

VIDEO SERMON SERIES

Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

Sermon #45, Lord's Day 35, part 2

The Preaching of God's Word, and Graven Images



The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

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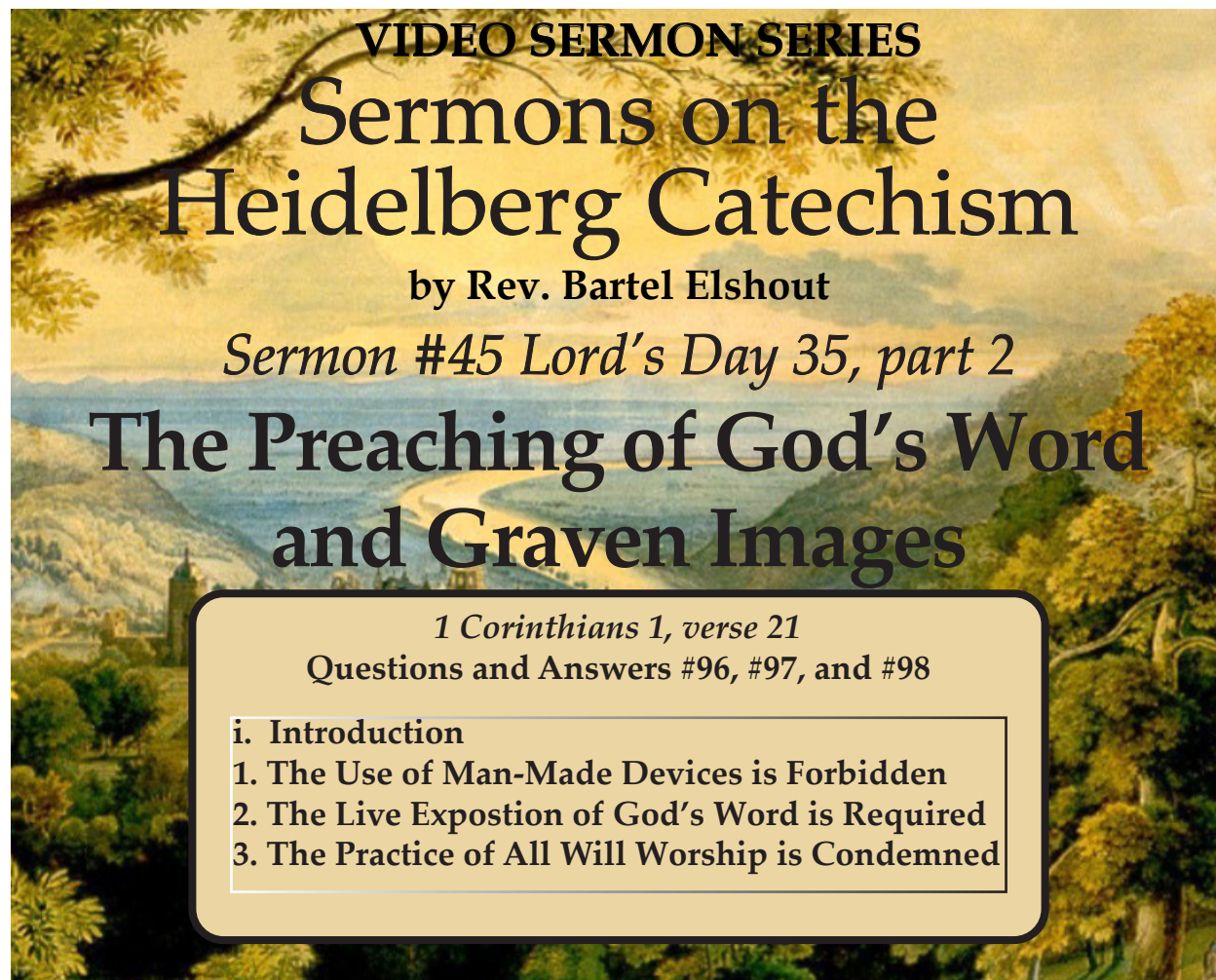
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Sermon #45 Lord's Day 35, part 2

The Preaching of God's Word and Graven Images

1 Corinthians 1, verse 21

Questions and Answers #96, #97, and #98

i. Introduction

- 1. The Use of Man-Made Devices is Forbidden**
- 2. The Live Exposition of God's Word is Required**
- 3. The Practice of All Will Worship is Condemned**

