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## The 2<sup>nd</sup> Law of Life - part 1 of 3

The first commandment runs through the entire decalogue. It is indeed the basis of all the other commandments, and they are all but the drawing out of this one. It teaches love to God with the whole being; and "love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom. 13:10). To keep God's commandments is to love Him. (1 John 5:3). He that keeps the whole law, and yet offends in one point, is guilty of all. (James 2:10). Conversely, whoever really keeps one, keeps all, for **the law is a unit; it is not ten separate items, but one word, given by one God.** If one could keep nine parts of the law, or ninety-nine hundredths of it, and yet transgress the other part, he would show that his seeming obedience was not really obedience, but only will worship. The disregarding of one precept would show that he did not respect the authority of the lawgiver, but that he simply pleases himself, as well in his seeming obedience as in his disobedience.

*"You shall not make for yourself a carved image—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 upon 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" (Ex. 20:4–6).*

### **A Perversion of the Commandment**

Before we deal at length with the positive teaching of this commandment, we must notice a common misunderstanding of it. There are some who attempt to cover up their failure in some points, by an excess of zeal in something else; or else they would divert attention from something which they are transgressing, by exaggerating some other commandment, and thus making it seem impossible to keep it. They will say, "You do not keep this," thereby implying that they are justified in not keeping the other. But the fact that some one steals is no excuse for somebody else to kill. It is imagined by some that the second commandment forbids the making of anything whatever that is like something else. So they will either say that we cannot keep it, or else when one talks to them about the fourth commandment, for instance, they will evade the matter by pointing to some picture in your possession, and saying, "You do not keep the second commandment."

Now **we must allow God to interpret His own law**, and we must not accuse Him of inconsistency, or of violating it. Only a few days after this commandment was spoken, God called Moses up into the mountain, and gave him directions to make a sanctuary and vessels for service, and said to him: "Look that thou make them after their pattern,

which was shown thee in the mount." Ex. xxv. 40. And we are expressly told that these things were "patterns of things in the heavens." Heb. ix. 23. Moreover by God's express command the walls of the sanctuary were covered with pictures of cherubim, and there were two figures of cherubim, images made of beaten gold, upon the ark, which itself was a representation of God's throne. This is sufficient to show us that the second commandment does not mean that we shall make no image of anything; indeed if some people's interpretation of the commandment were correct, it would largely stop the manufacture of machinery, or implements of agriculture. No two could be made alike, because the second would be a likeness of the first. One could not have the buttons of his clothes the same pattern. But the commandment does not descend to such absurdities. **The essence of the commandment lies in the words, "You shall not bow down to them nor serve them." Nothing is to be made with the idea of worshipping it.**

The Roman Catholic Bible has, "Thou shalt not adore them," instead of "You shall not bow down to them," and then the people are taught that it is no sin to bow down before an image. We are told that they do not worship or adore these images, but that they use them as reminders of God or of saints whom they reverence. But the commandment says literally, according to the Hebrew, "You shall not do obeisance to them," not bow down to nor recognize images in any way whatever as worthy of reverence. And it also forbids making any image to remind us of God; for every such thing must necessarily be infinitely below Him, and therefore must degrade the worshipper.

### ***Changing the Truth into a Lie***

**This commandment grows naturally out of the first. That forbids having any God but one; this forbids the attempt to represent Him in any way whatever.** We are to worship Him in person, and not some substitute for Him, nor to attempt to worship Him through something else. In the fourth chapter of Deuteronomy we are told why this is so. "And the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of the words, but saw no form; you only heard a voice." "Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any animal that is on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that is in the water beneath the earth. And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them" (Deut. 4:12, 15-19).

