

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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The Present Peril of Idolatry and the Jealousy of God

34. Lord's Day

Question 94. What does God enjoin in the first commandment?

Answer: That I, as sincerely as I desire the salvation of my own soul, avoid and flee from all idolatry, (a) sorcery, soothsaying, superstition, (b) invocation of saints, or any other creatures; (c) and learn rightly to know the only true God; (d) trust in him alone, (e) with humility (f) and patience submit to him; (g) expect all good things from him only; (h) love, (i) fear, (j) and glorify him with my whole heart; (k) so that I renounce and forsake all creatures, rather than commit even the least thing contrary to his will. (l)

(a) 1 John 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen. 1 Cor.6:9 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, 1 Cor.6:10 Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. 1 Cor.10:7 Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. 1 Cor.10:14 Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry. (b) Lev.19:31 Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God. Deut.18:9 When thou art come into the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee, thou shalt not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. Deut.18:10 There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Deut.18:11 Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. Deut.18:12 For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee. (c) Matt.4:10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Rev.19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Rev.22:8 And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things. Rev.22:9 Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book: worship God. (d) John 17:3 And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. (e) Jer.17:5 Thus saith the LORD; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. Jer.17:7 Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. (f) 1 Pet.5:5 Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble. 1 Pet.5:6 Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time: (g) Heb.10:36 For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. Col.1:11 Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness; Rom.5:3 And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; Rom.5:4 And patience, experience; and experience, hope: 1 Cor.10:10 Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer. Philip.2:14 Do

all things without murmurings and disputings: (h) Ps.104:27 These wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. Ps.104:28 That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good. Ps.104:29 Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. Ps.104:30 Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth. Isa.45:7 I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things. James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. (i) Deut.6:5 And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. Matt.22:37 Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. (j) Deut.6:2 That thou mightest fear the LORD thy God, to keep all his statutes and his commandments, which I command thee, thou, and thy son, and thy son's son, all the days of thy life; and that thy days may be prolonged. Ps.111:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments: his praise endureth for ever. Prov.1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction. Prov.9:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding. Matt.10:28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. (k) Matt.4:10 Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. Deut.10:20 Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name. Deut.10:21 He is thy praise, and he is thy God, that hath done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen. (l) Matt.5:29 And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. Matt.5:30 And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. Matt.10:37 He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. Acts 5:29 Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

Question 95. What is idolatry?

Answer: Idolatry is, instead of, or besides that one true God, who has manifested himself in his word, to contrive, or have any other object, in which men place their trust. (a)

(a) Eph.5:5 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. 1 Chron.16:26 For all the gods of the people are idols: but the LORD made the heavens. Philip.3:19 Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.) Gal.4:8 Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods. Eph.2:12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world: 1 John 2:23 Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: (but) he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also. 2 John 1:9 Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. John 5:23 That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him.

35. Lord's Day

Question 96. What does God require in the second commandment?

Answer: That we in no wise represent God by images, (a) nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his word. (b)

(a) Deut.4:15 Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire: Deut.4:16 Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female, Deut.4:17 The likeness of any beast that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged fowl that flieth in the air, Deut.4:18 The likeness of any thing that creepeth on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the waters beneath the earth: Deut.4:19 And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven, shouldest be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the LORD thy God hath divided unto all nations under the whole heaven. Isa.40:18 To whom then

will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him? Isa.40:19 The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains. Isa.40:20 He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved. Isa.40:21 Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? Isa.40:22 It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: Isa.40:23 That bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. Isa.40:24 Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble. Isa.40:25 To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Rom.1:23 And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. Rom.1:24 Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: Acts 17:29 Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. (b) 1 Sam.15:23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king. Deut.12:30 Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Deut.12:31 Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods. Deut.12:32 What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it. Matt.15:9 But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.

Question 97. Are images then not at all to be made?

