

Two!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 September 2023

Preacher: Cory Brock

[0 : 00] We're in a series on Sunday evenings looking at the Ten Commandments. God calls them the Ten Words here in verse one, and we're doing them one by one every single Sunday.

And tonight we're on the second commandment. We read it. It was verse four to six. It's all about worship. This command I should say. Now at St. Columbus we have a confession of faith that the leaders subscribe to, the West Westminster Confession of Faith, and in it there's a larger catechism, and in the larger catechism the larger catechism takes every single one of the commandments and asks two questions of every single one of them.

It asks what is forbidden in this commandment and why, and then it asks positively what is being commanded here. So the catechism, the authors of it in the 17th century thought that in every single one of the commandments it's not just something being forbidden even though it is negative.

There's also positive things being commanded. So it's a helpful frame for a sermon outline. So let's do it. What is forbidden in the second commandment and why?

What is being implicitly commanded and why? And then how can we grow in our obedience? Now there's lots of things to talk about with this commandment that I'm not going to.

[1 : 20] So I'm not going to talk tonight about the sacraments. Some of you people who are interested in that will know why you're interested in it. And I'm not going to talk tonight about images of Christ of Jesus.

We just don't have time. So we'll have to lay that aside, but I'd love to talk to you afterwards about it if you'd like. But let's think about first what is forbidden in this commandment and why.

Now command number one, I'm the Lord your God and I brought you out of the land of Egypt on Eagle's wings, he told us in chapter 19, don't have any other gods before me.

So Derek looked at command number one last week and it means that God alone is God. He's the real God. There is no other God except God, the God of the Bible.

And they had been living in a land of Egypt where Egypt had tons of gods, all sorts of gods. And every ancient Near Eastern people group is organized around a pantheon or polytheism, lots and lots and lots of gods.

[2 : 15] And so this is addressing that directly in command one. There is only one real God. Don't have any other things that you treat as gods before the real God. All right, that's command one.

Command two, God not only cares about true belief that he is the real God, but also about true worship. So you can't just approach God any way you want.

That's what the second command really is all about. The Egyptians approach their gods in tons of different ways. They've just come out of slavery in Egypt. They've seen that.

You can't approach modern person. You cannot approach the living God any way you want to. Because when you approach God on your terms, not his terms, you're actually constructing a God, not approaching the real God.

That's really the heart of this second commandment. Now there's an assumption here. And the assumption when he tells us how to worship, don't make any carved images.

[3 : 14] That's the wrong way to approach the true Lord. There's an assumption. And the assumption is you could frame it as we frame it in our century. What makes us human beings different from the animals?

And in our age, people will say, of course, it's that we have the capacity to master a controlled nature. We have the capacity for scientific and cultural and technical advancement.

We can build an iPhone. And that makes us drastically different from the animals all around us. Now the Bible says that's true. That is one of the ways that you're different.

But the more fundamental way that you are different, that human beings are different than the animals, and it's right here in the second commandment, is that we are homo-religiosus.

We are religious humans. That's the most fundamental difference between us and everything else in the world, is that we are fundamentally, our human nature is to be religious.

[4 : 13] And so as soon as human beings are born and society starts to get formed in shape, as soon as people can think and can feel, they start to worship.

We will worship anything. We'll worship anything we can see, anything we can touch, anything we can't see. We are fundamentally religious people. We have to worship. We need to worship. We can't help but worship.

It's who we are. Really the question of our age, the sociologists have started to say this more and more and more, but the question of our age is not how do you fit religion in a scientific age, but how do you fit science in a religious age?

And the reason we ask it like that is because whether it's the Iron Age or Bronze Age, Stone Age even further back, or the Industrial Age or the Scientific Age, religion is more fundamental.

Religion is more important to human beings than any of it, no matter what age we live in. Now, we see this because every single ancient Near Eastern culture, like Egypt, where they've just come from, is organized around very visible objects of public religion.

[5 : 20] So there are going to be temples in ancient Egypt. And everybody knows that that temple is the centerpiece of their life. Everything is structured around the temple.

But all the way to the New Testament, Paul goes up, Marcel in Athens, and he sees that religious objects are the fundamental thing that everybody structures their life around.

