

Deuteronomy 5:8-10
The Ten Commandments
TC1003

Commandment #2
June 20, 2010 pm

“THE REALITY OF GOD”

INTRODUCTION: The human heart is an idol factory.

1. **John Calvin** wrote this in his famous *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Book 1, Chapter 11, section 8; p. 108)

From this we may gather that man's nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols. After the Flood there was a sort of rebirth of the world, but not many years passed by before men were fashioning gods according to their pleasure. So it goes. Man's mind, full as it is of pride and boldness, dares to imagine a god according to its own capacity; as it sluggishly plods, indeed is overwhelmed with the crassest ignorance, it conceives an unreality and an empty appearance as God. To these evils a new wickedness joins itself, that man tries to express in his work the sort of God he has inwardly conceived. Therefore, the mind begets an idol; the hand gives it birth.

2. Calvin's profound wisdom, though 451 years old, speaks to the **major spiritual issue** of our times: *the idolatry of the 21st century American Church.*
3. “Idolatry?”, you ask. “Why, we're not bowing down to statues, crucifixes, paintings or relics!”
4. Nevertheless, *the American heart is an idol factory.*
5. **Tim Keller** has recognized this and written his third book about it: *Counterfeit God's: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters.* (Dutton Books; 209) (pp. xviii-xxi)

A counterfeit god is anything so central and essential to your life that, should you lose it, your life would feel hardly worth living. An idol has such a controlling position in your heart that you can spend most of your passion and energy, your emotional and financial resources, on it without a second thought. The old pagans were not fanciful when they depicted virtually everything as a God. They had sex gods, work gods, war gods, money gods, nation gods—for the simple fact that anything can be a god that rules and serves as a deity in the heart of a person or in the life of a people. The Biblical concept of idolatry is an extremely sophisticated idea, integrating intellectual, psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual categories. There are personal idols. There are cultural idols. There can also be intellectual idols. There are also idols, non-negotiable absolute values, in every vocational field. In the business world, self-expression is suppressed for the ultimate value, profit. In the art world, however, it is the other way around. Everything is sacrificed to self-expression, and it is done in the name of redemption. This, it is thought, is what the human race needs above all. There are idols everywhere.

6. **C. J. Mahaney** has preached a series of messages by the title *The Idol Factory* (Sovereign Grace Ministries)
7. **Richard Keyes**, founder and director of L'Abri Fellowship in Southborough, Massachusetts, wrote about the “*Idol Factory*” of modern Americans back in 1992.
 - a. *No God But God*, by Os Guinness and John Seel
 - b. “*Idol Factory*”, chapter 1, pp. 29-31

As modern people we usually think of an idol as an animal or human figure made of stone or wood. We see it as an object for religious devotion or magical power for premodern people who might prostrate themselves on the ground before it. If we have updated the idea at all, we might use “idolatry” to describe someone’s obsessional preoccupations with money or of an “idol” like Elvis Presley. We have, in effect, distanced ourselves from the whole idea of idolatry by pushing it out to the extreme cultural and psychological margins of life. A careful reading of the Old and New Testaments shows that idolatry is nothing like the crude, simplistic picture that springs to mind of an idol sculpture in some distant country. As the main category to describe unbelief, the idea is highly sophisticated, drawing together the complexities of motivation in individual psychology, the social environment, and also the unseen world. The Bible does not allow us to marginalize idolatry to the fringes of life. All too often it is found on center stage.

8. **Os Guinness** and **John Seel** wrote a book, back in 1992, *No God But God: Breaking the Idols of Our Age*.

- a. I read that book in 1993. It was a spiritual wakeup call for my soul.
- b. The book began with these words... (pp. 11-13)

It is therefore time, and past time, for Americans to face the challenge of faith to the character, ideals and institutions of our nation. More important still, it is time for our church to examine the integrity and effectiveness of its character and witness and its own response to the above questions. For if the nation’s crisis is largely because of the decreasing influence of faith on American culture, the church’s crisis is largely because of the increasing influence of American culture on the Christian faith. For all the undoubted growth and achievements of the past fifty years, many of the hopes of the evangelical leaders of the forties and fifties have not been fulfilled. Much of the promise of the so-called Year of the Evangelical in 1976 has not materialized.

