

Shorter Catechism 49-52      “The Image and the Word: 2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment”      July 25, 2021  
Deuteronomy 4  
Psalm 96  
Colossians 1

We’re going through the Ten Commandments as a part of our catechetical series,  
looking at the basics of Christian faith and life.

In Deuteronomy 5, Moses repeats the Ten Commandments – that were first given in Ex 20.  
Then in Deuteronomy 6-26, Moses expounds the Ten Commandments.

The order of Moses’ teaching in the central 20 chapters of Deuteronomy  
follows the same order as the Ten Commandments.

So what is chapter 4 doing?

Deuteronomy consists of several sermons that Moses’ preached.

Chapters 1-4 are his first sermon, which lays out the historical background –  
reminding Israel of their past.

Chapters 5-26 are his second sermon, which expounds the Ten Commandments.

Chapters 27-34 then conclude with two final sermons and two final songs  
in preparation for Israel to enter the land.

So chapter 4 functions as the conclusion of Moses’ first sermon.

It’s worth noting that the *one* commandment that Moses highlights in this sermon  
is the second commandment.

Why does Moses do this?

Because this was going to be the biggest challenge that Israel would face.

All the nations around them were in the habit of making graven images.

Q. 49. *Which is the second commandment?*

A. The second commandment is, You shall not make for yourselves any graven 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: You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord your 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.

The first commandment says that we are to have no other god besides the one true God.

The second commandment goes on to say something about

*how* we are to worship the one true God.

After all, it is really easy to *say* that you are worshiping the true God.

But *saying* that you are worshiping God is not necessarily the same thing as *doing* it.

Our Shorter Catechism puts it this way:

Q. 50. *What is required in the second commandment?*

A. The second commandment requires the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God has appointed in his word.

The second commandment focuses on one point:

do not make graven images; do not worship them.

The catechism recognizes that this one point has further implications.

When Jesus comments on the command, “you shall not kill,”

he says that this specific command has a more general application.

Jesus says that “you shall not kill” is not just about the outward act,  
but focuses on the heart.

Even being angry with your brother is sin.

Likewise, the command not to make graven images has broader implications as well.

This command has to do with the worship of God.

Question 51 follows up:

Q. 51. *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.

God has told us how to worship him.

Therefore we should worship God in the way that he has said.

And the second commandment concludes by giving us reasons:

“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.”

As the catechism puts it:

Q. 52. *What are the reasons annexed to the second commandment?*

A. The reasons annexed to the second commandment are, God's sovereignty over us, his propriety in us, and the zeal he has to his own worship.

Our Psalm of response – Psalm 96 –

emphasizes both the positive command to worship the LORD aright –

as well as the warning against the idols of the nations –

concluding with the reminder that God will come to judge the world in righteousness.

Sing Psalm 96

Read Colossians 1:1-23

As we saw from Deuteronomy 6, *the* commandment – the *shema* –  
said that all the law depends on one command:

"Love the LORD your God with all your heart,

and with all your soul, and with all your strength."

So there is a very real way in which each commandment will begin with the question,

"How do I love God in this area of my life?"

So how do we *love God* well with respect to the second commandment?

**1. “Keeping Pure and Entire”: What Is Required in the 2nd Commandment? (v1-14)**

The Larger Catechism expands a bit on the Shorter Catechism’s language:

*Q. 108. What are the duties required in the second commandment?*

A. The duties required in the second commandment are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God has instituted in his word; particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ; the reading, preaching, and hearing of the word; the administration and receiving of the sacraments; church government and discipline; the ministry and maintenance thereof; religious fasting; swearing by the name of God, and vowing unto him: as also the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship; and, according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry.

If the first commandment emphasizes how we should love the Lord our God,  
and have no other God but God,  
the second commandment shows us our need to worship God in Spirit and in truth.

We construct idols by *seeing* and *coveting*.

We construct idols because we have discontented hearts.

And we see this in Deuteronomy 4.

He warns the Israelites to “take care, and keep your soul diligently,  
lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen,  
and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life.” (4:9)

Notice the focus on “the things that your eyes have seen.”

Forty years ago they were children when God delivered them from Egypt.

As wide-eyed children, they crossed the Red Sea,  
marveling at the mighty power of God to save.

They grew up eating manna in the wilderness,  
drinking water from the Rock.

They had seen for themselves the greatness of God,  
as the Spirit of God led them through the wilderness in the pillar of cloud and fire.

They had also seen the judgment of God at Peor,  
when some of their own friends and relatives worshiped the Baal of Peor,  
and God had brought judgment upon them – and they died in the wilderness.

God’s works in history are at the heart of what we do in worship.

As Christians, this is centered on God’s mighty deeds in Jesus Christ:  
his incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension,  
and his pouring out the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.