Answer: God neither can, nor may be represented by any means: (a) but as to creatures; though they may be represented, yet God forbids to make, or have any resemblance of them, either in order to worship them or to serve God by them. (b)

(a) Isa.40:25 To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. (b) Exod.23:24 Thou shalt not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do after their works: but thou shalt utterly overthrow them, and quite break down their images. Exod.23:25 And ye shall serve the LORD your God, and he shall bless thy bread, and thy water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of thee. Exod.34:13 But ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves: Exod.34:14 For thou shalt worship no other god: for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God: Exod.34:17 Thou shalt make thee no molten gods. Num.33:52 Then ye shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, and destroy all their pictures, and destroy all their molten images, and quite pluck down all their high places: Deut.7:5 But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire. Deut.12:3 And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place. Deut.16:21 Thou shalt not plant thee a grove of any trees near unto the altar of the LORD thy God, which thou shalt make thee. 2 Kin.18:3 And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that David his father did. 2 Kin.18:4 He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brasen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan.

Question 98. But may not images be tolerated in the churches, as books to the laity?

Answer: No: for we must not pretend to be wiser than God, who will have his people taught, not by dumb images, (a) but by the lively preaching of his word. (b)

(a) Jer.10:8 But they are altogether brutish and foolish: the stock is a doctrine of vanities. Hab.2:18 What profiteth the graven image that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols? Hab.2:19 Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise, it shall teach! Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it. (b) Rom.10:14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not

believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? Rom.10:15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! Rom.10:17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. 2 Pet.1:19 We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: 2 Tim.3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: 2 Tim.3:17 That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.

Princeton sociologist Robert Wuthnow (who is also a conscientious evangelical) suggests that there is an overwhelming effort to *remold* the image of God to satisfy people's emotional needs. "God has, in a sense, become 'subjectivized' rather than existing as a metaphysical, transcendent, or omnipotent being... God is relevant to contemporary Americans mainly because the sense of God's presence is subjectively comforting: that is, religion solves personal problems rather than addressing broader questions."¹ What is happening is that in an increasing number of evangelical churches the Christian faith is being distinctly framed by psychological models and not by the biblical one (which is decidedly theological). Almost everything that is distinctive to historic Christianity is being jettisoned in favor of a revamped new model that is shaped and formed by the world's standards. We need to pay close attention to texts like Exodus 20:5. "I the Lord your God am a jealous God." Rightly understood, the idea of jealousy is central to any true concept of God. It is, as Boice points out, "analogous to a proper jealousy within marriage. A married person ought not to allow any third person to enter into the inner relationship. Similarly, God rejects every attack on his sole rights as Lord of his creation. The holiness of God is therefore not only an absolute difference of nature, but it is an active self-differentiation, the willed energy with which God asserts and maintains the fact that He is Wholly Other against all else. The absoluteness of this difference becomes the absoluteness of his holy will, and which is supreme and unique."² The God who has chosen to reveal Himself in Scripture is a very jealous God. He condemns as idolatry any attempt to add to or subtract from His revealed nature. This is so important that God devoted the first two Commandments of the Decalogue to a condemnation of all attempts to mold God into a manmade image. "It does not matter," as Morey has noted, "if the image is mental or metal, wooden or woolly, all manmade ideas of God are idolatry."³

I. THE FIRST COMMANDMENT: A CHOICE

In the First Commandment God tells us, "You shall have no other gods before Me" (Exodus 20:3).

In this commandment we find that:

- A. There is only one God.
- B. The God who has revealed Himself in Scripture is this God.
- C. He alone is to be worshipped, feared, loved, and obeyed.
- D. We are not free to make up any ideas on or own of what God is like. It does not matter if our ideas seem "reasonable" or "practical" to us. We cannot have any ideas of God except those revealed in Scripture.
- E. Man is not a god-maker of a god-in-the-making. Any concept of the "divinity of man" is idolatrous.
- F. God is His own interpreter. He has revealed Himself and interpreted this self-revelation in Scripture.
- G. Any and all forms of religion are hereby condemned as idolatry for they would exalt man's opinion over God's self-revelation as given in Scripture.

