

Exodus 20:4-6 – Second Commandment

We are continuing to study God's law. God's law does *not* show us the way of salvation. It shows us God's standards, and shows us how we are falling short of those standards. It shows us why we *need* salvation. The law is not the gospel; but it shows our sin and why we then need the gospel. It shows us why God is right to be angry with us, and why Jesus had to die to save sinners. Last week, we studied the first commandment, which told us that the true God must be our only God, without any rivals in our hearts or lives. Now we are studying the second.

1. A God who is jealous

This command is teaching us about true worship. A vital lesson about worship is that “God is jealous”. This means that he insists on having what belongs to him. Sometimes by “jealous” we mean a person is angry because they do not have something that does not belong to them. But when we speak of God, we are speaking of what *does* belong to him. He deserves our worship and praise. He is our Creator, Sustainer and Provider. For those who love Jesus, he is our Saviour. He deserves our worship, and it is right for us to give it. A husband will be jealous if his wife gives her love to another man. God says he will “visit the iniquity” (punish the sin) of those who do not worship him exactly as his law teaches. It is a kind of treason. He will not forget, even to many generations (but see 2 Kings 14:6 and Ezekiel 18:10-14 to make sure you do not misunderstand the teaching). We have sinned by not being so jealous and eager for the true God's honour and glory.

2. A God who is far more than we can imagine

The commandment forbids any use of images in worship. We must not make any picture or statue of anything in creation to use in worship. Why is this forbidden? Because the Creator is infinitely greater than anything in Creation. He made the skies to declare his glory (Psalm 19:1); what we make cannot come close to capturing it. Christ is the full revelation of God's glory, being the eternal God, and he shows us what the Father is like (John 14:7-9). We certainly do not have pictures of Christ, because the Bible never shows us Christ's appearance, but instead calls us to come to him by faith, not sight. The commandment is telling us that all true religion is revealed by God, not invented by human thinking. We must strictly and closely follow the Bible, not decide what we like to believe. The world is full of different religions because people loved their own ideas and worshipped them instead of the true God. Are you a person of God's book? Do you obey his commandments alone, or do you mix in your own ideas about God and about salvation? Following our own ideas is sin, and will provoke God's holy anger.

3. A God who is merciful and faithful

Is there any hope for us? Surely we have all followed our own ideas and desires instead of going God's ways. We have re-imagined God the way we want him to be – soft with sin, not punishing it as strictly as the Bible says! But there is hope. Verse 4 speaks of mercy. There is forgiveness. It is greater than his judgment: it is to thousands. This mercy is given in Christ. Christ followed God's Word perfectly and exactly, and then went to the cross to die for all the sins of idolatry which men commit. His death achieved the salvation of thousands of generations! He calls us to repent, believe in him, and show our love by following and obeying him.