

# No image or idol

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[ 0 : 00 ]     Father, your word is written, and Lord, you've given us minds and hearts to feel and to think, to rationalize. Lord, help us to come to your word in honesty. Help us to be true about ourselves so that we can come to you in truth. And Lord, would you give us grace this morning? In Jesus' name, Amen.

Amen. So I'm guessing that probably a certain amount of people here, a good number of you have grown up in an Anglican setting. And if you're familiar with the Anglican setting, for you, seeing images like this of Jesus is fine. But for some people who are newer to the Anglican way, if you're like me, you walked in this church and you saw these images and you're wondering what is going on. Like, isn't that what the second commandment forbids us to do? And so what I did, I saw that, but I just, you know, I said, you know what, I'll just stick it through. They teach the Bible here. So like, I don't know, it's evangelical. They believe the Bible. So I'll just stay here for a few other weeks, but there's something about these images. So with the text that we're going to look at today, we're going to have some indication as to what we should do with these images. Should we repent as a church for having images like that, or is it okay? So if you have your Bibles with you, you can turn to Deuteronomy chapter 5, and we'll read from verse, I'll start at verse 8. So this is the second commandment, and this is the second week of our series for the 10 commandments. So the second commandment starts in verse 8. You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. 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 fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. So this is the commandment, that we shouldn't make a carved image, and the implication here is that it's a carved image of God. So as Christians, we believe that Jesus is God, and here we have an image that was created by human hands and that we set up every week.

Is that a sin against the second commandment? Is that what the second commandment forbids? Well, in the Protestant tradition, we believe that the Word of God is at the center of worship, and let's just kind of take a look at verses 1 all the way through verse 7, and we'll see the importance of God's Word, or actually 1 to 5. So, and Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, Hear, O Israel. So there's the Word. God is speaking through his servant Moses, and the first word comes to them saying, Hear, hear, O Israel, the statutes and the rules that I speak, that I speak in your hearing today, and you shall learn to do them and be careful to do them.

The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. Not with our fathers did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today. The Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain.

And here, face to face, it's not saying literally face to face. God was not literally face to face, but God was in their presence, and it was in an intimate setting, face to face at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire. And out of the midst of the fire is talking in terms of, it's a language to communicate that God's presence was consuming like a fire.

[ 4 : 10 ] While I stood between the Lord and you at that time to declare to you the word of the Lord, for you were afraid because of the fire, and you did not go up into the mountain.

So, here we have in the opening verses of the chapter, the emphasis is on the Word of God. Do we hear God's Word? And when we hear God's Word that God declared, that God spoke, what is going to happen? Are we going to obey? And this theme is something that we see all the way, starting with Adam in the garden, Adam and Eve hearing God's Word and disobeying God's Word.

And then we see later on with Abraham. Abraham heard the word of the Lord, he trusted in the Lord, and his faith in God's Word was counted to him as righteousness. Now we have Israel hearing God's Word, establishing a new covenant, and the fulfillment is found in Jesus, who is the Word of God.

God become flesh. So, here's the theme is really, really important of the Word of God, and that's what is central in our Protestant understanding of worship, because it seems like that's what the Bible is making central. So, the question remains, are we sinning corporately every week by limiting and containing Jesus in these images? Is that what the church has done for so many years in history? Well, let's take a look at the second commandment again, just at the very beginning.

It says, you shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything, and anything going on, saying anything that is of a creature nature. And the point of this is to say that we cannot hold God or contain God in this image, in an image of worship. And that's what we call a New Testament. In Greek, we have the word icon, and it's similar to what we have on your phones or on your computer. The icon of, say, Google or Facebook or something, you click on it, and then you have access to all of Google, all of Facebook, all of whatever icon you have on your computer. Now, is this what we have here? Do we come here and experience the fullness of Jesus by looking at these images and by engaging with these images? Just like in Exodus, we have the story of Israel making a carved image out of gold and saying, when Aaron said, this is your God, Israel, who delivered you out of Egypt, are we saying, church of the Messiah, this is your God who saved you from your sins? Or do we say, when we have the wooden cross set up here usually, do we say, this is the cross that you need to hold on to, you need to physically hold on to this cross because they will carry you all the way to heaven? Or do we say, when we have a worship experience with music, with song, that when we have the right instruments, the right voice singing, and we have the slides are changing perfectly on cue, and the lighting is just right, and that's when the Holy Spirit comes. The Holy Spirit is in the room. It's just, it's tangible.

