

The Second Commandment: Idolatry

The Way We Worship

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Given 15-Mar-08; Sermon #872

The previous sermon of this series on the Ten Commandments covered the keeping of the first commandment as having to do with the worship of the true God—the Creator, the Sustainer, the Ruler, the Provider of this universe, and the Source of this Christian way of life. Making sure that He is the Source of one's values is of primary importance to you and me.

My concern here is about the effect of a misguided worship. One effect is that without the true worship of the true God, the standards—the ideals of conduct, of moral, ethical, and spiritual areas which are heavily influenced by Satan—are then left to that of human experience. By comparison to God, human experience is shallow, fallible, and competitively and selfishly lived.

I want you to turn with me to Romans 1, and I am going to specifically concentrate for a little bit here on verse 28. As we begin, I want you to understand that Romans 1 is giving us a brief overview of why this world is in such a disgusting, disastrously stressful mess. It says this:

Romans 1:28 And even as they [the people that Paul was speaking about here] did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient [or "not appropriate," or "not fitting"].

The *Revised English Version* of the Bible translates part of that verse this way: "Thus, because they have not seen fit to acknowledge God, He has given them up to their own depraved way of thinking, and this leads them to break all rules of conduct."

Another translation translated one part of that this way: "He gave them over to their worthless dispositions," that is, their inclinations to do this or that which God considers to be worthless.

The context of the entire chapter gives us a brief overview of the effect of mankind turning its collective back on the Creator God. The term "reprobate mind" in the *King James Version* indicates a mind that is devoid of proper judgment. When God's judgment against Adam and Eve went into effect, mankind's choices in daily life became

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almost entirely based on human experience.

These verses show specifically, in a couple of areas, what happens when one leaves the true Source out of one's life. What we see here are effects, and they are given in very succinct statements that are delivered—"This, this, this, and this occurred." I am going to give you three things that I think will illustrate, maybe a little bit more vividly and easily understood, what has happened. These are my own ideas.

The first illustration is this: I think everybody is familiar with pinball machines. Well, mankind becomes like a pinball, wandering aimlessly from one crashing experience after another.

Another one: Mankind becomes like a bull in a china shop, breaking things at every turn, causing an incredible amount of destruction and pain without ever being able to pull himself together and thus creates a lasting way of a non-peaceful life.

Another one: Man becomes like an animal in a jungle, competing viciously in order that he survives, and eats before he is eaten. That is the way mankind is.

That expression, "God gave them up," is like God saying, "Okay, you can do whatever you want." That is the way it may seem on the surface, but it is not exactly what it is, because what the apostle Paul is expressing here is a judicial act. Think of God sitting on His throne, and He comes and gives a sentence, and the sentence is this: "I sentence you to experience the full effect of your failure to seek Me. You will feel the effects of your stupid choices."

What we are seeing here is a punishment that God arrived at because they would not seek Him and obey His law. He did not really say, "Oh, it's okay for you to sin." That was one of the effects, but it was really not what Paul was getting at. For man to feel the effects of what he does is a punishment. What we see listed in this chapter are the consequences of a purely secular mind. In brief, this description shows that when God is removed, or He removes Himself, humanity not only loses its godliness, but also even loses true humanness. This degeneration occurs because men are not seeking God.

I want you to contrast this with Jesus Christ. In John 5, we see the contrast between Him and all other men.

John 5:30 I can of my own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not my own will, but the will of the Father which has sent me.

What a difference! Man does not seek God. Man rejects God. Man suppresses the knowledge of God even though it is shown to him clearly.

John 8:29 And he that sent me is with me: the Father has not left me alone; for I do always those things that please him.

That is seeking God—seeking to be like God, and always doing what He says. Let us ask a question. How can one discern truth in moral and spiritual areas if one already has the wrong source and is not consistently seeking the right one? One cannot.

The following occasion took place at a Feast of Tabernacles. Maybe in that sense it is interesting as well.

John 7:15 And the Jews marveled, saying, How knows this man letters, having never learned?

