

True Worship and You

The Ten Commandments

By Don Green

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Bible Verse: Exodus 20:4-6
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Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Well, it's a wonderful opportunity that we have to come back to God's word and to come back to our study of the 10 Commandments which we've been engaged in over a period of time. We did a number of introductory messages to prepare us for the 10 Commandments themselves and today we come to our second message, our final message on the second commandment, the second commandment which you find in Exodus 20:4-6 and if you're not already there, I invite you to turn to this surpassing passage of Scripture. I'll read the text and then we will consider its implications here this morning.

Exodus 20, beginning in verse 4 says,

4 "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me, 6 but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

Now as we said last time, this second commandment comes after God had made a very short but significant statement in the first commandment in verse 3. Look up there with me for just a moment where it says in the first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before Me." The majestic authority with which God speaks here in the 10 Commandments and the 10 Commandments are premised on who he is, this gives us a sense of the might and the majesty of our God. God is holy, meaning that he is separate. He is alone in majesty. He alone is the only true God. There is no other God beside him. There is no one else. And God in talking to his people starts the 10 Commandments by commanding us to recognize his unique place in the universe and to give him honor accordingly. In other words, you could state it this way: God commands us to worship the right God and that implies that we must know who he is and we must honor him and submit to him as the foundation of true morality. This is the first and foremost of the 10 Commandments at God has placed them in sequence. God says, "You must recognize who I am, you must worship Me and Me alone."

So immediately we're confronted with the question of who your God is, who is it that you worship, do you know him according to his revealed word in the Scriptures. All of these things bring out the fullness and the force that there is only one God and he is to be your God. He commands you to do this. You have no alternative. As I said when we were preaching on the first commandment, anyone who is not a Christian, anyone who does not worship God through our Lord Jesus Christ is living in continual and unbroken rebellion against the first commandment. The first commandment condemns everyone who is not even a Christian before you even get to the other nine. That's a pretty stunning recognition to make. Now the second commandment here that I just read, as we saw last time, the second commandment requires us to worship the right God in the right way. In other words, God has revealed to us how it is that he is to be worshiped. We are not at liberty to make up our own doctrines, we're not at liberty to make up our own forms of worship according to the way that we like things to go or what our world likes today. That's not the way that worship is done.

God commands worship to be made in accordance with his instruction and so he says there in verse 4, "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth below or in the water under the earth." Now many of you have come out of backgrounds, you grew up in backgrounds where you were used to a lot of visual stimulation when you went to church. Maybe there were statues and images and things like that, that you associated with worship in the past, and I sympathize with how difficult it is to purge that out of your mind, but the beginning point for purging it out is recognizing that that is wrong, that that is not how God has commanded us to worship, in fact, it is a violation of the way that God has commanded us to worship. He says we are not to use images, we're not to use pictures, we're not to use visual representations to stimulate our thoughts about what God is like or how he supposedly looks. No. No, no, no, no, no. God is an invisible God. He is an eternal spirit and so he cannot be properly represented by anything material and, furthermore, he cannot be localized, if you think about it this way, God is omnipresent, he is everywhere present throughout the universe. Even the temple that he commanded to be built in Jerusalem in the Old Testament was not a house that contained him locally. Solomon made that clear in his prayer at the dedication of the temple. And so there is nothing that we can make with our hands by way of drawings or artwork or images or statues or anything like that that could ever possibly represent God in a right way. By every account, those things by definition misrepresent God, they are a false representation of who he is, and they lead the minds of those who follow them and engage in worship that way, they lead them astray and they think of God as someone other than who he is and that mental image of God that people carry around having been conditioned in worship like that, is a false god. So it's a violation of the second commandment, it's a violation of the first commandment because it represents God to be someone other than who he is and God says don't do that.

