

OUR JEALOUS HUSBAND¹

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God wants us to hear the Good News gospel before we even begin to hear about the Law!

He tells you He is your God, your Savior, even before you knew about Him, even while you were living in darkness, alienated from Him. Jesus' very name proclaims, I AM already your Savior! I have already brought you out of the bondage of "Egypt," which is guilt, fear, and worry about the future, yes, the prison-house of sin. What we all have needed is the knowledge of that good news. Without it, we cannot keep God's holy law, but with that knowledge, we can.

Once we have seen and believed the truth of what the Son of God accomplished by His sacrifice on the cross, we cannot worship any other "god" instead of our one true Creator-and-Redeemer—God of the Holy Bible. Since He reversed the "condemnation" that came on the human race through Adam, now He treats us as though we had never sinned. He brought us out of "Egypt," out of the "house of bondage." It's time to tell Him "thank you!"

What we have always thought is the "second commandment" turns out to be the second statement of good news. Here it is:

"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or 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 on 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).

Let's look at the good news that is in this second commandment:

Our God and Savior is too great and wonderful for any idol on earth to represent Him in any way. He is the Creator of heaven and earth! The Maker of the Milky Way! The ocean is but a teacup in His hand! And He knows every one of us, all of our secrets, better than a mother can know her children. How could we drag Him down to the level of any "thing" that humans could devise?

He is not only "great" in the sense of vastness, bigness, and power. He is "great" in the sense that His love for each of us is personal and never ending. Not only did He fling into endless space the numberless suns and worlds of the Milky Way, He also designed and made the tiny humming bird with its delicate wings. And Jesus told us that when one of them flies against my window in summertime and breaks its neck and falls, that same infinite Father in heaven looks down and notices what happened and He is sorry.

After telling us about this, Jesus said: "The very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows" (Matt. 10:30, 31). Why, there's not an astronomer on earth who can tell you how many

¹ Psalm 139:7-10. 88, 101.

suns and stars are in the Milky Way! Nor can any mother on earth count how many hairs are in her child's head. But although "the Lord your God" knows all your secrets and even shameful thoughts, He still loves you!

Since God is Spirit, it's impossible that any idol or statue could represent Him. He wants us to learn to worship Him, not some useless idol. When mom and dad kiss baby goodnight, often he wants a teddy bear in bed with him, a kind of surrogate "mom or dad." But our loving heavenly Father is too wise to let us ever have a surrogate of Himself. No Teddy Bear "god" for anyone who has learned Lesson Number One about the love of God!

The baby's teddy bear is clutched in bed because mom or dad can't stay in the bedroom all night.

But "the Lord our God" is always with us, not down the hall somewhere: "He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" (Heb. 13:5). One of the names of Jesus is "Immanuel," which is translated, "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). David asks, "Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? . . . If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall fall on me,' even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day" (Ps. 139:7, 11, 12).

But His nearness is even greater than David saw it to be! The New Testament reveals Jesus as One who came so close to us that He became one of us (that's what "Immanuel, . . . God with us" means). As our Creator and Redeemer, He was utterly without sin, but He took upon His sinless nature our

sinful nature, that He might know what it is to be tempted in all points like as we are, yet always without sin (Heb. 4:15). He experienced all of our temptations and our feelings. He even tasted that bitter cup of feeling forsaken. He cried out on His cross, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" (Matt. 27:46). He felt that way and conquered it, so that we might never have to feel forsaken by God.

Why did Jesus, the Son of God, come down to this earth?

Not simply so He might take us to heaven when we die. He has another blessed purpose. The angel Gabriel told the virgin Mary before He was born, "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21).

This is how the Apostle Paul described it:

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom. 8:2-4).

That was a greater achievement even than making the Milky Way! It's "easy" for the Creator to make a world or a sun; He simply speaks the word—and it's done. But conquering sin in fallen, sinful human flesh? "Condemning" it there? Delivering us who have fallen, sinful flesh from the dominion that sin has over us? That's something God could not do by

simply saying an empty word, “I conquer sin!” No, that would never do.