Introduction

Congregation, please open your Bibles to Leviticus 9, verses 22 through 24, and the opening two verses of chapter 10. Because here, we have another example of Scripture how highly displeased God is with will worship, worshipping God according to our will rather than his will. So, we read in verse 22—this is the chapter that records for us the official inauguration of the Tabernacle, if you will—and we read in verse 22, “And Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them”—that Aaronic blessing that we read of at the end of Numbers chapter 6. “And Aaron lifted up his hand toward the people, and blessed them, and came down from offering of the sin offering, and the burnt offering, and peace offerings. And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of the congregation, and came out, and blessed the people: and the glory of the LORD appeared unto all the people. And there came a fire out from before the LORD, and consumed upon the altar the burnt offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces.” This was an extraordinary moment, a moment that profoundly impressed the people, a moment of great joy, a moment when they witnessed the Lord's stamp of approval upon this new structure that had been built, and his stamp of approval on that sacrifice, that burnt offering that was laid upon that altar. That fire that should have consumed a sinful people, but instead, it consumed the sacrifice. And therefore, God could be gracious to Israel, and he could dwell in their midst.

And then we read, in chapter 10, “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 he commanded them not. And there went out fire from the LORD, and devoured them, and they died before the LORD.” So boys and girls, perhaps you have wondered, was this necessary? Did God have to strike these two men? Could he not have somehow rebuked them instead of killing them with fire, the same fire that consumed the burnt offering? But congregation, what this story illustrates is how greatly God is offended when we worship him according to our imagination rather than according to divine revelation. God had clearly revealed to Aaron and his sons that the only fire that was legitimate was the fire that came from God’s appointed altar. And these two sons of Aaron, they ignored that precept. And they thought that they could bring their own fire into the sanctuary. And God immediately responded and destroyed them. Because the people of Israel had to learn a very important lesson—the people of Israel, who grew up in Egypt; the people of Israel, of whom we read that in their foolishness, they made a golden calf; the people of Israel, who had to learn who this God really was, this God who had led them out of Egypt. They had to learn that the only way we can worship God is according to his revealed will. And that’s what the Second Commandment is all about. So this, too, was not a transgression of the First Commandment—the First Commandment, which tells us whom we are to worship—but it was a transgression of the Second Commandment, which tells us how we are to worship God.

And so, let’s turn to Exodus 20, and let’s read the Second Commandment, and then we will turn to our Heidelberg Catechism. Exodus 20, verses 4, and 5, and 6, which gives us the Second Commandment. And there, we read:

“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”—and the “them” here means “thousands of generations”—“that love me and keep my commandments.”

Again, you will have noticed that this Commandment is far more elaborate than the First Commandment. And that was necessary. And so, God made is crystal clear in that Second Commandment how he wants to be worshipped. He makes it very clear that in no way were they allowed to represent him in a way that came forth out of their own way of thinking. And in the Second Commandment, God is saying, “You may only worship me in harmony with my way of thinking.”

So let’s turn again to the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 35, which gives us the Catechism’s exposition of that Second Commandment.

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 than He has commanded in His Word.*

There, you have it.

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

Of course, that Question was also written in light of the fact that they had just come out of Roman Catholicism, where images were very common, and still are today.

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.*

And then we come to Question #98, on which we will focus tonight: *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, or live—preaching of His Word.*

So, we're going to consider tonight preaching, *The Preaching of God's Word, and Graven Images*. Three things—first of all, that *The Use of Man-Made Devices is Forbidden*. Secondly, that *The Live Exposition of God's Word is Required*; and thirdly, that *The Practice of All Will Worship is Condemned*, because *we must not pretend to be wiser than God*. So, *The Use of Man-Made Devices is Forbidden*—that relates to the Question, *But may not images be tolerated in the churches as books to the laity?*—as helps for the laity to worship God. And the Answer is an emphatic “No.” So, *The Use of Man-Made Devices is Forbidden*; and secondly, *The Live Exposition of God's Word is Required*, because *God will have his people taught, not by dumb—or lifeless—images, but by the lively preaching of His Word*. And thirdly, *The Practice of All Will Worship*—all worship according to our will, according to our thinking—*is Condemned*.

