

NO WORSHIP OF ENGRAVEN IMAGES!

(Scripture: Exodus 20: 3-7)

Introduction:

This is a great subject for all of us, especially Indians. We all have to be careful about what we buy from Indian shops. Even though their products may meet our needs, it could very well be an engraven image. While some go overboard with their graven Image theology, others become careless with it! There is a nice proverb in Tamil language. “Arandavan kannukku Irundathellam Peyi.” It means, for a person who is scared, any kind of darkness he sees, it appears to him as a ghost! It is so easy to brand any kind of art or sculpture as graven image! Jews in first century, took vs 4 literally and prohibited people from embracing any kind of drawing, or carved images. Muslims, even now, prohibit lot of those drawings or sculptures.

We have to be careful as to how we interpret the Bible. The following passage must be carefully compared with other parts of the Scripture to come to the right kind of interpretation.

Exodus 20:3-6.

3 “You shall have no other gods before Me.

4 “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;

5 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 générations of those who hate Me,

6 but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.

Verse 4 and 5 must be taken together. Jesus says, Scriptures must not be broken. (John 10:35). If you take verse 4 alone and interpret, you will become a literalist like a Muslim. If you take both the verses together, you will have a much better understanding.

The Hebrew Word for graven image is Peh-Sel. It may mean Graven image, carved image, or idols meant for worship. (Graven Image - KJV, carved image - NKJV, image - NIV, idol. NASB)

What is a graven image? Many of us may immediately think of any kind of engraved pictures on stone or metal or some kind of drawing. Not really. It is actually a carved image made of wood or stone. But sometimes it may be covered with gold or iron metal.

Verse 4 says that you shall not make an engraven image, any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, that is in the earth below, or in the water under the earth. If we take it literally, we will not be able to paint any picture, or make any sculptures. Moses himself sanctioned the cherubic forms above the mercy-seat in the Holy of holy, the brazen serpent was made and lifted up in the wilderness when the Israelites were bitten by snakes, and the lilies and pomegranates of the golden candlestick. Solomon had lions on the steps of his throne, oxen under his “molten sea,” and palm-trees, flowers, and cherubim on the walls of the Temple, “within and without” (1Kings 6:29).

Exodus 20:4 basically forbids all idolatrous representations of Deity. God is Spirit, and He cannot be captured with some imagery of heavens or earth or sea or under the ground. Unseen God cannot be

portrayed in any form of earthly images. God is indeed Spirit and He must be worshipped in Spirit and Truth!

So we have to be extremely careful about interpreting the verse 4 too literally. It basically says that unseen almighty God cannot be portrayed through any carved out images! But when it is joined with vs 5 the meaning comes out very clear. You cannot make any images to bow down or surrender and serve them.

In other words, the intent behind carved image is what matters. Rachel story about idol teaches us about carved images and idols. That idol was called household idol. People kept it in their houses to get some favor supernaturally. Rachel believed in that so much, she decided to steal it from her dad. Jacob got rid of it only after Rachel's death. She was stubborn not to let that idol go until she died! Rachel went through a lot in her life. She was childless for a very long time. Also, she died young when she had her second baby. Did she suffer excessively because of these idols? God only knows!

We will soon come across an idol worship when Moses stays on Sinai Mountain for 40 days. People thought that Moses may not come back, and they molded a golden calf in gold to worship!

Micah the priest from Ephraim story also gives us a glimpse over idols. (Judges 17, 18).

Jeroboam and the idol of golden calves that were set up in Dan and Bethel in the northern kingdom caused so much anger among the prophets and we could read about it throughout the Scripture.

The entire Old Testament is full of stories with Israel's fixation on idol worship and the consequences in spite of God's strict commandments!

The so called idol does not have any power on its own. It cannot hear, or talk, or see or move. But when we worship, and serve that object, we empower that idol to affect our own lives, and become enslaved to it.

When we reject all idols and worship the Living God as our Lord and Savior, we show our love to Him and He will bless us for even thousand generations. But if we go after dumb idols, we actually hate Him, and He will visit our iniquities up to **4th generation**.

Spiritually speaking, carving an image is equivalent to carving a life style that builds our pride of life. We may be carving out fame, power, wealth, and ability trying to prove ourselves. We waste so much energy trying to prove to others how great we are. (Dog and cheetah race story).

The speed race committee wanted to know who is the fastest - The dogs or the cheetah. But the cheetah did not move at all and just sat in its place. People asked the race coordinator what happened. He responded saying "sometimes trying to prove you are the best is unnecessary." There is absolutely no need to compare ourselves with others.

We run our race for Christ. We run it faithfully for His glory.

THE LORD IS JEALOUS OF HIS GLORY. He will not let anyone steal His glory

How careful we ought to be to walk humbly before the Lord. The moment we glorify ourselves, since there is room for one glory only in the universe, we set ourselves up as rivals to the Most High.

Let us see to it that we never misrepresent God, so as to rob Him of His honor.

THE LORD IS JEALOUS OVER HIS OWN PEOPLE.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ is very jealous of our love! He wants our total focus and attention, just like our spouse demands it.

2. He is very jealous of our trust. He will not permit us to trust in our own strength.

To carve a true image of God is impossible. What is invisible cannot be portrayed

It is unlawful to worship God by an image; "the images of God, statues of Our Savior, the Virgin Mary, are dangerous; therefore we must make sure that they stand not in temples and churches.

Romans 1:22-28 warns about engraven images.

Romans 1; 22-28.

*22*Professing to be wise, they became fools,

*23*and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

*24*Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, so that their bodies would be dishonored among them

*25*For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

*26*For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,

*27*and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error.

*28*And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,

God let them walk in their depraved or reprobate mind, and let them stumble in ignorance and darkness. Their children and their generations follow the same footsteps of ignorance!

We worship idols out of ignorance. But we carve out certain idols deliberately. Spiritually speaking, we carve out certain life style to bring more fame, power, wealth. In that process, we start investing more time on our career, or making money, or working on certain skill, and slowly we tend to push God in the closer. Life without God will lead to some form of idol! Beware.

Worshipping idol is nothing but surrendering ourselves to its cause serving that idol always.

- If we surrender ourselves to career, it becomes an idol.
- If we surrender to sports or music that can become a carved image.

- If we start loving our family more than God, we start carving an idol.
- If we start loving wealth more than God, it can become an idol.

Anything our heart desires above and beyond God, can become our carved image of our life.

- What are we doing with our life?
- How are we carving out our life?
- Where is our eye of our heart focused?
- Is it set on heavenly things or on earthly desires?

Putting pastors on pedestal can turn out to be a carved image that replaces God. Putting a political leader on pedestal can lead us to surrender to that leader. Hail Hitler was just a salute. But Hitler was idolized and put on pedestal. We carve out nationalistic patriotism. But when we are programmed to salute the flag and pledge the legion every moment of our life, we are in danger of carving out nationalistic idolatry.

Conclusion:

It is very easy to push God out of our lives, and replace Him with some form of earthly idol.

Let us not worship or surrender or serve any idol.

God is invisible. We can never portray Him through anything that is visible.

God is Spirit. We must worship Him in Spirit and Truth.

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