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Title: How Big Is Your God? (10 Commandments Series)

Text: Exodus 20:4-6

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."*

There is a book written by J.B. Phillips (who also has a translation of the New Testament) entitled *Your God Is Too Small*. The book's premise is built on the observation that many people have a concept of God that belittles Him. I hold that the reason the Ten Commandments begin with our relationship with God is because we must be sure that our relationship is RIGHT WITH HIM before we can expect our relationship WITH OTHERS to be what it ought to be. As we said last week – the first four Commandments are Godward. They have to do with our relationship to God. The first two Commandments hang together. The First Commandment tells us WHO GOD IS. Commandment Two tells us HOW we are to worship God. The First Commandment teaches us that we are to worship the RIGHT God. The Second says that we are NOT to worship the RIGHT God in the WRONG way. The impulse to worship is universal. Anywhere you go, among any tribe or race of people, you will find those people engaged in worship OF SOME KIND. It is a God-given inclination. There is a God consciousness in the heart of every human being. I believe that atheism is unnatural to the heart of mankind. God has placed that God-consciousness in us so it is unnatural to be an atheist. The atheist states that he doesn't believe in God. I hold that God doesn't believe in atheists. There's really no such thing. In light of what we said last week – the fool has said in his heart – NO GOD. But his head knows better. Everyone knows that EVERYTHING has a creator. When a person becomes an atheist, he really commits moral suicide. He violates his own inner awareness of God. This Commandment has to do with this matter of HOW we are to worship God. How BIG a God do YOU worship? I believe it is extremely important that we understand HOW to worship God AND we understand HOW BIG our God is.

1. PROHIBITED. Let's look at the Second Commandment and note WHAT IS PROHIBITED. *"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..."* This Commandment prohibits basically two things. In verse 4 we are NOT TO MAKE ANY GRAVEN IMAGE OR ANY LIKENESS OF GOD and WE ARE NOT TO BOW DOWN TO THEM OR SERVE THEM. That's what God prohibits. That's His "thou shalt nots." When we read that statement, it calls to mind a variety of thoughts. Certain people have the idea that this forbids the use of art form. Some feel there aren't to be any pictures around a church. Some even go so far as to argue that there is to be no music, because music is an art form. If that were the interpretation, then God Himself has violated the Commandment. In the magnificent tabernacle there were cherubim and all kinds of gorgeous colors. There were altars and pieces of furniture that were beautifully and lavishly made. Scripture demands that we sing to the Lord. David and others were musicians. All of that taught lessons about the God we worship. So, He is NOT teaching that there is to be no art or that art is not a legitimate form to use as an instructive method, BUT God DOES declare that ART which is INTENDED TO BE AN OBJECT OF WORSHIP is prohibited. He has in mind graven images, idols, and statues MADE FOR WORSHIP. I think we would be accurate in saying that there has always been a human tendency to do exactly what this Commandment says we are NOT to do. In Romans 1:23, Paul lays out the sinfulness of the human race: *"They have changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beasts, and creeping things."* Then verse 25 states, *"Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than the Creator."* So, mankind has had a tendency to do this all along – to MAKE a god. Man has bowed down before creeping creatures, before images of dogs and frogs and crocodiles and snakes and reptiles and all kinds of beings. The children of Israel had that bent. We won't even leave the Book of Exodus before the people will have a golden calf made and cry out, *"These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt"* (32:4). All through the history of the children of Israel you will find that they had a constant problem violating this very Commandment. Jeroboam set up golden calves in Dan and also in Beersheba. Even the brazen serpent that was used in the wilderness to deliver them from snakebites was later made a graven object of worship on the part of the Israelites. Only when Israel was carried into captivity were they cured of the problem of idolatry. That instinct is there. That tendency for man to make graven images and mold his own gods is constantly there. The Bible prophesies that, at the end of the age, idolatry is exactly the kind of worship many people are going to prefer. In Revelation

