

No.2: God is NOT #2

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Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 00] But if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this morning, if we could turn back to, or if we could turn to the book of Exodus, the book of Exodus and chapter 20.

The book of Exodus and chapter 20. We will continue in our study in the Ten Commandments, or as we've described them as house rules, rules from our Heavenly Father.

Exodus chapter 20, it's on page 73 of the Pew Bible. And we'll read again from the beginning. God spoke all these words, saying, I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

You shall have no other gods before me. 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, or 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 the fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me, and keep my commandments.

[1 : 34] And so on. Brian Clough was an English footballer during the 1950s.

He scored 251 goals in only 274 appearances. His footballing career was cut short, and he went on to manage two football clubs, and he won the English League with these two different football clubs. However, Brian Clough is often remembered for his controversial comments about his players and about other people. Brian Clough, he wasn't more controversial than when he made a comment, even about his own creator.

He said, When I die, God is going to have to give up his favorite chair. When I die, God is going to have to give up his favorite chair.

And although it was probably said tongue-in-cheek, Brian Clough's statement, it actually reflects the society that we live in today. Because although we all know that we're not God, yet many of us live our lives as if we are God.

[2 : 48] We're God over our own life. We live our lives as if we are number one. We are number one. That's why Brian Clough said it.

When I die, God is going to have to give up his favorite chair. But by saying we are number one, we are immediately breaking the first commandment.

Because as we learned last Lord's Day, commandment number one is number one, because God needs to be number one. Commandment number one is number one, because God needs to be number one.

And this morning, as we look at the second commandment, we see that commandment number two is number two, because God is not number two. Commandment number two is number two, because God is not number two.

God is not second, secondary, or second place. God is number one. But when self or something or someone else is first and foremost in our lives, the Bible tells us that's idolatry.

[3 : 56] That's idolatry. And commandment number two condemns idolatry. And it condemns idolatry for three reasons. Three reasons this morning. Idolatry commands attention.

Idolatry causes addiction. And idolatry creates anxiety. Idolatry commands attention. Idolatry causes addiction.

And idolatry creates anxiety. So first of all, idolatry commands attention. It commands attention. The Lord says in verse four, you shall not make for yourself a carved image of 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 or serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. You know, I love books.

I didn't always love books. I didn't really like reading books when I was younger. But I love reading good Christian books. Of course, there's lots of rubbish books on the market, and there's also lots of rubbish Christian books on the market.

[5 : 04] That's why it's always good to have recommendations. That's why I'm always trying to recommend books to you. But when I was at in-service training a couple of weeks ago in Edinburgh with a group of ministers, we were all recommended a little book by an English pastor called Pete Jackson.

And the book is called Things We All Have in Common. Things We All Have in Common. So I highly recommend it to you. It's a little book about the fact that even though we're all different, and we all live in a diverse society, there are many things we all have in common.

For instance, we are all created in the image and likeness of God. Yes, we're all different. We're all diverse. And yet the Bible says that we all have dignity.

And our dignity is because we were all created in the image and likeness of our Creator. Which leads us to another thing that we all have in common. Because as those who have been created in the image and likeness of our Creator, we have all been created to worship God.

We've all been created to worship our Creator. Because God has created us for His own glory. He has created us to worship Him.

[6 : 21] That's man's chief end. That's the reason we exist. That's why we're here. That's the point to life. Man's chief end, as we mentioned last week, and as we probably learned as children, man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

Therefore, something we all have in common is that we were all created to worship. We were all created to worship. In fact, our Bible tells us in the book of Ecclesiastes that God has put eternity in our hearts.

God has put eternity in our hearts. And God has put eternity in our hearts because we have been created to worship our infinite, eternal, and unchangeable God.

So we have been created to worship. And as you know, the word worship, it's derived from the word worth. Therefore, our worship is worth-ship because we worship what we believe has most worth in our lives.

Our worship is worth-ship because we worship what we believe to have most worth in our lives. And the thing is, when we worship God as our creator, we find worth in God as His creation.

[7 : 41] When we worship God as our creator, we find worth in God as His creation. But the deception of sin and the deception of self is that instead of worshiping and finding worth in our creator, we often worship and seek to find worth in the created.

We replace the creator with the creature. And we worship self or something or someone else, which is, as the Bible says, it's idolatry.

But the thing about idolatry, as we were saying earlier, idolatry commands attention. Idolatry commands attention.

One commentator said, since the fall of Adam, the history of the human race has been a history of idolatry. Every race in every generation has manufactured its own idols in one form or another.

