

# END-TIMES ISSUES



**#56** Commandment #2 – Images in the church.

1

## THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

"You shall not make for yourself an **image** in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall **not bow down to them or worship them**; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who **hate** me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments."

Exodus 20:4-6 (NIV); also Deuteronomy 5:8-10.

### OVERVIEW

- Images that are in any way connected to worship are *totally* forbidden. They are an expression of *hatred* toward God.
- This command represents all our obligations related to images (whether physical or mental), as they pertain to God and worship.

2

### COMMANDMENT #2 – SO FAR, WE'VE SEEN...

- ⇒ Making images of the *uncreated* God is strictly forbidden.
  - God *cannot* be visibly portrayed in *any* way. It's simply not possible, without *distorting* who he is.
- ⇒ Making images of *created* objects is not forbidden.
  - They can be used for teaching or as reminders. But they cannot be used for the purpose of *worship*, or for *serving God* through them.
- ⇒ Using images in the church, as a substitute for teaching the message of Scripture is also forbidden.
  - ("Images" can include pictures, statues, stained-glass windows, video productions, and any other means of symbolically representing something in Scripture.)
  - The problem is when "substitution" occurs; for God *commands* that Scripture *must* be taught. Images, if used, CANNOT be a *substitute* for teaching God's Word.

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### ISSUES THAT STILL NEED CONSIDERED.

- ⇒ What about physical images of *Jesus* (pictures, statues, videos, etc.)?
  - Images of the *invisible* God are forbidden. But what about Jesus? After all, he was also a *visible* human. Is making images of the *human* Jesus a violation of this command?
- ⇒ What else does Scripture tell us about "mental images" and worship?
  - Though we have already mentioned the connection of this command to *worship* (which may involve *mental* images), most of our focus has been on *visible* images.
- ⇒ If "no images" is the "*negative*" obligation, is there a "*positive*" obligation implied by the commandment?
- ⇒ What is the reason for the verses about God punishing people (Exodus 20:5-6)?

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### TODAY:

#### What about images of Jesus (pictures, statues, etc.)?

(Also some comments applicable to images in general.)

- The second commandment forbids images of the *invisible* creator God. But what about Jesus? Though he is God, he took on a *visible* human body. It isn't a *temporary* situation (as sometimes occurred in the Old Testament), but a *permanent* situation.
- A *visible* Jesus exists right now – though not on earth. In the future, all will see him *visibly*.

[STEPHEN, THE FIRST MARTYR.] "Look," he said, "I **see** heaven open and **the Son of Man** standing at the right hand of God."

Acts 7:56 (BSB)

[WHEN JESUS RETURNS.] Look, he is coming with the clouds, and **every eye will see him**, even those who pierced him."

Revelation 1:7 (CSB)

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### ⇒ THERE ARE TWO MAIN VIEWS THAT HAVE BEEN VERY STRONGLY HELD:

- "YES!"** Down through the centuries, there have been many in the church who greatly encouraged the use of images – not only of Jesus, but of many other things that are found in the Bible (people, events, symbolism, etc.). This is probably the most common view.
  - ✓ Unfortunately, it sometimes became a substitute for Scripture itself. And the objects often became associated with worship (as an "aid" to worship, or even something that was being prayed to.)
- "NO!"** There have been others who have taken the opposite view. They not only *opposed* images, but some did everything they could to *destroy* them.
  - ✓ This may be due to the idolatry they observed, and the realization that those doing it would *perish* eternally, because of it. They also saw, in Scripture, that Israel was told to destroy images that were being used for worship.
- ["SOMETIMES!"]** Others had views somewhere in-between these two.

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### How should we respond?

#### ⇒ PHYSICAL images (in general).

- They may range from symbolic to life-like, and may influence (for better or worse) one's perspective of what is being imaged – especially if they are portrayed as "real" representations of what is being imaged.
- They can become a means of worship – a violation of the prohibition against idolatry.

#### ⇒ PHYSICAL images of Jesus.

- They are based on *imagination*, not on a description of Jesus found in Scripture.
- People who create these images will be influenced ① by the culture they live in, ② by their values, understanding of the Bible and attitude toward God, and even ③ by their artistic ability.

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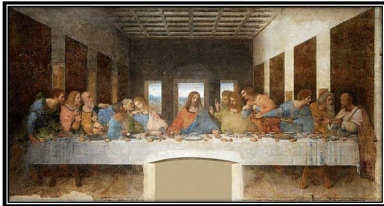
#### ⇒ MENTAL images of Jesus – they exist... we can't avoid them!

- It's nearly impossible to think about Jesus without having some type of *mental* image of him!
- **EXAMPLES:** Try thinking about the following situations *without* having an image of Jesus in your "mental picture" of the event:
  - ✓ Jesus walking on the water, telling Peter to come to him – Matthew 14:25-32.
  - ✓ Jesus overturning the tables of the money changers in the temple – Matthew 21:12.
  - ✓ Jesus washing the disciple's feet – John 13:3-12+.
  - ✓ Jesus ascending into heaven, as the apostles watch it happen – Luke 24:50-51; Acts 1:9.
- **Differences between mental and physical images of Jesus:** We could probably say that **the mental image** comes and goes, may vary, and does not necessarily define who Jesus is. In contrast, **the physical image** makes a specific statement about him, and (depending on its "realness") may define and influence our views.

