

## **Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino, The Ten Commandments, Session 3: Commandment 2: No images**

This is Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino, and his teaching on the Ten Commandments. This is session 3, Commandment 2: No images.

So now we're going to begin looking at the second commandment.

You shall not make for yourselves any graven images. Now this one, in some ways, might seem fairly straightforward. Interestingly enough, in the history of the church, this has probably been the most controversial of the Ten Commandments in its way.

Part of the reason is the wording. Is this commandment two, or is this simply commandment 1b? And this is kind of it raises an interesting question. Are we talking here really an extension of commandment number one, you shall have no other gods, including graven images, or is this a separate commandment saying you shall not have idols either? Among Jews, Protestants, and the Orthodox, this is number two.

You shall not have any graven images. And the commandment is understood as being a prohibition of all images, not just pagan gods. However, Catholics and Lutherans would disagree with that.

They believe that this is 1b, that this is actually the second half of the first commandment. And this raises all kinds of questions because that would mean that it does not prohibit any kind of images of the Lord, but rather only images of pagan gods. So this is where we get into all the controversy regarding icons and whether or not you can have pictures of God.

Is it really denied by the Ten Commandments? Then there are questions with orthodoxy. The whole question is associated with the idea of what we call the iconoclastic controversy, which took place a long, long ago, where the church was divided over the question of whether or not you could have icons. And eventually, it seemed like most of them settled on the idea that you could, but they did so with different rationales.

So, this particular commandment has been controversial in its way. So, it would be nice if the words could help us to determine just by the language whether or not we are to view this as one commandment or two. But unfortunately, the words don't make it all that clear.

You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on earth beneath or in the waters below. Now, it would be nice if they had said here

that it includes images of God or the Lord, but it doesn't. 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 parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to the thousand generations of those who love me.

This seems to imply we're talking about pagan gods here. So, the question then becomes, are we talking only about pagan gods, or are we talking about any images whatsoever? In Jewish tradition, this was clearly understood to be a separate commandment from the first commandment and was understood to include any graven images of any sort. In fact, at various times in Jewish history, this has been interpreted very, very strictly to mean no representational art of any kind.

And there are also some strands of Islam that interpret it the same way. And so, in some strands of Islam, they're not allowed to have any representational art either because of the same understanding. So, these little things here were called eye idols, which is kind of an interesting sort of sideline here.

But these are clearly representational art, but there's a big question of what they represent. And it was thought that we found a whole bunch of these in some Sumerian excavations and so on. And it was believed that these represented gods.

Well, now they believe that they represent not gods, but actually worshipers. And it was apparently that when you could not be present at the temple when you wanted to be, you would put one of these little idols in your place. And I was just imagining, wouldn't it be interesting to step up in the pulpit sometime and look out into my congregation and see a bunch of cardboard cutouts sitting there.

Don't see me, I'm really here. But yeah, I guess they didn't have a whole lot of confidence in the intelligence of their gods. But at any rate, when you think about it, there's a certain kind of logic in it.

I mean, if god can be present in a stone idol, why can't the worshiper also be present in a stone idol, right? Anyway, so what do we mean by an idol? What is an idol? We hear the word idol a lot these days, and we probably think about sports heroes, singers, or political figures that people look up to or something of that sort. But if we really think about where the whole thing comes from, we know that idol really is referring more to an image of some kind of god. It's not just a famous person or something.

So it seems on the surface, at least, that this commandment is going to be kind of straightforward. You don't make images of gods. And if it were that easy, I could stop right there, and I wouldn't have to go any further.

But it goes a lot deeper than that and has a lot more things involved with it than only determining what we mean indeed by a god or, in this case, an idol. Okay, so we know that idols aren't just famous people. Obviously, they refer to gods.

They refer to pieces of stone and rock. Idols in the ancient world came in a wide variety of forms. And in the Middle East, one of the most common forms is the form of a figure, a human being.

