"Additional Thoughts on the Second Commandment:
Scripture & Worship"
Deuteronomy 5:6,8-10
September 25, 2022
Faith Presbyterian Church – Evening Service
Pastor Nicoletti

The Reading of the Word

This morning we discussed the ways that we can violate the second commandment in our hearts, in how we view God, how we relate to God, and what we believe about God. And our focus was primarily internal.

This evening, we want to turn our attention to the question of what kind of external practices are in view in the second commandment. And we will begin by thinking about concrete practical questions related to the application of the second commandment. And in doing that we'll see some broader concepts emerge related to Biblical interpretation and the relationship between Scripture and worship.

With that said, let's hear again from our text: Deuteronomy 5:6,8-10.

Please do listen carefully, for this is God's word for us this evening.

The Lord said to his people:

6 "'I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

[…]

8 "'You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 9 You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I Yahweh your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, 10 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.'"

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

Introduction

So this evening, our focus is on the question of what kind of external practices are in view in the second commandment.

And I want to start with two disclaimers.

The first is that a lot of foundation under what I will say this evening comes from the approach to worship and the regulative principle that I spoke about in an evening service back in March. And so if you were here for that, some of the ideas or approach tonight might sound familiar. And if you weren't and you'd like to dig deeper into this topic, I'd encourage you to take a look at that

sermon on our website, it's titled "Additional Thoughts on Our Theological Vision: A Whole-Bible Regulative Principle"[1]

The second disclaimer I want to give is to acknowledge that our topic tonight is one that Christians have often disagreed on – particularly within the Reformed tradition. Some Reformed believers will disagree with the case I make this evening. In fact, I have stated to our presbytery certain differences with the Westminster Standards (the constitution of our denomination) on these questions.[2] In a similar way, some of you may disagree with me. In fact, even our pastoral staff doesn't share the same perspective on some of these questions. And that's okay.

The perspective I present tonight is my view of what the Scripture teaches, and it is consistent with our historic practice here at Faith, and I believe it pretty strongly. And so I'll present it tonight with conviction.

But as we discussed this morning, Herman Bavinck reminds us that, not only when it comes to God, but really when it comes to any point of theology, the more human reasoning that is required, the more modesty we should have – especially in areas where Christians have historically disagreed. As I'll try to model tonight, this does not mean a lack of conviction for the views we hold that we believe are taught in the Scripture. But it does mean that we view fellow Christians who disagree with us with charity, recognizing that they too are trying to wrestle with the same Biblical data that we are, with the goal of honoring the Lord and thinking his thoughts after him.

With that said, I want to come at the issue of what kind of external practices are forbidden by the second commandment, by considering a series of questions.

And, as you'll see, one of the principles I'll employ throughout this sermon is that of relying on Scripture to interpret Scripture. This is rooted in the conviction that the Scriptures are a united whole, and we can better understand one passage of Scripture by interpreting it in light of other passages of Scripture.

With that principle in mind, let's consider a few questions.

Does the Second Commandment Forbid the Creation of Any Visually Representative Art in Any Setting?

The first question for us to consider is: Does the second commandment forbid the creation of any visually representative art in any setting?

Taken by itself, it may, at first, sound this way. The commandment says: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them;"

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[1] https://www.faithtacoma.org/vision-nicoletti/additional-thoughts-on-our-theological-vision-thoughtful-and-robust-liturgical-worship

[2] My differences with the Westminster Standards on this issue have been judged by my presbytery to be more than semantic, but not out of accord with the fundamentals of our doctrinal standards. No restrictions on teaching my views have been imposed on me.

The commandment includes the heavens, the earth, and the sea – which is the Bible's way of saying "everything." [Leithart, 33] And so the commandment may seem to be outlawing the creation of any visually representative art of anything at all – any carved image or any likeness of anything anywhere.

And yet we know that can't be what it means. Because while God first gives the second commandment in Exodus 20, in Exodus 25, just five chapters later, God himself commands Moses to make a carved image of two cherubim. [Exodus 25:18] And just a few verses after that, he orders him to make carved images of plants – of almond blossoms. [Exodus 25:33] In other words, just a few pages after God gives the second commandment, or also orders Moses – he doesn't just permit him, but he orders him – to make carved images in the likeness of things in heaven above, and also on the earth beneath. Technically he doesn't order the creation of any images of sea creatures, but the point still remains: if God commands the making of such things, then the second commandment must not forbid the creation of any visually representative art in any setting. [Frame, 452]

Does the Second Commandment Forbid the Presence of Visually Representative Art in a Worship Setting?

That leads us then to a second, more specific question: Obviously the second commandment allows for the creation of visually representative art. But does the second commandment forbid the presence of visual art in a worship setting?

But just as quickly, as before, the answer comes back no. Because those two examples we just mentioned – the cherubim and the almond blossoms – were carved images that were to be included in the tabernacle of the Lord – in the worship space of Yahweh. In other words, we see in Exodus 25 that God didn't just allow visually representative art in the space designated for worship, but he commanded it in the tabernacle. And actually, he called for much more than those two examples. God commanded that the tabernacle be filled with visually representative art.

As one theologian puts it: "If the Second [Commandment] prohibits representational art, the Lord didn't stick with his program very long." [Leithart, 34]

In the temple there were the two cherubim that God ordered to be made of gold and placed on the ark of the covenant in the holy of holies. Then there were the golden almond blossoms to be placed on the lampstand of the holy place. Then there were additional images of cherubim that were to be woven into the curtain within the tabernacle. [Exodus 36:8] The hem of the priest's garments was to have images of pomegranates on it – pomegranates of different colors … including blue pomegranates. [Exodus 28:33-34] I remember listening to a talk by R.C. Sproul years ago, in which he pointed out that in nature there is no such thing as blue pomegranates. Which meant, he said, that here we had not only a biblical basis for visual art in general, but also abstract visual art.[3] In any case, there were many kinds of visually representative art in the tabernacle.

