

# The Second Commandment

by A.W. Pink

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*A.W. Pink's sermon on the Second Commandment emphasizes the prohibition of idolatry and the importance of true worship in spirit and truth.*

**Scripture:** Exodus 20:4

**Topics:** "Idolatry", "Worship"

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## Description

A.W. Pink emphasizes the significance of the Second Commandment, which forbids the creation and worship of graven images, highlighting that true worship must be spiritual and not reliant on physical representations. He explains that this commandment not only addresses the nature of God as incorporeal and invisible but also warns against the human tendency to seek tangible aids in worship. Pink stresses that legitimate worship must adhere strictly to what God has prescribed in His Word, condemning any form of worship that deviates from this. He concludes with the assurance that God shows mercy to those who love Him and keep His commandments, while also warning of the consequences of idolatry that can affect future generations. The sermon calls for a sincere and pure approach to worship, free from superstition and human invention.

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## Transcript

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments" (Ex. 20:4-6).

Though this second Commandment is closely related to the first, yet there is a clear distinction between them, which may be expressed in a variety of ways. As the first Commandment concerns the choice of the true God as our God, so the second tells of our actual profession of His worship; as the former fixes the Object so this fixes the mode of religious worship. As in the first commandment Jehovah had proclaimed Himself to be the true God, so here He reveals His nature and how He is to be honored.

"Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image thou shalt not bow down thyself to them." This commandment strikes against a desire, or should we say a disease, which is deeply rooted in the human heart, namely, to bring in some aids to the worship of God, beyond those which He has appointed--material aids, things which can be perceived by the senses. Nor is the reason for this difficult to find: God is incorporeal, invisible, and can be realized only by a spiritual principle, and since that principle is dead in fallen man, he naturally seeks that which accords with his carnality.

But how different is it with those who have been quickened by the Holy Spirit. No one who truly knows God as a living reality needs any images to aid his devotions; none who enjoys daily communion with Christ requires any pictures of Him to help him to pray and adore, for he conceives of Him by faith and not by fancy. "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness." It is a manifest straining of this precept to make it condemn all statuary and paintings: it is not the ingenuity of making but the stupidity in the worshipping of them which is condemned, as is clear from the words "thou shalt not bow down thyself to them," and from the fact that God Himself shortly afterwards ordered Israel to "make two cherubim of gold of beaten work" for the mercy seat (Ex. 25:18) and later the serpent of brass.

Since God is a spiritual, invisible, and omnipotent Being, to represent Him as being of a material and limited form is a falsehood and an insult to His majesty. Under this most extreme corruption of mode--image worship--all erroneous modes of Divine homage are here forbidden. The legitimate worship of God must not be profaned by any superstitious rites. This second Commandment is but the negative way of saying "God is Spirit: and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24).

If it be asked, what are the duties here required? The answer is this: "The receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God has instituted in His Word (Deut. 32:46, 47; Matthew 28:20; Acts 2:42; 1 Tim 6:13, 14); particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ (Phil. 4:6, Eph. 5:20); the reading, preaching, and hearing of the Word (Deut. 17:18, 19; Acts 15:21; 2 Tim. 4:2, etc.); the administration and receiving of the sacraments (Matthew 28:19; 1 Cor. 11:21-30); church government and discipline (Matthew 18:15, 17; 16:19; 1 Cor. 5); the ministry and maintenance thereof (Eph. 4:11, 12, etc.); religious fasting (1 Cor. 8:5); swearing by the name of God (Deut. 6:13), and vowing unto Him (Isa. 19:21; Ps. 76:11); as also the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship (Acts 16:16, 17, etc.); and according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry (Deut. 7:5; Isa. 30:22)"--Westminster Confession of Faith.

To this we would simply add, there is required of us a diligent preparation before we enter upon any holy exercise (Eccl. 5:1) and a right disposition of mind in the act itself. For example, we must not hear or read the Word just to satisfy curiosity, but that we may learn how better to please God. In the forbidding of images God by parity of reason prohibits all other modes and means of worship not appointed by Him. Every form of worship, even of the true God Himself, which is contrary to or diverse from what the Lord has prescribed in His Word, and which is called by the apostle "will worship" (Col. 2:23), together with all corruptions of the true worship of God and all inclinations of heart toward superstition in the service of God are reprehended by this Commandment.

