

Guidelines to Freedom Part 2 - Graven Mistakes

by Alistair Begg

Alistair Begg explores the significance of the Second Commandment, emphasizing the importance of worshiping God correctly without the influence of idolatry or images.

Duration: 45:40

Scripture: Exodus 20:4-6, Isaiah 40:18, Matthew 6:33, John 4:19

Topics: "Freedom"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the influence of entertainment on our culture and how it has affected public discourse. He emphasizes the longing within every person to get close to God and the various ways people try to achieve this. The preacher warns against creating our own images of God based on human sources rather than seeking Him directly. He also highlights the example of the city of Las Vegas as a metaphor for our national character and the dominance of entertainment in various aspects of our lives, including religion, news, athletics, and education.

Transcript

I invite you to take your Bibles and we'll turn to Exodus chapter 20 as we proceed with these studies now in the Ten Commandments. Our focus this morning is on the second commandment which is in verse 4 stated succinctly in a phrase and then expanded upon in verses 5 and 6. It reads as follows, You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them.

For I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. The first commandment as we saw last week deals with the object of our worship, forbidding us to worship any false god. The second commandment deals with the manner of our worship, forbidding us to worship the true God in any unworthy way.

Or if you like to state it positively, it is not enough to worship the correct God, but the correct God must be worshiped correctly. And when we come to consider this, we come face to face with a whole issue of idolatry. Many of us would assume that the second commandment is somewhat anachronistic.

Even while we were prepared to acknowledge commandment one insofar as we may worship incorrectly in terms of a misunderstanding of God, many of us would want to skip commandment two, assuming that once we had got one correct, we certainly wouldn't get too wrong. I think we're in for a bit of a surprise as we'll see this morning. We content ourselves with the fact that since we don't have any graven images in our homes or haven't been dancing around any religious totem poles lately, that presumably we're not in violation of the command.

But what we're going to discover is that the essence of idolatry, which is what this is addressing, is the entertainment of thoughts about God that are unworthy of God. That is, the coming to God with imaginations which are more the product of our fertile minds than they either are of any biblical revelation. The kind of thing to which I'm referring is what we often hear people say, I like to think of God as.

And then they add whatever it might be. And they think that because they preface it by saying, I like to think of God as, that somehow that justifies whatever they like to think of God as. You know, I like to think of God as the heavenly architect.

Or I like to think of God as the great timekeeper. Or I like to think of God as just a loving father. And when they use that word just, what they're saying is, I like to think of him this way and I don't like to think of him that way.

As if somehow or another just our conceiving of him can create him in the way that we want to worship him. Now one of the things that is apparent, I think, in our generation is the lack of instruction that has a memorization as a part of it. We can debate that.

I know I debate it all the time with educationists who tell me that learning by rote is taboo and it's not a good way to learn anything. Well, it sure helped me how to do the 1 through 12 times tables, and I could never have got through New Testament Greek without learning it by rote and myriad other things. And so this idea of that kind of memorization is furious, has bled into our church thinking, and so we tend to kind of catch things in the air rather than to give our attention to them.

Well, if we lived in the 16th century, we wouldn't have been able to get off quite so easily, and many of us would have been confronted by the Heidelberg Catechism. And we would have been sat down by our moms and our dads, and we would have been regularly drilled on these following questions. This actually is question number 96 of the Heidelberg Catechism, so the children are already well into it by this point.

The question is, what is God's will for us in the second commandment? Answer, that we in no way make any image of God, nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word. Question number 97, may we then not make any image at all? Answer, God cannot and may not be visibly portrayed in any way. Although creatures may be portrayed, yet God forbids making or having such images if one's intention is to worship them or to serve God through them.

Question, but may not images be permitted in the churches as teaching aids for the unlearned? Answer, no, we shouldn't try to be wiser than God. He wants his people instructed by the living preaching of his word, not by idols that cannot even talk. Good, straightforward, understandable, helpful, and vital.

And yet this morning, most of us, even those who walk the path of righteousness, would be hard-pressed to give any kind of answer to those questions. More is the pity. So what I'd like to do with you is to ask three simple questions of the second commandment.

