

## REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 8 DECEMBER 2013 EVENING SERVICE

**Sing before:** Psalm 31: 1

*Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:*

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. Beloved grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

**Amen**

Psalm of praise: Psalm 18:1

**Prayer:**

We thank You Lord for the loveliness of this day again proclaiming your majesty. We thank You Lord for health and physical strength and also the possibility to be gathered today around Your Word. We also thank You Lord for the never-ending advantage of being able to listen to the proclaiming of Your holy Gospel.

Lord, we pray from you to install Your Holy Spirit in our hearts so that his working may guide us into the depth of knowledge about You and Your Word. Grant that the ministering of Your Word would be proper and in the truth and also so that it may reach us in a way that it brings forth fruit of faith.

We pray for our church in its misery and needs. We pray o Lord that You would strengthen each if us in our faith. Spiritually we become drained. The struggle to persevere in the faith and to remain on the proper road often becomes a terrible battle. Sometimes our faith falters in doubt when we come under pressure. Lord, please come to our aid in this because you are powerful and You can strengthen and convert us so that we are able to persevere on the way of conversion and re-birth.

We also pray for our material needs. May your goodness also follow us in this o Lord.

We pray for Your Kingdom to come. We know that awaiting us is a time of misery and oppression before eternity in its never-ending goodness comes over us. But should You save us in the faith we await longingly to see the arrival of the Lord Jesus in the clouds so that we may experience the glory of Your presence.

We also pray that the weakness of our human work here on earth may be used by You in the building of Your Kingdom. We confess that all our works are marred by the sinfulness of the flesh, but we also know that Your power is revealed by our weaknesses.

Please bless us in this service, for the sakes of the Lord Jesus Christ.  
Amen.

Psalm 25:1

**Scripture reading:** Deuteronomy 4

**Scripture text:** Deuteronomy 4:15-19; Catechism Sunday 35

**15 "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.**

(Deuteronomy 15 – 19)

We may not make images.

- It does appear as if this commandment no longer has anything to say to us modern people.
- We indeed are no longer idolaters honoring holy tree stumps and such idols by kneeling to them and worshipping them.

Our faith is also no longer so primitive that we couple images to our God at all.

- Or is it just possible that the opposite is true that we still exercise the danger of imagery service in our worship?
- Has it not perhaps become in our so-called modern times more necessary to pay attention to this honoring of images? We have possibly developed far in the sciences, but our spiritual development was so poor that the demands of the Lord, during all the times, have remained unchanged and relevant for us.

Today we still have to definitely make adaptations like Israel had to do in order to truly observe the law of the Lord.

In the Ten Commandments we have the first commandment commanding that God be served as the only God. Then follows this second commandment to show how the Lord wants to be served as the only God.

- 1. the commandment sets the first way: Not through images.**
- 2. Secondly the reason: an image proclaims a false God.**
- 3. Thirdly the purpose thereof in not honoring God in an image.**

**1. The way in which God wants to be served and honored.**

It is written: **"You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness..."**

- It is in the singular, because this image has relevance to God.

- Further it is told that no created thing may be depicted with the purpose of worshipping it.
- Of course because the honor and worship is due to God.

This second commandment landed the first Christians under great stress.

- They originally had the viewpoint that man may not even have a painting or artwork as decoration in your house.
- Later the viewpoint changed so that you are allowed to make drawings and paintings, but you may not kneel in worship to it.

The mistake in the approach of the first Christians came from the fact that they lived amongst the heathens who made images of fish and birds and worshipped these articles of cult.

- We read about it in Romans 1:23.
- By this idol service the mind of mankind was darkened.

But further also because the matter was put in the singular.

- The image or likeness is of God – no image of any kind whatever may be created of God.
- People and animals may be depicted.
  - The following verses of Deuteronomy 4:16 puts it very clear. They may not make idols of a man or a woman or any animal.
- Idols then bring worship of something in the place of God. This is what the second commandment deals with.

*The commandment of God is in fact logic. As no human has seen God how can an idol be made of God? There is not the slightest indication to anybody wanting to depict the Lord about how he must do it.*

After the Fall this sin of course started coming strongly to the foreground.

- In a growing way we read in the Old Testament about the needs that arose to the people to make a depiction of the God they worshipped.
- Later it was so bad that the prophets had to continually warn that God is not inside stone or dry wood!

The Lord also decreed this commandment because He knows us and knows that should we be allowed to honor Him through an image, the accent would move towards the image.

- Later the image and not God would receive the worship.
- The Lord indeed wants us to worship Him personally. Directly

Further this attempt to depict God is a massive assault and mutilation of His being.

- The Lord is Spirit. He is powerful and elevated above any man or creation.
- Should we make a depiction of God by an image or sketch then we erase the barrier between God and a creature.
- Then the imitation of the image of the Lord is a mere human creation doing much injury and damage to the holiness of the Lord.
- Then your religion becomes a caricature.

In the second instance this commandment deals with the reason why we may not make an image of God.