No scope whatever is here permitted to the inventive faculty of man. Christ condemned the religious washing of the hands, because it was a human addition to the Divine regulations. In like manner this Commandment denounces the modern passion for ritualism (the dressing up of simplicity in Divine worship), as also the magical virtues ascribed to, or even the special influences of, the Lord's Supper, still

more so the use of a crucifix. So also it condemns a neglect of God's worship, the leaving undone the service which God has commanded.

The Scriptures have set us bounds for worship, to which we must not add, and from which we must not diminish. In the application of this principle we need to distinguish sharply between the substantial and the incidentals of worship. Anything which men seek to impose upon us as a part of Divine worship, if it be not expressly required of us in the Scriptures--such as bowing the knee at the name of Jesus, crossing ourselves, etc.--is to be abominated. But if certain circumstantial and modifications of worship are practiced by those with whom we meet, even though there be no express Scripture for them, they are to be submitted unto by us, providing they are such things as tend to decency and order and distract not from the solemnity and devotion of spiritual worship.

That was a wise rule inculcated by Ambrose: "If thou wilt neither give offense nor take offense, conform thyself to all the lawful customs of the churches where thou comest." It is a grievous breaking of this commandment if we neglect any of the ordinances of worship which God has appointed. So too if we engage in the same hypocritically, with coldness of affection, wanderings of mind, lack of holy zeal, or in unbelief, honoring God with our lips while our hearts are far from Him.

This Commandment is enforced by three reasons. The first is drawn from the Person who pronounces judgment upon those who break it. He is described by His relationship, "thy God"; by the might of His power, for the Hebrew word for "God" here is "the Strong One", able to vindicate His honor and avenge all insults thereto; and by a similitude taken from the state of wedlock, wherein unfaithfulness results in summary punishment--He is a "jealous God." It is the Lord speaking after the manner of men, intimating that He will not spare those who mock Him.

"They provoked Him to jealousy with strange gods, with abominations provoked they Him to anger. . . . They have moved Me to jealousy with that which is not God" (Deut. 32:16-21 ff). Secondly, a sore judgment is threatened: "visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me." "Visiting" is a figurative expression, which signifies that after a space of time, in which God appears to have taken no notice or to have forgotten, He then shows by His providences that He has observed the evil ways and doings of men.

"Shall I not visit for these things? saith the Lord: and shall not My soul be avenged on such a nation as this?" (Jer. 5:9, and cf. 32:18; Matthew 23:34-36). This was designed to deter men from idolatry by an appeal to their natural affections. "The curse of the Lord righteously rests not only on the person of an impious man, but also on the whole of his family" (John Calvin). It is a terrible thing to pass on to children a false conception of God, either by precept or by example.

The penalty inflicted corresponds to the crime: it is not only that God punishes the child for the offenses committed by the parents, but that He gives them over unto the same transgressions and then deals with them accordingly, for the example of parents is not sufficient warrant for us to commit sin. Thirdly, there is a most blessed encouragement to obedience, in the form of a gracious promise: "Showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments." To the same effect He assures us, "The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him" (Prov. 20:7).

Love for God is evidenced by a keeping of His commandments. Papists contend that their use of images is with the object of promoting love, by keeping a visible image before them as an aid; but God says it is because they hate Him. This promise to show mercy unto thousands of the descendants of those who

truly love God does not express a universal principle, as is clear from the cases of Isaac having a godless Esau and David an Absalom. "The Legislator never intended to establish in this case such an invariable rule as would derogate from His own free choice. . .

When the Lord exhibits one example of this blessing, He affords a proof of His constant and perpetual favor to His worshippers" (Calvin). Observe that here, as elsewhere in Scripture (Jude 14, for example), God speaks of "thousands" (and not "millions," as men so often do) of them that love Him and who manifest the genuineness of their love by keeping His commandments. His flock is but a "little" one (Luke 12:32). What cause for thanksgiving unto God have those who are born of pious parents, whose parents treasure up not wrath for them, but prayers!

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