Now let's back up for just a moment here. This is all kind of by way of introduction and by way of review. There's something that you and I really need to come to grips with and it's difficult to do in the nature of the Western society in which we live. We are used to thinking that it's an utter virtue that every man makes decisions for himself, and it's being

carried to such extremes today that people are doing what was unthinkable just a few, you know, just a few years ago. People are saying, "I'll even determine what gender I am. I will decide what gender I am. Yesterday I may have been male, today I feel like being female, and tomorrow I may feel like being something outside of those two categories." And our society is affirming that contrary to Scripture, our society is embracing and affirming that as an expression of the independence of the soul of man and every man gets to do what's right in his own eyes. Well, my friends, that is not the way that God has ordained things to be and we are not free agents to just do whatever we want. God is boss. God is sovereign. God is Lord. God is the ultimate authority and when it comes to how he is to be worshiped and who is to be worshiped, God alone has the authority to tell us the way that things really are and we are not at liberty to change that. We are not at liberty to make up a God of our own liking. We're not at liberty to worship God in ways other than what he has ordained. God is an invisible spirit who has revealed himself in the Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ and Jesus said that, "No one comes to the Father except through Me," so that we understand that the force of Scripture, the force of these commandments, especially in light of the fullness of New Testament revelation, means that we can only rightly worship God if we come to him humbly and repentantly, trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ alone and not in our own works and according to who God has revealed himself to be. I can't emphasize that enough. You are not free to do anything else, and if you are not worshiping God with your life through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, you are the worst kind of rebel in his sight, you have rebelled against the first two commandments before we even get to anything else.

So this is sobering. This is serious. This is not a seeker friendly portion of Scripture. The 10 Commandments are not seeker friendly. And I realize those of you that want to hear God's word, I realize that this is a message that the world is not interested in hearing. That doesn't bother me. I'm not concerned about that. I'm not concerned about being relevant to the world and what the world wants in my preaching, and we as a church are not concerned about being relevant to what the world wants. Our only concern, our only concern, there's only one thing that we're concerned about, we want to be relevant to God. We want to be relevant to him. We want to be following and teaching and believing the things that he has instituted and trust him to honor us for that and to bring glory to him as a result of that regardless of what the world thinks. I could not care less what the world thinks about Truth Community Church. I really couldn't because the world does not love Christ. The world is hostile to God. The world is under the wrath of God. Why would any church, why would any pastor want to cater in the name of Christ, why would you want to cater to them to do what they want you to do? Our only desire is to communicate to them what God has to say to them and trust God to do with it in their hearts what he desires. But to have the world dictate the terms of what our worship looks like? To have the world dictate that to us? No way. No way. And under no circumstances, as happened in California under the reign of their governor, under no circumstances will we let a secular government authority tell us if we can or cannot sing, if we can or cannot gather together. That is not the world's place to do that. We worship God according to what he has instructed us to do and that's the force and the impact of the second commandment here as we read there in verse 4.

Now let me just give you another little sense of perspective, again by way of introduction here. Understand that the first and second commandments about worshiping the right God and worshiping him in the right way, those commandments come before the commandments that we're more generally familiar with, you know, that you shall not murder, that you shall not commit adultery, you know, you shall not bear false witness, you shall not steal. Those commandments come after these first two and we tend, if we think about the 10 Commandments at all, we tend to go to those things that we'll deal with in future weeks, but understand that in order in the sequence in which God has given them, right worship and right worship the right way is given a greater priority than those other commandments. And so this just gives us a sense that the very placement of these two commandments before the commandment against murder, against adultery, against theft, against deceit, against coveting, shows us something very important. Totally counter-cultural. It shows us that false religion is the greater sin than even these other things that will send plenty of people to hell as it is. False religion is the greater sin. God is concerned for his glory, God has commanded us to respond to his glory, and therefore we need to take this seriously. That's the point here this morning as we contemplate what God has said in the 10 Commandments, all right?

So what we find now is that in the second commandment we see God forbidding the making or worshiping of idols. I haven't emphasized this and I'm not going to go off onto this very important tangent, but this even applies to the mental images of God. You should not be making up mental images of your own about God, about God running to meet you and embracing you in his arms. You shouldn't think like that. You should just think according to Scripture realizing that God is an invisible God and you're not to make up your own pictures of God in your own mind even because the law applies to our hearts, not just to our external behavior. That's worth a whole message and I'm just going to touch that, tap on it and move on. The commandment is exceedingly broad.

Now all of this, all of this we can summarize now with a transitional question that needs to be asked and it's a simple question: why? Why? Why is God so concerned about his glory that he would be worshiped as the right God, and that he would be worshiped in the right way? Well, this second commandment gives us the explanation for it. I'm very very excited to be able to go into this and to unpack it for you because I feel like, my sense is that for many of you I'm going to be opening a door to let you look into riches about the character of God that you've never really contemplated before. This is an aspect of the character of God that is not emphasized and yet God makes it central to the purpose of these opening commandments in the Decalogue.