chapter 13 we are told about the Antichrist. It is predicted that there will be an image of the Antichrist made and set up in the temple at Jerusalem. The Antichrist will require that the whole world bow down and worship his image. Our world is no different. We find the use of statues and idols continue as aids to worship. Anyone ever visit any of the massive cathedrals in Europe? In the Vatican in Italy there is a noted statue of Simon Peter. Long lines have formed to “kiss the foot” of the statue. When they would reach the statue, they would kiss the TOES of the statue. So many people have kissed the toes of the statue that they were absolutely wiped out. In the picture I saw, it looked like he was wearing a shiny boot. On the foot that protruded there was nothing that looked like toes. Some argue, “I use these kinds of things, but I DON’T REALLY worship them. They are just aids to worship.” I’m not too sure about that. The Bible emphasizes that you are not to make graven images, and you are not to bow down and worship them. Why is this prohibited? There are two reasons God prohibits the making of graven images. Number ONE – it DISTORTS God. If you are going to worship God correctly, then you MUST have a correct conception of God. That’s why it’s important to know how big your God is. The SIZE of your God, the CONCEPT of your God, will determine HOW you worship that God. Jesus, in John 4:24, said, *“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.”* It is IMPOSSIBLE for a MATERIAL image to represent a SPIRITUAL God. God can HEAR – images cannot. God can FEEL – images cannot. God can HELP – images cannot. Any attempt to represent God with an image distorts Him and is a poor imitation. ILLUSTRATION: I heard about a little girl busily drawing at school. Her teacher came over and asked, “Honey, what are you doing?” She replied, “Oh, I’m drawing a picture of God.” The teacher smiled and answered, “Sugar, NOBODY knows what God looks like.” The girl said, “They will when I get through!” That’s a cute story, but you and I recognize there is no adequate means of representing who God is by any man-made physical form. In fact, the Bible presents the attempts to do so as utter foolishness. Isaiah 44:9-10 – *“Those who make an image, all of them are useless, And their precious things shall not profit; They are their own witnesses; They neither see nor know, that they may be ashamed. Who would form a god or mold an image that profits him nothing?”* In Isaiah 44, Isaiah, with sarcastic language, refers to a blacksmith who “fires up” a god. It says he shapes a god with hammers, AND he forges it with his might. Then he speaks of the carpenter who “nails up” a god. He cuts down trees. He chisels and marks it with a compass. He is basically writing that you cannot make ANYTHING that will represent the God who is worthy of your worship. An image is FIXED and UNCHANGING. As you and I grow in our understanding of the Lord, our concept of God should expand and mature. I am not sure about you, but my God is bigger in my understanding than He was a few years ago. When you make a graven image of God, you fix God. An image is LIMITED. God is UNLIMITED. An image is LOCAL. God is UNIVERSAL. An image is TEMPORAL. God is ETERNAL. An image is MATERIAL. God is SPIRITUAL. When you have a graven image it DISTORTS God. When you bow down before an idol, it not only distorts God, it DEGRADES Him. To bring God down to the level of man or to that of bugs, frogs, dogs, beasts, or fish – THAT degrades God! How would You feel if You were GOD and people made images of YOUR creation and worshiped them? I’m not particularly fond of people taking pictures of me – probably because too many of them are poor. Have you ever had someone take an embarrassing photo of you and show it to everybody? OR Plaster it on Facebook? Maybe one of your baby pictures when you were fat or filthy or NAKED? That’s embarrassing. Nobody likes a poor representation of oneself. My FAVORITE photographers make me look better than I really am. I love the motto of the photographer who said, “Where there is beauty I TAKE IT; where there is NONE, I MAKE IT.” (I just wish he lived closer.) If you look carefully at this Commandment, you see that there is also something...

