

## “THE SECOND COMMANDMENT”

Text: Exodus 20:4-6

By Pastor YAU

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### INTRODUCTION:

1) The first commandment: God demands that we acknowledge Him as the one and only true God. This is the foundation of the Bible on faith and worship by God's people. This commandment was given at the time when Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land, a land with people who worshiped many gods. So God told the Israelites that there is only ONE God.

2) The second commandment: In this commandment, God forbids the Israelite from making idols or to bow down to those idols. He also stressed the consequences He will exact on those who violate His command. Here we see the omniscience of God in display: God knows what men may do even before they actually do it. Some may ask why didn't God do something to stop men from making idols. No one knows God's way of doing things. God just wants to foretell the consequence if men violate his law.

### THE THREE COMPONENTS OF THIS COMMANDMENT:

1) God forbids anyone from making idols: 20:4. Making idols is part of human nature. This is evident from very early in human history. When men didn't seek to worship the one true God, they made gods on their own: idols of things like it says in the text today, or other human beings or objects of the mind such as beauty, power, prestige and fame. Man is very good in making idols. In America, we call people with exceptional talents American Idols.

2) God forbids anyone from worshipping idols: 20:5. In Encyclopedic dictionary, “worship” means to revere, honor or to respect as divine; adoration or devotion shown to person, things or principle. The word “worship” comes from “worth” and ship, someone or something worthy of devotion or honor or reverence. This is exactly what God forbids his children from doing to any one or anything. Throughout human history, men not just made idols, they also worship idols they made. We have seen idols of things from nature, idols made of people, from political leaders to religious founders to entertainment performers. Many people worship these idols, paying homage to them as gods. God clearly stated that no one should make any idols and if idols were made, then no one should worship them.

3) God promises stern judgment on violators of his command. 20:6. The word “jealous” here isn't the same as we see in human jealousy. Here it is about the “intolerant nature” of God toward all acts of evil, and worshipping

idols is on the top of the list of evil acts. To all who violate God's command in worshiping idols, God doesn't hesitate to pronounce his severe judgment on them. Our God isn't just a jealous God of evil, he is also a God of justice for good. Although he clearly stated the punishment he would pronounce on those who violate his command, he also pronounces his blessings on those who will heed his warning and obey his command.

### THREE CATEGORIES OF MAN-MADE IDOLS:

1) Idols of nature because of fear: Ever since human history, man faced the awesome power of nature with fear, and gradually learned to make elements of nature as gods: the sun, the moon, winds, rains, the stars, mountains and rivers, trees and rocks. Then fearful animals such as snakes, lions, tigers, elephants, monkey, birds and many other things in the natural world. Man felt the needs to revere these things of the nature, tried to make peace with them to have a peaceful life. We may think these gods are for the primitive people, but they meet the basic needs of the people in their environment. In the text of today, God specifically forbids anyone to create or worship gods of nature.

2) Idols of morality for the soul: Since God created man in his own image and capacity, there is a need in the deepest part of his soul, an urge to get close to his creator, God. Without knowing the creator God, and worship this one true God, men made religion and idols to meet the needs of their souls. In almost all religions, there are images or idols men created to be gods so men many worship, pray to and ask for protection and blessing. This phenomenon is universally true in all human history chronologically and geographically. That is why we have religions in every continent, every tribe, every century and every society. Ironically, God made man according to his image, but man made god according to man's image—most gods in history are like man, in their look, personality and behavior. One thing all these man-made idols of religion and moral teaching cannot do is they cannot offer real and lasting fulfillment and peace to the soul, because God is the only creator of the soul.

3) Idols of mental desires of the world: These are all man-made idols of men in their respective area of fame in everyday life such as in politics, wealth, socioeconomic figures, successful people in business, entertainment, leaders of cult movements. Many people revere the above personalities in ways like gods. In promoting the moral doctrine of Confucius in Taiwan, people in Taiwan had pushed Confucius to the point as god in their ceremonial worship and celebration of his birthday. In the heights of Communist revolution, Chairman Mao of China was worshiped as god to many diehard Communist,

even today. The founder of Islam, Mohammed, is being revered and worshiped like god by all Muslims, although the Islam religion forbids worship of another God besides the Allah.

