

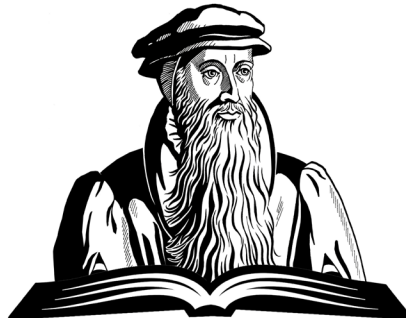
VIDEO SERMON SERIES

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

Sermon #44, Lord's Day 35, part 1

The Second Commandment



The John Knox Institute
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Sermons on the
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1. The Christian's Only Comfort in Life and Death (Lord's Day 1–1, Question 1)
2. The Pattern of Christian Experience (Lord's Day 1–2, Question 2)
3. The Law of God and Our Misery (Lord's Day 2, Questions 3–5)
4. The Total (Radical) Depravity of Man (Lord's Day 3, Questions 6–8)
5. Man's Sinnership in Light of God's Justice (Lord's Day 4-1, Questions 9–11)
6. The Doctrine of Hell (Lord's Day 4-2, Question 11)
7. Perfect Satisfaction: A Requirement for Deliverance (Lord's Day 5, Q. 12–15)
8. The One Mediator Between God and Man (Lord's Day 6, Questions 16–19)
9. True Saving Faith (Lord's Day 7, Questions 20–23)
10. The God of Salvation: A Triune God (Lord's Day 8, Questions 24–25)
11. Faith in God the Father (Lord's Day 9, Question 26)
12. The Providence of God (Lord's Day 10–1, Question 27)
13. Rich Benefits Derived from Believing God's Providence (Lord's Day 10–2, Q. 28)
14. Jesus, the Savior of Sinners (Lord's Day 11, Questions 29–30)
15. Faith in Christ (Lord's Day 12–1, Question 31)
16. The Identity of the True Christian (Lord's Day 12–2, Question 32)
17. The Unique Identity of Jesus Christ (Lord's Day 13–1, Question 33)
18. The Lordship of Jesus Christ (Lord's Day 13–2, Question 34)
19. The Incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ (Lord's Day 14, Questions 35–36)
20. Faith in the Suffering Son of God (Lord's Day 15, Questions 37–39)
21. Christ—A Savior Who Has Paid the Wages of Sin in Full (Lord's Day 16, Q. 40–44)



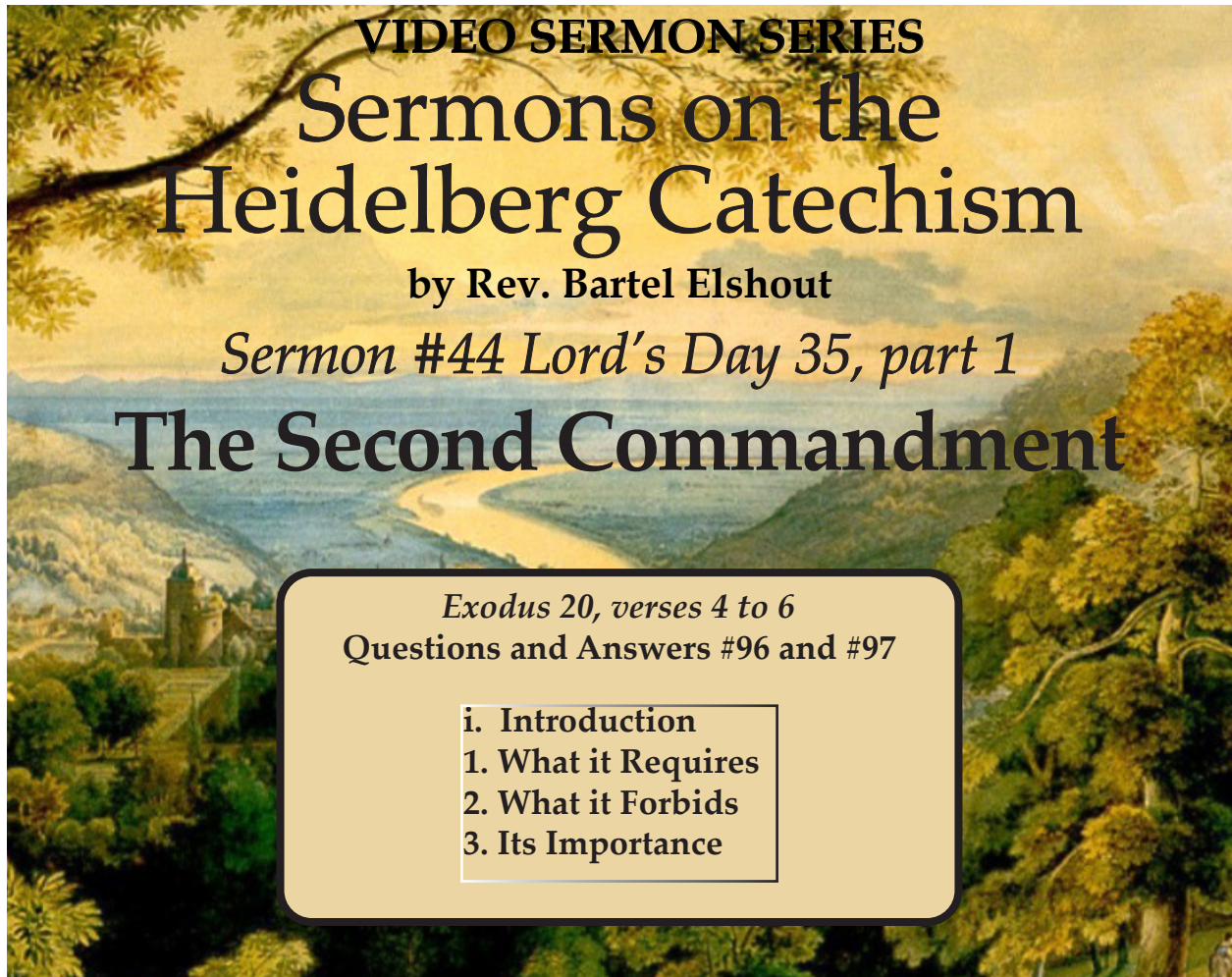
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Sermons on the
Heidelberg Catechism
by Rev. Bartel Elshout

