

Lord's Day 35

**11 July 2010**

Sermon Notes by Pastor Paul Goh

Beloved, the first and second commandments are closely related. The first commandment answers the question: who is God? The second commandment is positive: how is the true God to be worshipped? The first commandment forbids any imaginary God next to or instead of the true God; The second commandment prohibits to represent God in any visible image. The first commandment stresses the truth that God is One, and that there is no God besides Him; the second commandment is based upon the truth that God is a Spirit and is infinitely glorious.

By the second commandment, God says, "Because I am the living, personal God, the infinite, eternal Spirit, you must never try to represent me visually, for it is impossible to portray my attributes. The moment you reduce me to a puny picture or a lifeless image, you insult my attributes and set a small god in your mind".

The theme is, DIVINE WORSHIP ACCORDING TO GOD'S WORD.

First the underlying principle. Secondly the terrible threat. Thirdly, the declared promise.

The underlying principle is God is all glorious.

The glory of God is the radiation of his infinite virtues revealed to us. Infinite means limitless in space, extent or size. God is all glorious in his attributes that is found only in Him and of which he does not share with his people. In Reformed Theology we call it incommunicable attributes. Firstly, His name is Jehovah. He is the I am, the absolutely independent One, who exists in and by himself and has the ground of his existence in his own being. As such, he is distinct from other creatures and infinitely glorious. Secondly, God is the eternal One. He is not limited by time, but from eternity to eternity is and lives. He is in his eternity is distinct from all creatures and is therefore absolutely glorious. Thirdly, God is the everywhere present One, the immeasurable One. He cannot be comprehended within the limitation of space. He is distinct from all other creatures and therefore he is all glorious in all his perfections. And finally, he is the unchangeable God. With whom there is no change or shadow of turning, using the language of the apostle James. He is from eternity to eternity. Thus, he is distinct from all other creatures and is therefore glorious.

God is also glorious in the attributes that he shares with his people. They are called God's communicable attributes. He is infinite in righteousness for his will is always in harmony with his infinitely perfect being. He is infinite in love or as the Triune God he loves himself in infinite perfection. And he is also infinite in knowledge, in wisdom, in truth, in mercy, in grace. God's glory is also manifested at the cross of Christ. Firstly, this is where the love of God is displayed that he sent his beloved son to die on the cross for his beloved people. Secondly, this is where his justice is displayed when he punished the sins of his people in his son Jesus Christ and will not let sin go unpunished. And finally, this is where God displayed his mercy at the cross, that by the death of His Son saved his people from their sins and delivered them from their sins. Thus, the radiance of the glory of God shines ever so brightly at Christ's death on the cross of Christ. And therefore, God is infinite in all his perfections and as such he is infinitely glorious.

Closely connected to the glory of God is that God is a spirit and as such invisible. This truth is taught in Deut. 4.15-18, 23, "Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day *that* the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: Lest ye corrupt *yourselves*, and make you a

graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, The likeness of any beast that *is* on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, the likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that *is* in the waters beneath the earth: 23 Take heed unto yourselves, lest ye forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make you a graven image, *or* the likeness of any *thing*, which the LORD thy God hath forbidden thee”.

John 4.24, 4 God *is* a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship *him* in spirit and in truth. Col. 1.15, 5 “Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature”. This spirituality of God must be distinguished from the personal existence of God the Holy Spirit. When Scripture says that God is a Spirit, this means that God’s nature is spiritual. God is not material, like the visible creation and therefore, he is not and may not be represented in any form. God is a spirit, and they that worship must in spirit and in truth. He is the absolutely invisible One and may not be represented by material images. If he is invisible, how then can we see God in heaven? We shall see him in the face of Jesus Christ. In himself, he is the invisible, spiritual essence that is infinite and glorious in all his perfections.

And as the God who is all glorious, he has clearly declared how he ought to be worshipped. This is the regulative principle of worship. This principle says, “we worship God only as he has commanded us in his word”. The basis of this principle is in the second commandment. It is not about whom we worship but how we worship. It lays down the principle that we are to worship God in the manner which he has prescribed in His Word. And the positive implication of this command is that God alone will determine how must we must worship Him. This truth was denied first, by the Roman Catholic Church in its toleration of images as books to the laity and secondly, Martin Luther who taught allowed that what was not explicitly forbidden in the worship of God.

Therefore, any graven images to represent God are rejected by God. We must not think that the heathens only break this commandment but the fact is that this sin is found in our sinful nature. By nature we are all image worshippers, we are always inclined to lie about God and to deprive him of his glorious attributes. Though we do not carve or chisel a representation of God in wood or stone, in gold or silver but we make images of him in our minds, and in our false conceptions of him. And our false conceptions of him are these. First, when we conceive of God as a being that is filled with love that he condones sin. And in this way, we deny his righteousness and make an image of him. Secondly, when we imagine God to be so merciful that he cannot possibly cast the sinner into the eternal desolation as punishment for his sin, and then, we deprive him of the glory of his unchangeable justice and form an image of him in our minds. And finally, when we conceive of God as a Santa Claus. He exists to give to us all kinds of good things, e.g. A fabulous house, a five – figure salary. He will solve all our problems, heals all our sickness and give us good health. And he is one to whom we cry when we are in trouble, but for the rest we forget him, then we simply worship an image of our own imagination.