Look at verse 5, Exodus 20:5 where God having forbidden idols, we've looked at that now, we're moving on in the text, in verse 5 he says, "You shall not worship them or serve them; for," here's the reason why, this is why God commands us to honor him in this way in the first two commandments, he's saying, "Because. You cannot do that, I forbid you from doing that because, for I," he premises it on who he, himself, is, "for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me." Why does God

come to us and reveal his moral will for us in these opening commandments in this way? It's because he is a jealous God.

Now we sometimes think of jealousy as a negative emotion, a bad emotion, and because somebody maybe in a relationship is possessive and controlling in the relationship and we think about jealousy in those negative terms. We need to set that wrong thinking about God aside and realize what it means for him to be a jealous God. Now again, he said, "You shall worship only Me and you shall worship Me in the way that I have commanded for I am a jealous God." What does that mean? What's the significance of that? It is this: God does not share his glory with anyone else. God is jealous for his own glory. He is protective of his own glory and it is good and right that he should. He alone is the Triune God who existed before the beginning of time. He alone is the Creator of the human race, of the universe. He alone has come to earth as the Redeemer in the Lord Jesus Christ. He alone is sovereign in his providence. There's no one like that and so it is right, it is proper for God to defend his glory and to command the human race not to create false gods in competition with him, and we're going to unpack that as we go along here today.

What for God to be a jealous God means this, it means that he will vindicate his glory against anyone who ascribes glory to creatures or graven images. This is really serious. God brings the full weight of his glory to bear against those who would violate this commandment as we read on in verse 5. Look at it there in verse 5 with me, "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me," verse 6, "but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments." And so we have this commandment requiring proper worship, physical objects, visual stimulation are contrary to that, and so this second commandment is based on God's attribute of his jealousy. The first commandment, "You shall have no other gods before Me," gives us a sense of the holiness, the separateness of God. The way in which God is to be worshiped points us to respond to his jealousy and I want to give you three principles here this morning about how this works out in your life, even as a believer, how you are to respond to this and we'll go through the text one by one in these points here this morning.

First point for this morning is for you to understand the God of jealousy. Understand the God of jealousy, and I think we have to start here, if my sense is right and that we haven't taken this attribute seriously as individuals, we haven't studied it closely, then it's important for us to understand just exactly what is meant by this attribute of jealousy. You can't respond to the commandment rightly until you understand the premise upon which the commandment rests. And God says, "Here is the commandment and here is why. The why is related to the fact that I am a jealous God." So we need to understand the jealous God and then we work our way through the implications of what that means.

So our text helps us see the sin of image-based worship and it is a sin, it is a gross gross sin, it helps us see the sin from God's perspective. True worship does not use images or physical objects. As I said last time and because we have so many welcome guests with

us here this morning, I want to repeat this just to give you a sense of perspective. As you enter into our worship center, you see that there are no images on the wall, there are no images behind us. We have a beautiful worship center but it's very plain. It is aesthetically pleasing but there is nothing suggesting anything about God to your visual sight. That's for a reason. It's because images are not to have a part of worship and that's part of the way that we at Truth Community Church, that we honor this commandment. True worship does not use images or physical objects because we fear the God of jealousy. We don't want to provoke him to anger by the way that we do things and by the way that we even orchestrate the place in which we worship week by week. So God is a jealous God. This matters to him. It may not matter to man, it obviously doesn't matter to the purveyors of false religion at all, but it matters to God and that's his right, it's his prerogative to do so, to view it this way.

So he says, "I'm a jealous God. Don't do this." Now just to step back, I want to kind of expand your sense of the importance of this theme. The Bible presses the theme of the jealousy of God far more than you might think, and I'm just going to read several passages here, I'm not going to have you turn there for the sake of time, but just jot down the text reference, you can read them later on your own so that you see that I'm not making it up when I say this is an important theme in the Bible.

In Exodus 34:14 it says, "you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God."

In Deuteronomy 4:24 it says, "the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."

In Deuteronomy 6:14-15 it says, "You shall not follow other gods, any of the gods of the peoples who surround you, for the LORD your God in the midst of you is a jealous God; otherwise the anger of the LORD your God will be kindled against you, and He will wipe you off the face of the earth." Take my breath away, that's how serious this is as God was speaking to the children of Israel. He says, "You honor this command, you honor and respect My jealousy or I'll wipe you off the face of the earth." Whoa.

In Joshua 24 it says, "You will not be able to serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgression or your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you after He has done good to you."