He cannot tell a lie, or claim to have accomplished something that’s not real. So, He does it! He becomes a real Baby in Bethlehem’s manger, a true human being, grows up as a child and a youth, meeting all our temptations to sin, and saying, “No!” to every one of them, even until He was hanged on a cross.

And there on His cross, the devil throws his worst temptations at Jesus, trying to get Him to sin in one tiny, almost insignificant way so that Jesus might fail of His mission “to save His people from their sins.” But Jesus conquered every subtle temptation!

No, no idol or image can ever represent that glorious achievement! No angel in heaven would ever think of bowing down to an image of any kind. He couldn’t do it! And neither can you or I if we have an adequate understanding of the righteousness of Christ our Savior.

Once we know this good news, we want to sing the “Hallelujah Chorus” forever!

The second commandment is not a stern warning of doom if we bow to an idol, it is good news that we simply could never get involved in any idol worship or even idol “veneration” if we remember what a wonderful God and Savior we already have.

We are living in a visual age. Everywhere we go we see images flickering across the screen. Some Christian leaders say that the church needs to adapt by becoming more visual in its presentation of the gospel. Instead of simply talking about God,

we need to show people something. But this impulse is idolatrous.

Neil Postman says, “In studying the Bible as a young man, I found intimations of the idea that forms of media favor particular kinds of content and there are capable of taking command of a culture. I refer specifically to the Decalogue, the second commandment of which prohibits the Israelites from making concrete images of anything. . . . The God of the Jews was to exist in the Word and through the Word, an unprecedented conception requiring the highest order of abstract thinking. Iconography [pictures] thus became blasphemy so that a new kind of God could enter a culture. People like ourselves who are in the process of converting their culture from word-centered to image-centered might profit by reflecting on this Mosaic injunction.”²

What the image always wants to do in worship is to distract us from hearing the Word. The crucifix, the icon, the drama, and the dance—these things are not aids to worship but make true worship all but impossible. In a visual age we need to be all the more careful not to look at the image but to listen to the Word.

I have found something “new” to thank the Lord for, and also something new for me to repent of!

I am thankful that I did not go down with that greatest of all ships, the so-called “unsinkable” TITANIC that went down well before I was born.

² Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, p. 9.

So someone asks, How can you be thankful for some supposed “deliverance” before you were even born?

The answer is that corporately I share the guilt of those people who gloried in the handiwork of man and boasted that they had built something that even “God cannot sink.” That was idolatry pure and simple; and since I have been born with a sinful nature which I have inherited from the fallen Adam, my mind is what the Apostle Paul says is “carnal.” Here’s what Paul says: For “the carnal mind is enmity against God, for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7).

Wherever there is human idolatry, there you will find me, unless the Savior the Lord Jesus in His much more abounding grace has delivered me.

Yes, I would have joined in the proud boasting of the masses in what we ourselves have built; if I had been there, I would have made every effort to get a ticket and get on the TITANIC on its maiden voyage, exulting in that pride of idolatry.

If you are a man, you share in the idolatry of many men, over automobiles. So I have found something “new” I hadn’t realized, to repent for. That’s a blessing right there—the privilege of the gift of repentance.

It’s time to thank the dear Lord that He has already saved us from this sin (and many others!) and has already given us this gift of repentance (repentance is not something that we “do” on our own—no one can repent unless the Lord in His great mercy gives him that gift; read Acts 5:31: Our “Prince and

Saviour [gives] repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins”.

It’s the Lord Himself through the Holy Spirit who takes the initiative in saving us!

In His eternal kingdom not one of us will “boast” the slightest that we helped to save ourselves!

He has been good to you to lead you to give up your idolatry of SUV’s, fancy houses, bank accounts, position, and through His grace He has opened your eyes to see that this world is not your home, that Donald Trump’s millions can give you no happiness. Why doubt?