22. The Threefold Benefits of the Resurrection of Christ (Lord's Day 17, Q. 45)
23. The Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ (Lord's Day 18, Questions 46–49)
24. Faith in the Exalted Christ (Lord's Day 19–1, Questions 50–51)
25. The Second Coming of Christ (Lord's Day 19–2, Question 52)
26. Faith in God the Holy Spirit (Lord's Day 20, Question 53)
27. The Holy Catholic (Universal) Church of Christ (Lord's Day 21–1, Q. 54–56)
28. The Church's Confession Regarding the Forgiveness of Sins (Lord's Day 21–2, Q. 56)
29. The Future of the Christian (Lord's Day 22, Questions 57–58)
30. Justifying Faith (Lord's Day 23, Questions 59–61)
31. The Believer and Good Works (Lord's Day 24, Questions 62–64)
32. Faith and the Sacraments (Lord's Day 25, Questions 65–68)
33. Holy Baptism and the Promise of the Gospel (Lord's Day 26, Questions 69–71)
34. The Water of Holy Baptism (Lord's Day 27–1 Questions 72–73)
35. The Baptism of Infants (Lord's Day 27–2, Question 74)
36. The Holy Supper of the Lord Jesus Christ (Lord's Day 28, Questions 75–77)
37. The Value of the Lord's Supper (Lord's Day 29, Questions 78–79)
38. The Observance of the Lord's Supper (Lord's Day 30, Questions 80–82)
39. The Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven (Lord's Day 31, Questions 83–85)
40. The Good Works of the Christian (Lord's Day 32, Questions 86–87)
41. The True Conversion of Man (Lord's Day 33, Questions 88–91)
42. The Transcript of God's Mind (LD 34, Introductory to God's Law)



VIDEO SERMON SERIES
**Sermons on the
Heidelberg Catechism**
by Rev. Bartel Elshout

- 43. The Holy Law of God (Lord's Day 34, Questions 92–95)
- 44. The Second Commandment (Lord's Day 35–1, Questions 96–97)**
- 45. Preaching of God's Word and Graven Images (Lord's Day 35–2, Question 98)
- 46. God's Commandment Concerning His Name (Lord's Day 36, Questions 99–100)
- 47. God's Name and the Oath (Lord's Day 37, Questions 101–102)
- 48. The Fourth Commandment, part 1 (Lord's Day 38–1, Question 103)
- 49. The Fourth Commandment, part 2 (Lord's Day 38–2, Question 103)
- 50. The Threefold Requirement of the Fifth Commandment (Lord's Day 39, Q. 104)
- 51. The Sixth Commandment (Lord's Day 40, Questions 105–107)
- 52. The Seventh Commandment and Marriage (Lord's Day 41, Questions 108–109)
- 53. The Eighth Commandment (Lord's Day 42, Questions 110–111)
- 54. The Ninth Commandment (Lord's Day 43, Question 112)
- 55. Final Observations About the Law of God (Lord's Day 44, Questions 113–115)
- 56. The Prayer of the Christian (Lord's Day 45, Questions 116–119)
- 57. The Address of the Lord's Prayer (Lord's Day 46, Questions 120–121)
- 58. Hallowing of God's "Father" Name (Lord's Day 47, Question 122)
- 59. The Second Petition of the Lord's Prayer (Lord's Day 48, Question 123)
- 60. The Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer, (Lord's Day 49, Question 124)
- 61. The Christian's Petition for Daily Bread (Lord's Day 50, Question 125)
- 62. Readiness to Forgive (Lord's Day 51, Question 126)
- 63. The Last Petition of the Lord's Prayer (Lord's Day 52, Questions 127–129)