In the prophet Nahum 1:2, for some of you, yes, there is a book in the Bible called Nahum. Nahum 1:2, it's an amazing three chapter prophecy. It opens, that prophecy opens on this theme in verse 2, "A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; The LORD is avenging and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies." He's a jealous God, he's an avenging God. He avenges the violations of his glory and the violations of his holiness that take place.

Now look, he doesn't do it in a moment, he doesn't do it in a spiteful immediate reaction when it takes place, but God has a settled wrath, a settled jealousy against these things

and the accumulation of quadrillions of sins against these commandments does not diminish the fact that God will one day vindicate his glory against them. God is patient, God doesn't execute his jealousy immediately, but you can rest assured that he doesn't forget about it because to violate the glory of God is to violate the theme of the universe and there must be consequences for that eventually. There must be consequences. It's a frightening thought.

One more passage about his jealousy in Zephaniah 1:18 speaking of a time yet future to us, it says, "all the earth will be devoured In the fire of His jealousy, For He will make a complete end, Indeed a terrifying one, Of all the inhabitants of the earth."

You see, my friends, I just read you at least a half dozen texts of Scripture talking about the jealousy of God, the implications of it. There's a divine anger against the violations of his glory, that he will act on his jealousy and divine anger one day to destroy the world, 2 Peter 3 talks about it from a New Testament perspective. This is serious and we would be foolish to hide this from one another, we would be foolish to suppress this truth simply because it's not popular today and men don't want to hear it, and I would be a fool of a pastor not to bring it before you as it comes up in the texts that we are preaching. I would be a fool and you would be a fool to ignore it and push it aside and say, "Well, I don't agree with that." It doesn't matter if you agree with it. This is the way things are. This is who God is. It is revealed clearly in his inerrant, infallible, holy word and so we have to come to grips with this and it is right that we do so.

You know, I get a lot of joy out of preaching for a lot of different reasons, but there's a certain joy that I get out of simply being able to be a voice that gives sound to these things. It gives me pleasure to be able to give sound to the things that are contained in God's word knowing that it's something that much of the professing church and all of the world wants to suppress from us. I'm glad and privileged to be able to give voice to that in opposition to it and just trust the Lord to use it in any way he chooses to do. If he doesn't do anything with it, that's fine with me. At least we as a church can be faithful to the proclamation of his word and that's all I care about.

So we gladly come to God's word here to hear about his jealousy. We realize he is someone other, he is different, he is transcendent, he's jealous for his own glory, and we revel in the fact, we rejoice in the fact that we don't belong to the world that opposes that, we welcome what God has to say to his people in his word. So what's the meaning of this jealousy? I've shown you that this is a common theme in Scripture. What is the meaning of this divine jealousy? What does it mean that God is a jealous God? Remember, we're in our first point here. We need to understand the God of jealousy.

What does it mean, then? And going to quote from a couple of sources here, one very good lexical source says this, "Jealousy is God's settled indignation to the violation of His right to completely exclusive worship from His people." God is indignant when man violates his right to completely exclusive worship, and so there should be nothing in your heart that you cherish more than the God of your salvation. There should be nothing in your heart that competes with your affection for the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ himself

made that point clearly in Matthew 10. Let's look at that, Matthew 10:37. We've come here often and that's all right. It's a good thing. You'll understand this word from Jesus more clearly with the thought of divine jealousy in your mind. Matthew 10:37, Jesus said, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." In other words, what Jesus is saying is, "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not love someone else in a way that competes with the way that you love Me." There must be a love for Christ that is unique, that is exclusive, that is in your heart that is reserved only for him, moreso than your parents, moreso than your spouse, moreso than your children. Jesus goes on to say, "he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it."

This is the nature of the command of God on your life and, my friends, I've got to ask you has your heart responded to him like this? Or has religion simply been something that you did on Sunday, something that's just an adjunct to your life but Christ is not central to all of your affections and all of the reasons that you live and all that you love? Because, my friend, if you have something else in your heart that is more important to you than Christ, you are sinning greatly against God and under the threat of his jealousy and the vindication of his rights to exclusive worship. And so of course I'm going to ask you what's in your heart, of course I'm going to ask you to consider yourself in light of the jealousy of God.

