THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

**Lesson 3 – The Second Commandment - No Graven Images (Part 1)**

**Exodus 20:4-5a**

**Introduction**: *Jehovah* has revealed Himself to be *Qadowsh-Iysh: the Holy One!* This of course eliminates the possibility of there being another. He has no peer. He has no competitor; there is no leading contender. *God alone is God!*

As one scholar put it, “The second commandment is a corollary to the first commandment and a logical continuation of it.” It is certainly true that the second naturally follows the first and, as we shall see through the course of this lesson, is a very relevant commandment for modern man. It has to do with the most primitive notions that come to our mind about graven images. However, the application is not confined to those primitive notions alone. “In the first commandment, worshipping a false god is forbidden; in this, worshipping the true God in a false manner (is forbidden).” (Thomas Watson) God forbids that man make any creation of anything which is supposed to be a representation of Him, *to assist man in worship*.

It is not possible to overstate the importance of accepting by faith and trust the revelation that God has made of Himself. Any time you hear someone say, “This is how I like to think of God” or “I’ve always likened God to …” then get ready! You are about to hear a pitiful effort to explain God, Who is far greater, higher, and mightier than man’s imagination and ridiculous comparisons.

**I.** **V4 EXACTLY WHAT IT IS WHICH IS FORBIDDEN BY GOD**

## What is not forbidden.

### God did not disallow any images of any kind ever. (Some have gone to the extreme against any paintings, photographs, sculptures, etc.)

### Immediately following the giving of the Ten Commandments, Moses was given the pattern for making the Tabernacle and all associated with it. Two graven cherubim were to overshadow the ark in the Holy of Holies. The priestly garments were to have on them bells of gold and pomegranates of blue and purple.

## What is forbidden.

### Man is forbidden to make anything that is supposed to be a *representation* of God.

1. Man is to make *no representation* of God as an *aid to worship*.
2. See V4 clearly:

#### “…any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above…”

God is not like angels and cherubim; He is not like the moon, sun, and stars; He is not like the clouds, birds, and flying things. All the things God created of the first, second, and third heavens are wonderful creations. They are pitifully and woefully short of God’s likeness.

#### “…or that is in the earth beneath…”

God is not like man; God is not like an ox or a horse or a bull or a ram, etc. All of His creation on earth is wonderful and marvelous to behold; however they are all woefully short of representing *Jehovah*.

#### “…or that is in the water under the earth:”

God is not like the whale, shark, or leviathan of Job 41. God is not like the sea, ocean, etc. How great are His creation and the works of His hands in the great waters! They just cannot represent Him.

## The essence of the problem of *idolatry* is as follows:

### Men say an image or idol assists them in thinking of God; it gives them tangible help.

1. However, the very fact that a man needs “help” to worship God, reveals his lack of ability in making an appropriate representation of God. His views or thoughts of God are already erroneous, so whatever he makes to represent God is also erroneous, which makes any worship erroneous.
2. God is Spirit, and must be worshipped in Spirit and in truth. (John 4:24)
3. God explicitly forbids that there be anything made that is to be a representation of Himself. Please follow on to the next point, as the reasoning becomes even clearer.

**II. V5a IMAGES ARE FORBIDDEN BECAUSE THEY BECOME THE OBJECTS OF WORSHIP**

## Deuteronomy 4:14-19 God’s own commentary on the second commandment.

### It is clear. God says if man makes something to assist him in a tangible way to worship, that tangible thing will bit by bit become the object of worship.

### See Zephaniah 1:4-5. Lo, and behold; Jews worshipped the host of heaven upon their housetops! *Idolatry!*

### Read Isaiah 44:9-20 and 46:5-10.

## Further illustrations of idolatry.

### In Numbers 21, Moses lifted up the serpent of brass and all who looked, believing God, were healed of serpent bites. By II Kings 18:4, Israel was burning incense to it in worship, and King Hezekiah destroyed it , calling it *Nehushtan*: a piece of brass!

### Such idolatry is seen everywhere in Roman Catholicism.

#### The crucifix has become an idol.

#### Bowing to and praying to statues of Mary and to the “saints” is nothing short of abominable idolatry, clearly forbidden in the Second Commandment.

#### Even a statue of Christ is nothing but a piece of carved wood and constitutes idolatry in its simplest form.

d. Thomas Watson states that even in some Roman Catholic catechisms, the second commandment is excluded and the tenth commandment is divided into two parts to make ten.

# THERE IS ALSO A MORE BROAD APPLICATION

**(Note:** There is such a thing as a “sophisticated” violation of the second commandment, which is in principle the same sin as the primitive form.)

## A man’s god is that which he deems the most important thing in life.

### A *career* can become a man’s god. It is what he gives his energy and devotion and affection to.

### A *sport* can become a man’s god and constitute idolatry. Complete devotion and affection and energy is given to a sport by many a “Christian” athlete who gives lip service to Christ or to God. (Thank God for every true Christian in sports or anywhere else.)

### A *hobby* can become a god. *Money* can be a god. The possibilities are almost endless.

## Another form of idolatry is a view of God as we wish Him to be.

### Read this quote of Carroll Simcox:

“Let us suppose that we are good average people of our own time and culture – typical mid-twentieth century Americans. Being such, we either think, or are strongly inclined to think, the following things about God: (a) He is our Father in Heaven (although many of us actually think He is more like a Grandfather in Heaven); (b) He is wonderfully broad-minded and tolerant – the Divine Democrat who agrees to disagree with us, graciously and to the limit; (c) He wants everybody to enjoy and exercise self-expression; (d) He keeps abreast of the changing times, and whereas He may once have disapproved of certain kinds of self-expression, especially in matters like sex, He now recognizes that we know more than we used to and can be trusted to do as we please; (e) He wants the clergy to preach the broad spirit of religion rather than the narrow dogmas of what used to be called ‘the Faith’."

2. He went on to say that “the liberal god of liberal people is a figment of the liberal mind, and an idol.”

### 3. This is why our thoughts of God must be shaped only by His revelation of Himself in the Word. Otherwise, we make our own imagination the creator of an idol god.

**Conclusion**: One more quote from Mr. Simcox. “An overmastering realization that we are the children of the one true God who forbids us to give our hearts to the services of any but Him: this alone is the answer to the problem of keeping ourselves from idols.” (I John 5:21)