

We are in a series on the Ten Commandments as we walk through Exodus. God has freed his people from Egyptian slavery. God had promised Abraham that he'd make a great nation out of his family and through them the whole world would be blessed and here we are. He has redeemed Israel and is now giving them his Law, summarized by the Ten Commandments. Deliverance then demand – that's how our God roles.

A couple weeks ago we considered the first commandment. We looked at God's demand that he alone be worshipped. No gods besides me. That was *who* to worship. This week, the second commandment tells us *how* to worship. Who then how. Object v.s. mode. We are prone to worship the wrong god or to worship right god in the wrong way. Idolatry is worshipping the wrong god in wrong way. We must worship the true God in a true way.

So here in the second commandment, God says no graven images. Look again at Exodus **20:4-5a** – Do not make an idol, a graven image, or a carved god. Don't look at a *made* thing while you worship the *Maker* of all things. He's much too big for all for that. We do not serve or bow down to any object. God's presence will not be mediated through things. That's off limits. We'll see in ch. 32 that Israel blows it. But God prohibits us from infusing any object with spiritual effectiveness, as if objects can bring us closer to God, represent God, or establish communion with God.¹ He desires undiminished worship.

Of course, the ancient pagans believed the deity was present in their images. That was the norm, but the One True God will not be identified with any created thing. Why? Cuz he is present everywhere. Right, you would never bow down to a picture of a King if the King were present. No, the Word says don't worship their gods and don't worship your God their way.²

This is where biblical Christianity is so different from every other religion. We have no Mecca that you must visit in order to be saved, though the Roman Catholic Church has tried. This is also one of the reasons we are a Protestant church that is still protesting against both the Roman Catholic Church and Eastern Orthodoxy. Every 25 years especially! Jubilee years. So if you visited Rome last year you could receive a plenary indulgence – meaning all your sins would be forgiven based upon your visit to certain buildings, walk through certain holy doors only opened up every 25 years or looking upon certain images or items, whether it be Mary's hair, Jesus' nail, Peter's toenails or whatever. But that's only every 25 years so too bad if you missed it. You don't get another chance till 2050 and if you die before then, no mercy for you. If the church actually had that sort of power, . . . if I were Pope every year'd be a Jubilee year. Just keep em open. Let the mercy flow out.

This is why the Reformers called the mass (and transubstantiation where the bread actually becomes the body of Jesus and the wine becomes the blood of Jesus) idolatry. WCF 29.2 says "So that the popish sacrifice of the Mass (as they call it) is most abominably injurious to Christ's one, only sacrifice, the alone propitiation for all the sins of the his elect." Then it says, "That doctrine which maintains a

¹ DeYoung, *The Ten Commandments*, 42.

² Enns, *Exodus*, 415.

change of the substance of bread and wine, into the substance of Christ's body and blood (commonly called transubstantiation) by consecration of a priest, or by any other way, is repugnant, not to Scripture alone, but even to common sense and reason" (29.6).

The Anglican Church's doctrinal statement, *The 39 Articles*, says that transubstantiation "is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions" (28). "Wherefore the sacrifices of Masses, in which it was commonly said, that the Priest did offer Christ for the quick and the dead, to have remission of pain or guilt, were blasphemous fables, and dangerous deceits" (XXXI). Calvin called it the foulest sacrilege and said their public assemblies have become schools of idolatry and ungodliness.³

Some Christians treat icons as "sacraments" of Jesus and his saints. They venerate them as homage to the one pictured. They would say they do not worship icons but only venerate them, but we don't think that distinction will do.⁴ "Hey Moses, don't sweat it boss, we not worshiping this golden calf, just venerating." No, do not use, kneel, kiss, or burn incense to an object.

I want to tread carefully here, but when it comes to pictures of Jesus or videos depicting Jesus (I mean the like-like ones – not the kids Bible ones), be very thoughtful and cautious. Don't assume God doesn't have an opinion. We do not live in the age of the eye, but the age of the ear. We walk by faith, not by sight. Listen to Deut 4:12: "Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice." Here we see a contrast between sight and hearing, eye and ear. They *heard a voice* on Sinai. Later on in Ex 34:1, a similar word is used. Moses is told to carve tablets of stone. Importantly, not *graven* or carved images, but words. Graven stones with holy words. Until Christ returns, we see by hearing. The eye is not yet. That age is yet to come.

The Heidelberg Catechism addresses this in question 98: "But may not images, as books for the unlearned, be permitted in churches? Answer. No, we should not try to be wiser than God. He wants the Christian community instructed by the living preaching of his Word."

Why no graven images? **Because our God is jealous 5b-6.** Many don't like the idea of a jealous God, but we worship God as He has revealed himself not how we might like him to be. Now, its not some petty jealousy but a meaningful jealousy in the context of love and mutual commitment. Like in a marriage. If some handsome dude is talking to my wife, no problem. If that man takes her by the hand . . . you better back up and gimme 50 feet. This is TX. End up doing prison ministry from the inside, you know. The prophets often speak of Israel's idolatry as spiritual adultery. They are breaking a covenant relationship. We have seen again and again in Exodus that God is glorious and he desires his glory to be known. Deut 4:24: "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God."