Another Old Testament scholar says this in defining jealousy. He says, "Jealousy refers to that quality of His character that demands exclusive devotion to all that is just, right and fair. Jealousy is the anger that God directs against all that opposes Him. It is also the energy He expends in vindicating those who believe in the rightness of this quality and of His name." In other words, God is jealous against those who violate his glory in this way, and on the positive side for his children, God's jealousy means that he protects them as they seek to uphold his glory.

You can think about it this way. I know this is all kind of heavy. I don't apologize for that, I just recognize the reality of it. The jealousy of God, you can think about it this way by way of a weak parallel analogy, the jealousy of God is like a godly husband's protective love for his wife. A godly husband, a good husband, protects their relationship from any rivals that might come. If a man starts to court his wife or starts to show affections toward her, the godly man, the husband is there to protect it and to squelch that from the beginning because that wife is his. You could put it the same way going the other way with the wife toward the husband. There is an exclusivity about the marital relationship that the husband and wife protect from those that would seek to harm it, those that would inject adulterous intent into it, those that would pull the spouse away from another. Stated differently, the husband preserves, protects his wife through that which would threaten her. The godly man has a protective sense about his spouse.

Well, if we can understand that on a human level, well, then multiply it by infinity and recognize that God has a right to be jealous over the way that worship is offered to him, and to not see particularly his people, for God to be jealous that humanity would give the

worship that he deserves to him and him alone. That's right. That's appropriate. Just as it's appropriate for a husband or wife to approach a wayward spouse and say, "No, your affection belongs to me. You're not at liberty to step outside of marriage to look for emotional or physical satisfaction with someone else. That's not right and I'm going to protect the relationship." Well, how much more the God, the holy God of the universe saying, "I will protect the worship that is given to Me."

Now just one little side explanation about the jealousy of God. We should not, we should not think about God responding emotionally in the moment to everything that all of the violations of this, and at one moment he's placid and content and then he sees someone bowing down to a statue of Mary and he gets all fired up about it. Don't think about it that way. That's not the way it works. God, the essence of God does not respond to human provocation. He is above and beyond it all. Phil Johnson explains it this way, "God's jealousy is a deliberate and unchanging contempt for everything that challenges His rightful place as Sovereign God. It is a steadfast loathing of everything that would pretend to rival Him." So this is a settled aspect of the nature of God, not something that responds to offense. This is a settled aspect of the character and nature of God, he's jealous for his own glory, he protects it, and one day he will act to vindicate his glory when he brings human history to a close.

So God is a jealous God, understand that, understand that he is protective of his own glory. And this commandment, the second commandment, helps us measure the nature of his jealousy. Watch this. God is jealous even against false worship that is offered in his own name. People that use images in their worship, God rejects that, God is indignant against that even if they think in their mind they're doing that which pleases him because it's not offered, it's not worship offered according to his revelation. And so ultimately this text, the second commandment, requires us to worship only in the way that God prescribes. For those of you that study theology, we're talking about the regulative principle here, only that which is commanded is permitted in the worship of God.

Now we've said throughout this series that we need to let Scripture interpret Scripture. Scripture interprets the 10 Commandments for us. Well, Jesus gives us help in understanding this in Matthew 15. Look back to Matthew 15 with me. Matthew 15:8-9. As you're turning there, take a moment, take a deep breath, reset your mind, reset your patience. We see Jesus speaking to this principle in verse 8. Starting in verse 7 he says, "You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 'This people honors Me with their lips,' in other words, the outward form of their worship was supposedly in honor of the true God and the things that they said were supposedly in respect and reverence to him but it wasn't true worship. It was wrong and it was sinful. Jesus goes on quoting from the Old Testament, quoting from Isaiah, I believe. He says, "but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men." He says, "They are worshiping Me according to man-made doctrine. They are worshiping Me according to man-made traditions and that is not acceptable. That is sinful. Their hearts are far from Me because they're worshiping according to their own ideas and desires rather than what God has revealed in his holy word." This is really really important. This is really really important and, my friend, it means, and I say this for the benefit of some

of you that are just visiting here as, you know, you contemplate your home churches in all of this, you know, it means that we have to step back and not just simply follow the flow of whatever place we happen to be in but can I discern biblical reasons, a biblical justification for the things that I see happening in my church, and especially in the public worship services that are given. You know, for us, we sing, Ephesians 5. We read Scripture, Timothy said, "Give attention to the public reading of Scripture." We proclaim God's word because it says in 2 Timothy 4, "Preach the word." We pray because God commands us to pray, Jesus said, "Pray then in this way." That's it, you know? That's what we do and that's a brief survey of the biblical reasons why we do it. You know, and I'm not saying we do it perfectly, I'm not even saying we do it well, but at least there's a biblical reason for what we do, that we're trying to honor. By contrast, understand, my friends, that unbiblical worship with made up stuff from men is false worship and it's dangerous. It leads people astray.