Introduction

Beloved congregation, boys and girls, what the devil did in the garden, in Genesis 3, was so very, very devious. All he did was ask a question. “Hath God said?” And by doing that, he cast doubts upon the Word of God. Not only did he cast doubts upon the Word of God, but worse than that, and that was his whole, subtle, and devious objective, is to misrepresent God’s character, to give Adam and Eve a distorted view of who God really is. Adam and Eve, who had enjoyed the fellowship and communion with God for probably several weeks before this wretched moment arrived. Morning and evening they had the privilege of communing with God in the cool of the day—God, who opened his heart to Adam and Eve; who revealed himself to them. And then comes Satan, and he’s really suggesting, “Do you really know this God? Are you sure you’ve understood him? Is it not possible that he has not been truthful with you? Is it not possible that he is withholding something from you? Is it not possible that he’s hiding from you that which you need to know in order that you would be like unto God?”

And we know that Adam and Eve believed that lie. They embraced that vile distortion of the character of God. They embraced that misrepresentation of God’s character. And congregation, Satan’s vile devices, his evil design has not changed. Because, if he cannot succeed in keeping us from worshipping God, he will try to corrupt that worship. And he will try in every conceivable way to foist upon our minds a misrepresentation of the character of God. And that’s why the

Second Commandment is so very, very important.

And so, let's turn to Lord's Day 35 of the Heidelberg Catechism, in which we have an exposition of that Second Commandment. And so, first, let me read the Second Commandment to you. We hear it every Sunday. "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 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; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments" (Deuteronomy 5, verses 8 to 10).

Lord's Day 35.

Question #96: *What doth God require in the second commandment?*

The Answer is: *That we in no wise represent God by images, nor worship Him in any other way that He has commanded in His Word.*

Question #97: *Are images then not at all to be made?*

The Answer is: *God neither can, nor may be represented by any means. But as to creatures, though they may be represented, yet God forbids to make, or have any resemblance of them, either in order to worship them or to serve God by them.*

Question #98: *But may not images be tolerated in the churches as books to the laity?*

The Answer is: *No, for we must not pretend to be wiser than God, who will have His people taught, not by dumb—or lifeless—images, but by the lively—or living—preaching of His Word.*

And so we consider *The Second Commandment* within this structure of the Catechism, we will look at *The Requirements*. What does God require, what is the positive requirement of this commandment? That's addressed in Question and Answer #96. We are to worship him only in the manner in which he has commanded in his Word. Secondly, *The Prohibitions* of this Commandment. We are forbidden to worship him by any other means, other than what he has revealed of himself. Or, to put it simply, God requires us to worship him *according to revelation*, and he forbids us to worship him *according to our imagination*. That's a very important point of this Commandment—revelation, and no imagination—that's the second point, *The Prohibition* of this Commandment. Then thirdly, *The Importance* of this Commandment, as highlighted in Question #98, where the Question asked, of course, related to the context in which the Catechism was written, coming out of Roman Catholicism. They argued that we need to have statues, we need to have images in the church as books to the laity in order to help people in their faith. And the Answer is very straight forward, *We [should] not pretend to be wiser than God, who will have His people taught, not by [lifeless] images, but by the lively preaching of His Word*. So, *The Second Commandment; What it Requires; What it Forbids; and, Its Importance*.

1. What it Requires

So, boys and girls, in the First Commandment—listen carefully to me—in the First Commandment, God forbids us to worship a false god. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Deuteronomy 5:7). As I pointed out two weeks ago, God is not saying, "I should be your number one option." No, he's saying, "I am your only option. There are no other gods besides me." So the well-intentioned statement that we are to love God above all, that language is not found in Scripture. God is saying, "Thou shalt worship the Lord God alone. Thou shalt worship him with all thy heart, with all thy strength, with all thy might, with all thy intellect, with every fiber of thy being." So he forbids us to worship a false God. And now, in the Second Commandment, he forbids the false worship of the true God. So in the First Commandment, he forbids the worship of

a false God; in the Second Commandment, he forbids us the false worship of the true God.

