

## **“A JEALOUS GOD”**

### The Second Commandment

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

*It's a tragic irony that while God was giving Moses the second commandment, the nation of Israel was engaged in the very activity that it forbids. Exodus tells us that during Moses' extended stay on the mountain, the people began to doubt he would ever return to lead them. As a result, they decided to "make a god" that could go on before them. Aaron, their leader during Moses' absence, gathered together gold jewelry from the people, melted it down, and fashioned it into a golden bull. Then he built an altar before it and said, "Tomorrow shall be a Feast to the Lord" (32:5).*

*While some commentators believe that in building their golden calf the Israelites abandoned the true God, others believe they had no such intention. Aaron's declaration of a feast "to the Lord" seems to indicate that he, at least, had not turned to another god. He was simply yielding to the people's request for a tangible image of their God. As commentator Robert Jamieson noted: "They required, like children, to have something to strike their sense...some visible material object as the symbol of the Divine presence, which should go before them." In other words, if the Israelites couldn't have their visible, human leader, Moses, at least they would have a portrayal of a God that they could see, touch, and display.*

*But God was offended. So offended, in fact, that only Moses' impassioned plea for mercy kept the Lord from destroying the nation all together.*

*Why was God so intensely angered? Because He knew that a bull—or any other tangible symbol—could portray only a miniscule portion of His true character. Yes, the bull portrayed His power; but what of His holiness, His majesty, His love? Could it be that their imitation of Egyptian ceremony blinded their eyes to the mystery of God's absolute moral perfection?*

*You see, the Israelites meant the calf to be an image of the true God, so they were not violating the first commandment—only the second. In other words, they didn't turn to a false god—they merely made an image of the real God.*

*Can it happen to you and me today? Yes—and it can be our downfall! Why? Because like all images, the thing we cling to as a divine representation will be unable to portray the fullness of God's identity. As a result, it will hinder rather than help our worship. It will lead us down the crooked path of disobedience.*

*-Bill Hybels, Engraved On Your Heart*

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Exodus 20:4-6 says:  
*"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."*  
What is the difference between the first commandment and the second?
2. What qualities of God simply cannot be captured in any image made by man?
3. Read Exodus 32. These events occur while Moses is on the mountain receiving the law.
  - a) What is the intention for constructing this golden calf?
  - b) Why does this offend God so much? (vv. 27-29)
4. Carefully examine vv. 4-6. What are some things we can learn as God calls himself a "jealous God".
5. How might we arouse the jealousy of God in the church today?
6. Share some of the convictions that you received today.