He says, I see that you are very religious. That's the thing Paul says. I see that you are religious people, just like everybody else that's ever existed. And I see that you have a statue right here at the center of your city to the unknown God, that that is the thing that gathers you.

The God that, in case you missed one, here's the one that you know you've missed, the unknown God. You see, he's saying everybody's religious and we all actually structure our lives around something that we worship.

And it's always been that way. It was just that in the ancient world and in the pre-modern world, it was much more visible. Temples were the mark of the city center. And it's really always been that way for all of human society.

[6 : 23] Now you can see why then in verse four that God addresses the form of worship by referring to these three orders of existence.

You shall not make for yourself a carved image to worship God or any likeness where? That is in heaven above, earth beneath, or the water under the earth. So he talks about this three tiers of existence.

And the reason he does that is because he's saying in the ancient mind, there are three domains of creatureliness. The heavens where the birds live, the earth where the animals live, and the seas and the waters underneath the earth where the monsters, the sea creatures live.

And he's saying that in Egypt, in Babylon, in Rome, in Greece of the first century, they've taken creatures and birds, animals, trees, flowers, plants, and they've taken them and put them in the temples.

And they've taken them to the markets and the priests have blessed them. And you can go buy one and you can take it to your house. And you can form a shrine at your house. And you can use it as a mediation point for communicating with and getting benefits from the divine.

[7 : 36] This is the normal order of life for almost every human being in all of history. Now you can come to this and say, oh boy, you know, I don't struggle with that.

I don't struggle. I don't ever find myself in the marketplace looking for icons made of whales to put in my home to mediate the divine.

But it's very important to know that this actually is the default position of humanity, that most human beings have gone this way throughout all the years.

Now you say that's not something I struggle with, but is it? Is it? So even in the midst of Christianity, we can begin to drift.

This happened many, many times throughout the centuries. In some sense, the Reformation had a big emphasis on the fact that even Christians can drift towards worshiping God through images of birds or creatures or whatever else it might be, any creaturely thing that we can craft out of wood or stone.

[8 : 36] And so he's coming and he's saying here, very important, the true God rescued you on Eagle's wings. There is no other God like him. He is not a creature and so you cannot worship God in the form of creatureliness.

He's invisible. You can't see him. That's just not the way you can approach. Now two caveats. One where maybe you're here tonight and you've grown up in the free church of Scotland.

We're a free church, a Scotland church. Many of you haven't. Some of you are Presbyterian historically. Some of you aren't. Some of you are just coming in and exploring Christianity and that's great too.

But for our free church folk, our Presbyterians are people who have wrestled with this in the past, one of the things to say here is that this command does not mean that you can't have images in worship.

It actually doesn't mean that. You say, whoa, are you sure? Well, if you just look around the room, you can see things carved out of wood.

[9 : 40] Things on the banisters here carved out of wood. There's pulpit right behind me carved out of wood. John Fram says that even if you take a church and you empty the room and you paint all the walls white, you're still communicating something by representational art.

It's actually impossible. It's impossible not to have an image in a church, in a worship space. The key here in this passage is God is saying, never try to make an image of God.

Don't ever try to image God himself. You can't do it. You cannot image the invisible God. Number one, number two, never try to take an image, something carved, something built, something in the creaturely domain at all, and use it as a medium to interact with the divine, with God.

That's the simple thing. He's not saying you can't have an image. He's not saying you can't have images. He's saying never use it and think that's God. That's what God looks like and never use it as a point at which you can meet the holy, a point through which you can come to the mountain.

Here's how we can both drift as Protestant Christians or use things well. One of the ways you might can drift into the fault here that he's talking about.

[10 : 54] When I was growing up, I would be at church any time the doors were open. That was my family life. Maybe you grew up that way.

You're the first person to get there. The last person to leave and one of the things that your parents and the elders, the deacons, whoever else says to you is, do not run, do not run, child, through God's house.

Never run through the house. This is the house of the Lord. Don't you know that? So it's a Monday night and there's nobody in the building and you're running down the hall. What are you doing? This is the house of the Lord.

Now, that's a slight drift because you're saying that this building has become a medium. A mediation point for the divine and that's not what it is.