NOTE: The one God and the many Religions—What about the devotees of the other world religions? Do they worship a different God? Yes. You will hear people say things like—"We all worship the same God, each in his or her own way—but by whatever name we use, we all worship the same God." We cannot agree with this conclusion. The unbridgeable gulf between the Christian faith and other religions can be identified in various ways, but in our opinion, the clearest way is by asking the central question in Scripture: "What do you think about the Christ?" (Matthew 22:42). If we see Him as one prophet among many others, one of many manifestations of the supreme being in this world, then putting Christianity on a par with other world religions is required and inevitable. Why would Jesus be unique if there is also a Mohammed who demands for himself a place alongside Abraham, Moses, and Jesus as (the highest) prophet? However, if Jesus is not a prophet standing on the same level as other prophets, but the Christ, the Son of the living God (Matthew 16:13-17), then putting Christianity alongside other religions is impossible. The same must be said of Judaism, even though it is based on the Old

Testament. For those committed to Judaism deny that Jesus is the Messiah who is one with the Father in an absolutely unique way (John 1:1, 3, 14; 10:30; Romans 9:5). This unity between the Son and the Father has consequences for reading the first commandment. We can no longer speak about Yahweh, about God, except as the Father of Jesus Christ. Their indissoluble unity makes it impossible to fill the word “God” in any other way than Christ has filled it.⁴

II. THE UNIQUE PLACE OF THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

William Plumer, one of the great Presbyterian preachers of the last century commented, “God never gave a command more solemn in its terms, or in the sanction connected with it. Nor are we left in doubt respecting the vast importance of this precept. On this point other parts of God’s word are full and urgent.” The first and second commandments deal with different subjects, idol worship, and self-willed worship of Yahweh. Thereby we do not deny the very strong connection between them. The idols were not served apart from images, and images of Yahweh inevitably became “other gods.” Therefore, it is no wonder that in the Old Testament, images of Yahweh and of idols are mentioned together. Think of the images Jeroboam made. They may have been intended as images of Yahweh, but Yahweh Himself views them as obtaining “other gods,” with the result that they turned their backs on *Him* (1 Kings 14:9)!⁵

A. The Significance of an Image

Even though we do not have images like those described in Acts 17:29, we still have idolatrous hearts. Calvin rightly declared, “The commandment has two parts. The first restrains our license from daring to subject God, who is incomprehensible, to our sense perceptions, or to represent him by any form. The second part forbids us to worship any images in the name of religion. But he briefly lists all the forms with which profane and superstitious peoples customarily represent God. By those things which are in heaven he means the sun, moon, other luminaries, and perhaps birds; as in Deut. 4, expressing his mind, he mentions both birds and stars (vs. 17, 19). I would not have noted this if I had not observed that some undiscerningly apply the expression to the angels. Therefore I pass over the remaining parts because they are known of themselves. We have already thought with sufficient clarity in Book I that whatever visible forms of God man devises are diametrically opposed to His nature; therefore, as soon as idols appear, true religion is corrupted and adulterated.”⁶

B. Why No Images?

1. To try and capture God in an image is to misunderstand His *freedom*. Images attempt to make the incomprehensible comprehensible.

2. To try and capture God in an image is to misunderstand His *majesty*. Image worship evokes ridicule and sarcasm. God will not tolerate being compared (Isaiah 40:18; 41:7). He is dishonored, for images obscure His glory. As Packer has observed, “The point here is not just that an image represents God as having body and parts, whereas in reality He has neither. If this were the only ground of objection to images, representations of Christ would be blameless. But the point really goes much deeper. The heart of the objection to pictures and images is that they inevitably conceal most, if not all, of the truth about the personal nature and character of the divine Being whom they represent.”⁷

3. To try and capture God in an image is to misunderstand His *covenant*. How so? You may not make images on account of God’s freedom, you cannot make images on account of God’s majesty, but you need not make images on account of Yahweh’s covenant with Israel. The bond between God and His people does not need to be established (via images), for it has already been established. “The freedom and majesty of Yahweh do not mean that He is unreachable and acts capriciously—something Israel would then have to neutralize by controlling divine power by means of an image of Yahweh. For Yahweh has covenanted Himself in faithfulness to Israel.”⁸

