

Worship Me Without Idols

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[0:00] Please be seated. Take your Bibles and turn to the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy chapter 4. It's good to see our children turning in their Bibles.

! Deuteronomy chapter 4. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy chapter 4. We'll be reading the first 24 verses.

Hear now, O Israel, the decrees and laws I am about to teach you. Follow them so that you may live and may go in and take possession of the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, has given you.

Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you. You saw with your own eyes what the Lord did at Baal of Peor.

The Lord your God destroyed from among you everyone who followed the Baal of Peor. But all of you who held fast to the Lord your God are still alive today.

[1:08] See, I have taught you decrees and laws as the Lord my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it. Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations who will hear about all these decrees and say, surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.

What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them in a way that the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him? And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?

Only be careful and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live.

Teach them to your children and to their children after them. Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when he said to me, Assemble the people before me to hear my words, so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children.

You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness. Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire.

[2:38] You heard the sound of words but saw no form. There was only a voice. He declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote them on two stone tablets.

And the Lord directed me at that time to teach you the decrees and laws you are to follow in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess. You saw no form of any kind the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire.

Therefore, watch yourselves very carefully so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourselves an idol, an image of any shape, whether formed like a man or a woman, or like any animal on earth or any bird that flies in the air, or like any creature that moves along the ground, or any fish in the waters below.

And when you look up to the sky and see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the heavenly array, do not be enticed into bowing down to them and worshiping things the Lord your God has apportioned to all the nations under heaven.

But as for you, the Lord took you and brought you out of the iron smelting furnace out of Egypt to be the people of his inheritance as you now are.

[4:01] The Lord was angry with me because of you, and he solemnly swore that I would not cross the Jordan and enter the good land the Lord your God has given you as your inheritance.

I will die in this land. I will not cross the Jordan. But you are about to cross over and take possession of that good land. Be careful not to forget the covenant of the Lord your God that he made with you.

Do not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything the Lord your God has forbidden. For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

Would you open with me to Exodus chapter 20? And while you are finding your place, let me just thank you for your prayers for Josie and I.

And I want to thank you for singing the praises of Jesus. The Bible, in Proverbs 34, 4, says something blessed happens when the saints sing.

[5:09] Come, let us praise and glorify the Lord with me and let us exalt his name together. And as you sing and praise and boast in the Lord, the afflicted hear and rejoice.

So yes, you, as you praise the Lord, are ministering to others who are afflicted and hear about this great king that is ours and what a friend that he is for us.

So remember that as you're praising the Lord, it is ministering to one another in the body of Christ. And I thank God for your ministry to me this morning.

The last two weeks, we have been studying the first commandment that God gave from Mount Sinai, you shall have no other gods besides me. That the God revealed in the Bible is the only God there is and therefore he is to be your God and your only God.

The one you give your complete trust to, your full obedience to, your supreme love and devotion and your exclusive worship. You're not to worship anyone or thing but him.

[6:24] And that reveals our fundamental duty. That's why we find it first in the list. Here's our fundamental duty, what we owe to God as God, as his creatures.

And it also then points out our fundamental sin, doesn't it? That we actually put other things in his place and give to them what we owe to him as the only God.

Well, today we move on to the second commandment and I just want you to see it for yourselves here in Exodus chapter 20 and I'll read verses 4 to 6. you shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.

You shall not bow down to them or worship them for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

Now the second commandment is not merely a repetition of the first commandment. No other gods, no idols.

[7:42] They're not saying the same thing. So what is the difference then between the first and the second commandments? The Roman Catholic and Lutheran traditions have not seen much, if any, difference between the first and the second.

So in their list of the ten commandments, they have these first two commands as one, as part of the first commandment. But there's a problem that leaves them with nine commandments, and the Bible clearly speaks of the ten commandments.

So they do need to find another commandment to fill out the list of ten. And so what they've done is they've divided the last commandment into two. If you'll notice it there in verse 17, you shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant, or maidservant, his ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

And they have divided that commandment, so that the ninth commandment is you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, and then number ten is you shall not covet your neighbor's house.

But again, we would say, but why quit there? Why wouldn't you go on to say that number eleven is you shall not covet your neighbor's manservant, and number twelve, his maidservant, and number thirteen, don't covet his ox, and fourteen, his donkey, and fifteen, don't covet anything belonging to your neighbor.