- c. Guinness and Seel went on to say this (p. 23, 28)

Idolatry is the most discussed problem in the Bible and one of the most powerful spiritual and intellectual concepts in the believer’s arsenal. Yet for Christians today it is one of the least meaningful notions and is surrounded with ironies. Perhaps this is why many evangelicals are ignorant of the idols in their lives.

The challenge of our time is the recovery of the living reality of the Gospel, including the all-sufficiency of the one, true God over against the self-sufficiency of our modern age. Either we put our full trust in God, or we do not. If we do not, we are left to the folly of trusting in false gods and the grief of becoming what we worship. If we do, there is no room for any other God. For the people of God, there is no other way because there is no other God. There is one God, there is no god but God, and there is no rest for any who rely on any god but God.

9. We often think that idolatry was a problem that Old Testament Israel struggled with, the Roman Catholics have fallen into with the veneration of Mary and the saints and their use of relics and sacramentals, or that pagans usually practice – like Hindus, Animists or New Agers.
10. But I direct your attention to the apostle John, writing to the New Testament church at the end of the Apostolic Age...

- a. *We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.*

We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.

And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life. Little children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:18-21)

- b. *We know...that converted sinners grow in holiness. (v. 18)*
 c. *We know...that the world is under Satan's influence (v. 19)*
 d. *We know...that Jesus has come to reveal the true God to us that we might be saved (v. 20)*
 e. *"Little Children, keep (guard) yourselves from idols."*

11. Why should we be surprised by John's last sentence?

- a. *"Little children, guard yourselves from idols"?*
 b. We **know** these things...
 i. We are sinners who tend to sin
 ii. Satan is powerfully at work in our world
 iii. Jesus and His Gospel came to show us the true God and the way to eternal life
 c. So...*Idolatry remains the great challenge of any and every age – ancient, medieval, modern or postmodern!*

12. **Therefore:** These Commandments of God never lose their importance, their relevance or their purpose...

- a. *You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Deuteronomy 5:8-10)*
- b. The second commandment: *Prohibition against Idolatry*
- c. **Ken Sande** of Peacemakers Ministries reminds us of a central truth for life
An idol is not simply a statue of wood, stone, or metal; it is anything we love and pursue in place of God, and can also be referred to as a 'false god' or a 'functional god.' In Biblical terms, an idol is something other than God that we set our hearts on, that motivates us, that masters or rules us, or that we serve.

13. **Perhaps the times are changing.** *Maybe with the collapse of our economic prosperity, the destruction of our marriages and the ruin of our American way of life by debt, immoral forces and a leftist government in the White House and Washington, D.C., we are ready to face reality.*

- a. America is awash in an ocean of idolatry.
 b. What Paul said to Athens he now says to us...

Men of America, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, 'To the unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. (Acts 17:16, 22-23)

- c. Back in 1993, after I read *No God But God*, three of my PCA minister friends distanced themselves from me. I had become “*too negative.*”
- d. One of them said, “*Ross has been reading Os Guinness.*”
- e. Well, 17 years later, let me tell you about those three friends of mine:
 - i. One has lost his ministry and his marriage, and has been “defrocked” from the ministry.
 - ii. The second had to leave his church because his wife was ready to leave him and his kids were godless – some turning to the homosexual lifestyle.
 - iii. The third, left a large church in frustration, went to a smaller church in the Deep South, and has since asked my forgiveness for talking about me behind my back.
- f. All three men fell, in one way or another, to the gods **Tim Keller** writes about: *Money, Sex and Power.*
- g. While I was reading *No God But God* (and becoming “negative”), they were serving other gods and have been hurt by it.
- h. *God has graciously recovered all three of them, by grace.*
- i. But their *idolatry* has cost them all...dearly.