This is the god Baal, apparently. And this hand very likely had a lightning bolt in it. Then we have things like the gods of Egypt, which are what we call theriomorphic, which have animal forms.

Idols could also take the forms of symbols, as in this depiction here of the Aten disc, the sun disc up here, with all of his hands reaching down and giving all kinds of wonderful blessings to people. Over here, this is an interesting combination. We can't really see it clearly, I'm sure, but here we have a god seated on a throne.

We know he's a god because he's got his horns. We've got two symbols up here, which seem to be symbols of the sun and maybe a star, perhaps Ishtar or something of that sort. And over here, we have an altar, which has a symbol sitting upon it.

And this is a fairly common kind of thing to have symbols that represent gods. And there's a question, is this also an idol, or is it just a symbol? You know, like in Christian churches, of course, we have the triangles and sometimes with the three circles or something of this sort, a symbol representing God. And for ancient peoples, oftentimes these would take the place of your more typical idols.

And then there's a kind of the roughest of them all, which are the massabots, just a standing stone, a pillar of some sort, or even just a rock that somebody has decided to stand up and call a dwelling place or a symbol of a god. So, a variety of forms of different physical representations of the gods. But going on a little bit here, you know, clearly we have the anthropomorphic, we have the, let me go on here, theriomorphic, which I've talked about, we have symbols, and finally the massabots.

Sacred trees or sacred groves. This is an interesting one because, you know, this is sort of like a make-your-own-idol kind of thing. You know, a tree has grown up, and you designate the tree as being a representation of some sort of god.

There's been some speculation on how this might relate to the Asherahs of the Old Testament, whether they might, in some way, just be connected with these sacred grove ideas. Don't really know. But something to bear in mind is that idols are more than just images, and there was a very real sense in which it was believed that they embodied the spirit of the god they represented.

In the Old Testament, in the prophets, they have lampoons occasionally of idolatry, and they have one of these famous images of the craftsman who has made his idol, and then he takes a part of the wood, and he bows down before it and says, well, part of the wood he takes and he throws in his fireplace and nods, ah, I'm warm! Wonderful! And part of the wood, he bows down before it, and he says, Oh, you're my god! Not quite that simple, but, you know, that certainly seems to be that way from the outside, but typically they had to go through a very elaborate ritual in order to make an image into a representation of the god, and in a sense, a portion of the god's presence dwelt within the image itself. Typically, there was a ritual that was called the Cleansing of the Mouth, and then there was the opening of the mouth, and then various sacrifices and prayers were made, all designed to forge a connection between the god who is out there somewhere and this image that is sitting here somewhere. And we might compare that in a way to, like, the sanctification of an icon, perhaps, though they were a little bit more into it than perhaps we are in our days.

But no, they clearly made a distinction between a statue of, say, a person and the idol that was to represent the god, and it wasn't just a question of artistic differences. It was a question of the rituals, the processes that were involved. Before the rituals, it's a statue, and after the rituals are performed, it can actually be called a god.

So there was that clear distinction made there between them. Everybody in the ancient world had their idols, some kind or another. This is a wonderful depiction here of the Assyrian warriors carrying away the idols that they've captured from various places.

Sometimes you have pictures of idols actually with chains upon them as if they've bound the gods themselves. But all the different people, all the different lands, all have their own idols, and oftentimes these would be taken away in wartime and put in various places in temples or other things of that sort as a way of not only subjugating the peoples, but subjugating their gods as well. The idols were so common that when the Greeks first encountered the Jews around the time of Alexander the Great, they were amazed at the fact that the Jews didn't have any images.

In fact, one of the early Greek descriptions of the Jews described them as a nation of atheists, atheists because they saw no gods. You don't have an idol, you don't have a god, obviously. Now, the Bible did not prohibit images of God, and I think this is an important distinction because when you think about God, as we all do, I hope, we think in very, I guess, sense-oriented terminology as we should.