1. The Use of Man-Made Devices is Forbidden

Congregation, I can hardly emphasize enough how important the Second Commandment is for God's church. We can truly say that the wellbeing of God's church depends on how well we honor the Second Commandment. In other words, the wellbeing of the church depends on how we worship God. The wellbeing of the church—God's favor upon his church, and upon the ministry of his church—is very much connected to the manner in which we worship him. And that's why we need to take this very, very seriously. That's why, as a church, as a congregation, we are to continually examine all of our practices. We are to continually examine the manner in which we come together for public worship, to ascertain whether our worship is in conformity to the revealed will of God.

And why is it, congregation, why is it that God forbids all human imagination when it comes to his worship? It is because, congregation, we will end up worshipping a god of our imagination, rather than the God of revelation. Precisely because God is who he is—infinite in greatness, infinite in majesty, infinite in glory—is that God cannot leave it to us, his creatures, to determine how we are to worship him. And so, what God has stipulated in his Word, about the worship of his name, is consistent with his being. That's why we need to take this so seriously, as a congregation, and also individually, and as families. Because if, in our worship, we deviate, even in the smallest detail, and thereby go contrary to the Word of God, we are worshipping a god of our imagination, rather than the God of revelation.

And that's why, of course, this Second Commandment is closely linked to the First Commandment. Because when will worship begins to flourish in the church, it is but one step towards wholesale idolatry. And we see that, of course, in the history of the nation of Israel. When King Jeroboam wanted to prevent his people going to Jerusalem on a regular basis, he came up with an alternate religion. He came with an alternate way of worship, and he established the golden calves (1 Kings 12:26–33). And what a great judgment came upon him and came upon the people of Israel because of that sin. And you read the books of the Kings and Chronicles, and you read the history of the kings, especially the history of the ten tribes, you will notice how that it is repeated over, and over again, that the kings who followed Jeroboam, that they were under divine judgment, because they continued in that sin of Jeroboam.

And that's why I purposely read the Second Commandment once again in your hearing. I already briefly referred to it in the morning hour. That's why God attaches such a serious warning to that Commandment. That's why he said, “I will visit the iniquity of the fathers...to the third

and fourth generation.” And that doesn’t only apply to the fathers of our nuclear families, but that applies to us, we who are the church fathers. What a responsibility we have, as the overseers of this flock, to make sure that we function according to God’s revealed will; and that we are not worshipping a god of our imagination. “I will visit the iniquity”—the failure of the fathers—“to the third and fourth generation.” So displeased God is, when we misrepresent him, when we distort his worship. Because I’m quite certain that the Israelites who danced around the golden calf, it wasn’t that they, at least in their own minds, had rejected the God who had just brought them through the Red Sea. But because of their ignorance, and because of their background, having been raised in Egypt, they simply resorted to something that made sense to them. And we read the chapter (Exodus chapter 32), the consequences were accordingly.

The Lord said—we read it together—“I the LORD thy God am a jealous God.” What does it mean? And of course, boys and girls, we’re not talking about sinful jealousy. But that means that God is saying, “I am jealous of my name. I will guard the honor and integrity of my name.” And now, let’s go a step further. Because, ultimately, as a pointed out a few weeks ago, the Second Commandment is about God’s Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Because he alone is the only legitimate image of God. He alone is the brightness of God’s glory, and the express image of God’s Person (Hebrews 1:3). So, what really Second Commandment is all about is that we must worship God as he has revealed himself in his Son. Any worship other than that, any worship that does not honor his Son is an abomination in the sight of God. God jealously guards the honor of his only begotten Son. “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17). And that’s why this transgression, as we pointed out this morning already, this transgression has generational consequences. That’s how serious it is. Oh, we need to understand, and I try to teach you this as often as I can—the Father loves his Son. And we may say with reverence that the Father is eternally preoccupied with his only begotten Son. Everything he does revolves around his Son. In all that he does, he aims for the glory of his Son. And therefore, any worship that does not honor his Son is an abomination in his sight. And that’s why the Catechism says *we must not pretend to be wiser than God*, and to have his people taught by other means than those means which God has ordained.

