

“One Perfect Image”

Exodus 20:4-6

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Introduction & The First Commandment

Last week we've been doing this series on the Ten Commandments. And so we made it all the way through the first one last week. And now we're going off to number two today and that'll be fun times. Last week though what we learned in the first commandment was that there's only one God. And there's only one way to God. And that is through Jesus Christ. That's the only way.

“He is the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

John 14:6

So that's the only way. So, the first commandment, you shall have no other gods before me, is about that. It's saying, listen, I'm defining this relationship. It's exclusive. It's just me and you. There's no other gods involved. You have a God for this and a God for that. No, I'm the God of your whole self. I want you to love me with all of your heart and with all of your soul and with all of your mind, all of you. So that's the first question. You're like, alright, well that's cool. We got one God. That's cool. But that leads to another question. I understand I've got to worship you, but how do I do that?

Worshiping God on His Terms

Because I'll tell you what the major problem we have in a church today is. It's not just the church, it's always been this way. We have a natural proclivity to want to worship God in our own way. We say, well yeah, we'll worship the one God. We'll do commandment number one, but we want to do it how we want to do it. And I want to define God the way I want to define him. There's one God, but I want my God to be a God that likes the things I like. So, I like a God that's really, really, really accepting of everything. I like a God that just accepts any kind of activity. I want my God to be pro, LGBTQ, MR, SUV, W. I want my God to be pro all of that, right? So, I'm going to have, that's what my God will be, and so I'm going to worship him that way.

I want my God to be a God that's cool with me being rich and having lots of money. And so, I'm going to follow the teaching of Joel Osteen so that I can have my best life now. Because he's teaching the kind of God I like, a God that's going to guarantee me that I have riches and I have this because I can manipulate God and get God to do what I want. And God's saying, no, no, no, you don't get to define how you worship me. I am God.

Well God is saying in the second commandment, I am God, and you will worship me the way I tell you to worship me because I'm God and you're not. That's his point in the second

commandment. So how are we to worship God? How are we to receive God? How are we to learn what God is? Do we come up with this out of the sky? Do we say, well, I feel this way and so therefore because I feel this way and I'm in the image of God and somehow that's how God is? Because contrary to belief, we do not get to decide how to worship God. Or we don't get to decide who he is. We don't get to decide what he loves or what he doesn't love. We don't get to decide that. God sets the rules because he's God and you ain't.

The Second Commandment & Graven Images

All right. So, let's look at the second commandment. It's verse four, and actually it's longer in the Bible than you would think.

Any of you all go to Catholic school? Any of you Catholics—recovering Catholics in the room? Any of you? Any of that? Well, because your commandments are different if you grew up Catholic. Now your scripture is the same. Your scripture is the same. If you go to the scripture and you look at the scripture and say, well, what does scripture say about this commandment?

When you get to Exodus chapter 20 verse four to verse six, what the Catholic Bible does is it uses the Septuagint, which is a great translation—a Greek translation of the Hebrew. But the Septuagint, there's no gap between the first commandment and the second commandment in the Septuagint. And so they're combined together. So, when you're in Catholic school, they teach you that the first and second commandment is the same commandment. And they only teach you that you shall have no other gods before me. And then they skip down to not using the Lord's name in vain.

All right. Hey, we got to—we got—show me a picture real quick. We have it. There you go. So on the left is a Protestant. That's Catholic on the right. And you'll see that on the Catholic side it says, “I'm the Lord your God, you shall not have strange gods before me.” And then it will skip immediately to “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” Well, they don't—they haven't omitted any scripture. Right? They just don't teach it in their Ten Commandments because they have graven images all over the place. Right? You say, well, you got to have Ten Commandments. Well, why do you have to have Ten Commandments?

It doesn't ever—the word “Ten Commandments” is never in scripture. It's just there are ten of them that are there. But we don't want to be conspicuous, right, about there not being ten. So how do we make sure we got ten? Well, we emphasize—if you're Catholic—coveting twice. So nine is “You shall not covet your neighbor's wife,” and ten is “You shall not covet your neighbor's goods.” Okay. We only just say “Don't covet.” Right? Because that's really what the commandment says—don't covet. But if you get rid of one of it—if you get rid of number two—you kind of have to figure out a tenth one. And so—and if you ask them,

they're not going to say that's how they do it because I don't think that's really their purpose. They're emphasizing different things than we are. They're emphasizing different things.

