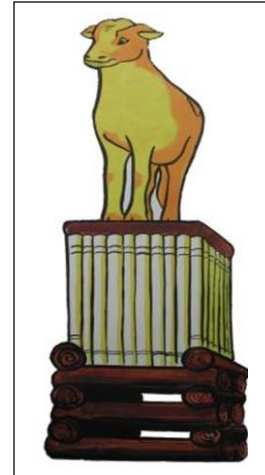


*“It’s
just
art!”*



2nd Commandment, continued

Ex. 20:4-6

The Regulative Principle of Worship means God tells us what He wants from us in our worship of Him. That is what He commands and that is what we must give to Him.

But, as with all the commandments of God there are not only the things He commands - things He wants - and there are the things He forbids. When it comes to the 2nd Commandment, God is quite clear: “You shall not make for yourself a carved image ...”.

The Golden “ Christmas Tie”

Are you looking forward to Christmas? What kind of gifts are you used to receiving? Sometimes you get exactly what you want, but other times others give you something that just “won’t do”. The standing joke in this department seems to be the tie that men always get for Christmas. Where in the world do those awful ties come from? And why would anyone think that you would appreciate that tie? You immediately begin to think - not to what occasion you would actually wear this but how good a shop rag it might be.

*Do you point to anything - even by suggestion -
and say to your children - even by your silence -
“This is our God!”?*

There is an incident recorded in Scripture that is very close to giving God a Christmas tie. It occurs during the story of the Exodus of the Israelites out of Egypt and toward the promised land.

Now this is probably a very familiar story to all of us - Moses had led the people through the wilderness and right up to Mt. Sinai. God has called the people to prepare themselves and to come before him in worship. The mountaintop is covered with darkness. The presence of God is not seen but it is surely felt.

“a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest”¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.²⁰ For they could not endure the

*order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." ²¹ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear."
(Heb. 12:18b-21, ESV)*

Moses was called of God to ascend the mount in order to receive the Law of God. But he had been gone for 40 days without word. In his absence - even right in front of God's presence on the mountain - the people grew impatient. "Make us gods", they cried - idols, in other words, - "to go before us", "to set before our eyes". Moses' brother, Aaron finally and reluctantly bowed to the pressure of the people and had the idol made. In his weakness, he tried to keep the true God in their minds, however. "This is your god," he cried, "that brought you out of Egypt!" "Tomorrow is a feast to the Lord." And what was the result?

If God calls himself a jealous God there must be a meaning that carries with it a holiness, an appropriateness, a justice.

"The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." (Heb. 10:7, ESV) In other words, first the people worshipped as they pleased. And then, they enjoyed themselves as they pleased. And it was all OK, because, after all, they thought, even though it was an idol of their own making, it was still worship done in the name of their God. Aaron had said so. "We worshipped the one, true God - just according to our own preference to do so.

But what did God think? Look at Ex. 32:7. This was not worship as the people thought it was. God said "they have corrupted themselves." First, they **made** for themselves an idol. Second, they **worshipped** and **sacrificed** to their idol. Third, they **called** it their god, the god who delivered them. God's opinion of all this is not in dispute: they were not a people who loved the Lord at all. They were a stiff-necked people. Their worship should not be received and accepted by Him. They should be destroyed.

But then, look at verse 14 - Why were they not destroyed? Was it because Moses convinced God the idol wasn't all that bad? Had he successfully argued that religious art should be appreciated in the worship of God? Was Moses satisfied that the calf wasn't a pagan god after all but simply one person's idea of the true God; and that if it helped the people worship that it should be OK? No. None of those things were true. None of those things mattered at all. The people were not destroyed in their sin because of God's covenant promise to them. God's name shall yet redeem them.

You see, idolatry doesn't draw anyone closer to God. It only demonstrates how wicked our hearts really are and why we truly need to be redeemed, delivered, changed in heart, in soul and in mind after the true image of God's own son.

Now look at Ex. 32:19. How did Moses respond when he came off the mountain? The Law of God had been broken, not just stretched or fudged. There are many artists who have depicted this dramatic scene in which Moses breaks the tablets. Artists seem to get the point even though some Christians do not!

There could be no compromise, no discussion, no congregational vote. It was not up to the people whether to keep this Law or not, the idol was a sin and it needed to be destroyed. And judgment must begin with the house of God.

Moses cried out "Who is on the Lord's side?" It is sad to think that one of the church's well-known hymns of faith and duty is based on the issue and matter of idolatry - not outside the ranks of the church but within them. And the judgment of God was terrible - splitting the church over it was not too high a price to pay, hurting people's feelings was not too major a consideration. It was the Lord that must be worshipped and nothing else.



In the church today, we, a congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ, cannot afford to be any less careful or zealous or fearful to worship this same God. The Lord deserves and calls for our full worship and obedience. We should not think of compromise because our hearts are no less

There could be no compromise, no discussion, no congregational vote.

prone to sin and wandering today, our need for the redemption and changing by the Lord is no less today.

What do we offer to God?

When we come into the presence of the Lord for worship, what is worthy to set before our eyes, to put between our God and ourselves? And how does God truly receive it? When you bring your covenant children into the worship of God do you gaze upon some image? Do you point to anything – even by suggestion – and say to your children – even by your silence – “This is our God who has delivered us!”? “This is the one who has died for our sins!”? “Let’s come and worship before him.”?

As I have said before, we hold the commandments of God dear because we know that Jesus fulfilled the law perfectly in himself. And yet, the fully righteous one died a sinner’s death. He died in our place because we needed him to do so, because we are prone to break this commandment. We are prone to idolatry. Who is on the Lord’s side? Savior, we are thine!

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