[9:11] I think that as you look at the list of the ten commandments, and especially as you look at number seventeen, you realize that's just one command. And it's delineating all the different things that we are not to covet.

The thing that holds that command together is that it's forbidding us to covet anything that is our neighbor's. And if it's not on the list, we're not saying, oh, I can covet that, I can covet his car, because the last word is anything.

So he lists several things that we might covet, and then anything. So that to say, that there is an important difference between the first and second commandments.

We ought not to think, well, that's just saying no other gods. And idols are other gods, so you shouldn't have any other gods. It's all the same. No, there is an important difference in the Reformed tradition and rest of Christendom have seen that difference.

And I've put it there before you on your little handout. The first commandment is about who we are to worship. It's the object of our worship, God alone.

[10:20] And the second commandment is about how we are to worship him, the manner of our worship. Number one, we're to worship God alone. And number two, we must worship him only in the way that he prescribes in his word.

In other words, we're not free to worship him in any way that our imaginations might invent. That I think that God would be pleased for me to bring worship to him in this way.

Or you might think this way or that way. No, it forbids all such inventiveness in worship. And the positive point being made in the second command is that the only God is to be worshipped only in the way that he commands.

So we learn that it's possible to worship the right God in the wrong way. That's what the second command is pointing out.

It was a danger in Israel's day. It's still with us today. When the Israelites came to the border of the promised land, the land that God had promised to give them and that he would drive out the nations before them, they have this warning in Deuteronomy 12, 30 and following.

[11:34] Be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, how do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same.

You must not worship the Lord, your God, in their way. See that you do all that I command. You do not add to it or take away from it.

You see, when we come to the worship of God, adding to what God commands is as serious as subtracting from what God commands.

We're not to add to it or to take away from it. We're just to worship God as he commands us to do. Nothing else must be added to it. And the stated point of concern here in Deuteronomy 12 is not so much worshipping other gods as though that is a concern elsewhere, but here his concern is that you shall not worship the Lord, your God, in their way.

See, the manner, the how you worship God is important. So don't ask, well, how do the nations worship their gods? We'll do the same. Not enough that you worship the Lord, your God.

[12:49] It must be in his way. God alone, in his way alone. So that's one and two. And I think you see the distinction between them. Now, the common way that the nations worship their God was through images, through physical, graven images, drawn images, carved images, idols, as our translation has it.

They weren't satisfied to have their gods living up in the heavens. They wanted something to see. And so they made graven images, physical idols, carved out of wood, stone, precious metals.

And these idols were visible representations of their gods who lived in the heavens. You remember the claim that we saw of the Ephesians in Acts chapter 19?

They claimed that the image of their God, Artemis, fell from heaven. And they were the keepers of that image. It wasn't that Artemis, their goddess, fell.

It was her image. And so they worshipped these gods and goddesses, but they wanted images, something to be seen and handled and touched, to worship them by.

[14:02] And those idols became a point of connection then between them and their God, who was thought to be present in the idol. And so their worship would be channeled to their God, but through this physical object.

And the earthly image became the way then to bring the power and presence of their God near to them, that they might have dealings with their God through this medium.

They channeled their worship through it, and their God would channel His power and blessing to them through the idol. Eventually, the idol itself was treated as the God that it represented.

So all the nations around Israel used visible representations of their gods, images in their worship. But in worshipping the only God, He said to them, you shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth, beneath, in the waters below, you shall not bow down to them or worship them.

Forty days later, Forty days after they heard the voice of God tell them those very words, they did exactly what they had been forbidden to do.

[15:22] You remember, Genesis 32, Moses is up on Mount Sinai now, and he's been up there a long time, forty days in all, and the people get tired of waiting, and they want to get on with their journey to the promised land.

It's stalled here at Mount Sinai. But they want a God to go with them, something that they could see like the gods of Egypt. So, they brought their golden earrings to Aaron who cast and fashioned them as an idol in the shape of a bull calf, like the Egyptian image of Baal, the fertility god.

And they all said, this is your God, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt. Now, you remember when Moses came down and confronted Aaron and said, whatever happened to you, that you would do what you did?

And remember how he says, we just threw all these earrings in and out came this golden calf. It wasn't exactly like that, was it? No, they cast it, they fashioned it into the likeness of a golden bull.

And so Aaron built an altar in front of the calf and announced, tomorrow, there will be a festival to Yahweh, to the Lord. It's important for us to see that.

