

“Love God as Who He is” (Exodus 20:4-6)

We are in the series of “The Call to Undivided Intimacy.” We are studying the Ten Commandments. Today, we will look at the second commandment.

After I graduated university, I worked at a media production company. It was more than 30 years ago, so the equipment was totally different from now. Sometimes I worked with models. They are cool and all good looking. But most of them had the same kind of problems. They say, “There are many people who are interested in me. But they just look at my appearance. I don’t know who really loves me, who knows who I really am. Most of them just look at my image, not my true self. Am I truly loved? I want people to love my true self, not my image. I want to be loved as I am.”

What about God? We may also create a certain image of God. And we turn our hearts toward that God we imagine. We come near, praise, serve, worship and love that image of God. God tells us not to do that.

Exodus 20:4-6

You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ 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 their fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.

In this second commandment, God is saying, “Seek Me and love the real Me, instead of the God you imagined. I am a jealous God. I cannot let you turn your heart to something that is not Me.”

Today, we’ll first look at the context and the reasons why we need this commandment, and then unpack the problems that can happen when we ignore it. And later I’ll talk about how we may apply it in our life.

1. Searching a User-Friendly God

For 400 years, Israelites have been surrounded by Egyptians who have many different kinds of gods. They’ve seen different kinds of worship. Now God tells them:

Exodus 20:4-5

You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them;

This is not the same as saying, “You shouldn’t worship other gods.” That was already commanded in the first commandment. Here God is not repeating the same commandment. The second commandment says, “You shouldn’t make this great God something other than Himself or something less than Himself.”

“People insist on having power over the idol so that they can control their own destinies.”¹ People love to have a user-friendly God who will adapt to our desires and purposes. He is like a big Santa Claus. If we ask, he will give us what we want. If you pray in a certain way, he will solve your problems, he will heal a sick person. If you follow a kind of ritual, he will bless you.

People search a convenient God. He will serve me according to my wish. He will save me from danger, from my problem, from my challenge so that I can accomplish my plan.

People want to have a comfortable God. He has limited authority over them. He won’t mess up their life too much. We are equal. We’re good partners. We discuss, exchange opinions, and we’ll do only what I agree. “God, can you see the line here? You can’t come to this part of my life. It’s not your business. It’s mine. Ok? God, you can know only what I want to share, you must respect the line in my life.”

In our society, we are surrounded by these kinds of people. But God says, you don’t do that.

We also have a tendency to worship God as we want him to be, as we wish him to be. For example, God blesses us. What we tend to imagine from this is that we receive a lot of good things, our material possessions increase and we have visible prosperity. Surely the Bible speaks of material blessings like that, but that is not all. If we look at the book of Job, for example, it says, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away” (Job 1:21). What the Bible says is that God gives blessings, and He also takes away the blessings. He is sovereign over us.

The God who gives me the blessings I expect is the God I imagine. That would limit God to the boundaries of my thought. But God wants us to experience the fullness of him as he is, because he loves us so much. That’s why he gave us this commandment.

God doesn’t need our worship, but we need to worship him as he is. God accepted us as who we were and he never leaves us there, but he will heal us, restore us, and transform us from glory to glory. It’s not we who shape God, but God who shapes us. All these things will happen only when we have a real relationship with a real God. God is calling us to undivided intimacy.

2. Shaping an Image of God

Through the 2nd Commandment, God says, “You must be careful how you know me. If you have a distorted view of who I am, your life is going to be

¹ Michael S. Horton, “The Law of Perfect Freedom,” Moody Publishers, 1993, [Kindle] location 1150

distorted.” Actually, this commandment isn't just about physical objects, but more about mental images we have.

Many people imagine God through their childhood experiences. For example, people who were abused mentally, physically or sexually by their parent or caregiver can imagine God as terrible and abusing. Or they think God is indifferent or powerless to protect them, because of what happened to them.

Those who grew up worrying think God cannot be reliable. God rules the whole world with His wisdom. But I have so much to worry about. What He is doing is not effective. Nothing is going well. He is not reliable. I need to worry about myself.