“No man has seen God at any time,” therefore no man can make a representation of Him. We read that outside the Holy City, among the lost, is “whoever loves and practices a lie” (Rev. 22:15). And whoever makes any image to represent God, makes a lie, because it is a misrepresentation of Him. The maker and the worshipper of a graven image has a lie in his right hand. (Isa. 44:9-20). In Romans 1:18-32 we read of the heathen who changed the truth of God into a lie. It is that the invisible things of God, namely His everlasting power and divinity, are seen in everything that He has made. But none of these things are a likeness of God. **The truth was changed into a lie when men assumed that the things which reveal God were God Himself, or representations of Him.**

**There is a vast difference between Pantheism and God’s omnipresence, but the heathen did not discern it.** “Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things” (Rom. 1:21–23). Here we see how necessary this commandment is today and that it is as really broken in so-called Christian nations, as in the openly heathen ones. God looks upon the heart, and understands the thought afar off, and **what one purposes to do is counted as the act itself.** Nay, what one has not definitely purposed to do, and is not conscious that he will do, is counted as the act already done, if the thing that he has in his mind naturally leads to it. If we have in us the spirit which would result in open sin, that is sin, for “the devising of foolishness is sin” (Prov. 24:9).

### ***Imagination and Image Making***

Notice that before the heathen changed the truth of God into a lie by making images to represent Him, they “became futile in their thoughts,” trusting in themselves that they were wise. The work of the Spirit is “mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor. 10:4, 5). Every one, therefore, who has vain thoughts, who trusts in his own wisdom - which is foolishness in the sight of God - is essentially an idolater.

How few have thought of the connection between an image and imagination. Before a man makes a molten or graven image, he has the form of it in his mind. **The evil does not consist merely in the image made, but in the imagination of it, “We know that an idol is nothing” (1 Cor. 8:4). And the reason why it is nothing is that it is the product of an empty thought. Therefore they who make them are like unto them,**

**for he who thinks nothing, is nothing; and every thought that is not of God is a vain thought.**

This is why those who profess themselves to be wise become fools. They could not think that they themselves were wise if they had the true knowledge of God. **When men lose the knowledge of God, they really know nothing at all. Therefore the difference between those who make and bow down to images, and those who trust in the imagination of their own heart, is only one of outward form and circumstance.**

The truth is that God's power and presence are revealed in every created thing. The lie is that every creature is a god. Men assume that the force exerted through matter is inherent in the matter. From this it is but a natural step to conclude that the power manifest in man is inherent in him, and therefore that he himself is a god. This, instead of being elevating, is most degrading, as shown in the facts set forth in the first of Romans. **Men become like that which they worship, so when they worship and serve the creature instead of the Creator, they inevitably fall to the level and even below the level of the lowest creature.**

### ***Our Only Safeguard is Seeing the Invisible***

Is it not clear that this commandment forbids every vain thought, that it provides for a perfect mind, a perfect heart? Its message is identical with that to be given in the last days as a preparation for the revelation of the power and glory of God in the clouds of heaven at the second coming of Christ. That message is, "Behold your God!" This commandment teaches us to behold God in all His manifestations; and whoever does this can never be so foolish as to attempt to make an image of Him.

But some one will say, "We cannot see Him." Nevertheless we are to see Him, even though He is invisible. **For it is the invisible things of God that are clearly seen in the things that He has made. (Rom. 1:20).**

It was because men could not see God, that they made images to represent Him, and every one who does not see God in His works has in himself the essential elements of the transgression of the second commandment. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8), not merely in the future, but now. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). God's fingerprints are upon everything that He has made. Everywhere we see the traces of His hand. We see not simply where He has been working, but we see Him actively at work. One may say with Job: "Look, I go forward, but He is not there, and backward, but I cannot perceive Him; when He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him; when He turns to the right

hand, I cannot see Him" (Job 23:8, 9). But He is there nevertheless, for He says, "Do I not fill heaven and earth?" (Jer. 23:24). And **the sole business of our lives is to behold Him, and get acquainted with Him. This is the only safeguard against the violation of the second commandment.**

Whoever gets acquainted with God, must be lost in wonder and adoration, and it is not possible for him to think of making something to represent Him, for he sees that He is an infinite God, with an infinite variety of manifestations. **He learns that God is all, and he himself is nothing.** As he looks at the revelation of God, he sees as it were God expanded before his eyes, and the more he sees of Him the more fully he realizes that there is yet infinitely more to see. Now since one must necessarily see the whole of a thing before he can make an image of it, it is plain that no one who sees God as revealed in His works can ever be so foolish as to think of making an image of Him.