[16 : 40] This was to help them worship the one true God, the Lord, who had manifested himself to them. Tomorrow, we'll have a festival to the Lord, not to Baal, not to some Egyptian deity, but to the Lord, the true God.

And this golden calf was to be an image that would represent the Lord, who had brought them up out of Egypt and who had promised to lead them into the promised land.

Well, does that make it okay? That it was only a medium through which they would worship the true God in heaven? Shouldn't he be pleased that they're making aids to help them worship him?

Well, we find that God did not take kindly to it at all. Rather, his anger burned against them and he tells Moses, go down because your people whom you brought up out of Egypt have become corrupt.

They've quickly turned away from what I commanded them. They've made for themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They've bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, this is your God who Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.

[17 : 47] And so Moses comes down and he grinds the calf to powder. He first burns it in fire and then grinds the gold into powder, throws it in water, makes the Israelites drink it, and then calls on the sword to be strapped on and to go through the land and cut down the idolaters and 3,000 were killed with the sword and God sent a plague on more besides that.

That's what the Lord thinks of worshiping him with aids and helps, images, thought to represent him. It was much the same after the death of King Solomon.

Remember through Solomon, the kingdom was split into two. After Solomon, the kingdom split into two and you had the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom. Well, the southern kingdom had the benefit of having Jerusalem, the capital city there, and the temple and the priesthood and all the worship.

It was all to happen at Jerusalem. Well, that became a threat to the northern kingdom. What if every time they have a festival, a religious festival, our people go down to the southern kingdom to go worship God and they start to get friendly with the southern kingdom and maybe they abandon us up here in the northern kingdom and want to join forces with them.

No, we must have our own worship centers. And so he set up a golden bull calf in Dan to the north, the northern part of the kingdom, Jerusalem and in Bethel to the southern, in the southern part of this kingdom so that his people would stay in the kingdom and not go down to Jerusalem.

[19 : 27] He pointed at his own worship centers with statutes of bull calves and priests and he said, here are your gods, O Israel. The same thing that was said at Mount Sinai.

Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt. The fact that these idols were meant to represent the Lord was no redeeming feature.

God was not at all flattered by Jeroboam's innovations in worship. He was provoked to anger. He wiped out the whole line of Jeroboam for this sin of will worship, leading the nation astray from the true worship of God by instituting images, images, this one in the form of a bull calf.

So what's wrong with making images of God if it's meant to help us worship God? Well, number one, it's rebellion against his express command. And if we went no further, that should just be the end of the day, shouldn't it?

That we have such a command as number two that just says in plain language, you shall not make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything to bow down or to worship.

[20:42] Okay. Who is God? You see, what happens when what God commands is out of line with what you think?

Isn't that what we have here? I think it would be helpful to have an image, physical object to channel my worship to this invisible God. But he says no. So who is God then?

Who is God that receives your obedience and your love and your trust then? what we see then is to break the second commandment is to break the first commandment.

Not having the Lord as your God to whom you give what is owed to God, obedience. For if I'm willing to violate the second command, then I'm not treating him as God, am I?

We never please God by doing what he is expressly forbidden. We ought to start there. But beyond this, using images and idols to worship God is forbidden because it dishonors God by hiding his glory and majesty.

[21:45] It actually hides his glory and majesty. Think with me for a moment. Suppose there was a king, a queen, excuse me, a queen with such a beautiful face that no matter what artist in the kingdom would paint it, the painting would never really capture her beauty.

It would always be less than her true beauty. So that canvas and paint simply couldn't capture her beauty or do her justice. whatever the intentions of the artist, they always left something to be desired in her portrait.

They diminished her glory. So the king made a law that no one was to paint his queen wife's face. Well, even so, our God is so majestic and glorious in all of his being and all of his attributes that to represent him in any way by a physical object, an image, an idol, is always reductionism.

It always reduces his glory. It always diminishes his honor. It always perverts his majesty, lowers his real beauty, and so he, as the king of the universe, has forbidden in the second commandment.

He's made a law to forbid the making and using of any physical representations of him. To make a graven image is to set in stone and paint and metal or wood one or two particular aspects of God, but thereby other aspects of his are kept hidden.

[23:38] So the golden bull calf, well, it was made no doubt to represent the strength and the power of God, like a bull is strong. So our God is like this bull calf.

