

Christ In The Commandments — Week 6

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

THE MANNER OF WORSHIP

Exodus 20:4-6

Shorter Catechism

Q. 49. Which is the second commandment?

A. The second commandment is, Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven 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: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

Review

Last week I claimed that the LORD (YHWH) who is speaking in the first commandment is Jesus Christ Himself. “You shall have no other Gods before *me*” —the *Me* is Christ. We couldn’t know this from the OT by itself. It is the NT that shows us that the OT is mainly and chiefly (including the ten commandments) about Christ. I showed from several passages that Jesus Christ is the *end* or aim of the law (**Romans 10:4**); that the law (not just the prophets) prophesied about Jesus (**Matthew 11:13**); that Moses who wrote the law spoke chiefly about Christ (**John 5:46**); and that Jesus is the fulfillment of the law (**Matthew 5:17-18**).

For me, the most convincing truth was that over and over again in the NT, it is Jesus Christ who is revealed as being the LORD (YHWH). John tells us in **John 12:41** that it was Jesus whom Isaiah saw in Isaiah 6:1-5—Jesus is the LORD of Hosts. Jesus said in **John 8:58** “Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I

say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” In **Acts 13:33**, Paul claimed that it was Jesus who was spoken about in Psalm 2 and there He is called the LORD.

This doesn't mean that the Father is not the LORD also. In Psalm 2, the very place where Jesus is called LORD, the Father is also called LORD. **Psalm 2:7** says “The LORD said to me, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.”¹ How can both the Father and the Son be the LORD? Remember what Calvin said—that whenever we are talking about the essence of God, in so far as the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God, whatever can be affirmed about one of them can be affirmed about all of them.² Last week, I the need to see Christ as the one speaking in the commandments. And that is 100% true. That needs to be emphasized because I think we tend to hear a generic sort of God speaking in the OT. God is not generic.

What we need to be is Christologically Trinitarian. Jesus is the revelation of the Father. He is the One sent. The Father is the Sender. The Holy Spirit is the Life Giver and the Divine Love that both Father and Son share. We ought to be thinking about and worshipping all three. We ought to be Christologically Trinitarian. Gregory of Nazianzus, a late fourth century Greek Father said it like this:

“No sooner do I conceive of the one than I am illuminated by the splendor of the three; no sooner do I distinguish them than I am carried back to the one. When I think of any one of the three I think of him as the whole, and my eyes are filled, and the greater part of what I am thinking escapes me. I cannot grasp the greatness of that one so as to attribute a greater greatness to the rest. When I contemplate the three

¹ Also cf. Isaiah 44:6. Likewise the Holy Spirit is called the LORD in Isaiah 11:2 and 61:1

² “Certainly,” Calvin said “if the distinction between the Father and Word be attentively considered, we shall say that the one is from the other. If, however, the essential quality of the Word be considered, in so far as he is one God with the Father, whatever can be said concerning God may also be applied to him, the second person in the glorious Trinity.” John Calvin, *Calvin's Selected Works, Vol. 4: Letters Part 1, 1528-1545*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1983), pg. 55-56

together, I see but one torch, and cannot divide or measure out the undivided light.”³

So when we hear God speaking in the Commandments, we should hear all of them speaking, and we should hear Christ specifically speaking since He is the revelation of the Father. We could not know God, (John 1:18) if Jesus did not reveal Him to us.

Secondly, I claimed last week that the preface and the first commandment are structured *not* in terms of a cold dutiful contract, but in terms of a deeply intimate marital covenant. And I think for many, this sounds novel or weird, perhaps dirty or even irreverent. And therefore I want to demonstrate more carefully that we should think about the commandments in terms of a marital covenant rather than a cold contract. It’s one thing to claim something, it’s another to demonstrate it. Whenever the OT saints broke the covenant, how did God view them? As adulterers. As being unfaithful.

Jeremiah 3:20 Surely, as a treacherous wife leaves her husband, so have you been treacherous to me, O house of Israel, declares the Lord.

Isaiah 1:21 How the faithful city has become a whore, she who was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers.

Ezekiel 16:30 How sick is your heart, declares the Lord God, because you did all these things, the deeds of a brazen prostitute,

God viewed the breaking of His commandments as spiritual adultery. The NT picks up on the same theme. James calls Christians who pursue friendship with the world “You adulterous people!” (James 4:4) God views His people as His bride, His wife, His beloved one, His cherished possession. **Isaiah 54:5** “For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name;” Christ is the

³ Source: <http://www.albertmohler.com/2005/05/29/gregory-of-nazianzus-on-the-trinity/> accessed October 11, 2017

church's husband. The intimacy that God wants with His people is far more profound, far more personal, far more rewarding than the way that human marriage foreshadows it. Or as Paul said "This mystery [the mystery of the two becoming one flesh] is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church." (**Ephesians 5:32**)

Therefore as God's covenant people, we need to see these commands not as a cold contract, but as a summons to love our husband who is Christ.