The author Philip Ryken in a work on the 10 Commandments that I appreciate called "Written in Stone," he said this and I quote, "The crucifix, the icon, the drama, and the dance, these things are not aids to worship. They make true worship all but impossible. In a visual age, we need to be all the more careful not to look at the image but to listen to the word." That's a great quote. That's worth the price of that book, which was given to me. It just occurred to me. But I would go out and buy this book twice just for the sake of that quote.

These are not casual issues that arise to us from the second commandment. These things take a great spotlight from God and spotlight the nature of what passes for worship in so many churches: fog machines, lights, dimming the lights, raising the lights, all the emotional manipulation that goes in with that, interpretive dance, drama teams. The second commandment puts a light on all of that and says, "Where do you find that in My word? Where do you find that commanded in the New Testament? Why this neglect of the preaching of the word for the sake of visual stimulation?" And it frightens me, it pains me to say those things but they must be said. These are the implications of the second commandment and the jealousy of God and so we need to understand the God of jealousy.

Second point here this morning as time moves on, the second point this morning: fear the God of jealousy. Fear the God of jealousy. Let's take a closer look at that warning that takes place there in verse 5. Exodus 20:5. Fear the God of jealousy. In verse 5 it says, "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me." Visiting the iniquities of the fathers is a way of referring to punishment. God punishes people for sinning against him, and this idea is found elsewhere. If you look just a few chapters back at Exodus, I have some other passages but for the sake of time I'll just point you to this one in Exodus 34:7. The point of what's being said here is that there are consequences to our sins and they effect other people, and when churches sin against this commandment like they do, there are far-reaching consequences far beyond what happens on a Sunday morning when they do whatever it is that they're doing. The consequences are far-reaching. It's like throwing a rock into a lake

and watching the ripples go far beyond the point of impact. We must understand this and fear the results of it.

In Exodus 34, this is where God reveals his glory to Moses and he speaks about his nature. He says in verse 7, "[I keep] lovingkindness for thousands, [He] forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." You know, I don't know if they're in the room at the moment, but I have grandchildren that are in this room, I have children that are in this room. This sobered me up and to realize that what I do has consequences for them, the way that I live has consequences for them, especially in my position. Are you kidding me? This frightens me. I'm going to be held to a stricter judgment, James 3, and beyond that also something of my example is going to have impact on them. Wow. I don't want to trifle with this. I don't want to mess around. I want to be squarely within the four corners of the word of God as much as he enables me to do that, and not step outside of it because who knows what the unintended consequences of sinning against him like that might be on the ones that I love, my own flesh and blood. Well, do you know what? You all ought to be thinking about your own walks with Christ in that same way.

Let's stay within the context of the verse and then expand out. God saying, "I'll visit the iniquities of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me." This is a way of saying there is punishment. There are adverse consequences that come from false worship. And you could just equally say there are adverse consequences from not worshipping at all, which is another form of false worship, but just to be indifferent and cold to the things of God, you know, this invites his punishment. And here's what God is saying here in this commandment to us, in this explanation about it. Beloved, I say this with love and sympathy but with a sense of urgency as well. When parents engage in false worship, when parents neglect true worship, it poisons their children. I'm talking about lifestyle patterns, I'm not speaking to people who, you know, they're away for Labor Day weekend. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking about patterns of life, sins against God, to understand what parents do affects their children and when parents sin, it poisons their children. We see this in the history of the Old Testament. Early kings built images and false altars and subsequent generations followed in their steps until they were taken off into captivity as discipline from God. And so that's just a quick illustration biblically speaking, but you parents, oh, and you young parents especially where you're setting the mold, you're casting the die for what's going to come after you. You have a high responsibility in light of God's jealousy and for those of you that your children are grown, perhaps you look back with some regret on things that you did or didn't do and you see the effects of what I'm about to describe. The sobering reality is this, is that our children are adversely affected by the sins that we commit. Even divine wrath can come upon them. And just think about it in this way, think about it this way: children of those who have abused drugs or alcohol suffer the evil consequences as a result of their parental sins. They feel the effects of that. Divorce has long-lasting consequences on children. Whatever the reasons for the divorce may have been, it affects them going forward. I have people that are close to me and their parents were divorced decades ago and there is still the pain of that even after the parents are

gone. They feel the affects of that. Angry parents often produce angry children, don't they? Parents that are casual about worship, maybe they'll show up on Sunday, maybe they won't, maybe they'll be gone for six weeks and bring their kids back for a couple of weeks and back and forth.