The house of the Lord is the people of God, wherever they might be gathered. Or you say, you know, I wear it. It's a great thing to wear a cross. A cross helps you to remember to pray.

[11 : 54] There's all sorts of things like that that might help you to remember to pray. But when you start to treat it in a way that it's magic, it's divine, that's superstition.

That's what's being forbidden here. So there's all sorts of ways that we can fall into this command. Now here's the why and we'll close the first point. What's forbidden? Don't ever try to create an image of God.

Don't ever try to use any object in the creature-led domain through which God is mediated. His presence is mediated and use it for worship. Why? Let me just say quickly, two things about God, one thing about us to give the why.

And he tells us the first thing, I've already said it. You can't do that because God is free. He can't be bounded. God is invisible.

He can't be imaged. God cannot be captured in any way. And so to bound God through any type of creature-ly thing is forbidden because it actually tries to limit that which cannot be limited.

[12 : 54] Right? That's the first thing. The second reason is he tells us right here, he says, don't do this because I am jealous. And when I was growing up, I heard a celebrity on television.

I remember this so vividly as a child say on a talk show, I used to be a Christian, but whenever I read that God is jealous, I had to leave the faith behind.

I couldn't follow a God who says I'm jealous. Now, what does God mean? He says, you can't do this because I'm jealous. I'm jealous of you and for you. And even more importantly, he's saying here, I'm jealous for my own glory.

Now the word jealousy here is a marriage term. You look at the way this word in Hebrews used all across the Old Testament and almost exclusively it's used in the context of marriages.

And so God has already said, I bore you on eagle's wings in Exodus 19, if you were here two weeks ago, you are my family. You're my children. You're my sons and daughters.

[13 : 53] And now he takes the metaphor to another level and says, you're also my bride and I'm your groom. And so he's saying here, whenever you give worship to something in the creaturely realm that's created, you are actually robbing me of the glory that I'm owed.

God deserves to be worshiped. He deserves to be glorified. And he's saying, he's saying in other words, anytime you use an image, something carved to worship me, it's as if you are committing adultery against me.

That's the language of the Old Testament. And so every single act of idolatry is an act of adultery in the grand image that God is the great groom and the church, the people of God are his bride.

And so he says, I'm jealous for my glory and I'm jealous for you. And so don't give it to a piece of wood. Don't give it to a piece of stone or to the cross on your neck or to the church building or to anything else in all of creation, give me the glory I'm due.

Think about it like this. If you're married, if you're married, you get up in the morning and you get ready. Maybe you leave the house for work, perhaps one of you does.

[15 : 03] And you're getting ready to leave and your spouse is about to walk out the door, the wife, husband. And before your husband, your wife asks for a kiss.

You know, you're leaving for the day and you're going to give your wife a kiss, your husband a kiss. And they say, don't leave without giving me a kiss. And so you say, oh, yeah, sure, no problem. And you pull your wallet out of your pocket and you open up your wallet and you pull a picture of your wife out and you peck the picture and you say, all good.

And you walk out the door, right? You've actually stolen from your wife, your husband. You've stolen the love that is due to them by relationship of the covenant marriage.

And he's saying, I'm jealous for your love. I'm jealous. Don't give it to a piece of wood or a statue or anything else in all of the creaturely domain. Don't kiss a picture when your spouse is standing right in front of you.

It's the exact same idea, except on a much grander level. Now, those are the two reasons from God's perspective. One for Mars. The reason why that this is forbidden is because you don't try and image God at all ever in this world.

[16 : 16] Not only because God is invisible and cannot be imaged, but also because God already has been imaged. You see, back in Genesis chapter one, God created the Garden of Eden.

And he put first, first, he put, he put all sorts of things to remind you of himself. So it's not that we don't think God's presence is mediated through anything in the world.

No, we say like Calvin said, creation itself is the theater of God's glory. You don't need images because God says, go out and look at creation and there's my power.

I speak, I speak through the stars, through the sun. I speak deeply into your consciousness. I am with you. He reveals himself already in the things that have been made.

And he did that most acutely in the Garden of Eden. And then at the center of the Garden of Eden, he said, there, he said, you don't make an image. There already is an image. And on day six, remember, he said, the image of God is humanity, male and female.

