

Ex. 20:4-6 - The Second Commandment

Written by Tim Black

Sunday, 09 November 2008 02:00 -

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The 2nd Commandment

Distinctions between the Commandments

1.

Differing Theological Traditions (agreements shaded)

Verses

Commandments

Ex. 20

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Deut. 5

Roman Catholic (Deut.)

**Lutheran
(Exodus)**

Orthodox Jews

**Greek
Orthodox**

Reformed

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□ **Preface**

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17a

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17b

21b

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- 1.
- 1.

Disputed boundaries are between the Reformed Preface, 1st and 2nd Commandments, and within the Reformed 10th Commandment.

- 2.

The Catholic division does not *deny* a distinction between the Reformed 1st & 2nd

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Commandments, but the Reformed division
maintains

the distinction better, and so is less susceptible to the errors of worshiping images.

3.

Why the Reformed distinction?

1.

The commandment is not about worshiping *other gods*, but about worshiping the true God
by means of
images
of Him

1.

Ex. 32:4-5: Golden calf is identified as Yahweh or an image of Him

2.

1 Kings 12:28: Sin of Jeroboam was to make 2 golden calves, use same phrases as Ex. 32:4
to say "Here are your gods...which brought you up from the land of Egypt!" This divided Israel
from Judah!

3.

Deuteronomy 12:3-4: 3 *You shall tear down their altars and dash in pieces their pillars and
burn their Asherim with fire. You shall chop down the carved* **images**
of their gods and destroy their name out of that place. 4
You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way.

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The text of the 2nd Commandment

1.

Its Outline

Command

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.*

5 *You shall not **bow** down to them or **serve** them,*

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Reason

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,*

*6 but **showing steadfast love** to thousands of those who **love** me and **keep my commandments*** .”

— *Exodus 20:4-6*

1.

Its Meaning

1.

Command: You shall not “make,” you shall not “bow,” you shall not “serve”

1.

Is this *one*, *two*, or *three* commands?

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1.

If it's *three* discrete commands, this would prohibit all images of God and Christ, including mental images. Incidentally, this would also prohibit all graphic, or at least graven, art!

2.

If it's *one* threefold command, the "making" is specifically "making-in-order-to-worship."

3.

WLC 109 says the commandment forbids "the making any representation of God," and does not *explicitly* specify whether that making aims at the goal of worship. Johannes Vos takes this to prohibit making any image of God absolutely. However, WLC 109 places this statement in the middle of prohibitions of all false ways of worship, and thereby specifies that the making is making-in-order-to-worship.

4.

It is *one* threefold command.

1.

The *making* is for the purpose of *bowing* in worship, and both making and bowing find their outflow in *servicing*.

2.

The *making* brings the idol into being as an entity, the *bowing* shows respect for the object's specific religious meaning; the *servicing* is the living out of that religious meaning in the whole scope of one's ethical life.

3.

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“You shall not *make*”

1.

The prohibition of *making* is highlighted by the way the description of the image (“anything that is in the heaven above...”) separates it from *bowing* and *ser-ving*

. Not only the idol’s use, but the act of its construction, and its resulting design, is prohibited. Its intended use is woven into its design, and tempts us toward using it in false worship.

2.

“a carved image...any likeness”

1.

What is it?

-

Any non-linguistic representation of God intended to convey meaning about Him which is intended to immediately lead to worshipping Him

-

What are the images of? “Heaven,” “earth,” “water” = anything in the whole creation!

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These are the realms of creation in Gen. 1:26-30

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Dt. 4:15-18

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No images of *birds, animals, fish*. = all *creatures* within all realms of creation

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No worship of sun, moon, stars even *without* doing so by means of an image = anything you "see" in creation

-

"Bow...or serve"

1.

"Bow" - expressing worshipful respect for God's majesty, authority, etc., which is expressed through the image

2.

"Serve" - worshipful acts of living out one's respect for the image's religious meaning

3.

Reason

1.

Foundation: God's justice and mercy (cf. Ex. 34:6-7)

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2.

Twofold structure, contrasting the two modes of God's revelation: Word & Deed

Man's emotion &
motive

Man's action

God's response

Focus

"hate"

["Make," "bow," "serve" idols]

"visiting the iniquity"

Deed-revelation

"love"

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“keep my commandments”

“showing steadfast love”

Word-revelation

3.

Summarized:

1.

If you hate God, you will make, bow to, and serve idols, and God will visit your iniquity upon you.