We are creatures that are bound to our five senses, and we think about the things we see and hear and smell and so on, but more so our sight than anything else. And

so we oftentimes have images that we use to relate to God. For some people, it's the old man with the long white hair or the kind of lovely-looking Jesus, or the kind of thing, and I've talked to some people who say, well, when they pray, they just imagine a big ball of light or something of that sort.

In any case, you're always talking about some kind of image of some sort or another, and that's not wrong. The Bible itself uses a lot of different images to describe God. So, you know, we have this image of God reaching down with his own finger and writing in the Ten Commandments and telling Moses that God is going to let him see his back as he walks by.

We've got the image of the husband that is used frequently in the Old Testament. God is the mountain, the rock. Their rock is not like our rock.

This is clearly an image that is designed to embody certain qualities of God that we are supposed to be able to relate to. There are images of God as mother in the Old Testament, two or three places. It's not commonly used in the Old Testament, but it does appear there.

God is a fortress. The most common Old Testament image by far is God is king. Now, that is certainly the imagery which is most prominent in a lot of the prophetic and other texts.

And as we've talked about, the relationship between God and Israel is oftentimes depicted in ways that would be very much analogous to a sovereign relating to his vassals. God, the great king. And we have in Malachi, you know, if I am a king, where is my honor? We have all this representation of God in imagery that we can relate to.

So, the Bible does not say, you shall not have images. Rather, it says, you shall have no graven images, no images that are set in stone, we might say. This has become quite the area of investigation in recent years, a whole question of what we call an iconism.

And this is a, again, an Assyrian relief. This is used in the cover of a book about the very topic of an iconism. What does an iconism mean? Well, an, to have an icon's image.

So, an iconism simply means no images. Not quite fair, because this is still an image. But this is clearly, it's not your typical image of a God, right? It's not some big bearded man sitting on a throne.

It's not somebody with horns coming out of the top of their head. It's, maybe, or we're not really sure, but it looks like it might be a quill or something of that sort, maybe referring as a symbol of perhaps a scribal God or something of that sort, you

know? So, an iconism simply means rejecting the use of images in worship. And this, of course, has been something which has been controversial, not only in Judaism, but also in Christianity as well.

Some of Israel's neighbors seem to prefer symbols of their gods. And I think the Persians are a great example of this. They oftentimes have a picture of the winged sun disk or something of that sort to represent Huromazda.

Sometimes, however, there's also a figure of a kind of man over the top of that. But it's done both ways. But no ancient peoples represented or rejected iconic representations.

Everybody had idols of some sort or another. So, that certainly makes Israel unique in that sense. Not in the sense that they had no idols, because they did, but usually their idols were not of the Lord, or at least as far as we can tell, they weren't.

So, moving then to this commandment, looking at it in a little more detail, when Moses is giving the Ten Commandments, remarkably enough, ironically enough, Israel is already in the process of demanding that they have an idol. So, God had given them an image. He led them by a pillar of fire.

He led them by a pillar of cloud. Those were images that the people could relate to. Moses goes up the mountain.

The people don't know what he's doing up there. Where did he go? He's been gone for so long. And so, the people come to Aaron and they say, Give us a God.

Give us a God whom we can see, who can lead us back to Egypt. And so, yeah, they're already in the process of breaking this second commandment here. This ideological issue is persistent, and it continues throughout the history of Israel.

Not emphasized the same way as the other gods and pagan gods, and yet at the same time, it is certainly an issue of concern, particularly for some of the later prophets. Even 30 years ago, when I first started writing and researching the Ten Commandments, I could say that there had been no idols found that could definitely be said to be images of the Lord. I can't say that with quite as much certainty now, because it seems that there is a possibility that such images do exist.