- The answer to this is in fact very simple: Any form of depiction of the Lord is a lie.
- Because no depiction can even mirror anything true about the Lord.
- We would have to make a completely untrue image – our image would purely rest upon the power of our own thoughts.

Therewith we will open ourselves for the largest form of abuse the holiness of God has ever undergone. Who of us can tell how God is and to what we can compare Him? The Lord cannot be served in this way!

Therefore we experience so many practical problems with this matter. For many years the Caucasian Christians are just ignoring this commandment.

- You sometimes find paintings attempting to depict the greatness of God.
- In many homes you find drawings of Christ and His disciples. Or of Jesus surrounded by children.

From the transgression of commandment that God – and Christ is also God – may not be depicted, there flowed in our times the black theology and the feministic.

- The viewpoint of the one group is that God may only be depicted in black and that a black God has no time for a white person.
- The viewpoint of the other group is that God is a woman. Therefore there are now Bibles on the market that refer to and depict God as “our Mother”!
- This is nothing else than our sins catching up with us because we started fiddling with the public image of God – now we sit with idolatry that is totally false and from the devil.

Even the pictures of the Lord Jesus as a human are wrong.

- Who would know how the Lord Jesus looked like? And should you not know, what purpose has a picture with your own viewpoint to the advancement of your and the faith of others?
- Should a depiction of the Lord Jesus have been of importance, then God would have seen to it that indeed such an image would have been saved through the history.
  - The Greeks, who in those times already had a world civilization, were already for ages creating true images of people.
  - The same about the Romans who were then rulers in Palestine. But it is indeed because the Lord did not want to leave any image, even of Christ in His humanity, that there is no indication or legacy of Him.

The motive behind this decision of the Lord is to prevent us humanizing the Lord in our faith.

There is indeed a depiction of God in creation.

- It is man, created to the image and likeness of God.
- Because God is spirit, the imagery of God in us is also spiritual of nature.

- The image exists in knowledge, justness and holiness. The ability to thus worship God without a visible image!

But in a certain way we have lost this imagery.

- In fact it was only damaged and distorted by the Fall and the fact that we thereby became estranged to the Lord.
- Now man experiences a longing and a search for this image of the Lord that he has lost, and now it comes to light in this service if images.
- We regard ourselves as highly developed and scientifically far advanced, but we still teach our children with pictures to serve God. This cannot and should not be.

The Lord teaches in the Bible that He wants to be served by live worship and ministering of the Word. Romans 10:14:

**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?**

And verse 17:

**So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.**

2Peter 1:19 puts it more difficult language but still in much more beautiful:

**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;**

A dead image cannot replace this lively working of the Spirit of God. And can also not work so much depth in your heart.

- In this commandment we see the Lord Jesus after His resurrection when He appeared to the eleven disciples and admonishes them that they did not want to believe what proclaimed that He would arise.
- We find that only after they have seen Him themselves do they believe! Mark 16:14
- This is why the Catechism teaches that now we must not be wiser than God. The wisdom of God in fact determined that we must honour Him through the ministering of the Gospel and not by images or pictures.

Thirdly it deals with the reason of this commandment prohibiting the making of depictions of God.

- Again the answer is short and logical: It is so that we can see the true revelation of God and can receive it from God.
- It is to be able to truly know the Lord through the working of His Holy Spirit and by His Word.
- Otherwise our honoring towards the Lord would be completely useless.

Just as a slave cannot dictate to his master so we cannot prescribe the commandments of honoring God to the Lord.

- We merely have to obey His demands.

- Therefore we will do damage to His demands should we want to honor the Lord by another form or object.

Further it is also to teach us spiritual honoring of God. So that we may spiritually school ourselves.

- An image cannot teach you anything about salvation.
- A picture of Christ cannot teach you about conversion and re-birth.
- In fact the opposite is true: it can blunt your spirit because you become dependent upon the visible matters.
- The Bible teaches that we must walk in spirit and truth.

Let us then live spiritually and not consider our God in an earthly way and as such exercise communion with Him. Let us honor His greatness and majesty in His invisibility. And let us trust in His unseen nearness and grace.

Let us listen what our confession teaches about the depiction of the Lord in Sunday 35 of the Heidelberg Catechism:

Sunday 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] Deut. 4:15-19; Is. 40:18-25; Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:23. [2] Lev. 10:1-7; Deut. 12:30; I Sam. 15:22, 23; Matt. 15:9; John 4:23, 24.

**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] Ex. 34:13, 14, 17; Num. 33:52; II Kings 18:4, 5; Is. 40:25.

**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 images[1] but by the living preaching of His Word.[2]

[1] Jer. 10:8; Hab. 2:18-20. [2] Rom. 10:14, 15, 17; II Tim. 3:16, 17; II Pet. 1:19.

**Amen.**

Closing prayer.

Closing Psalm: Psalm 31:1

The Lord bless and keep you, the Lord make his face shine on you, the Lord turn His countenance to you and give peace.

**Amen**

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