

January 23, 2021

In the early church, the making and veneration of images of Christ, the apostles and various designated saints was consistently opposed. Despite the consistent teaching that the images did not contain power, and were only likenesses made out of wood, stone and other materials, the use of such images in worship steadily gained popularity and prevalence. One teaching was that the images could become animated – in other words, come to life – and bestow powers upon the one worshipping the image. Powers such as healing, forgiveness, guidance and direction. These powers could then be passed on to the uneducated masses by the church clergy. It is easy to see how such a teaching could pervert the gospel message and leave the people vulnerable to deception.

In 726 AD, the Byzantine emperor Leo III, took a stand against the worship of icons and began openly persecuting those who persisted in the practice. This persecution lasted 60 years, but in 787 AD the empress Irene successfully re-established the use of images. The cycle repeated itself again in 816 AD with emperor Leo V passing laws against it, and empress Theodora restoring icon veneration in 843 AD.

When power is assigned to an object without power, such as an image of wood, stone, plastic, glass, or clay, a void is created when the image is worshipped. There is nothing there to grant requests, nothing there to impart power. With image worship, direction and guidance will only come from one place, from the heart of the worshipper himself. We are told in *Jeremiah 17:9 that the heart is deceitful in all things, and desperately wicked*. Worshipping an object is essentially worshipping yourself; deceiving yourself that the guidance coming back to you is from God.

The second commandment is one that would not have you sidetracked into believing there is power in stuff. *You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below.*<sup>5</sup> *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,*<sup>6</sup> *but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

Consider another, slightly updated, way to read that commandment. Don't take any object and put it in the place of God. Most do not do this with carved images anymore, but modern society is filled with lots of stuff! Houses, cars, computers, boats! Let's remember that it is all going to burn, and that no man can take his treasures with him to the grave.

Jesus said, "*But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.*" *Matthew 6:33*. The **stuff** we need, comes from God, not from ourselves. By putting Him first, by seeking Him first, we can be assured that He will give us what we need.

Not a single commandment can condemn us, because we are no longer under the law. We are new creatures in Christ who, if we allow, will live through us in our weaknesses, and save us to His kingdom.

It is so very simple. Don't worship images (stuff!), don't bow down to idols (stuff!). By doing so, you put your trust in yourself, rather than in the God who created you and knows what is best for you.