The Second Commandment

Now on to the second commandment. [Pull out last week's chart] If the first commandment shows us who *the object of worship* is, namely, God in Christ, our faithful redeeming husband, then the second commandment shows us the *manner in which* we ought to love Him. We don't have the right to worship or love God in whatever way that we desire. Just like we don't have the right to do that with our earthly spouses. 'I think the way that I'm going to love you honey, is by letting you serve me 24/7; is by spending all our money on whatever I want; is by coming home whenever I feel like it.' That is not love. And neither is it love to try and worship God on our own terms. God has determined the way in which He wants to be worshipped. [Turn to **Exodus 20:4-6**]

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, 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. [Mention the controversy about this commandment]

There are two main parts in this commandment

- 1) What God forbids
- 2) What God threatens for disobedience and promises for obedience.

The threatenings and promises of God

Let's look at what God threatens and promises first. In v.5 God says "I the Lord your God am a **jealous** God." God has a holy jealousy over His bride. That Hebrew word carries with it the idea that God will not bear any rival. He is an avenger of any who would depart from Him.⁴ He forbids that we would run to any other lovers. God takes sin personally, just as a husband would take it personally if his wife committed adultery.

For those who rebel against this perfect and faithful God, He says that He visits "the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me," What does this mean?

What this doesn't mean

First it can't mean that if your parents hated God that you will suffer their same fate. If that were the case, nobody would be saved, because our first parents rebelled against God. Additionally no child of any unbeliever anywhere would ever be saved. Likewise the promise in v. 6 of "showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments." does not mean that all the children of believers are automatically saved. The Bible has many examples of children who had godly parents who rebelled against God.

That being said, Calvin is very careful to hold up the free grace of God in this passage. He says this

"If human nature is universally condemned, [then] those on whom the Lord does not bestow...his grace must be doomed to destruction; nevertheless, they perish by their own iniquity, not by unjust hatred on the part of God...Therefore when God punishes the wicked...for their crimes, by depriving their families of grace for many generations, who will dare bring a charge against him?"⁵

⁴ Source: <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strongs=H7067&t=KJV> accessed October 11, 2017

⁵ John Calvin *Institutes of the Christian Religion* II.VIII.XX

When a family hates God, God is under no obligation to show them grace. So if God forsakes a family because of the violation of this command and subsequent generations follow in disobedience, God has done no wrong. Only grace will stop this pattern. [Newton's meaning: "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear"]

As for the language of "visiting the iniquity to the third and fourth generation." Three things need to be noted

- 1) When Adam fell, the whole human race was ruined. He covenantally represented everyone. David said that he was conceived in sin (Psalm 51:5). Babies die because Adam sinned.
- 2) "Human experience confirms that immoral behavior on the part of parents often results in suffering for their children and grandchildren. This is one of the grievous aspects of sin, that it harms other besides the the sinner himself."⁶
- 3) The important qualifier "of those who hate me." Who gets the iniquities of their fathers visited upon them? Only those who hate God. That is who this threatening applies to: unbelievers. But consider how this threatening screams for the need of gospel grace. We were all born haters of God. That is before we are even able to actually break the second commandment on our own.

This language points to degree and extent

But I think there is something else to consider. I think this language is speaking about the severity of judgment. God can withhold grace and therefore justly punish 3-4 generations for their unfaithfulness. What happens when a severe wound is not treated? It gets worse and worse. I believe this 3-4 generation *language* points to the severity of sin that is *visited* on "those who hate me." As generations passed, Israel grew worse and worse in their sin. So each subsequent generation that hated God was more wicked than the previous one (Remember the wicked Israel was at the captivity? Parents eating their own children.)

However consider the reward that God promises in v.6 God says "but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my

⁶ ESV Study Bible, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2008), pg. 176

commandments.” The degree of reward is not limited to 3-4 but for thousands. This doesn’t mean that children will automatically be saved. It means that God rewards grace upon grace. Those who love him (that is who is in view here) will be rewarded not on the basis of their merits but on the basis of His own grace and mercy. Believers benefit from previous generations. We are graciously blessed through the thousands of faithful believers that have gone before us.⁷ Our reward is grace upon grace.⁸ We benefit from Christ showing grace to our fathers and our forefathers going back thousands of generations.

What God forbids

This commandment is connected to the first commandment. The first commandment is telling us to have no other gods—the second commandment is telling us how God wants us to worship Him.

How do we worship God falsely?

First ask yourself: What is God after? What does He want from us? God wants our hearts. **Proverbs 23:26** “My son, give me your heart, and let your eyes observe my ways.” When we give our hearts to images, we are not giving ourselves to God. Because those images lie about God. [Let’s turn to **Deuteronomy 4:15-16**] “Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw *no form* on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves, *in the form of any figure*, the likeness of male or female,” Israel is told here not to act corruptly by making a form in order to worship it, because God did not reveal Himself in a form. In other words He’s saying, don’t worship Me in a way that I have not revealed myself to be. Israel did this. The golden calf incident was followed by a feast dedicated to *the LORD*. After Aaron fashioned the idol, **Exodus 32:4-5** says “And they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” When Aaron saw this, he built an

⁷ Hebrews 11:39-40

⁸ John 1:16

altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to *the LORD.*” And what happened? God punished them for unfaithfulness.

