

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20:4-6

The necessity for this commandment arises out of the fact that man has an instinct to worship. He cannot escape worship. He will worship something.

Having graven images inevitably led away from Jehovah. There was no possibility of keeping the first commandment if the second was broken in the least degree. Why men should have made images and called them gods is a mystery. We cannot but wonder who was the first man to make an image and why he made it. But that image-making, once established, should continue in spite of all attempts to destroy it is easy enough to understand. Tradition, habit or training will account for most things in this way.

The second commandment naturally falls into two parts:

I. The Divine Prohibition.

The commandment forbids setting up an image of religious use or worship. It forbids all idolatrous representations of deity. To set up an image to represent God is a debasement of deity. What greater disparagement to God than to represent the infinite God by that which is finite, the living God by that which is without life, and the Maker of all by a thing which is made?

To make a true image of God is impossible. God is a spiritual essence. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." John 4:24. Being a Spirit He is invisible. "Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire." Deuteronomy 4:15. But we must worship God according to His nature. His nature is spiritual, therefore, we must worship Him spiritually--spirit-wise, not image-wise; for only what is spiritual in us can worship that which is spiritual above us.

To worship an image is absurd and irrational. The workman is better than the work. "He who hath builded the house hath more honor than the house." Hebrews 3:3. It is an absurd thing to bow down to the king's picture, when the king himself is present. It is more absurd to bow down to an image of God, when God Himself is present everywhere.

To worship an image is unlawful. Image-worship is expressly forbidden in the scriptures. It is also contrary to the practices of the saints of old.

II. The Divine Reason.

"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 shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments." Exodus 20:5-6.

1. Jehovah is a jealous God.

2. The Law of hereditary forbids it.

(1) The merciless aspect of heredity.

Everybody knows that there are hereditary diseases. How carefully the medical examiners in our Life Insurance Companies question the applicant touching ancestral maladies. As certainly as there are hereditary diseases, there are also hereditary vices.

(2) The merciful aspect of heredity.

While God visits the penalty of bad fathers upon the children of the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him, He also visits the reward of good fathers upon their children. "Showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments."