

## THE SECOND COMMANDMENT IDOLS FOR DESTRUCTION

*“For the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the Truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the Creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made by corruptible man...who exchanged the Truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.”* Romans 1:18-25

Throughout the Bible commandments and warnings against idolatry are the most repeated of all. There are more denunciations of idolatry than any other sin in the Bible.

*“You shall not make for yourself a carved image...you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.”* Exodus 20:4-6

*“Do not turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molded gods; I am the Lord your God.”* Leviticus 19:4

*“Thus says the Lord God: repent and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations. For everyone...which setteth up his idols in his heart...I the Lord will answer him by Myself.”* Ezekiel 14:6-7

*“The works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries and the like...those who practice such things will not inherit the Kingdom of God.”* Galatians 5:19-21

The Apostle John beseeches us: *“Little children, keep yourselves from idols.”* 1 John 5:21

Of course, the second commandment prohibits the idolatry of polytheistic religions such as Hinduism. Idols of Kali before whom devotees used to offer human sacrifices, Shiva, Krishna, and Vishnu are all obviously idols forbidden by the second commandment.

The Apostle Paul taught: *“That the things which the gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord’s Table and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?”* 1 Corinthians 10:20-22

Moses wrote: *“They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods; with abominations they provoked Him to anger. They sacrificed to demons, not to God...”* Deuteronomy 32:16-20

The Law of God demanded: *“But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images (for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose Name is Jehovah, is a jealous God)”* Exodus 34:13-14

The Prophet Jeremiah wrote: *“The children gather wood, the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead dough, to make cakes for the queen of heaven; and they pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger. Do they provoke Me to anger? asks the Lord. Do they not provoke themselves, to the shame of their own faces? Therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, My anger and My fury will be poured out on this place...and it will burn and not be quenched.”* Jeremiah 7:18-20

It is significant that Roman Catholicism has omitted this Second Commandment not to bow down to any idols from their traditional listing of the Ten Commandments. To make up for the omission of number two, the Tenth Commandment to not covet is divided into two, with *Do not covet your neighbour's wife* now being number nine, and *Do not covet anything else that is your neighbour's* as number ten. When I've pointed this out to people in the field quoting the Ten Commandments to me, and shown them the passages in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, they are shocked. *“Why would our church change the Ten Commandments?”* They would ask in shock. *“Perhaps it's because they have statues and crucifixes that they bow down to,”* I have suggested.

The *Westminster Larger Catechism* lists under the Second Commandment the **Sins Forbidden** as: the sin of enticing to idolatry (*“If your brother, the son of your mother, your son or your daughter, the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, secretly entices you, saying let us go and serve other gods...you shall not consent to him or listen to him, nor shall your eye pity him, nor shall you spare him or conceal him.”* Deuteronomy 13:6-8);

The sin of approving any religious worship not instituted by God Himself (*“Take heed to yourself that you are ensnared to follow them...and that you do not enquire after their gods, saying, how did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise. You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods. Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.”* Deuteronomy 12:30-32;

The sin of tolerating false religion (*“It shall be in that day, says the Lord of Hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered. I will also cause the prophets and their unclean spirits to depart from the land. It shall come to pass if anyone still prophesies, then his father and mother who begot him will say to him, you shall not live, because you have spoken lies in the Name of the Lord.”* Zechariah 13:2-3; *“I know your works, your labour, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are Apostles and are not, and have found them liars...but I have a few things against you, because you have there those who hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. Thus you also have those who hold to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate...”* Revelation 2:2, 14-15, 20);

The sin of making any representation of God (*“Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure;...take heed lest you lift your eyes to Heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the hosts of Heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the Lord your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage.”* Deuteronomy 4:15-19; *“We ought not to think that the Divine nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising”* Acts 17:29);

The sin of worshipping images (*“Let it be known to you, o king, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.”* Daniel 3:18; *“You served those which by nature are not gods”* Galatians 4:8);

The sin of making representations of imagined deities (*“They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I have commanded them. They have made themselves a moulded calf and worshipped it and sacrificed to it and said, this is your god O Israel that brought you out of the land of Egypt!”* Exodus 32:8);

The sin of superstition (***“Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle...according to the commandments and doctrines of man. These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom and self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.”*** Colossians 2:21-23);

The sin of corrupting the worship of God (***“You offer defiled food on My altar...you offer the blind as a sacrifice...you offer the lame and sick...offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favourably? says the Lord of Hosts.”*** Malachi 1:7-8);

The sin of adding to, or taking away from, the worship of God (***“You shall not add to the Word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.”*** Deuteronomy 4:2; ***“And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”*** Matthew 15:9);

The sin of simony (***“When Simon saw that through the laying on of the Apostles hands, the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money.”*** Acts 8:18);

The sin of despising the worship and ordinances of God (***“But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business.”*** Matthew 22:5; ***“You also say, O, what a weariness! And you sneer at it...”*** Malachi 1:13);

