

INTRODUCTION

We are in series entitled, “Ten Requirements for America’s Survival” about the Ten Commandments. As you know, there’s an on-going controversy over whether or not the Ten Commandments should be posted in public places, on public property. Well, much more important than whether or not they are posted, is whether or not we know the Ten Commandments, and whether or not we are willing to obey the Ten Commandments, because, it takes more than just posting them in public places for us to be right with God.

A number of years ago, I learned a little song called “The Perfect Ten.” It’s was a song taught to children and it’s an easy way to remember the Ten Commandments. I find myself, when I’m trying to go through the commandments, repeating this little song to myself.

*Number One, we’ve just begun. God should be first in our life.
Number Two’s the idol rule, those graven images aren’t nice.
Number Three, God’s name should be never spoken in jest.
Number Four, the Sabbath’s for our worship and our rest.
Number Five, we all should strive to honor father and mother.
Number Six, don’t get your kicks from killing one another.
Number Seven, life is heaven when you’re true to your mate.
Number Eight, don’t steal and break this rule for goodness sake, boom, boom, boom,
boom.
Number Nine, don’t be the kind who goes around telling lies,
Number Ten, don’t covet when you see your neighbor’s house or wives.
That’s the list and God insists we stay away from these sins,
That is why we memorize commandments one through ten.*

If you haven’t learned that little song, “The Perfect Ten,” it will help you remember the Ten Commandments, because almost anything put to music is much easier to remember.

I believe if our nation is going to be restored to the greatness that was part of our founding, we are going to have to go back to the Bible and back to God’s word when it comes to what his laws and commandments are. Not everybody in America believes that. When Ted Turner was named Humanist of the Year, he said this about the Ten Commandments. “We are living with outdated rules. The rules we are living under are the Ten Commandments and I bet nobody here even pays much attention to them because they’re too old. When Moses went up on the mountain, there were no nuclear weapons. There was no poverty. The Ten Commandments today wouldn’t go over. Nobody around likes to be commanded. Commandments are out.”

But, for once, I believe someone on television said the right thing and it’s another Ted. In a speech he gave at Duke University, ABC Commentator, Ted Koppel, said this about the Ten Commandments. “Our society finds truth too strong a medicine to digest undiluted. What Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai, were not the Ten Suggestions. They are commandments—**ARE** commandments, not *were*. The sheer brilliance of the Ten Commandments is that they codify in a handful of words, acceptable human behavior—not just for then and now, but for all time.” I

don't know about you, but for once I agree with Ted Koppel much more than I agree with Ted Turner.

Thirty three centuries ago God gave this law, not just to the Jewish people, but to the entire human race and we'll find what he has to say about this second commandment.

Exodus 20:4-6. God says, "You shall not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers, to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."

There are a lot of people who think maybe they're guilty of breaking some of the other commandments, but they don't think they have broken the second commandment of idolatry. Some time ago, I saw a cartoon of a couple leaving church and you could see from the marquee on the sign that the sermon had been on The Ten Commandments. As the man is dragging out, obviously he's been hit on just about every commandment. He turns and says to his wife, "Well, at least I don't worship idols." So few people think they have broken the Second Commandment, yet when you look below the surface, you will find there's a lot of spiritual truth in this Second Commandment.

For one thing, God is not prohibiting the use of artistic or esthetic items. So some people think that God has forbidden any kind of picture or any kind of image. Not at all. In fact, later when God gives directions and specifications for the beautiful tabernacle, he specifically instructed there were to be some beautiful diagrams and decorations involved in the temple. And, over the arch of the covenant itself was the beautiful rendering of two cherubim leaning over, with their long golden wings touching each other. So, God is not opposed to art by any means.

I. MATERIAL IDOLATRY

This Second Commandment is all about worship. First of all, we see God giving a warning against material idolatry. That could be anything from a statue of Buddha, to a crucifix somebody kisses, to a totem pole someone worships in a third world country or somebody worshipping their automobile or even their own success. An idol is anything a man has created with his own hands. I've known many men who say, "I built this business with my own two hands." There are many people who are self-made and they worship their own creator. They think they got to where they are by their own strength. You need to guard against what the Bible calls material idolatry.

