

2. The Second Commandment

Exodus 20:4-6 -- "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any representation of that which is in heaven above or that which is on earth beneath or that which is in the waters beneath the earth. You shall not bow down to them and you shall not serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, avenging the transgression of the fathers upon the sons to the third and to the fourth for the one hating Me, but showing loving-kindness to thousands for the one loving Me and keeping My commandments."

a. What the commandment does not forbid

- (1) The worship of false gods by means of idols (this has already been forbidden in the First Commandment)
- (2) The making of all pictorial or sculptured representations of anything in the world
 - (a) Because the commandment has reference to religious worship, and to the use of images in that context only
 - (b) Because Moses, at God's command, and Solomon, with God's approval, made many such images, and even used them in connection with worship in the tabernacle and the temple

b. What the commandment does forbid

- (1) It forbids the making of and bowing down to and serving images, in a religious context.

In the history of image worship, the worshipper began by worshipping the god whom the image represented, and ended by worshipping the image itself

- (2) But what about the use of religious art for the purposes of instruction or ornament? What about the use of pictures, sculptures, or crucifixes in our churches, our homes, or on our persons? Is it permissible? Is it desirable?

If the pitfalls and dangers of image worship can be avoided, then perhaps we can use images in painting, sculpture, architecture, drama, music, and literature, in the same way God intended the images in the tabernacle and temple to be used--not to draw the worshipper's attention to the images, but to Him!

c. What the commandment positively implies

- (1) That Jehovah alone, and no humanly contrived representation of Him or of His works is to be bowed down and served with religious devotion.
- (2) That Jehovah is to be worshipped as a Spirit, i.e., as a living Person, not a thing; that He is to be worshipped by men's spirits, i.e., inwardly and not only outwardly with their lips and hands; and that He is to be worshipped in truth, i.e., not as men wish Him to be, or as they create Him in their imaginations, but as He has revealed Himself.