

LORD'S DAY 35

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

A. We are not to make an image of God in any way,¹ nor to worship Him in any other manner than He has commanded in His Word.²

1. **Deuteronomy 4:15-19** Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire,¹⁶ lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female,¹⁷ the likeness of any animal that is on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air,¹⁸ the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that is in the water beneath the earth.¹⁹ And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the LORD your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage.

Isaiah 40:18-25 To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?¹⁹ The workman molds an image, the goldsmith overspreads it with gold, and the silversmith casts silver chains.²⁰ Whoever is too impoverished for such a contribution chooses a tree that will not rot; he seeks for himself a skillful workman to prepare a carved image that will not totter.²¹ Have you not known? Have you not heard? 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 out like a tent to dwell in.²³ He brings the prince to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless.²⁴ Scarcely shall they be planted, scarcely shall they be sown, scarcely shall their stock take root in the earth, when He will also blow on them, and they will wither, and the whirlwind will take them away like stubble.²⁵ To whom then will you liken Me, Or to whom shall I be equal? says the Holy One.

Acts 17:29 Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising.

Romans 1:23 and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man; and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

Leviticus 10:1-7 Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them.² So fire went out from the LORD and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.³ And Moses said to Aaron, "This is what the LORD spoke, saying: 'By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; And before all the people I must be glorified.'" "So Aaron held his peace."⁴ And Moses called Mishael and Elzaphan, the sons of Uzziel the uncle of Aaron, and said to them, "Come near, carry your brethren from before the sanctuary out of the camp."⁵ So they went near and carried them by their tunics out of the camp, as Moses had said.⁶ And Moses said to Aaron, and to Eleazar and Ithamar, his sons, "Do not uncover your heads nor tear your clothes, lest you die, and wrath come upon all the people. But let your brethren, the whole house of Israel, bewail the burning which the LORD has kindled."⁷ "You shall not go out from the door of the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die, for the anointing oil of the LORD is upon you." And they did according to the word of Moses.

Deuteronomy 12:30 take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, "How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise."

1 Samuel 15:22-23 Then Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.²³ For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king."

Matthew 15:9 And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

John 4:23-24 But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him.²⁴ God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

97. Q. May we then not make any image at all?

A. God cannot and may not be visibly portrayed in any way. Creatures may be portrayed, but God forbids us to make or have any images of them in order to worship them or to serve God through them.¹

1. **Exodus 34:13-14** But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images¹⁴ (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God),

Exodus 34:17 You shall make no molded gods for yourselves.

Numbers 33:52 then you shall drive out all the inhabitants of the land from before you, destroy all their engraved stones, destroy all their molded images, and demolish all their high places;

2 Kings 18:4-5 He 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.⁵ 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.

Isaiah 40:25 "To whom then will you liken Me, Or to whom shall I be equal?" says the Holy One.

98. Q. But may images not be tolerated in the churches as "books for the laity"?

A. No, for we should not be wiser than God. He wants His people to be taught not by means of dumb images¹ but by the living preaching of His Word.²

1. **Jeremiah 10:8** But they are altogether dull-hearted and foolish; A wooden idol is a worthless doctrine.

Habakkuk 2:18-20 What profit is the image, that its maker should carve it, the molded image, a teacher of lies, that the maker of its mold should trust in it, to make mute idols?¹⁹ Woe to him who says to wood, 'Awake!' To silent stone, 'Arise! It shall teach!' Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, yet in it there is no breath at all.²⁰ But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him.

2. **Romans 10:14-15** 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?¹⁵ And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"

Romans 10:17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Peter 1:19 And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts;



Reading the first and the second commandments, you might ask what difference exists between them, for they appear to deal with the same thing. The first commandment reads, "*You shall have no other gods before Me.*" The second reads, "*You shall not make a graven image of any likeness...*"

Even though they appear to be the same, they deal with two different subjects. The first commandment deals with the matter of having something or someone besides God in which or whom to place our trust. The second commandment deals with the way we worship the only true God whom we trust. We could put it this way:

1st commandment: **whom** we worship

2nd commandment: **how** we worship Him

As an example of transgression against the second commandment, think of the time when the people of Israel made a golden calf. They had no intention of worshipping a different God. They intended to worship Yahweh who brought them out of Egypt. They did not sin against the first commandment, but rather, against the second. They wanted to worship Yahweh by means of a visible image.