14. So, please...turn with me to **Deuteronomy 5:8-10** and join me in studying America’s root sin: Idolatry.
- a. We’ll do what we plan to do with each commandment...
 - b. First: The Character of God
 - c. Second: The Fulfillment in Christ
 - d. Third: The Prescriptions and Prohibition for us

I. THE SPIRITUALITY OF GOD (Deuteronomy 5:8-10)

You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Deuteronomy 5:8-10)

A. God is a Spiritual Being

- 1. *You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. (Deuteronomy 5:8)*
- 2. The main purpose of this second commandment is to teach us this *essential truth* about God:
 - a. **God is spirit...a pure spirit...a spiritual being.**

- b. *Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”* (John 4:21-24)
- c. **The Catechism for Young Children** (Question #9)
9. Q. *What is God?*
- A. *God is a spirit, and does not have a body like men.*
10. Q. *Where is God?*
- A. *God is everywhere.*
11. Q. *Can you see God?*
- A. *No; I cannot see God, but He always sees me.*
- d. **The Westminster Shorter Catechism** (Question #4)
- God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being.*
- e. **Westminster Confession of Faith** (2:1)
- There is but one only, living and true God, who is infinite in being and perfection, a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions.*
3. The great American theologian of Princeton Seminary, **Charles Hodge** expresses this truth in his *Systematic Theology; Volume I, “Theology Proper”*; p. 378-379.
- It is impossible, therefore, to overestimate the importance of the truth contained in the simple proposition, God is a Spirit. It is involved in that proposition that God is immaterial. None of the properties of matter can be predicated of Him. He is not extended or divisible, or compounded, or visible, or tangible. He has neither bulk nor form. If God be a spirit, it follows of necessity that He is a person, - a self-conscious, intelligent, voluntary agent. As all this is involved in our consciousness of ourselves as spirit, it must all be true of God, or God is of a lower order of being than man.*
4. The Hebrew and Greek words pointedly express this truth for us...
- Hebrew: *ruach*: wind, breath, spirit
 - Greek: *pneuma*: the same meaning (spirit, breath)
 - ...then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.* (Genesis 2:7)
 - God’s spirit “breathes” into man “*the breath of life*” and man possesses a spiritual and immortal life in his soul.
 - Hebrew: *nephesh*: soul, life, living being, person
 - Greek: *psyche*: “psychology” (study of the self/soul)
5. Men are made in the image of God because God in spirit implants His life in them...

- a. *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."*

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:26-28)

...then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. (Genesis 2:7)

- b. Men have the **substance** of body and soul/spirit
c. God has only the **substance** of spirit (*pure spirit*)
d. (Westminster Shorter Catechism #6)

There are three persons in the Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one God, the same in substance, equal in power and glory.

6. Here is what Theology Proper (study of God) says about God's being, essence, substance and nature:

- a. God is a *pure spirit* (100% spiritual: 0% physical)
b. God has a *real substance*: invisible reality and being
c. God is *personal*: He is not a mere force.
d. God possesses a *personal consciousness*: He is a self-aware, intelligent, feeling, thinking, willing, moral being. God exists and knows this:

And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" (Exodus 3:6, 13-14)

- e. God is a *simple being*. He has no "body, parts or passions." Unlike man who is a complex being of flesh and spirit, God is "pure spirit." Nothing can be added to or taken away from God. God is a simple, immutable and unified being.

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. (Deuteronomy 6:4)

- f. God is *always invisible* in His primary essence. No one can see God. To see God is to die.

But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." (Exodus 33:20)

...who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. (1 Tim. 6:16)

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. (John 1:18)

7. **Put this all together and here is what emerges:** Men can never create an image of God that is true because we cannot make visible or carnal that which is invisible and pure spirit. To attempt to make an image of God – in stone, in metal, in art-form, or in your mind – is to create a false god, a god who is not true or real, a figment of the fallen mind...*an idol.*
8. When we concoct such mental ideas or construct such religious images, we begin to worship that false God rather than the true God. This makes God jealous!