But what does a bull calf say about God's righteousness, about his goodness, about his justice, his faithfulness, his grace, his love, his omnipresence, his omniscience?

No, these are all hidden by the image that is worshipped, the bull, the strong bull. So though the idol is made to represent God, in the end it always misrepresents God.

And it always sets forth a distortion of God. It always hides his glory and so misleads men by giving them the wrong ideas about God.

The prophet Habakkuk asks an important question in chapter 2 and verse 18, of what value is an idol since a man has carved it? You see, that's going to be the whole issue.

[24:42] This is coming from man's imagination, of what value is an idol since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies?

An image that teaches lies. The Roman church has justified their practice of introducing images in worship, claiming that they were, textbooks for the illiterate.

So you had illiterate people who didn't know how to read the Bible. We'll give them pictures. And images. So these things will be textbooks to teach them about God.

But Habakkuk tells us exactly what they're teaching. They're teaching lies. They're holding forth misinformation about God. And that can only be the case wherever the infinite is represented by something finite, where the creator is represented by created thing, the invisible represented by the visible.

and all from the mind of man. So in Isaiah 40, God's greatness and majesty is set forth throughout that chapter. And then he asks this question, to whom then will you compare God?

[25:56] What image will you compare him to? The point is he's beyond comparison. You can't make anything to compare him with. You'll always bring him down.

God refuses to be compared to any image, to be brought down to its it always will be insufficient. It will always be a distortion and therefore misleading and therefore it is condemned.

But the objection is made. We only use these physical objects to remind us of God, the real God. The old Puritan Thomas Watson responds, this is like a woman saying she keeps company with other men to remind her of her true husband.

Right. No, no. You don't remind yourself of the true God by giving religious significance and honor to that which is another God besides him.

For you see the idolatrous misrepresentations of God always become another God, not the true God. they don't say about God what he has revealed himself to be in the scriptures.

[27:11] Now the second commandment is not against artists making sculptures of animals or painting things like that in clay, making marble, silver, wood, gold, whatever.

It's against any man-made representations of God, of making some physical object and saying this is a representation of God and then giving religious importance to it, bowing to it, worshipping it.

So the second commandment forbids any man-made aids in worship that are not given us by God in which we give special honor to, we bow to, we kiss, we cross ourselves to, anything that's used as a medium, a physical object through which we channel our worship to God.

or assign special religious significance and power to it, like a vial of holy water from the Jordan River, as if that becomes a good luck charm to me, just to have that.

I'm expecting something from that thing, maybe even I say it's from God, but it comes through that holy water that I have, or a stone from Nazareth that Jesus may have put his foot on.

[28:29] A physical cross that's supposed to have special powers that channel the blessings of God, like the ornate brass cross that was mailed to my wife from an acquaintance this week, praying that she will, quote, feel her healing through it from God's love.

Now, you see, it's the same thing. It's from God. It's from his love and power. But may you feel it coming through this physical object. And that physical object then brings the presence and power of God near.

And God says, I don't want it. I don't want it to be a part of your worship of me. Jesus says that his father is seeking worshipers who will worship him not through these mediums of objects that made to represent him, but who will worship him in spirit.

in spirit and in truth. An artist's picture of Christ, which you look at each time you come to worship him or to pray to him, a crucifix used to help focus on Christ.

I've seen worship centers, little benches where people kneel and there's candles and there's a picture of Jesus or a crucifix. And so each time they come, they have these pictures, these objects to help them draw near to God, make his presence real to them.

[30:03] J.I. Packer says, it is certain that if you habitually focus your thoughts on an image or a picture of the one to whom you're going to pray, you will come to think of him and pray to him as the image represents him.

And to the extent to which the image fails to tell the truth about God, to that extent you will fail to worship God in truth. Jesus says the Father wants worshipers who worship him in truth.

In other words, he's to be worshipped as he represents himself to us in the scriptures. The Bible gives us the only heaven drawn picture of God.

It's here that you see, in quotes, see with the eye of faith, the God that exists in words, not man-made pictures, not in objects that we might come up with.

And that's why God forbids any graven images in worship. It habitually holds before the eye some aspect of him that is less than the true and the full revelation that we find in his word.

[31 : 12] And we notice how Israel's worshipping of Jehovah through the idol of a bullcalf led to the orgy that followed.

Shameful orgy running wild. You see, their image failed to hold before their mind's eye the holiness of their God, his righteous demands.

