

The Idolatry of the Papal King #2

Daniel 11:38-39; Exodus 20:1-6

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What constitutes the idolatrous use of images? Is idolatry only the use of images in worshipping a false/pagan god (whether Baal, or Zeus, or the sun or the earth)? Or is idolatry also the use of an image in worship to represent the God of the Bible, or an angel, or a departed martyr? This is the question we shall seek to answer this Lord's Day.

We are not disengaging with our text in Daniel 11:38 but are really further expounding that text. As you recall, the Papal King is marked out as one who will honor "the God (or a god) of forces (*mauzzim*)". That may be used in a military sense to refer to his campaigns against those who oppose him (which was certainly true of the Papacy for hundreds of years). It may also be used in a religious sense to refer to his veneration of martyrs/saints and the use of images of not only martyrs/saints in worship, but also the use of images of the Son of God in worship.

We noted in the previous sermon how the veneration of martyrs and saints (and their images) was not practiced by the church before the fourth century, but slowly came to be venerated in praying to them as intercessors/protectors/patrons (*mauzzim*) and in kissing and bowing down before these images.

It is claimed by the Papal King and the Church of Rome that such veneration of the martyrs/saints and their images is not idolatry, but is a lawful, biblical act that is appropriate in worship. Is that true? Let us turn to Exodus 20 to consider the Second Commandment. The main points are: (1) An Overview of the Ten Commandments; (2) A Brief Exposition of the Second Commandment.

I. An Overview of the Ten Commandments.

A. The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5) were given by God to Israel after Israel was redeemed/delivered by the Lord out of Egyptian bondage (which is a picture of our redemption by Christ).

1. The Ten Commandments embody God's gracious covenant with His people (in the Old Testament and in the New Testament) not as the way for sinners to be justified before God (for that comes only through the righteousness of Christ), but as evidence of our faith, love, and submission to God in our sanctification and growth in Christ.

2. The Ten Commandments (not the Ten Suggestions) are a summary of God's Moral Law (not just the Nine Commandments, Exodus 34:27-28—written upon stone tablets and placed in the Ark of the Covenant as a summary of God's Covenant with His people). Jesus summarized God's Moral Law in the Two Commandments (Matthew 22:37-40). God's Moral Law perpetually binds all people/nations in all ages (in both the Old Testament period and the New Testament period). We know they are binding even in the New Testament, for Paul declares that all people (Jews and Gentiles alike) are sinners (Romans 3:23). But what is sin? Sin is the transgression of God's Law in thought, word, or deed (1 John 3:4). Where there is sin, God's Law is broken.

3. God's Law is like a mirror that reveals our sin, but it has no power to cleanse us from our sin. Only God through the atoning death of Jesus Christ can cleanse us of our sin (just as a mirror only reveals our dirty face, but it cannot wash the dirt from our face—soap/water is needed for that). The Law of God sends us to Christ to be cleansed and justified, and Christ sends us to the Law of God to evidence we have been cleansed/justified as God's Spirit works in us to conform us more and more to His righteousness that is found in the perfect Law of liberty (James 1:25). God's Law has its perfect work in our lives when we do not obey it merely because we are duty-bound to do so, but when we do so because we are love-bound through a gracious covenant with the Lord to do so (Psalm 119:97; 1 John 5:3).

4. Let's be clear that it is not legalism to obey the Ten Commandments out of love for God

who justified us, out of love for Jesus who redeemed us, and out of love for the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us. That's biblical Christianity. Legalism is seeking to be justified before God by keeping God's Law (Galatians 2:16). That is not the gospel of life, but rather is the message of death/destruction that has blinded the world. It is lawlessness to believe that we are set free from God's Law. We are set free from the curse of God's Law, but not from our love bound duty to it. Paul says that he is "under the law to Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:21).

B. Besides the Moral Law of God (as summarized in the Ten Commandments), there is also the Ceremonial Law (sacrificial system) and the Judicial Law (cities of refuge those guilty of man slaughter), both of which were given to Israel as a church and nation, but which no longer bind Christian churches or nations (except for that which is clearly of a moral nature in them as demonstrated in the New Testament); for Colossians 2:14 tells us that all those ordinances were nailed to the cross.

C. There are 3 parts to the summary of God's Law found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5.

1. The Preface (Exodus 20:1-2). This is what makes this a Covenant of Grace. God as Lord and Savior first redeemed Israel and then He calls Israel to submit to Him and love Him by keeping His commandments. Without the Preface, the Ten Commandments become a Covenant of Works.

2. Duties to God—Commandments 1-4 (Exodus 20:3-11).

3. Duties to Man—Commandments 5-10 (Exodus 20:12-17).

II. A Brief Exposition of the Second Commandment.

A. First, note the distinction between the First and Second Commandments.

1. The First Commandment forbids having any other god but Jehovah as our God (Exodus 20:3). This commandment clearly condemns all false religions and gods that people profess, believe in, and worship. This commandment tells us WHO we are to worship alone: the LORD thy God. To worship any god besides the one and only true God (eternally existing as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is to bring that which is an abomination before His presence. It is like a wife bringing another man into the presence of her husband to commit adultery—spiritual adultery.