Those who are angry against people who hurt them doubt God's righteousness and His judgment. I am suffering so much. What is God doing? Why doesn't He judge them immediately? God's righteousness is no good. They become bitter against God.

Some people feel their parents always made them help them, but they were never allowed to do what they wanted to do. And they see God as a ruthless commander. “He only commands me to do things. He wouldn't give me rest. He will throw me away if I get weak. God doesn't care about me at all.” That's how they perceive God.

The problem is this. We end up denying some of who God is and we try to shape him. It's like we shape God the way we think he is, or the way we think he should be. We're imagining God to be something he's not.

In the 2nd commandment, God is saying, you don't do that to me. You created an image of me and you say “God, this is who you are.” Or “God, this is what you should be.” God says, “No, no, no. You, don't do that.”

3. God is Jealous for Your Love

Exodus 20:5

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,

First, “Man-made images of God arouse God's jealousy.”² God says, “I'm jealous for your love. I want your love exclusively.” This is healthy jealousy. It's like a married couple who want each other exclusively. God is saying, “I don't want you to be attached to or to love anything else. I want you to have a real relationship with the real me, not with something you've imagined in your head, which is not actually me. I want you to love who I really am because I truly love you.”

Second, Man-made image of God distorts the glory of God. Not only that, it misleads people.³ In Exodus 32, we see that Israelites made a golden calf. Here

² Mark Mitchell, “Ten: How the Commandments Set Us Free,” Discovery House, 2016, [Kindle] location 235

³ Ibid., 231

they didn't have a new god. Listen what Aaron said in v.4, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. (NASB)"

"The form of a golden calf or a bull. This was intended to symbolize the God who brought them out of Egypt. They were trying to honor God with what they thought was a fitting symbol of His great strength. But that symbol actually insulted God, because it fell short of depicting His true glory. That symbol couldn't even begin to capture God's moral character, goodness, justice, and patience."⁴

The following day, early in the morning, the people of Israel were bringing their offerings and sacrifices. Without doubt, they did this in the way they had given offerings to God Yahweh before. They sang loudly and danced joyfully. It sounded like great worship. The whole nation of Israel came together and worshiped God. Did it honor God? Did it please God? No, not at all. Actually, it made him very angry, even to the point where he wanted to destroy all of them.

Third, your having a distorted image of God will infect your family and other relationships.

God doesn't punish children for their father's sins (Duet 24:16; Eze 18:20). But what is said here is that parents' attitudes toward God will affect the lives of their children. Parents live, talk, behave based on their belief. So, the parents' relationship with God will affect the lives of their children. And these patterns will repeat themselves. And it will take many generations to undo these patterns. God doesn't call us responsible for our parents' sins, but sometimes we will suffer from the result of their sins.

The other way around can be also true. When parents are set free from Man-made images of God, or distorted images of God, and start to love God as he is, start to live God's words in His love, they will be blessings to their children. And when their faith is succeeded to the next generation, the grace of God will flow richly across generations.

God is calling us to undivided intimacy. "You're my people. I've set you free by my grace. I've called you. I've loved you first. Now don't go with everybody else around you. You come to me, follow me, stay with me. Don't make any graven images. I'm jealous for your love."

4. Be Humble

How can we observe the 2nd commandment? In short, "be humble." I'll talk about three things. First, we must recognize God's greatness. Second, we must accept who we really are in God's eyes. Third, we are to remain in God's love and love Him.

(1) Recognize God's greatness

⁴ Ibid., 225

We can only know some parts of God. But we tend to think we know all about God. But God is not so small that we can understand all about Him. He is so great and immeasurable.

“Right worship begins with the recognition that the worshipers have absolutely no control over God, no claim on Him, and no magical power over their own destinies by knowing certain formulas, rituals or “laws.”⁵

God is a self-existent, self-sufficient, and Sovereign over everything. God depends on no one and nothing, but is rather the one on whom and for whom all depends.⁶ We can understand only the part of God through which he reveals himself. We can understand only a small part of what God is doing. We must be humble before God. We must learn from the humility of Jeremiah who confronts God in the midst of his confusion. The humility of Habakkuk, who said, “God, I can’t fully understand you, what you said does not make sense to me, but I live by faith in you.” And the humility of Job, who said, “God, now I know you are beyond my knowledge.”

