

No Images

Guard your hands

By giving to us his ten words, God gives shape to his encounter with us.

- ▣ The commands arise from and express God's own character.
- ▣ They come to us from our Redeemer—as a covenant.
- ▣ They define his complaint against us.
- ▣ They shape the atonement he provides—Jesus is born under the law.
- ▣ They are the shape of the life worked in us by the Holy Spirit.

No idols are to be made by our hands and for ourselves.

- ▣ Notice how emphatic detailed, threatening and promising they are.
- ▣ They develop the first command (as do all the others).
- ▣ God, being who he is, *cannot* be represented by what we make.
 - The Lord is infinite in every respect, and good in all he does.
 - We cannot conceive these things, and far less, represent them.
- ▣ So, God *must not* be represented by anything we make.
- ▣ But why even try? Because wholehearted trust in the Lord alone is never straightforward.

Israel illustrates our problem.

- ▣ They object to God speaking to them directly from the mountain—preferring to hear from Moses.
- ▣ They can see, negotiate with and complain against Moses.
- ▣ When he is absent, they make a calf—a visible means of support and focus.
- ▣ Aaron calls this 'the gods who brought you up out of Egypt'. He understand the calf to represent the Lord.
- ▣ They manifest Adam's sin of hoping to be in control.
- ▣ God insists that he is known through his word (Deut. 4:12-13).
- ▣ No one sees God, but Christ has declared him (John 1:18). We are to know him by the word of Christ (Eph. 4:20-21).

Idols begin representing the Lord, but then replace the Lord.

- ▣ This may be true for all idolatry. Some attempt is made to represent the mystery of various phenomena. But then the idols become the deity.
- ▣ If we adopt the principle that we cannot know God personally, and replace him with a representation, we have the same principle in our hearts as an idolator. We will worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed forever (Rom. 1:25).
- ▣ So, Moses warns Israel about worshipping the idols of surrounding nations (Deut. 29:18).
- ▣ In the end, the choice is between love for God, or worship of another god.
- ▣ Idolatry is not limited to carvings to which worship is given. In the days of our Lord, Jews had no idols, but were envious of Christ—clear evidence of idolatry (Col. 3:5).
- ▣ Secular, or rather, profane society, is not exempt from idolatry. 'Divine' worship is being conducted regularly and religiously. For this, a new narrative is required. Hence ideologies.

God may be known personally

- ▣ It is true that the Lord cannot be known in his essence, but he reveals himself to us in his love, and through that, to his greatness.
- ▣ Irenaus writes, 'When it comes to His greatness, He is unknown to all whom He has made. No mortal human has searched out His lofty nature With regard to His love, however, He is always known through Him by whom He set up all things. This is His Word, our Lord Jesus Christ. In these last times He became human among humans, that He might join the end with

the beginning, that is, humanity with God'. And again: 'The Father is beyond understanding. However, with regard to His love, His compassion, and His almighty strength, God gives the vision of Himself to those who love Him'.

Christians are not exempt from the evasiveness of idolatry or the desire for control.

- ❑ If we find love for God too hard, we may find a substitute—in sacraments, going to church. We have not seen God's kindness.
- ❑ We may find prayer to God too uncertain, and opt for success in ministry.
- ❑ We may not want to rely on God to lead us, and lose ourselves in abstractions rather than the indicatives of promise and imperatives of command.
- ❑ The church at Pergamum entertained 'Balaam'—who taught Israel to worship idols (Rev. 2:14). Idolatry can be part of any church. In this case, the whole church must repent.
- ❑ In such ways, the people of God become servants of the world. Idols have not only represented the Lord but replaced him.

Christ calls to us, knocks on the door of those who are neither hot or cold in their love, as a Laodicea (Rev. 3:20).

- ❑ Where immediacy is replaced by what we can do, we need to discover again that the Lord is gracious—that we can know the Lord, truly and personally.
- ❑ Jesus alone is the image of God—wholly.
- ❑ We ourselves are created to be God's image, and this, entirely, because we are his workmanship and not our own (Eph. 2:10).
- ❑ The work of our 'hands', artistry, loving deeds, careful thinking are part of serving the Lord with all we have and are.
- ❑ Our works are then a testimony, not a replacement for the Lord's presence.
- ❑ 'Little children, keep yourselves from idols' (1 John 5:21).