2. Since there is only one true God (First Commandment), there is only one way to worship Him—that is His way appointed in His Word (Second Commandment). This commandment tells us HOW we are to worship the one true God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). We are not to worship God by way of what we create/invent out of our own minds or imaginations, but only by way of what God commands (graven images are to be taken literally, but also by way of extension refer to all our innovations we might offer to God that are not appointed in His Word).

3. The Second Commandment forbids two things: (1) the making of a graven image in representing God; (2) the bowing down to images and serving or venerating images in the worship of God.

4. The Papal King (Daniel 11:36-39) takes these two distinct commandments and unites them as one commandment forbidding only the idolizing of false gods (and having nothing to do with forming images of God, martyrs, or saints in worship). However, the Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria (20 B.C.-50 A.D.) divided the first two commandments (*The Decalogue*, IX, 32-37) rather than uniting them as one commandment. Likewise, the Jewish historian and military leader, Josephus (37-100) divided these commandments into two distinct commandments (*Antiquities*, 3:5:5). It is important to recognize the First Commandment relates to false gods, whereas the Second Commandment relates to those who claim to worship Jehovah God by means of images.

B. The biblical commentary as to what is forbidden in the Second Commandment is given to us in Deuteronomy 4:12-19 where Moses renews the covenant between God and His people before entering the Promise Land (note that both images of false gods and images of the true God are forbidden). Then Moses repeats the Ten Commandments with the Preface in Deuteronomy 5:6-21. Carefully note the same language that was used in Deuteronomy 4:12-19 (in forbidding the making and using any image of God in worship is repeated here in the Second Commandment). God specifically forbids images of Himself.

C. Indeed, God did strongly condemn and judge Israel for joining in the worship of the false god, Baal of Peor (Numbers 25:1-5). However, let us not forget that God likewise strongly condemned and judged Israel for idolatry when Aaron made a golden calf that represented Jehovah at Israel's urging and worshipped before it (Exodus 32:1-6,27).

1. Thus, when God forbids the making of images and the bowing down to images, these images include any images that represent God or any image (by way of extension) that might be made and venerated in worship. All manmade images or physical representations of God or of martyrs/saints brought into worship are condemned by God in the Second Commandment.

2. What about the cherubim in the Holy of Holies and the brazen serpent upon whom those bitten by serpents in the wilderness were to look?

a. First, these were specifically appointed by God, not by man. There is no recorded example of a prophet/apostle making an approved image of God or of angels/martyrs/saints on their own.

b. Second, they were not prayed to, toward, or through to God as the Church of Rome and the Papal King claim now is the case. The cherubim were hidden from the public, and neither were bowed before or prayed to/through.

c. Third, God ended even the use of these images and brought them to an end (Josiah destroyed the serpent because it was being used in a religious way in 2 Kings 18:4 not to be replicated by Israel, and Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple but the cherubim and ark of the covenant are not mentioned as being taken in 2 Kings 25:13-17 because they were either destroyed or taken previously). Neither were ever replicated in the rebuilt temple (Ezra 6:16). God gave them, and God took them away. He has not given us any such commands in the New Testament for New Covenant worship. In fact, all such images are completely absent. We have no warrant to erect them in the New Testament. We have only two physical symbols of God's gracious covenant in the New Testament: Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Next week, we shall consider some objections used in favor of the veneration given to martyrs/saints and to their images.

D. Application

1. Regulative Principle of Worship.

Are we allowed by God to introduce whatever we want into worship if we think it will be helpful to people or might bring more people to church? Is worship about our desires and what we want? If not, it must be God's will that determines what we do in His worship. And where do we find God's infallible will? Only in Scripture. God must take His worship very seriously, for **Nadab and Abihu** were slain for offering strange fire in the incense offering made to the Lord; and **Uzza** was slain for touching the Ark of the Covenant when it was transported by a cart to Jerusalem. These were slain because they added what God had not commanded. We may say that was unique to them, but it is for our instruction (Adam/Eve; Ananias and Sapphira). It is not our feelings, sincerity, or what we think is relevant—it is God's will. He has not ordered it (steak not chicken).

2. Spiritual Worship (John 4:24).

Not only are we to worship our great and glorious God outwardly by way of His truth in what He has commanded (that's easy), but also inwardly by way of a spirit/heart that delights in Him to be in His presence. If we desire His blessing in worship and not simply to go through the outward motions of worship, let us by God's grace come to our God through Christ with **peace** (not fighting against Him or living in bitterness/unforgiveness with the brethren), with **holiness** (a pure/sincere heart that desires to commune with Christ and to be like Him), and with **thanksgiving** (filled with joy at all that God has graciously given to us in Christ Jesus).

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