DEVASTATING HARMS OF IDOL WORSHIP: Most people don't know or don't care the serious harms on idol worship. Many of the harm of idol worship is long term and irreversible. The harm to different individuals are different and personal. Here are some of the major ill effects of idol worship:

1) Idol worship leads to burdensome life: During the exile in a foreign land, the Israelites learned to worship idols. God sent them a message through Isaiah to call them to come back to worship the one true God. God reminded them of the burden they carry in idol worship: “Bel bowl down, Nebo stoops low; their idols are borne by beasts of burden. The images that are carried about are burdensome, a burden for the weary.” (Isaiah 46:1) All idol worshipers always have fear in their hearts. They were afraid of negligence, omissions and punishments if they didn't do enough to please their idols. Unlike Jesus Christ who comes to set us free, idols were created by man to put burdens on their shoulders and fear in their hearts. I had helped one family removed all their idols when they felt overly burdensome to carry on their normal life with the idols in their home.

2) Idol worship leads to helplessness: Everyone with a normal intelligence knows that idols are man-made images that can't do anything except things the worshipers imagine they could. The Bible has clear teaching on the futile nature of idols: “Idols are silver and gold made by the hands of men. They have mouths but cannot speak, eyes but they cannot see; noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands but cannot feel; they have ears but cannot hear; feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who made them will be like them, and so will all who trust them.” (Ps. 115:4-8) Besides man made images, human idols are no different. Most of the human idols people worship are full of flaws and defects in their character and inability in their claims of power. These human idols can only control the emotion of their worshipers for a little while. This is true especially political figures, entertainers and sport super stars. They can't even help themselves, how can anyone expect to get something from worshiping them?

3) Idol worship leads to personal imitation: Many of the idol worshipers love to imitate their idols. Those who worship material idols will try to amass as much possessions; those who worship political idols tend to pursue political position and power; those who worship idols of entertainers or sport stars

tend to imitate the way they dress, their life style, the language they use, the goals of life they pursued. People worship human idols will be drawn to be like their idols. But the Bible says, we should pursue to be like Jesus who is the perfect image of God with all the spiritual virtues.

4) Idol worship blocks people from God: When Jesus was telling people on the truth of dedication in one's pursuit of life, he said, “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.” (Mt 6:24) When a heart is occupied by idol or idols, there is no room for the one true God and the person of that heart is lost because of the occupation of idol. This is also true to all false religions and worldly philosophies. When you believe in one thing, you cannot believe in something else with equal share of your devotion. Therefore, idol worship is deadly because it pushes God and his way of salvation out of that heart.

5) Idol worship draws God's judgment: In the text today, God had clearly spelled out horrible punishment on those who worship idols, the offender and his children to the third and fourth generations. There had been discussions on the “fairness” of this punishment, yet we need to revere God as the final and righteous judge of all human behavior. If God sees it as a cardinal sin to worship idols, who are we to judge if God is being fair. The best and safest way to avoid severe punishment from God, we need to stop worshipping idols.

### WHAT SHOULD WE DO NOW?

1) Use that spiritual microscope: This means we need to search our heart up side down and inside out to see if there are idols in our hearts or mind. Any thing that competes or takes place of God in our mind and heart are idols, no doubt. This search includes things in the world and things in the spiritual arena, even the very job we have in serving God can be an idol if we allow it to take the rightful place of God in our dedication and devotion.

2) Remove all idols from our hearts: God will not and cannot tolerate anyone who worships idols. We need to see the real danger of doing that. Be serious in getting rid of any and all idols from your heart and be devoted only to God. Don't try to explain it away or to minimize the sinful nature of idol worship. No amount of explanation or argument may change anything on the truth of God forbidding this serious sin. You can't have idols in your heart and ask God to stay in there. God can never coexist with idols anywhere anytime. You need to make a choice either you worship God or idols.