

Instruction In The Westminster Standards

The Historic Standards of Presbyterian Denominations.

STUDIES IN THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 51. What is forbidden in the second commandment?

A. The second commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in His word.

Scripture References: Deut. 4:15, 16; Acts 17:29; Deut. 12:30-32.

Questions:

1. What is the great sin forbidden in the second commandment?

The great sin forbidden in the second commandment is idolatry.

2. How does the idolatry forbidden in the second commandment differ from the sin forbidden in the first commandment?

The idolatry forbidden in the first commandment has to do with an object, where in man worships something else other than the true and living God. The idolatry forbidden in the second commandment has to do with the means of worship, and forbids us to worship God in ways contrary to His will.

3. How is it possible for a person to worship images and thus commit the sin of idolatry?

There are many ways this can be done. Some of them are: (1) By worshipping false gods such as the heathen idolatry in the culture of the Greeks. (2) By worshipping the true God by the use of an image or a representation of Him. (3) By worshipping the true God by creating in one's minds a false image of Him.

4. Is it permissible for any image or representation to be made of God?

No, it is forbidden because He is infinite, incomprehensible. (Isa. 40:18) Any attempt to represent God necessarily involves limitations which misrepresent Him.

5. Is it lawful for us to have pictures of Jesus Christ?

No, it is not lawful for us to do so. It is true, He was man as well as God, but the Bible teaches He is even fairer than the children of men. (Ps. 45:2) It is impossible for us to know what He was like and therefore, any representation of Him would be a guesswork. If He had wanted us to know He would have made it clear in the Word.

6. Does the second commandment forbid ceremony in our worship?

No, it does not forbid ceremony in our worship, as long as the ceremony is taught in the Word of God. Therefore, the ceremony would have to be "decent and in order" and only what is appointed in the Word of God. (Matt. 15:9)

WORSHIP ACCORDING TO THE WORD

The matter of worship in the church today is of grave concern. In churches which are creedal churches, and claim the Westminster Standards, the matter of worship should at all times be consistent with the Word of God. If it is not, there is the danger of breaking the second commandment, breaking it by not endeavoring to worship according to the pattern of the Word of God. In this area we should be zealous, refusing to allow anything within the worship that is not consistent with the Word.

There are many areas today where the church stands in danger of departing from the Word. Doctrinally speaking, the church is departing from the historic position of the Reformed Faith regarding the Scripture by allowing a lower view of inspiration than that of an infallible, verbally inspired Word of God. The church is departing by absolutely by-passing the Scripture-taught doctrine of discipline and thereby the purity of the church is falling into disrepute. These, and many others that could be mentioned, are ways in which the church is departing from the faith in matters of doctrine.

In addition, the church should always be careful regarding its worship. Nothing should be allowed in the service that is not taught by the Scripture. The worship of the church exists for the glory of God, for the purpose of carrying out His Great Commission, for the evangelization of the world. The early church was careful lest something be introduced into it that would hinder its mission.

What about your church in its worship? Have things been added that can not find their warrant in Scripture? Is your church more concerned with the building than the preaching of the Word of God, with itself instead of its outreach, with friendship instead of its purity? Is the second commandment being broken?

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