And so, a very common transgression of this Commandment, also in our day, is the use of man-made devices in worship. We see that tendency also here in North America, this hankering to innovate, this hankering to make the worship services more exciting, to make them more attractive to the people, as if we come to church to be entertained. And what a serious error that is! Because, you see, what happens, when we corrupt biblical worship, when we begin to substitute biblical mandates with human ideas, with human notions, ultimately, we end up with a corrupt church. And ultimately, a corrupt church will become an apostate church. And so, the devil is so very clever. The devil is always out to attack the church of Jesus Christ, not only from the outside by way of brutal persecution, but also from within. And the devil knows that if somehow he can manage to corrupt worship, somehow to bring human elements, human thinking into the worship of God, that it’s only a matter of time before that church will begin to drift away from the Word of God.

And so, a common trend today is that “worship activity” replaces the preaching of God’s Word. And so, what’s very common today is that the service consists almost entirely of worship activities, and a very, very small segment of the service is devoted to the preaching of the Word, if you can call it that. And congregation, what a serious error that is! Because the whole thrust of a worship service, such as ours today, is that our worship must be informed by the Word that we hear. Our worship must be fueled by the Word of God. And so, how can we gather for worship unless the Word of God has the preeminence. And so, a worship service is a service in which we respond to God’s revelation by worshipping him. But it has to be a service in which the Word of God has the

preeminence.

And so, it's one of Satan's Trojan horses, is to come up with what's called "user friendly" or "contemporary worship." Congregation, there's no such thing as user friendly worship. There's no such thing as contemporary worship. There's only one kind of worship—that's biblical worship; that is worship that conforms to God's revealed will; a worship in which his Word has the preeminence; a worship that is consistent with the character of God; a worship that is consistent with what he has revealed of himself in his Word. And that's what we have to jealously guard, that we do not ever move beyond the boundaries of his Word, this foolish notion that we can somehow make our worship attractive to the world. No, congregation, the truth is very simple. Biblical worship, in all of its simplicity, worship in which the Word of God has the preeminence will never be attractive to the ungodly. The world in which we live is hostile to the biblical gospel. The biblical gospel is an offense to the natural man.

And so, when churches become result-oriented, rather than message-oriented, they will begin to come up with innovative ways of worshipping, innovative ways of trying to make the worship service attractive. No, congregation, it's the simple preaching of the Word which God will bless for the salvation of sinners. That's why, when you read the book of Acts attentively, you will notice there are two words that are very dominant in the book of Acts, and that's "teaching" and "preaching." That's what we read in Acts 5, verse 42—very simply, very simply it sets before us what the ministry of the apostles was all about. And it says, "They ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ." That's it—teaching and preaching.

That's why, in the Old Testament, God made it very, very clear to Moses and to Aaron, that they were not to deviate in any way from what he had revealed to them. Let me just read a few passages to you. Exodus 25, verse 40: "And look that thou make them after their pattern, which was shewed thee in the mount." And so, God said to Moses, "You are to build that structure, you are to build that Tabernacle, you are to implement that whole sacrificial system exactly as I have shown you in the minutest detail." You can't help but notice, when you read the Book of Leviticus especially that it's remarkable the detail that God gave to Moses. That's why the Book of Leviticus is a very special book. The Book of Leviticus is the gospel of the Pentateuch, of those five books of Moses. There's not a single book in the entire Bible where we read so often, "And the Lord said," "And the Lord spoke." And so, God revealed, in exquisite detail, how he was to be worshipped, and told Moses not to deviate from it.

Stephen, when he stood before the Sanhedrin, in Acts 7, he spoke of that as well. He said, "Our fathers had the tabernacle...in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen" (verse 44). In Hebrews 8, verse 5, we read, "Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount." So God did not leave it to Moses' imagination. God did not leave it to the imagination of Aholiab and Bezaleel, men who were endowed with the Holy Spirit to do exactly what God told them to do (Exodus 36:1). Because, congregation, the Tabernacle, as we know, is this amazing depiction of the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every detail of that structure, every measurement, every piece of material, all of it speaks of Christ.

And so, if Moses would have deviated from what God had revealed to him in the Mount, he would have dishonored God's Son. He would have been guilty of misrepresenting the character of the Son of God. That's why God forbade him to deviate in any way. And that's why the judgment upon Nadab and Abihu was so swift and was so severe. The people needed to understand who this God was that delivered them from Egypt; who he was in his holiness, in his majesty. They

needed to understand that God's character is such that we cannot compromise the way we worship him. That's why, congregation, we, too, personally, have to always examine ourselves that we are worshipping God in conformity to his Word. Also, when it comes to our worship, we need to pray the prayer of David, Lord, search me, search my heart "and see if there by any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting" (Psalm 139:23–24). And so, *The Use of Man-Made Devices is Forbidden*.