And this second house rule, the second commandment, it actually seeks to show us how easily we break the first commandment. The second commandment shows us how easily we replace God as number one and make him number two or number three or number four.

[9 : 07] But as we said, commandment number one is number one because God needs to be number one. Commandment number two is number two because God is not number two. God is not to be number two.

But when God is number two, he's number two because there's an idol. There's an idol. An idol which either represents God or has replaced God.

But you know, when it comes to idolatry, we often associate idolatry with the physical idols of world religions, such as the Buddha in Buddhism or the 33 million gods of Hinduism or even the Virgin Mary in Roman Catholicism or the golden calf, as we were saying to the children that the Israelites worshipped.

We often associate idolatry with these physical idols. And yet the truth is, there are more idols in the 21st century than any other century.

They just come in different forms and different fashions. I always go back to what the 16th century reformer John Calvin said, Our heart is a factory of idols.

[10 : 27] Our heart is a factory of idols because we invent idols. We are the ones who create idols. And the thing about idols is that idols command our attention. They command our attention. They divide our hearts. They distract our minds.

They divert our attention away from the one who is to be number one. They make us focus and fixate our time and energy all on them to the point that idols command our attention and they create an addiction.

Idols that command our attention create an addiction. That's what we see secondly. Idolatry creates addiction. So idolatry commands attention. Then idolatry creates addiction.

It creates addiction. Look at verse 4 again, which is the second commandment. 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.

[11 : 35] You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. Now when our holy and heavenly Father issued this house rule, he commanded us not to make for ourselves a carved image or a graven image.

And it was to be, we're not to make it of anything in all creation so that we wouldn't worship it. So the heavens above, the earth beneath, or the water under the earth.

We're not to make anything that reflects the creation. But you know, the issue of idolatry is not actually creating or carving something because there are many good and great sculptors and artists who have wonderful creative skills.

And we see that. And these creative skills that they use, they actually reflect the creator in whose image they are made. But the issue of idolatry that's highlighted here in the commandment is that when the created and carved image is worshipped instead of the creator.

The issue of idolatry is when we worship what is created, what is carved, instead of the creator. The issue of idolatry is when we actually become proud and we give priority of place to the created and the carved rather than the creator.

[13 : 01] And the reason for this issue of idolatry is revealed to us in verse 5 where the Lord says in verse 5, you shall not bow down to them or serve them for I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God.

I, the Lord, your God, am a jealous God. Now, we often view jealousy in terms of human relationships where these human relationships, they often, with jealousy, it presents and portrays itself in various and a variety of sinful ways.

But I was reading what John L. wrote in his commentary on the book of Exodus, the late professor John L. Mackay, who was my professor in college, he said, jealousy isn't sinful in and of itself because jealousy is fundamentally something good.

And I want to be clear on this because jealousy is not envy. Jealousy is not envy. Envy is wanting something or someone that doesn't belong to you, which is sinful, it's covetous.

But jealousy jealousy in the explanation of the word itself. Jealousy is relational. Jealousy is wanting someone that does belong to you, but whose attention has been attracted and allured by the appeal of another person.

[14 : 36] Jealousy is wanting someone that does belong to you, but whose attention has been attracted or allured by the appeal of another person. And this happens in relationships, it happens in friendships, when there's a third party.

Because as the saying goes, we all know the saying, two's company, three's a crowd. Two's company, three's a crowd. Therefore, a relationship or a friendship, it's often tested.

There is temptation when one of them, their attention is being attracted and allured by the appeal of another person.

And the Lord says when the relationship with his people, when the relationship with his people is being tempted and tried and turned away by a third party, the Lord says, I, the Lord, your God, I'm a jealous God.

I'm a jealous God. And he's a jealous God who has a holy jealousy, a righteous jealousy towards his people. Why? Because they belong to him.

[15 : 45] His people belong to him. His creation belongs to him. You are created in the image and likeness of your creator. So we belong to him.

And so when our attention has been attracted and allured by the appeal of self or something or someone else, and that puts the Lord second, that's what makes the Lord jealous.

The Lord is jealous. You know, when our attention has been attracted or allured by the appeal of self or something or someone else, the Lord is jealous. And he's jealous because he needs to be number one.

He needs to be number one. As we said, commandment number one is number one because God needs to be number one. Commandment number two is number two because God is not to be number two. And when God is number two, he's number two because there's an idol in our life or in our heart that's attracting our attention and alluring us away from the Lord.

We're being appealed by this idol. And the thing about idols is that they're often delightful. They're often desirable. idol is very easily and very subtly draws in.