2. PROTECTED. Verse 5 says, *For I the Lord thy God am a JEALOUS God.* Isn’t that a strange statement about God? Exodus 34:14 says, *“For thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is JEALOUS, is a jealous God.”* Most wouldn’t put those words together – JEALOUS & GOD. It just doesn’t sound right to me, that’s because, when we employ the word “jealous”, we normally use it in a NEGATIVE sense. When you dig into the root meaning of that word “jealous” it means “to be inflamed.” It is akin to the word “zeal,” “ON FIRE.” Jealousy is a ZEAL to protect a relationship. The Bible teaches that when you come to know the Lord, you enter into a COVENANT RELATIONSHIP with Him, which is compared to MARRIAGE. In the Old Testament, ISRAEL was called the “bride” of JEHOVAH. In the New Testament, BELIEVERS are called the “bride” of CHRIST. In a matter of speaking, we are in a spiritual marriage relationship. The Bible uses anthropomorphic imagery – related to mankind. The Bible attempts to help us understand God by using terms that relate to man in relationship to God. The Bible talks, for instance, about the “hands” of God, the “eyes” of God. Those are anthropomorphic terms. When God says, “I am a jealous God,” He is trying to communicate a relationship we have to Him that is EXTRA SPECIAL to Him and which HE is going to PROTECT. God is saying, “You belong to Me. You are special to Me, and I am going to fight to maintain our relationship.” Adrian Rogers made a statement which is quite illustrative, “No athlete has a right to be jealous of any other athlete. Young athlete, you do not own athletics. No singer has a right to be jealous of any other singer. No one singer owns music. But a HUSBAND HAS A RIGHT to be jealous of/for his wife. I’m NOT talking about that in the BAD sense. Not a suspicious, destructive, detrimental kind of jealousy. I’m using

“jealous” in a GOOD sense. A husband has a right to be jealous of his wife because she is HIS wife. She’s NOT someone else’s wife. She DOESN’T belong to anybody else. SHE belongs to HIM. A wife has a right to be jealous of her husband because HE IS HER SPOUSE. He belongs to HER and to NO ONE ELSE. God is saying, “I’m the ONLY God there is. I am YOUR God. YOU belong to ME. I am jealous FOR that relationship.” He is protecting that which is very precious to Him. He is jealous to maintain that relationship. He is saying, “I’m expecting from you your LOVE & LIFE. When you marry, you are to share the life of that mate – TWO become ONE. You have intimacies together. God wants your life, not just on Sunday but EVERY DAY. We tend to divide aspects of life into the spiritual and the secular – but in the eyes of God, it is ALL spiritual. He wants ALL of our love EVERY day of our life. He wants our undivided time and attention. He must be FIRST – *“Thou shalt have no other gods before me.”* He is saying, “I don’t want anybody or anything to come between Me and you.” IDOLATRY is putting anything between you and God. There are different kinds of idols and images besides those of wood and stone. Think about how people love their HOUSES, CARS, CLOTHES, MONEY, MATERIAL THINGS before the Lord. Yet, the Lord demands your LIFE, your LOVE and your LOYALTY. He says, “I want to be absolutely first in your life.” Let’s dig deeper. There is also in the commandment something...