Jesus has not left us alone. He Himself is with us by the Holy Spirit. But we ask the question: Why didn’t God make a video of Jesus so we could play it and watch it? Wouldn’t that help us feel like Jesus is near to us? Wouldn’t that make it easier for us not to feel alone?

Many people for thousands of years have thought so, and that is why they have made images. A video of Jesus and an image of Jesus are really the same thing—just a difference in the sophistication of the technology. Those who feel they must have an image of Jesus or of the Virgin Mary or of Peter or someone else, are using it, or reverencing it, as a substitute for the real thing. Thus it actually becomes a hindrance to experiencing a genuine nearness. It is idolatry; and that is the sin of paganism.

Jesus said to the woman at Samaria, in John 4:23, 24: “The hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.

God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” That does away with all images or physical attempts to make Jesus seem near. You will be free to enjoy the nearness of Christ when you believe His word. It is so, not because you feel it or you see it or you handle it, but because He says it.

“I am . . . a jealous God,” He says. God forbids idolatry because of His jealousy. Why? Because He loves us! No husband who truly loves his wife could possibly endure seeing her in the arms of another man. It would make him intensely jealous. A husband who truly loves his wife is “jealous” if she strays from him to give her attentions to some other man.

God feels the same way about His people. His commitment to us is total. His love is exclusive, passionate, intense. Godly jealousy is not the insecure, insane, and possessive human jealousy that we often mean by our use of the word. Rather, it is an intensely caring devotion to the objects of His love, like a mother’s jealous protection of her children, a father’s jealous guarding of his home.

God makes exclusive claims and has the right to a monopoly on our love. Jealousy is God’s love protecting itself. What God so jealously protects is the honor of His love. God not only loves us, but He also wants us to love Him in return. This means worshiping Him in a way that is worthy of His honor. We will not spurn His love by turning Him into an idol when we believe His promise.

Our Lord and Savior (whose name is “the Lamb”) has come so close to us that He is eagerly awaiting

the glorious day when it can be said, “Let us be glad and rejoice, . . . for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife [His church] has made herself ready” (Rev. 19:7). Such “jealousy” is holy.

That day will come once His church chooses to believe how good this good news is, and permits Him to “cleanse us from all unrighteousness,” for the “fine linen” in which the “wife” is dressed at the wedding feast is “the righteous acts of the saints” (see 1 John 1:9; Rev. 19:8).

But here the good news gets even better. Look at the promise of His forgiveness in the second commandment. Although He has to “visit” the iniquity of evil fathers upon the children if they choose to continue to hate righteousness, refusing to learn any of the lessons of grace their fathers could have known, still the Lord shows “mercy to thousands [of generations], to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”

One day is a 365th fraction of a year. In Isaiah 61:2 the Lord says that His “vengeance” is as one “day,” but His grace is 365 times as great—it’s a whole “year” long.

He loves to forgive! He delights in mercy! The Bible says that He has “fun” being kind to sinners, redeeming them, saving them from ruin, treating them generously. “He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor punished us according to our iniquities. For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him” (Ps. 103:10, 11). It does not say that His mercy is “great” toward people who do everything just right. No, His mercy is great towards sinners

who “fear Him,” who call upon Him. Joel says, “Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved” (Joel 2:32). Luke says that Jesus’ enemies criticized Him for He “receives sinners” (Luke 15:2). But that’s why Jesus is so wonderful!

When they said that about Him, He responded by telling the story of the one sheep that was lost, and how the Good Shepherd left the 99 that were “safe” and went in search of the one that was lost. That’s Jesus, looking for you, unworthy or sinful as you may be.

In fact, while we have “fun” going to Disneyland or playing golf or fishing or playing games, Jesus has “fun” seeking out discouraged, broken-hearted people who have messed up their lives, wandered far away, lost their marriages or homes perhaps, alcoholics, or drug addicts or criminals who have lost hope, and by the Holy Spirit He whispers words of encouragement to them. Micah 7:19 says He “will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” It’s as if He says, “I am ‘the LORD your God,’ your Savior. My very name ‘Jesus’ has a built-in special meaning, ‘I will save you from your sins.’ And those sins that have brought you so much heartache and guilt, I have cast behind My back, far deeper in the ocean than the wreck of the Titanic; no one will ever be able to find them again.”