CONCLUSION: The late James Boice wrote these very relevant remarks shortly before his death. “A few years ago, Professor Martin Marty, always a shrewd observer of the American church, said in a magazine interview that, in judgment, evangelicals would be “the most worldly people in America” by the end of the century. Marty’s observations are not always right, in my opinion, but in this case he is on target. Evangelicals have embraced worldliness in the same ways that it was embraced by the liberal churches. Like those liberals of past years

evangelicals today: (1) *Pursue the world's wisdom*. Evangelicals are not heretics, of course, at least not consciously. If they are asked whether the Bible is the authoritative and inerrant Word of God, most will answer affirmatively. But many have abandoned the Bible all the same because they do not think it is adequate for the challenges we face as we enter a new millennium. They do not think it is sufficient for winning people to Christ, so they turn to felt-need sermons, to entertainment, or to “signs and wonders.” They do not think the Scriptures are sufficient for achieving genuine Christian growth, so they turn to therapy groups or defer to Christian counseling. They do not think the Bible is sufficient for discovering the will of God for their lives, so they look for mystical signs or subjective feelings. They do not think it is sufficient for impacting the secular society that surrounds us, so they fund lobby groups in Washington or throw their efforts into electing increasingly larger numbers of “born-again” government officials. (2) *Embrace the world's theology*. Like the liberals before us, evangelicals use the Bible's words but give them new meanings. Sin becomes “dysfunctional behavior.” Salvation becomes “self-esteem” or “wholeness.” Faith becomes “possibility thinking.” Jesus becomes more of an example for right living than our Savior from sin. People are told how to succeed in business, have happy marriages, and raise nice children, but not how to get right with an offended God. (3) *Follow the world's agenda*. The world's major agenda is not hunger, racism, the redistribution of wealth, or ecology. The world's major agenda is being happy, and happiness is achieving the maximum amount of personal peace and sufficient prosperity to enjoy it. But is that not the bottom line of much evangelical preaching today? Being happy? Being content? Being satisfied? Francis Schaeffer saw it and called the evangelical church to repentance, but we are too self-satisfied to do that. Far be it from us to preach a Gospel that would expose our liberal-like sins and drive us to the Savior. (4) *Employ the world's methods*. Evangelicals have become like liberals in this area, too. How else are we to explain the stress so many place on numerical growth and money? How else are we to explain that so many pastors tone down the hard edges of Bible truth in order to attract greater numbers to their services... A recent column in the *New Yorker* magazine bemoaned what it called the “brave, new audience-driven preaching” of our day. “The preacher, instead of looking out upon the world, looks out upon public opinion, trying to find out about the world, discovers nothing but its own reflection. The unexamined world, meanwhile, drifts blindly into the future.”⁹ To put it concisely, all that Boice has described amounts to idolatry. Say what you will about evangelical zeal and evangelistic energy, idolatry is something that not only dishonors the God we claim to worship and serve, but it also provokes His judgment because He is a jealous God.

¹ As cited in G.A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services: Evaluating a New Way of Doing Church* (Baker, 1996), p. 260.

² J.M. Boice, *The Sovereign God: Foundations of the Christian Faith* (IVP, 1979), p. 164.

³ R.A. Morey, *Battle of the Gods* (Crown, 1989), p. 143.

⁴ W.S. Plumer, *The Law of God* (rpt. Sprinkle, 1996), p. 167.

⁵ J. Douma, *The Ten Commandments: Manual for the Christian Life* (P & R, 1996), p. 30.

⁶ *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion* Bk. II, Ch. VIII, sec. 17. I would urge all of you to read Calvin's discussion on idols and images.

⁷ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (IVP, 1974), p. 40.

⁸ Douma, op.cit. p. 42.

⁹ J.M. Boice, “Running With Wolves”, *Table Talk* (Aug. 2000), p. 14.