[ 7 : 21 ] Is that what we're saying? The answer is no. That's not what we're saying. We don't believe that we can manipulate God, that we can play with God in such a way that we'll activate him, kind of like rubbing stones on a piece of wood and creating a fire. That's not what we're saying.

But what we are saying is that these images here serve a different purpose, that we don't come here to engage with God, like with an idol, like the second commandment is prohibiting. But these images serve to tell a story. So they communicate a story that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, he was crucified, and he was raised from the dead. They tell a story. They move us away from the pictures. They're not meant to be accurate in and of themselves, but they're meant to tell us of a story, of a story that the word encapsulates. And so even with words, we can create imagination.

With words, we can tell stories. And this is what the images are doing as well. So here's the big question. Why does God command us to not make images of him? Why does he command us to not make images of him? I answered that a little bit already. But the first reason, which I believe, is that God reveals himself. When we create objects of something, it derives from our imagination.

I recently had a conversation with a friend who, it was an acquaintance I haven't seen in a little while. And I mean, it was an acquaintance. We met a few times. We talked a bit, but that was a couple years ago. I just saw him last week. And he said, Jonathan, I thank you so much. Thank you so much for the blog post that you put on the internet and how like, yeah, you're engaging with culture and showing a really good Christian view on how to engage with that. And I said, oh, that's great.

But it's not me. Like, I didn't write those. I don't do blogs. You're probably thinking of someone else. And then I was able to clarify with him verbally that, yeah, in fact, it was not me. It was another Jonathan. And I kind of looked like him, but it was not me. So with my words, I provided clarity. I revealed to him who I am and corrected him. And he was thankful. It was a bit awkward, but he was very thankful that we're able to continue. And he has a right perception of who I am. And that way we can engage in truth. So is it possible that we do that with God?

[ 9 : 52 ] Is it possible that we come to God with a perception that is not of God, that is of our own doing? Now, this is, I think, what the commandment is first trying to drive home. We have the first commandment, which we looked at last week. It talks about having God in our relationship, a unique relationship, that he is our God, we are his people, and we are to put him first in our lives, that God is to be preeminent in our lives. And now we come to the second commandment, which talks about having a right understanding of God, that God is transcendent. God in his nature is holy. He's uncreated. And so this is, in having a relationship with someone, you want to have a right understanding of them, a right knowing of them, if you're going to have a truthful relationship with them. When I first started my relationship, another relationship analogy, please bear with me, my girlfriend, now fiancé, we had, we really liked one another. And we read a really helpful marriage book that said that what we really liked was our perception of one another, because we didn't actually get to know each other yet. We only knew a little bit of ourselves, of one another. And what we really liked was an image, a fantasy of the other person. And then as the more we get to know each other, the more we're able to clarify that this is who I am, this is who you are. And that way, we were able to have a true relationship where we actually get to know each other more and more.

And as we know each other more and more, we're able to love each other more and more. And so this is, I think, the idea that God is trying to show here. Let's read verse four again. So just to get a real drive home, just to drive home the point that God has revealed himself. So chapter five, verse four, the Lord spoke with you face to face at the mountain, out of the midst of the fire, while I stood between the Lord and you at that time to declare to you the word of the Lord.

So the Bible says that God has revealed himself. And with that revelation, when we come into a relationship with God, we need to continually test our perception of God so that we come into a right understanding. So Andrew, can I have my first point, please?

So to understand God apart from his revelation in his word written is to not understand him. It is a good and fearful thing that God has revealed himself.

Now, you might be thinking here, maybe you're not a Christian and maybe you are a Christian, but you're not too sure about this whole revelation thing. And you might be wondering, don't all religions start with someone inventing a deity and calling it God? Like, isn't that how religions start? Like, isn't that how Christianity started? Like, just somebody who decided to make a story and that is where, that is what religion is and that's what all religions are. Like, isn't that, isn't Christianity just the retelling of pagan stories through history that, and just to try to explain the inexplicable? So the question, are all religions the same? Well, no, they're not. But the reason why people make that claim is because, and there is some truth to that, is that yes, they usually start with one person making a claim about God, but that's not the case with Christianity.

[ 13 : 44 ] And no, they're not the same. No, the religions are not the same because they're not all about explaining the inexplicable. See, religions and worldviews have things superficially in common.

