course not. There's a lot more to the sea coast of Oregon than a jar full of sand. My jar would be an incomplete picture.

Likewise whenever I point to one symbol, or setting and say this is God to me I'm narrowing down my understanding of God. My knowledge of God becomes fuzzy, and limited, and inadequate. I end up reducing God to less than He is.

Guys, the way to worship God is not to *reduce Him*, but to *exalt Him*.

The psalmist - the Bible's worship leader tells us in Psalm 99:9, "Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at His holy hill; for the LORD our God is holy."

Psalm 69:30 tells us, "I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving." *Magnify Him – exalt Him – don't reduce Him.*

A physical image to aid your worship is ultimately a reducer not

an exalter.

I would imagine that most of us here today are in little danger of worshipping alongside a *medal* image of God – but I am concerned about our *mental* images. It's not just an *icon* than can become an *idol* – it can also happen with an *idea*.

C.S. Lewis once said, “The first prayer to pray before every other prayer is this... Lord, let it be the real You I pray to, and let it be the real me that prays.”

Lewis was acknowledging that often our own wrong perceptions of God can interfere with our communication with Him. Misconceptions – erroneous mental images – can also reduce God in our minds. Have you judged God unfairly, or pigeon-holed God, or had a characterization of God that's simply not true.

It's been said, “It's much worse to have a false idea of God than no idea at all.”

When it comes to these mental images of God the list is endless...

People envision God as **Father Time** - old guy with a gray beard - hopelessly outdated and old-fashioned. Rather than a timeless God who is forever old and forever young – who has the wisdom of age, but is always up to something new.

Or they see God as the **Cosmic Cop** – out on the beat looking for someone to bust. Rather than a gracious God who is rich in mercy, and quick to forgive...

Or they see God the Father as the **Godfather** – He's keeps the family in line, or else. Rather than the father in the parable of the Prodigal, who races to meet his wayward son - to assure him of His love, and welcomed him home.

Or the **God of Country Music** – a good ole boy, the man upstairs – the friend we only really need when you're in a heap of trouble. Rather than the sovereign Lord, who has a plan and purpose for

every decision and every detail of our life.

Or one more... The **heavenly slot machine** – you pop in a prayer and if you're lucky out pops a blessing. Rather than a God who has an agenda of His own, and is working all things according to His purpose and expects you to walk in His will.

AW Tozer once said, *"What comes to our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."* *Do you have an accurate concept of God?*

Understand you won't gain it by listening to the people around you, or by watching television, or by reading the newspaper. There are only two places you can turn to get a clear, accurate, somewhat comprehensive concept of God.

You need to go to His Word. *My word is the disclosure of my thoughts.* And God's Word is the unveiling of who He is. And God has revealed Himself in two Words... His written Word, the Bible - and His Living Word, Jesus Christ...

If you want a picture of God to guide your thoughts about God don't turn to a man-made image - *medal or mental* - look to Jesus - read the Bible – there you'll get to know an otherwise unknowable God, and discover His unsearchable riches.

The reason the second commandment is so vital is due to *humanity's tendency, God's transcendency*, and finally, **worship's transferency**.

Notice the reason in verse 5 that God is so concerned that we worship right. *"For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."* How we worship God effects the destiny of our kids, and grandkids, and future generations.

Worship is something that's far more *caught* than *taught*. You transfer your love for God to your kids by loving God yourself with a

sacrificial, sincere, obedient love.

When people worship right – when they worship God in the way He desires to be worshipped – when they worship in spirit and in truth – God shows mercy.

But when people steer off course in their worship – or worship selfishly – or get worldly in their worship - or worship only in ways that are convenient – when a society forgets how to worship right - judgment comes down on its offspring.

Throughout history when the church has compromised its worship, and lost its vision of God seldom did it effect just one generation. When a society or culture forgets how to worship right, it takes several generations to turn it back around.

Right worship is like the front end on your automobile. If your steering gets knocked out of alignment bad things happen elsewhere. Your tires wear out unevenly. It effects your braking. Ultimately, it can lead to a crash. *And I've seen kids crash... because their parent's worship got out of alignment.*

This is why God says in verse 5, “**For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God**”. God is jealous for us in a good way. He has a vested interest in our lives.

After all His Son died to save us. He wants to show mercy and bestow blessing on us... But how can He if our devotion gets misplaced or we begin to neglect Him?

Hey, jealousy is not always an improper attitude. If I saw my wife in the arms of another man, trust me, I'd be jealous. I would hate it, if what she pledged to only me was shared with someone else. And God has the same feelings toward us.

Imagine dad, coming home for dinner tomorrow, and in front of your seat at the table your wife has sat your photograph. She's talking to the photo. She reaches over and plants a kiss on the picture frame. Your kids show their school work to the picture – all

the while you're being ignored. After dinner your son goes out and bounces the football off the picture frame, instead of asking you to throw.

Hey, eventually you'd become jealous.

And not just because you are being *left out*, but because your wife, and son, and family are *missing out*... A real dad is a lot more fun than a picture frame.

This is what God feels when we lack right worship... *When we fall in love with a graven image, and kiss the symbol to the neglect of the Savior. Or, when we stop short of truly knowing the true God, and stay distracted by a false, mental image of God. Or, when we say we love and worship God, but don't make the effort to love and worship Him in the way He desires...* We might think this kind of worship is innocent, but in the long run it will affect our kids and even future generations.

God is not just upset *He's being left out*... He's upset that *we're missing out*...

Author Alan Redpath wrote these words, "God's jealousy is love in action. He refuses to share the human heart with any rival, not because He is selfish and wants us all to Himself, but because He knows that upon that loyalty to Him depends our very moral life... God is not jealous of us: He is jealous for us."

God clothed Himself in human flesh, took our sin upon His shoulders, and died the death that we deserved. Three days later Jesus rose from the dead, and sent His Holy Spirit to live in our hearts - to bring us into fellowship with Him. Now, He doesn't want that fellowship to be hindered, or polluted by a lack of right worship.

Here is the non-negotiable we find in the Second Commandment... **Don't just worship the right God, worship God right.** Both your future, and the future of your kids, and even the future of our society... *depends on right worship.*