The likelihood, humanly speaking, of producing a child that fears God with that kind of parental leadership is virtually nil because the children learn from the parents' example. "Do you know what? This isn't that important." In fact, I can tell you that that was exactly how my mind worked as a young man before I became a Christian. Exactly how my mind worked. My dad, bless his heart, I miss him to this day after 30-some years. My dad was not a churchgoing man. My mom took me to church. My mom took me, you know, week by week. She was pretty faithful about it. As a young boy, you know, she put me in the car, we'd drive to church. Great. Good stuff. And as a child, you kind of respond to that, you learn some things, but as I entered into my early teen years, I observed something. My dad wasn't going and I drew from that that church, God, the Bible, was for women and young children, and as a result of that, I made the decision that I was no longer going to go because I was following in the footsteps of my father at that time, and it was only a miracle of regenerating grace in my heart many years later when the Lord saved me that that pattern was broken. But my dad's example conditioned me against the things of Christ and against the things of God's word. This is the nature of things. A family environment of sin often predisposes those children to repetition in their own lives. It certainly was true of me. And that kind of sin invites the long-lasting judgment of God. That is reason to fear the God of jealousy.

We really do need to kind of think through these things as parents, as grandparents, and to just take the painful time to say, "What kind of example am I setting? What kind of example have I set? O God, I see how unfaithful I have been. Have mercy on my miserable soul. I repent, Lord. In the brief time I have left, Lord, I want to live differently. I want to show the change that says I'll respond to Your word when it strikes my conscience." And to the extent that, you know, somehow our children follow what we've tried to set for them, we take no credit for it and we just say, "God, thank You for being gracious upon my most imperfect example. Thank You that my children are with me following Christ." You know, whatever, you get the idea here. We're just humbled before this.

Let me make a brief statement about something else. There are some people in some areas, you find this in homeschool circles sometimes, people that teach that there are generational sins and demons that children get from their parents and they can't escape them no matter what. That's not true. That is false teaching that simply leads to superstitious fear. It's not talking about that. This text does not say that the children are irretrievably doomed. It doesn't say that at all. Look at the very words of the text. As you read in verse 5, "visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me," but the sentence goes on and there's a contrast, "but showing lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments." This is a warning to parents not to engage in idolatry but it holds out the promise of hope to children who would repent of their own sins, who would reject

their parental examples, and embrace Christ, and embrace truth. It's a promise of grace and truth upon those who would merely repent and put their faith in the true and living God through faith in Christ. So there's nothing that seals the doom irretrievably of future generations, otherwise we'd be wasting our time preaching the gospel if God wasn't going to bless it to the salvation of people who had grown up in sin. No, this passage, this second commandment is a warning to parents not to engage in idolatry and when their children agree with the sin and adopt it as their own, they feel the effects of it. But the children are not doomed to follow a path that they want to avoid. They're not forced to follow it. God doesn't force anyone to sin. The sin comes from the willing desire of their own rebel heart.

So we see that there's a way to break the effect of that sin and it brings us to our third point here this morning. Thirdly: trust the God of jealousy. Trust the God of jealousy. Those who honor the jealousy of God will find that he protects them. This is the positive side of this command. This is the wonderful aspect of the jealousy of God. Verse 6, he shows "lovingkindness to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments." His jealousy becomes a source of comfort for those of us that belong to his family, again, through faith in Christ. God will spare us from that cycle of sin; when we turn from sin, when we trust in him, when we follow him, God spares us the cycle. He delivers those who repent and follow Christ. He takes them not only out of judgment, he not only breaks the power of sin, he delivers them from this cycle and the pervasive impact of parental sins, he breaks it and replaces it with grace, replaces it with the transforming work of the Holy Spirit whose fruit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