Now, obviously He learned. That is a poor translation. They meant that He never studied at one of the rabbinical institutions for priests and so forth. Well, Jesus did not go to those things. He was taught directly by the Father because He always sought the Father. The sought Father never left Him alone. The Father was always with Him. The Father was inspiring His mind and helping Him. You see, that same circumstance is open to you and me. "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do." If we seek Him and submit to His will, we are never left alone. If we are never left alone, how much does that increase our opportunity to make right choices, to make right judgments? That was, in a sense, the secret of Jesus' success. But let us go on.

John 7:16-17 Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine [or teaching] is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself.

He shall know concerning the doctrine, concerning the teaching. That is the subject here. If God is with us, we will get it. We will grasp the teaching.

John 7:18-21 He that speaks of himself seeks his own glory: but he that seeks his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him. Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keeps the law?

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Why go you about to kill me? The people answered and said, You have a demon: who goes about to kill you? Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work, and you all marvel.

These peoples' judgment was so affected by their lack of attention to God, their failure to seek God, and their failure to submit to Him, that they could not even discern their murderous intent. Jesus said, "Hey! You're here to kill Me." Of course, it was not long after this that they did kill Him, but their intent was not even in their awareness at all. That is how far they were from God. This confrontation that we have here in John can help us to see how very wide the gap is between people, whose main source of values was human experience, and Jesus, whose Source was God.

Let us begin to take a look at the second commandment more closely. The purpose of that introduction is just a reminder that if you do not have the right source, you cannot make the right choices; that is, those choices that will be in alignment with God.

We are going to look at something in Ezekiel 20 that is aimed at Israel and Judah both, generally, in a historical setting. From this we will begin to see the deceptive nature of idolatry, and especially the second commandment.

Ezekiel 20:13-14 But the house of Israel rebelled against me in the wilderness: they walked not in my statutes, and they despised my judgments, which if a man do, he shall even live in them; and my Sabbaths they greatly polluted: then I said, I would pour out my fury upon them in the wilderness, to consume them. But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, in whose sight I brought them out.

Ezekiel 20:16 Because they despised my judgments, and walked not in my statutes, but polluted my Sabbaths: for their heart went after their idols.

If we would go through the whole chapter we would see more concisely that this chapter sums up that both Israel and Judah went into captivity and scattering primarily as a result of idolatry and Sabbath-breaking. Do not forget that the Jews in John 7 could not even see the murderous intent that was in their attitude. Now do you think the Israelites saw that their idolatry and their Sabbath-breaking was going to take them into captivity, that there would be a punishment that eventually would come upon them as a result of that?

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It is very interesting that idolatry and Sabbath-breaking are both linked, and I think that the breaking of either one of those commandments—whether it is the first or the fourth—is going to lead directly to the breaking of the other one.

Let us see Ezekiel's thought a little bit further and a bit more specifically in Jeremiah 25. We are going to see something here that is aimed specifically at Judah. Jeremiah, who was a contemporary of Ezekiel, is the one who makes this statement.

Jeremiah 25:3-7 From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, even unto this day [the day in which he was speaking], that is the three and twentieth year, the word of the LOORD has come unto me, and I have spoken unto you, rising early and speaking; but you have not hearkened. And the LOORD has sent unto you all his servants the prophets [These are people besides Jeremiah.], rising early and sending them, but you have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear. They said, Turn you again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the LOORD has given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever: And go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt. [There would be no punishment.] Yet you have not hearkened unto me, says the LOORD; that you might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt.

This must have been a period of time in which God flooded the land of Judea with prophets in order to make a witness against the people there so that they could never come to Him and say, "Hey! You didn't give us any warning."

In this day of mass and rapid communication, God would probably not have to do this. He would flood the nation with radio and television, let us say, or over the Internet, using the electronic means to bring the same charges against us that were brought against Judah. But Jeremiah reports that nothing changed in the attitude and the conduct of the people. They never stopped their idolatrous practice.

