

# The True God, The True Way

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Exodus 20:4-6

As you drive around in Lebanon, you will find shrines for prayer on the corner of streets. Usually someone will have encountered a miraculous experience at that location. They will build a little shrine with a cross, with the statue of Jesus, his mother Mary, or a saint...

In the Bible, we see several monuments. Jacob erected a stone reminding him of his dream and named the place Bethel. Is it wrong to make a monument, an artistic structure to remind you of something significant?

Here is the problem, people come to these shrines to touch them, to kneel in front of them and pray to them asking for healing, or praying for a financial need, or even finding a husband...

The Second WORD or Commandment is something to do with the word “image.” We are all created with the ability to **imagine**. It is a gift from God. Think about Beethoven’s 9<sup>th</sup> Symphony. A deaf person using his imagination to create that symphonic score...wow... Or just listen to J.S. Bach and his compositions, such as Toccata and Fugue in D minor...

Yet, our imagination can be a curse, a terrible thing that can take us to wrong places. It all started with sin.

Remember how Satan convinced humanity saying: **“You will be like God”** (Gen 3:5), “and the effect of our wanting to be on God's level is that we bring him down to ours. This is unrealistic, not to say irreverent, but it is what we all do when imagination is in the saddle.”<sup>1</sup>

Let us now read the Third WORD, the Third Commandment. I will always start with the first introductory statement that goes:

**I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.**

**<sup>4</sup>“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup>You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup>but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Exodus 20:1,4-6 ESV)**

This is the longest commandment of ten. It relates with the First Commandment. If the first one told us to worship the right and true God, the second commandment **tells us to worship the right God in a RIGHT WAY, TRUE WAY**. If the first commandment told us not to worship false gods, this commandment will tell us not to worship falsely. Brothers and sisters, “**how we worship** matters nearly as much to God as **whom we worship**.”<sup>2</sup>

“By exercising the desire to worship God in a way contrary to his command, we set ourselves in his place, thus making ourselves God.”<sup>3</sup> That is exactly Satan wanted us to do in the first place. “You will be like God...”

Let me give an example from the Bible from the time of Moses to show how we can use our imagination in a false way.

Moses was gone to the mountain, and the people got tired of waiting. So they created a golden calf. It was not a new god. No, it was Yahweh with a new image, a man-made image. Remember they came from Egypt, and they had seen gods in different forms and statues. They knew about Baal, the big bull. They wanted to have a more friendly image of Yahweh. They decided to create a nice “pet god”, yes, *anoushig*, golden calf, not a bull, not a bird, like the Egyptian god heads...

Think about the lie and false imagination:

“It is small, but God is immense.

It is inanimate, but God is a spirit.

It is location—bound, but God is everywhere fully present.

It is created, but God is uncreated.

It is new, but God is eternal.

It is impotent, but God is omnipotent.

It is destructible, but God is indestructible.

it is blind and deaf and mute, but God sees hears and speaks.”<sup>4</sup>

This is minimizing who God is. This is a false image of God. They did it, and we can do it today as well.

We find four elements in this commandment:

1) the rule, 2) the reason, 3) the warning, 4) the promise.

### **1. The Rule:**

**You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or serve them,**

Don't create things that present God. We should not put God in a box. When we create an image, we limit God.

This does not mean God does not like artistic talent.

He said to Moses:

**and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship, <sup>4</sup> to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, <sup>5</sup> in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, to work in every craft... I have given to all able men ability, that they may make all that I have commanded you: <sup>7</sup> the tent of meeting, and the ark of the testimony, and the mercy seat that is on it, and all the furnishings of the tent, <sup>8</sup> the table..."** (Exodus 31:3-8 ESV)

We have a beautiful church sanctuary. Just look around and see how beautiful those windows are. Yet, all these should not replace God. Sometimes we worship our creativity and the "sacred" objects in the church or outside the church building. That is dangerous. We minimize God. We replace God.

The rule is clear: do not form objects to represent God.

## **2. The Reason**

**for I the LORD your God am a jealous God,**

What is this? Does God have a self-esteem problem?

I don't think so. "Godly jealousy is not the insecure, insane, and possessive human jealousy that we often interpret this word to mean. Rather, it is an intensely caring devotion to the objects of his love."<sup>5</sup>

If the word jealousy is bothering you, let me use another way to describe what he is saying. **God loves us, because of his zeal--the burning passion of his love, he doesn't want any other object or gods to stand between us.**

We discussed during the First Word, there are things we cannot share, and I gave the example of the relationship between a husband and a wife. I am a jealous person when it comes to loving my wife. We both made a commitment, a covenant to love and belong to each other. Nothing should separate us. God's love to us is exclusive and passionate. I am the Lord YOUR God.