2. The Live Exposition of God's Word is Required

God will have his people taught, not by dumb images—lifeless images—but by the lively preaching of His Word. So, congregation, what the Catechism is capturing here is how exceedingly important preaching is in God's purposes, in God's plan; what a central role, the preaching of the Word has in the manner in which we worship God. And that means, congregation, and I'm well aware of it, that I have an enormous responsibility, an enormous responsibility as I proclaim God's Word to you; an enormous responsibility to make sure that what I am communicating to you is not my idea, not my notion, not my way of thinking; that I communicate to you the Word of God. Preaching is, without a doubt, the primary means of grace. Let me just give you a sampling from the New Testament.

In Romans 10, verse 15, we read the well-known words, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" First Corinthians 1:21, we read that portion together: "It pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe." Why does Paul use the word "foolishness" here? Well, to our sophisticated culture today, our culture, with all of its devices, all of its gimmicks, all of its marketing tools, it seems foolishness to just preach, to just preach the Word of God. It seems foolishness, when we read in Ezekiel that God called his servant to preach to a valley of dead bones. And yet, Ezekiel obeyed, and when he obeyed, and when he preached to dead bones, God blew upon those dead bones, and they came to life (Ezekiel 37:1–10). And so, in our sophisticated culture, it seems foolishness that we have a worship service that is so very simple; a worship service that revolves around the preaching of the Word of God. And yet, it pleased God, and it pleases him today, "by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

Titus 1, verse 3, "But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour." And why is it that preaching is the primary means of grace? Let me put it simply this way, congregation. Because what preaching means, faithful preaching of the Word of God, is that when we preach about a certain passage, that sermon, that exposition of the Word of God, becomes a window through which we see all of Scripture. All Scripture comes together in the exposition of that text and of that passage. That's why, we who are called to preach have to be so diligent in our study, and to make sure that what we're going to say is consistent with the entire Word of God. One of the most fundamental rules of biblical hermeneutics means, that is, the means whereby we explain the Bible, is that the Bible explains itself; that the Bible is the context of every individual passage. And so, our calling is, when we focus on a specific passage or a specific chapter, that our exposition can in no way contradict the Word of God. It must be consistent with the Word of God. And so, in faithful preaching—let me say it again—it becomes a window through which we see the entire Word of God.

It's always encouraged me over the years when people would respond to me, and would say, "Pastor, while you were preaching, this passage came to mind," a passage that I had not necessarily quoted. And when I was a young pastor, I felt guilty, and I thought I had failed somehow, but I

learned later that when I am preaching, I cannot possibly quote every single text. But when you are hearing me expound the Word of God, and God's Word comes to mind, that means that, by the grace of God, I am succeeding in some measure to allow you to see the whole Word of God through the window of that text. Preaching—the primary means of grace.

It's also important that preaching is aimed at the soul. That's why we don't use visual aids. Preaching is verbal communication of the Word of God. And God has so ordained it. And why? Because God himself is a verbal communicator, because God is a Spirit. And those that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth. And because God is a Spirit, he does not reveal himself by visual means. As I've pointed out to you several times, that's what is so striking about Exodus 34. When Moses is called up on the mountain, and when God promised him, "Moses, I'm going to show you my glory." And God revealed that glory, not visually, but verbally. And he proclaimed his name (Exodus 34:6–7). That's how God is. God is a verbal communicator. That's why we have a written Word of God. We don't have a picture book. That's why God does not want his people to be taught by dumb lifeless images.

That's why I find it grievous that there are many in this world who think that, in order to be successful in evangelism, you have to show people the "Jesus"¹ film, or you have to show them "The Passion".² God will not have his people taught by dumb images. That's not the means. God does not want us to think of Jesus in terms of a film. He doesn't want us to think of the suffering of his Son in terms of a film. He wants us to think of his Son in terms of his Word, because God is a verbal communicator. And that means, of course, that the preaching of that Word must necessarily always be Christ centered, Son centered.