And your thoughts of God in worship do affect the way that you live before him as well. Well, the second commandment then forbids these representations of God, these man-made representations of God.

The second commandment also forbids wrong mental images of God, what Ezekiel calls idols of the heart. And this is where all idol making starts, isn't it?

In the mind, in the heart. It's first in the imagination. Calvin said that man's mind is a workshop where idols are continually being crafted. And whether they're ever fixed into an outward image of wood or stone or paint, they must not be allowed to live even in the mind.

[32 : 21] By a wrong mental image, we can craft a God of our own making. So Psalm 50 and verse 21, the Lord says to his people, you thought I was altogether like you.

Where did they go wrong? You thought. You formed in your mind a view of me that was like you. And so you thought I was easy on sin.

You thought I was light on sin just because I didn't crush you right after you sinned. You thought of me as an old grandfather with white hair who's soft on sin and is all love and has no discipline.

You thought I was this overindulgent God. They say the Lord does not see. The God of Jacob pays no heed. The Lord knows the thoughts of man that they are futile.

Or we could have harsh thoughts of God. We could think of him as some celestial scrooge that's always out to crush us and to always hurt us and harm us and do us evil. And that's a wrong view of God.

[33 : 21] And it starts in the thoughts. Paul tells idolaters in Athens who had formed idols and temples and shrines. He says we should not think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone an image made by man's design and skill.

We shouldn't even start in the mind with the thoughts that he's like this. Rather our thoughts of him are to follow the track that he has laid for us in his word.

This is how we're to think of him. You see idols have their source in man's mind and man's imagination is always an unreliable source for knowledge of God and his glory.

During the debates of the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century Martin Luther wrote to Erasmus these words. He said Erasmus, your thoughts of God are too human. And that's not just Erasmus' problem.

That's all of our problem. We think of God too small. We think of him as being made in our image as if he is like us when in fact he is so other that we cannot comprehend.

[34 : 30] We cannot get our minds around him. He dwells in inapproachable light whom no one has seen or can see. He's higher than our thoughts can even reach.

So we need God to reveal himself to us. Not this man reaching up in his imagination positing truths about this God who's beyond our reach.

Man's own imagination never reaches up to the heights of the true God. What man pretends to know enough to make a faithful image representing this God?

God. Paul says that the world by its wisdom did not know God. All the philosophers of the ages, all the religions of the ages, they don't know God.

Look at their idols, birds and beasts and creeping things. Are we to believe that this is what God is like? Look at all the man-made religions and their philosophical views of God.

[35 : 27] That's man in the dark left to think about the God who dwells in inapproachable light. And that's why in seeking this Lord and this God in salvation, the very first thing, one of the first things that we are to repent of is our own thoughts.

Isaiah 55, seek the Lord while he may be found, call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts.

One of the first things to forsake when you come to Jesus to save you is your thoughts. Your thoughts about your sin, your thoughts about yourself, but mostly your thoughts about God.

They are far too human and you must forsake them. For my thoughts are not your thoughts and neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

So we must forsake our thoughts of God and we must come and say, Lord, you teach me how to think about my sin and myself and my world and most of all what to think about you.

[36 : 38] I don't have a clue what you're like. Come and teach me. I'm blind. Come and shed your light upon me. Oh, he delights to do just that. And that's what he has done for us in the holy scriptures of the Old and New Testaments.

It's here that the Bible has made God known. It's here that God and how he's to be worshipped is clearly set forth. It's here that we read our duty and it's this that we must be satisfied with.

In our knowledge of God and in our worship of him, this not some physical representation of him. Indeed, the passage that was read for us from Deuteronomy 4 emphasizes the form of revelation that God gave to Israel from Mount Sinai.

The Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but you saw no form. You see the emphasis? There was only a voice and he declared to you his covenant, the Ten Commandments, which he commanded you to follow and then wrote on two stone tablets.

You saw no form of any kind the day the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the fire. Therefore, watch yourselves very closely so that you do not become corrupt and make for yourself an idol in the form of anything, an image of any shape.

[38 : 03] You see, you saw no form, you only heard a voice, and that underscores how we are to learn of this God, not by some physical representation that someone has passed down to us, only by the scriptures, the word that God himself has revealed himself with.

That's how we come to know God. And when we come to the Bible, what do we see? We see what God's like. We see his attributes, we see his works, his ways, and he's telling us what he's like.