First of all, what is the commandment saying? Secondly, why is the commandment important? And finally, how does the commandment essentially apply to our relationship with God? First of all then, what is the commandment saying? We discovered last time that God was interested in only one kind of relationship with us, namely an exclusive relationship. A relationship in which we were encountering no one other than him, and there was nothing coming between us and God. He then goes on in the second commandment to tell us that God alone is to be worshipped, and that without any visual symbols of himself, in accordance with how he has revealed himself.

Now this is very, very important because we can be successful, as I said, in part number one, and yet make a dreadful hash of number two. If you've got your Bible open, you may want to turn to 2 Kings chapter 10 for just a moment, and there we have the record of Jehu and his destruction of the Baals. These people who were worshipping Baal had built a temple to Baal.

Jehu was not pleased with this and took it upon himself to make sure that they wouldn't be doing that for much longer. He comes up with a dirty little trick whereby he tells all the Baal worshippers that he wants them to come because he's worshipping Baal too, and they were all going to come and meet in the temple. When he gets them all in the temple, he gives them all new robes so they're all getting excited about how things are going, and then he tells the people that he has got surrounding the building to go in and run them through with the swords.

So he takes care of Baal and his worshippers. In verse 26 of 2 Kings 10, they brought the sacred stone out of the temple of Baal and burned it. They demolished the sacred stone of Baal and tore down the temple of Baal, and people have used it for a latrine to this day.

It's kind of graphic. One minute is the focus of worship, the next minute is the focus of other things. People will walk past and say, you know, that used to be where they worshipped Baal.

I tell you what, Jehu really dealt with that, didn't he? He was concerned that they wouldn't be worshipping the wrong God. He wanted to make sure that everyone worshipped the right God. So far so good, but look at verse 28.

So Jehu destroyed Baal worship in Israel. Now the word however that introduces verse 29 is important. However, he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit.

Namely, the worship of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan. In other words, he was clear that there was only one true God who was to be worshipped. He got that correct.

But then he fouled up by assuming that the true God could be worshipped incorrectly by means of the construction of these calves that they had set up in these pagan shrines. You see, we need to understand this morning that idolatry consists not only in the worship of false gods, but also in the worship of the true God in false ways. Now we could expand this if we were talking with one another along all kinds of lines.

That is why the nature of what happens here in worship has to happen within the confines of what the Bible says worship is all about. This is not a theater. This is not a performance.

This is not an entertainment center. This is not a place in which we try and get folks in off the streets and feed them just a little bit of information, enough that will make it palatable to them. Rather, this is a place in which we are compelled to worship the God in all of his glory, in all of his power and his might.

Therefore, there needs to be about our worship that which is true. Not the worship of self, not the worship that is false, but that is true, so that it is transcendent, so that it begins and magnifies God in his glory. So when people come in, as we hope they will, it will not be to come into something that they immediately find acceptable, but it will be to come into something that they immediately find challenging.

What is happening here? Here we have a company of people who are seeking to worship the true God and to worship the correct God correctly. So when we deviate from that, we deviate badly. When God constructed the temple or commanded the construction of the temple, he made sure that there was to be no representation of the deity.

You can read of this in 1 Kings chapter 6. He allowed for the use of color and shapes and images from the natural world, fruit and trees and flowers and land and water. After all, the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork, but there were to be no images of God himself, because it would confuse people as to the nature of what they were dealing with. Now people react fairly vehemently to this.

I've discovered folks often say that there's no problem in our having statutes or pictures of the one that we're worshiping. After all, aren't they just an aid to worship? What harm can they do? Surely this only applies to images which somehow are contrary to God as he has revealed himself. But when you look at the commandment, you find that that isn't the case.

God says you shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything. Even if it is approximating to who I am, you're not supposed to do it. Even if it is your best guess at who I am and what I am, you're not supposed to fiddle with it.

Well, in every generation people have rejected that. People have said, you know, and Thomas Aquinas was one in an earlier century, he said that people would be more easily moved by what they see than by what they hear or what they read. And people say that all the time.

They say, that's why we think that we ought to do this, or we ought to do that, or we ought to use drama, or we ought to use these things. Because after all, far more will take place in an instant in what people see than will take place in an hour and a half of reading the Bible. That's not true.