And he punishes generations for such spiritual adultery. Punishing to the third and fourth generation, *but* showing steadfast love to a thousand generations. **34:5-7** / Now, this is not meant to be a math equation, but God is eager to show grace. 3-4 versus a thousand. Deut 7:9: "Know therefore that the

³ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.2.2.

⁴ Leithart, *The Ten Commandments*, 35.

LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.”

Does this mean that the kids of wicked people are doomed? No. Listen to Deut 24:16: “Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin.” Ezek 18:20: “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself” (cf 18:4). / They share in the punishment because they share in the sin.⁵ See that language in verse 5: those who hate me. You want to avoid this? Love and obey God, don’t hate him.

Here is the take away: obedience has far-reaching implications. Your parents don’t determine who you are but there can be consequences. What you want to do is give your kids a downhill slide to righteousness. Put them on third base at birth. How do you do that? Live all of life for Christ. *You* can break the cycle. Can I get a witness? I come from a broken home. So does Alicia. How do you break the streak? Trust Jesus get married commit to a local church, have kids, discipline them, disciple them, raise them in the Christian worldview. Live for Christ and help others do the same.

So what else does this mean for us today? A main take away is that **God cares about how we worship**. We have that clearly here, but just consider Cain and Abel. The Lord rejects Cain’s offering. Or Nadab and Abihu. Remember them? In Lev 10, they offer up an unauthorized sacrifice, unsanctioned worship and God strikes them dead. Lev 10:2-3: “And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, ‘This is what the LORD has said: “Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified”’.”

Or Saul, who is rejected for trying to offer sacrifice not in accord with God’s instructions (1 Sam 15:22). Or Uzzah and the ark. 2 Sam 6:6: “And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God.” Why? Because God had said. The Law forbade any touching of the ark. Num 4:15: “they must not touch the holy things, lest they die.”

God cares about how he is worshipped. He is holy. In his fantastic book, *The Holiness of God*, here is how R.C. Sproul describes the Uzzah incident, “An act of holy heroism? No! It was an act of arrogance, a sin of presumption. Uzzah assumed that his hand was less polluted than the earth. But it wasn’t the ground or the mud that would desecrate the ark; it was the touch of man. The earth is an obedient creature. It does what God tells it to do.”⁶ Uzzah made mistake of assuming his hand was cleaner than the dirt.

⁵ DeYoung, *The Ten Commandments*, 44.

⁶ R.C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1988), 107.

I wonder if you think about this? Maybe you are here visiting. Welcome! So glad you're here! I wonder if this question is on your radar: "Is this church's worship biblically ordered?" By worship I mean all that we do, not just the music. Not many Christians ask this question. As one has said, most Americans "tend to worship their work, to work at their play, and to play at their worship."⁷ We play at our worship. We don't think about what the Bible says about what we should do when we gather.

This is why the Reformers practiced what they called the Regulative Principle. Scripture should *regulate* corporate worship. The Word of God should regulate the worship of God. Terry Johnson describes the Regulative Principle this way: "In prohibiting worship through images, God declares that He alone determines how He is to be worshiped. Though their use be ever so sincere and sensible (as aids to worship) images are not pleasing to Him, and by implication, *neither is anything else that He has not sanctioned*."⁸ Calvin: "God disapproves of all modes of worship not expressly sanctioned by His Word."⁹ WCF: "the acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself and so limited by his own revealed will."¹⁰ Heidelberg 96 "That we in no way make any image of God nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his Word."¹¹

This is why our membership covenant says: "We are ruled by God's Word. We will not forsake the gathering of ourselves together, but will prioritize corporate worship, treasuring our church's weekly opportunities to sing the Word, pray the Word, hear the Word, and see the Word displayed in the ordinances." God's Word must rule, regulate what we do together. We need to worship on God's terms. We need to worship by the book.

This is why we have a well-thought-out **liturgy**. All churches have a liturgy, an order of service and liturgy is important. We should see the corporate worship service as a whole as a mass discipling activity, a powerful force to shape our hearts.¹² One authors says, "The church's worship is the heart of discipleship. Yes, Christian formation is a life-encompassing, Monday through Saturday, week in and week out project; but it radiates from, and is nourished by, the worship life of the congregation gathered around Word and Table."¹³ Liturgy shapes us. It trains and transforms our hearts.¹⁴ Through it, we are rescripted, conformed to the new world, caught up in the action of the divine drama.¹⁵

⁷ G. Dahl

⁸ Terry Johnson, *Reformed Worship* (Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 2000), 24.

⁹ John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church* (rep. Audubon, NJ: Old Paths, 1994), 7.