So in the surface of things, they look alike. Usually religions and worldviews will tend to provide for us a framework on, on how we ought to live. They'll give us instructions on how to be a better person, for instance. But where they differ completely is either in the reality that they are part of, of history, if it's experiential. But most importantly is how do we get to that, to do the right things? How do we get to follow that religion? Is it because we see that it's a good thing, that it would be better for us to do because we would become better persons? We might become more successful. We'll make friends by doing it. Or is it because this God whom we worship interrupted human history, while he has created it, comes into history, reveals himself, and to not believe him is to deny reality? Is that really what it's about? So here's the thing. Christianity is not a religion that tries to give answers for the unknown. It's a reliable account of history, and it's even a biography of the true and living God dealing with humanity. So this leads us to the fact that having a right information about God is important because so far we've come to understand that God created all things, we live in this world, and God has revealed himself. And so to have a right relationship with God, we need to have a right knowledge of God. Just last week I had a conversation with one of my brothers. He's a pilot, and he's been a pilot for a long time, and he's known a lot of pilots who've unfortunately lost their lives in flying airplanes. And he said what happened was that these pilots, they would follow their radars, and the radar would only be so accurate to tell them that there's a mountain coming ahead, but it wasn't accurate enough to tell how high the mountain was. So a lot of these pilots were flying into clouds and hit right in the mountain and died. And so the reason I'm sharing this is because having the right information about something can have some pretty serious consequences, or not having the right information of something can have some pretty serious ramifications. And so we want to have a right knowledge of God. So if I were to summarize in one statement the idea that to have a right information of God is to seek to know his essence, his nature, and that they are different than creation. They are different than the created order. And the second commandment is telling us that we cannot think of God, Yahweh, the Lord God of Israel, in terms of Egyptian and Canaanite worship, which is what is primarily trying to address here, that we cannot think in those terms, where God is one with and part of creation, and he is not a creature like a fish or a bird or any animal.

He's different from them, and he cannot be represented by such images. So, why is this relevant to me and you? Why does all of this matter? Why does God's character matter?

Well, let's look at verse 9. Continue here at verse 9. It says, You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.

So, it's saying here that we should not bow down to these images and serve them. And what it's really picking up on is that human beings are creatures of worship, that if we don't have a tangible revelation of the true and living God, we'll turn to other things and we'll worship. And we'll worship when that thing fails, we'll worship something else. And we'll keep going and worshipping and worshipping, because it's part of us. And what, if I were to define worship just in a very simple statement, I would say that worship is a service to and an intimate identification with the object of our affection. So, we tend to seek something that is greater in life, something that is more powerful in life. We tend to say words like, thank goodness. Well, who's goodness? Who's that? But for some reason, we're thankful to something greater. We're thankful to something that might have provided goodness. And in some ways, if you're familiar with your Bible, in the book of Acts, there's the altar to the unknown God. And that's basically what it is. Thank goodness for this. And I say it. I'm not saying that it's a bad thing to say, but I'm just kind of pointing something out. So, here it says, verse 9, you shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.

[ 19 : 03 ] And now you're thinking in your seats, I don't have to worry about that. I don't have to worry about bowing down to an image or serving an image. That's an ancient thing. These people were not intelligent enough to know the difference. Well, here's what it's trying to say. When it's talking about bowing down, we need to understand the principle behind that. When we bow down, we show honor, we show respect, we show allegiance to a king. We say, my liege, and we bow. And in doing that, we show that this is something that is of great importance. And so, whether it's the true and living God or if it's other things, this is what it's trying to draw here. And then when it talks about serving, it's talking about worship. Worship that demonstrates our love. So, when we love something, we want to dedicate ourselves to it. If it's a good cause, if it's a political party, if it's a cultural norm, we want to invest ourselves in it. And that is what worship is getting to.

And so, whether it is politics or good causes or culture, as Canadians, we love to invest ourselves and to identify with these things. And those are things that the Bible is trying to show here, that we are worshipers and we serve, we bow down to these things, and we let them influence us and change us in a way that will serve their purpose.

So, here it says that God is jealous. In verse 9, you shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God.

Why is he jealous? Well, these things are not God. Our political party, whether it's the old political party or the one that was right now, however we feel about them, they're not God.