Archaeologists have found some interesting images that they've dug up around Jerusalem that are clearly divine images, but whether or not they're supposed to be the Lord or not, or whether there are some of these pagan gods that the Israelites worship, that's kind of difficult for us to determine from our point of view. Some recent excavations have dug up some very suggestive findings and artifacts. Idolatry

does remain a persistent problem up until really the second temple period, the time after 515, when they rebuild the temple.

Here are some of the idols that have been found in Jerusalem or in some of the other Judean cities of Judah. Sekhmet idols. Bez.

Bez was apparently a very popular god. He was the patron of childbirth, and he's really kind of a little dwarf kind of fellow. He was an Egyptian god, but a lot of images of Bez have been found.

The Eye of Horus. I believe this is one from Megiddo. This looks like one of the Megiddo ivories, but this was also an Egyptian symbol that represents the god Horus, a symbol of the god.

Anna, mother goddess. Fertility figurines of various goddesses of some sort or another. This is the Baal Seth Scarab, which here has the image of an animal and a god standing on its back, and probably a figure who is kneeling before it.

We've also found a number of scarabs in Jerusalem in recent excavations. Scarabs, of course, are again an Egyptian symbol representing eternal life. These are inscribed with various Egyptian symbols and so on.

This was during the days when Israel had some very close relations with Egypt, and God discouraged those relationships in the books of the prophets. In a way, you have these entanglements between the kings of Israel and Judah and the kings of Egypt repeatedly. They were expecting the Egyptians to help them and aid them, particularly in their struggles against Assyria.

Egypt never came through. But for some reason, the hope springs eternal. One of the ways, of course, you do your relationships with these other kingdoms is by honoring the gods of your neighbors.

It's very likely that a lot of these symbols that we find here represent a kind of political alliance. This is perhaps one of the more disturbing images. The Hezekiah seal.

This is the 8th century BC and seems to be from Hezekiah, the king. Yet here we can see that we have the Ankh, the Egyptian symbol of life. We have the winged sun disk on this.

The question, of course, is who does this winged sun disk represent? Is this supposed to be a representation of the Lord? We really can't say. Hezekiah was a good king according to the Bible. Yet here it seems like the seals that are in use during his reign are in violation of the second commandment.

Moving on a little bit further, we have something we call the Shalemite seal, which again has a couple of worshipers. This is again from Israel, and we've got Hebrew down here, Hebrew text identifying with Shalemite. Here we have two people who are worshipping, and then up here, apparently the moon disk.

This is apparently an altar. So, an Israelite seal with a Hebrew inscription with a pagan moon god. Here's another seal from Israel, which seems to come from the 7th century BC.

This one depicts what we call a Masu, which is a protective spirit of some sort. So Israel certainly seemed to have indulged in its share of pagan idolatry, worshipping images of the gods of their neighbors. Did they engage in depictions of the Lord? Certainly less so, maybe not at all, but we cannot say they did not at all.

But what we can say is that there definitely was a persistence of a problem of idolatry in Israel throughout the Old Testament period. So why were images of the Lord banned? If God gives his people images to use, to relate to him, why was it so bad for the Israelites to turn these images into pieces of rock or clay or inscriptions on a wall? What makes that so bad? The Bible never really explicitly says why, but there are a number of passages in the Old Testament and the New Testament that give us some of the rationale about why the Israelites should not have idols. And not only are we talking here about, again, idols of pagan gods.

I mean, obviously, anything that's a pagan god is banned by the first commandment. Why no idols for the Lord? I think one of the first principles that we can point out is the fact that no idol, no set in stone image, could do justice to the Lord. We have this wonderful statement in 1 Kings, but will God indeed dwell upon the earth? See, the heavens and the highest heaven cannot contain you, how much less so this house that I have built.

Here, this is Solomon dedicating the temple, and Solomon makes this acknowledgement that his temple cannot hold the presence of God. What was the whole understanding underlying idolatry was the idea that God was going to dwell in some sense in this piece of rock. And here King Solomon is saying, no, not even this huge house can hold you because not even the heavens can hold you.