B. God is a Jealous Being

1. *You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me... (Deuteronomy 5:9)*
2. God refers to Himself as *jealous* for His people's love, their covenant loyalty and their worship a number of times in the Bible – Old Testament and New Testament...

- a. *Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods. "You shall not make for yourself any gods of cast metal." (Exodus 34:11-17)*

- b. *For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God. (Deuteronomy 4:24)*

You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are around you—for the Lord your God in your midst is a jealous God—lest the anger of the Lord your God be kindled against you, and he destroy you from off the face of the earth. (Deuteronomy 6:14-15)

*They have made me jealous with what is no god;
they have provoked me to anger with their idols.*

So I will make them jealous with those who are no people;

I will provoke them to anger with a foolish nation. (Deuteronomy 32:21)

Therefore thus says the Lord God: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel, and I will be jealous for my holy name.

(Ezekiel 39:25)

*Neither their silver nor their gold
shall be able to deliver them*

*on the day of the wrath of the Lord.
In the fire of his jealousy,
all the earth shall be consumed;
for a full and sudden end
he will make of all the inhabitants of the earth. (Zep. 1:18)*

Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, “He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us”? (James 4:5)

3. **Oprah Winfrey** stated that she left the Baptist Church, the Christian Faith and turned to New Age religion because she was offended by the idea of a *jealous God*.
4. Let's be clear about three things:
 - a. First, *God Himself says that He is jealous*.
 - b. Second, *Jealousy* is not the same thing as *envy*.
 - i. Envy: desiring what belongs to another
 - ii. Example: coveting another man's beautiful wife
 - iii. Jealousy: desiring what rightfully belongs to you
 - iv. Example: Upset that my beautiful wife flirts with another man
 - v. Jealousy is a virtue; envy is a sin
 - c. Third: Human jealousy is often rooted in sin
 - i. Fallen man's jealousy is often envy. We use the words interchangeably.
 - ii. God's jealousy is a righteous anger that the devotion and love all men owe to Him are given to other gods, false gods, idols.
 - iii. Idolatry is often called *adultery* in the Bible.
 - d. God's jealousy leads Him to *punish* idolatry and *pursue* His people in order to save them for Himself.
5. **Illustration:** I have a dear friend whose wife left him and their two children for an adulterous affair with a fellow artist. The counselor told my friend it was wrong for him to feel jealousy!
 - a. Wrong! *He had a holy right to be upset that his wife was intimate with another man*.
 - b. The **Covenant of Marriage** bound her to him.
 - c. When she committed adultery three things happened –
 - i. She broke the *covenant* and forsook her *vows*.
 - ii. The fellow artist acted out of *covetous envy* by taking another man's wife.
 - iii. My friend was rightly *jealous*.
 - d. Had my friend not been jealous, he would have been morally sick!
6. God is **jealous** over the worship and devotion of mankind, and especially His people the church, for three reasons –
 - a. **First:** He made mankind for Himself; to worship Him.

- b. **Second:** He formed a covenant with the elect to love Him.
 - c. **Third:** He is God, the Creator and Pure Spirit, who is worth all glory, honor, adoration and love.
7. **Imagine** if my wife left me, married a carved, wooden Indian in front of a cigar store, and gave her love, affections and sexual pleasures to this wooden statue. *Would I not have a godly duty to be upset...jealous?*
8. That is how God feels about **idolatry**...
- a. *I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. (Isaiah 42:8)*
 - b. Since there is **only one God** there can be no other gods to worship.
 - c. Hence, God's wrath against idolatry...

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! (Romans 1:18-25)

9. **James I. Packer:** *Knowing God*; p. 172

So God's jealousy leads Him, on the one hand, to judge and destroy the faithless among His people who fall into idolatry and sin; it also leads Him, on the other hand, to restore His people after national judgment has chastened and humbled them. And what is it that motivates these actions? Simply the fact that He is "jealous for [His] holy name."