[17 : 19] That's the image. Now the image is not God. And so you don't worship the image, but there is an image. And he said that human beings are actually that which you can look at in this world and remember a faint analogy of the glory of the triune God built in the corporate humanity, revealed in corporate humanity, that human beings are the image of God.

You don't need an image. There already is one. It's the closest thing you can get to helping you remember what God could be like and never worship the image, but know that there is an image.

And so you don't need any more images. Actually one of the ways the Old Testament develops this is that in Ezekiel 18, Ezekiel 18 says this very acutely.

It talks about how the nations, as they focused on carved images, idols throughout the centuries, more and more and more lost their focus on the real image.

And this happens across the Old Testament. Derek mentioned this morning, one of the most difficult things to read about in the Old Testament is that the more and more and more idolatry through images took over a society, the closer and closer and closer they drew to human sacrifice as one of the ways of worship.

[18 : 33] You see, the more and more and more you forget that there already is an image and you create images, the more and more and more you mistreat the real image of God, which is human beings. And so in Ezekiel 18, it says that you've replaced humans with idols and you've forgotten about the poor.

You've actually been so focused on a statue and trying to get what you want from the gods that you don't ever think about the people who are suffering all around you when God says, look at them. Go and give them a drink of water and boy, have you loved me, have you served me.

That's one of the fundamental costs of graven image idolatry throughout the Old Testament. Now that's what's forbidden. That's why, secondly, what is commanded.

This is the implicit side. Let me give you four. The first two, I'll just list. What is being positively commanded here? I think it's this.

One, remember, you are fundamentally religious. You have to worship. That's the first thing he's telling us implicitly.

[19 : 38] The second thing he's telling us implicitly is come to worship to worship God, the real God. It's as simple as that.

He's commanding us here that when we come to worship and we gather together, come to worship to worship the real God, the God of the Bible, the God of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Triune God.

Come and worship nothing else. Give your worship completely to the God that has saved you. That's the second thing. It's that simple. God alone is worthy of worship.

Worship has this idea of worth built into it, worthship. What is worship? Worship is nothing but giving that which it is due.

Giving worth, giving value, ascribing honor to something that deserves it. God is the only being in all of existence that is truly deserving of worthship.

[20 : 35] So, come to worship to worship the one who is worthy of worship. That's the implicit command here. Third, now a little more detail.

Third, the implicit idea here is when you do that, you have to be okay with living by faith not by sight.

He's saying, don't make any graven images of God, oh, I know you want to. You see, it's default, human nature, to try to find images of God, to bring God down, to bound God in some way.

Why? Oh, we want to. And he's coming and saying, you've got to actually be okay to live by faith, not by sight. You see, they wanted graven images.

They had been trained by Egypt for graven images. And what they got instead in this passage is graven words. God engraved words into stone for them, but they wanted an image.

[21 : 36] And they would run at the golden calf not long after this. And that's us too. We want an image, but what we've got is words. Why? It's never been harder to face this, I think, than now. We live in an age of image more than ever in human history.

If it was hard for Israel, it's harder for you. Because most people in the modern world are not words people. They're image people.

We read less books than ever. We look at things more than ever. We want sight, not faith. We want image, not word. Why? Why are images so appealing?

Peter Lightheart points out that with images, why do you want to graven image of God? Because an image is something that you can control. You can fashion it. You can shape it. You can move it around.

You can bring it anywhere you want to bring it. You can smash it. You can rebuild it. You can add things to it. You can restructure it. You see, it's saying you can never approach God by sight, by image, because that would train you to think that you can control the God who can't be controlled.

[22 : 42] He is good, but he's not safe. And as soon as you try to image him and bound him, you've tried to control him. And exactly the reverse is the truth, that God is the one who sees you, the image.

You never see him. Meaning he has total control over you. You're bounded. He decides. You never do. You can't bound him, but he has bounded you.

You can't image him, but you are his image. And it doesn't work if you flip it around. And any attempt to do so is actually to try to control or construct a God that doesn't actually exist.

He says, you've got to be okay with faith, not by sight. And so the Holy Spirit works in our hearts in the New Covenant era by speaking, by speech, through the word. Why are we a word-centered religion?