Now what is it that, in a way, is almost unique about idolatry and Sabbath-breaking? When I say idolatry, I am including the first four commandments, and of course the fourth commandment specifically deals with Sabbath-breaking. Do you know that it is almost impossible for the carnal mind to make the connection between idolatry and its punishment? It is almost impossible for the person to make a connection between his Sabbath-breaking and his punishment.

Now if one breaks others of the commandments, like "You shall not murder," immediately there is a witness that a sin has been committed. If a person lies or steals, the effect usually occurs pretty quickly. But let somebody break the Sabbath, and it is almost impossible to tell, "Hey! I am being punished because I did not keep the Sabbath."

The same thing is true of idolatry. A person can bow down before an idol, let us say, and no lightning appears out of the sky. There is not a clap of thunder, and it is almost impossible for that person to make the connection between his idolatry and the punishment that comes. This is why God points out these two as being the major causes of their scattering and their going into captivity.

He pointed it out verbally through His prophets so that the people would get the idea that when Jeremiah said, "Hey! You have been breaking the Sabbath, and that is why the punishment is coming." Or "Hey! You have been bowing down to idols, and that is why the punishment is coming." They would have never thought of that. But if a person had murdered and the authorities came to get him, it would very quickly come to mind that the punishment was coming because he murdered somebody.

We cannot really say that the commandment is devious, but it is much more difficult to make the proper judgment about sins committed in those areas as being the cause. So God had to flood the country with prophets in order to tell them, "You are going into captivity because you broke the Sabbath." "You are going into captivity because you are committing idolatry left and right."

We ought to be able to understand this most important principle. When we break the first commandment, it is this that leads to the breaking of the other nine. It is just "cause and effect." So understand that there is probably going to be a measure of idolatry in every sin.

There is also something here that is quite important, and I will read verse 6 again.

Jeremiah 25:6 And go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands.

In verse 7, it appears again.

Jeremiah 25:7 Yet you have not hearkened [listened] unto me, says the LORD; that you might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to

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you own hurt.

That statement would tend to make us think right off the bat of an idol or a statue that one would bow down to. That is certainly included, because those idols, those statues, had to be made by the works of their hands. They would carve or sculpt something, but do not limit it to that, because that statement—"the works of your hands"—also includes the source from which the thought came to do this thing. It includes things that are in the mind. It is the mind that produces the works of the hands.

What I am doing here is to help you to see that idolatry includes things that may not be the bowing down to an idol. You know that. Idolatry includes bowing down mentally to an idea, to a concept, or to a thought. In the spirit of God's law, anything like this that comes between us and God warps our thinking, warps our judgment, and causes us to make wrong choices, and is just as much an idol as a statue that has been made to bow down before, and would be included within the statement, "the works of your hands."

Isaiah 40 contains a description of the Creator God, and it is challenging you and me to compare Him with anything else, any idea or concept, that we might have the potential to bow down before, whether literally or figuratively bowing down. As we begin to read, I want you to notice especially to whom this is addressed.

Isaiah 40:9 O Zion, that brings good tidings, get you up into the high mountains; O Jerusalem, that brings good tidings, lift up your voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!

Do you understand to whom this is being addressed? Who is it that brings good tidings and good news to the world? Who is it that brings the gospel to the world? This is addressed directly to the church.

Isaiah 40:10 Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him.

Who does that remind you of? It is someone who is going to come not many years in the future, and His reward is with Him, and He is going to rule when He comes. Do you see that this is being pointed directly at the church?

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Isaiah 40:11 He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.

Is there any doubt in your mind who that is?

Isaiah 40:12 Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?

Do you see that he is speaking here figuratively? It is not that God Himself is literally doing these things, but figuratively. These are descriptions of His power, His ability to do those things. Can anything that man can figure, determine, draw, or conceive in his mind, do those things?

Isaiah 40:13-14 Who has directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counselor has taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and showed to him the way of understanding?

Who was intelligent enough, smart enough, lived long enough, and had enough wisdom to be able to teach God?