C. God is Self-Revealing

1. Since God is pure spirit, the only way for us to know Him is for Him to reveal Himself to us.
2. Hence: *God is self-revealing, making Himself known through revelation.*
 - a. General revelation: creation, conscience, culture
 - b. Special revelation: Christ, Canon, Church
3. We can only know the true God through God's revelation: **Jesus Christ.**

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.
(John 1:18)

II. JESUS CHRIST IS GOD INCARNATE

A. Jesus is the Perfect Revelation of God

1. *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.* (Hebrews 1:1-3)

2. God can be “known” in a number of ways:

a. His power and attributes in creation...

For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (Romans 1:19-20)

b. In the quiet voice of the human conscience...

The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds, there is none who does good. (Psalm 14:1)

c. In the moral and spiritual constructs of human culture...

So Paul, standing in the midst of the Areopagus, said: “Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are very religious. For as I passed along and observed the objects of your worship, I found also an altar with this inscription, ‘To the unknown god.’ What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you.

And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel their way toward him and find him. Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for

“In him we live and move and have our being’;

as even some of your own poets have said,

“For we are indeed his offspring.’

Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. (Acts 17:22-23; 26-29)

d. Through the Canon of Scripture: 66 books about God

e. Through the Church: The Communion of Saints

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:14-15)

3. But, God's **perfect, complete** and **final** revelation of Himself is in Jesus Christ

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. (John 1:1, 14, 18)

Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves. (John 14:9-11)

4. If you want to *see God*, then read the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John! *God in the flesh!!!*

5. Most people *fear God* but they *like (love) Jesus*. This duplicity is a subtle form of idolatry.

- a. A harsh, angry, aloof God the Father (of the Old Testament)
- b. A loving, gracious and merciful Jesus (of the New Testament)
- c. **This is idolatrous thinking! False view of God.**
- d. "He who has seen me has seen the Father"

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. (John 1:14, 16-18)

- a. Grace and truth...in God...seen in Christ.

6. **James I. Packer:** *Knowing God*, p. 204

God has not left us to guess what His fatherhood amounts to by drawing analogies from human fatherhood. He revealed the full meaning of this relationship once and for all through our Lord Jesus Christ, His own incarnate Son. For God intends the lives of believers to be a reflection and reproduction of Jesus' own fellowship with Himself.

7. **The Reality Behind this Second Commandment:** *God has shown Himself to us, in visible form, in His Son, Jesus Christ, who is "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature." (Heb. 1:3)*

8. The Face of God can be seen in the Face of Jesus Christ...

- a. *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:6)*
- b. **No longer true:** "No man can see Me and live..."
- c. **Now it is true:** The only way to live with God is to see Him in Jesus Christ...

B. Jesus is the Only Way to God

1. Idolatry is contrary to the Gospel because it offers us an alternative to finding God other than Jesus Christ.
2. Christ Himself and the Scriptures make it plain that Jesus is the only way to God, salvation, and a life with God – now and in eternity.
 - a. *Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)*
 - b. *And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. (Acts 4:12)*
 - c. *This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. (1 Tim. 2:3-5)*
 - d. *But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior. (Titus 3:4-6)*
3. The **essence of idolatry** is to attempt to find another way to forgiveness, blessing and eternal life without going through Christ, the Cross and surrender to Jesus.
4. **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**, reflecting the very thoughts and words of Martin Luther (*Eric Mataxas: Bonhoeffer Biography; p. 137*)

If it is I who determine where God is to be found, then I shall always find a God who corresponds to me in some way, who is obliging, who is connected with my own nature. But if God determines where He is to be found, then it will be in a place which is not immediately pleasing to my nature and which is not at all congenial to me. This place is the Cross of Christ. And whoever would find Him must go to the foot of the Cross, as the Sermon on the Mount commands. This is not according to our nature at all, it is entirely contrary to it. But this is the message of the Bible, not only in the New but also in the Old Testament...
5. **Martin Luther:** *The Heidelberg Disputation (Thesis 21 and proof)*

This is clear: He who does not know Christ does not know God hidden in suffering. Therefore, he prefers works to suffering, glory to the Cross, strength to weakness, wisdom to folly, and, in general, good to evil. These are the people whom the Apostle calls "enemies of the Cross of Christ," for they hate the Cross and suffering and love works and the glory of works. Thus they call the good of the Cross evil and the evil of a deed good. God can be found only in suffering

and the Cross, as has already been said. Therefore, the friends of the Cross say that the Cross is good and works are evil, for through the Cross works are dethroned and the Old Adam, who is especially edified by works, is crucified.