As often as I can, I remind you of that significant relationship between Christ and the Word. Because Christ is the living Word of God. That's how the Gospel of John begins. Christ is the revelation of the Father. Christ is the one in whom the Father reveals himself. Christ is the one through whom the Father speaks to us. Christ is the one in whom we behold God's glory in his countenance. Christ is the one in whom the Father opens his heart to sinners. And that's why the written Word—as I've often said here—the written Word of God is about the living Word. And we can only properly understand that written Word, and interpret that written Word, when we use the key of the living Word. And so, when we read the written Word, our prayer should always be that God would open our eyes, that he would use the written Word to lead us to the living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so, preaching the Word means preaching The Word, with capital letters, the Lord Jesus Christ.

"They ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ" (Acts 5:42). For the apostles, that was the very essence of their ministry. That's why Paul writes, in 1 Corinthians 2, verse 2, "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." He must have the preeminence. He must be the one to whom all of our preaching directs you. That's why, when he met those men of Emmaus, what does he do? What does the living Word do when he joins them? He opens his written Word, and he shows them in all of the Scriptures how they all testify of him (Luke 24:13–32). And I think that's the reason why, when they recognized him, the moment they recognized him, he vanished. And I suggest to you that he vanished, because he did not want those men to remember him by his visual appearance. He wanted these men to think of

¹ 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.

² 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.

him in terms of his Word—the Word that he had opened for them, the Word that he had expounded to them, he had shown them in all of the Scriptures how they all testified of him.

That’s why, actually, the expression, “Christ-centered preaching” is an unnecessary description of preaching. Because preaching that is not Christ centered is not preaching. Preaching is preaching Christ. We, as the servants of God, we are called to do what the apostles did. We may not, and we must not cease to teach and preach Jesus Christ. We are only preaching the Word, if we are preaching The Word, with capital letters. And so, preaching has to focus on the only legitimate image of God, namely, his only begotten Son.

Open your Bibles please to Hebrews 1, an extraordinarily important passage, the first three verses. And there, we read, “God, who at sundry times”—at various periods—“and in divers manners”—in various ways—“spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,”—and now, listen carefully—“hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person” (Hebrews 1:1–3). That’s why I said that Christ, God’s Son, is the only legitimate image of God, the only legitimate revelation of God. That’s why God forbids us, in the Second Commandment, to use any other means, any other image, forbids the use of it all. It’s because the Father loves the Son, he’s so offended when we misrepresent his Son; so offended when we distort the witness of Scripture. It all must focus on the person and the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. And that’s why every component of our worship services must revolve around the preaching of the Word.

That’s why our worship services are simple. And so, the Psalms that we sing, the Psalms that I seek to select, are all related to the message that is about to be brought. The Scripture passage we read is to set the tone for the worship service. We read the law of God as a foundation of all biblical truth. We call upon God’s name, but the central event of the worship service is the Word of God.

Because, congregation, when we come here on Sunday, we do not come here with the question, “What’s in it for me?” but, “What’s in it for God?” We come here to worship. We come here to hear what God has to say. We come to this place, because it pleases God to meet us here through the ministry of his Word. Our obligation is to recognize that. Our obligation is to worship this God who is pleased to speak to us; this God who is pleased to reveal himself to us by means of his precious Word. And so, biblical worship is man’s response to God’s revelation of himself in his Word, in his Word, in capital letters. That’s why, in Exodus 34, what do we read? After God so marvelously revealed himself, after he opened his heart to Moses, it says that “Moses made haste, and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshipped” (verse 8).

Congregation, do you worship? Is this a day of worship for you? Do you go home and worship the God who has been pleased to speak to you through the preaching of his precious Word? That should be our response. And that’s, by the way, why we sing the Psalms. Not because we are suggesting that there are not some nice hymns, but we sing the Psalms because, you see there again, God gave us a book of worship in the Psalms. And those Psalms are inspired. Those Psalms are consistent with whom he is. And the history of the church has proven that, when hymnody gains the upper hand in the church, then it always opens the door towards deviation, towards error. Many hymns are wonderful and are consistent with the Word of God, but this whole concept of worshipping God, not according to our wisdom, or to our imagination, is expressed in that position as well. And we receive the Book of Psalms. And Christ said, “They all testify of me.” And so, we have to pray when we sing the Psalms, when we read them, “Lord, open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things in thy law” (Psalm 119:18). “Open my eyes that in these Psalms, I may see the beauty and the preciousness of Christ.” Because Christ said, “The Psalms are about me”

(Luke 24:44).