The sin of hindering and opposing the worship and ordinances of God (***“But woe to you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in.”*** Matthew 23:13;

Under **Duties Required** the *Westminster Larger Catechism* lists:

***“The receiving, observing and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in His Word; particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the Name of Christ.”*** (***“Set your hearts on all the Words...which you shall command your children to be careful to observe – all the Words of this Law...it is your life, and by this Word you shall prolong your days.”*** Deuteronomy 32:46-47; ***“Teach them to observe all things that I have commanded you.”*** Matthew 28:20; ***“And they continued steadfastly in the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship...”*** Acts 2:42; ***“Keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing.”*** 1 Timothy 6:13-14

Other Duties Required by the Second Commandment include: the duty to read the Word of God (Deut. 17:18-19); the duty to hear the Word of God (James 1:21-22); the duty to administer and receive the Sacraments (Matthew 28:19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26); the duty of church government and discipline (Matthew 18:15-17; Matthew 16:19); the duty to receive and maintain the ministry (Ephesians 4:11-12; 1 Tim. 5:17-18); the duty of religious fasting (Joel 2:12); the duty to disapprove of, detest and oppose all false worship (***“Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within when he saw that the city was given over to idols.”*** Acts 17:16-17).

The Commandment against idol worship was broken before the Words burned into the tablets of stone by the finger of God had even cooled. The Israelites fashioned a graven image of a golden calf, right beneath the mountain of God.

How could God’s chosen people bow down before a cold, lifeless image of a golden calf when they had just witnessed the ten plagues of the Living God expose as powerless the false gods of Egypt?

How could they have been so unfaithful to the God who had delivered them out of slavery in Egypt, carrying them on eagles wings, the One who had led them through the Red Sea with walls of water on each side. How could they have lowered themselves to worshipping an idol when they had been fed with manna in the desert, and satisfied with water from the rock, following the Pillar of Cloud by day and the Pillar of Fire by night?

When Moses confronted his brother, Aaron’s attempts to excuse this abomination seemed embarrassing like our feeble attempts to justify disobedience to the clearly expressed Word of God. Aaron claimed that

they threw all their gold into the fire, and out came the golden calf! Earlier Aaron had even claimed that the feast before the golden calf would be held in honour of the Lord! (Exodus 32:5).

After King Solomon, many of the Israelites turned to the sin of idolatry. Jeroboam had other golden calves fashioned for worship in Dan and Bethel. All over Israel, on countless hills and amidst clumps of trees, altars were erected to the false gods of the Canaanites: Baal, Ashteroth, Kronos and Molech. The consequence of this idolatry was judgment.

God sent the Assyrians to destroy the Northern Kingdom of Israel and lead His people into captivity. The Southern Kingdom of Judah was later conquered under Nebukhednezzar of Babylon. It took the furnace of affliction and slavery in Babylon to purge the dregs of idolatry from the hearts of God's people. First under the ministry of great prophets such as Ezekiel and Daniel, and then after the return from Exile under Ezra and Nehemiah, the people resolved to never again compromise with idolatry.

Christianity cannot worship before the idolatrous altar of pluralism, multiculturalism and the interfaith movement. ***“Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Him.”*** John 14:6

The Second Commandment is the only commandment where God implies that those who break it hate Him. to worship a false god, any sort of image, or attempt to worship God through some kind of statue or image, was defined in the second commandment as hating God.

We should also note that the Second Commandment does not forbid artistry. The Second Commandment forbids idolatry. On the same day that God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, He gave Moses detailed instructions for the building of the Tabernacle which included numerous visual arts. Exodus 25 and 26 include details for the Tabernacle, the curtains, the Ark of the Covenant and even for the statues of the angels over the Ark of the Covenant.

There are three functions of art. Two are acceptable, the third is forbidden by the second commandment.

Art may be used for decoration, or as a teaching too, but not for Devotional purposes. God is a God of beauty. He is the great Artist whose creativity and love of beauty is seen in so much of His magnificent creation, sunsets and sunrises, mountains, trees, plants, flowers, the ocean and the sky itself. God intends that we exercise the talents He entrusts us with to beautify His world further.

Art can also be used to teach and instruct and it is perfectly acceptable to produce and use pictures of Noah, The Ark and the animals, Moses parting the Red Sea, David defeating Goliath, Elijah challenging the Prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel and so many other great Bible stories.

What the Second Commandment is forbidding is the Devotional use of art. God Himself is greater than His Creation and everything in it. The Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 asks: *“Must we, then, not make any images at all? Answer: God cannot and may not be imaged in any way...but may not images be tolerated in churches as books of the laity? Answer: No, for we should not be wiser than God, who will not have His people taught by dumb idols, but by the lively preaching of His Word.”*

God is infinite, eternal and perfect. How can anyone depict that artistically? How can any artist depict holiness and unlimited wisdom and power? God forbids any representation of Himself because His nature is too great to be drawn or depicted. This Commandment requires that our worship be simple and Spiritual, free of elaborate human gimmicks and ornamentation. God has designed a way of worship through intelligent, sincere, wholehearted words - said and sung. God is Spirit and we who worship Him must worship Him in Spirit and Truth. We must prepare our hearts, humble ourselves, confess our sins, be grateful for His many blessings, and rejoice in the Lord with all our hearts.

