

ANCIENT LAW | TIMELESS TRUTH

A Study of the Ten Commandments



THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

The background of the image is a close-up, slightly blurred view of a scroll with Hebrew text written in black ink on aged, yellowish parchment. The text is arranged in horizontal lines, following the curve of the scroll. The focus is sharp on the central text box, while the background text is out of focus.

DEUTERONOMY 5:8–9A

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them.”



THE FIRST AND SECOND COMMANDMENTS

- The First Commandment declares God's desire for our exclusive worship and allegiance.
- The second teaches us *how* he is to be revered and worshiped.

TWO PROHIBITIONS

- There are two prohibitions in the second commandment
 - Worshiping Yahweh through images
 - “God will not have his legitimate worship profaned by superstitious rites.” (Calvin)
 - Worship of images in general
 - The command prohibits worship of any “thing” in creation, not just animals.
- Since God cannot be represented in an idol or an image, an idol is automatically “another god”.

IDOLS IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

- The god's presence was marked and mediated by the image.
- The god received worship through the image.
- Many scholars argue that the image was *not* thought to actually be the deity. Instead, it was meant to channel the presence of the deity.



PROPER WORSHIP

- The true God does not need his presence to be mediated through physical objects.
- He ask us to worship him “in Spirit and in truth” (John 4:23)
- Worship of images either blurs or erases the line between Creation and Creator.
 - Worship is in one direction. From Creation to God.

GOD'S RIGHTS IN THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

- God has a right to proper representation.
- As the supreme God and Creator, Yahweh expects that he be known worshiped as he truly is—not as how humans would like him to be or imagine he is.

A “JEALOUS” GOD

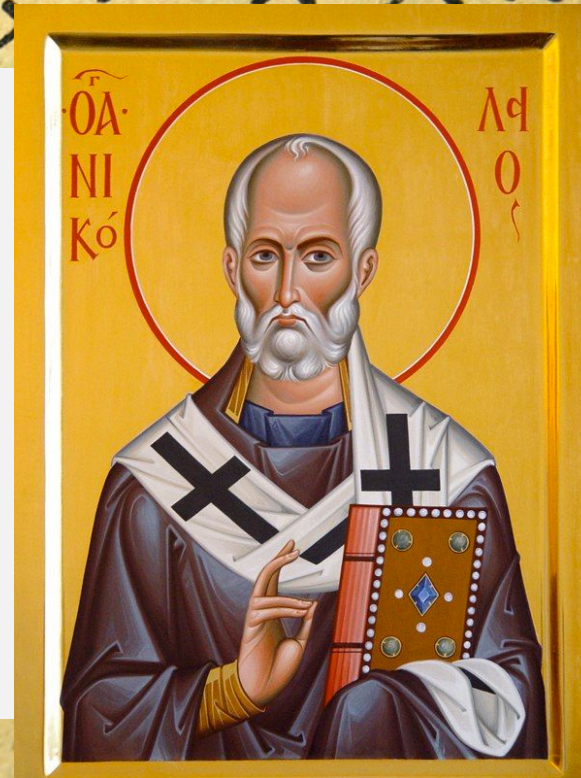
- Applies to both first and second commandment
 - Isaiah 42:8
- Jealousy is not a vice when in reference to a relationship that is properly exclusive.
- El Qanna “An Impassioned God”
 - Other gods may tolerate other worship “partners”. Yahweh does not. “God cannot bear a partner” (Calvin)

HUMANS ARE NATURAL IDOLATERS

- We have a habit of making God in our own image.
- Deciding for ourselves what we think God is like rather than listening to what he has told us about himself.
- The second commandment is God's way of addressing this natural tendency.

CHRISTIAN ICONS

- Does veneration of icons of Jesus and the saints count as a violation of the second commandment?
- The Seventh Ecumenical Council (787)
- Later Protestant Traditions also reject icons and veneration of the saints and of icons.



APPLICATIONS

- How have we worshiped God in ways that are contrary to how he has revealed himself in scripture?
- How have we invested special significance in physical objects?
- How have we blurred the line of division between Creation and the Creator?
- If God doesn't mediate his presence through physical objects, in what ways does he make himself present to us today?