[17 : 04] My friend, idolatry commands attention and idolatry causes addiction. Idolatry commands attention and causes addiction.

Now, when we think of addiction, we think of someone who is addicted to a substance which is harmful to their health. But in the book that I was recommended, Things We All Have in Common, a book I'm recommending to you, Pete Jackson, he has this chapter, a chapter called The Addict in Us All.

The Addict in Us All. And he writes, and this is what he says, it's ironic that we refer to them as recreational drink and drugs because they don't actually recreate anything.

They only destroy. They destroy lives. They destroy families. They destroy communities. And we know that for ourselves.

There's lots of it in our communities. There's lots of brokenness that goes on behind closed doors. And you know, I wish there was more we could do to help when it comes to these things.

[18 : 09] But we often feel absolutely helpless. But as Pete Jackson points out, he says there's an addict in all of us. We may not be looking for our next drink or our next high, but we're all easily addicted to self or to something or to someone else.

Now, I don't know if you made a New Year's resolution this year, but they say that on average it takes 66 days to create a habit and twice as long to kick it.

It takes 66 days to create a habit but twice as long to kick it. And as you know, there are wholesome habits, there are horrible habits, and there are also holy habits which are very helpful.

But when it comes to addiction, there's an addict in all of us. There's an addict in all of us because we're addicted to something. And addiction, as it explains in the book, it's a form of slavery.

Even legal things can enslave us because it's not just the drug addict that seeks the next high. The shopaholic seeks their next high from their next purchase.

[19 : 19] The workaholic seeks the next promotion or the next pay rise from working so hard. The fitness freak is obsessed with exercise and ultimately because of their appearance.

They're worried about their appearance. And so similar to drugs and alcohol, these things can be destructive. The shopaholic can mass amounts of debt. The workaholic can neglect their family or reach burnout.

The fitness freak, well, they'll never be satisfied with the way they look. Addiction can be destructive because at its root is idolatry.

Where even good things can become God things. Even good things can become God things. I mentioned to you before all the F's of life.

I'm sure we can add plenty other F's to it too. Fun. Food, family, friendship, fellowship, falling in love, fitness, football, finance, and Facebook. Nothing wrong with any of these things in their rightful place.

[20 : 22] But all these good things can easily become God things. And they become God things when we're not satisfied with God. And we want more.

We want more. And you know, you can actually tell if a good thing is becoming a God thing in your life when it keeps you up late at night. You can tell if a good thing is becoming a God thing when it keeps you from your Bible.

Or it keeps you from prayer. Or it keeps you from church. You can tell if a good thing is becoming a God thing when you think about it first thing in the morning and last thing at night.

More than that, you can tell if a good thing is becoming a God thing if you're saying about your good thing just one more. Just one more. Just one more.

But it's very rarely just one more. My friend, you can tell if a good thing is becoming a God thing when it affects your relationship with the one who is to be number one.

[21 : 27] God. Where God is becoming second. And even salvation is secondary. But when God is second and salvation is secondary, our idolatry not only commands attention and causes addiction.

It creates anxiety. It creates anxiety. Which is what we see lastly and briefly. Idolatry creates anxiety. So idolatry commands attention, commands attention, causes addiction and creates anxiety.

So idolatry creates anxiety. Look at verse 4 again. 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 or serve them for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. One writer said that you can tell if a good thing is becoming a God thing in your life when you're afraid to lose it.

You can tell if a good thing is becoming a God thing in your life when you're afraid to lose it.

Because that good thing, whether it's fun, food, family, friendship, fellowship, falling in love, fitness, football, finance, or Facebook, that good thing becomes a God thing when it takes the place of God and precedence over God and you can't live without it.

[23 : 01] And when you can't live without these things that are attracting and appealing to you, when you can't live without them, the thought of losing them is what often creates anxiety.

Now, I'm not talking about medical anxiety. I'm talking about general anxiety, which is something we all have in common. You know, when Pete Jackson, go back to the book, read the book, buy the book, he writes a chapter, he wrote the chapter, The Addict in Us All, but he also wrote a chapter, The Anxiety in Us All.

And he said, Anxiety is arguably the most common psychological issue of our time. It's that inner feeling of apprehension, worry, or dread.

Anxiety often spikes when we feel afraid, insecure, or under pressure. But it's not just a threat to our health that makes us anxious. Anxiety rears its head when we perceive a threat to our reputation, our home.

Our possessions, our job, our financial security, our relationships, and even our lifestyle. Thankfully, the Bible has a lot to say about anxiety.