I regularly see the unfortunate effects of idolatrous images of the Lord Jesus. One young man who came to join us for our Great Commission Course, arrived with long hair and a scruffy beard. I asked him if he was serious about missions. When he said that yes, he was, I told him to have a haircut and smarten and clean up. He was somewhat indignant: *“But Jesus had long hair!”*

I handed him a Bible and asked him to please show me where the Bible tells us that. *“Well, I don’t know where, but didn’t Jesus have long hair?”*

No, I assured him that there was no passage anywhere in the Bible that describes Jesus as having long hair. In fact, there is nothing in the Scriptures that describes His features, His hair, His eye colour, or even the expressions on His face. We are informed that His face was marred more than any man, and he had no form or comeliness about Him (Isaiah 52:14 and 53:2). It is hard to argue from silence. However the Apostle Paul did say that long hair on a man is a disgrace (1 Corinthians 11:14).

Unfortunately, because of imaginative Renaissance depictions of Jesus having long hair, that image has stuck. Although we do know that the Jewish people did not typically have long hair. In fact almost every film on the life of Christ depicts the disciples as having short hair, and the actor playing the role of Jesus stands out by having the longest hair on the set! (Although, it is interesting that in more recent films actors depicting the Lord Jesus have tended to have much shorter hair than has been traditionally depicted.) It is worth noting that Samson stood out for having long hair, this identified him as Nasserite. If it was typical for Hebrews to have long hair, it would have been of no significance to distinguish Samson. We need to repent of having idolatrous images of the Lord Jesus, whether as some delicate Renaissance figure with surgeons fingers, or a Californian hippie or surfer.

As the Lord worked as a carpenter, He would have had to be physically strong to chop down the trees, carry the logs, craft the wood into furniture, and to carry and to deliver it. Considering how long the Lord could survive while fasting in the desert, how he endured such cruel flogging and abuse at the hands of the Roman soldiers, and the fact the Lord could walk through a murderous mob intent on stoning him or throwing Him off the cliff, without anyone daring to touch Him, indicates that He must have had quite a different physical appearance to how He is typically depicted in Renaissance art.

There seems to be some understanding of how this Second Commandment still applies to us today, in that the popular vocabulary identifies *“sports idols”*, *“Hollywood idols”*, *“sex idols”*, and musicians who are described as *“idols”*. There is also no doubt that people make idols of their favourite political party. The Soviet Union made a god of *“The Party”* and instituted idolatrous pilgrimages to Lenin’s tomb.

Friends of mine who minister on a university campus related how one individual was incensed that the President of South Africa had been referred to by his bare surname. **“THAT’S PRESIDENT THABO MBEKI TO YOU!”** he shouted. Shortly after that this same individual cursed and blasphemed - opening himself up to the response: *“That’s the Lord Jesus Christ to you!”*

What comes into our minds when we think of God, is the most important thing about us. All too often people betray the idolatry within in their minds in how they speak of God. Bishop Desmond Tutu was quoted on the front page of daily newspapers in South Africa as declaring that *“my God isn’t homophobic”*, that *“I could never worship a God who is against homosexuals.”* Tutu even declared that if homosexuals don’t go to Heaven, then he didn’t want to go there!

When people talk like this, they reveal that they have fashioned a god in the factory of their mind. Of course, their god would never be harsh and judgmental, he would never condemn anyone to hell, because his/her god does not exist. It is a figment of his/her imagination. What people have done when they speak like this is to invent a god to suit their own purposes. This is the essence of idolatry.

The fact is that the God of the Bible is not only a God of love, but a God of light. God is not only gracious and merciful, but He is holy and just. God is not only a Saviour, but He is the Eternal Judge. The God of the Bible, the one true God who made Heaven and Earth, gave us His Ten Commandments. He sent plagues upon Egypt. He destroyed the pursuing Egyptian army in the Red Sea. He sent fire and sulphur upon the wicked inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah.

The Day will come when each one of us will have to stand before His Judgment Seat and give an account of our lives.

What is most important to you? Anything more important to us than God is an idol. To many people the idol in their life is fame, fortune, success, their fancy car, or home, their computer, prestige, or a certain relationship. Nothing must be more important in our lives than God.

It is noteworthy throughout the Bible that whenever God's Word is proclaimed, the response of repentant people has been to destroy their idols. When the Apostle Paul proclaimed the Gospel in Ephesus, people brought their occultic materials and burned them. ***"They were all seized with fear, and the Name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour...in this way the Word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power."*** Acts 19:17-20

We need to repent of idolatry in our hearts, minds and lives. Where there is a physical idol, we should break, burn or bury it. ***"Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted Word, which is able to save your souls. Be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."*** James 1:21-22

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