

October 6-7, 2012  
Exodus 20  
“No Idle Idols”  
Pastor Gary Hamrick

The second Commandment is a companion to the first, because God specifically disallowed carved images or handcrafted idols that would either replace or reduce him to nothing more than a man-made object.<sup>1</sup> It’s important to note that God was not prohibiting religious art or symbols, like a cross, dove or menorah, as long as we don’t pray or bow down to it or venerate it in any way. Symbols or pictures, in and of themselves, aren’t the problem. We need to be reminded, however, that any time we treat a symbol as sacred that’s when we violate the second Commandment. We know symbols are okay because God commanded the Israelites to decorate the Tabernacle and the Temple with images of cherubim<sup>2</sup> on top of the Ark of the Covenant.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, images of cherubim were sewn into the fabric of the curtain,<sup>4</sup> as well as carved into the walls<sup>5</sup> and the doors of the Temple.<sup>6</sup>

The simplest way to look at the second Commandment is to see it as a prohibition against creating something with your hands or your heart that either reduces God or replaces God.

### Reducing God

1. If you make an idol of God by carving something and think that the object can properly represent God so that you have something tangible to worship and bow down to, you are kidding yourself.

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<sup>1</sup> The KJV uses the term “graven image,” and the NKJV uses the term “carved image.”

<sup>2</sup> Winged, angelic creatures.

<sup>3</sup> [Exodus 25:18-20](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Exodus 26:1](#)

<sup>5</sup> [1 Kings 6:29](#)

<sup>6</sup> [1 Kings 6:32](#)

2. No object created by human beings will ever come close to adequately representing the magnificence, majesty, and splendor of God!
3. [Isaiah 40:18](#) - *“To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to?”*
4. There will never be anything that compares to God and any attempt to do so reduces him below who he is.

### Replacing God

5. [Psalm 115:4-8](#) - *“But their idols are of silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.”*
6. One biblical example of the nonsense of idolatry is found in [Exodus 32](#).
  - a. The Israelites were encamped at the base of Mt. Sinai when God spoke the Ten Commandments in the hearing of all of the people.<sup>7</sup>
  - b. Between chapter’s 20 and 32, Moses was away from the people, when he received the statutes and laws.
  - c. While he was out of their physical sight for 40 days, the people became impatient and decided to take matters into their own hands by resorting to the same kind of idolatry they had witnessed in Egypt.
  - d. [Exodus 32:1-6](#) describes the choice of the calf god.
    - i. The Israelites were familiar with Apis, the bull god of the Egyptians, so they chose that idol to worship.
  - e. In [Exodus 32:7-8](#), God sent Moses to witness the goings-on in the camp!
7. When God created human beings in his image and his likeness, he designed them with a capacity to connect with him, worship him, and have fellowship with him.
  - a. Mankind was created with a need for these aspects of relationship, however, the problem is that we will either take our adoration God-ward (where it belongs) or we will idolize something or someone out of an innate need to worship.
8. The last part of [Exodus 20:5](#) gives us a commentary about God when we read that he is a *“jealous God.”*

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<sup>7</sup> [Exodus 20:1](#)

- a. The word jealous appears only six times in the Old Testament, and each time it's used to refer to God.
  - b. In [Exodus 34:14](#) we read that this word is actually used as a name for God!<sup>8</sup>
9. God is jealous for us, not jealous of us.<sup>9</sup>
- a. The word can also be translated as zealous, which shows a quality of true love, like a parent being jealous over their children for their care and protection.

### Consequences For Those Who Hate God

10. God's jealousy is revealed in consequences for those who hate him.
11. [Exodus 20:5b](#) - *"... punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me."*
- a. The KJV translation uses *"visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children..."*
  - b. In ancient cultures, a household was made up of three or four generations, which means the consequences would only be limited to just one household.
  - c. In this verse, who are *"those"*?
    - i. Is it *"the fathers"* who hate me or is it the *"generations"* who hate me?
    - ii. If you believe it's *"the fathers,"* then the children would be doomed to suffer for their parents' sin.
    - iii. If you believe it's the *"generations,"* then each person would be responsible for his or her own sin.
  - d. Clearly, the effects and influence of a godless father are felt in his household, but the consequences fall only on those generations who hate God.
    - i. We know this because the Israelites repeated a saying that children were punished for the sins of their fathers, and they were somehow spiritually bound to repeat the sins of their fathers and mothers as if they were under a generational curse.
    - ii. [Ezekiel 18:1-4](#) - *"The word of the Lord came to me: 'What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: 'The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge'? 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, you will no longer quote this proverb in Israel. For every living soul belongs to me, the*

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<sup>8</sup> *"Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."*

<sup>9</sup> This can also be translated as zealous.

*father as well as the son – both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die.’ ”*

- iii. In other words, we don't have to pay the price for what our parents have done, so we are accountable to God for ourselves, and we are not predestined to repeat the sins of our parents, nor are we defined by their sins.
- iv. It's true that environment and upbringing play a role in shaping us, however, we can escape them.
- v. We should never give our environment more power than the power of God to reshape us.
- vi. [2 Corinthians 5:17](#)<sup>10</sup> tells us that God can and does make us new in Christ!
- vii. God can save us, heal us, and change us, and praise the Lord, we are not destined to live a 'messed-up' life no matter what our background is!