**God will not share his glory with any other gods<sup>6</sup> or images...**

## **3. The Warning**

**visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me,**

What is the meaning of this punishment or warning?

It appears in Exodus 34 as well.

**“The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.”** (Exodus 34: 6-7 ESV)

If you recall, Jonah was not happy that God's is slow to anger and has steadfast love towards people. Yet also in the verse above we see God will punish unconfessed sin, rebellious people, fathers and children, from generation to generation.

Let us be careful with the interpretation of those verses. “It's not a reference to generational curses, hexes, or demonic oppression. Nor does it mean that a righteous child will be punished unfairly for the sins of his wicked father.”<sup>7</sup>

We read in Ezekiel,

**The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son.** (Ezekiel 18:20 ESV)

The punishment is not blood punishment. This is good verse for us as parents to remember how important is what we teach to our kids, what legacy we pass to them. “The children share in their father's punishment because they share in their father's sin. Ezekiel teaches that if you turn away from your father's sin, you will not face your father's punishment. But Exodus says, if you keep on sinning as your father did, you will not escape your father's punishment.”<sup>8</sup>

We can't just say, “Well, my parents passed to me this lifestyle. I am not responsible for that.” Each generation is responsible for their choices.

Now let us go to the promise.

#### **4. The Promise**

**but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.**

Please notice how God is merciful and has **steadfast love** *HESED* (*do you remember my sermon series on this word?*) for thousands of generations. The punishment is to the third and fourth generation, but the love and compassion to the thousandth generation. This is figurative speech, the numbers. But it tells us how God loves His creation and wants to give them His compassion and love. The promise of steadfast love, *Hesed*, is for those who keep the commandments of God.

#### **Application:**

**1. How did your false imagination make you create a false god?**

Ryken says, “We are tempted to worship God the way we want him to be rather than the way he actually is.”

We tend to emphasize certain things about God and ignore other things.

Our source to know God is the Word of God. Our church is *Avedaranagan* (աւեդարանական) It means based on the *Avedaran* the Gospel. We will teach the Word of God over and over without hesitation. Pray that Kevin and I will not be selective to cover certain things about God and ignore other things. God is love and just, God is merciful, and He hates sin. God is angry and compassionate. Hearing is important. Paul says: “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:17 ESV)

Moses heard the voice of God. He came with the Ten Words.

I pray that in our church service you hear His voice, through music, sermon, the reading of the Word, offertory, communion, service, reaching out, teaching, choir, band... I don't plan these things as activities. We want to hear His voice. Let us be careful not to create a false image of God.

## **2. What is God doing in your family?**

What are you doing to your family?

My heart saddens when families don't give time to God in their daily walk. Church starts at home. What are you teaching your kids? What are you passing to the next generation?

## **3. God Has His Image in us.**

Why create new images of God? He created us in His image.

Calvin said, “God cannot be represented by picture or sculpture, since he has intended his likeness to appear in us.”<sup>9</sup>

We are not allowed to make God's image come up but only to be God's image. Because of sin, the image of God is broken, shattered. Who can restore that image?

Jesus is the perfect image of God. **He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.** (Col 1:15 ESV)

Jesus told us, if we see him, we see the Father.

By the power of Holy Spirit, we can put to death sin and seek Jesus everyday so we can be transformed to His Image.

This is daily... daily... daily.

“Bearing the image of God does not mean we look like him in physical terms but rather in spiritual terms--not so that others may worship us, but so that they may worship him.

Christ, the perfect graven image of God, had “no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.” (Isaiah 53:2 NIV) Physically he is unremarkable, but spiritually he is the undiminished image bearer. Yet we are consumed with outward appearances. To obey the second word is to turn from worshipping lesser versions of God, and to worship God in spirit and truth. Inwardly, our spirits are renewed in his image as we witness and obey the truth of his word.”<sup>10</sup>

1. J.I. Packer, *Keeping the 10 Commandments*, p 54
2. Philip Graham Ryken, *Written in the Stone*, p 72
3. Jen Wilkin, *Ten Words to Live By*, p 34
4. *ibid* p 38
5. Philip Graham Ryken, *Written in the Stone*, p 74
6. *ibid* p57
7. Kevin DeYoung, *The 10 Commandments*, P 43
8. *ibid* P 44
9. Calvin, *The Acts of Apostles*, vol 2 from the book *Written in the Stone* P 82
10. Jen Wilkin, *Ten Words to Live By*, p 42