But of course, this is all rooted in the whole history of redemption revealed in the OT.

And we only know of these mighty deeds because God has also *spoken*.

The *word* of God is equally important with his *works*.

Remember also, Moses says, how God spoke to you at Mt Sinai (verse 11):

“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.

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.

And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform,  
that is, the Ten Commandments.” (v11-13)

Verse 13 gives the Ten Commandments a unique place in the law.

The Ten Commandments is referred to as “the covenant” that Israel must perform.

Verse 14 will go on to talk about statutes and rules.

It would be a bit simplistic to say that “statutes” refers to the religious laws,  
and “rules” refers to the civil laws,  
but that *is* the basic idea.

Do not forget God’s works—do not forget God’s word.

We live in a day when people want to ignore God’s word.

We think that we know better than God.

But God’s word is true – it is not only true in the intellectual sense –

it is also true in the sense that it is true to the way that God made the world!

When you live the way that God says that you should live –

you are living in harmony with the universe that God made!

Indeed, vv 6-8 point out that when the nations around you hear all these statutes and rules  
they will marvel at the righteousness of these statutes and rules.

“For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us,  
whenever we call upon him?” (v7)

When the people of God live according to God’s statutes and rules,  
then the nations say,

“Wow! That’s amazing!

That’s a community that is characterized by justice and wisdom.”

Notice something:

it doesn’t say that the nations will want to be ruled by the same laws!

Notice something else:

it doesn’t say that Israel should seek to impose their laws on others.

We *should* expect people today to be *impressed*

by the wisdom and justice of the Christian community.

The world should say about the Christians, “See how they love one another!”

Now, they may hate us for that –  
they may seek to destroy us –  
but they should never be able to call us hateful and bigoted.

Why are they doing that today?

Because too many Christians are trying to impose God's law on the world.  
We are trying to use political *power* – we are trying to use the weapons of the world –  
in order to accomplish what only the cross can do.

You might say, “but aren't they just doing what the Catechism says –  
'the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship;  
and, according to each one's place and calling,  
removing it, and all monuments of idolatry.'!”

Shouldn't Christian citizens seek to *remove* false worship from the land?!

But that's why the catechism is worded as it is:  
“according to each one's place and calling.”

We live in a society that protects the rights all people to worship as they please.  
The Constitution was designed to protect the rights of Protestants,  
Catholics, Jews, Muslims, and those of no religion.  
Therefore, not even a Christian legislator in the United States  
has the “place and calling” to remove false worship by *law*.  
The way that we seek to remove false worship from the land  
is *not* by political action –  
but by the faithful preaching and living of the gospel!

When the Christian church is living faithfully before God –  
denying ourselves – taking up our cross – following Jesus –  
what will happen is the gradual elimination of false worship.

The best way to oppose false worship is to practice true worship!  
Because the true worship of God more and more conforms us to the image of Christ.  
And that image is *beautiful*.  
That image is *true*.  
That image is *real*.

Yes, every knee *should* bow and every tongue *should* confess that Jesus Christ is Lord –  
and one day *they will* –  
but the only way to that day is the way of the cross.

That was true for Israel – and it is true for us,  
because, as Paul says, it was true for Jesus.

And that's really what we need to see in our second point.  
Again, our Larger Catechism is really helpful:

## 2. Word and Image: What Is Forbidden in the Second Commandment? (v15-31)

*Q. 109. What sins are forbidden in the second commandment?*

A. The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, counseling, commanding, using, and any wise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself; 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; all worshiping of it, or God in it or by it; the making of any representation of feigned deities, and all worship of them, or service belonging to them; all superstitious devices, corrupting the worship of God, adding to it, or taking from it, whether invented and taken up of ourselves, or received by tradition from others, though under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretense whatsoever; simony; sacrilege; all neglect, contempt, hindering, and opposing the worship and ordinances which God hath appointed.

In Deuteronomy 4:15 Moses reminds Israel that they “saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb.”

You cannot worship God by means of an image—  
whether the figure of a male or female, or that of an animal or any other creature.  
You cannot worship God by means of the sun, moon or stars.  
Do not confuse the Creator with the creature.

Why are images condemned so thoroughly?

Because no creature fully reflects God.

These creatures are things

“that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.”

Notice that there are two reasons given in Deuteronomy 4 for the prohibition of images.

1) because you saw no form at the mountain (v15)

2) because you heard a voice (v36)

There is no image at Mt Sinai—only the Word.

“You saw no form” therefore do not make any carved image.

And to make a carved image is to “forget the covenant of the LORD your God.”

You are to remember the Word of God and the works of God—

what he has said, and what he has done.

But why was there no image at Mt. Sinai?

Every other god in the ancient near east had images.