And so therefore, we should never ever substitute the live preaching of God's Word by a so-called media-produced event, a multi-media event. That's happening in many evangelical churches today, where the pastor will use a power-point presentation and will show video clips as part of his message. There's nothing wrong with doing that in another setting, but not here—here, in the house of God, we should not have a media, a multi-media presentation. In this place, only one thing belongs, and that is the live preaching of the Word of God. God will not have his people taught any other way except by the lively preaching of his Word. That's why the words of John 4 are so significant, when Christ speaks to the woman by the well in Samaria, "The true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23). That means our worship is to be spiritual, and it is to be in harmony with truth. "For," he says, "the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth" (verses 24, 25).

3. The Practice of All Will Worship is Condemned

And so, let me conclude here. It should be obvious by now why will worship is so offensive to God; why Uzzah died when he touched the ark when he thought it would fall to the ground. People say, "Isn't that extreme?" He was violating God's revealed will about that ark, which represented his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And the worst thing that happened to that ark was not that it would have touched the earth, but that the hand of an unclean sinner touched the ark of God, and God's judgment was swift. That's how he despises will worship.

In Isaiah 29, verse 13, we read, "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me,"—and then, listen to what he says—"and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men"—human ideas; human imagination, rather than my precepts. And so, when we worship God according to man's wisdom, it will be a misrepresentation of God, it will ultimately lead to idolatry. Will worship led to idolatry in the ten tribes. And most of all, it supremely dishonors the Son, the living Word.

Isaiah 1, verse 13, God was so offended by how they had distorted worship, he says, "Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity even the solemn meeting." In Psalm 50, God accused Israel of their phony, hypocritical worship. He said, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself"—you've brought me down to your level—"but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes." And in Deuteronomy 4, verse 15, God addresses this as well. He says, "Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves"—and listen to what he says here—you may want to look that up at home—"For ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire"—you did not see a visible revelation of God; you did not see any similitude—"lest," he says, Moses, "lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image." This is what they did. So, may God give us the grace to remain true to him, to his Son, and to his Word.

Also, regarding our worship, the watchword of the Reformers should govern everything we do: SOLA SCRIPTURA—Scripture, Scripture alone. The psalmist prayed in Psalm 119, verse 133, "Order my steps in thy word." That should be our prayer. That should be your prayer for me, because I have an enormously responsible position, called to preach the Word of God. Pray for me—and I know you do—that God will guide me by his Spirit that when I stand here, that through the window of that sermon, you see the entire Word of God.

And so, our obligation is to worship God according to his revealed will. Psalm 29, verse 2,

“Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.” And so, that’s why we call this day “The Day of Worship.” That’s why Sunday is the Son’s day. It is the day in which Christ, the living Word, has the preeminence through the preaching of his Word. So let us examine ourselves, individually, as families. Are we biblical worshippers of the living God? *For 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.* Amen.

Let’s pray.

Our gracious God, we give thee thanks for the privilege we’ve had today to be in this house of prayer. And Lord, as thy servant, we have attempted to speak on thy behalf, we have attempted to open the Scriptures for our beloved congregation entrusted to our care. And Lord, we pray that the proclamation of thy Word, that the proclamation of Christ may bear fruit in our hearts and lives; that also, as parents, as we’ve been exhorted this morning to be diligent in the teaching of our children. Lord, may our teaching also at home have one focus, and one objective, and that is to show our children who this living Word of God is, to show them the Christ of the Scriptures, whom to know is life eternal. And we pray, therefore, that by grace, oh, that we may know this Christ not only outwardly, but that we may know him personally, that we may know him experientially, that this Christ, the Christ of the Word of God, also for us, has become the one and only name given under heaven whereby we must and can be saved. Dismiss us with thy blessing. Bless our study tonight with our young people, as we continue to study the book of James. May this be profitable for them as well. Go with us into this new week. Bless us in our daily calling. And we pray for fathers and mothers as they seek to care for their children. Keep us from harm and danger, and grant us the privilege of gathering here again on thy Day. We ask it alone in Christ’s name. Amen.