

REFORMED CHURCH CLANWILLIAM : SUNDAY 2 NOVEMBER 2014 EVENING SERVICE

And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the Lord: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever toward Israel." Then all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

(Ezra 3:11)

Sing before: Psalm 25:1

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: 18:1

Prayer:

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation of the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

Amen

Psalm 31:1

Scripture reading: Psalm 106

Scripture text: Psalm 106:20 and Catechism Sunday 35

Thus they changed their glory into the image of an ox that eats grass.

(Psalm 106:20)

We may not make images. Somehow, although this may sound strange, in our modern, educated days, people are beginning to do this again.

- One would think that we no longer are idolaters who revere images of bulls and holy trees and who kneel down before them and worship the image.
- But it would appear that the opposite is true:
 - The Satanists keep all kinds of images and signs

- There are sects and false churches in which things such as pieces of the cross and golden tablets on which the original Ten Commandments are supposedly engraved are kept.
- To them these things have divine value – that is idolatry.
- In the Christian church we find a movement towards the introduction of images of the Lord Jesus, supposedly to invigorate the worship.

Has it not become necessary, in our modern days perhaps more than ever, to pay attention to this worshipping of idols?

* We might be far advanced in our scientific knowledge but in our religion the development of some of us is so poor that we must look again at this commandment.

- The Lord's commandments remain unchanged and equally valid for us.
- Today we must, as surely as Israel did, adapt in order to keep the Lord's Law properly.

The First Commandment of the Ten Commandments demands that God be worshipped and revered as the only God. Thereafter follows the Second Commandment, which tells us in what way the Lord wants to be worshipped as the only God.

The commandments firstly sets the way:

- Not with images
- The Commandment also furnishes the reason why not – an image proclaims a false God.
- The Commandment therefore teaches us that God does not wish to be revered in an image.

It is written:

'You shall not make for yourself a carved image-any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth;
(Deuteronomy 5:8)

- This is stated in the single form, because this idol refers to God.
- It says that no created thing may be made into an idol for the purpose of worshipping it.
- Obviously, because the glory and adoration belongs to God

This Second Commandment created a problem for the early Christians.

- Originally they believed that bit meant that it was forbidden to have a painting or a statue as a decoration in your house.
- Later on it was understood to mean that the making of paintings and drawings was permitted but that one may worship them.

The early Christians lived among unbelievers who made images of fishes and birds and worshipped those idols.

We read of that in Romans 1:23:

... and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man-and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.

(Romans 1:23)

Through these idols the thinking of man was darkened.

Furthermore it is important also because the matter is stated in the single form.

- The image or likeness is of God. No image of whatever kind may be made of God.
- People and animals may be portrayed. Deuteronomy 4:16 and following verses puts it clearly.
 - No idols whether formed like a man or a woman or like any animal may be made.
 - Idols bring in worship of something else in the place of God.

That is what it is about in the Second Commandment.

God's Commandment is logical.

- If nobody has ever seen God, how is it possible to make an image of God?
- Nobody who wants to portray God has the slightest idea of how to do it.

After the Fall into sin this sin became increasingly more evident.

- We read in the Old Testament how the desire grew in the people to make an image of the God they worshipped.
- It was so serious that the prophets had to warn repeatedly that God was not to be found in stone or dry wood!

The LORD also gave this Commandment because He knows us and knows that, were we to be allowed to worship Him through an image, the balance would shift towards the image.

- It would be the image that would eventually be worshipped and not God.
- The LORD wants us to worship Him personally. Directly.

An attempt to portray God would be an assault on and a defacing of His being.

- The Lord is Spirit
- He is mighty and exalted above any human being or creature.

Were we now to make image of God in the shape of a statue or picture then we would erase the dividing line between God and creature.

- The imitation of the image of God is then merely a man-made creation.
- It causes untold damage to the holiness of the Lord.
- Your religion then becomes a caricature.

Yet there still are people who, although they know all this, ask why we may not make an image of God

- The answer is obvious:
 - Any form of portrayal of the Lord is a lie.

- No portrayal can present even the slightest truth of the Lord.
- We would be manufacturing an untruthful image – an image based on purely our own imagination!

The Lord's purpose in this decision is to prevent us from humanising the Lord in our religion.

- With idolatry we would be guilty of the worst form of defacing of the holiness of God ever.
- The Lord cannot be served in that way!

There is an image of God in creation, but it is not a physical image.

- That image is man who was created in the image of God.
- Because God is Spirit, the image of God in us is spiritual.
 - The image consists of knowledge, righteousness and holiness.
 - That is the ability to worship God without a visible image!.

But in a way we have lost this image.

- Actually it was disfigured and twisted by the Fall into sin and the fact that, because of it, we became estranged from God.
- Man now is homesick and longs and searches for this image of the Lord, which he has lost, and this expresses itself in this idolatry.
- We consider ourselves to be highly educated and scientifically advanced, yet some of us want to teach our children with images how to serve God. That cannot be.

The Lord teaches us in the Bible that He wants to be served through living worship and preaching of the Word. See 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?

(Romans 10:14)

- We can pray to the Lord only in faith.
- We can know Him only when we hear of Him!
- We can hear only when there is someone who preaches.

And verse 17:

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

(Romans 10:17)

2 Peter 1:19 puts it in more difficult language but 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;

(2 Peter 1:19)

A dead statue cannot replace this vibrant ministry of the Spirit of God. It can also not work depth in your heart.

We see this Commandment when after His resurrection the Lord Jesus appears to the eleven Disciples and He reproaches them for not believing those who told them that He had arisen. They believed it only on seeing Him themselves!

Later He appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table; and He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen.

(Mark 16:14)

- That is why the Catechism tells us that we should not be wiser than God.
- God's wisdom determined that we must revere Him through the preaching of the Gospel and not through statues or pictures.

We must also remember the purpose for which this Commandment forbids us to make images of God.

- The answer is short and logical: it is so that we might see the true revelation of God and receive it from Him.
- It is to be able to know the Lord truly through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and of His Word.
- Otherwise our worship of the Lord would be totally in vain.

Just as a slave cannot prescribe to his master, so we cannot prescribe to the Lord the Commandments of how to adore Him.

- We must simply obey His demands
- Therefore we would harm His Commands should we wish to worship Him in another shape or in a different object.

Further it is to teach us a spiritual adoration of God – it is to school us spiritually.

- An image cannot teach you anything about salvation.
- A Picture of Christ cannot teach you about repentance and rebirth.
- The opposite is true – it can stultify you spiritually because you become dependant on the visible things. And the Bible teaches us to walk in spirit and truth.

Let us, then, live spiritually, and not think of God in earthly terms, and in that way have communion with Him.

- Let us revere His greatness and His Majesty in His invisibility.
- And let us trust in His invisible nearness and grace.

Let us read what our confession says of this in the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's day 35:

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: 32:1

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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