

# Shorter Catechism: Questions 49 & 51

The Second Commandment. Sins Forbidden Part 1: Images of God

"And he received *the gold* from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, "This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" – Exodus 32:4

## Word of God (Exodus 20 - KJV)

**20** And God spake all these words, saying, <sup>2</sup>I *am* the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

<sup>3</sup>Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

<sup>4</sup>Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of *any thing* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth: <sup>5</sup>Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me; <sup>6</sup>And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

<sup>7</sup>Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

<sup>8</sup>Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup>Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: <sup>10</sup>But the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the Lord thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates: <sup>11</sup>For *in* six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them *is*, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

<sup>12</sup>Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

<sup>13</sup>Thou shalt not kill.

<sup>14</sup>Thou shalt not commit adultery.

<sup>15</sup>Thou shalt not steal.

<sup>16</sup>Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

<sup>17</sup>Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that *is* thy neighbour's.

## Shorter Catechism

**Question 49** – Which is the second commandment?

A: The second commandment is, Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thy self to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. (Exod. 20:4–6)

**Question 51** - What is forbidden in the second commandment?

A: The second commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images, (Deut. 4:15–19, Exod. 32:5,8) or any other way not appointed in his Word. (Deut. 12:31–32)

## I. Our Nature is Prone to Idolatry

What do we have to know about our own nature before we consider how we worship?

- **John Calvin (Institutes 1.11.8)** - "Hence we may infer, that the human mind is, so to speak, a perpetual forge of idols."
- **Thomas Watson** - Take heed of the idolatry of image-worship. Our nature is prone to this sin as dry wood to take fire; and, indeed, what need of so many words in the commandment: 'Thou shalt not make any graven image, or the likeness of anything in heaven, earth, water,' sun, moon, stars, male, female, fish; 'Thou shalt not bow down to them.' I say, what need of so many words, but to show how subject we are to this sin of false worship? It concerns us, therefore, to resist this sin. Where the tide is apt to run with greater force, there we had need to make the banks higher and stronger. The plague of idolatry is very infectious.

## II. The Example of the Bronze Serpent

Have God's People struggled with this in the past?

- **Numbers 21** - <sup>8</sup>Then the Lord said to Moses, "Make a fiery *serpent*, and set it on a pole; and it shall be that everyone who is bitten, when he looks at it, shall live." <sup>9</sup>So Moses made a bronze serpent, and put it on a pole; and so it was, if a serpent had bitten anyone, when he looked at the bronze serpent, he lived.
- **2 Kings 18** - <sup>4</sup>He [*Hezekiah*] removed the high places and broke the *sacred* pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan.
- **Hezekiah Commended for Removing this Monument to Idolatry (2 Kings 18, continued)**
  - <sup>5</sup>He trusted in the Lord God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him. <sup>6</sup>For he held fast to the Lord; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the Lord had commanded Moses. <sup>7</sup>The Lord was with him; he prospered wherever he went.

## III. The Example of the Golden Calf

Is it possible to worship the true God through images?

- **Exodus 32** - <sup>4</sup>And he received *the gold* from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, "This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!" <sup>5</sup>So when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow *is* a feast to the LORD."

## IV. God's Likeness Cannot Be Captured

Is it possible to capture a likeness of God?

- **Children's Catechism Q.9** – What is God? A: God is a Spirit, and has not a body like man.
- **Isaiah 40** - <sup>18</sup>To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?

## V. Images of Jesus: God-Man Redeemer

### If Jesus is a man, then could it really be a sin to create images of Him?

- **Isaiah 53** –<sup>2</sup> For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, And as a root out of dry ground. He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him, *There is* no beauty that we should desire Him. <sup>3</sup> He is despised and rejected by men, A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, *our* faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.
- **Revelation 1** –<sup>12</sup> *One* like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. <sup>14</sup> His head and hair *were* white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; <sup>15</sup> His feet *were* like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; <sup>16</sup> He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance *was* like the sun shining in its strength. <sup>17</sup> And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead.
- **Thomas Watson** - It is Christ's Godhead, united to his manhood, that makes him to be Christ; therefore to picture his manhood, when we cannot picture his Godhead, is a sin, because we make him to be but half Christ - we separate what God has joined, we leave out that which is the chief thing which makes him to be Christ.
- **A.A Hodge** - Pictures and images were first introduced into the Christian Church for instruction, then as helps in worship, and finally as objects of reverence.
- **Thomas Watson** - Though idolaters love the false image of God in a picture, they hate his true image in a believer. They pretend to honour Christ in a crucifix, and yet persecute him in his members. Such hate God.
- **James Fisher - Q. 24. May they not be placed in churches for beauty and ornament?** A. No; the proper ornament of churches is the sound preaching of the gospel, and the pure dispensation of the sacraments, and other ordinances of divine institution.

## VI. Making inward representations of God

- **Larger Catechism Q. 109 - What are the sins forbidden in the second commandment?**  
The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, (Numb. 15:39) counselling, (Deut. 13:6–8) commanding, (Hosea 5:11, Micah 6:16) using, (1 Kings 11:33, 1 Kings 12:33) and any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself; (Deut. 12:30–32) the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever; (Deut. 4:15–19, Acts 17:29, Rom. 1:21–23,25) all worshipping of it, (Dan. 3:18, Gal. 4:8) or God in it or by it; (Exod. 32:5) the making of any representation of feigned deities, (Exod. 32:8) and all worship of them, or service belonging to them, (1 Kings 18:26,28, Isa. 65:11) all superstitious devices, (Acts 17:22, Col. 2:21–23) corrupting the worship of God, (Mal. 1:7–8,14) adding to it, or taking from it, (Deut. 4:2) whether invented and taken up of ourselves, (Ps. 106:39) or received by tradition from others, (Matt. 15:9) though under the title of antiquity, (1 Pet. 1:18) custom, (Jer. 44:17) devotion, (Isa. 65:3–5, Gal. 1:13–14) good intent, or any other pretence whatsoever; (1 Sam. 13:11–12, 1 Sam. 15:21) simony; (Acts 8:18) sacrilege; (Rom. 2:22, Mal. 3:8) all neglect, (Exod. 4:24–26) contempt, (Matt. 22:5, Mal. 1:7,13) hindering, (Matt. 23:13) and opposing the worship and ordinances which God hath appointed. (Acts 13:44–45, 1 Thess. 2:15–16)