

DEVOTIONAL AID FOR 8 FEBRUARY 2021 – 14 FEBRUARY 2021



**UPPER
HUNTER**
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Dear church family,

The Second Commandment is this:

“You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.” (Exodus 20:4–6)

This commandment is not teaching us that there is no place for visual art in the Christian life. The commandment has to do with 1) representing God in a visual form, and 2) using images to worship God.

Firstly, when it comes to representing God Himself, we are forbidden to make or use any pictures, sculptures, paintings or whatever else for God. This does not mean we cannot use any visual aids in teaching spiritual truths or decorate our homes or church buildings with paintings or stained-glass windows. We are “simply” forbidden to make a visible representation of God Himself.

But I put “simply” in quotation marks to indicate that there is actually something more involved than merely not making a picture or a sculpture of God. It also has to do with worship of God. So the commandment goes on to say, we must “not bow down to them or worship them.” What this means is that we cannot worship God using some statues or paintings even if they are representing some people or creatures. For example, we should not think our prayers are more effective when we pray in front of a sculpture of a saint than when we just pray in a bedroom. Also, we must not think our worship is more pleasing to God or more dignified when it is done in a beautiful sandstone church building than when it is done in a plain shed.

On the flip-side, however, this commandment is delightfully liberating for all of us who love the Lord Jesus. Jesus, who is the image (representation) of the invisible God (Col 1:15) told us that “true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” (John 4:23) We do not need any dazzling production in our worship. We do not need pricey art objects to make our worship acceptable or more effective. We only need God’s Word and His Spirit as we gather around God’s Son, Jesus Christ.

May we grow in purity of our worship and grow in our knowledge of God through His Word.

Yours in Christ,

Timothy Lee

<https://www.upperhunterpc.com>

THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM¹

Lord's Day 35

Q96) What is God's will for us in the Second Commandment?

A) That we in no way make any image of God nor worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word.

Q97) May we then not make any image at all?

A) God can not and may not be visibly portrayed in any way. Although creatures may be portrayed, yet God forbids making or having such images if one's intention is to worship them or to serve God through them.

Q98) But may not images be permitted in the churches as teaching aids for the unlearned?

A) No, we shouldn't try to be wiser than God. He wants His people instructed by the living preaching of His Word—not by idols that cannot even talk.

ROMANS 10:14-15

Rom 10:14 How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? 15 And how can anyone preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!"

Obviously there are people who are yet to believe in Jesus. And we must go and tell them the good news of Jesus. But some of these people not only lack the Bible in their own language, but they might not even have a writing system for their language. And closer to home, little children cannot read the Bible for themselves yet. For these reasons, some people argue that images (pictures and sculptures, etc) are useful and allowed in teaching illiterate people about God. As teaching aids, pictures and statues are fine (bar the image of God). That's why we have children's Bibles. Yet, we must first engage in telling them the good news of Jesus, not simply giving them a picture book to look at. We can also teach them how to read. How should we then think about teaching our children about Jesus? What do you think are implications of this for the global mission?

Prayer

Dear heavenly Father,

Thank you for freeing me from the slavery of false images of God and idol-worship. Thank you for enabling me to worship You truly through Your Son Jesus and by Your Spirit. Please protect me from the temptations of false worship and grow me in the true knowledge through Your Word, the Bible. Also, help me think about and engage in mission more biblically both in our homes and neighbourhood as well as in far-away places. In Jesus's name. Amen.

¹ The text of the Catechism is usually from <https://threeforms.org/heidelberg-catechism/>, but time to time, for the sake of clarity, I have also adopted the translation used in *The Good News We Almost Forgot* by Kevin DeYoung.