

"GOD IN TRUTH"**LAST WEEK:** Commandment #1: You shall have no other gods before me

The "foundational" commandment. A commandment built upon the importance of a right relationship to God.

→ God forbids any "other gods before" him and so frees us to live in an undistracted relationship with God

It's important to God that we do live that way. Obviously (!) when one considers the life and work of Christ.

COMING UP: In Commandment(s) #2 (and 3,) more of the same: getting right and keeping right the most basic part of life. The Point: It is important to God that we know him accurately ~ so as to be dealing with **GOD IN TRUTH**.**THIS WEEK:** The 2nd of the 10 **COMMANDMENT #2****NOTES:****Exodus 20:4** 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.

1. God forbids the use of any and all depictions of himself in our worship of him.

worship → "bow down" and "serve" (vs.5)*in our worship of him* → since the first commandment has forbidden any "other gods"Being who he is and what he is, the LORD cannot be pictured: *depicted*. He is "*the King... invisible*."**1 Timothy 1:17** ... the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God ... We can't know what he looks like because he doesn't look like anything!**John 4:24** God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. If we are not worshipping him *in spirit*, we are not worshipping him *in truth*. The rationale that images "help people to worship God" by helping them to picture him is invalid. Because it is NOT God that they are picturing!

All through the history of the church of Christ, this has been a problem.

The records show that worshippers of Christ have often been inclined to use images ("icons") as worship aids.

The Orthodox churches (Russian, Greek, etc.) focused attention on the word "carved" or "graven." So they made sure that the images ("icons") used to worship God were two-dimensional, or at the most "barely three-dimensional" ("bas-reliefs") so as to be considered not "carved."**The Roman Catholic church** took a simpler approach. They removed this commandment from the Ten (making the 10th into two commandments to make the list still add up to ten.)**The Protestant reformers**, on the other hand, took a simple approach of a different sort. They banned any and all images or likenesses. Period. And where did they get this idea? Primarily from this second of the Ten Commandments!

So good for them, because this is serious! How serious?

Exodus 20:5 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

2. God equates the use of images and likenesses in worship to hating him.

The word "hating" gets our attention. But the point is clearer when we emphasize the other "h" word. *That is*, God sees the use of images and likenesses as hating the real God. Any depiction of him is a misrepresentation of him. Any use of an image or likeness of God is a turning away from him to something less than him. Turning from the Creator to some creature. He calls that "hating him." It's loving a shot-down version of him instead.And he is against it! He "visits" this iniquity and he doesn't get over it. He "visits" it for four generations. He doesn't say, "*Whatever*" as we do about things that don't matter to us either way. He continues to address this form of hatred when he sees it in his own people --- and in their descendants!

[ADDITIONAL NOTE: "visiting iniquities" means "punishing iniquities"]

Exodus 32:34 But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them."**Leviticus 26:16** then I will do this to you: I will visit you with panic, with wasting disease and fever that consume the eyes and make the heart ache. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it.

Exodus 20:5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God...

3. **God links this "equation" to his jealousy.**

Jealousy is sometimes a wrong and ugly thing. "*Envious of someone else's possessions*" (This jealousy is addressed by the 10th commandment.)

Jealousy is sometimes an entirely right and beautiful thing: as when a husband hates the idea of his wife loving any other man the way she should love him: just because he is her husband. (Would she want it any other way?)

Lack of jealousy is sometimes an entirely wrong and ugly thing. Neglectful. Unloving. Unwise. And God is attentive, loving and wise. And he is zealous about his people really knowing him --- so he is jealous about their understanding of him.

THINK ABOUT THIS: If God simply wanted as much attention as possible [If he was really only thinking of himself], he might be fine with depictions that help people to pay attention to him --- but it wouldn't be him they were paying attention to! So whenever and wherever people begin to get this right --- loving God and keeping his commandments -- - he encourages the behavior --- to a thousand generations!

Exodus 20:6 ... but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

4. **God's intention is to steadfastly love those who love him and keep his commandments.**

And not just to love *them*. To love their children and their grandchildren --- and not just them! To love their descendants way past the 3rd and 4th generations! **Deuteronomy 7:9** Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations. This is an indication of how steadfast is his love --- and it indicates the focus of his love.

AND THINK ABOUT THIS... To hate God is to hate your source of life, and so to hate life and so to choose death. It's a poison. **This commandment frees us from the dangers of that disastrous way of living!** To love God is to love the source of life and so to love life itself --- especially the quality of life that he who is the source of life intends for his people.

This is how life works: we are impacted for good or bad by our relationship to God: how we relate to God. And that is affected by what we think of God. So for our own good, God is against us misunderstanding him. And he remains against it. And has intentions to set us up --- and to set up our children and their children --- to know him: so to be actually alive! So once again, God forbids something in order to free us to really live. The Ten Commandments show us how to "live in the Promised Land."

ACTIONS:

a) **Do not include in your worship any use of visual depictions of God.**

Deuteronomy 4:15-20 Therefore **watch yourselves very carefully.** Since you saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth.

And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the Lord your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. But the Lord has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own inheritance, as you are this day.

NOTE: This ban on visual depictions must include mental depictions! What were you imagining last week as we pictured standing before God with nothing between him and you? So we must work on thinking of him as the invisible God!

QUESTION: What about visual depictions of Jesus? The right answer is not so obvious since he was/is a human being, with a visible body. Since he became a human being, he became a visual depiction of God.

Colossians 1:15 He is the image ("icon") of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Hebrews 1:3 He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature

But notice and think about the fact that the New Testament writers never write or speak a word about his actual physical appearance. Nothing! It is perhaps significant that he was born and he lived at a time when it didn't occur to historians to mention physical appearance. (We have nothing about the appearance of Caesar. Nothing about Pharaoh. Not even any details about the physical appearance of Helen of Troy --- even though her face launched a thousand ships. We can't even imagine a biography which doesn't include details about height and body type and hair color, etc. If Jesus had been born in the 20th century, we'd have photographs and movie clips and sound bites and coffee table books and posters ...) This question impacts the idea of movies about Jesus... should a movie be made in which some actor plays the part of Jesus?

So what about visual depictions of Jesus? Perhaps we can all agree: NOT as objects of worship: not as something to revere, to bow down to and serve. **But can a picture of Jesus be used for teaching**, as in Sunday School papers and movies about Jesus? That's how the Roman Catholic practice of crucifixes and other art work and the Easter Orthodox practices of icons was justified: *our people are mostly illiterate so we need to help them to picture Jesus.* And we quite naturally say something similar about our children.

In this we are a pretty ordinary evangelical church: no policies about this at all. But many evangelical churches don't pay attention to the Ten Commandments. And many evangelical Christians don't even know the Ten Commandments. So maybe there is something important being done wrongly here.

I'll say this: considering the seriousness with which God addresses the issue here in the Ten Commandments, it is (at least) best to take the side of caution. There can be no harm done by choosing to not make pictures of Jesus. And let us agree, as a part of **Action a)** → **Let's be careful not to include in our worship any use** of visual depictions of Jesus. Let's be more "reformed" than that!

b) **Seek to really live by seeking to love and honor the real God.**

And here is where we see the value of personally knowing Jesus!

John 17:3 And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

John 1:18 No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.

No wonder Paul the apostle writes... **Philippians 1:21** For to me to live is Christ...

And why he writes... **Philippians 3:8** I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.

And how does one go about "knowing Jesus." In a way it's not complicated. It's right here in the 2nd commandment **Exodus 20:6** ... steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

John 14:21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

Next week: January 24 ~ The 3rd commandment ~ Exodus 20:7 (Chris Postma) ~ "GOD IN ALL"