Or there may be more than impinges upon the senses of a man, depending on the context out of which he comes. But in terms of God revealing himself, it isn't true. The Reformers had to answer it carefully.

Calvin, responding to the kind of things that Aquinas was saying, said this, because God does not speak to us every day from the heavens, there are only the scriptures in which he has willed that his truth should be published. It is only in the scriptures that he has willed that his truth should be published. That's why the Bible must be central.

It's not that we worship the Bible, but that it is in the Bible that God has made himself known to us. It is in the incarnation that he has manifested the nature and the totality of what he is, as we will see as we bring this to a conclusion this morning. That's in accord with what all of scripture has to say.

Isaiah chapter 40 verse 18, to whom will you liken God, or what likeness will you compare unto him? How are you going to make anything that approximates to the creator of the ends of the earth? So when God establishes the building of the temple, and establishes the place in which his presence was to be manifested, there was nothing in there. It's interesting. In pagan cultures, there would be some great

monolithic thing.

People would go in and go, whoa, that's it. It's like raiders of the lost ark, they're coming to the next thing and the next thing, but not for God, no. It was just a cedar plate, and in it dwelt the ark, and in the ark dwelt the tablets, and dwelt the law of God.

What was God saying? Don't look for me in shrine, don't look for me in painting, don't look for me in statutes, I'm not there. Look for me in my word. And that's why you see the reformation church coming out of the dark ages was the pains to make it clear to the people, and something that needs to be reiterated to our day, that there were three things essential for a church to really exist.

Number one, the presence of the scriptures proclaimed in all their fullness. Number two, the expression of the sacraments of baptism and of the Lord's Supper. And number three, the establishing of church discipline.

Now doesn't that seem a little kind of limited? After all that had gone before the 16th century? Certainly. Was Cromwell and his roundheads, were Cromwell and the roundheads simply just a bunch of bad guys, or did they have any theological underpinnings to them at all? What were they doing going knocking down all these things and firing cannonballs all over the place? Why was it so important? It was so important because they thought that the second commandment was to be taken seriously, and anything that was in violation of it should be destroyed. It was a theological underpinning for them.

A theological underpinning which needs to be grasped again in our day, because we are living in a world of great confusion, not least of all in relationship to the nature of God. It is impossible for man to try and encapsulate the living creator God in a box, in a statue, or in a painting. It is interesting that even in the Incarnation, we have no record of the physical appearance of Jesus Christ.

There is no indication whether his hair was long or short, whether he had brown eyes or blue eyes, whether he was five foot six or six foot two--none of that. It is interesting, isn't it? There isn't another figure that ever walked the stage of human history whose record is devoid of that kind of information. God deliberately left it out.

Because imagine if Jesus actually had been six foot two with dark hair and brown eyes, and you happen to be six foot two with dark hair and brown eyes. You would be saying to people, hey, don't you think I look a lot like that? Don't you? And we would be tempted to somehow circumscribe deity in our own little conceptions, and the second commandment is dealing with that. Jesus makes this clear to the lady at the well, John chapter 4. Remember, he is thirsty.

The disciples go off to get something to eat, off for a sandwich, to bring it back for Jesus. He meets the lady at the well. He begins a wonderful conversation with her, and as he begins to talk to her concerning her life and her understanding of spiritual things, the lady throws out a kind of red herring.

She begins to see that this person to whom she's speaking is someone extraordinary, and in verse 19 of John 4, she says, I can see that you're a prophet. Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem. So she's about to have a discussion now about locations, about where worship should take place, a kind of thing that often happens to us in conversation with our neighbors and our friends who begin to talk concerning spiritual things, and they want to push it out to discussions about, well, my grandmother used to go to the church of the

such-and-such in South Euclid.

Oh, what a wonderful church that was for worship. What a reverberation there was in there. They had no carpeting in there.

It was just wonderful the way it went around, and they wanted to talk about that and about something else, and Jesus says this lady, he said, hey, wait. We're not talking about up here or down there. This is what we're talking about.

God is not concerned about Gerizim, Jerusalem, first of all. God is spirit, says Jesus to the lady, and they that worship him will worship him in spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshippers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshippers must worship in spirit and in truth.

The implication being that if we endeavor to introduce any kind of intermediary element, we inevitably obscure the true truth of God as he has revealed it. And our images and our shrines and our icons do a great disservice to his glory. Now, let us go on and ask a second question.

If that is the case, why is the commandment important? Now, it's obviously important because God said it. Everything that God has said in his word is important. But beyond that, let me say two things.

This commandment is important, first of all, because images dishonor God, and secondly, because images misdirect men. Images dishonor God, and images misdirect men. Let's spend a moment or two in the first.

The real problem with statues or shrines or pictures or anything like that is not that they don't look good, but it is this, that no matter how good they look, no matter how grand and wonderful they may be, they will inevitably conceal most, if not all of the truth about the nature and character of God. See? So, when we say to ourselves, well, I like to think of God in a certain way, and my imagination is very important to me, the way I think of God is very important. I hear people saying this to me all the time.

There is great danger in this, loved ones. I hope you understand this. If that had been so important to God, he would have revealed himself in some other kind of way, so as to make it possible for us to latch on to some imaginary capacity, whereby we may know God better.

But he hasn't done that. He has revealed himself in the creative order. He has revealed himself in the written word, and he has revealed himself fully in the person of his son, Jesus Christ.

And we are to look no other place, nor create any other thing, that would divert us from that pathway, his pathway of revelation. There have been many times in the history of man when the work of a sculptor or an artist has been laid aside, because the monarch whom the artist was seeking to portray, judged that they had highlighted one aspect to the detriment of others, and thus the monarch said, this image is singularly unhelpful. So the artist who had done his best with the sculptor is sent packing with his little sculptor, because the king or the queen said, it doesn't do me justice.

Don't come here with that crummy painting. I look far better than that. Now the fact may be in relationship to earthly monarchs, that that may not have been the case.

Some of them, if their renditions of them are anywhere close to accurate, they needed merciful painters, merciful portrait painters. You go in the great banqueting hall of Holyrood Palace at the end of the Royal

Mile in Edinburgh, and you can see some ugly characters in there by any standard. And what they needed was a touch-up artist to come behind.

But nevertheless, many of these artisans were thrown out because the monarch said, it doesn't do me justice. Not true necessarily, but in God's case, always true. There is no statue that could ever be erected.

There is no painting that could ever be painted. There is nothing that could be done to visibly express God that would do anything other than diminish our view of God. It is impossible to conceive of something greater than God.

Therefore, anything of which we conceive is going to be inevitably less than God. Therefore, something that is less than God to portray well is going to diminish our understanding of the God that we are trying to portray. It is a dead-end street.

It is stupidity. It is idolatry. And it is ultimately blasphemy.

That is why you see in Exodus chapter 32, after Moses goes off on a trip, and Aaron stays with the folks and says to them, why don't you cash in your earrings and your stuff, and we'll make ourselves a little representation of God here. Presumably, Aaron wasn't starting off in seeking to violate the first commandment. There is no way that he started off by saying, now we are not going to worship the true God.

No, he was committed to worshipping the true God. But he thought it would be a smart idea, responding to the agitations of people around him, to put together this little shrine deal where you had this calf. And he would make it of gold, and it would involve sacrifice, and that seems appealing.

It's going to cost the people something they're going to give on themselves. And then we'll make this little deal, and we'll put it on a statue, and then we'll come to it. He wasn't trying to violate commandment one, but he was violating commandment two.

You can't worship the correct God incorrectly. And that's what he started to do. So the calf spoke of power, and maybe he wanted to say to the people, this is a powerful little calf, and it reminds us that we have a powerful God.

But what did the calf also speak to the people of? Sexual impurity. So now the people couldn't look at the calf and think about power, without looking at the calf and thinking about impurity. So now they had a problem.

God has no impurity. He is all power. But the conception of the calf makes man think diversely concerning this, and consequently his worship is inadequate and is in violation of that which God has said should take place.

In the same way today, loved ones, any kind of images that we create, whether they be crucifixes or anything else, cannot depict God in all of his fullness. I was in a church in Chicago this week. I went in just for a moment or two.

I was thinking along these lines, and I stood for a moment and watched in this context as people gravitated to material representations of deity. I don't, for a moment, question the individual's zeal. Nor do I even question, at this point, why it is that somebody determined that that would be good to do.

Because what they're actually seeking to do is to make God more real, more imminent to the people. And their logic is, if we can only represent him in this way and bring him here, then the people will be able to get to him. That can't be bad.

But the issue is, what is it or to whom is it that they get? You see, because a Jesus on a cross speaks to us of his suffering, but does not speak to us of his power and of his victory and of his glory. A Jesus on a cross is a Jesus on a cross, and thereby limits him by manifesting him in that way to the pathos of all that that scene represents. But Jesus is not on the cross, right? So why would we leave him on a cross? Because we want to depict him at the right hand of the Father on high.

That's where the great artwork of the Sistine Chapel has at least tried to take it up and beyond so that the transcendence of God may be revealed. Still, the people gravitate to those things. It depicts his suffering, but it obscures his victory.

It obscures his joy and his power and his glory. The image is unworthy because of what it fails to display. It is not unworthy insofar as it displays a truth, but it cannot encapsulate truth.

How did Christ determine that we'd be remembered? By people hanging crosses around their necks? No, do this in remembrance of me. He recognized that it was important for people to have a point of identification, to have a place of meeting. He said, when you break bread, remember that my body was broken for you.

When you drink wine, you remember that my blood was shed for you. And here, O Lord, as the hymn writer says, we see face to face. Here do we touch and handle things unseen, but not in the machinations and imaginations of the minds of men and women, even with two thousand years of religious history driving the boat.

So what do we learn? We learn that the establishing of images and shrines and statues create a dishonoring of God. Secondly, that they create the potential for misdirecting men. If you study carefully Exodus 32, you'll see that this is the case.

They created a calf. I'm sure that they weren't wrong in their beginning. At least conceptually, they probably thought that it was a good idea.

They were probably wrong that it was a good idea, but nevertheless their motivation was right. But you go through Exodus 32 and what do you find? You find that when people begin wrong in their worship, they will end wrong in their lives. As soon as they began to worship at the calf, they got into all kinds of pagan practices, which were contrary to what God was really like.

And somebody would have said, hey, it doesn't matter if you have a little shrine. Yes, it does matter, because look what happened. People say, it doesn't really matter how you conceive of God.

Yes, it does. How one generation conceives of God has implications for the generation to follow. When a culture, when a society, when a people begin to devalue God and exalt humanity, begin to devalue deity and exalt the creations of men, then that culture is in deep trouble.

And loved ones, that's where our culture is this morning. That's why we're in the situation in which we find ourselves. Oh, you're not going to find this in Time Magazine or in US News and World Report.

Every explanation of why we are the way we are is largely in response to a very secular view of history. But listen to what the Bible says about why we are the way we are. Romans chapter 1. Men, although they knew God, didn't glorify him as God.

This is verse 21. And they didn't give thanks to him. So they got up in the morning and they went around as if they made everything.

They got up in the morning and they never gave thanks to God. They never thanked God for their food. They never bowed and said, God, I thank you for my food.

Most people don't. Why? Because they don't actually think that God gave them their food. They don't get up in the morning and thank God for their health and strength.

They think they just have health and strength. And that then leads to something else. Then they became futile in their thinking and their foolish hearts were darkened.

They thought they were really bright, verse 22, but they were actually really stupid. And because they were, they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Now, what could be possibly harmful about the film Free Willy, which I mentioned last week? Well, probably not a lot, but any perceptive individual going to watch that movie understands just exactly what's going on there.

Even when you set aside the Indian incantations that took place, the little boy finds out that if he says, that's going to have a big impact. So now we've got a God who's a different God that we're going to include in the thing. The big deal has to do with the whale and poor old whale.

And it's a completely secular view of man. Now, should we look after whales? Yeah, that's not in question. I don't like them swimming around up the road here any more than anyone else does.

But the point is that the whole of man has shifted in its thinking. We're still aborting babies. Millions of them created in the image of God with a soul.

What's going on? Well, you see, they broke the second commandment. They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. And so God says, that's the way you want it.

That's the way you'll have it. God gave them up. God took his hands off.

He said, you want to live like that? Watch what happens. And they gave themselves over in sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. The whole idea of the commandment, you shall not commit adultery, got thrown right out the door along with the second commandment.

They said, we don't care about this. People don't care any more about whether they're married and have children or not married or whatever. The whole culture is in total collapse.

And they exchanged the truth of God for a lie. They said, God didn't say that. This is what we think.

And they worshipped and served creative things rather than the Creator. And so God says, is that the way you want it? He gave them over again. He gave them over to shameful lusts.

And so women became lesbians and men became homosexual. And God said, and that's not enough. And he gave them over again.

Not once. If you just live your life with your eyes open and your Bible on your lap, it's not hard to see that the inviolable commands of God will contravene. Do not simply impinge upon an individual's life and character, but the effect of family, the effect of nation, the effect of our whole culture.

And that is where we are. And I understand how unbelievably stupid it sounds to stand up and say, loved ones, there's a big issue here. And it's commandment number two.

We got it wrong. We started to worship ourselves and our own creations and we ceased the worship of God. And when we do, men are misdirected.

It's a psychological fact that if we entertain a lie long enough, we can eventually come to regard it as a truth. So if we have a mental or a metal or a wooden or a stone image of God, we will eventually come to think of God as the image represents him. And that is a graven mistake.

You see, when we make an image of God, what we're doing is taking our thoughts of God from a human source rather than from God himself. This, in our age, is a little more difficult to pinpoint. I think it speaks to things that we might not immediately notice.

Some of the images that we have are not static, but they are dynamic. In a tele video age, many of our images are a lot more fast moving. Neil Postman points this out in his book, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, when he says that today we must look to the city of Las Vegas, Nevada, as a metaphor of our national character and aspiration.

It's symbol, a 30-foot high cardboard picture of a slot machine and a chorus girl. For Las Vegas is a city entirely devoted to the idea of entertainment, and as such proclaims the spirit of a culture in which all public discourse increasingly takes the form of entertainment. What about this 3, 5, and 8 news? You call this news? With apologies to all of you who are involved in the news.

It is driven by ratings and rankings. I can't find out one thing that's happening in London. London is a significant city.

You agree with that, don't you? It's one of the key cities in the whole world. What are we treated to? Sad stuff, bad stuff, and mad stuff. Why? Because we are capitulating to the spirit of our age.

We are driven by the God of entertainment. Our religion, our news, our athletics, our education. Take, for example, the race between Carl Lewis and the British guy in the 100 meters.

Bill does the great race at Gateshead just about a month or five weeks ago. Carl Lewis flew in on Concord, and then he took an executive jet from there to Gateshead, and he came into Gateshead in all of his finery, and he was picking up a check for a hundred thousand pounds, win or lose. It was nothing about athletics.

It was all about entertainment. He put 80,000 people in the stands, got a huge television audience. All the guys with the money repaid themselves many times over, and Carl Lewis got back on Concord and came back here again.

But it had nothing really to do with athleticism. It had to do with entertainment. Well, you say, what are you on about, Al? Well, here's the deal.

If we live long enough in a culture that is on the verge of amusing itself to death, what do you think is going to happen in the church? What do you think is happening in the church? People come to church and say, hey, amuse me. Amuse me. Tickle me.

Cajole me. Don't tell me about a transcendent God. I don't like that.

I want a we God. I want my God. I want a God I can control.

I want a God I can manipulate. I don't want this God. And so, in my line of work, the great temptation is, are you going to amuse them to death? Are you going to give them what they want? Are you going to tell them what they need? And some of you are embarrassed when you bring your friends.

Because your friends, they're sitting on this gigantic prong with a huge pin through it. And you hear me talking and they're going, ooh, ah, ooh, ah. And you go for coffee.

He's really quite nice. Come and meet him at coffee. He's not such a bad guy.

I don't know. He had a bad morning. When I'm bad, I'm bad.

But if we're talking about the Word of God, don't sell it short. This is the Word of God. I'm not an entertainer.

This isn't entertainment tonight. Okay, let me wrap this up. What does this teach me about my relationship with God? Well, God says, I'm not like any of your images, but I am like this.