#### Blessings For Those Who Love And Obey God

12. God's jealousy is revealed blessings for those who love him.
13. The blessings for loving God far outweigh the consequences for hating him.
14. [Exodus 20:6](#) – *“But showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.”*
15. The influence of a godly home has unlimited potential, whereas the influence of a godless home is limited to that household.
16. The love and mercy of God extend far beyond the justice of God – a thousand generations versus a single household – which means that a godly home will produce a godly heritage that will experience the blessings of God for generations to come!

#### Modern Idolatry – Worship Of Creation Rather Than The Creator

17. In [Romans 1:21–23, 25](#), Paul warned about this sin when he wrote: *“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and*

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<sup>10</sup> *“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!”*

*animals and reptiles. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator – who is forever praised. Amen.”*

### Modern Idolatry – Idolatry Of The Heart

18. John Calvin said, “The human heart is a perpetual factory of idols... Everyone of us is, from his mother’s womb, expert in inventing idols.”<sup>11</sup>
19. Stuff is elevated more than God.
  - a. Paul called greed an idol when he wrote in **Colossians 3:5**, *“Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.”*
20. Self is elevated more than God.
  - a. In reference to his own personal pride, Jonah made the statement that *“[t]hose who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs.”*<sup>12</sup>
21. We have the capacity and the tendency to make idols out of people, career, and possessions.
22. **Habakkuk 2:18–20** – *“Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to him who says to wood, ‘Come to life!’ Or to lifeless stone, ‘Wake up!’ Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it. But the Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.’ ”*
23. The environmental movement has taken on a life of its own and has become a modern form of idolatry.
  - a. People derive “good feelings” about themselves because they put their grass clippings in recyclable bags, their plastic, bottles, cans, and newspapers in bins at the curb.
  - b. The legal mandates (green laws concerning an individual’s or national carbon footprint) that have been passed all over the country, in many ways, celebrate “Mother Earth,” while disregarding Father God.
    - i. These things are the modern package of pantheism or the worship of nature.

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<sup>11</sup> Institutes of the Christian Religion, 1.11.8

<sup>12</sup> **Jonah 2:8**

- c. One example of the incredible lengths to which some people will go is found in the case in Texas in which a \$15 million dollar construction project was halted because there was the possibility that the habitat of a particular type of rare spider might be harmed. What's ironic is that the spider was eventually dissected!<sup>13</sup>

### Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Exodus 20:4-6](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Spend time talking about experiences you've had that mirror the example Pastor Gary shared concerning the man he met who had a portrait of Jesus in his living room.
  - a. Why do you think people believe so strongly in icons, portraits, statues, etc.?
  - b. Read and discuss [Psalm 115:4-8](#).
  - c. How does superstition play a part in their behavior toward these things?
4. Provide an overview of the main facts from [Exodus 32](#) prior to your discussion.
  - a. Remind everyone of these facts when they think about this incident:
    - i. God had already displayed his power through the Ten Plagues.
    - ii. God had delivered them from slavery.
    - iii. God had parted the Red Sea and killed the entire Egyptian army.
    - iv. God had appeared on Mt. Sinai in a cloud of smoke, thunder and lightning, as he spoke the Ten Commandments to all of the Israelites.
  - b. How is it possible that after just 40 days they would be so quick to violate the second Commandment?
  - c. Could it be that this is an illustration of the desire within every human being to worship something or someone larger than himself or herself?
  - d. Why do you think Aaron was so willing to participate in the making of an idol?
  - e. If you were Moses, how would you have reacted to God's comments about "*your people... have become corrupt*"?
  - f. If you were Moses, how would you have reacted when you found out that Aaron lied to you?<sup>14 15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> <http://video.foxnews.com/v/1835215989001/angered-spider-threatens-15-million-highway-project/>

<sup>14</sup> [Exodus 32:24b](#) - "Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!"

<sup>15</sup> [Exodus 32:4](#) - "He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool."

5. Read and discuss [Ezekiel 18:1-4](#).
  - a. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about the influence and effects of their upbringing.
  - b. Spend time talking about the benefits and blessings of growing up in a godly home.
  - c. What are some of the consequences for those who hate God?
  - d. How has the Lord ministered to you concerning things you experienced growing up in an ungodly home?
  
6. Read and discuss [Romans 1:21-23, 25](#).
  
7. Read and discuss the John Calvin quote (See #18 above).
  - a. How have you seen evidence of this in your life?
  - b. Has there been a time in your life when you've elevated "stuff" or "self" above God?
    - i. What were the short-term and long-term effects?
  - c. How has the Lord helped you overcome the tendency/temptation to create idols?
  - d. Read and discuss [Habakkuk 2:18-20](#).
  
8. How should Christians respond to the idea that they should be good stewards when it comes to taking care of God's creation?
  
9. If you have the opportunity, you may want to watch and discuss the video clip Pastor Gary used to provide evidence of inverted worship of creation rather than the Creator.<sup>16</sup>
  
10. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: remember that anything or anyone that reduces God or replaces God in their life is a violation of the second Commandment; recognize and avoid the temptation/tendency to create idolatry of creation or idolatry of the heart; be thankful for the Lord's blessings, which are promised to all who choose to love him.
  - i. You shall have no other gods before me
  - ii. You shall not make for yourself an idol
  - iii. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God
  - iv. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy
  - v. Honor your father and mother
  - vi. You shall not murder
  - vii. You shall not commit adultery

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<sup>16</sup> Earth First group in North Carolina - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EIJFYwRtrH4>

- viii. You shall not steal
- ix. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor
- x. You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).