So on that basis, the idea of making a statue to hold God would seem to be nonsense. Isaiah chapter 66, heaven is my throne and earth a stool for my feet. Where's the house that you would build for me? Where would be my place of rest? All these things my hand has made, and also all of these things were declared by the Lord.



Once again, the idea that there could be a place where God could dwell in and be limited by physical structures is rejected here. God is too big, too much. Simply put, idols will limit our vision of God.

Cats fit in boxes. God does not fit in a box. And God is not able to be bound in that way.

So there is a sense where these images are all, to some extent, going to be limiting. And you think about it, and you think about the way that we try to imagine God. As long as we hold loosely to those images, we can adjust.

But once those things become set in stone or painted on the wall, then there becomes the danger that they can be limiting to us. I remember a story a number of years ago about a child who had mistaken a picture of Jesus for God. No, that can't be God because God has long hair.

Those are the kind of limitations that images will put upon us if we allow them to become set in stone. So that's certainly one of the problems, the limitations that the idols will place upon God. Another problem is that idols can be manipulated.

And this is very clear from the Old Testament. This is part of the major critique that the prophets have against idols: the fact that you can basically make an idol do whatever you want the idol to do. In the ancient world, the idols would be taken down from their shrines, particularly at certain festivals of the year.

They would be brought out into the city. In one of the festivals, the gods would have a nice little mock battle, and then the god would be returned to his shrine in triumph. You often wonder what would happen if somebody dropped the broken idol.

That would throw your theology all off, wouldn't it? Idols can be made to do what we want them to do. And so the people would go and they would pour liquid blood or whatever down the throat of the image that they have created, and the god doesn't spit it out. Ah, the god has accepted my gift.

You could cause the idols to have a great big smile painted on their faces and think they're perpetually pleased with you. Idols can be made to do what you want them to do, to act in the ways that you think that you want them to act. God, of course, was not to be manipulated.

And this is, of course, one of the big images behind the most famous incident of idolatry, the whole golden calf thing. There is a sense of manipulation of the Lord here because why do they make a golden calf and say we want a golden calf to take

us back down to Egypt? Well, calves were worshipped in Egypt. That was the form of one of their gods, Hathor.

So here come the Israelites marching back, saying, Look, we've got a golden god of Egypt right here with us. And thinking they're going to be welcomed back into Egypt because of their identification with the Egyptians. That's certainly manipulation of God.

And he is going before them, which means, of course, that he approves of them and what they're doing. Yet another problem. Idols embody human biases.

And this is pretty remarkable when you think about it. You know, the Bible never comes out and states why idols are wrong. St. Paul talks about it in the New Testament.

One of the things that he talks about is the fact that while idolatry could inspire some beautiful artworks, that doesn't mean that it makes idolatry pretty. If you look at these images of the Greek gods, they're not obese. They're not bald.

They're beautiful. They're lovely. They embody the ideals that people have for themselves.

And we see that same kind of mindset oftentimes, even in our art of today, when people depict Jesus. And people have that wonderful tendency, of course, to reflect on Jesus, their idealization of themselves. It kind of reminds you of that statement that Albert Schweitzer made when he said that the person who goes looking for the historical Jesus is like somebody who looks into a deep well and what they see looking back at them is their own reflection.

That is the kind of way that a lot of times people approach the image of God, which is that they want to project onto God their thoughts, their values. Is God white or black? No, you've got to choose. If you're going to make a solid image of God, you've got to choose.

Is God strong? Is he mighty? Is he artistic? Is he male? Is he female? He? Female? At any rate, you've got to choose. And in each case, you are choosing to embody God in some value or some image that you hold as being valuable. You've got to love Thor, right? Thor kind of embodies the spirit that the Vikings would have valued the most.

Idols will embody our values. God, on the other hand, would have his people embody his values. And so that is why you couldn't set your images of God in stone.

