

Commandment 2: No carved images

II. Exodus 20:4-6: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or 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. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands¹ of those who love me and keep my commandments." (ESV)

A. This does not prohibit all images of anything in creation

And you shall make two cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat. (Exod 25:18)

You shall make a lampstand of pure gold . . . three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on one branch, and three cups made like almond blossoms, each with calyx and flower, on the other branch--so for the six branches going out of the lampstand. (Exodus 25:31-33)

→ Therefore the commandment means "You shall not make a carved image . . . in order to bow down to them, or to portray me with them."

B. Images of false gods are prohibited (these would be "other gods" in terms of first commandment)

The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of human hands. ¹⁶ They have mouths, but do not speak; they have eyes, but do not see; ¹⁷ they have ears, but do not hear, nor is there any breath in their mouths. ¹⁸ Those who make them become like them, so do all who trust in them! (Psalm 135:15-18)

[Wicked King Manasseh:] For he rebuilt the high places that his father Hezekiah had broken down, and he erected altars to the Baals, and made Asherahs, and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them. (2 Chronicles 33:3)

C. And any images of the true God are prohibited

So Aaron said to them, "Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me." ³ So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!" ⁵ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made proclamation and said, "Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD." (Exodus 32:2-5)

Jeroboam: "So the king took counsel and made two calves of gold. And he said to the people, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt." (1Ki 12:28)

D. Reason: God's jealousy (Exod 20:5: "for I the LORD your God am a jealous God")

→ any physical form dishonors God

"Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, ¹⁶ beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, ¹⁷ the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, ¹⁸ the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth. ¹⁹ And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven. (Deuteronomy 4:15-19)

-- Therefore I do not agree with paintings of God the Father (as in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling)
(you can appreciate the artistic skill and intent of art work without thinking that the painting is right to create)

E. What about mental images, pictures of God?

1. Compare Jesus' teaching about attitudes of heart in Matt. 5:21-30: murder/ anger; adultery/ lust
2. We should keep all the commandments in our hearts and minds, not just with our actions
"the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."
(1Sam 16:7)
3. Therefore we should not think of God as having any kind of physical form.
4. Then how should you think about God when you pray?

F. What about pictures of Christ?

1. Thinking of Christ in human form does not misrepresent Him
2. The explanation in Deut. 4:15-19 ("since you saw no form") does not apply to Christ as a man: people did see him in human form

3. Conclusion: It is not wrong to portray Christ as a man
painting, sculpture, films, Christmas plays, children's books
4. But some cautions:
 - a. Be careful not to think that Christ is in the picture or statue
→ don't pray to it!
 - b. In movies, drama: be careful not to portray Christ as sinning in any way
(films, drama, need much care)

All of the class lessons and outlines are posted on the class website <http://www.christianessentialssbc.com>.