Our culture does not define what is right and wrong. God defines what is right and wrong. And these are images that we have in our culture that we try to attribute deity to.

[ 21 : 15 ] So, now, Andrew, can I have my second point? We are image bearers of God, image bearers who chose selfishness over a glorious relationship with our loving creator.

So, this is the second reason, I would believe, that God commands us to not make carved images of him. When we read, we'll go back to verse 8, and we'll read the words here that are really important, that are resonating, something that was spoken of before.

So, verse 8, you shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, and so on. So, the two words here, image and likeness, are seen in juxtaposition in Genesis chapter 1, verse 27, when God says, let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over all the earth.

See, in Genesis 1, it is God who created man. God created man in his image, in his likeness. Now, after the fall, it is man who tries to create God in his image.

He tries to create God in his likeness. And this is what this commandment is trying to say. Look, this is an error. You can't do that. God is self-sustaining.

[ 22 : 46 ] He's self-sufficient, self-existent from all eternity. And we are mere creatures. How can we think that we can arrive at a conclusion, we can create God and contain him and put him in such an image?

So we see a reversal of roles in the mind of human beings. And what this does, let's just read that again.

We are image bearers of God, image bearers who chose selfishness over a glorious relationship with our creator. What I'm trying to communicate here is that we, in our sinfulness, in our sinful inclinations, to create a subversion image of God, is that we want to cut off any type of accountability with God by pretending that God is sculpted by human imagination and human hands.

But the truth is that human beings like God are not statues that are static and have no moral responsibility. We are dynamic, and our actions have moral ramifications.

So here we see, at the height of human sin and arrogance and pride is a willful ignorance of God's existence and person. Andrew, can we have the second point?

[ 24 : 12 ] Our imagination is a sacred, God-given gift that we must shepherd. Either we imagine rightly about God and thereby cultivate humility, or we imagine falsely about God and foster pride.

Our imagination is a mechanism that God has given us so that we can see something that is not present tangibly. So he gives us this imagination so that we can create wonderful things like art, like music, like do scientific experiments, that we can tell stories, that we can do poetry, all to help demonstrate his character and his purpose and his goodness to all of creation.

And so we need to use our imaginations to ponder about God and ponder about his goodness and render back, give thanks and worship God with our imaginations. But the problem is that we use our imaginations to ponder how we can gain power, how we can gain success, how we can scheme our way up the ladder.

And in doing that, we often betray our fellow human beings. So we create another image of God, a worship idol, to pretend that we are not image bearers and let ourselves off the hook when we sin.

Andrew, can we have the next point? With our nature bent towards sin, we deflect responsibility and moral accountability.

[ 25 : 47 ] We hide behind the fig leaves of philosophy and modern thought, claiming innocence from our wrongdoings. Isn't it common that we just think we brush religion off or at least Christianity off?

We say, oh, that's just an old book. That's just an old fairy tale. Well, and we just dismiss it, right? And in creating an image of God that's saying that God is smaller than he is, that God is maybe very, very loving, we tend to give ourselves the license to say, well, maybe the way that I treat my employees at work doesn't actually matter.

I can do this and it'll be fine. Or maybe the way that we treat our sexuality in such a way we can say that actually God created me this way and he's fine with it.

I can do what I want with it. And we reduce God in a smaller God so that we can hide ourselves behind the fig leaves of philosophy and modern thought.

So here's the thing. Our pride feels safe when there is a God limited by our imagination. And worshiping it makes me look pious. We like to look like we're doing good things as Canadians.

[ 27 : 09 ] We like to look like when we give a good amount of money to a certain resource organization or we give our time. We tend to do this so that people will look at us and say, oh, look at him.

Look at Jonathan. Look at the way that he serves his church. Look at the way that he serves his neighbors in his neighborhood. Or we look at different maybe missionaries who go to do missions.

And it's maybe because, you know, look at me. Look at the way that I'm doing this. Or we try to work in a good environment to make lots of money really quickly and maybe even unethically so that, you know, we can help the church.

We can help our family. And so here, this is what's important is that we have a right understanding of God, a right understanding that God is who he revealed himself to be.

So let's look back. We'll read verses 8 to 10, which is the whole second commandment. It says, You shall not make for yourself a carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth.

[ 28 : 23 ] 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 fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

So, so far, we see that we can't contain God. We can't bind him in our attempts to control him. And it's also telling us that we are God's images in creation, that we're meant to reflect his character, that we are accountable in the actions that we do.