Of course, those Commandments are very closely linked together. Because not only do we need to understand who this God is, but we need to know what he has revealed of himself. And it's very clear from this Commandment, that God does not allow us to leave that to our own imagination. But instead, he has given us his precious Word. We are to worship him in no other way than he has commanded us in his precious Word.

So what that ultimately means is this, congregation, that this Commandment is ultimately about God's Son. Because it is in his Son that God has revealed himself to us. God cannot be known in any other way except in and through his Son. That's why John 1, verse 18 is so important, where John, moved by the Spirit, says, "No man hath seen God at any time" but he that "is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" unto us. And so, that clearly teaches us that God is not knowable apart from his Son. As human beings, we can only know God as he has revealed himself in his only begotten Son. That's why the Gospel of John begins by saying, "In the beginning"—when God created the world—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God...and all things were made by him"—by the Word of God (John 1, verses 1 and 3). That means that even to Adam and Eve, it was in the Son that God revealed himself to them. It was in the Son that God drew near to them. It is the Son, John says, whose dwelling place is in the heart of his Father. And so, he knows the heart of his Father from the inside-out; and he has come forth in the fulness of time to make his Father known unto us.

Now, Adam and Eve, before they fell, they did not need the written Word of God. They were created with a perfect capacity to know God, and to behold in all of creation the glory of God's Son. But now that we have fallen, and have become spiritually ignorant, we can only know God by means of what he has revealed to us. And what a gift it is that God has given to fallen man his written Word—his Word in which he unveils himself to us; his written Word which ultimately is about the living Word; his written Word which is the record the Father has given us of his Son. And because of our darkened understanding, we would go utterly astray if we did not have the written Word of God. That's why we may never move outside of the boundaries of God's Word in our worship of him, because our understanding is darkened as a result of sin. And even God's redeemed people, we still have such limited capacity to understand the things of God. And since God is infinite in all of his attributes—infinite in glory, in power, in majesty, and wisdom; we, without his own revelation, would not truly know him. And that's why God commands us not ever to go beyond the boundaries of his Word. That's what the Puritans called "The Regulative Principle of Worship." What they simply meant by that simple expression is that God not only tells us to serve him alone, but he has regulated in his Word how we are to worship him. Because unless we abide by his Word, we will end up worshipping a God of our imagination rather than the God of revelation.

And so, when God says that he is a jealous God, that means, not of course, that's not sinful jealousy, but that means that God will not tolerate the dishonoring of his Son. He is jealous of the glory of his only begotten Son. He is jealous of the glory of him who is the living Word of God. And if we worship God according to our imagination rather than of revelation, we end up dishonoring the Son of God. He, as we read in those amazing opening verses of Hebrews chapter 1, "[He is] the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person" (verse 3). And in 2 Corinthians 4, verse 6, we read those amazing words that God has caused "the light to shine upon us" in the face of his only begotten Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so, what that means is this: there is only one legitimate image of God, and that is his Son. He is the only legitimate, he is the express image of his person. That's why we need to

know Christ. That's why we need to be students of the Scriptures, because, in proportion to our knowledge of Christ, so will be our understanding of God. So it is the Holy Spirit, who is the author of the Scriptures, the Spirit of Christ, it is the Spirit who sheds light upon God's Son, so that in the Son, we behold the glory of the Father. That's why Jesus said, when Philip asked him, "Show us the Father and it will suffice us." "Philip," he said, "if you have seen me, you have seen the Father. I am the revelation of the Father." And that's why proper biblical worship will always revolve around the Person of God's Son. Oh, we can say, reverently speaking, that God the Father is absolutely Son-centered. In God's eternal purposes, in his good pleasure, everything revolves around his only begotten Son. And that's why it has pleased the Father, as Paul writes to the Colossians, that he should have the preeminence (Colossians 1:18). Because when God's Son is honored, that's when God is honored and exalted to the highest. "This is my beloved Son," he says, "in whom I am well pleased" (Matthew 3:17). It's God's desire that we would be well pleased with his only begotten Son.

And that's why we, as preachers of the gospel, have such a sacred obligation to preach Christ. That's why it says of the apostles, when they had just been told they were forbidden to preach in that name, we read that they went forth and they ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus Christ (Acts 5:40–42). It is in the Son that God has revealed himself. And so, proper worship, worshipping God in spirit and truth, will always be Son-centered worship, Christ-centered worship. He must have the preeminence.