One lexical source says this, "Jealousy has both a negative and a positive effect. In a negative sense, it brings punishment to sin. In a positive sense, it brings God's blessing on those who worship Him alone according to the manner He has established." My friends, when Christ saved you, I'm speaking to my brothers and sisters in Christ now, when Christ saved you, he broke the power of the influence of your parents upon you. You are not doomed. You do not have to continue in the ways of your father. You don't have to follow in the ways of your controlling mother. You don't have to be like them, and I can say that from personal experience. When I, you know, I hate thinking about what I was like as a young man and I get no satisfaction out of describing it but I say this only to help you, for your sake. Before I became a Christian, I was like my dad. I was profane. I was godless. I was angry. And that marked who I was and I was feeling the effects of having grown up under his roof. I don't say this to dishonor the man. I love him. To this day I love him. I'm not dishonoring my father, I'm describing facts. That's who he was, that's who I was. But then, but then, but then as a young man, Christ saved me. But God being rich in mercy caused me to be born again. God made me alive in Christ Jesus and he changed me. Not that I became any model of perfection, but he broke the profanity in my heart. He broke the godlessness of it. He broke the anger of it. Not that I've never been angry since then. Not that I've never sinned in any of those ways since then. I'm not saying that but the whole principle of life changed, the whole direction was different so that I'm now a man that is totally different than what my father was in those ways.

God spared me the visitation of the iniquities of my father. He showed grace to me and that's what he does to everyone that trust the God of jealousy, that trusts Christ, so that if we interpret Scripture with Scripture, we learn a key lesson. Turn to Ezekiel 18 as we try to bring this plane in for a landing here. Ezekiel 18:19-20, "you say, 'Why should the son,'" Ezekiel 18:19-20, "you say, 'Why should the son not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity?'" God answers the question, "When the son has practiced justice and righteousness and has observed all My statutes and done them, he shall surely live. The person who sins," verse 20, "will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself." God does not arbitrarily impose the sins of parents on their children but there is this environmental effect that goes forward if there's not repentance and faith.

So what's the answer for you today here? Maybe you realize you're like your parents like I was and you don't want to be that way anymore, what's the key for you? You need to repudiate those sins. You need to repent of them. It's not dishonoring to your parents to say to God, "God, I see the sinful way that my parents were. I see its effect on me and I don't want to be that way anymore. I repent. O Christ, have mercy on me the sinner! I'm responsible for my own sin and I'm mirroring what my parents have done but this is me, I've chosen this on my own. God, have mercy on me the sinner!" And in the language of Luke 18:14, Jesus looks on that kind of repentant call for mercy and says, "That one goes away justified." Mercy is available from this God who is a God of jealousy. It's the promise that God makes for everyone who believes in him.

Look at the end of Exodus 20:6 one last time. Look at the promise that is attached to this. God in his jealousy at the same time shows forth an unfolding of his loyal love to his own. In verse 6 he says, "but showing lovingkindness," loyal love, "to thousands," for the sins of the fathers last for three or four generations, the love of God extends for thousands of generations, so expansive and deep is his love, "to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

So, my friends, as we come to the end of this most inadequate treatment of the second commandment, true worship requires you to repent and to come to Christ alone, forsake your sin, forsake your self-righteousness, forsake your indifference to God and his word, admit it freely and come to the Christ who offers forgiveness to everyone who believes in him. He graciously forgives your past sin. I know there are some, it's kind of a rare trait, some that just groan under the weight of their past sin. I was talking with someone not long ago and how awful it felt to realize what their sinful lives had been in the past, and just to be able to say to you as I said to them, "Oh, but my friend, if any man is in Christ, he's a new creature. Behold, the old things have passed away. New things have come. God doesn't hold your old sins against you. He's given you new life in Christ out of His love and grace and mercy, and He embraces you as His own child." What a great God! What an incomprehensibly magnificent God who defends his glory and yet shows grace upon those who believe. I'm glad he's like that, aren't you?

And so in Christ you can find forgiveness, in Christ you can find deliverance, in Christ the one who perfectly kept this second commandment you find the righteousness that God requires from those who would know him. My friend, God is a jealous God and I ask you what are you doing with that? What have you done with that looking back and what are you going to do with it going forward?

Let's pray.

Father, we honor You in the greatness of Your being. We pray that You would guard us from false worship. Help us to honor You, worship You as You have commanded us to do and that You would show lovingkindness to the generations of those who come after us and that You would show mercy, O God, show mercy on those who walked in with hard hearts. Father, may the washing of their souls with the water of Your word, Father, may it bring them to new life in Christ under the power and influence of Your great Holy Spirit. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

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