Basic to this second commandment is the temptation for man to make for himself some kind of representation of God. Man desires to see with his eyes what he worships with his heart. Yet God says, "*You shall not make any kind of image of Me.*"

Why not? There are at least three reasons:

1. In the first place, God cannot be visibly portrayed. God is spirit (cf. John 4:24). It is impossible to make a physical representation of a spiritual being.
2. In the second place, any representation we might make of God would be a creaturely representation. Man is not able to conceive of anything except what he has seen in creation. We have all seen pictures of Martians or other outer-space creatures. Though they look different, they are really composed of things that are found on earth. A Martian will have some appendage with which to move, whether feet, wings or wheels. He will have some appendage to hold things and organs with which to see and hear. It is impossible for man to think of something which he has not seen on earth. Whatever man draws, he draws from that which he sees in creation.

If we were to make an image of God, we would be using creaturely characteristics to portray the Creator. If we portray God by things of this earth, then we bring God down from His glorious position to our own level and make Him

in our own likeness (cf. Romans 1:23). That is an insult to God's greatness and does injustice to God's greatness and uniqueness (cf. Psalm 106:20). Therefore God cannot be visibly portrayed.

3. In the third place, pagans made images of their gods as a means to manipulate (to control) their gods. They believed that they could channel the power of their gods into their lives by making and having images of their gods. Their view of images could be compared to our use of extension cords. When a power outlet is too far away from us, we use an extension cord to bring the power to us. So the pagans believed that an image was a channel through which the power of their distant gods could be channelled to them when and where they needed it.

Israel once adopted similar pagan thoughts and committed idolatry with the ark of the covenant. In 1 Samuel 4, we read that the Israelites fought against the Philistines, but they were defeated. They decided to bring the ark of the covenant with them into the second battle. (The ark of the covenant was a symbol of the presence of God who sat enthroned on the mercy seat of the ark). By bringing the ark into battle, they thought that they could force God to be in their midst and thereby win the battle. It is this manipulation that God forbids in the second commandment. Man must never suppose that he can control God.

The negative aspect of this commandment **forbids man *to make* images of God**. But the positive aspect of this commandment **demand man *to be* the image of God**. When God created man He created man in His own image (cf. LD 3). This means that man was given in measure some of the qualities of God. For example, man was created holy and righteous. Man was also created with wisdom and knowledge of God, of himself and of creation. These *static* qualities we have are to be used in the *dynamic* reflection of God in daily life. Man was created *after* (*static*) God's image

in order that he might *bear (dynamic)* God's image in everything that he did.

This bearing of God's image was and remains the ***original worship***⁴ that God requires of man. This deserves some emphasis. In Paradise, the worship of God did not consist of going to church, reading the Bible or listening to a sermon. There were no churches and there was no Bible, and there was no need for anyone to preach to man about God for he knew God intimately. The original manner of worship consisted of reflecting God's image by doing the things that God would do in the way that He would do it.

Since the fall into sin, man is not able of himself to bear God's image. For this reason God instituted ***formal worship*** which consists of reading and preaching the Word of God, of praying to God with word and song. God instituted formal worship as a means to promote original worship.

Formal worship takes place in three different forms:⁵

1. congregational worship
2. family worship
3. personal worship

We would like to take some time to discuss the worship of God in church. The 'events' which take place in the church service, such as the singing, the reading, the prayers, the sermon, are referred to as ***liturgy***. Different churches will have different liturgies. The Bible does not prescribe a definite order of worship as we find it in the Book of Praise. (pg. 581ff.) Yet the pattern which we follow is very Scriptural.

The liturgy which we follow may be called "***covenantal liturgy***." In a covenant, there are two parties who interact with each other. Similarly there are two parties who interact with each other in the church

service. There is God, and there is the congregation.

This covenantal liturgy is based upon the temple worship of the old dispensation. The priest acted as a sort of "go-between" or mediator. He either offered a sacrifice to God on behalf of the people, or he blessed the people on behalf of God. He either prayed to God on behalf of the people, or he read to them from the law of God, and thus spoke on God's behalf. (See *Diagram A* at the end of this lesson.)

The church service in the new dispensation is patterned after the temple service in the old dispensation. The minister (or the elder) who leads the service is only a "spokesman" for one of the two parties. He speaks either on God's behalf or on behalf of the congregation. For example, when the minister prays, he speaks on our behalf to God. When he reads the Ten Commandments, he speaks on God's behalf to us.

If the church service is to remain covenantal, the minister should not speak to the congregation as an individual person or on behalf of consistory. Neither should there be a dialogue between the minister and the congregation. If the people speak, they must only address God. If the minister speaks, he must either speak on behalf of the congregation or on behalf of God.⁶

There are some parts in the church service where the minister is not needed as a "spokesman" (see *Diagram C* below). If the congregation is able to address God itself in an orderly manner, then there is no need for the minister to be its spokesman.