Boys and girls, let me tell you a little story that illustrates this, perhaps, in a way that you can understand. The story goes like this. There was a very, very wealthy man who had an enormous art collection. He was known far and wide about the extraordinary works of art that he had in his possession. Then the man died, and then there was going to be a public reading of his will, and it had been advertised that there would be an auction in which his vast art collection would be auctioned. And so, art collectors came from far and wide to this auction, anxious to purchase some of the extraordinary works of art that this man had. And to their surprise, the auctioneer held up as the first item to be sold, a portrait of this man's son. There was nothing really special about that portrait, but it was a portrait of this man's son. And the auctioneer said, "It is the express will of the deceased this item should be sold first." There was a sigh of disappointment. The art collectors had not come for that. And so, the auctioneer began, and there was only one person participating in this. It was one of the servants who had labored for years in that house, who knew the man and who knew his son. Nobody was interested in purchasing it except him. And finally, when the auctioneer said, "If there is no one else, then, it is sold." And he pointed to this servant, and he said, "Sir, the portrait is yours." But then, he added, "And now, I have to tell you, it was the will of this man that he who purchased the portrait of his son would receive the entire art collection." The crowd gasped. They had come for naught. You see this man, this servant understood how much that son meant to the father. And so the father had stipulated, "Whoever buys the portrait of my son gets the entire collection." And that's how much God's Son means to his Father. That's how jealous he is of the honor of his Son. And in his Word, he has given us a portrait of his only begotten Son—the Father's record of his Son.

Oh, the Lord Jesus Christ, God's Son, as it were—I've used this illustration before, but let me use it again—is like a prism. We would never know, when we look at this light even in this room, that this light is made up of seven distinct colors. In order for us to have those colors revealed to us, we need a prism. And when this light shines upon a prism, suddenly we see the seven beautiful colors of the rainbow. That's why we have a rainbow. The sun shines upon those droplets in the clouds who function like little prisms, and suddenly we see this majestic display, and suddenly we

realize that this light is made up of seven beautiful, distinct colors.

And so, the light of God, as it were, shines upon his Son, and in his Son, God unveils himself. In his Son, he unveils the glory of his being. In his Son, he unveils the beauty of all his attributes. And that's why the transgression of that Commandment is a matter that highly, highly offends God. As a matter of fact, you cannot offend the Father more than by dishonoring his Son. And when we don't take God's written Word seriously, when we do not strive, by grace, to order our worship according to that Word, we are dishonoring the living Word; we are dishonoring God's Son. That's why God says, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image"—"You may not use your imagination to worship me. You must worship me in harmony with revelation." If anything, you can remember—young people too—remember this: no imagination, but revelation must govern our worship of God. That's why we have to be such diligent students of the Word of God.

2. What it Forbids

And so, as we consider, secondly, what God prohibits in this Commandment, I want to highlight three things. First of all, he forbids us to represent him by physical images. Secondly, he forbids us to engage in what's called "will worship," and I will explain that. And thirdly, he forbids us to misrepresent him, and to misrepresent his character; in other words, to worship a caricature of who the real living God is.

First of all, *We may in no wise represent him by images*. That's why we read Exodus 32, because that's how Israel's sinned. Somehow they were still thinking they were worshipping the Lord. And we read it, Aaron said, "And we will tomorrow, we will worship the Lord by means of that golden calf." In a way, you can understand why they did. You have to understand, they were the people of God, but all they had ever known was Egypt. That's where they were born and raised. They were surrounded by idolatry. They had seen the golden calf as an object of worship. And so, they decided to use that to worship the living God. And so, they were guilty of what we read in Romans 1:23, "And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God unto an image made like"...unto "fourfooted beasts." That's what they did.

And so, if God had not powerfully intervened here, it would have reinforced the notion in the minds of Israel that their God who led them out of Egypt was like unto the Egyptian gods. If God had not brought great judgment here immediately upon the people of Israel, they would have thought of him in light of that golden calf, which was a horrendous misrepresentation of his character. And that's why God's judgment was so severe, for nearly 3,000 people perished, because this so supremely dishonored him.

That was Jeroboam's sin. Jeroboam, who for political reasons, decided to make golden calves in Dan and Bethel, because he did not want his people to journey to Jerusalem during the great feast days; fearful that, by traveling to Jerusalem, they would switch their loyalty from him to the one who reigned in Jerusalem. And so, he conveniently established an alternate way to worship the Lord, by means of the golden calves (1 Kings 12:26–33). And we know what tremendous consequences that had for the nation of Israel. It's not by accident that, from worshipping the golden calves, they ultimately worshipped Baal. Because, you see, by worshipping the golden calves, they were no longer worshipping the God of revelation; they now were worshipping a god of their imagination. And once we worship a god of our imagination, there is but a small step towards idolatry itself. And that's why we read in 1 Kings 12, verse 30, "And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan." And you know, when you read those books, how time and again it is mentioned, when subsequent kings would commit the same sins that Jeroboam had committed.