But, does that mean that we cannot have any representations of the creatures. The second commandment does not forbid all kinds of art, such as sculpture or paintings or photography. We may surely use pictures of biblical events, visual aids for children but never depicting the Father or the Eternal Son. Why is it forbidden to have pictures of Christ? We may never lock the earthly Christ in the minds of the young, for in doing this we become no better than liberals do who virtually limit him to be a man. It is also forbidden so as to preserve a worthy concept of the divine Lord. The command not to make any graven images of God is accompanied by a terrible threat because God is a jealous God.

God is a jealous God.

Jealousy is rooted in love. We are not jealous of strangers that has no relation to us but only of those whom we love. Thus a man is jealous of his wife. Numbers 5.12 – 15, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, If any man's wife go aside, and commit a trespass against him, 13 And a man lie with her carnally, and it be hid from the eyes of her husband, and be kept close, and she be defiled, and *there be* no witness against her, neither she be taken *with the manner*; 14 And the spirit of jealousy come upon him, and he be jealous of his wife, and she be defiled: or if the spirit of jealousy come upon him, and he be jealous of his wife, and she be not defiled: 15 Then shall the man bring his wife unto the priest, and he shall bring her offering for her, the tenth *part* of an ephah of barley meal; he shall pour no oil upon it, nor put frankincense thereon; for it *is* an offering of jealousy, an offering of memorial, bringing iniquity to remembrance”.

God's jealousy is rooted in his love is clear from the second commandment. For in his jealousy he not only visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation, but he also shows mercy unto thousands of them that love him and keep his commandments. That both wrath and mercy can be rooted in the love of God is explained from the fact that God always loves himself, and all creatures exist only for his own name' sake. Hence he is jealous of his own glory, and never gives it to another. The jealousy of God is in the second commandment because image is an attack upon the glory of God and a denial of his infinite majesty. In his jealousy, God shows himself as a God of wrath and consuming fire. He visits the iniquity of the fathers upon their children in the third and fourth generation.

This cannot mean that God ever punishes *righteous* children for the sins of their wicked fathers. Even though it may be true that the consequences of certain sins run in the line of generations. This is proven in Ezekiel 18.1-4, The word of the LORD came unto me again, saying, What mean ye, that ye use this proverb concerning the land of Israel, saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge? As I live, saith the Lord GOD, ye shall not have *occasion* any more to use this proverb in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die”.

14-17, “Now, lo, *if* he beget a son, that seeth all his father's sins which he hath done, and considereth, and doeth not such like, *That* hath not eaten upon the mountains, neither hath lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, hath not defiled his neighbour's wife, Neither hath oppressed any, hath not withholden the pledge, neither hath spoiled by violence, *but* hath given his bread to the hungry, and hath covered the naked with a garment, *that* hath taken off his hand from the poor, *that* hath not received usury nor increase, hath executed my judgments, hath walked in my statutes; he shall not die for the iniquity of his father, he shall surely live”.

Rather, it should be understood, that God does visit the sins of the father upon the children of the third and fourth generation of them that hate me. The fact is that those generations that hate God are the reprobates, to whom God does not reveal his saving mercy. In those generations they commit the same sins as their fathers: that is,

making grave images and bowing before them to worship him, commit the rebellion of refusing to hear and heed his revelation, then, their sin will continue in the line of generations. As a general rule, the sins develop organically and increase more and more, until the final destruction is the end. This is the meaning of the dreadful curse in Matthew 23.34, 35, “Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and *some* of them ye shall kill and crucify; and *some* of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute *them* from city to city: 35 That upon you

may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar”.

God threatens that he will visit the sins of the fathers in their children, those who continue in the sins of their fathers. And concerning the meaning of the third and fourth generation, it must not be interpreted to mean that after the fourth generation the wrath of God will cease to be visited on them. But rather, the sin of image worship, or the sin of rejecting God will incur the wrath of God and will develop more and more in the line of generations, until they are completely hardened in their sins and are hopelessly lost. This commandment concludes with a glorious promise that God will show mercy unto thousands that love him and keep his commandments.

Mercy is the attribute of God. Mercy is God’s attitude of pity towards his people in their misery and his power to deliver them from it. (Eph. 2.4, 5). We learn in a few things about the mercy of God from this passage. Firstly, God is rich in mercy. Secondly, in his mercy because of his great love he loves us. And finally, he loved us when we are not lovely for were dead in sins and what did he do for us:? He made us alive in Christ.

And towards his people, in mercy, firstly, he wills them to be perfectly blessed in him. And to taste to of his own blessedness. This comes in the way of leading them through death to the highest possible life of his covenant friendship and they will experience everlastingly. Secondly, he is merciful to thousands of them that love him and keep his commandments and thirdly, he revealed this love in the death of his beloved Son. He cause them to taste of his live by shedding it in their hearts, so that they know and experience his love and the result is that they keep his commandments out of love for him.

Thus, we understand that the mercy of the Lord is upon them that love him and fear his name. The reason why we love him and fear his name is because we have tasted the mercy of the Lord has revealed to us in the death and resurrection of Christ. This resulted in God saving us from sin into righteousness, out of death unto life, out of darkness into his marvellous light and not in the way of the flesh nor in the way of the world, not in the way of trampling under foot the glory of his name and the truth of his revelation of Jesus Christ.

Mercy is not only for those who keep his covenant and do his commandments but it is also for those who are still burdened with sin, and often stumble into sin. They have an inner and strong and heartfelt desire to be delivered from all iniquity and to be pleasing to the Lord. To them alone, the light of this everlasting mercy shines. Amen.