

**Sermon preached by Mr. Michael Bittenbender
at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, June 24, 2018**

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS (2)

Exodus 20:2, 4-6

Good Morning.

I am going to have to apologize to you all this morning. No, I didn't throw out my sermon last night and write a new one, but I have decided to not combine the 2nd and 3rd commandments. I wanted to combine them so I can get through this series and it not take 3 years to do so. I looked at the 3rd commandment and thought it would be simple enough to just tag on at the end but I think that will not give it enough credit for making it into the Ten Commandments. Clearly it is more important than a quick addition at the end of a sermon.

With that said, let me pray.

This morning's scripture comes to us from Exodus Chapter 20. Now, the bulletin says 4-7. However, I want to reiterate Verse 2, and then skip to verse 4 and read through verse 6.

Now let us give our reverent attention to the reading of God's Holy Word.

I am realizing more and more, with each of these, that preaching on really popular, almost famous verses, is really difficult because we have either 1. heard sermons on them many times over, 2. have in general, heard the verses over and over or 3. the verses seem to be pretty self-explanatory. Don't make anything into an idol. See you guys next time....

Well, it is not quite that simple. As I started my research into the second commandment some aspects of the commandment began coming to life. With the help of Ron Mehl, author of "The Ten(der) Commandments", Robert Morris, pastor of Gateway Church in Dallas, Texas, and even Rev. Graham Smith I began to realize the seriousness, the easiness, and the deception of idols in our lives and why God makes this such a big deal as to mention it here, His top 10 rules for being in a relationship with Him.

Here are some connections that I think need to be made to help set some of the historical situation that we find at the giving of the 10 commandments as well as the time that shortly follows. After receiving the 10 commandments and wandering around in the desert for a while, the Israelites head into the promised land that God had said would be theirs. At the time, the land was inhabited by the Canaanites. The Canaanites worshiped a ton of gods. They had gods for everything. They also had a national god, a family god, and a personal god. When the Israelites came, Canaanites thought, yeah we agree we have the same national god, but what you also need is a family god, Baal and Ashera, a personal God. They deceived the Israelites in this way. The Canaanites also believed that if you carved a god, that that god would then put his spirit into that image. Any idea where they got the idea from? The devil

himself. The devil saw God create man in His image and breathe into man. The deceiver takes truth and twists it. But don't miss this. God tells us not to make an image of Him because he has already made His image on earth: us. We are made in the Imago Dei, the image of God as Genesis 1 tells us. God knows how easy it is for truth to be twisted and humans deceived and here in the second commandment, He is also trying to warn us and give us wisdom as to not follow false, empty, worthless gods.

Now, there are basically two schools of thought about this second commandment and what is meant by created images. The first deals with having an image of God that represents God. Almost universally, everyone who I read from gave this example.

A wife walks into a room and sees her husband with his arm around another woman getting cozy. The wife confronts her husband and the husband tries to explain that this woman reminded him of her and that really he was thinking about her the whole time, that this other woman was representing her. The man using the other woman as a representation doesn't fly with the wife, and that kind of thinking doesn't fly with God. People using images of God, perhaps to help them worship God, it's a fine line. When we think we have something that is representing God, but not actually Him, and we turn our worship towards it, we are breaking this commandment. See later in the verse God identifies Himself as a jealous God. He doesn't want anything representing Him or taking our affections away from Him. While God is giving this commandment, the people of Israel were literally right down the mountain getting Aaron to fashion two gold calves for them.... and when we worship something we make, even if it's to help us worship God, we are still worshipping something we ourselves have made.

The second school of thought is taking things that exist and making them into idols in our lives by the way we treat them. So not necessarily an artifact that we have created, but perhaps a principle, something we highly value, our car, our job, our family, our technology, our knowledge, our pleasure, our power...