2.

If you love God, you will keep His commandments, and God will show steadfast love to you.

3.

Significant order: begins with “make a carved image,” ends with “keep my commandments.” Expresses an exclusive contrast between idol-worship and commandment-keeping—they are at utter odds!

1.

If you make idols, you do not keep God’s commandments.

2.

If you keep God’s commandments, you do not make idols.

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3.

Why? Because idol-worship and commandment keeping each seek to use their respective mode of revelation to provide the controlling interpretation of the other. Will God's deeds interpret His words, or His words interpret His deeds?

The Issue of the 2nd Commandment

1.

Revelation in Its Two Modes: Word & Deed

1.

Idol-worship focuses on *deed-revelation*

1.

"Heaven," "earth," "water" recall God's deeds of creation in Gen. 1 – throughout God "created" (v. 1, 21, 27) and "made" (7, 16, 25, 26, 31) all things by creative fiats

2.

Dt. 4:32 lists God's acts of *creation* and *redemption* as the two greatest summaries of His deeds - "For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God **created** man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether **such a great thing** as this has ever happened or was ever heard of."

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3.

An “image” is revelatory – it’s an image *of* something & conveys its meaning

1.

In Gen. 1, “heaven,” “earth,” “water” manifest God’s creative activity and goodness (4, 12, 17, 21, 25, 31) to all observers (cf. v. 31, “Behold! It was very good.”)

2.

Images of these realms’ inhabitants then seek to manifest something about God.

3.

Commandment-keeping focuses on *word-revelation*

1.

“Commandments” is plural. Idol-worship is opposed to the general character of keeping *any* and *all* of God’s commandments, which are given in words.

2.

“My commandments” reveal the speaker – God

3.

Revelation in *promises*: Commandments bind us because they rest on God’s prior commitments expressed in promises – summarized in the Preface in “I am the LORD your God,” and woven throughout the whole of God’s word

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Revelation in *laws*: *all* of God's "commandments" throughout scripture are in view

5.

Correct Order of Interpretive Priority: Words interpret Deeds

1.

Scriptural harmony when God's words control the interpretation of His deeds

1.

Gen. 1: Creation by fiat – "Let there be...and there was..." God's words commanded into being what His deeds brought into being.

2.

God's words truly and adequately *describe* His deeds; His deeds truly and adequately *manifest* that which His words describe.

3.

Scriptural disharmony when we use God's deeds to control the interpretation of His words

1.

We fail to hear God's message & recognize its truth about the world around us

2.

We construct our own interpretation of God & the world around us.

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1.

By whose commandments are idols made? Not God's.

2.

Man makes his own commandments, then follows them, when he creates an image to worship God. Man's false replica of God's word-revelation leads to man's false replica of God's deed-revelation.

3.

God's deed-revelation manifests what His word-revelation says, not what man's false interpretations say; God's deeds even refute man's false interpretations.

1.

Is. 29:13-14: *13 And the Lord said: "Because this people draw near with their mouth and honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a commandment taught by men, 14 therefore, behold, I will again do wonderful things with this people, with wonder upon wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be hidden."*

2.

Further, man's false interpretations & their resulting sinful deeds lead to God's judgment: "visiting the iniquity upon..."

3.

The Heart of the Issue

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1.

Idol-worship gives deed-revelation the controlling say. Commandment-keeping gives word-revelation the controlling say.

2.

Man does not tell God what God's deeds or words mean! Only God has that prerogative.

3.

No matter how "good for food" the forbidden fruit looks, no matter how much it is a "delight to the eyes," no matter how much someone other than God has told you it is "desired to make one wise," if God has told you, "You shall not eat," you shall not eat. No selfish rationalizations, no sneaky re-interpretations of the meaning of God's deeds, can trump the interpretive priority of God's words.

4.

Traditional explanation: Not the *object* of worship, but the *way* of worship

1.

WSC 50: *The second commandment requireth the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in his word.*

2.

WSC 51: *The second commandment forbiddeth the worshiping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his word.*

3.

Worship God in the way He commands

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4.

More general issue: Love God for what He SAYS

5.

Refinement of terms: Love God *in accord with* what He says

1.

Our knowledge & interpretation needs to be brought into accord with *God's*

The Biblical Commentary on the 2nd Commandment

1.

In Deuteronomy 12:1-13:18

1.

The Danger in the Canaanite sanctuary system 12:1-32

1.