As I thought of this this morning, the thought struck me. Out of all the people who have ever lived, think how few actually saw Jesus.

Of all the people who have ever lived, those before him, thousands of years, people who lived before him, thousands, a couple thousand years since his ascension.

He's only actually been seen by a few. just those who lived in that part of the world at that time when he visited this earth.

[39 : 22] And most of that time, he was hidden away back in Nazareth where he was hidden from the rest of the world. Only a few people knew him there. And even then, most of the people that grew up with him had no clue of who he was.

They didn't really see him and know who he was. And even as he began his public minister, for three years, people saw him on a larger scale. And even then, most did not know what they were looking at and just dismissed him or wrote him off.

There were really only a few that really saw Jesus. Now, where am I going with this? The word of God sets before us who God is.

And it's here alone that I can see a true image of God because it sets before me the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you want an image? Do you want an image of the invisible God?

Colossians 1.15 says of Jesus Christ, he is the image of the invisible God. For in Christ, all the fullness of the deity is in the body.

[40 : 38] And so he's visited us. It's Jesus. He's the perfect image of God. Do you want an image that faithfully represents God, that doesn't lie about who God is and what he's like?

You have Jesus. Hebrews 1.3 says, God's son is the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of his being. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God is to be seen in the face of Jesus Christ.

There is the image of God, the only image of God that we have been given and it's come to us from God himself. And again, I want you to appreciate the rareness of those who saw that image.

There are a lot of believers in the Old and the New Testament who never saw him. Isn't that what Peter says? I believe in Jesus though I've never seen him.

Peter talking about the followers he's writing to. They hadn't seen him but they still believed. Well, Peter saw him. But the apostles, what did everybody have?

[41 : 50] Well, those before Christ, they had the word, didn't they? They had the revelation of God's word through the prophets. This is the coming Savior. This is what he's like. The revelation of God through the prophets.

Those who came, lived after Jesus' ascension, what do we have? We have the word, the word of the apostles. And who are they? They're the ones that actually saw him. They saw the image of God, the perfect representation of God.

Jesus is God. And so in seeing Jesus, you've seen God, the Father. And what did they leave us? They didn't leave us a sketch of Jesus' face.

They didn't leave us a picture of him. they didn't leave us a cup from which he drank on the night of his betrayal as he had in the upper room communion there with his disciples.

They didn't leave us a robe or a piece of garment. We'd all certainly worshipped it and bowed before it. You know what they did leave us?

[42 : 54] They left us words. words. And what words? The Word was with the Father in the beginning.

The Word was God and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory. The glory of the one and only from the Father full of grace and truth.

This is God. This is the one who is in the bosom of the Father and he has made him known. He has exegeted God.

It's in Jesus that we learn what God is like. And we have the gospel accounts and we have the epistles. We have these heaven inspired words to fill out our minds as to who God is.

And we meet him in Jesus Christ and we meet Jesus Christ in his Word. The form that God has chosen to reveal himself is the form of words.

[44 : 00] Oh, that simply means that this book must be central in the worship of God. We must read the Word of God about Jesus. We must preach the Word of God about Jesus.

We must sing the Word of God about Jesus. We must pray the Word of God about Jesus. He must be central. The Word must be central. And Jesus, God's perfect image of himself, must be central in the worship.

And do you know when that goes out of central, then do people start hankering after some physical object to channel their worship, some superstitious thing to trust in, rather than having dealings with the living Word of God, the living Son of God, the living Father, the living Holy Spirit.

Oh, let us keep our eyes on Jesus, fixed on Him, and anything of this physical representation, and any other image of Him, and any physical object, we won't want such shallow things, such deceiving, misleading things.

We have the truth as it's found in Jesus Christ. So may the Lord help us. This second commandment lays the foundation of the regulative principle in worship, as it's been called.

[45 : 25] In our confession of faith, we read this under religious worship, that the only acceptable way of worshiping the true God is appointed by Himself.

It's not enough that we worship the true God alone, we must worship in His appointed way alone. And though some claim that these objects help them worship God, feel close to God, God simply says, I don't want them.

I don't want them. Who has required this from your hands? If He hasn't commanded it, we're not to bring it. Say, tell me, what happened to Nadab and Abihu, those priestly sons of Aaron?

You say, well, they were struck dead. Why? What horrible thing were they doing? Were they consorting with women in the temple like other so-called priests in God's temple?