Anything we value more than God is an idol

Paul says Athens was filled with gods and idols on every street corner/ What is that in comparison today? What are our culture's idols? Our culture offers us many idols. Sex, alcohol, money, power, and pleasure are constantly being shoved in our faces as things to lust after, to dedicate your life to attaining. When asking what our values are as a society, one only need to look at the media we consume to find the answer. Our cultural values can be seen in the media that we consume. The TV, movies, music, social media are all places where we find what's important to our culture. Walt Mueller, a Youth Worker who runs the Center for Parent Youth Understanding says that the media being consumed in our culture is both a mirror and a map, it is both reflective and directive. He says "Media tells us how to live in the world. It maps out life for us. This is especially true for impressionable and growing children and teens. As a mirror, it reflects back to us what the prevailing cultural ideals, values, and worldviews currently are." So looking at media today, images of materialism, sexual indulgence, personal power fill everything we see and hear. Companies all over the world are

trying to crack the code for how to capture our attention, our interest, our money, our time, and our commitment. They all want to make sure that their product, is our idol.

So there are 2 different ways that we put idols first: one with making images of God that are not God, and putting other things before Him in our time, affection and influence. So what? What's so bad?

Some things to remember about where we put our affection, time and influence is that things are temporary, God is forever. Things, burn, God will do the burning, Things will lie to you, God is truth. Things will disappoint you, God is faithful. Things will control you, God loves you. And therefore He brings you out of slavery, slavery to sin, out of the grave, and into life with Him.

See, things don't deliver what they promise. Here is an example of a thing that disappointed me, I was expecting something awesome and got something terribly disappointing. A polar bear skin blanket. I bought this off eBay many years ago. I was so excited to have a faux polar bear skin throw and I was going to use it as a comforter. Down in the description, in small print I didn't read, "item in the image not representative of actual item." In reality, the rug was 2 ft. by 3 ft. I think everything this world has to offer should come with a warning label but perhaps easier to find. A warning such as "This item will not fulfill what you're looking for and will only leave you feeling disappointed."

Things will leave us with hollow despair, and the need to come back trying harder to find fulfillment in it, and we will never find that fulfillment. Jesus said to the woman at the well, "If you drink this water, you'll come back every day because you will get thirsty again, but if you drink from My well, you'll never be thirsty again."

Think about it. Illicit substances, while they may offer a very short escape high, it quickly deteriorates. It leaves you yearning for that feeling and that feeling becomes harder and harder to replicate and before you know, it controls you now.

Jobs: Jobs are good things to have. We can discuss the work mandate God gave us and how work can be great at another time but it can also control us in unhealthy ways. We will talk about one side effect of work and the Sabbath when we get to the 4th commandment. When the need for a better job, more money, a bigger paycheck leads us to not be content where God has placed us, that leads to idolatry. Again, there are good and proper ways of going about career advancement, but it is so easy to let it become an idol. And in today's world when sayings like time is money, I'll sleep when I'm dead so I can keep on working, that kind of thinking can lead our job to being an idol.

Power: When the need for power, for control consumes us to where we can no longer surrender our lives to the God who created us, who gives us freedom, who gives us life, who sacrificed His only Son, and all He wants in return is for us to trust Him, that He is in control, and He says surrender to me, let me take the lead, let me direct your path.

I hope you guys can fill in the blanks similarly for things like pleasure, money, fame, materialism because we need to keep moving or else I'll ruin my reputation of being a very short preacher.

Scripture tells us that the gods of this world will lead us astray. They will make us follow them away from God's truth and away from His will. They will discard us, leaving us alone, feeling worthless, and desiring something else. But if we stay true to God's Word, steadfast in His love and living according to His will, refraining from idolatry, there is freedom, fulfillment, and we begin to become more like Him every day.

So this morning, I want to challenge you to ask yourself the really hard question. Make this yours, take the time to do the hard stuff and ask yourself, as Dr. Graham Smith said, "What is it that you own that if God asks for it you couldn't give it, or you wouldn't give it willingly? What is your most prized possession that you aren't able to part with?" Maybe it is a house, a job, a car, a computer or other device, money. Maybe, it's someone in your life, that if God were to take away you would then resent God, and turn against Him. This is getting uncomfortable now to think about so we too often stop here. God says there shall be nothing before me, don't make or worship anything that resembles me in your life. Don't worship it by giving it your time, affection and influence. I am jealous for you. I brought you out of the land of slavery, not into it. Things will lead you back into slavery. I brought you out, worship me and me alone.

So ask yourself, "What is the idol in my life that I need to dethrone, that I can enthrone the one who paid it all for my life?" Amen.