Isaiah 40:15-18 Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold, he takes up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering. All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare unto him?

There is our challenge. Is there anybody like God?

Isaiah 40:19-24 The workman melts a graven image, and the goldsmith spreads it over with gold, and casts silver chains. He that is so impoverished that he has no oblation chooses a tree that will not rot; he seeks unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved [That

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is, that it will not be tottered around, but will be well anchored]. Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he that sits upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretches out the heavens as a curtain and spreads them out as a tent to dwell in: That brings the princes to nothing; he makes the judges of the earth as vanity. Yes, they shall not be planted; yes, they shall not be sown: yes, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble.

If God takes stock, who is going to stand before Him?

Isaiah 40:25-27 To whom then will you liken me, or shall I be equal? says the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high, and behold who has created these things, that brings out their host by number: he calls them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one fails. Why say you, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?

Judah and Israel are saying, "God does not see. He is not watching. He cannot keep track of all of us." But God is challenging—"Oh, yes I can!"

Isaiah 40:28 Have you not known? Have you not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth faints not, neither is weary? There is no searching of his understanding.

He never even goes to sleep. That is something we cannot comprehend at all. The next couple of verses are really encouraging.

Isaiah 40:29 He gives power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increases strength.

The idea here is that God calls the weak of the earth, but He can strengthen them to be able to make the kind of witness before the people that will glorify God, and so we should not worry about being able to represent God, and not fear that He is not able to give us the strength.

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Isaiah 40:30-31 Even the youth shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: But they that wait upon the LORD [meaning those who serve the LORD, like a person who waits on tables] shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

The natural mind, at least partly because it is so physically oriented and is tied to the five senses, cries out for something physical to "help" in worshipping God. But Isaiah 40 is telling us that there is nothing in man's imagination that can measure up, because this requires faith and a spiritual connection to God for man to come up with the right concept.

Because of this in-built weakness in man, any time that a man comes up with an image of God other than the true One, this person will draw his own boundary, and those boundaries will limit God. If I can put it this way, God is far bigger than we can ever imagine. He is bigger in His thinking, bigger in His power. Anything we come up with is going to be woefully short of the reality of what He is.

Did you ever notice that every description that God gives of Himself are of His attributes? I am talking about the qualities of His mind, the qualities of His character, and so when God gives descriptions of Himself, He says, "I am merciful." "I am kind." "I am gracious." "I am long-suffering." "I am abundant in goodness and truth." How can that be put on a piece of paper? How can somebody draw that? How can somebody paint that? How can somebody sculpt that into an image? It is impossible.

There is only one way we can adequately come to the place where we begin to see the edges of what He is in His mercy, in His kindness, in His grace, in His patience, in His gifts, and in all those other things. Do you know what it is? It is by faith in experiencing life with Him as a part of our lives. It is only then that we have the opportunity to worship Him as He wants to be worshipped. He wants to be worshipped for what He really is: the qualities of His mind, the qualities of His character, the qualities of His wisdom, of His understanding, and of the hope that He is able to generate in us, and on and on it goes.

In II Timothy 3, it is interesting that God gave us a little bit of a description of the times that we live in. Paul wrote:

II Timothy 3:1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

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II Timothy 3:5 Having a form of godliness [describing the religion of the times in which we live], but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

What God has given us here is a brief overview, a little, tiny description, that in the last days there is going to be a religion that has a form of Christianity, but it also will contain a denial of His power. In other words, what we see out there is a religion in which God is supposedly worshipped, but that God is limited by those who are worshipping Him within those religions. That is idolatry because the denial will not allow Him into their lives. They carry around the wrong concept.

The reason I wanted to turn to this verse is because it brings us around to a cultural situation similar to what we read in Ezekiel 20 and Jeremiah 25. Those people thought they were worshipping God. We will see a little bit more of that in just a minute.