3. PROJECTED. He PROJECTS something in the future. He says, *“visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children until the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; And showing mercy unto the thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments”* (vs. 5-6). God demands that we be EXCEEDINGLY careful to observe this Commandment, because the way we worship God projects something on OUR CHILDREN and our GRANDCHILDREN. The way WE worship God is so very important. First of all, God talks about a visitation of misery. *“Visiting INIQUITIES of the fathers on the children unto the third and fourth generation.”* Anyone hear that and think, “That’s not fair?” Why should a helpless child be held guilty for something the parents did? GOD didn’t claim they would be guilty, but that He would visit iniquity. HE is pointing out that CHILDREN sometimes pay an AWFUL PRICE because of the SINS of their PARENTS. Isn’t that true? Perhaps someone here or someone you know was brought up in the home of an alcoholic. Some may still be bearing the scars of that situation. The sin of their father or mother’s drinking has reaped untold misery, agony, and heartache in their life. Romans 5:12 says, *“Wherefore, as by one man, sin entered into the world, and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”* In the fall of Adam, we all picked up the baggage. God is saying that we inherited the fallen estate of Adam. ILLUSTRATION: It’s like a son whose father left him a farm for an inheritance, but the farm was rundown, covered with thorns, briars, and weeds, and the ground was eroding. He inherited it from his father, but it was a WRETCHED farm. That is exactly what we have all inherited from father Adam. And from our own fathers we have reaped the results and the impact of their sin. Just so you know – your children and your grandchildren and their children MAY reap the results of YOUR sin. It’s true in the realm of the PHYSICAL. You go to the doctor for an examination, and the doctor might very likely begin by asking you about your parents. “Does your dad have any history of heart disease? Is there any cancer in your family?” Last month I went to a genetic doctor. Before I even met the doctor, I had to provide them not only with a medical history, but a family history – my grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, siblings. I had to report their age and when they died (if they had), and what they died from. MOST doctors, if not all doctors, hold that our genes are the seeds of all the diseases that plague the human race. There are physical and medical things that generally are passed from one generation to another. The doctor told me that if I had the VHL gene, there was a 50% chance that my daughter, Jessica, had the gene. Go see a psychologist, and he’ll also ask you questions about your parents and grandparents. It has all come down – visiting the iniquities on the children to the third and fourth generations. That is involved here, but there is far more. God stresses that HOW you serve and worship Him will have an impact on your children and your grandchildren as to how THEY respond to God. I want to share what I feel is one of the most vivid illustrations of that truth I have ever read. In 2 Chronicles 26:16, we read the account of King UZZIAH, a godly man. Read his record, and we learn in the opening verses that he was indeed a good man. Verse 16 tells us that when he became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. *“But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense.”* That was NOT his prerogative. Back in those days, they had priests who did that. This was Old Testament. You were NOT supposed to worship God in that manner. You went through a priest. I guess Uzziah thought, “Wait a minute; every man worships God according to the dictates of his own heart.” Ever heard that? No! You DON’T worship according to the dictates of your own heart – you worship according to the DICTATES OF GOD’S WORD. Uzziah transgressed against the Lord by going into the temple. Verse 18 says, they confronted King Uzziah and said, *“It is not right for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the Lord. That is for the priests, the descendants of Aaron, who have been consecrated to burn incense. Leave the sanctuary, for you have been unfaithful; and you will not be honored by the Lord God.”* Verse 19 says he became angry and was raging at the priests. Uzziah got mad at the preacher! Verse 21 says he contracted leprosy and was cut off from the house of the Lord. Here was a good man, but he created a severe problem because he tried to worship the right God in the WRONG way and had

trouble at church. That was one man and his sin. That was King Uzziah, a father, and his sin. So far that's the only effect you can see. Read on. In chapter 27, you can read about his son, JOTHAM, twenty-five years old when he began to reign. He was a good boy, too. Remember, he was the son of a father who had trouble at church. Note verse 2 – "He *did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Uzziah did; howbeit he entered not into the temple of the Lord.*" He was a good boy, but he quit going to church. Why? Dad had trouble at church, a problem, a church fuss. So, Jotham entered NOT into the house of the Lord. That was not the end of it. The iniquities of the father, Uzziah, were being visited upon the son, Jotham. Move on to chapter 28 – "AHAZ [*grandson of Uzziah*] was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem: but he did NOT that which was right in the sight of the Lord, like David his father: For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire" (vs. 1-3). He became such a devout worshiper of images to the extent that he took his own children and threw them into the fire. Verse 24 says, "And Ahaz gathered together the vessels of the house of God, and cut in pieces the vessels of the house of God, and shut up the doors of the house of the Lord." Get the picture? The FATHER started worshiping God the WRONG way and HAD TROUBLE. His SON quit going altogether. His GRANDSON became a devil worshiper, sacrificing his own children, and he shut the doors of the house of the Lord.