And so, in being created in his image, we ought to reflect him in creation. And it's also talking about how God is jealous over human beings for our unique privilege as his image bearers who seek their own advancement.

So, whether you're a Christian or not, we tend to think that God is either good and nice. You know, he's kind of the old grandpa God who will accept everything and he'll just be very nice to his grandchildren.

He'll give them a lot of gifts. So, we tend to think of God either like that or we think of God as the merciless bear who's just hungry and wants to shed blood and who wants to destroy us off the face of the earth.

[ 29 : 50 ] But here's the question. Who does God say he is? Who does God say he is? Let's look back at verse 9. It says, For I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God visiting the iniquity of the Father.

So, here it's talking about God bringing judgment, holy judgment, a judgment that is set apart because there is a purpose that isn't met. There isn't love that's rendered back to God.

People, in their pride, in our sinful nature, we tend to think badly about God and we don't want to have anything to do with God. So, God brings judgment to bring order back again in the hope that they will repent.

And here's the second thing, but showing steadfast love to those who love me and keep my commandments. And so, God's love, God reveals that he's just in his judgment and now his love.

He's steadfast in his love. His love endures forever. It's saying to a thousand generations, I believe, in the Exodus or here as well in verse 10, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

[ 31 : 04 ] And the word thousands is just trying to paint the picture that it's so much love and God wants to show his steadfast love to those who love him and keep his commandments.

And he's jealous over them. He shows jealous love because there's an intimate relationship there that is supposed to be, that's supposed to happen with human beings and God.

God. And so, here's the thing. When we think of God in these terms that he's both just and he's both loving, he judges and he shows grace and mercy, this tells us, at least in the ancient days, nowadays, it's hard to tell because I even struggle with that, to think of God as a God who shows mercy because I tend to think in an entitled way.

To think, of course, he owes me love, he owes me grace, he owes me mercy. But here, it's so unique of God that he's a just judge and at the same time a loving, loving God.

And we see the clearest picture of all this when God sent his son to die on our behalf, to die on the cross, when Jesus offered himself to be crucified at the hands of people who would reject God.

[ 32 : 23 ] So, let's just have our next slide, which is essentially the gospel. So, we are image bearers of God, image bearers who chose selfishness over a glorious relationship with our creator.

Christ is the perfect image of God who chose to suffer and die at human hands and who was raised to eternal life to make things right between us and God.

God. So, if this is actually the first time that you come to somebody sharing the gospel with you, that maybe this is the only explanation that you've had about the gospel, this is really what it's all about.

It's God showing his love and showing his wrath, pouring it on Jesus, the wrath that sinful people like you and me should have borne ourselves. So, God shows his justice that he pours his anger against sin and our sinfulness on Jesus and he shows his steadfast love by sending Jesus so that his arms are wide open and he's asking you to trust in him.

In the service so far, we've looked, we've said the words that God said in the Bible that he does not desire the death of the wicked or of the sinner but that they would turn from their wickedness and live.

[ 33 : 46 ] This is God's heart. This is God's revelation. I don't want to have anything to do with a God who's not like that. I'm too sinful. I need a God who shows mercy, who shows steadfast love.

I don't want a God who flatters me, who makes me think better of myself than I actually am so that I hurt people that are around me. No, I need a God who deals rightly with sin and who deals mercifully with a sinner.

And that's Jesus. And that's Jesus. So here's the thing. Everyone here has sin in their lives that separate us from God.

And our only hope is to trust in Jesus and to confess our sins so to receive the pardon for our offenses and power by the Holy Spirit to live a new life.

Please stand. Father, as much as we on a daily basis want to think of you differently, if it was for my will and Lord, I would make things differently.

[ 35 : 07 ] But Lord, you are the God who is holy. You're the God who's eternal. You're the God who knows and sees all things. You're the God who sees every thought in the imagination of my heart.

And yet, God, you show love. You show mercy. You bring things to a right end. And Lord, this is the hope that we have in you, that you would make things right in the end.

that it does not depend on us who made things wrong and now have to make things right. No, it's you, Lord, who's shown it to us. You've shown how you want us to be made right with you.

And Lord, this is our hope that you will make things finally right with you. Lord, would you give us grace this day to continue our lives in light of this gospel.

In Jesus' name, Amen.