What we have got to think here is that since we have a situation around us where there is a form of godliness—in other words, there is a measure of truth there—but in the minds of those worshipping in that religion, they are putting limitations on God. That limitation is in their minds. They deny His power in the way that they live. You see, intellectually they would say, "Oh, I believe in God the Creator," but what happens whenever they try to put that into practice in their lives? Brethren, they cannot even keep the Sabbath. They will not keep the Sabbath. That is a denial of God's power. Do you know what they say? They say that God does not care. They are never going to be able to make the connection between their sin of Sabbath-breaking and the punishment that comes down on their head until God reveals it to them, and that is going to happen in the Tribulation and in the Day of the Lord.

As we come toward Passover, we need to be brutally honest and ask ourselves if we are being affected by the Christianity of this world. Are we putting limitations upon God—limitations that are in our minds? Do we limit God in areas such as healing? I am talking not just physical healing. I am talking spiritual healing, because, in a sense, they are one and the same thing.

How about in our marriage, in our husband and wife relationship? How about in our childrearing? Do we use God's system of rearing children? How about in tithing? Do we fail to do these things because we are fearful, and thus denying the power of God? Are we refusing to humble ourselves to trust Him? The basis of idolatry, other than ignorance, is that self-willed man refuses to surrender himself to worship God in the way God commands. That is the essence of the breaking of the second commandment. Man

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refuses to worship God in the way God commands. This is different from the first commandment. The first commandment is broken when we use some other source than God for the conduct of our lives. The second commandment is broken when we refuse to worship God in the way He commands.

Worship is our response to God, and it occurs every day in the attitudes and in the way we live our life. It is not just something that is limited to Sabbath and Holy Days. It includes such things as prayer, Bible study, and our diligence at work. It includes things like not stealing or lying, or worshiping God through tithing. Did you know that tithing is an act of worshipping God? We can come up with all kinds of justifications for not doing what God says to do.

Let us go to Exodus 20 where the commandments are given.

Exodus 20:4-6 You shall not make unto you 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. You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD your 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 [meaning thousands of generations] that love me, and keep my commandments.

Many of you do not perceive the difference between the first and second commandment, so I will repeat what I said earlier. The first commandment stresses the uniqueness and the distinctiveness of the Creator God. Just remember Isaiah 40. It draws attention to our obligation to the One without which there would be no life, no hope whatever. He is the One who is the Source of truth, right values and standards that will produce right relationships and peaceful prosperity so that life is not merely lived, but has the potential to be lived with great peaceful joy and accomplishment; thus the first commandment deals with what we worship.

The second commandment deals with the way we worship, and God points out that the Father and the Son are unique individuals who come into our lives from beyond the physical realm. They are absolutely holy, pure, undefiled, uncreated, and eternal. By contrast, an idol is someone or something of any other realm that we might imagine and assign a value to in place of them—the Father and the Son.

In John 4 is the episode in which Jesus is talking to the Samaritan woman at the well. He says this to her after she says to Him that her fathers worshipped in this mountain,

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but that the Jews worshipped in Jerusalem. Jesus replied to that by saying the following:

John 4:23-24 But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeks such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

There is the way He wants to be worshipped. He wants to be worshipped "in spirit and in truth." Can anybody here think of an idol that man creates and makes—the work of his own hands—that can think like that, that is true to what God really is? No way! God has to be worshipped in spirit and in truth.

So, the second commandment covers God's spirituality, and that is the way we have to worship God. The most obvious aspect of it is that it therefore positively prohibits the use of any physical help or aid in worshipping the invisible spiritual God by faith. To worship God in spirit requires faith. Anything physical is just that. It is physical, and it is an aid, and it is going to lead in the wrong direction.

John 1:18 No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him.

Are you aware that this same Jesus in John 6:63 said, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life"? Moses is speaking here in Deuteronomy 4:

Deuteronomy 4:15-20 Take you therefore good heed unto yourselves; for you saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spoke unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: lest you corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flies in the air, the likeness of any thing that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth: and lest you lift up your eyes unto heaven, and when you see the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, should be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD your God has divided unto all nations under the whole heaven. But the LORD has taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance, as you are this day.