And congregation, there's nothing new under the sun. Because also in our age, there are many ways, even within professing Christianity, where we are resorting to man-made ideas, visible images, even of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, in the recent past there's been the famous "Passion" film.¹ That film is a blatant transgression of the Second Commandment, because it completely misrepresents the Person of Christ; it misrepresents the very nature and purpose of his suffering. It fails to focus on that the essence of his suffering was his being forsaken by his Father during the three hours of darkness. And so, it is a misrepresentation of the biblical record. And God does not want us to remember his Son by way of a movie. We know that throughout the world, they are using the so-called "Jesus" film,² as if that's the ultimate means of evangelism. Congregation, that's using a graven image to proclaim the gospel. That's why our forefathers, our forefathers, many of our forefathers have been opposed to depictions of Christ. Well, was he not a man? Of course he was a man. Did he not look like an ordinary Jewish man? Yes, he did; so much so that, if Judas had not kissed him, they would have arrested the wrong man. That's all very true. But we may never forget that, even as he walked upon earth in his genuine humanity, he was God manifest in the flesh. And that's why the Bible says nothing about his physical appearance, nothing. Anything that depicts him is purely conjecture and imagination. Because the focus of Scripture is not on his physical appearance. The focus of Scripture is on his identity as Emmanuel, God manifest in the flesh.

And so, the great sin in all of this the misrepresentation of who God is. It's a caricature of who he is. And that's why, congregation, God not only gave them Ten Commandments, but Moses brought with him, when he came down again, this elaborate form of worship. God spelled out in detail for these Israelites, who were an infant nation, like you do with children, he spelled out in a great and explicit detail how he was to be worshipped. And Hebrews 8 we read that God exhorts Moses and said, "Make sure that you do not deviate in any way from what I have revealed to you in the Mount. Make sure that you construct that Tabernacle exactly as I have specified it to you" (Hebrews 8:5). So God did not give Moses any artistic license to built that Tabernacle as he saw fit. It was not left to his imagination. No, God said, "Moses, you must adhere to my revelation. Every dimension, every component of that Tabernacle must be exactly in conformity to what I have revealed" (Exodus chapters 25–31 and 35–40). Why? Because that whole structure, that entire sacrificial system was a revelation of Christ; a revelation of him, of whom John says that in the fulness of time, "the Word was made flesh, and he dwelt among us" (John 1:14)—he tabernacled among us.

And so, that leads us to the second thing, namely, we are forbidden to engage in "will worship." What is will worship? And it's all closely connected. Will worship means that we worship God according to our will rather than his will. And let me simply give you a number of illustrations from Scriptures that highlight this.

First of all, it begins in Genesis chapter 4. That was Cain's sin. His sin was not that he sought to worship God, but he worshipped God according to his imagination, and he ignored what God had revealed. He was too proud to go to his brother and ask for a lamb. God had taught Adam and Eve before they left the garden that the only way that they could now worship him was on the basis of shed blood. And you see, Cain was offended by that. He just thought that what he produced in

¹ An American film released in 2004, titled, "The Passion of the Christ" which blasphemously and graphically depicts the final twelve hours in the life of Jesus Christ.

² An American film released in 1979, titled "Jesus" which blasphemously depicts the life of the Lord Jesus Christ according to the Gospel of Luke. Translated versions of this film have been used as part of an international evangelistic outreach.

his field, God should be satisfied with that. So he thought he could worship God apart from what God had revealed, namely, that he could only be worshipped on the basis of shed blood. And that's why God did not accept his sacrifice. That's how Abel knew, because we know throughout the Old Testament, God answered by fire. He did that when the Tabernacle was completed (Leviticus 9:24). He did it on Mount Carmel when Elijah built an altar, he answered by fire (1 Kings 18:38). That's how Abel knew that his sacrifice had been accepted and Cain's had not. Because Cain tried to worship God according to his imagination rather than revelation.

Then there was the sin of Nadab and Abihu, the two sons of Aaron. We read in Leviticus 10, verse 1 and 2, "And Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took either of them his censer, and put fire therein, and put incense thereon, and offered strange fire before the LORD, which"—listen carefully—"which he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD." And so, what did they do, boys and girls? You see, they were supposed to go to the altar of burnt offering and take coals of fire, and carry that inside of the sanctuary, and put it on the altar of incense. And they said, "Forget this. Why should we go to there? We can get fire from somewhere else"—fire that was not connected to the altar. And by doing that, they were worshipping God according to their imagination rather than revelation. And now the fire strikes them. The fire that struck the altar when the Tabernacle was inaugurated, the fire that struck the altar when Elijah made an altar unto the Lord rather than striking at sinful people. That fire now struck them. That may seem like a severe judgment. But congregation, that's because we are so ignorant about God. We're so ignorant about his holiness. This tells us how deeply offended God is when we ignore his revelation.