Why do we have preaching? All because we cannot control God. He controls us. We can't image God. We can't bind him. He images himself in us and binds us.

[23 : 45] That's all. We have to be okay with faith, not by sight. Fourth, finally, maybe most importantly, the fourth implicit thing that's being commanded to us here is to realize that because we are religious people by nature, we're always going to worship.

We're not only going to worship explicitly in corporate contexts, surrounded and gathered around something, whether it's the temple of Athena or the word of the Lord.

Not only are we like that as human beings, but also worship is built into our daily existence, our 24-7 existence. We never stop.

We're always worshiping. It's not only about the corporate gathering. It's also about being awake to how often you worship outside the space of the gathered church. The gods of Egypt, the gods of Babylon, the gods of Hinduism, they're all crafted gods.

You say, that's not really my problem. That's not the thing I'm struggling with. The second commandment doesn't hit me that hard because I'm not prone to something like this. Let me ask you, do you craft gods that you can control in your ordinary life and bring them with you into the space of worship?

[25 : 05] Have you brought gods that you've created, idols of the heart, into worship with you tonight? David Foster Wallace, I've used this quote several times in this pulpit.

He gave the very famous Kenyan College address some 15 years ago now, I think it was. I'll give you the very famous quote in just a moment, but nobody ever reads what he wrote before the famous part of the quote.

Listen to what David Foster Wallace, the philosopher, says to these graduates in their final day in university. He says, well, let me frame it.

Think about it. You can be a Christian, you can be a Christian tonight and say, I don't struggle with icons. I don't struggle with little gods. Maybe you're not a Christian tonight and you say, I don't even recognize the category of idolatry.

It's not a category that makes sense to me in any way, shape, or form because I don't believe in the God that you're talking about. Listen to what he says.

[26 : 05] It's a bit of a long quote, so you'll have to focus. He says, a huge percentage of the stuff that I tend to be automatically certain of is, it turns out, totally wrong and deluded.

For example, everything in my own immediate experience supports my deep belief that I am the absolute center of the universe.

The realist, the most vivid and important person in all of existence. We rarely talk about this sort of natural, basic self-centeredness because it's so socially repulsive, but it's pretty much the same for all of us deep down, that we center our universe around me.

Now, Abraham Kuiper a century ago, he said this. He said that the God, the icon, the idols that we structure our world around. Remember, Egypt had a God, the God of the Sun, right at the center of the city.

The unknown God right at the center of Athens, and Athena right at the center of Ephesus. And you say, well, what's the God, what are the crafted Gods that we're all gathered around? Here's what Kuiper says. He says, in the modern world, there is no longer a graven image at the center of the city, but instead it's just me.

[27 : 23] It's just the eye, the ego. It's the great eye, no longer a big statue, no longer the Egyptian God or the Babylonian God's, it's individualized self-actualization.

It is that I live in my world, and my world centers on me. And so you think about it. If society is not demanding, society no longer demands that you turn and bow before a great statue at the city center, then the default position of humanity is that you will naturally serve the master that is most immediate, most near you, most often, and that is your own mind, your own heart, your own consciousness.

And so Wallace then says this, the famous part. He says, in the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping.

Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what we're going to worship. And if you worship something that is not true and transcendent, then pretty much anything else that you worship is going to eat you alive.

If you worship money and stuff, if they are where you tap real meaning, then you will never have enough. You'll never feel like you have enough. It's true. You worship your body and beauty and sexual allure, and you will always feel ugly.

[28 : 42] And when time and age starts showing, you will die a million deaths before they finally plant you. Now here's the real key, the real secret of the Second Commandment, and we'll move to the final thing.

God deserves your worship, but he does not need it. But you need to worship the real God, or you will fall into despair.

God commands your worship, he deserves your worship, he doesn't have to have it. He doesn't need it. But you desperately need to worship him, or you will slowly but surely fall into deep despair.

You see, anytime you fail to worship the real God, ultimately you will move and drift towards the default position of putting your trust and your hope in your own self-justification, in some way, shape, or form.

And when you try to justify yourself through performance, or through prodigality, or through anything else, you will fail and you will fall into sadness.