Can you see that absolutely anything that any person who has ever lived would come up with as a physical representation of God would be a lie? God cannot be worshipped through a lie. Do not think that this is minor, because in II Thessalonians 2, where it is talking about the Beast and the False Prophet being in the Temple of God and so forth, it says that those who are going to worship have been "roped in" [my words, not God's], that they should be a lie.

As we turn to Numbers 33, it might be helpful to remember that in the Holy of Holies there was no representation of God whatsoever. The object (if I can put it that way) most commonly used in biblical description for worshipping God, or indicating that worship of God is taking place, is an altar. But even here it is very interesting. You can check this out later in Exodus 20:20-26. God forbid that all the altars, except for the brazen altar that was set up in front of the Tabernacle and then later the Temple, had to be made out of nothing more than dirt stacked up to make something they could burn on, set a grate on top, or made of uncut stones. It could not have even the sculpting of the stones in any way.

God is reminding you and me—in even such a thing like the altar, insisting that it be made out of dirt or uncut stone—that everything we touch with our hands we defile. God does not want to be worshipped by people with defiled hands. Hands signify work. God has to be worshipped in spirit by means of faith: faith in His character; faith in what He really is; faith in His grace; faith in His kindness; faith in His mercy; faith in the fact that He says, "I will never leave you or forsake you"; faith that He says "I will hear your prayers. I will respond at the right time and the right place for your benefit or for somebody else's benefit that you are praying for. I will follow through." With that kind of an attitude we can worship God and keep the second commandment, because our dirty hands are not creating a concept of Him that is untrue.

Numbers 33:51-52 Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When you are passed over Jordan into the land of Canaan; then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places:

This command is only intended for things involving the religious worshipping of whatever it was that they happened to call god. Every representation of God changes into a god that is not really God, because it is a lie. When Israel was in Egypt they worshipped these things because they were in that land and it was part of the culture. I am not saying that every Israelite did this, because there were obviously some who did

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not, and they still were worshipping the true God. But the Egyptians worshipped oxen, heifers, sheep, goats, lions, dogs, cats, monkeys, ibis, cranes, oxen, crocodiles, serpents, frogs, flies, beetles, the sun, the moon, planets, stars, fire, light, air, and darkness, and probably others that I could not find a representation named.

Do you know what? Because we can understand what carnal nature is like, these people could come up with good reasons why they did it. When I say "good," I mean it seemed logical to them, and to those who were doing the same thing.

I mentioned in my previous sermon—the one on the first commandment—of a man telling me in an email that he did not care whether the Bible said to not do as the pagans do through the worshipping or the use of Christmas and Easter, because he was going to do it anyway because, as he justified it, "It is my way of worshipping God." To him it was perfectly justifiable because he wanted to do it that way. So it really did not matter whether God wanted it or not. This was the way he was going to worship God. He justified it by quoting Luke 2 about the angels proclaiming joy that the Savior was born. That was his basis for it.

Here is the essence of this: Idolatry denies the nature of God, and thus obedience to this commandment determines the way one will worship. It must be in spirit and in harmony with His nature—the truth that the Bible reveals. Thus knowing God's true nature is important, because what we worship we become. That is a truth. What we worship we become, and this is why we absolutely must seek God, so that we will have truth to use in our worship of Him. This commandment covers idolatry in a form in which the true God is worshipped either in an image or an idolatrous practice, and thus perverting the reality through a false representation that if we idolize, we become the wrong thing.

Let us go to Exodus 32. This is a classic.

Exodus 32:1-4 And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him, Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him. And Aaron said unto them, Break off the golden earrings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me. And all the people broke off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, These be your gods, O Israel, which

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brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

This episode shows us something not directly touching worship that can be twisted into something else. This is something that the movie *The Ten Commandments* actually portrayed very well, because the leaders of this rebellion were not really seeking for a change of God; rather what they were seeking was a change of leadership. They did not like Moses. All you have to do is to think back about the movie.