That's why God's judgment upon Uzzah was so severe. When he tried to keep the ark from falling, we were thinking he was doing a noble thing (2 Samuel 6:3–7). And so, when it appeared that the ark would fall off the cart, he reached out and he died. Because God had forbidden that the ark, which symbolized his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, would be carried on a vehicle. It was only to be carried by God's appointed priests. And by not doing that, even though David had very good intentions, but David should have gone to the priests, and Uzzah would have known this. And so, David should have examined God's revelation, instead of transporting the ark according to his imagination. And as R. C. Sproul³ pointed out, the greatest threat was not that the ark would fall into the dirt, but that the ark was touched by the hand of a sinful man. And God's judgment was immediate.

Then there's King Uzziah, who reigned for a long time, and who, then, in a moment of pride, thought that he could enter into the Temple. And it says, when we read in 2 Chronicles 26:18, "And they"—the priests—"withstood Uzziah the king, and said unto him, It appertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto the LORD, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed." So here's King Uzziah, again. We have reason to believe that throughout his whole reign, he, in a way, was a God-fearing king. But here, he made the crucial error, that he thought he could use his imagination, and he disobeyed God's revelation. And the priests, they knew it, and they warned him, and they said, "Uzziah, you may not come here." And you know what happened, he was stricken with leprosy for the remainder of his days.

Now, congregation, we have to examine our own hearts, because I think we transgress this

³ R. C. Sproul, or Robert Charles Sproul (1939–2017) was an American Reformed theologian, Christian apologist, and ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church in America, a staunch defender of Protestantism, he was founder and chairman of Ligonier Ministries, and could be heard daily on *Renewing Your Mind* a radio broadcast in the United States and Internationally.

Commandment far more often than we know. We have to ask ourselves, are there ways in which we conduct ourselves; are there ways in which we worship in which we are bypassing God's revelation. In Matthew 15, verse 9, Christ rebukes the Pharisees, he says, "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." How many are there now in North America today who are worshipping God according to their imaginations? There are those who say, "Well, you don't have to go to church to worship God. I just like to nature. I like to go to the mountains. That's where I worship God." That's a wonderful thing to do, but not on the Lord's Day. On the Lord's Day, we are called to gather with the people of God, not to forsake the assembly of ourselves (Hebrews 10:25). There are many who say today, "Why in the world should we have to worship twice on the Lord's Day? If I go once, the rest of the day is mine." That's will worship. I realize there's no specific chapter and verse that says, "Thou shalt have morning and evening services," but we don't need it, because that's the pattern God established in Paradise when he met with Adam and Eve morning and evening, in the cool of the day, and perpetuated that pattern by way of the morning and evening sacrifice, thereby teaching us and them that worship of God should be the bookends of our day. Our day should begin with worship and it should end with worship. And that's certainly true for the Lord's Day. Oh, this is something that we need to take seriously.

And, as one commentator points out, if you sit under the preaching of God's Word, and you do not repent and flee to Christ, you are also ignoring the God of revelation. You are treating him as if he were ignorant. You are treating him as if it didn't matter. Because, my friend, if you take the witness of God's Word seriously, then you should know that as long as you continue in sin, you will perish, unless you flee to Christ and put your trust in him.

So, we are forbidden to worship Him by images; we are forbidden to engage in will worship. But also to misrepresent him—and really, I've been weaving that through already—to misrepresent God and his character, to end up with a caricature of who God is. So there are those who exclusively focus on the love of God, and ignore his holiness, and ignore his justice. That's a caricature of God. Then there are others who only focus on his justice and his wrath, and ignore the love of God. That's also a caricature. I remember my first wife telling me, "I grew up thinking that God was a tyrant waiting at the door to club me over the head if I didn't do his will." What an awful caricature. What an awful misunderstanding of the character of God. That's why we need to look at the complete record of Scripture.

So, when God reveals himself to Moses, in Exodus chapter 34, after Moses had said, "Lord, oh, it is my desire to know thee. Show me thy glory." And God says, "I will show you my glory." And then God opens up his heart, and he reveals himself verbally. That's also remarkable. There was not this majestic visual display. No, God pronounced his name. He revealed himself by means of words. And what does he say about himself? "Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty" (Exodus 34, verse 7). So on the one hand, he speaks of his gracious attributes. But he says, let there be no misunderstanding, that does not mean that I make light of sin. And the only way you can bring that together, of course, is through the cross, is through the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Congregation, we also misrepresent God, when we, who profess to know him, when we misbehave ourselves; when our conduct does not align with the Word of God. Because whether we realize it or not, people are watching us; our children are watching us. And if our walk contradicts the Word of God, then we are guilty of misrepresenting him by our faulty profession. Paul speaks of this in Titus 1, verse 16, he says, "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate." May God forbid that you and I deny him by our works; that our walk contradicts what we profess.