¹⁰ Westminster Confession of Faith, 21.1, in *The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms with Proof Texts*.

¹¹ Heidelberg Catechism, question and answer 96, in *Ecumenical Creeds and Reformed Confessions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith Alive, 1988).

¹² Matt Merker, *Corporate Worship* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021), 96, 102.

¹³ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 68.

¹⁴ Jonathan Landry Cruse, *What Happens When We Worship* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), 28.

¹⁵ Horton, *A Better Way*, 52.

We don't feel it right away though. It is not catalytic but cumulative. Week by week, we are reformed, reshaped, and remade by worship regulated by the Word of God.¹⁶ Worship is the workshop where we are transformed into the image of the Son. Because - God acts through the liturgy. It is not just something we do. A biblically ordered and historically rooted liturgy is a trellis that embodies the gospel. Just take a look at ours today:

Singing – We sing songs together. Singing honors God, encourages one another, produces thankfulness, cultivates joy, articulates lament, and teaches memorable theology. Wesley said hymnody is “a ‘body of practical divinity,’ a sung theology.” We sing songs that align with the sermon.

Listen to Ephesians 5:18-21 says, “And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Notice that in singing we address one another. Too many churches seek to create an environment where its just me and Jesus, but here singing is congregational. We sing to one another. But it also says to the Lord. Singing is both horizontal and vertical.

Announcements – a necessary evil. The bulletin/weekly email / **Worship Through Giving** While we currently do not “pass the plate,” we do want to make the offering part of the weekly rhythm.

Call to Worship – The ministry of the Word doesn't begin with the sermon, but with the call to worship!¹⁷ God's Word calls us to worship and everything we do is in response to God's initiative. God speaks then we respond.¹⁸

Prayer of Confession This practice encourages us to confess specific sin. It shows us our need for grace. The weekly confession of sin is a “healthy orientation to reality.”¹⁹ It serves as a three-fold acknowledgement that: 1) the world is not the way it was meant to be 2) we are not the way we were meant to be 3) I am not the way I was meant to be.²⁰

Assurance of Pardon The confession of sin is quickly followed by absolution. This is a gospel passage that functions to remind us of the gospel, rid us of guilt, and assure us of the love of God. God's grace is greater than our sin. There is more mercy in Christ than sin in us. The enemy's flaming arrows of accusation are extinguished.

¹⁶ Cruse, *What Happens When We Worship*, 34.

¹⁷ Michael Horton, *A Better Way* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 142.

¹⁸ Mike Cospers, *Rhythms of Grace* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 126.

¹⁹ William A. Dryness, “Confession and Assurance = Sin and Grace,” in Leanne Van Dyk, ed. *A More Profound Alleluia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 40.

²⁰ Mike Cospers, *Rhythms of Grace* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 130.

Creed The recitation of the historic creeds reminds of the core body of doctrine of the Christian faith. It also unites us with what the church has confessed throughout the centuries. Today was Nicene Creed from the 4th C. Christians have been reciting this for 1700 years.

The Creeds are a pledge of allegiance. They keep the main things the main things. They are Trinitarian through and through. By reciting the Creeds, we affirm the story to which we belong.²¹ We're rescripted.

Public Reading of Scripture – 1 Tim 4:13: “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.”

Prayer of Intercession and Illumination This is the pastoral prayer time. Asking for specific needs locally and globally, praying for gospel partners, then asking God to open up the preached Word.

Sermon: Lectio Continua – meaning “continuous reading.” The main diet of the congregation should be the systematic exposition of Scripture: book by book and paragraph by paragraph. Westminster Larger Catechism Question 155 asks, “How is the word made effectual to salvation?” The answer: “The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.” Especially the preaching. / **Prayer of Application After the Sermon**

Baptism – I wish baptism was every week! When we have them we watch a visible display of the gospel. Scripture teaches baptism is by immersion as believers. If you have not been baptized as a believer, you need to. Jesus commands it. It doesn't save you, but Christ commands it.

Communion – We have communion once a month. It is a reminder of the cross and a means of fellowship with him. It's a visible physical proclamation of the gospel / **Benediction** – We begin and end with the Word of God. You Are Sent out into the world as an ambassador of Jesus. This is our commission: we go and make disciples.

So, we seek to honor God through worship and how we worship. The who and the how. We don't make images. Only God can make an image of himself. Col 1:15: Jesus is the *image* (Greek *eikon*) of the invisible God. We don't have icons because we worship the *eikon*, who is now in heaven at the right hand of God. The tomb is empty and the throne is occupied. / God provides his own mediators. John 1:14 The Word became flesh. 14:9: If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. There is one mediator between God and man, the Lord Jesus Christ. We don't make graven images but we worship the glorious image of God, the Lord Jesus Christ – in all of life.

²¹ Brian Rosner, *How to Find Yourself* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2022), 197.

Benediction: Rom 11:33-36