When Peter was sinking in the waves, he cried out to Jesus, “Lord, save me!” And Jesus heard that prayer immediately, caught him by the hand, and lifted him up. He will never refuse anyone: “All that the Father gives to Me will come to Me, and the one

who comes to Me I will by no means cast out” (John 6:37).

You may ask, “But how can I be sure that ‘the Father’ has predestined me to be saved?” The truth is that the Father has given you to Jesus! He “desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4). He has already paid the penalty of your sins, died the second death that your sins would have to “pay” for. And even though “the wages of sin is death, . . . the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord,” your Lord (Rom. 6:23).

Every word that God says is important. He has no fine print like lawyers who can wriggle out of a contract. He has given the gift to you, not merely “offered” it provided you first do everything right to deserve it. You don’t deserve it, I don’t either, for Adam gave us “condemnation” but Christ is the One who has already given us “grace.” “To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ’s gift” (Eph. 4:7). Grace brings with it a special “gift”—“justification of life” (Rom. 5:15-18). The Father treats the world of sinners as though they have not sinned, “not imputing their trespasses to them” (2 Cor. 5:19). You have wondered why He doesn’t strike some wicked criminals with lightning; it’s His grace, purchased for the human race by Christ’s sacrifice.

But when you realize the truth about that amazing grace, you simply cannot go on living a life of sin. It’s not fear that motivates you; it’s grace. “The grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness

and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age” (Titus 2:11, 12, NIV). You keep the second commandment. “You shall have no other gods before Me.” It’s a guarantee!

So, again the ten commandments become good news. God is tired of writing them in stone. That’s fruitless work! Now He wants to write them in human hearts, so our greatest joy is to live in harmony with Him and in harmony with the great universe where His love prevails for all eternity. He will write His commandments in our hearts, if only we will make a choice to let Him do so.

There is a marvelous blessing from heaven that has already begun. Here in California the dry season has been long and hot and now cooler, but still dry. Just to hear a few drops fall on the roof is great good news, even though the refreshing showers you want and you need haven’t come yet. But yes, there has been a beginning of the great, real “latter rain.” Many people haven’t known about it yet. But the full rain will come and it will prepare God’s people to “lighten the earth with glory” just before Jesus can come again.

What had begun as “the former rain” on the great Day of Pentecost long ago when thousands heard the message of Jesus preached so clearly, will now be finished with this “latter rain” of the same Holy Spirit, only in a greater way.

People all over the world are beginning to look at the message itself that is such “most precious good news.” We can be sure that the Holy Spirit sent

from God is working worldwide to help people to begin to understand.

Jesus has not forsaken His precious church, nor is He trying to raise up another church. What He is doing is giving this church the precious gift of repentance. It’s the greatest repentance of all the ages! The Holy Spirit is working. The Lord loves this church, just like a bridegroom loves his bride who wants the wedding day to come soon.

A wedding is an exciting time, isn’t it? Now, the greatest wedding ever is just upon us. It’s what the Book of Revelation says is “the marriage of the Lamb.” You have never seen a wedding like that will be! And it says the announcement will be made in heaven that “the time has come for the wedding of the Lamb, and His bride has prepared herself for it” (Rev. 19:7, 8). We can’t forget that Jesus is still a man, even though He is also still the Son of God. And He loves His bride-to-be more than any man on earth has ever loved his wife. And for His wedding to be postponed so long as it has been postponed makes Jesus to be very disappointed.

And all this long time while Jesus is still disappointed, He has to endure the pain of watching and feeling the suffering of people all over the world. If we could say something to that wonderful Bride, we would say, “Please, come; don’t delay any longer! Tell your Bridegroom ‘I do!’ in the great wedding.”

We don’t want to miss that party, do we?