

# The Words of a Covenant

## Part 3 - The Second Commandment

April 5, 1998

Exodus 20:4-6

*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;<sup>5</sup> you shall not bow down to them nor 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 generations of those who hate Me,<sup>6</sup> but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments. NKJV*

- **Review & Introduction**

Although this second commandment is distinct from the first, it is clearly connected with it. The first commandment gave us unequivocal instruction on who to worship. This second commandment tells us *who not* to worship and *how not* to worship the true God.

As we discussed previously, because these commandments were delivered at a time where idol worship was prevalent, there is a temptation for us to think that there is no application to us today. However, with this particular command, there is more occasions for us to violate it than we might think. The same God who gave the command through Moses still requires of us obedience to the command and therefore it is incumbent upon us to see to it that we obey the command.

- **The Religious Heart Versus the Obedient Heart**

- While it is true that we in this society are less tempted to build something with our hands and then declare that it is our God or that it is the image of the true God, we should understand that we are told from the beginning to stay away from the worship of false gods and stay away from the false worship of the true God. Those who have a religious heart are those who wish to pursue spiritual things, pursue a pious life and the knowledge that they are participating in genuine religious activity. However, the heart is deceitfully wicked and must be softened by the Spirit of Grace and shaped and instructed by the Word of God.

- **Prohibition of Worshipping False Gods**

- The first and most obvious prohibition pertains to the rank idolatry found in those who would carve/mold/fashion an image and then declare that it was a god. We see this in the polytheistic mind of Rome, Athens and Ephesus where statues were an important part of religious worship. Sometimes those who used the idols knew that the idol was just an image and in the even more rank idolatry, they believed that the idols actually were the gods. Acts 19:21-27

- **Jealousy is a Virtue**

- It is interesting that most frequently we do not think of jealousy as a Godly virtue. Normally we think of an insecure husband who domineers over his wife. Sometimes we might speak of someone who coveted something belonging to somebody else. But notice here that God not only describes Himself as jealous, He declares that His name is Jealous. This means that our understanding of jealousy must be shaped by the revealed Word of God and not by our vernacular.
- God is the one who revealed Himself to the Israelites and brought them out of slavery. He is the one who established His covenant with them and brought them into a special relationship that does not exist with all mankind. Therefore He is like a husband (and is frequently described in the Scriptures as a husband) in a special covenant relationship with His wife and expects her singular attention. This is very instructive for us. It is a good thing when a man craves the affection and attention of his wife and when the wife expects the undivided attention and affections of her husband. Husbands should be jealous for the wives and wives should be jealous for their husbands. We should keep this in mind as we live amongst one another striving to protect and foster this Godly jealousy.
- Notice that God's jealousy is efficacious. His jealousy is not without action. He visits the sins of the fathers down to subsequent generations; this should not surprise us. God has built the world in such a way that children are reared and taught by their parents and God declares that in the normal course of providence, the sins will have an affect upon the progeny. However, also note that God's wrath is dwarfed by His mercy. Compare with Deut. 7:1-9

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- **Prohibition of False Worship of the True God**

- One of the common objections to a complete ban on the making of religious images (historically called the Iconoclastic

Controversy) is that they are not worshipping other gods with the images but rather assisting them in the worship of the true God. However, even the assistance in worship of the true God is forbidden by the command as well. Notice in Deut 4:1-20 where God insists that they have seen no image of Him and therefore, any image we were to make of Him would be a manmade guess. Acts 17:16-34, Col. 2:20-23 2 Kings 18:4

- God has however, revealed the one true image of Himself in His Son Jesus Christ. Notice in John 14:7-11 and in Hebrews 1:1-4, Colossians 1:15-20 Jesus is the image of the invisible God the Father. The Father is Spirit but miraculously, the Spirit became flesh and walked and talked among us.

- **This Commandment Does Not Prohibit Historic or Artistic Representations**

- This brings us the inevitable question, is there any religious images that are lawful. We should keep clearly in our minds that this prohibition is within the context of worship. We should not use images whether carved, molded painted or whatever manner to aid us in bolstering our emotional worship. These images should not come to our minds so as to make us feel like we are worshipping more fervently. We are commanded to worship our God in Spirit and in truth and He forbids us to worship Him with images.
- However, this command does not prohibit making images that remind us of historic truths or images that teach us about events from the Scriptures. A cross that reminds us of the completed work of Christ and the mercy bestowed to us is not the same thing as an idol. A nativity scene that teaches us about the setting in which our Lord was born is not idolatrous. We should be very careful though to ensure that even this valid images do not become things to which we begin to ascribe worship.