[29 : 44] Anything else can handle the weight of your worship except the true God. Now lastly and finally, how can we grow? Only one thing. How can we grow into obedience?

It's the maths of mercy here. Did you see the mathematics that God lays out here at the end of this commandment? He says, as we close, don't bow down to gods that are crafted, don't have idols in your life because I'm jealous and I will visit the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me.

But I'll show steadfast love to thousands of those who keep my commandments. So he says here briefly that it is the default position of humanity to run to craft the idols, whether you can see them or they're deep down in your heart.

And he says that I will punish, I will visit that iniquity, the iniquity of idolatry, the iniquity of a father, of a parent, onto the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, of those who persist, he's saying, in idolatry.

Now people come to this passage, a 90 second aside on this, people come to this passage and they say, is this teaching corporate guilt that the sins of a parent God will take and he will save that punishment for the grandchildren?

[31 : 13] And the answer is no, he's not at all talking about here some substitutionary punishment where grandchildren are going to pay the price for the sins of idolatry that you commit today or did in Israel.

We know this because in Ezekiel 18, verse 20, he says, the sons shall not suffer the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. So it's not anything like that.

Instead he's saying a couple things, he's saying one, when a generation, a family, a parent, someone in relationships really, really struggles with idolatries chasing after false gods in this world repeatedly and repeatedly, it has consequences for everybody around them.

So the iniquity of a father can be brought down on even the third and the fourth generation because sin has consequences and sometimes those consequences really, really ripple out and matter a lot.

And he's just saying, you've got to be aware of that. But did you see how he concluded? He said, you know, there's consequences for sin down to three and four generations, but and here's the translation issue.

[32 : 27] He says, verse six, but I will show mercy, steadfast love to not thousands, but to literally the thousandth generation of those who love me.

You see what he's saying? He's saying every single one of us struggles with idolatry and every single one of us can say I'm a person who has cost other people in some way, shape or form because of my idols.

Every single one of us has to be able to say that. That's what he's asking of us. And he's saying, but yes, your sin has consequences. Your idolatries have consequences, but I, you know, three generations, I want to show you mercy to a thousand generations.

You see the math he's saying his mercy is so much bigger than our idolatry. He has mercy to overcome all of our sins, to overwhelm our sins.

And so here's the real secret of the second commandment. How he says, you know, I want to take this to a thousand generations of pouring mercy down for people who struggle with idolatry.

[33 : 34] How does he do it? And he does it all through John 14.9. When John 14.9, Jesus Christ turned to Philip when Philip was very confused and he said, Philip, don't you know that if you've looked at me, you have seen God the Father.

So you can never image God, but Jesus Christ did what is absolutely impossible. He imaged God Colossians 1:15. He is the icon, Paul says of the invisible God.

When you look at him, God has been perfectly imaged. Jesus Christ has made him known and he says, you know, I will visit punishment on idolatry, but I want to show mercy to a thousand generations.

How he had said in Ezekiel 18, I will not punish the sons for the sins of their parents, the daughters for exactly what the parents did. I will not, I will not put vicarious satisfaction onto a child for what their mom and dad did, or I will not cause a parent to have to suffer in vicarious satisfaction for what their son or daughter do.

Oh boy, but one time he did. One time he did. One time he put the sins of every father and mother, every son and daughter, the idolatries through vicarious satisfaction substitution on one, the image himself, Jesus Christ at the cross, at the cross.

[35 : 01] When you say tonight with the hymn writer, cast down, oh God, the idols that hold us in their power, the empty God's eye worship. When darkness has its hour, we bow, I bow to other masters than Jesus Christ.

I invite you this week simply to this, contemplate and meditate on the cross of Jesus Christ in order to smash your idols and come to true worship.

Pray. Father, we ask that you would reveal to us the idols of our heart tonight.

Maybe we don't struggle with icons and graven images of wood and stone, but we struggle with graven images of the heart. And so we ask tonight that you would show us the truth about us, remake us, reshape us, help us to see that in Jesus at the cross, at the cross, Jesus has poured forth mercy to a thousand generations.

So we thank you, oh Lord, and help us to live into that tonight. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.