(2) Accept who we are in God’s eyes

Humbleness accepts who we really are, who God says we are.

God created human beings as his greatest masterpieces. Once we were lost, and God redeemed us and made us his treasured possessions again. But we are ruled and bound by the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things. Then we imagine God, and serve this God we imagine, wishing those desires of ours will be fulfilled. The act of worship shows our will to obey what we are worshipping.

God is sad to see that we, humans have lost our original dignity. Because of His jealous love, God will do anything to save us, you and me. In fact, He sacrificed His beloved Son Jesus in order for you to come back to him and to recover your original dignity. We are loved by God so much.

We must humbly accept the fact that we lost the image of God in our sin. We humbly come to Jesus and receive him as our Savior and Lord. We humbly remain in His grace and let him restore our dignity. And we humbly live new life in his image, and not to destroy our dignity as well as others. Because we are his bride.

(3) Remain in God's love and love Him

Exodus 20:6

but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Please pay attention that God says “those who love me.” To have faith is to love God. Love is not about appearances or formalities. To love is to do something from our heart, to care for someone more than oneself.

⁵ Michael, 1166

⁶ Ibid., 1585

And God says “Keep my commandments.” That is to listen to this God because you love him, and actually it’s to live in the awareness of his presence. And he desires to give unfailing love that reaches a thousand generations.

But God is Spirit (John 4:24). So, we can’t see Him with our physical eyes. And God is so great and beyond our understanding. How can we love him as he is then? It sounds impossible. We need a miracle.

So, he did a miracle so that he can have an inseparable, deep loving relationship with us. He did a great thing which is beyond our imagination. That is incarnation. That is Jesus. Jesus is “the image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1:15). He is “the exact representation of [God’s] being” (Hebrews 1:3). And Jesus himself said, “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:9).

We don’t create a physical image of Jesus and worship it. But in order to worship the right God in the right way, we must focus on the person of Jesus. When we focus on him, come to him, love him and spend time with him, we will be more and more like Him. When we worship the right God in the right way, our worship will be centered on the person and work of Jesus. And that always leads to a transformed life.⁷

Ephesians 3:17-19

so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love,¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ,¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

This is the prayer of Apostle Paul. But we can also see God’s earnest wish for us in this prayer. The life of faith is to allow Jesus to live in us, and experience abundance, the fullness of God.

Jesus totally understands our feelings. Sometimes we are so confused about what God is doing. Sometimes we think what God is doing is totally unreasonable. Jesus knows these feelings very well. He cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46). He knows this feeling. And he submitted his life to God the Father. Now this Jesus lives in you and me. And from inside, he is leading and guiding our lives.

He died on the cross for my sin and your sin. And he draws us back into perfect loving relationship which we are originally given. In this relationship, God will restore our dignity, which he created in the beginning. This is God’s love, which is far beyond our understanding. That makes us humble.

In short, we humbly accept that Christ’s love is far beyond our understanding, which sometimes confuses us, frustrates us, even disappoints us. We can gradually understand how wide and long and high and deep is the love

⁷ Mark, 292

of Christ, in our daily lives, when we humbly come to him and let him love us in our relationship with him.

It's the call to undivided intimacy.

For Self-Reflection and Small Groups

1. Think about the example (in your life if possible) of 1) Man-made image of God that distorts the glory of God, 2) Man-made image of God that misleads people, and 3) a distorted image of God that infects family.

2. Why is "being humble" the key to recognize God's greatness, to accept what we really are, to remain in God's love and to love God? How may we think about these, if we are not humble?

3. What may be the obstacles that are hindering you from 1) recognizing God's greatness more, 2) accepting what you really are in God's eyes, 3) restoring the image of God in your life, 4) being loved by God more and 5) loving God more? What will you do?