You may recall the movie "Cool Hand Luke," starring Paul Newman, in which Cool Hand Luke is driving down the road in his 1956 Chevrolet and he's singing, "I don't care if it rains or freezes as long as I've got my plastic Jesus." On the dashboard was a little plastic Jesus. Sometimes you'll see cars and they'll have a little plastic Jesus or perhaps a little plastic Mary, something material they can look at to represent God. That's the human tendency, because we always want to have something we can see, touch, and feel.

It's like the little boy I heard about who was sleeping alone one night in his room and all of a sudden, got so afraid he thought the boogey man was under his bed, so he called out to his daddy. "Daddy, daddy, I'm afraid. Come help me." His daddy called from the other bedroom, "Son, you're okay. Don't you know God's in there with you? Don't be afraid—just go to sleep." But the little boy shouted back, "Daddy, daddy, I want somebody with skin on."

We all want somebody with skin on, want something we can see and touch and that's the danger of material idolatry. The problem with any kind of material that we use to represent God is that there is nothing ever created on this planet that can capture the greatness of the character of God.

How many of you have ever been to South Dakota and seen Mt. Rushmore with those beautiful faces of the presidents? George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Hillary Clinton... Wait a minute. That just doesn't seem to fit in. No. Teddy Roosevelt. I've seen pictures of Mt. Rushmore. I've never been there. But there's not a picture on the earth that can do justice to the majestic beauty of Mt. Rushmore. You can give a lump of clay to the most talented sculptor on earth and ask them to reproduce Mt. Rushmore and they might do a wonderful identical image but it would fall far short of capturing the grandeur. Each president's face, I'm told, stands more than 100 feet in height. And as you look at this beautiful carving in the side of the mountain, at different times of the day, I'm told there are different shades and colors that seem to touch it. In fact, I'm convinced someone could do a better job of describing Mt. Rushmore by words than they could by any picture.

Even though we say a picture is worth a thousand words; that's not always true. That's why in the Bible and in all of creation, there's not a picture or an image that can capture the greatness of God, so what God has given us is words. He's given us his words.

There is a difference between something that reminds us of God, which might be a symbol, and something people use to represent God. You might recall what happened after Moses came down from Mt. Sinai. The Children of Israel at the bottom of the mountain thought he had left them. So they pooled all their gold and melted it down and made a golden calf and started bowing down and worshipping the work of their own hands. They were letting that calf represent God. There's a difference between an idol, which is a *representation* of God, and a symbol, which perhaps only *reminds* us of God.

An idol cannot capture the greatness and the glory of who God is. Think about those two words, "reminder" and "representative." Let me try to explain it or illustrate it. Suppose you're a husband and you and your wife go to some dinner party where everybody's standing around before dinner and they're talking and chatting and there are some people there you don't know. As you are standing there, a beautiful girl walks by. Your wife looks at her and says, "Wow! She's beautiful." You say to your wife, "Yes, dear, she's beautiful. In fact she reminds me of you." I mean, that's pretty good to say. You get brownie points for that. Reminding you is okay.

Scenario #2. Later on that evening, your wife is walking down the hall and she opens the closet door and there you are, in the arms of that woman, in an embrace, kissing her. Your wife says, "Explain yourself." You say, "Uh, no problem sweetheart. I just want you to know, even though

it looks like I’m kissing her, she is just representing you. That’s all she is.” Ladies, if any of you believe that, I’ve got some ocean front property in Abilene, Texas I want to sell to you today. There is a tremendous difference between something that reminds us of God and something that represents God. That’s the danger of any of these material idols.

II. MENTAL IDOLATRY

There’s another kind of idolatry God warns us against, mental idolatry, because you can commit the sin of mental idolatry without ever bowing down before any material thing. What is your picture of God? When you close your eyes and try to imagine an image of God, what do you see? The problem with idolatry, even material and mental idolatry, is that it is always a bad picture of God.

It’s like the lady I heard about who had some pictures made from a photographer and when she looked at the proofs, none of them looked good. She went back to the photographer and said, “These pictures don’t do me justice.” He said, “You don’t need justice, you need mercy, darling.”

There’s not an image you have that does justice to God. For instance, if you have an image in your mind that God is some kind of a cosmic policeman who’s just waiting to try to catch somebody doing wrong and to shake his fist at them and say, “I’m taking you in and booking you.” That’s a bad picture, although there is a part of God that is absolute and holy, justice, righteousness.