6. To attempt to avoid Jesus Christ revealed in Scripture, the Cross of Christ (atonement) and the way of the Cross as the essence of the Christian life is to turn to **idolatry**.
7. *The only way to the true God is to embrace the true Christ of Scripture – the Jesus who is, and not the Jesus you would like to exist.*

III. THE CHRISTIAN AND THE TRUE GOD

A. The Prescriptions of the Second Commandment

1. Each commandment **requires** us to obey God in specific ways.
2. This second commandment concerns primarily the *Worship of God*

- a. **Calvin Knox Cummings:** *Confessing Christ* (p. 33)

This is the commandment that is omitted, unfortunately, in the Roman Catholic and Lutheran catechisms. It tells us how we are to worship God. We are not to worship God thorough images, crucifixes, altars, or any other ways not prescribed in God’s Word. This includes unscriptural imaginings and concepts of God. Any likeness of God that we might make, either with our hands or with our minds, will be false and insulting representation of God. The next step, history teaches us, is to attach reverence to this likeness of God and to start worshiping the image in the place of God. “God is Spirit, and His worshipers must worship Him in spirit and in truth,” Christ explained (John 4:24). We are to worship the Lord from the heart renewed by the Holy Spirit. We are to worship God through that one and only Mediator who is the Truth, Jesus Christ. We are, then to avoid those churches that have other mediators. Beware of those churches where the emphasis is upon an altar, ritual and form. These eventually become substitutes for the heart-worship of God’s people.

- b. **Westminster Larger Catechism** (question #108)

The duties required in the second commandment are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in His Word; particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ; the reading, preaching, and hearing of the Word; the administration and receiving of the sacraments; church government and discipline; the ministry and maintenance thereof; religious fasting; swearing by the name of God; and vowing unto Him; as also the disapproving, detesting, opposing all false worship and, according to each one’s place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry.

3. There are **three** broad categories of duty required by this second commandment. Here they are...
 - a. **First:** *To follow the Regulative Principle of Worship in all of life—church, home personal.*

i. **Westminster Confession of Faith 21-1**

The light of nature sheweth that there is a God, who hath lordship and sovereignty over all, is good, and doth good unto all, and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in, and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might. But the acceptable way of worshipping the true God is instituted by Himself, and so limited by His own revealed will, that He may not be worshipped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture.

ii. **Book of Church Order 47-1**

Since the Holy Scriptures are the only infallible rule of faith and practice, the principles of public worship must be derived from the Bible, and from no other source. The Scriptures forbid the worshipping of God by images, or in any other way not appointed in His Word, and requires the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in His Word.

- iii. We cannot import into worship any and everything we “like” or think is “helpful”
- iv. We *regulate* worship, by the *Word* of God, to negate *idolatrous* practices.
- v. **Remember:** *How we worship eventually determines what/whom we worship. (style leads to substance)*

b. **Second:** *To approach God only through the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospels.*

- i. A Gospel-centered faith
- ii. A Christ-centered worldview
- iii. A Cross-centered lifestyle
- iv. **A cruciform religion**
- v. *And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.* (1 Corinthians 2:1-2)

c. **Third:** *To find our contentment in life and satisfaction in soul only in Jesus Christ and the grace of God.*

- i. Not money, sex and power
- ii. *No God But God*
- iii. Examining our own heart and smashing all idols.
- iv. **Know this:** *All idols are born out of the fear that God will fail to provide for you what you need.*
- v. *Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!*

*And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting! (Ps. 139:23-24)*

vi. **The human heart is an idol factory.**

vii. *Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.*

“Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (Matthew 6:31-34)