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#### ⇒ EXAMPLES – PHYSICAL IMAGES: Consider the images of Jesus, on the following pages.

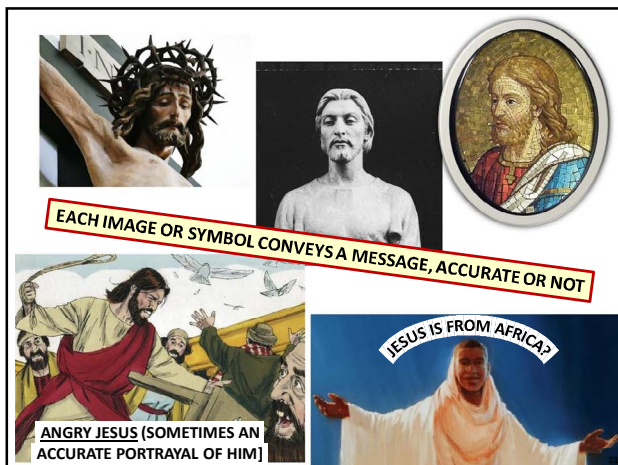
- This includes symbols, drawings, pictures, statues – all intended to represent Jesus. Some may be more accurate than others... but *none* of them will be *completely* accurate.
- These examples include pictures and statues. You could add audio and video examples, and consider the influence that the voice, mannerisms, and portrayal of Jesus might have on one's perspective of him.



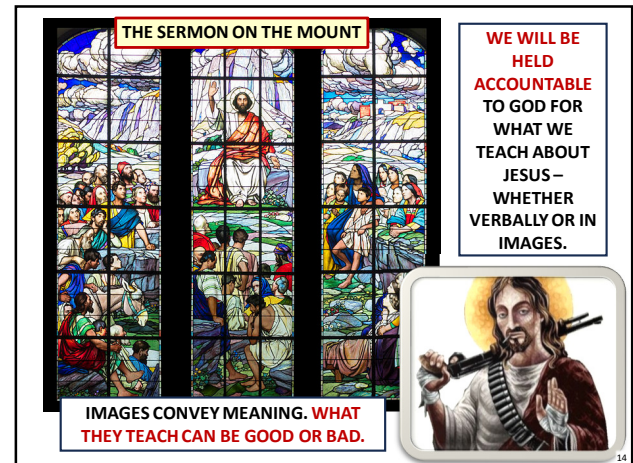
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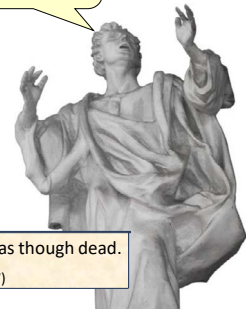
### ⇒ CAUTIONS: Be aware of the dangers and prohibitions.

- ✓ Images of the *invisible* God are obviously forbidden.
- ✓ Though other types of images might be useful for *teaching*, their use must not go *beyond* that. They are *not* to become a means of worship, or an object of worship. (The appearance – aesthetic quality – of the image is not the issue... but what you do with it is.)
- If the image portrays Jesus, be aware of the inaccuracies.
  - ✓ NO image accurately portrays Jesus. If people don't realize this, some portrayals may lead them to a *wrong* understanding of who Jesus is.
  - ✓ Any image that portrays Jesus in ways that contradict his moral nature, or anything that Scripture teaches about him, must be rejected.
  - ✓ ALL images portray Jesus as a *human*; yet NONE shows what he looks like *now*.

- Scripture tells us what Jesus looks like *NOW* – and *no image can represent it!*

- ✓ The apostle John describes what Jesus looks like *NOW*.
- ✓ We may wish that John had been able to take a photograph of Jesus... *but...*
- ✓ What John saw was *beyond* overwhelming. *It would have probably caused the camera to explode!*

OH NO!!  
I FORGOT MY CAMERA!



When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.

Revelation 1:17a (NIV)

- ✓ What John saw could *never* be fully described, even in words.
- ✓ The best he could do was to describe Jesus in ways that would *point* our *minds* in the right direction – though the reality of his appearance would be far beyond what our minds can comprehend.



[Actually, the picture would have been brighter than this.]

MY CAMERA EXPLODED!!

(NO CAMERAS NEEDED)

- *No physical image can represent this!* This is Jesus, the "Lord of Glory" (1 Corinthians 2:8b), the way he *now* looks!

... someone like a son of man,  
dressed in a **robe**\* reaching down to his feet  
and with a **golden sash** around his chest.  
The **hair** on his head was **white** like wool, as white as snow,  
and his **eyes** were like **blazing fire**.  
His **feet** were like **bronze glowing** in a furnace,  
and his **voice** was like the sound of **rushing waters**.  
In his right **hand** he held seven **stars**,  
and coming out of his **mouth** was a sharp, **double-edged sword**.  
His **face** was like the **sun** shining in all its brilliance.

Revelation 1:13b-16 (NIV)

\* (Robe = described in Matthew 17:2 as **white as the light**.)

