



Deut 5:8-9
Idol Worship

8 ' You shall not make for yourself a carved image -- 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;

9 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 upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me,

10 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

You'll recall that earlier I'd said that in going through the Ten Commandments this time, my stress was going to be on how they were given by God to free His people from bondage and slavery to sin, how they were designed to take away the heavy yoke of the commandments and traditions of the world, the flesh, and the devil and replace them with the light and easy yoke that comes with serving Christ.

I also, stated I was going to point out how it is that the Lord's people in every age have a distressing tendency to squander that new-found freedom and instead return to bondage. We have a perverse tendency to want to go back to Egypt, to clap the manacles back on and get our shoulders back under the burdens too heavy to bear.

Now in Egypt the people had been in the midst of a nation that did not worship the One true God Yahweh, and their worship as we noted earlier, was highly sensual. In particular it was filled with images that could be seen. The made lifeless images of their equally lifeless gods. Statues carved in stone and wood and made to look like animals, or combinations of men and animals like Anubis the half human, half jackal Egyptian god of death, To quote Paul in Romans 1: 22-23 ***“Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man -- and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.”***

God therefore had gone to great pains to tell them, not to try to worship him the way the Egyptians worshipped their false gods. In fact there is perhaps no commandment of the Lord repeated more often in the Torah, than the commandment not to worship idols, or to worship Him using images fashioned after created things. For instance, in the prior chapter, Deut. 4 God had reminded them that at Sinai when they heard His voice and received His revelation, when He proved to them that He alone was the living God who ruled over heaven and earth, that they saw no image, and that this was on purpose. Therefore he is telling them DON'T try to make an image of me and don't put yourself in bondage to these empty images and the imaginations of men. They are lies and deceits meant to trap you and worshipping them will do you no good.

In the first commandment he had said to them only worship ME the living God, and now in this commandment God is telling them that not only are they to worship only Him the true, but that they must not try to worship the true God in the same way the false gods were worshipped. He is spirit and

his worship is meant to be in spirit and in truth. His worship is fundamentally *spiritual and relational*. We worship him not through repeated and wooden rituals performed before dead and lifeless wood and stone images, but in the heart. Our worship must be based in a heart relationship to Him, and animated by His Holy Spirit dwelling within us. To make an image of God therefore is to destroy that worship, we take living personal, relational, worship of the living God and make it into something lifeless and false.

As Christopher Wright points out in his commentary on Deuteronomy, ***“Yahweh is the living God, and any carved statue is necessarily lifeless. Something that can do nothing is no image of the God who can do all things.”*** He goes on to make a great point therefore about the importance of the incarnation to our worship: ***“The only legitimate image of God, therefore, is the image of God created in his own likeness. – the living, thinking, working, speaking, breathing, relating human being (not even a human statue will do but only the living person.)”***

This is by no means something new to Wright though, Paul makes exactly the same point about Christ being the only true image of the Living God in Colossians:

Col. 1:13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love,

14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

18 And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.

19 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

Now understand that only the living Christ with whom we are united by faith is a proper image of the invisible God, and not a false carved or painted image of a human being we label “Christ.” That too is a lie. That too is to take the living God and to make a lifeless and lying image that in no way accurately contains or portrays either his humanity or his divinity. Brothers and Sisters, if you want to see God, as He wants you to see Him, you must do so through His own divine self-revelation in His Son Jesus Christ. And if you have seen Christ by faith, you have seen the father:

John 13:9 Jesus said to him, 'Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?

10 'Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works.

Now those words were not spoken merely to Phillip, they were spoken to all believers and Christ was not merely speaking of his physical appearance, far from it. In essence Jesus was saying to all who would come after, if you know me, you know God.

But the great problem with that, is it requires a living spiritual union with Christ. To see the father, you have to have the eyes that only faith can give, you have to be saved. That is a vision that the natural man doesn't have, and so therefore he prefers an image, something solid and concrete he can see with his earthly eyes.

That is why when Moses had been gone for too long from the camp, the faithless demanded that Aaron produce for them an image of Yahweh that they could worship according to the traditions that they had learned in Egypt. And again and again, in church history whenever zeal for meeting God through His word, on His terms, and for that living heart relationship, whenever in a word the covenant community became faithless, image worship and idolatry began to abound.

Brothers and Sisters, it is no accident that when the word of God was taken away from the common people, and when the preaching ceased to be biblical, that the church began to be filled with images and icons, and statues, and rituals, and traditions, and the gospel began to disappear. It was only with the recovery of the Word of God, in the middle ages, that we saw the recovery of the gospel. The Reformers and the Puritans understood that relationship all too well, that is why Thomas Watson preached: ***“Let us pray that God will preserve pure ordinances and powerful preaching among us. Idolatry came in at first by the want of good preaching. The people began to have golden images when they had wooden priests.”***

Well brothers and sisters, we live in a time when sensual worship is again abounding. Even Protestant churches are beginning to be filled with false images of all three members of the godhead. We have seen a resurrection of what used to be called passion plays, and the introduction of a farrago of sensual means of worship, including things like dance. That shouldn't surprise us given that biblical literacy is low and sinking lower and the knowledge of the gospel, even in the church is being lost. Brian Chappel, the President of our denominational seminary noted that when Covenant Seminary started the majority of the incoming classes passed the required English bible exam and so didn't have to take a remedial class on the English bible. Now he noted that over 2/3rds of the incoming class fails that exam. Now please take note, that is 2/3rds of our future pastors don't know what is in the bible when they show up to start seminary. And believe me, when you consider that the PCA has a reputation as being a “brain trust” amongst evangelical denoms, that should tell you that modern evangelicalism is in an alarming situation.

Given this lack of knowledge of what God has commanded, it shouldn't surprise us that churches have been split and riven by terrible “worship wars” that divide according to our human preferences in worship. I believe in that we are seeing just one of the results of worshipping God according to our own imaginations, rather than cleaving to his revealed will. I believe we are seeing the results of casting off the freedom that God has given us by freeing us from Idol worship and returning to our prior bondage, where instead of following God's instructions in his word, we grope blindly for him following our emotions and end up rending and tearing one another because our preferred images conflict with those of others.

God had told his people in Deut. 4 that corrupt worship would lead to bondage, and it surely did, as they were dragged away to serve lifeless idols in Assyria and Babylon. ***Deut. 4:27 "And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you.***

28 "And there you will serve gods, the work of men's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell”

The people became idolaters and as the Lord's curse promised their children reaped a bitter harvest, it will be the same with us. If we abandon the Lord's instructions and seek to worship Him in ways that seem good to us, we will end up bequeathing nothing but curses to our children in the third and fourth generation. Brethren idolatry is progressive, if you worship the true God in a false manner, be certain that just as the children of Israel did, your children will worship false Gods however they see fit.

But there is hope, in verse of chapter 4 the Lord had said, 29 ***"But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul."***

What we need is a reformation, a recovery of true worship, worship without images and imaginations, worship according to God's revelation. That will not be easy: as Calvin himself said "I know how difficult it is to persuade the world that God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by his word."

But we need Worship that is not sensual but worship in spirit and truth. As Calvin summarized the Second Commandment he said this: "The sum is, that the worship of God must be spiritual, in order that it may correspond with His nature. For although Moses only speaks of idolatry, yet there is no doubt but that by *synecdoche*, as in all the rest of the Law, he condemns all fictitious services which men in their ingenuity have invented." The only image of God we need Brother and Sisters, is His Son Jesus Christ, and the only way we can see Him is through a living relationship by Faith. In fact it is only through Faith alone in Christ and His work that true Worship can occur.