What is the rationale behind this?

I imagine an ancient Israelite pointing to those words “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD.” ‘We were worshipping Yahweh with that calf. This punishment was unjust. We were worshipping the LORD.’ To that God says no you weren’t. Outward idolatry is always a reflection of inward unfaithfulness. [Turn to Ezekiel 14:1]

Then certain of the elders of Israel came to me and sat before me. 2 And the word of the Lord came to me: 3 “Son of man, these men have taken **their idols into their hearts**, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity **before their faces**. [*There’s the progression, idolatry always moves from the heart to the hands*] Should I indeed let myself be consulted by them? 4 Therefore speak to them and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Any one of the house of Israel who takes **his idols into his heart** and sets the stumbling block of his iniquity **before his face**, and yet comes to the prophet, I the Lord will answer him as he comes with the multitude of his idols, 5 that I may lay hold of the hearts of the house of Israel, who are all estranged from me through their idols.

6 “Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: Repent and turn away from your idols, and turn away your faces from all your abominations. 7 For any one of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel, **who separates himself from me** [*there is that marital language again*], taking his idols **into his heart** and putting the stumbling block of his iniquity **before his face**, and yet comes to a prophet to consult me through him, I the Lord will answer him myself. 8 And I will set my face against that man; I will make him a sign and a

byword and cut him off from the midst of my people, and you shall know that I am the Lord

Therefore to the Israelite that says ‘We were worshipping Yahweh with that golden calf’ God says ‘no you weren’t. You are worshipping the god of your own imagination.

All our images lie about who God is

The reason the 2nd commandment says “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 or serve them,” is because any image that we could make would lie about who God is. All images obscure God because they can’t rightly represent who God is.

Think of it. Every image lies about God’s infinity—because *it* (the image) is finite. Every image lies about God’s omnipresence—because *it* (the image) is restricted to a single location. Every image lies about God’s eternality—because *it* (the image) was created and temporal. Perhaps most relevant to our present commandment is that every image lies about God because God is not dead but He is the Living God. He is the personal God. He is the relational God. Images are not personal, not relational, not intimate. Image worship strips God of those things that make Him most lovely. The image that is being worshipped is no longer God. It is ourselves. That’s why this second commandment does not just include physical images of God but also mental images of God.

“Mark Dever, pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist was teaching a theological seminar one day and he made an assertion from Scripture about God. A student in the class interrupted him and said, " Excuse me Mark, but I like to think of God as wise, but not meddling; compassionate but not overpowering; resourceful but not interrupting. That's how I like to think about God." Mark responded, "Thank you Bill for telling us so

much about yourself, but we're here to learn about God from the Bible.”⁹

Dever nails it. If we don't allow the Bible to correct our ideas of God, it is because we are interested in worshipping God, but ourselves. In summary, these are the three main reasons that God forbids us to worship Him through the use of images

- 1) God didn't reveal Himself in a form (Deuteronomy 4:15)
- 2) Our images strip God of His attributes and personhood
- 3) Image-worship is not God-worship but self-worship

Christ is the Image of God

So our series is called Christ in the Commandments. It has been our contention that the Ten Commandments are mainly about Christ. How is Christ in this Commandment? Jesus Christ is the image of God Himself. God forbids all images *ultimately* because His Son is the image of God that we are to worship.

2 Corinthians 4:4 “the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

Hebrews 1:3 “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature”

Colossians 1:15 “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.”

Jesus Christ is the only truthful representation of God *because* He is God Himself. When John 1:1 tells us He is the Word of God, he means something so profound. What is a word? It is the outward expression of an idea. Jesus is the

⁹ Source: <https://www.fpcjackson.org/resource-library/sermons/a-call-to-give-yourself-to-god> accessed October 12, 2017

outward expression of the invisible idea and Person of God. God is infinite. Jesus who is God is infinite. God is omnipresent, so is Jesus. God is perfectly holy, so is Jesus. God is personal and relational, and so is Jesus. Jesus Christ is the perfect image of God. So let's put the two commandments side by side.

1st Commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me." 'I alone am Your Husband Christ says' (**Ephesians 5:32**) 'I will not share you with anyone.'

2nd Commandment: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image...You shall not bow down to them or serve them" 'Because,' Christ says, 'I alone am the image of God.' (**Colossians 1:15**) 'No one comes to the Father except through Me, the only true Image of God and God Himself.'

We are being conformed to the image of Christ

And as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, our destiny is to be conformed to the image of Christ. (**Roman 8:29**). We "are being transformed *into the same image* from one degree of glory to another" (**2 Cor. 3:18**) Those are the indicatives of the gospel. Meaning, this is what God declares will happen to all believers.

So then what does 2nd commandment demand of us?

The first commandment demands that we do not surrender *our hearts* to other husbands. The second commandment demands that we do not surrender *our hands*—meaning we are forbidden from all behaviors that display our heart idolatry. [Turn to Colossians 3:5