It was Moses that was the enemy, and so the way to get rid of Moses was to establish leadership somewhere else. So they picked on Aaron, who they apparently felt would be more compliant, and convinced him that he needed to do this. If God had not intervened, you can be sure that they would have succeeded in getting rid of Moses, because the weight of the people would have been given to that one who had created this new representation of God.

Moses was associated with a God that they could not see, and that did not fit into their thinking. So, in their impatience, they moved to trust their leadership to one who could make or introduce them to a god in a way similar to what Moses had done. So what did they do? They immediately fell back on the gods of Egypt, because that was all they really knew.

But God and Moses were highly offended, because to them the golden calf was an attempt to define the nature of God and to control Him according to their desires. See, they were limiting God. That is what they were doing, and this is exactly what the man was doing who said he was going to keep Christmas anyway regardless of what God said. The image was in his mind. That man would reject, we will say, the authority of the church of God to do his own thing.

Now, in like manner, we will use the pope as an example, as if he is actually making the image. He takes peoples' ornaments of gold and silver and ivory and precious stones and makes a crucifix or a Madonna and says this is only to keep God in mind. This is following exactly the same principle as we see here in Exodus 32, and it will not be very long before the image is directly associated with God, and the people will need them to do their prayers, to do their studying and whatever, and so it becomes an aid to their worship. God then becomes really nothing more than something a man has made with his hands, and so, in that, the first and second commandments are directly broken.

Did you know that the man I was talking about said, "I do this to praise the Lord"? Is that not what they said here? "Let us make a feast to the Lord." Nothing changes. The only

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difference between Exodus 32 and the man about Christmas is the fact that he did not have a physical representation that he was bowing down before. It was in his mind, but it was idolatry nonetheless. He was determining on his own the way he wanted to worship God.

I am going to give you one more thing here which, to me, it is a vivid illustration. This, in a way, can be a warning to you and to me.

Isaiah 1:13-14 Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.

One of the reasons we are going to read Amos 5 is not only because of the similarity of the words, but the fact that Amos and Isaiah lived pretty close together in terms of time.

Amos 5:21-27 I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. Though you offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. Take you away from me the noise of your songs; for I will not hear the melody of your viols. But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream. Have you offered unto me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness forty years, O house of Israel? But you have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which you made to yourselves. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, says the LORD, whose name is the God of hosts.

One of the things Isaiah 1 provides us with is that there is no indication in the context of Isaiah 1 that they were not observing the Sabbath on Saturday. In other words, they were keeping it in that regard. Rather, the context shows it was the attitude and the way they were observing them that is put in contrast to God's desire how He wanted to be worshipped. So man feels free to worship God as he good and well pleases, and it is these attitudes and practices that break the second commandment.

This is paralleled with Amos 5:21-24 which took place at roughly the same time in history, because Amos preached about that same time, and both contexts show crowds

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of people with festive attitudes, and yet it is rejected by God as worthless. Their holiness was all a sham because it was not backed by righteous conduct in daily life. Both contexts will show that. The spirit behind the worship was wrong in both cases.

He mentioned "vain oblations." It means "lying meal offerings." He is saying that these people were hypocrites. These people had the morals of an alley cat, eyes that were hot with lust and greed, fortunes that were built on crime, envy, murder, and deceit. They were in reality, though, stingy, hateful gossipers, and yet on the Sabbath day they appeared before God as though everything in life was okay. God said, "Away with that!"

What kind of a god were they worshipping that would accept that kind of conduct? It certainly was not the true God, because they were just going through the motions with a punctilious observance. God is more concerned about truth, about right relationships between Him and men, and between men and men, than merely overly scrupulous regard for formal worship on the Sabbath.

Let me leave you with this thought, that worship cannot be separated from character and attitudes displayed in daily life. Worship is one's reaction to God all through the week, not just on Sabbath. Always remember what Paul said, that God cannot be mocked, and somehow we think we can get away with it. But, you see, that hypocritical approach is idolatry, and He will not accept it.