

TEACHING GOAL

To study the things forbidden by the second commandment.

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

Q. What is forbidden in the second commandment?

A. The second commandment forbids the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in His word.

S.C. 51, L.C. 109, W.C. of F. XIX, Savoy 19, Young 82

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Study Passage: Matthew 15:1-14

Support Passages: Mark 7:1-13, Deuteronomy 4, Acts 17:29,
Romans 1:21-25

BIBLE STORY

Daniel 3: Hannaniah, Azariah and Mishael refuse to bow to Nebuchadnezzar's image.

MEMORY ASSIGNMENT

Deuteronomy 4:23

23 "Take heed to yourselves, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God which He made with you, and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of anything which the LORD your God has forbidden you.

APPLICATION

Let us examine our worship practices to see if they are in accord with the commandment of the LORD.

SUMMARY

The experience of Daniel's three friends certainly illustrates the need to be careful to worship God rightly. They would not take part in the worship of Nebuchadnezzar's statue or graven image. But our lesson this week concerns the negative side of the commandment. Actually, two prohibitions are made in the second commandment: (1) You shall not make; Graven images (idols, statues) or likenesses of God (pictures, concepts, etc.): (2) You shall not worship them.

In enumerating the kinds of sin forbidden by this commandment, the Larger Catechism states, "...the making any representation of God, of all or any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever; all worshipping of it...". Other Reformed confessions likewise note that this commandment prohibits the depicting of God in any fashion whatsoever except as allowed in the Word of God.

The art involved with the Temple and Tabernacle used symbols to show the various attributes of God but no images or pictures of God were ever used. The Lord also authorizes the use of bread and wine to represent His body and blood. Beyond these, there does not appear to be any other representation of God in Scripture. The Apostle Paul pointed out to the men of Athens that, "...we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and thought of man".¹ Graven images, therefore, do not qualify to represent God. The Divine Nature is Spirit and cannot be depicted adequately by any kind of art. Even symbols at best only represent certain attributes but not God's entire nature.

So called pictures of Christ do not properly represent Him and actually represent Him falsely. Since no pictures of Christ that may have been made in the first century have survived, we do not know what he looked like. It is possible also that none were made at that time. With a painting or photograph it is not possible to portray the Divine Nature of Christ, therefore, these necessarily are inadequate representations of the Lord of Glory.

The word "likeness" in the second commandment can refer to a concept. False ideas or concepts about God are also a breaking of this commandment. Thus does Deuteronomy 4:15-24 forbid the making of likenesses of God in any way, shape or form. Even the making of these likenesses could serve to draw us into false worship and so we are to beware. Some examples of the violation of this principle are as follows:

1. The unauthorized fire of Nadab and Abihu.²
2. The unauthorized handling of the Ark of the Covenant by Uzzah.³

3. False asceticism and mysticism in the days of Paul.⁴

4. The traditions of the Pharisees who were careful to wash their hands of Gentile filth but substituted their traditions for the commandment of God.⁵

These all involve false concepts (likenesses Tamunah in Hebrew) of God. Thus we must be very careful to represent God only as He has authorized us in Scripture or we risk His displeasure. We must not use false representations of God made by others. If we dislike false representations of ourselves, which may in fact be libelous, how much more does the Holy God dislike false representations of Himself.

¹ Acts 17:29

² Leviticus 10

³ II Samuel 6:1-11

⁴ Colossians 2:13-23, I Timothy 4

⁵ Matthew 15:1-14