But I really, really do believe that the forbidding of graven images as its own commandment is really, really important. It's really, really important. Here's what it says:

“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.” Exodus 20:4

So that pretty much covers everything, doesn't it? Pretty much. Let's see where we go.

“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 sins of the parents 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.” Exodus 20:5–6

Generational Curses & Ezekiel 18

All right. So, there's a couple of things we want to look at. First, we talked about the difference here in this. The other thing is this says something kind of bizarre. And some of you might have heard of this word and maybe you've heard it in churches talking about generational curses.

You've ever heard of generational curses? You've heard of that term—that because my great-great-grandfather hated God and because he didn't follow God, and then the next generation, that caused them not to, and the next generation—that somehow there is a generation. And this is where that comes from, this idea that because my parents were a certain way, that's going to affect me. And there's so many people in our world that live that way as though I'm the way I am. Why am I the way I am? Because my mom was that way. And my dad was that way. Well, why are you involved? Because my parents were involved in drugs. Why are you promiscuous? Well, because my mom was promiscuous. Why am I involved? Why is that? That's true. It does say that.

But I want to point you to the whole of Scripture this morning. And so if you've got a Bible—and I was just thinking about this this morning, so I don't even have slides for this—I'm just going to go to Ezekiel chapter 18. And you've got Bibles in front of you. Turn to it. I'm going to read a little bit. Ezekiel chapter 18. Because this is picked up again. Because I think people get stuck in this idea that because my parents were a certain way, that's the way I am. And I'm going to be punished for what my parents did.

And look at what it says in verse 14 of Ezekiel 18:

“But suppose this son has a son who sees all the sins his father commits, and though he sees them, he does not do such things... He keeps my law and follows my decrees.” Ezekiel 18:14–17 See, this son doesn't do what his father's did.

Well, what does it say?

“He will not die for his father's sins. He will surely live.” Ezekiel 18:17 “But his father will die for his own sins, because he practiced extortion, robbed his brother, and did what was wrong among the people.” Ezekiel 18:18

Yet you ask, why does the son not share the guilt of his father?

“Since the son has done what is just and right and has been careful to keep all my commands, he will surely live.” Ezekiel 18:19

“The one who sins is the one who will die. The child will not share the guilt of his parents.” Ezekiel 18:20

Ezekiel the prophet—this comes after Moses—very, very clear. That if you repent, if you turn from the wicked ways of your parents, that you won't have the curses of your parents.

The Golden Calf & Misguided Worship

But I don't know, you may remember a story back after they got out of Egypt. They got freed. Moses goes up on the mountain and they're like, where's Moses at? And the people in Israel freak out. They wig out. They're scared to death. What are we going to do?

“When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, ‘Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.’” Exodus 32:1

Aaron answered them, take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons, and your daughters are wearing and bring them to me. So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. They took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioned it with a tool.

Why are they doing this? Why are they making a golden calf right after they got freed by God and they've walked through the dry land, through the Red Sea? God's done amazing things in freedom. And now Moses has gone a little too long. He's been delayed and now they're wiggling out. You know why? Because they're scared. These people are scared. They're homeless. They live in the desert. The guy that led them out of Egypt is gone. Nobody knows where he's at. There's enemies all around that they don't know who they are and nobody to lead them. Nobody to protect them. Nobody that's strong enough to do it.

And so, they're freaking out.

“Then they said, ‘These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.’ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, ‘Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord.’”

Exodus 32:4–5

So, the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings. So, what just happened? Did they create a new God? No. They did not create a new God. What they did is they created an image to worship Yahweh. They created a calf.

Why Images Distort God

Let me just give you an example. Let me give you an example. All right, go ahead and stand up for a second. Yes, I'm going to make an image of you. I'm going to make an accurate depiction of you. All right? All right. Oh, this is perfect.

Man, I don't want you to kill me after this. I'm just going to... I'll put some more hair. How do you feel about that? Do you feel as though I have really exalted you and lifted you up?

Speaker 2:

Heck no.

Speaker 1:

What?