A god without an image was unheard of!

Why was there no image at Mt. Sinai?

To understand this, we have to go back to Genesis 1.

Because God once had an image.

His name was Adam.

In Genesis 1:26, God said, “let us make man in our image.”

And so God created man in his own image and likeness.  
“God created man, male and female, after his own image,  
in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, with dominion over the creatures.”  
Man’s knowledge reflected God’s infinite knowledge.  
He was righteous and holy—as God is righteous and holy.  
And as God rules over all things,  
so man ruled over the creatures as the steward of God.

In the Garden of Eden, word and image came together.  
God created man in his image, and he spoke to him his word.  
Indeed, we are told that God walked in the garden with Adam,  
suggesting that God took some kind of visible form.

The Garden was God’s holy sanctuary.  
Eden was like the tabernacle.  
The Garden was like the Holy of Holies.  
And Adam was the Image –  
he was the image of God in the temple.

But Adam was not content to remain the image of God, his Father.  
And through his sin and rebellion, he exchanged the glory of the immortal God  
for the image of the serpent.  
Adam had been created as the image of God.  
He was created to look like God.  
But now that image was twisted and distorted.  
When you look at man today, you see a perversion of the image of God.  
Our knowledge has been mixed with folly and ignorance,  
so that our communication has become filled with half-truths.  
Yes, we still do good things from time to time,  
but our ‘righteousness’ is mixed with wickedness.  
Is there any one on earth of whom you could say,  
“Ah, that’s what God looks like!”?  
What dominion we still have over the creatures  
is turned to manipulation and destruction.  
No, when Israel comes to Mt. Sinai,  
there is no one and nothing that is worthy of being held up as the image of God.  
And so God speaks from the fire—  
a warning of the judgment that will come upon the earth  
The Word of God comes to Israel without an image.  
For Israel to make an image is to repeat the sin of Adam –  
to exchange the glory of God for the creature.

And the warning is given to them and to their children (4:25-28).  
“When you father children and children’s children, and have grown old in the land,  
if you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything,

and by doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God,  
so as to provoke him to anger,  
I call heaven and earth to witness against you today,  
that you will soon utterly perish from the land  
that you are going over the Jordan to possess.  
You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed.  
And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples,  
and you will be left few in number  
among the nations where the LORD will drive you.  
And there you will serve gods of wood and stone,  
the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.”

If Israel turns to images, then God will hand them over to their idolatry.

Now, I want you to notice something.

God does not say, “If you worship other gods, I will send you into exile.”

God says, “If you make images, I will send you into exile.”

At Sinai, Aaron made a golden calf,  
and he identified the golden calf with Yahweh.

King Jeroboam did the same thing –

golden calf worship was always an attempt to worship Yahweh with images.

You can successfully keep the first commandment (have no other gods),  
but yet fail to keep the second commandment.

You can say that you are worshiping the Triune God,  
when in fact you are worshiping a figment of your own imagination.

I once heard a pastor say that “my god would never command anyone to slaughter people,”  
and so the pastor said that various parts of the Bible could not be inspired by God.

That pastor was violating the second commandment –  
worshiping a figment of his own imagination!

### **3. The Jealousy of Our God: Why We Should Keep the 2nd Commandment? (v32-40)**

In verses 32-40, Moses reflects on *why* we should keep the second commandment.

Our Larger Catechism covers the same ground:

*Q. 110. What are the reasons annexed to the second commandment, the more to enforce it?*

A. The reasons annexed to the second commandment, the more to enforce it, contained in these words, 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 shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments; are, besides God's sovereignty over us, and propriety in us, his fervent zeal for his own worship, and his revengeful indignation against all false worship, as being a spiritual whoredom; accounting the breakers of this commandment such as hate him, and threatening to punish them unto divers generations; and

esteeming the observers of it such as love him and keep his commandments, and promising mercy to them unto many generations.

God's sovereignty over us is intimately bound up with his propriety in us.

What does it mean that God has "propriety" in us?

We don't use the word "propriety" in this way very much,  
but we still use the word "proprietor."

A proprietor is an owner –

and in the same way, God has ownership of us – we are his –  
he has *proprietary* rights in us,  
because he made us in his own image.

God took Israel out of Egypt by his mighty hand –

because he loved your fathers – and he promised to give their offspring the land.

And God really cares how he is worshiped.

He let you hear his voice from heaven (v36) that he might discipline you.

He let you see his great fire and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire.

Yes, he will discipline you if you worship images –

but if you repent and return to the Lord, he will deliver you (v29-30).

So the Second Commandment declares that you cannot use images in the true worship of God.

God has spoken by his Word.

To use images is to draw your eyes, your heart, and your mind  
away from who God is – and what God has done in history.