Some people picture God, as some senile old grandfather type with a long beard, who’s back in heaven somewhere, rocking in a rocking chair, oblivious to everything that is going on in your life. There is that part of God that is full of loving kindness and forgiveness and mercy. But, that picture alone is not a good picture. Any mental image we have of God is always wrong. The best thing to do is don’t try to have any mental image of God, because the Bible teaches that God is greater than our own minds.

That’s why in I Timothy 3:16, the Bible says, “Great is the mystery of Godliness.” That’s why God says in Isaiah 40:25, “To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?” There is no mental image that does him justice.

The brain is an amazing instrument. It starts working before you’re born and never stops until you stand up in front of a crowd and speak. Try to tell a joke and you get the punch line completely reversed. That’s the limitations of the human mind. It is an amazing computer with vast memory. But sometimes the memory seems to be hidden and you have to pull out the disk and plug it in and to bring back up those memories.

Have you ever discovered how hearing a song or seeing a face will bring back a memory? Yes, the mind is an amazing instrument, but for those of you who have computers, you can have multiple programs open and your computer may be multitasking, but there’s one thing about the human mind: It is limited to only one dimension. It can only grab one image at a time. You can swap back and forth between images, but you can only grab one image at a time. The Bible says

the problem with mental idolatry is the image you have always falls far short of who God really is, in his greatness and his majesty.

III. IDLE WORSHIP

The whole point of the Second Commandment is worship. So, what I find here is a warning against *idle* worship. Material idolatry is worshiping the wrong object, but idle worship is worshiping the right object with the wrong attitude. Once again, God is trying to reveal himself to us in these commandments. And, just as he said in the First Commandment, "I am the Lord your God. I brought you out of bondage." Here he says, "I am the Lord your God and I am a jealous God."

1. God is a jealous God

So what did we learn about the importance of how to correctly worship God? First of all, you've got to understand that God is a jealous God. Wait a minute. Jealousy, isn't that a sin? In I Corinthians 13:4, when it's talking about all the characteristics of love, it says, 'Love is not jealous.' Then, how can the Bible say God is a jealous God? There's a big difference between being jealous OF someone and being jealous FOR someone. True love is never jealous OF someone you love, but it is always jealous FOR the person you love.

I can illustrate that with my wife. I am not jealous *of* my wife; I love her. As many of you know, my wife speaks to women's groups all over the South, and she's a tremendous speaker. When somebody comes up to me after she has spoken here or somewhere else and they say, "Oh, pastor. Cindy did such a great job speaking! She's such a wonderful speaker." I don't get jealous of her. I know she's the best speaker in our house. But, that doesn't bother me. I'm not jealous of her; I'm happy when someone says that. But you let some good-for-nothing guy put his eyes on her and start trying to steal her away from me, I want to tell you, you'll see some righteous indignation in me in a hurry, because I'm jealous *for* her. That's what the Bible says. God says, "I'm jealous for you." In other words, he doesn't want you worshiping anything else or anyone else. He says, "I'm a jealous God."

2. God judges improper worship

The second thing we learn about God is he judges improper worship. A lot of people have trouble with verse 5. This says, "I am a jealous God and I punish the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

Many don't like that picture of God, because he seems vindictive and keeps on punishing future generations. This is not a statement about God as much as it is a statement about the *consequences* of bad worship. Bad worship gets passed on to your children and your grandchildren and your great-grandchildren and if you commit the sin of idle worship—improper worship—you'd better watch out! You're teaching your children and your grandchildren something that's going to damage their lives.

I can give you an example of that. In II Chronicles 26, we are introduced to King Uzziah. Uzziah was king and could do anything he wanted to, but the Bible says he could not go into the Holy of Holies in the Temple. That was reserved only for the High Priest. But Uzziah said, "I'm the king. I can go where I want to go. I can do what I want to do." So, he went into the Temple and the Bible says when God saw him break that law about the way to worship, leprosy began spreading on his face. It made Uzziah so angry he left the temple and he never went back again.

