

## Idol Making

2. You shall not make yourself a carved image.

What do you think of when you think of an idol? Some carved representation of a person or animal? Perhaps a sport's star or a movie star? What about your local priest as an idol?

Why do we look up to these people? Do we want to be like them - rich, well known, lavish life styles, good looking...? And yet for many, these people are idolised.

Human beings have always looked to things beyond themselves – it's in our make-up to look beyond ourselves. People often aren't quite satisfied within themselves – in the sense that they don't simply need someone or something to look up to, but also the need something or someone to find security and significance, certainty and hope – the gaps they perceive in themselves.

Do you agree? Is this what the second Commandment is saying to us? Does it still apply to us today?

The second Commandment is actually quite detailed; more detailed than any other Commandment. It comes right after the most important and it seems to expand on the first. The first Commandment says not to *have* any gods, the second is not to *make* any gods. But the detail follow the second is quite extensive.

### Exodus 20:4-6

You must not make for yourself an **idol** of any kind or an **image** of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea.

- You must not **bow down** to them
- or **worship/serve** them,

### **FOR**

I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God

- who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods.
- I lay the sins of the parents upon their children;
- the entire family is affected—  
even children in the *third and fourth generations* of those who reject me.

### **BUT**

I lavish unfailing love for a *thousand generations* on those who **love** me and **obey** my commands.

What do you think of when you hear this command? Obviously people don't think about carving up a little image of something from a piece of wood or clay and place it upon the mantelpiece to fall prostrate before every morning before breakfast and just before bedtime at night – some people may. Sometimes, and often, people have seen this as putting “things” before God – like career or making money. Money becomes an idol - or being successful or being right all the time when we know that's impossible... looking good.

However this commandment is more about the actions *we do* specifically and intentionally towards creating something for ourselves – i.e. the making of a god. And there is even more to it than some have realised... a lot more.

What kind of idol is the writer talking about here? Is it another god, a different god to YHWH? Although the Bible speaks of other gods – they are seen as nothing – with no power or standing before Israel's God. So many scholars believe the issue isn't about “making” other gods – gods made out of created material – because even if these other gods exist they have no real power compared to YHWH.

The idol-making talked about here is in fact about making an image that represents God. One of the absolute distinctions of YHWH's religions is that YHWH is above and beyond creation. When God made the heavens and the earth it was from nothing. Unlike other gods who already had some basic material to work with. Indeed

they were part of the created world – although they were in the heavens. YHWH is clearly described as not being part of creation – in fact the only part of creation that he touches is when he breathed life into human – the breathe of God. God is beyond creation and beyond us and our ability to imagine or create this God. So we replay - “Of course we don’t try to make up our God Owen.”

However this command is about making God in our own image. Not simply some wooden or golden thing but also something we make up in our minds too. The issue is, in fact, far more serious than we may realise... The temptation – the danger – then is not the creation of another god to rival YHWH, **but an attempt to domesticate God.** – to make God out of our imagination or desires.

It is the absolute inverse of the creation story where humanity was made in the image of God. It is a serious warning about distorting who God truly is, because we have created something ourselves that is not God at all – we have trodden where angels fear to walk – upon the freedom, the terrible – terrible as in serious, grave and intense – freedom, of God. We have tried to make God into something we want, we can use or handle or at worst... control. And we hear this all the time when people, even Christians, get frustrated when God doesn’t do what they want God to do. God don’t work like that.

This Commandment that has a very real and serious conclusion, noted in verse 5 with the word “for”. As I always say – in the Bible look out for the little words – the prepositions like – but and for, because they are describing the point either by contrasting is with something or expanding upon the point.

This “for” introduces, explains the reasoning behind this Commandment. The significance of this Commandment is simply based on one thing - who YHWH is – the character of YHWH. YHWH is uncompromising in who he/she is – God cannot and will not be changed – especially by those God created. God is not and will not be bound by anyone or anything. God’s freedom and power is complete and won’t be denied by anything or anyone. God is completely free to do as God chooses.

The word jealousy used here, ‘for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God,’ can have both negative and positive meanings. This jealousy isn’t about him being affronted, indeed insulted by people over their idol making because God is not that small minded; it’s not about hurting God’s ego. Rather the reasons for this jealousy are far more serious... and positive.

It is because it attacks YHWH’s fidelity, faithfulness, loyalty, and devotion – God’s character. What God will not jeopardise is the quality of who God is in this relationship. God will not be cheapened, devalued. God will not allow people to make him something God is not. Doesn’t matter how much we jump up and down - God will not change who God is. We need to change how we understand God - that’s the point.

An idol, even in the image of YHWH, that will come between God and his people will not be tolerated at all. Even if people make this god, based on their own needs or psychological deficiencies (whatever they may be). Even when we can make our god seem almost like YHWH – but we pick and choose what we like... When we do it, we are in danger, because we have no idea what we doing – we can’t create God, even though we try. But most importantly the problem it creates is a pathway that leads not to life, but essentially to death – as in existence without knowing the true God. Idols will fail us.

There seems to be a curse afterwards – well I’m sure there have been some people who have seen it as a curse and used it to hit others over the head with. But really the final verse is more an emphasis, a reinforcement, a description between those who truly love and those who in effect hate God because they don’t want to know the real terrifying God – but rather a poor imitation. The contrast dramatically describes the two alternatives before them. Those who love YHWH – who accept YHWH as he is, who have the courage and devotion to accept him are blessed for a thousand generations. But those who don’t live with this failing for only a few generations. This contrast is crystal clear and encouraging.

This verse again shows the love of God - a few generations of woe to those who chose wrong against a thousand generations for those who chose right. Judgement for a short while, but steadfast love for centuries.

The message to us is unchanging as it is breath-taking. It demands that we look at ourselves and ask if we indeed have made God different than what the Bible tells us. Have we picked and chosen our theology of God because we cannot face other aspects of God that may take control from our hands? Do we trust God enough? Do we have the courage to truly worship the God revealed in the Bible or have we compromised our relationship to suit our needs?

The first Commandment said that you shall worship no other gods but me. The second Commandment says that this God who we are worshipping – we need to worship in truth. God is not made in the image of any created being. The Commandment is far more serious than simply creating something that we may put before God – it is about denying God his rightful place in this world and in our life – as followers of YHWH. The closest we get this seeing this God on earth is in Jesus Christ and each week we remember his incredible sacrifice for us. This is our God.

Our final Commandment looks at how we use God's name. It is, again, an incredibly important insight for us all.