Some questions that are frequently asked follow:

1. *What should we think about the minister speaking to the congregation on a personal level, for example, by extending greetings or words of welcome from the pulpit?* We have patterned our church

4. cf. J. van Bruggen, Annotations to the Heidelberg Catechism, Inheritance Publications, 1991, pg. 224, who uses the distinction True and Formal worship.

5. Ibid.

6. Some announcements during the church service are necessary, such as when and what song to sing, when to take the offerings and what they are for, when to pray and for what to pray. These announcements should remain brief and simple.

service after the temple service, which was covenantal. It is a meeting of God with His people, where God speaks to them, and they speak to God. It seems best, then, for the minister to omit such personal greetings to the congregation, and to let the service begin with a greeting or salutation from God (eg. *“Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ”*).

2. *Concerning the announcements, does the minister speak to the congregation on God's behalf, or does he speak to God on behalf of the congregation?*

Neither! The announcements are spoken on behalf of the consistory. It is for this reason that the announcements are best read **before** the church service begins, that is, before the salutation from the Lord, or at the end of the church service, that is, **after** the blessing of the Lord. Or perhaps still better would be to have these announcements written in the bulletin or liturgy sheet.

3. *Should others besides the minister participate in leading the church service? While we enjoy variation, the emphasis must always be placed on **what is said**, not on **who says it**. We do not come to church to be entertained. There is sufficient room for variation from one service to the next. We have 150 Psalms to sing from, and 65 Hymns. We also have the 66 books of Holy Scripture which provide countless windows through which to view the age-old gospel from various angles.*

On the other hand, elders were appointed to read the Scriptures in the church service years ago. There can be no principle objection to reintroducing this custom into the churches. One thing should be clear, however: change should only occur for the greater edification of the congregation.

4. *Should we allow choirs to sing during the church service? We mentioned already that the church service is a meeting between God and His people. Whenever the congregation can address God in an orderly manner without the*

need for a spokesman or mediator, it should be entitled and encouraged to do so. Since the whole congregation is able to sing, this privilege should never be taken away from it. The congregation should itself respond to God's Word or blessing in joyful song. Choirs are a beautiful way to praise God's Name, but there are more than 160 hours left in each week to do so.

5. *Why does an elder shake the minister's hand? This custom seems to have arisen in the Netherlands at a time when the government forced consistories to allow ministers on to the pulpit whom the consistory did not approve. When these ministers entered the pulpit, they would not receive a handshake from the consistory. However, ministers who were approved received the hand of the consistory, indicating approval to the congregation.*

In what way would this serve the congregation? It may well have been a warning to the congregation. If a minister did not receive the approval of the consistory, the congregation would be warned to listen more critically to what was being said, and test it more closely on Scripture.

Although we do not live in the same historical setting, the custom has lived on. Today, it is usually taken to mean that the man who enters the pulpit has received the authority to preach from the consistory who must watch over the proclamation of God's Word. It is difficult to explain the handshake at the end of the service. Since we do not live in the same historical setting, some churches have discontinued the handshake.

Diagram A

Temple Service in the Old Dispensation

Holy of Holies GOD	Holy Place PRIESTS	Outer Court CONGREGATION
	← ←	Prayer
The Law of God	→ →	
	← ←	Sacrifices
Blessing	→ →	

Diagram B

Church Service in the New Dispensation

GOD	MINISTERS	CONGREGATION
The Law of God	→ →	
	← ←	Prayer
Preaching	→ →	
	← ←	Confession (if read)
Blessing	→ →	

Diagram C

GOD	CONGREGATION
	← Singing
	← Offering of Gifts
	← Confession (if sung)

Questions:

1. What is the difference between the first and second commandment?
2. Give an illustration of a transgression of the second commandment.
3. What is the first reason God forbids us to make a representation of Him? What does John 4:24 say?
4. What is the second reason God forbids us to make a representation of Him?
5. Why did pagans use images of their gods in worship? Did Israel ever adopt this pagan thought? If so, when?
6. What is the negative aspect of the second commandment? What is the positive aspect?
7. What does it mean that man was created in the image of God? Why did God create man with these “static” qualities?
8. How could we describe the “original worship” that God required of man?
9. What is “formal worship”? Why was it instituted?
10. List the three different forms of “formal worship.”
11. What is “*liturgy*”? What do we mean by “*covenantal liturgy*”? Upon what is covenantal liturgy based?
12. What is the role of the minister (or elder) who leads the church service? What should he not do during the church service? How should the service begin?

13. When making announcements (such as home-visits, meeting dates, etc) does the minister speak to the congregation on God's behalf, or does he speak to God on behalf of the congregation? Where are the announcements best placed?
14. May others participate in leading the worship service besides the minister?
15. Should choirs sing during the church service?
16. Why does an elder shake the minister's hand? Is the handshake a necessary part of the church service?