What about Uzziah's son? His name was Jotham. We never read that Jotham ever worshiped God or ever went to the Temple. Why? Because the church hurt his father. "Something happened to my daddy in church and I'm not going back down there." Through my ministry, I have met dozens and dozens of Uzziahs and Jothams, who worshiped the wrong way and got angry at God and angry at the church and didn't go back. Uzziah's sin was visited upon his son, not by God, but by his own attitude.

What about the third generation? Let's go to generation number 3. This is Ahaz. Ahaz was not merely indifferent about church like Jotham was; he was a wicked king opposed to God. He married foreign women and brought in idols and worshiped them. What about generation number 4? It's sad, but in II Chronicles 28, we read that Ahaz sacrificed his two baby boys to a pagan god. That's how this verse comes true. So the question I ask you today is, "What are you teaching your children and what are you teaching your grandchildren about worship?" If there's bad or improper worship, the consequences go down from generation to generation.

3. God rewards proper worship

You say, "Pastor, this is just so negative. I mean, I'm just really getting pretty downtrodden by hearing all this." There is a positive side to every one of these commandments and we learn that God is a God who rewards proper worship. Look at what he says in verse 6, "But showing love to a thousand generations of those who keep my commandments."

God says, "If you worship me properly, I will show you love, but not just for two or three generations, but for generations and generations and generations." We must not only worship the right object, the Lord God, but also with the right attitude. When Jesus was speaking to the woman at the well, he said, "They that worship God must worship him in Spirit and in Truth." Because God is spirit we must make a connection with God in that innermost part of who we are in our spirit. But he said, also in truth, meaning you must worship God according to the truth of the Bible. How do you do that? Look at who God is in the Bible, how he reveals himself.

I learned more about God in five minutes of being a daddy than I did in all my years of college and seminary. Because, when my daughter was born, I just loved her. It was my nature to love her, even though she was not the most pleasant one to be around for a while. (she woke me up at night a lot) Sometimes she didn't smell very good and I had to pay her a lot of attention, I still loved her and I didn't mind getting up. I had two daughters and I learned about worship by how I related to them. Although they are both grown and gone now, one of the greatest memories of my life would be when I came home in the afternoon and they would hear me come through that back door and would come running. I would hear those little feet running, "Daddy! Daddy! Daddy!" And they would jump up, one in each arm. I couldn't hold them today, that's for sure.

But, what a blessing it was for them just to be so excited to see me and to be with me. Wouldn't you say that's part of the attitude of worship? To just be so excited to be in the presence of the Lord that you just want to express your love to Him? Of course, like all children, there were times that they asked me for things and if it was within my power to give it to them, and it was good for them, I'd try to give it to them. The same is true with our Father. But, there were times when my daughters, especially when they got older, would write a card to me and they weren't asking for a thing. They were just telling me they loved me for who I was and for the kind of man that I am. I've kept those cards and letters, because they mean so much to me. That's what worship is: Abba, Father, Daddy. I don't have to ask you for anything right now; I just love you. That kind of worship will always prevent idol worship.

One of my favorite stories is in Luke 10 when Jesus goes to see Mary and Martha. I always keep coming back to that. How Martha had that wonderful temperament and she was always working, working, working. She was in the kitchen, just getting lunch ready for Jesus while Mary was sitting there at His feet, just experiencing an intimacy with him. Just like, as the personality of most Marthas, Martha didn't like it one bit. She rushed out there and said, "Jesus, would you tell my sister to come in here and help me with the dishes and preparing lunch?" In great love, Jesus said to her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things, but Mary has chosen the one thing that is necessary." My friend, what is the one thing that is necessary? It is knowing God. It is worshiping God. And it is experiencing God's love.

You say, "Wait a minute. I don't understand this commandment because doesn't it say that to those who obey Him and worship Him in the right way, He shows love? Doesn't God love everybody?" Oh yes. He loves everybody, but there's a difference between loving people and showing love to people. I always love my wife, but I would not be honest with you if I said I always show her love. That's what God is saying to you today. He's saying, "If you will avoid this idol worship and you'll worship me in spirit and in truth and you'll love me and reach out to me, I will show my love to you." That's what America needs today—to experience the love of God.

OUTLINE

I. MATERIAL IDOLATRY

II. MENTAL IDOLATRY

III. IDLE WORSHIP

God...

1. Is a jealous God
2. Judges improper worship
3. Rewards proper worship



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes