

# The Father's Ten Good Words: Treasure My Face

Exodus 20: 1-21, Psalm 33

Colossians 1:15-18

I remember when I was first going through puberty, and suddenly girls weren't disgusting to me any more. Suddenly they were amazing.

What is more embarrassing? To be a teenage boy and to get caught staring at a girl's body? Or to get caught staring into her eyes? Ok, both are really embarrassing! But if the girl is some guys' girlfriend, and he catches you staring at his girlfriend's behind, for example he might just be proud that the behind you're staring at belongs to *his* girlfriend. But if he catches you staring into her eyes, he knows that you don't want his girlfriend's body: you desire *her*. You are captured by the beauty and mystery of who she is. This is going to get you beat up on the playground.

Our passage says that God is *jealous*. Like a husband or wife who wants their spouse to have eyes for them only. Like a good Father who doesn't want some other creepy guy trying to become his kid's dad.

## 1. No images, anywhere

Okay, what's the good word here? For our own good, our Good Father commands his children to worship him, but *not* by images.

Images are not bad. Representational art is not forbidden. In fact, Just a little later God tells Israel to make some golden seraphim (angels) and some trees *for the tabernacle*. God likes decorations.

God says here: don't try to honor me by honoring an image. You can't serve me by serving a picture, a statue. Don't relate to me with an image as your mediator.

The ancient world was unpredictable. Armies might come and destroy your city and take your property and your family. Diseases might wipe out your village. Rains might NOT come, and you'll have famine.

What do you do? When things are unpredictable? When you want to make them *more* predictable? When you're not in control? When you want to feel more in control?

The ancient world had an answer: Religion!

If I bow down and serve the spiritual power that controls the rain ...

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If I show my allegiance to the god in charge of armies ...

If I honor the force behind disease ...

Then I might not have *control* over rain, armies, and disease.

But at least I'll have a good relationship with the power who controls those things.

I'll need *something* to focus my allegiance on. Cause I need to *show* that I'm loyal.

It's all about *relationships*, right? Build the relationships, maintain the relationships, and you've got power.

Guess what other world is unpredictable. Guess what other world is vulnerable to war, to famine, to ... disease. You guessed it! Our world!

Our Father, the true Lord of Heaven and Earth—that is, the one who is in charge of *everything*—reveals himself to Israel. He adopts them as his children. And he lovingly establishes the family rules.

One rule is:

“Look, children: I know you're vulnerable. This is a broken world. I know that every other nation in your culture is trying to protect themselves. They're carefully maintaining relationships with the gods who influence climate, military, public health. They're making images of these gods. They're trying to win the favor of these gods, in order to get power and control over these unpredictable things.”

“Listen carefully: I am both your loving Father, *and* the sovereign Lord of all creation. I've demonstrated my power to save you from mighty kings by breaking your Egyptian chains. I've shown my power over creation and humiliated all the Egyptian gods.”

“Don't 'work on your relationship' with false gods. And don't treat me like the gods of the world by representing me with a block of stone, a painting, or a piece of wood.”

“There's no image you can serve to try to influence me. You already have my saving power and my loving affection.”

You and I are not busy burning in esse to statues or praying to paintings. We're good Protestants, right?

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Yes. But you and I are in an image-drenched culture. We are shifting our allegiance constantly not from one politician or celebrity or boss to the next, but from one *image* of a boss or celebrity or politician to the next.

We are not reinventing *ourselves* left and right; we are re-making our *images* left and right.

If think ancient religious people, who worshipped and served images, could visit Zurich today, they would walk down the Bahnhofstrasse and sit in our team meetings at Credit Suisse, and follow us on Instagram, and they'd say, wow, this must be the most religious culture in history! People with so many fears. People with so many gods. People trying to control their lives by serving image after image after image.

But our Father gives this good word: make and serve no images anywhere. I can't be managed. I can only be heard, loved, served, obeyed, and delighted in. I've made you my precious people, and I want your hearts from generation to generation. Serve no images.

## 2. One image only

What's God's problem? Why doesn't he want to be *seen*? Why does he insist on being heard?

I want to see God!

Moses felt the same way. 13 chapters later, he asks God: show me your glorious presence. God says: "Ok, Moses. I'll hide you in this crack in this rock. I'll pass by you, and you can see a little bit of the back side of my goodness. While I'm walking by, I will speak my name to you, so you can hear it. But you can't see my face. No one can see my face and live."

Now, of course, God doesn't *have* a literal face. God is a spirit. That's another reason it's dumb to pray to an image.

But the problem is not that God is invisible. The problem is that we are so messed up, and so frail and finite, that we simply can't experience the fullness of God's face. It would kill us.

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But you know what God does? God still wants his glory—his grace and truth—to be seen. He wants to do more than simply *pass by us* with his goodness, so we can see a peek of the trace of God's back. As we said last week, we were made for his glory. To stand in its presence. To radiate with it. To reflect it.

So what does God do? He said before “no images anywhere. Don't pretend you're experiencing *me* while you're talking to a picture.”

But he also says “one image only. I'm coming to you, with all the fullness of my grace and truth. And I'm coming to you in a way won't kill you. My glory would kill you because of your finitude— you're mere women and men. So I'll clothe my glory in human flesh and I'll live in your neighborhood awhile. My glory would kill you because of your sin. So I'll clothe my glory in grace and truth. In my Son, who will become the rock you can hide yourself in, so you can see me and live.”

When God was having the artists and artisans decorate the tabernacle, he planned a box to hold the ten commandments. He wanted angels on the box holding their wings over the top of the box. It was a throne, this box. But no image was sitting on the throne. Just God's invisible presence.

But then Jesus comes, full of God's grace and truth, and finally, there's flesh and blood to sit on the throne of God's glory. The seat was made for him! And in Jesus, God says: here's the one image that can represent me. Here's the one face you can see, and when you look at this face, you can be completely sure that it's my face you're seeing. The face of Jesus, on God's throne!

One image only. Fit to represent God. Jesus!

### **3. Images everywhere**

That's true. In one sense.

But in another sense, that's not the whole truth.

Yes, God says “no images anywhere.” No face represents me.

Yes, God says “this one image only.” Jesus' face is my chosen representation.

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BUT. This was not God's original plan. And God has loved and chosen us, his people, to carry out his original plan.

See, Adam and Eve were God's image. But they failed to represent God's presence, power, glory, grace, and truth.

Israel was adopted as God's new son. But they failed to fully represent God.

Jesus comes along, and he's the son and image and representative that God the Father had always wanted, but never quite had— in Adam, in Israel. Now God can say "Yes! This is my beloved Son, whom I love, and in whom I am well pleased. Listen to him. Because he perfectly represents me. When you see his face, you see my face. When you hear his voice, you hear my voice."

But Jesus doesn't come as God's image in order to simply "do it for us." He *does* "do it for us." He does do what we fail to do— image God— for us. But he also restores God's image in us. He images God, and then he makes it possible for us to pick up where Adam and Israel left off—imaging God. It's not that God doesn't want images of him anywhere. He doesn't want *false* images of him anywhere. It's not that God doesn't want to be represented by pictures. It's that God wants women and men, girls and boys, whose hearts are so changed by the love of his Son, Jesus Christ, that they actually *can* picture God everywhere.

When the whole earth is full of God's glory, it will be because women and men, girls and boys, from every tribe and tongue and nation have covered the face of the earth with restored images of God. The Father will be pleased when he can point to you and me, and say: "this is my beloved daughter, my son, whom I love, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to her. Listen to him. If you want to know me, look at her face. Look at his face. Hear their voice. And through them, discover something true about my heart."

## **Conclusion**

Why is God our Father *jealous* for our eyes? Why does he insist that we don't use an image to worship him?

Because God the Father already *has* an image: his Son, Jesus.

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And because God the Father wants us to look at the face of his Son, Jesus, until God has us for his images, so that he can show himself to the whole creation.

Like every one of the Father's Ten Good Words, when we realize the incredible plans God has for us in Jesus .... When we realize the incredible privilege it is to join Jesus in God's plans to fill the whole creation with his glory ...

We're ready to say, "Ok, I don't always understand exactly what you're saying, and why you're saying it. But if you say "worship with no images," then I'm listening. I'm your child. And the fact that you are jealous for my affections just makes me even more delighted to be your dear daughter, your dear son, in Jesus your Son.