Now the use of images was a regular problem for Israel.

During the time of the judges as well as the kings

Israel frequently turned to the use of images in worship.

You can understand why.

We *were* created in the image of God.

We understand intuitively that there *should be* an image of God.

But sin has so corrupted that image, that from Adam to Christ,

there was no image worthy of God.

But now, in Jesus, Word and Image come together.

John's Gospel begins,

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

"The Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

Paul speaks likewise in Colossians 1:15

"He is the image of the invisible God,

the firstborn of all creation...the firstborn from the dead."

Jesus is the image of God in two respects.

First, he is the image of God as the eternal Son of God.  
If Adam was created in the image of God as the Son of God,  
    how much more is the eternal Son the true image of the Father,  
    because the eternal Son resembles the Father in every way.  
But second, he is the image of God because he is the firstborn from the dead.  
    Because Jesus has been raised from the dead,  
    man is restored to God's image.

Jesus Christ is the embodiment of Israel.  
He was exiled to Egypt as a child, and out of Egypt God called his Son.  
    He wandered in the wilderness for 40 days (even as Israel did for 40 years),  
    He endured the temptations of Israel in the desert:  
        longing for bread,  
        taking the easy route,  
        idolatry/worshipping false gods,  
    and where Israel had failed, Jesus succeeded.  
As the Image of God,  
    Israel was to make all nations ooh, and ahh over their righteous laws.  
    That didn't happen very often!  
As the Image of God,  
    Jesus declared, "when I am lifted up I will draw all men to myself"  
    And he has gathered the nations together in His Name.  
It is precisely in the cross that Jesus succeeds where Israel had failed.

In Jesus we see the true image of God.  
The Image is the Word.  
The Word is the Image.

What are the implications of this?  
Paul says in Romans 8:29  
    that God predestined us "to be conformed to the image of his Son,  
    in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."  
God restores us to his image through conforming us to the image of Jesus.  
Likewise, in 1Cor 15:49, Paul says that  
    just as we have borne the image of the man of dust,  
    so also we shall bear the image of the man from heaven.  
Just as we have shared in Adam's sin and misery,  
    so also we share in the glory of the resurrected Christ.

The admonition to the Israelites in the wilderness is somewhat different for us.  
We cannot say "you saw no form."  
No!  
Paul tells us that though the Son of God was in the form of God,  
    he took to himself the form of a servant.  
We have seen Jesus,

the one in whom the Word of God and the Works of God are united.  
He is the Image of God and the Word of God,  
and through his Word we are being renewed after his Image.

So some might say that we could make pictures of Jesus –  
because he is both the Image and the Word.

But what can you craft that could depict this?

Any artistic depiction of this can only give us half of the story.

The movie, “The Passion of the Christ,” gives a graphic portrayal  
of the sufferings of Jesus.

And it may have some educational value.

I know that it has driven many to read the scriptures,  
to find out who this Jesus was.

But an artistic depiction is only as powerful as the artist.

It can only give us a human Jesus.

It cannot give us the whole Jesus—the one who was God and man.

The incarnation *must* affect the way we read the Second Commandment.

But it does not change the Second Commandment.

God has come in the flesh.

The Word has been revealed in the flesh.

The Image of God has walked among us.

There is now an image through which we must worship God!

But that Image sits at the right hand of the Father.

And the only place on earth where you can catch a glimpse of that Image,  
is in the faces around you—

in those who are being conformed to likeness of Christ.

Therefore we must remember what God has done in Jesus Christ,  
and we must teach them to our children, and our grandchildren.

We must teach them the Word of God and the works of God.

That is one of the reasons why we have the catechism quiz each week.

We are teaching our children what God has done in Jesus Christ.

The catechism is designed as a summary of basic biblical teaching.

I know that some of you have difficulty memorizing.

As we get older our brains get slower.

But when each child is baptized, we as a congregation promise to support and encourage  
the parents in training their children in the way of Christ.

One way you can do that is by learning the catechism with them.

Another way is simply to be present when they are quizzed.

Every child who grows up at MCC should have a thorough understanding of the catechism.

Our Sunday school classes are designed to do precisely what Dt 4 commands,

as our children study the scriptures to learn the story of redemption,  
including two years on study of the shorter catechism  
to understand the basics of the faith.

We are called to remember what God has done, and what God has said.  
In Jesus Christ we hear God's Word, and we behold God's Image.  
Therefore let us worship him in Spirit and in truth,  
that we also might be conformed to the image of Christ through his Word.

Let us pray.

Almighty God, as we look into the face of your beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is your true image, we beseech you, in whom is all fullness of wisdom and light, to guide us by your Word and Spirit that we might bear the fruits of righteousness to the glory and exaltation of your holy name. Amen.