CONCLUSION. Some of you could be in danger of visiting your iniquities on your own children and grandchildren by the way you worship God and by your whole attitude toward God. You have a gripe, and you start fussing and fighting, and you have children who are listening to every bit of it, OR... It's time for church, and you are given to doing other things. There's the TV to watch. There's the ballgame to attend. The bed feels so good. There are graven images to take one's attention. Your son – your daughter – your grandchildren are sitting there, and don't be surprised – consciously or unconsciously – if they are perceiving a message that you really don't want them to perceive. The problem is that many a time our actions speak WAY LOUDER than our words. God's not nearly as important as we say He is or pretend that He is. We tell our kids over and over by the choices we make what is REALLY most important to us, and many times, it's NOT GOD. The way you worship God is serious business. Your attitudes and words are making indelible impressions on your kids. One of these days, if you aren't most careful, and if you don't change how you are going about it, you are going to have spiritual problems with your own family. There are those NOT here this morning because they made a choice to put something BEFORE God today. There might be people not here today, like Uzziah, because they're mad at the preacher. If so, it's likely that there's children and grandchildren that are moving away from God because a parent or grandparent has been a poor example and made bad choices in front of them. I read an account recently of a man who was very unkind toward and critical of the pastor. This man's son landed in jail. He asked the preacher to visit his son. So, the preacher did. When the preacher reached the jail, the boy asked with a snarl, "What are YOU doing here?" The preacher answered, "Your dad asked me to come over here and talk with you about the Lord." The boy came back, "The Lord! Man, the way my daddy has talked about you, made fun of the church, laughed about the church, and criticized the church! I don't want to hear anything out of you. Just go on your way. I'm not interested in anything you have to say." It's VERY SERIOUS how you worship God. The Scripture states that God visited the iniquities upon the children and the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations, BUT...notice the DEMONSTRATION OF MERCY. Verse 6 – "And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me." Notice the contrast – THOUSANDS. There is only one movement that can stop that downward spiral of sin and incorrect worship, and it is that upward spiral of God's mercy and grace. Romans 5:20 says, "Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound." That's why Wayne & Bonnie are leaving for Africa on Wednesday. That's why missionaries go to foreign countries. These poor people bow down before their idols because idolatry has been passed from generation to generation. All that can stop the downward trend, is the uprising of mercy, love, and grace found in worship of the true God. God will bless you if you will live for Him, worship Him, serve Him, honor Him, and be true to Him. God will bless you on down the road with your children AND grandchildren. The word "worship" is made up of two words – "worth" and "ship." "Th" dropped out, and it became worship. When you worship, you declare the WORTH of God. That's why in the Book of Revelation, when the Lamb is seated upon the throne, the congregation redeemed in heaven sing "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and honor, and glory..." (5:12). He ALONE is worthy. That's why our Savior said, "Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matthew 4:10). Notice that worship ALWAYS comes before service? They both DO have their place. Do you remember Mary and Martha? Martha became all hot and bothered with the pots and the pans in the kitchen. She came running in trying to tell Jesus what to do. She called Him LORD, then proceeded to tell HIM what to do! "Why don't you get Mary in here to help me, Lord?" (Luke 10:40). He said, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But Mary hath chosen that good part. But one thing is needful..." (vs. 41-42a). He was saying, "Martha, far more than anything you DO for Me is just having you with Me." I'm far more interested in your WORSHIPING Me than in your SERVING Me because you can't

serve Me the way you ought to serve Me until you are worshiping Me the way you ought to worship Me.” Let me close – God commands us not to make any graven images because He has already revealed Himself in an image. Colossians 1:15 says that the Lord Jesus *“is the image of the invisible God.”* Hebrews 1:3 says that Jesus Christ *“is the express image of his person.”* Jesus said, *“he that hath seen me hath seen the Father”* (John 14:9). The only representation we need of God is the revelation He has given to us in the person of His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. If you want to know God, meet Him in the person of His Son Jesus.