Destroy their places, altars, pillars, images: "You shall not **worship** the LORD your God in that **way.**" 1-4

2.

Worship God in the place & with the offerings, tithes, & firstfruits He commands, not "every man doing **whatever is right in his own eyes,**" but "do all that I **command** you" 5-14

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3.

Eat regular meals at home “whatever your heart desires,” but “tithes,” firstfruits, “offerings,” “holy things,” “sacrifices” “take...to the place which the LORD chooses.” “Be careful to obey all these words that I **command** you, that it may go well with you and with your children after you forever, when you do **what is good and right in the sight of the LORD** your God.” 15-28

4.

Don't say “**How** did these nations **serve** their gods?- that I also may do the same.’ You shall not worship the LORD your God in that **way....**”
“Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it.” 29-32

5.

The Danger in Israel Itself: Don't listen to those promoting other gods 13:1-18

1.

False prophets – God is testing your “**love**” for Him 1-5

2.

Family members 6-11

3.

Cities 12-18

4.

Conclusion in 17-18: “None of the devoted things shall stick to your hand, that the LORD may turn from the fierceness of his anger and show you **mercy** and have **compassion** on you and **multiply** you, as he swore to your fathers, if you **obey**”

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the
voice
of the LORD your God,
keeping
all his
commandments
that I am commanding you today, and doing
what is right in the sight of the LORD your God.
”

5.

In the History of Redemption

1.

The Old Covenant Problem

1.

Guilty record in God's eyes (Ex. 34:7), and evil thoughts in man's own (Gen. 6:5)

2.

The New Covenant Promise

1.

God will bring man's thought into accord with His own (Jer. 31:34a) by forgiving his "iniquity" (Jer. 31:34b; Ezek. 36:25), thereby giving him an innocent record in God's eyes

2.

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The New Covenant Fulfillment

1.

God forgives our sins in our justification (Rom. 4:25; 5:16, 18; Gal. 2:21) by faith (Rom. 3:28, 5:1; Gal. 2:16) at conversion, and daily forgives our sins (1 John 1:9).

2.

God renews our minds (Rom. 12:1-2) in the knowledge of Christ (2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 1:17; Col. 2:2), especially of His righteousness received by faith (Rom. 3:21-22)

3.

God completes this process by making us “openly acknowledged and acquitted in the day of judgment” (WSC 38) and enabling us to know Him fully, even as we are fully known (1 Cor. 13:12)

The Application of the 2nd Commandment

1.

Class Member's Questions & Issues

2.

Duties Required – WLC 108

1.

the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in his word; particularly

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1.

prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ;

2.

the reading, preaching, and hearing of the word;

3.

the administration and receiving of the sacraments;

4.

church government and discipline;

5.

the ministry and maintenance thereof;

6.

religious fasting;

7.

swearing by the name of God, and vowing unto him:

8.

as also the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship;

9.

and, according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry.

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10.

Sins Forbidden – WLC 109

1.

The sins forbidden in the second commandment are,

1.

all devising, counseling, commanding, using, and any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself;

2.

the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever;

3.

all worshiping of it, or God in it or by it; the making of any representation of feigned deities, and all worship of them, or service belonging to them;

4.

all superstitious devices, corrupting the worship of God, adding to it, or taking from it, whether invented and taken up of ourselves, or received by tradition from others, though under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretense whatsoever;

5.

simony;

6.

sacrilege;

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7.

all neglect, contempt, hindering, and opposing the worship and ordinances which God hath appointed.

8.

Reasons Annexed

1.

The reasons annexed to the second commandment...are,

1.

besides God's sovereignty over us, and propriety in us, his fervent zeal for his own worship, and his revengeful indignation against all false worship, as being a spiritual whoredom;

2.

accounting the breakers of this commandment such as hate him, and threatening to punish them unto divers generations;

3.

and esteeming the observers of it such as love him and keep his commandments, and promising mercy to them unto many generations.

4.

Regulative Principle

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1.

Elements of worship vs. circumstances of worship

2.

Pictures of Jesus

1.

Our congregation's view: Allowable as an aid to *teaching*, but not *worship*

2.

In Sunday School?

1.

Yes.

2.

In the film "*The Passion of the Christ*"?

1.

Yes, if the image doesn't take interpretive priority in your worship of God.

2.

Otherwise, no!

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3.

Crucifixes with Christ's body?

4.

Crosses without Christ's body?