

The Second Commandment

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BIG SANDY, Texas—We as believers are thankful that we are saved by grace. In fact, we should reflect our appreciation by giving much thought and attention to recognizing God's expectations for us.

We can reflect back to the time in the Old Testament when the children of Israel were brought out of the land of Egypt—the house of bondage (Exodus 20:1-2)—and remember that God gave them instructions about how to live (verses 3-17).

Let's spend some time considering the second commandment.

Exodus 20:4-6—"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor 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 generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."

Jealous God

God openly acknowledged that He is a jealous God.

He instructed the children of Israel to avoid making spiritual covenants with the nations surrounding them (Exodus 34:12) because He did not want them chasing the other gods of the neighbors (verses 14-15).

The prophet Isaiah quoted God as saying: "This is My name. I do not want to share My glory with other gods. I do not want to share My praise with graven images" (Isaiah 42:8).

Visiting iniquities

People oftentimes ask: How does God visit the iniquities of fathers to his family for three or four generations (Exodus 20:5)?

The answer: The consequences of sin affect more than just the initial sinner.

Someone could ask: Doesn't that statement contradict the teaching found in Ezekiel 18:4-32?

The answer: Not when we keep reading Ezekiel 18 and we remember the power of repentance.

The latter part of Ezekiel 18 (in verses 21-32) introduces the concept of repentance into the discussion.

This correlates directly back to Exodus 20:6. Immediately after God said that He visits iniquities for many generations (verse 5), He mentions how He shows mercy to thousands (verse 6).

Consequences can last a long time. Or they can be shortened because of God's mercy. Believers are instructed to repent.

Not bow down to them

Some people like to claim that the Second Commandment teaches that people must not *purchase* beautiful wood carvings or other excellent works of art.

Other people like to claim that the second commandment teaches that people must not *make* beautiful wood carvings or other excellent works of art.

But the Second Commandment is not a prohibition against owning certain items, and it is not a prohibition against making certain items.

The Second Commandment is a prohibition against bowing down to graven images. It is a prohibition against serving graven images.

It is probably wise to be careful to avoid allowing any images to consume your decor.

However, there is a significant difference between decorations with no spiritual connotation and graven images that are worshiped.

In the heart

It is probably safe to say that most readers of this article do not bow down to graven images.

However, it is also safe to say that most of us need to be careful about idols that are lurking in our heart.

Ezekiel 14:3-6—"Son of man, these men have set up their idols in their hearts, and put before them that which causes them to stumble into iniquity. Should I let Myself be inquired of at all by them? . . . Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Repent, turn away from your idols, and turn your faces away from all your abominations." ' "