No, they were making an offering to the Lord, the God of Israel, the God of the Bible, making an offering. Yes. The Bible says they took their censers and they put fire in them and they added incense and they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord, which he had not commanded them.

[46 : 48] So fire came out from the presence of the Lord and consumed them and they died before the Lord. You see, when it comes to worshiping God, we're not to seek to be inventive, but to be faithfully obedient to what he has told us in his word.

See to it that you do all I command you. Don't add to it or take away from it. In worship, adding to his word is his evil. as subtracting from it because it does indeed subtract from the glory of the God that we worship.

And just how strongly this God feels about this second commandment is seen in the attached reason for obeying it, which is longer than the command itself. Why should we not have other gods besides him and why should we not worship him in the way that the nations do, but only as he has commanded?

For I, the Lord your God, I'm a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

God's God's God's God. Did you know God is very jealous of his glory and worship? He'll not share it with images and idols and paintings or anything that diminishes his glory.

[48:13] He's also very jealous about the hearts of his people. And he'll not share their hearts worship with an idol put in his place.

So he's jealous and his zeal to maintain his own glory is seen fighting against anything that robs him of his glory. And an image robs him of his glory.

And so he says, in my zeal I will punish those who hate me. Now who's taught, who's said anything about hating God? Who would these be? Well they're the ones that don't obey his commands. That's why it's tacked on to the second commandment.

He's, he's saying those who do this may claim that they hate me, they're very religious, but it's like the mother who says, well I don't spank my child because I love him too much.

And the proverb says, no, you leave a child to himself, you hate him. You may claim you love him, but it's really hatred to just leave a child to go his own way and not correct him.

[49:21] And you may claim that you love God and you do this out of love for God, you make your images. God says, I'm a jealous God and I punish those who hate me. How do we know what true love for God looks like?

It looks like keeping his commandments. And that's what he says, that he not only punishes the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation, indeed King Jeroboam's sin of making an image of God, his sons were all cut down with the sword.

people suffer because of false witness, of false worship. But here's the contrast.

If God's punishment for this sin reaches to the third and fourth generation, what is his love that reaches to a thousand generations? And who is it for? It's for those who love him and keep his commandments.

It's for those who have him as their God and therefore they obey him and they have no other gods and they don't worship him in any way but what he has commanded, they're the ones that love him and he has mercy, he has love toward them to a thousand generations.

[50:32] That's like saying forever, forever. Well, I trust that what might seem small to us, just trying to have some help in worshiping to God is a serious thing.

May we learn from him how he thinks about himself and his worship and let's keep Jesus Christ central. Let's keep his word and we'll be safe. You know, Jesus never broke the second commandment and that's why we have a savior this morning to bring all of our confession of sin for our mental images, the images we make right up here where we think he's harsh and not good or we think he's just a pushover and easy on.

All the ways we create images of him right here, whether we've ever made a physical object. We have a savior to come to who never broke this command, who always thought of his father as the scriptures taught of him and always obeyed him.

And therefore he has a righteousness to give to us as we come and confess our sins to him. He can cleanse us. He can forgive us. And he did suffer the punishment that our sin should have received for the ways that we thought of him and brought him down in our worship.

So let's rejoice in the savior. Let's pray together. We thank you father for the revelation of yourself in words and that we have this book that you have inspired in our hands.

[52:19] Oh, teach us to treasure it. Teach us not to swerve to the left or to the right, to add to it or to subtract from it, especially in this matter of worship.

Oh, teach us just to bring you what you have commanded. Nothing more, nothing less. And please lift our poor minds to think of you as you have revealed in the scriptures.

And thank you for that clearest revelation in Jesus Christ and seeing him. We learn of your attributes. Where do we see such love as in that demonstration of your love at Calvary?

Where God demonstrates his love for us in this and that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Thank you for that. that's worth more than a million crucifixes to hear you tell us that you gave him up to die for sinners.

Thank you for the revelation of all your attributes at the cross, how holy you must be if it takes the crushing of your own son to set one sinner free.

[53 : 34] Oh, thank you for this glorious truth of yourself that we see in Christ, the eternal son of God. Make us lovers and worshipers of him. Keep us as a church from ever straying and wanting something else, something novel rather than the word that you've given us from heaven.

Help us, we're weak. Help us, there are others around us pulling in different directions. Thank you for the forgiveness we have in Christ and we pray in his name.

Amen.