Heck no. Heck no is right. Heck no. You know why? But I'm doing it. My intentions were good. My intentions were to show your beauty. My intentions were to show that that was my intention all along. I was trying to show you. It doesn't matter. There is no way that I can show the beauty and the honor and the glory that is Delaney. I can't. I can't capture it properly. Yeah, you can sit down. That's alright. That's right.

She's like, let me sit down and throw that thing away. See, I created an image. When you create an image of God, that is slanderous to God. It falls so short of who God is. It falls so short of how wonderful He is. It represents such a little part of what He is and distorts it.

So, if you make a golden calf in the desert and that golden calf is meant to represent the power of God, you've represented Him really, really poorly. The power of God is a cow. The power of God is a cold, impotent statue. And what about all the other wonderful things about God? All I presented about God is that He has power to defeat people that might beat me up. I haven't said anything. I've left out everything about how gracious God is, how loving He is, how He's going to provide us a Savior, how He's going to lead us through the desert and He's going to give us a promised life.

They forgot all that. Don't make an image of God because your image is so ridiculously puny and scandalous and insignificant. It's wrong.

Don't make an image of God. Don't make a picture of God.

How many pictures of Jesus do we have from the time of Jesus? Like good sketches from the time of Jesus? How many descriptions of Jesus do we have in Scripture? New Testament, right? New Testament in the Gospels describing what His ears looked like, what His nose looked like, what did He look like? I want to worship God because I want to know what He looks like. What color were His eyes? Jesus could have had that happen, right? We have depictions of all kinds of leaders during that time that people don't know anything about now or hardly know anything about. And there are statues that were made to represent them. Nothing about Jesus.

God doesn't want an image of Himself made. When Jesus wanted to be remembered, what did He do? He gives the Lord's Supper. He gives the Lord's Supper. Completely different.

The Consequences of Misguided Worship

These images of God don't lead us to worship the true God in righteousness. Look at the results of the worshiping. They're in the desert. They've just decided they're going to worship God in their own way. They've sacrificed, and this is the result behaviorally of how that worship affected them. Watch.

“So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.” Exodus 32:6

That word—you know what that revelry is? They had an orgy. And you say, well, we can worship God however we want. No. You can't.

When we as churches—even churches in our area—decide that they're going to worship the God that they want to worship, not defined by God but by themselves, not defined by God revealing Himself through His own image, but them creating their own image of who God is and God is going to be this for me and this for me and this for me... The result is debauchery. The result is turning away from the one true God and getting involved in all kinds of things that are wicked. And I look at the church and I see it everywhere. I see it everywhere. I look in the church and I see sexual sin like this all over.

Fashioning God to Fit Our Desires

And so the second point is that when you create a graven image, you are in control. You fashion it to fit what you want in your God. Just like the Israelites, they had a need. They said, I have a need. My need is I'm scared and I need somebody to take care of me. I need

somebody that's going to protect me. And so, I'm going to create a bull and that's going to show me the protection. Yes, I'm worshiping God. I'm worshiping God, but my own way for my own needs. And so, people who feel like they have to have money and things to be happy, they fashion a God that's going to guarantee they're rich. It's called the prosperity gospel. And then those people want to sleep around. They find and fashion a God that's okay with fornication and adultery and promiscuity. And they find a God that's cool with that. Oh, he's so gracious for all of that. He's fine with it. And people who want to hold on to the idea of homosexuality is fine, they refashion a God into a God that never condemned homosexuality, even though it's revealed differently in the scriptures. Or I really need a God who agrees with my views politically. Right? So, I'm going to fashion my God and my Bible to support my view.

The True Image of God—Jesus Christ

The third point is that the only accurate and edifying image of God is the one that is provided by Him.

The reason why you can't create an image of God to worship Him is that God said, “I will create the image. Wait for me to create the image of who I am. Don't create your own and confuse everything. I am God. I define my worship and I will create the image of myself. And when you look upon this image, you will see me clearly.” And He says that that is what He gives us in the person of Jesus. Jesus is the true image of God.