[24 : 22] Paul wrote, I'm sure you know these words, Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.

God. The only reason Paul could actually say that is because if you go, that was said in Philippians chapter 4, Paul actually says in chapter 2 that he himself is anxious.

That's why he said to the Philippians, Do not be anxious about everything, about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.

Ultimately, anxiety is caused when we realize we're not in control. We're not in control. And anxiety is exacerbated when we put our trust and we give our time to idols rather than to our Heavenly Father who is in control.

And you know, that's what Jesus was teaching us about in the Sermon on the Mount. That's what that whole chapter in Matthew chapter 6 is all about. Jesus is addressing the issue that idolatry creates anxiety.

[25 : 36] Idolatry creates anxiety because the idol of the Pharisees, that's how he starts the chapter, he says the idol of the Pharisees was their religious self-righteousness, which is always a danger. We can even make an idol of our biblical knowledge and our self-righteousness.

And for the Pharisees, they found their worth not in the pursuit of God, but in the praise and the approval of other people because they wanted to be seen. They wanted to be heard when they gave to the church or when they fasted over sin or when they prayed on the street corner.

They wanted to be seen and heard. But Jesus says, they have their reward. They have their reward. But let me tell you, their idolatry will create anxiety.

Their idolatry will create anxiety. Why? Because as Jesus went on to say in the chapter, no one, no one can serve two masters. No one can serve two masters.

Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. You cannot serve God and idols.

[26 : 44] Idolatry doesn't work because idolatry, it commands our attention. Idolatry, it causes addiction. And idolatry, it creates anxiety.

Therefore, says Jesus, you look through the chapter when you go home, therefore, says Jesus, and this is what I love about that chapter, Jesus says three times, do not be anxious.

Do not be anxious. Do not be anxious. Therefore, I tell you, says Jesus, do not be anxious about what? About your whole life. Or what you will eat.

Or what you will drink. Or about your body, what you will put on. Why? Because you're not in control. Look at the birds of the air, he says.

They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns. And yet, who feeds them? Your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they, he says?

[27 : 42] And which of you, which of you, by being anxious can add a single hour to their life.

Therefore, says Jesus, do not be anxious because your heavenly Father, who is in control of all these things, he knows what you need.

He knows what you need. And you need him. You need him. You know, my friend, these house rules have been given to us by our heavenly Father.

As we said before, they've been given not to hurt us or to harm us, but to help us. They've been given, these house rules have been given to us out of love because our heavenly Father wants to look after us.

He wants to protect us. He wants to keep us safe. And so what our heavenly Father is saying to us this morning is, put away your idols and pay attention to him.

Put away your idols, pay attention to him. Trust him and give your time to him. Find worth in him by worshipping him.

[28 : 54] And you know, that's why Jesus says right at the end of that chapter in Matthew chapter 6, Jesus gives us the remedy to all of this. He gives us the remedy to a ruin. He gives us the answer to idolatry, commanding attention and causing addiction and creating anxiety.

Jesus says, seek first. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these other things will be added unto you.

Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these other things that are meant to be second and third and fourth. They will be added unto you.

My friend, commandment number one is number one because God needs to be number one.

Commandment number two is number two because God is not to be number two.

Now Jesus says, seek first. Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.

[30 : 01] But may the Lord bless these thoughts to us and let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, we give thanks for speaking to us so compassionately and reminding us that thou art our heavenly Father.

And Lord, we give thanks for even the second commandment, reminding us of the care and the compassion and the concern of our heavenly Father that we are to put him first.

Forgive us, Lord, when we do not put thee first. Forgive us, Lord, we pray, when our minds and our hearts are distracted and diverted to other things, other idols.

But Lord, we pray that even as we leave here today, we would leave with the words of Jesus on our heart seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, knowing then that all other things will be added unto us.

Bless all thy truth to us, we pray. Guide us, we ask. Lead us by thy spirit, for we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion this morning by singing the words of Psalm 135.

[31 : 23] Psalm 135, again in the Scottish Psalter. Psalm 135, we're singing from verse 15, so it's on page 426 in the Blue Psalm book.

page 426, Psalm 135, and verse 15 down to the end of the psalm. And you'll notice as we sing these verses, they're very similar to what we sang earlier in Psalm 115.

They're almost identical. But there's this encouragement for us, not to put our confidence and our trust in idols, but to put our confidence and trust in the Lord.

The idols of the nations of silver are and gold and by the hands of men is made their fashion and mould. Mouths have they but they do not speak. Eyes but they do not see.