3. Its Importance

That's why, in the Second Commandment, God warns, and says, If you do this, I will visit "the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." And so, what that emphasizes—and I will unpack this when I come back, in more detail—but that shows you that the proper teaching about God begins at home. That shows us what a responsibility we have as fathers, to make sure our children know the God of the Scriptures, that we teach them, the Word of God, so that our children will have a correct view of God that is consistent with his Word. And God is saying, when fathers fail to do this, when they fail to fulfill their sacred obligation to be the prophets in their home, it will have generational consequences. Because we know from Psalm 78, that our instruction of our children has to be so faithful, so consistent with the Word of God, that what we teach our children will reach our great-grandchildren.

And God is saying, "If you fail to teach your children how I am to be worshipped, if you fail to teach them my Word, my covenant curse will rest upon your seed, to the third and fourth generation." And congregation, this happens all the time. Why is it that our nation is in such serious moral decline? And we kind of live in a bubble; it's far more serious than we realize. A nation, where a hundred years ago, ninety percent of the population still regularly worshipped God on Sunday. Why is it? Is it because of this? Because during that century so many fathers have not been faithful to the Word of God; so many churches have begun to worship God according to their imaginations, to try to make it attractive, to bring in worldly components in worship, to corrupt worship. And now we see the wretched consequences that more than fifty percent of the United States population no longer attends church regularly. That didn't happen overnight. That's God's covenant curse, to the third and to the fourth generation.

I saw it in my own family. As you know, my grandfather did not serve the Lord until my dad was seventeen, and they finally brought his family of nine children to church. And yet, what he did for those first seventy years of his life had consequences. Of the nine, I believe that four of them are in glory. But of other of my dad's siblings, I have cousins that are absolutely nothing, nothing—ignorant of God, living entirely in the world, some with open atheists—third and fourth generation. But God's mercy—that's also beautiful here, where it says, "But showing mercy unto thousands of them"—what does the "them" mean? That's generations. In other words, God's curse is to four generations, but his mercy is to a thousand generations.

Congregation, I've lived long enough to witness that as well, where I see God's covenant faithfulness in families from generation to generation. Oh, how great is the mercy of God. And therefore, how seriously we have to take the training of our children. That's why, in our busy lives, there must be time for family worship. There must be time for proper instruction, and we cannot simply leave it to our schools. It's a blessing that we have our schools, but we are the primary responsible parties for the instruction of our children, to teach them how to worship God.

Congregation, that's why, and that's something I can no longer address tonight, that's why the last Question of Lord's Day 35 is so important, where it says, *We must not pretend to be wiser than God, who will have His people taught, not by dumb images, but by the lively preaching of His Word.* When I return, Lord willing, I will devote an entire sermon to that Question and Answer.

But let us now examine our hearts, and return home to search our hearts before God. "Lord, when it comes to this Commandment, is there a wicked way within me? Is there any way in which my worship does not align with thy Word? Is there any way I might be guilty of misrepresenting to me, to my family, to the people with whom I work?" Congregation, that would be our daily prayer, "Lord, make me to go in the way of thy commandments. Enable me in my walk, in my worship, to be true and faithful to thy Word." For that's what God commands in this Commandment. We

are to worship him in no other way than he has commanded us in his Word. That's why Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, "My Father seeks such worshippers who worship Him in Spirit and in truth." Amen.

Let's pray.

Our faithful God, we thank thee so much for this day, and for the privilege of having been in thy house. Bless also this very vitally important instruction. O God, keep us from that sin, the sin of transgressing the Second Commandment by worshipping thee according to our imagination rather than revelation. And Lord, we know that Satan still tries to distort that record in our own hearts, time and again, misrepresenting thee. We are so prone, like Adam and Eve, to believe his lie. And so, may we be a people of the Word, devoted to that Word, abiding in that Word. And especially remember us a fathers. We are singled out in the Second Commandment. O God, give us the grace and the commitment to faithfully instruct our children, to teach them the Word of God, to teach them about the Person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, remember us as we go from here; bring us home safely. Go with us this coming week. Lord, give travelling mercies to my wife and myself, and we pray for those brothers who will be proclaiming thy Word in our absence. And we do pray that at the end of this month, we may meet one another again in health. Forgive our sins of this day and hour, and hear us only for Christ's sake. Amen.