In this commandment therefore we see that which is said of the whole law; it is "perfect, converting the soul;" it is, "pure, enlightening the eyes" (Ps. 19:7, 8). **God's "You shall," or "You shall not," is not an arbitrary decree which He issues, leaving the entire responsibility of performance with us, but is the statement of what will be the result if we allow Him to have His way with us. He has charged Himself with our salvation, and even as He is in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses onto them, so He Himself becomes responsible for the obedience of every one who sees and acknowledges Him. "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths" (Prov. 3:6).**

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## The 2<sup>nd</sup> Law of Life - part 2 of 3

*"You shall not make for yourself a carved image—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 upon 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" (Ex. 20:4–6).*

### **Visiting the Iniquity**

We have studied the part of the commandment which contains the direct precept, and must give a little attention to the last part, "For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon 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."

How many have ignorantly proclaimed the injustice of this, and have railed against God for punishing the children for the iniquities of the fathers. But God does not do this, and His commandment does not say that He does. God says of the wicked man, "If, however, he begets a son who sees all the sins which his father has done, and considers but does not do likewise; . . . he shall not die for the iniquity of his father; he shall surely live! "As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, robbed his brother by violence, and did what is not good among his people, behold, he shall die for his iniquity. Yet you say, 'Why should the son not bear the guilt of the father?' Because the son has done what is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes and observed them, he shall surely live. **The soul who sins shall die.** The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself" (Ezek. 18:14–20).

### **The New Birth - the Way of Escape**

**God does not punish one person for another's sins.** Note what the commandment says: "Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me." "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world," yet death did not pass upon all men because of his sin, but "because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12).

There was one Man who did not sin, and who knew no sin, and death did not pass upon Him. He went into the grave a victor over it. This One was the Son of God's love. He

comes to all, and as many as receive Him, to them He gives power to become the sons of God, so that any and every child of Adam may be the Son of God's love, even as Christ is. "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Rom. 5:19). Even as the heaven is higher than the earth, and God's life and love are stronger than death, so **the birth from above frees from all the consequences of being born from beneath**. Though a man be born of the most degraded parents, he may through the Holy Spirit inherit all the goodness of God. **By the exceeding great and precious promises of God, we are made partakers of the Divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. (2 Peter 1:3, 4).

### ***God's Way is Equal***

We see therefore that God does not punish any person for the sins of another. He Himself most expressly declares that the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father. **His grace provides for deliverance even in this present life from the physical infirmities that we have inherited from our first birth**. The term "visiting the iniquity" evidently means punishment for sin, and this punishment for the sins of the fathers comes only upon those who commit the same sins. This is made very emphatic.

The question naturally arises, Why only to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him? The answer is indicated in the statement itself. It is because sin is self-destructive, and haters of God in the full sense of the term, would entirely run out in three or four generations. When the line of demarcation is distinctly drawn between the righteous and the wicked, so that all on the one side are wholly devoted to God and filled with His Spirit, and all on the other side have sold themselves to Satan and have rejected God and His Spirit, the Lord will come to confer immortality upon the one class, and to destroy the other.

But this will be no arbitrary action. Those in the first class are not taken to heaven without seeing death, simply because they happen to be living when the Lord comes, but because they have in them the element of life, and if the Lord should not come they would continue living indefinitely, even in mortal flesh. The Lord, by conferring immortality upon them, and taking them to heaven, simply grants them the privilege of continuing their life under infinitely better conditions.

On the other hand, those who have rejected the Lord have rejected life, and have chosen death, as He says: "All those who hate Me love death" (Prov. 8:36).