So let's talk a little bit here about history again. What happened to the idols? The fall of the idols. King Josiah, 640 to 609 BC, banned idols in Israel.

But unfortunately for him, he died young, and his reforms did not outlive him. His son Manasseh was notorious for his idolatry. And so, according to Jeremiah chapter 2 verses 26 through 27, as a thief is ashamed when they are found out, so the house of Israel shall be ashamed.

They, their kings, their officials, their priests, their prophets, who say to a tree, you are my father, and to a stone, you gave me birth. Clearly, Jeremiah is depicting the situation that he sees happening around him, that wooden images and images of stone have become surrogates for the Lord in Israel. So these aren't just pagan gods we're talking about here.

We are talking about images of the Lord. And again, that's why I go back and say that I believe that the second commandment isn't just talking about pagan images, but talking about images of the Lord, because that's what they're condemning. Idolatry provoked the destruction of Jerusalem, according to Ezekiel 6 and 8. And Ezekiel talks about all the abominable images that the people were worshiping in the temple in Jerusalem.

Now, when we get to the second temple period, after the temple was rebuilt after 515 BC, we probably had some temptation to idolatry among the diaspora communities, as I mentioned last time. But there really does not seem to have been a problem of idolatry in Judah, once again, until the Hellenistic reforms began in about 170 BC, when some of the people thought it would be politically expedient for them to set up what was called the abomination of desolation in the temple in Jerusalem. So it's remarkable that the horror with which the book of Daniel speaks about that incident in the book of Maccabees as well, that they could see that this was by that point so foreign to their experience, that there were, at that time, no idols, no images in Israel.

Now, we see a shift in Judaism during the Second Temple period. By the time of Jesus, there had become a kind of obsessiveness about this second commandment, to the extent that representational art in general seemed to have been rejected. Menorahs were a common motif in art, but during this period, human depictions were not at all.

During this depiction, there was a riot in Jerusalem over an eagle that the Romans tried to put up in front of the temple, and the people demanded it be torn down. There was another riot that occurred when some of the Roman soldiers marched into Jerusalem with their standards, which had depictions of their various patron animals on them. When Herod the Great built his temple, he was very careful to include no representational art, because at that point, anything depicting animals or humans was considered to be a violation of the second commandment.

This kind of attitude ebbed and flowed a bit because a couple of hundred years later, they had once again embraced representational art, and we have some of these wonderful mosaics that have been found in synagogues from the fourth century AD, which depict the figures of the Zodiac and so on. So, the attitudes changed over time. So, geometrical patterns, plant motifs, and again, the Menorah and the Star of David, those became common symbols that were used in art, but not any kind of pictures of people, not any kind of images of even animals.

You might wonder at this point, is there a fundamental misunderstanding here of the purpose of the second commandment? The second commandment was designed to keep them from making images of gods, idols, and yet here, they're rejecting any kind of imagery at all. And I guess you could, you know, if you want to read the words literally, you shall make for yourself no graven image, not of anything that is in heaven above, or earth beneath, or any of the animals, etc., etc. If you want to read those words literally, of course, you can say you're not allowed to have any images of any animals, even if you're not worshipping them.

But I think that the implication is pretty clear that we're talking about idols, images of worship. So, it seems to me that during this period, they're becoming a little bit, let's say, pedantic about their observation of the second commandment. Well, what about the church? This is a different matter entirely, isn't it? Because in the church, the image, the question of icons, and the use of images in worship has become something of a major controversy.

And Jesus never mentioned the second commandment. Paul talked about it, but he was clearly talking about images that were of pagan gods. And apparently that's also what is meant in the book of 1 John, when we're told to keep from idols there.

But idols did come into the church by, about the, here we go, little children, keep yourself from idols, yes. And in Romans, claiming to be wise, they became as fools and they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. That's clearly talking about not only Roman gods, which were human-shaped, but also the Egyptian gods as well.