Like what? He says, well, I'm a jealous God. A jealous God? Yeah. What does that mean? Simply means the same way that I'm a jealous husband.

What does that mean? It means I'm not going to share my wife with anybody. That's what God means. I'm a jealous God.

I'm not going to share you with anyone. I'm a just God. If you sin against me and turn your back on me, then there will be punishment, which will go through the generations.

The sins of 50 years ago are manifest today in our culture. Bad decisions of yesterday, we live with today. The sins of today, we will pass on to our children and our grandchildren, cause and effect.

I'm a just God, but I'm a gracious God. Yes, there are implications to sin for those who hate me, but I show love to a thousand generations of those who love me and those who keep my commandments. He declares his mercy to those who follow after him.

Well, says somebody, you know, I'm really going to have to think this out, and I hope so, because you said, I thought that, first of all, these little places that I was sitting aren't much of a problem, and now you're telling me they might be. Secondly, because I like to imagine God, and you're telling me that I shouldn't. Well, I'm not telling you that you shouldn't.

I'm just trying to understand this second commandment. Imagination can really mess us up. Richard Foster, who has written very helpfully, doesn't do such a good job on this question.

Let me quote him, and I'm going to use this just to draw things to a conclusion. Richard Foster, in celebrating the disciplines of the Christian life, encourages his readers, quotes, in your imagination, allow your spiritual body, shining with light, to rise out of your physical body. As an evangelical writer, first of all, I don't know what that means.

I don't know about you. You got a spiritual body? We just got a body, right? We have a spirit, but we don't have a spiritual body. So, how we're going to get it out of here, I don't know.

And, he says, let it go up through the clouds and into the stratosphere. Deeper and deeper into outer space, until there is nothing except the warm presence of the Eternal Creator. See, Foster's going to say, we're not going to get down in front of this little shrine.

We're not going to put one of these in here. We don't believe in that. That breaks the second commandment.

What we're going to do is, we're going, we're doing the ET trip on this. We're going, outer space. We're going to get one of those bicycles.

My spiritual body is going to get pedaling up. That's how I imagine it, when I imagine it. It's like, when his friend goes, you know, why don't we, why don't we just, why don't we just get beamed up? And the kid says, well, don't be crazy.

This is reality. As he cycles his bicycle up and away from those people. What is this? What's the quest, loved ones? I'll tell you what the quest is.

In the heart of man, there is a longing to get close to God. God creates within your heart a searching for him. That may be why you're here today.

You couldn't articulate it necessarily, but somewhere deep inside of you, you know that you want to get close. Somebody told you, you could get close over here and you went there, but God never materialized and you have a sneaking suspicion that he wasn't localized. Somebody else told you that if you just imagined him and went into the stratosphere, that would be it.

And you've been in all manner of stratospheres and you're no closer. So is there an answer? Yeah. Colossians 2.9. For the fullness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form, Jesus, and we are complete.

He has drawn close to us in the person of his Son, so that all of our encounters with him would be there. And how would we know of this Jesus but in this book? And anything and anyone that encourages us to worship the correct God incorrectly is a great detriment to spiritual life and progress. Therefore, I encourage you to think these things out.

Jesus said, this is life eternal, that they might know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. Jesus said, he who has seen me has seen the Father. What a tragedy to embrace a picture and to miss the person, to sit at a shrine and to miss the Savior, to worship a statue and fail to know our God and our Father.

We thank you for the way that your word speaks with such clarity, challenging even the prevailing misconceptions of our days, the things that filter into our minds even within the framework of church, the silly ideas we tolerate, the things we embrace that diminish your glory and misdirect men. Grant that as we

think these things through, the Spirit of God may work within our hearts, calling those of us who long to know God to meet him at the one place that he is determined to keep all of his appointments, namely on that Judean hillside where he bore our sins in his body on the tree. And now, may grace and mercy and peace.

This concludes the information on side two. If you'd like to contact Alistair Bragg, you can write him at his ministry at Truth For Life, P.O. Box 39800 Cleveland, Ohio. Zip is 44139.

His telephone number is 1-888-588-7884. God bless you now. Goodbye.

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