### ***Sin is Self-destructive***

The destruction of the wicked is not the cutting short of their probation. **When all the wicked of all generations are brought to judgment, in the day of the Lord, no one will be lost who could possibly be saved, neither will any possible future generation be cut off; for so completely will the wicked have rejected the principles of life, that there could be no succeeding generation.** If the Lord should reserve judgment, the wicked would destroy themselves by their vices and by violence. They would prey upon one another, and each one would be preyed upon by his own vices, until none were left.

So we see that **the coming of the Lord is literally to the last generation of this earth. Righteousness is everlasting, but sin is only for a time.** There can be no such thing as sin continuing throughout eternity, and therefore no such thing as an immortal sinner. "Sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death" (James 1:15). Sin destroys itself in destroying the sinner. "The world passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:17). So God will not always chide, neither will He keep His anger forever, but His mercy is "from everlasting to everlasting." Thousands of generations will, in the ages to come, be the recipients of His mercies, which are ever new.

### ***God's Jealousy Our Salvation***

God is from everlasting to everlasting, and man becomes like that which he worships. We "beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18). God is a jealous God, but this by no means indicates that He has any selfish sensitiveness for His own dignity. His jealousy is our salvation. The Apostle Paul says: "For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds may be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:2, 3). God is, and there is no other. And we can be, only as we are in Him. Therefore He is jealous when He sees men given to idolatry, jealous for their sakes because He sees them going to nothing. For all the gods of the heathen are idols, literally "nothing." When the work for which Christ has ascended into the heavens is accomplished, He will "fill all things" (Eph. 4:10). And then there will be no room in the universe for idols or their worshippers. They shall be as though they had not been.

A great mistake is made by most people, in reading this commandment, in that they think the jealousy to be limited to visiting iniquity. **Read carefully, and you will see that His jealousy is manifested, not only in visiting iniquity, but also in showing mercy to thousands of generations of them that love Him and keep His commandments.**



How foolish unbelief and fear see discouragement in that which is for our comfort and hope! **Instead of cringing and cowering with dread at the thought that God is a jealous God, we should rather rejoice with exceeding great joy; for it assures us that He who is the Almighty will effectually guard us from the arts of the cunning foe, who seduces in order to destroy.**

Because the words are so familiar through frequent repetition, that we often take no thought of their meaning, we need to have our attention specially called to the fact that this commandment speaks love and mercy. The law is love, and they who love God keep His commandments. "This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments." Upon such His mercy is seen, because they do not shake it off. They find His mercy in their loving obedience to His commandments, for "in keeping them there is great reward" (Ps. 19:11).

Lost in the contemplation of the infinite greatness of God, His worshippers absorb Him until they are completely swallowed up in Him, then whoever looks at them can see not them, but God who is all and in all. God is jealous for the glory and welfare of His people; He desires their minds to be clear, their souls purified, and their lives continued throughout eternity.

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## The 2<sup>nd</sup> Law of Life - part 3 of 3

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### **Love is the Fulfillment of the Law**

In the last part of the Second Commandment, to the consideration of which we come this week in the series on “The Law of Life,” we are clearly shown that “love is the fulfillment of the law” (Rom. 13:10), for “those who love Me” “keep My commandments.” Yet how often this statement is made the excuse for disregarding one of the commandments, notably the Fourth.

“Love is the fulfillment of the law,” we are told by the one who intends to go on transgressing it, with as much confidence as though it read: Love is the transgressing, or disregarding, of the law. No; “love is the fulfillment of the law.” It is not a substitute for the keeping of the commandments, but **it manifests itself in obedience to the law**; for “this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments.” Therefore “he who says, “I know Him,” and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4). “If you love Me,” Jesus says, “keep My commandments.”

**“O God, of good the unfathomed sea!  
Who would not give his heart to Thee?  
Who would not love Thee with his might?  
O Jesus, Lover of mankind,  
Who would not his whole soul and mind,  
With all his strength, to Thee unite?”**

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