B. The Prohibitions of the Second Commandment

1. Each commandment **forbids** certain things.
2. This commandment prohibits *seeking God in faulty ways.*

The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, counseling, commanding, using, and any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God Himself; the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever; all worshipping of it, or God in it or by it; the making of any representation of feigned deities, and all worship of them, or service belonging to them, all superstitious devices, corrupting the worship of God, adding to it, or taking from it, whether invented and taken up of ourselves, or received by tradition from others, though under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretence whatsoever; simony; sacrilege; all neglect, contempt, hindering, and opposing the worship and ordinances which God hath appointed. (Westminster Larger Catechism #109)

3. Again, there are **three** broad categories or prohibitions in this second commandment. Here they are...
 - a. **First:** *We must never turn from the Word of God, especially the Gospels, in order to find God.*
 - i. Greatest lie in the universe: *“There are many ways to God”*
 - ii. Absolute Statement: *Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)*
 - iii. A restlessness or boredom with the Word of God is the **first symptom** of the soul-sickness called “idolatry”
 - b. **Second:** *We must never try to imagine a God other than the One found in Jesus.*
 - i. Warning sign: *“When I think of God, I imagine...”* (wrong approach)
 - ii. No need to “imagine.” God is found in Jesus, in truth, in the Bible.
 - iii. *“What God means to me...”* is an idolatrous statement of an idol-factory in the soul.
 - iv. **Warning:** *Mysticism, visions, dreams, superstition, and direct revelations* are always the tools of Satan to introduce idolatry.

- c. **Third:** *We must stop trying to improve on the way God has prescribed worship.*
- i. We cannot make it better, only worse.
 - ii. American culture is the enemy of true worship.
 - iii. *Entertainment is antithetical to worship.*
 - iv. *“When the Lord your God cuts off before you the nations whom you go in to dispossess, and you dispossess them and dwell in their land, take care that you be not ensnared to follow them, after they have been destroyed before you, and that you do not inquire about their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods?—that I also may do the same.’ You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods. “Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it. (Deut. 12:29-32)*
 - i. When you say, “Boy, reformed worship is boring”, you’re already on the road to idolatry.
4. **Here is the bottom line:** *There are only two kinds of gods in this world – the True God and idols.*
- a. The True God is always *The God of the ears!*
 - b. *“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. (Deuteronomy 6:4-6)*
 - c. *Hear...these words...the Scripture*
 - d. **We know God through the hearing of the Word and reading of Jesus in the Scriptures.**
 - e. False gods are always, always, always *the god of the eyes.*

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” So Aaron said to them, “Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” (Exodus 32:1-4)
 - f. Images, incense, crucifixes, flashing visuals on the overhead screen, rituals and rubrics for the five senses – these are the seed-bed of idolatry.
5. The old Marnatha song by **Robert Cull**, written back in 1976 was wrong-headed...

*Open our eyes, Lord
We want to see Jesus.*

*To reach out and touch Him
 And say that we love Him
 Open our ears, Lord
 And help us to listen
 Open our eyes, Lord
 We want to see Jesus*

6. And so was the version written by **Michael W. Smith** 25 years later, back in 2001

*Open the eyes of my heart, Lord
 Open the eyes of my heart
 I want to see You
 I want to see You
 To see You high and lifted up
 Shinin' in the light of Your glory
 Pour out Your power and love
 As we sing holy, holy, holy.*

7. **We don't need to see Jesus; we need to believe in Him!**

CONCLUSION: This is the bottom-line of this second commandment...

1. *The only antidote to idolatry is the pure Gospel, written in the Scriptures, focused on Christ, preached from the pulpit and read by the saints.*

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." (Romans 1:16-17)

2. This Gospel of the Apostles takes us to the true Christ who then brings us to the One True God – His Father and ours!

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit. (1 Peter 3:18)

3. This **Word of the Cross** is the only way to avoid the idols of the heart, to find the true God and to live under the favor of heaven...

I Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.

Whether then it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed. (1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 11)