

The Second Word

⁴ 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. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or 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 the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. – Exodus 20:4-6

(1) What is prohibited in the Second Commandment?

- not images or art in general
- but prohibition against making an image of God
- making our own image versus God's self-disclosure in his Word

Deuteronomy 4:11-24

¹¹ And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom. ¹² Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice.

¹⁵ Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, ¹⁶ beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, ¹⁷ the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, ¹⁸ the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth.

²³ Take care, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make a carved image, the form of anything that the LORD your God has forbidden you. ²⁴ For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.

(2) What is the harm of making an image of God?

Exodus 32:1-6

¹ When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us god who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”

² So Aaron said to them, “Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.”

³ So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron.

⁴ And Aaron received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, “This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” ⁵ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD.” ⁶ And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

Isaiah 40:18-25

¹⁸ To whom then will you liken God, or what likeness compare with him? ¹⁹ An idol! A craftsman casts it, and a goldsmith overlays it with gold and casts for it silver chains. ²⁰ He who is too impoverished for an offering chooses wood that will not rot; he seeks out a skillful craftsman to set up an idol that will not move.

²¹ Do you not know? Do you not hear? Has it not been told you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth? ²² It is he who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them like a tent to dwell in; ²³ who brings princes to nothing, and makes the rulers of the earth as emptiness. ²⁴ Scarcely are they planted, scarcely sown, scarcely has their stem taken root in

the earth, when he blows on them, and they wither, and the tempest carries them off like stubble. ²⁵ To whom then will you compare me, that I should be like him? says the Holy One.

(3) Why is God *jealous* with respect to images?

Exodus 34:14

You shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

(4) What is positively commanded in the Second Commandment?

Hosea 6:3

Let us know; let us press on to know the LORD; his going out is sure as the dawn; he will come to us as the showers, as the spring rains that water the earth.

Jeremiah 9:23-24

²³ Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.”

(5) The Commandment prohibits *man-made* images of God. Thus, implicit is the hope that God will provide his own image.

Job 19:25-27

²⁵ For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. ²⁶ And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, ²⁷ whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

Psalms 27:4

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.

Jesus is the perfect image of God

John 14:8-9

⁸ Philip said to Jesus, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” ⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”

Colossians 1:15

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Hebrews 1:3

And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power.

Isaiah 53:2-3

² For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. ³ He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

To see God in Christ is our final hope

2 Corinthians 3:18

And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.

1 John 3:2

Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

Notes:

Introduction

- first two commandments are related and similar
- I only have ten words | First, keep me first; second, keep me first

(1) What is prohibited in the Second Commandment?

Not prohibition of images or art in general

- all kinds of imagery throughout Bible | temple, carved imagery
- v. 5 – “you shall not bow down to them or serve them”
- do not make an image of God

Why is making an image of God wrong?

- difference between our imagination versus God’s self-revelation

“Carved image”

- KJV – “graven image”
- “carved” emphasizes man-made

Instead, God reveals himself through his Word

- we are to passively “listen” versus actively “create”

Deut. 4 – echo of Second Commandment

- emphasis on God’s self-disclosure being Word not image
- not to “make a carved image” for ourselves

(2) What is the harm of making an image of God?

Israel becomes impatient with God

- ask Aaron to make them image of God | a god they can control

Some translations render “gods” | meaning, pagan gods

- Hebrew word Elohim is both singular and plural – god or gods
- like English word “sheep” | depends on context

But this is God of Israel depicted | two reasons

- first, only one calf
- v. 5 – “feast to the LORD” | all caps – YHWH

People were impatient and afraid

- they wanted some kind of assurance by making image of God

But in making an image, they distorted who he is

- all man-made images misrepresent God

Used image of strong, yearling bull of pure gold

- this might seem absurd to us, but it made perfect sense ancient world
- in agricultural society, yearling bull was incredibly valuable
- pure gold – most valuable thing
- represented God’s worth, dignity and power

But this image distorts the true biblical God

- he is not a calf, not even a golden calf

Problem with calf is obvious to us, but not to them

- because culture is very difficult to be aware of

Therefore, so easy to make up image based on what culture tells us

- our culture says, “God is like this or like that”
- people say, “I don’t believe God is like that”

Isaiah 40 – “to whom will you liken God?”

- God is infinitely higher and greater than you can imagine

- therefore, how possibly understand God enough to create image?
- how can finite man create an image of an infinite God?

(3) Why is God *jealous* with respect to images?

Exodus 20:5 – “for I the LORD your God am a *jealous God*”

- embedded in Second Commandment
- God is provoked to jealousy with images

God’s jealousy is not like petty human jealousy

- human jealousy is desire for what is not legitimately yours

But God’s jealousy is a holy jealousy

- the desire to protect what is rightfully yours
- analogous husband’s jealousy for his wife | arms of another man.

Imagine your husband kissing the picture of Heidi Klum

- “but it represents you!”
- adoring and delighting in someone else

(4) What is positively commanded in the Second Commandment?

To obey is not merely avoid having false ideas of God

- it is pursue the knowledge of God with all your strength
- therefore, unless immersed in Scripture, fall prey popular culture

(5) The Commandment prohibits *man-made* images of God. Thus, implicit is the hope that God will provide his own image.

We are not to create “carved/graven” images

- but it is not that images themselves are wrong

It is not that God is immaterial spirit and thus cannot be imaged

But rather, man-made images presume upon God’s revelation

- redemptive history is unfolding so God will provide own image
- Job 19, Psalm 27 – desire to “see” God is good!

Jesus is the perfect image of God

Only in Jesus do we see the perfect image of God

- John 14, Colossians 1, Hebrews 1

When God finally images himself, it is nothing like we expect

- Jesus had no beauty, a man of sorrows, rejected by men
- this is nothing like what we would imagine | not golden calf
- who could have imagined this?

Now we understand – God strictly prohibited images because

- his true image is radically opposed to human values
- his image is lowly, humble and weak
- man dying on the cross | God – “this is who I am”

People wonder – what about now? Can we use images now?

First, Aryan Jesus is not even historically accurate

- blond and blue-eyed, but also handsome and strong
- what’s interesting NT never describes Jesus

Because we’re still waiting to see Jesus

- one day, we will behold him with unveiled face | 2nd Coming
- when we see him, we will be transformed