Now what are some other images? What's another image of God? You and me, right? We're made in the image of God. So, we have two things that are in the image of God. God creates Jesus, which is the perfect image of God. What kind of an image are we? We're a good image of God. However—and why do you think Jesus was a human? Right? Because first of all, He was reaching and saving humans, but also because human beings are made in the image of God, right? But because of our sin, we are a very distorted view, a very distorted picture, an image of God. So, we can't look directly at us and say that's what God looks like. The most perfect image of Jesus is Himself.

If you want an image, there's no other image that does the God of the universe justice than Jesus.

“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” Colossians 1:15

Jesus as Creator and Head of the Church

So turn in your Bible to Colossians 1:15. And it says this in the New Testament. It says the Son is the image—it even uses the word image.

“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” Colossians 1:15

Why did they make a calf? Because they couldn't see the power of God. They couldn't see the strong arm of God that delivered them from there. Moses is gone. And so what do they do? They create an image of that to tide them over, to get them to where they want to be.

“For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him.” Colossians 1:16

So, we're seeing that this image of God—Jesus Christ—He's the Creator. He's the one who created people. He's the one that created the universe.

“He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” Colossians 1:17

And He is the head of the body, the church. And so the church is also an image of God. It represents who we are because we as the body of Christ are made in the image of God. And we are led by the head, which is the image of God—Jesus Christ.

“He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.” Colossians 1:18

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.

“For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.” Colossians 1:19–20

So, it's not an impartial part image, right? Like you only got a little part of it—just the power part.

When you see Jesus, you're seeing the image of the one true full God in human form.

Rejecting False Images and Worshiping Through Christ

So Matthew 22. Pop one more thing in here and we'll be done. It says:

“Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap him in his words. They sent their disciples to him along with the Herodians.” Matthew 22:15–16

Jesus is out teaching. Religious leaders show up and they're trying to trap Jesus because they don't like Jesus. They say, “Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren't swayed by others because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us, then, what is your opinion?”

Oh yeah, they're interested in opinions.

“Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?” We supposed to pay taxes?

We don't like taxes because we live in Illinois. But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, “You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap me? Show me the coin used for paying the tax.” They brought him a denarius, and he asked them:

“Whose image is this? And whose inscription?” Matthew 22:20

“Caesar's,” they replied. Then he said to them—listen to what he says. This is brilliant:

“Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's.” Matthew 22:21

What is he saying? He's saying whatever image is on that thing, it belongs to the person the image is on. And so yes, give the taxes to Caesar. His image is on it—it belongs to him. But that's not the important part of this. I'm not interested in coins. I'm interested in you. And the image of God is upon you. The image is on you. And so, give God what belongs to God. Give God that which his image is upon. Give your whole self to him. Give your heart and your mind and your strength. Give it all.

If we're supposed to give the coin to Caesar because it belongs to him, because it bears his image, then you belong to God because you bear his image. Therefore, give yourself to God because you bear his image. Your response to being a true image bearer of God is not to fashion exterior images and create images. That's not how you obey this. You recognize that it's only through the true image of God provided by him that I worship him the way he wants to be worshiped.

And because I am an image bearer of God, I belong to the image giver. I belong to him. Images and pictures, even with the best intentions, don't draw you to the real God. They draw you to the image creator's limited, deceptive ideas of who God is. Reject that.

Final Point and Closing Prayer

So the very last point—and then we'll close and I'm going to pray and we're going to be dismissed:

The only image you are to worship is the one perfect image given to us by God himself—Jesus Christ—as revealed to us by him through his Word.

I'm going to say that one more time so that you all understand where we're coming from:

The only image that you are to worship is the one perfect image given to us by God himself—Jesus Christ—as he reveals himself to us, because he's the one that gave the image—through the Word, through his spoken Word, and through the Word made flesh that came: Jesus Christ.

God, I thank you so much for your Word. God, this command was a promise. You're a promise: "Don't make any images. Don't make any images of me. You'll screw it up. I'll make my image, and you'll worship through him." It'll be a perfect image—Jesus Christ. And so, God, we recognize the stamp of your image upon us. And in response to recognizing that we are made in your image, God, we will give unto God that which is God's—our whole heart. We will love you with all of our soul, with all of our heart, with all of our mind, with all of our strength. God, we will love our neighbor as ourself. God, in Jesus' name, empower us through your Spirit to be the people you want us to be. In Jesus' name, amen.