But in the church, we can see iconography starting to come into its own in about the third century AD. It's possible they had images even before then, but we don't know. There were always church leaders who criticized the use of icons.

But that was not really a prominent voice, actually, up until the Middle Ages. The iconoclasm controversy, or it's sometimes called the icon war, occurred in the Eastern Orthodox Church. And sometimes we have a couple of different episodes.

We called the first iconoclasm, occurred between 726 and 787 AD. Second iconoclasm occurred between 814 and 842. And there's a theory that the Christians

might well have been influenced in this direction by Muslims, who, of course, reject any images at all.

And so in the church, there were factions that were very much opposed to the use of icons. But that iconoclasm definitely left its mark on Christianity, even though eventually iconoclasm, the war against idols, was rejected, and the Orthodox Church came to embrace them. The spirit and the arguments of the iconoclasts were later resurrected by the Protestants and continued to shape many of their thoughts.

So the question that we need to ask ourselves when thinking about idols is, is it possible that Christians can sometimes make this confusion, have this confusion of the image of God with the real thing? Can we become obsessed with our images to the extent that they can form God into the image of the image, rather than allowing God to form our images of the Lord? I have known, of course, many Christians of many different traditions, many who use icons in worship. Some of my best friends use icons. But even so, I have to say that they do make me nervous, not necessarily because I believe that they're a violation of the Second Commandment, but rather the principles behind the Second Commandment, the principles that God is too big to be contained in a solid form or something of that sort.

That principle, I believe, is still very much relevant to us. And I worry that the use of imagery could, in fact, limit our vision of God. So it is fine to have images of God.

Obviously, the Bible gives us lots of images of God that we can use. The problem, of course, is when we let those images get set in stone, when they become too permanent in our minds, because that's when we become limited and we become constricted in our understandings of who God is, how God works. When we allow those images to become permanent, there's always a danger that they can take the place of the real Lord.

One more fact that we need to bear in mind is that the Bible does permit one image of God, and in fact endorses one image of God. And that image is, of course, the human image. God made humanity in the image of God.

The meaning of that assertion has been much debated, of course, through the ages. My own feelings, I'm probably not going to go into too much depth here because of the fact that I would get into opinions that would be controversial and wouldn't be able to adequately flesh out in a few minutes. Rather, it's sufficient to say that the Bible affirms that human beings are God's image.

How is God manifest in this world? God is manifest in this world through humanity. And Jesus, of course, affirms this when he tells his followers, How can you say, Show me the Father? If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. Jesus was fully human in his fully human form.

He says, You have seen the Father. He embodied the Spirit of God, of course, like no other human being could. And yet, if we try to downplay his humanity and say, well, we see God in his divinity, not in his humanity, well, that thereby lays the root of heresy.

That is dividing the divine nature of Christ into human nature and divine nature. That has been rejected by the Church as heresy. It is one nature in Christ.

He is divine, human and divine. And it is in his wholeness that we see God manifest. And so, Jesus depicts for us in himself the fullness of God.

And he is, of course, still present. Jesus tells his followers, his disciples, that we are his body. We are the body of Christ, still here in the world.

We don't serve God best by pouring out libations in front of an image. Rather, we serve God best by feeding our neighbors, by clothing the naked. The image of God which we should cherish most highly isn't something we can set on our shelf.

But rather, the image of God that we should cherish most highly is the one that wears the face of the poor person down the street or the wealthy neighbor as well, the businessman, the orphan, the waitress. Those are the images of God that we should honor. And in serving our neighbors, we can help to embody the kind of spirit that God wants us to have, the spirit of worship and the spirit of service.

It has nothing to do with those pictures, those depictions, those images that might serve as foci, focuses for our devotion. The greatest devotion that we can show, the greatest way that we can see the image of God, is to look for that image in the neighbors who are called in the Bible, the image of God.

This is Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino and his teaching on the Ten Commandments. This is session 3, Commandment 2: No Images.