There was even more in Solomon's temple. There we read of carvings of gourds and flowers [1 Kings 6:18], of even larger statues of cherubim in the inner sanctuary [1 Kings 6:23-28], and of

[3] I believe this comment was in his video series "Recovering the Beauty of the Arts," but when I tried to track down the exact location, I found that the series is behind a paywall. So I am recounting the comment here from memory.

carved engraved images of cherubim, and palm trees, and flowers on the walls and the doors [1 Kings 6:29, 32, 35]. [Frame, 452; Leithart, 33-34]

So clearly, in the time of Moses and continuing on to Solomon, the second commandment did not forbid the presence of visual art in a worship setting. Far from that, God commanded such visual art.

Now some might want to argue that while visually representative art was present in worship in the Old Testament, it should not be present in worship in the time of the New Testament. But such claims, it seems, would need a clear New Testament commandment to support them, and I am not aware of one. Arguments can be made for such a shift, but the ones I've heard seem implausible to me. [e.g. cf.: Frame, 483] And I think we should be hesitant to claim that somehow after the incarnation, the second commandment became more restrictive than it was at the time it was given. Without solid biblical warrant, it makes sense to me that what the second commandment meant then, it most likely continues to mean today. And if that is the case, then the second commandment does not forbid the presence of visual art in a worship setting.

Does the Second Commandment Forbid the Creation of Visual Art for the Purpose of Spiritual Instruction?

That brings us to a third question: Does the second commandment forbid the creation of visual art for the purpose of spiritual instruction?

And the idea here is that maybe visual art can have a role in general aesthetics in a worship setting, but maybe it should not be used for spiritual instruction.

But again, in the Bible itself, we see God calling for visual art to be used for spiritual instruction.

Let me note two examples.

One comes in Numbers 21. There, in an act of judgment, God sends serpents to attack his people. When the people look to Moses for help, Moses prays for the people. And then we read this – we read: "And Yahweh said to Moses, 'Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live.' So Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live." [Numbers 21:8-9]

What's going on here? Well, for one thing, we again see God calling for the making of a carved image. But then we also see God using it for the spiritual instruction of his people. As Raymond Brown notes, drawing from John Calvin, God intended to use the bronze serpent to teach the people a lesson about the nature of his saving work. [Brown, 191; Calvin, 155]

And, in fact, Jesus will later say that this bronze serpent was also meant to point to him – that just as it was lifted up for the salvation of others, so he would be lifted up for the salvation of others. [John 3:14-15] God used the bronze serpent to instruct his people in the gospel.

The exact way of instruction there might be a bit odd to us, but an even more clear example comes, once again, from the tabernacle.

As John Frame notes, the images in the tabernacle were meant to be instructive. The images prescribed there, he writes, "recall the garden of Eden: its beautiful growing things and the cherubim that barred man's return after the fall (Gen. 3:24). So the tabernacle and the temple serve as images of the garden. Indeed," Frame continues, "we are told in Hebrews 8:5 that the whole tabernacle is also an image of heaven, the antitype of Eden. It is an image, a likeness, of the heavenly tabernacle. It is for this reason that Moses was to make everything precisely according to the pattern that God gave him on the mountain (Ex. 25:40; Heb 8:5)." [Frame, 452; see also Frame, 482]

In other words, the images in the tabernacle were meant for spiritual instruction: instruction about the garden, instruction about heaven, and instruction about what is required for human beings to be restored to those places.

In all this, we see that the second commandment does not forbid the creation of visual art for the purpose of spiritual instruction.

Does the Second Commandment Forbid Symbolic Visual Representations of God?

That might then lead to our next question.

So … we might agree that the second commandment does not forbid visual representative art in general. It may not forbid visual art in worship spaces or visual art for spiritual instruction. "But," we might ask, "doesn't the second commandment forbid symbolic visual representations of God?"

And here, again, the answer is not as straightforward as some might assume.

For one thing, the commandment doesn't actually say not to make images of God. It doesn't say "Don't make images of God." It says, "don't make images of anything." [Leithart, 33] That said, worship is in view here, as we see in verse nine, so we need to wrestle with this question.

And to address it, we need to consider a few things.

First is that any image of God is symbolic. God is invisible. And so any image will be a symbolic representation.

Second is that the Bible itself describes some symbolic representations of the presence of God. Though God is invisible, the Bible tells us of how God has, at times, revealed himself by visible means. [Frame, 456-457, 459, 484]

In Exodus 13 God appeared to his people – he revealed his presence with his people, symbolically, as a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night [13:21-22]. In Isaiah 6 God is described as being seen as One sitting on a throne [6:1]. In Daniel 7 he is described as the Ancient of Days, and as being seen in a robe as white as snow, and with hair like pure wool [7:9-10]. In all four gospels the Holy Spirit is described as being seen in the form of a dove [Matthew 3:16; Mark 1:10; Luke 3:22; , John 1:32], and in Acts 2, the Holy Spirit's presence is symbolized visually as fire [2:3-4]. And we could go on.

By giving these descriptions, God is inviting us – really, he's calling us – to imagine what he describes, in our minds. [Frame, 459] And once we are imagining what he describes in our minds, is it really wrong to translate those descriptions given by him, and imaged in our minds, into a visual form? Would we say it's okay, based on Luke 3 to picture an image of a dove as a symbol of the Holy Spirit in our minds … but that it's wrong, based on Luke 3 to picture an image of a dove as a symbol of the Holy Spirit on a canvas? I'm not convinced that the Bible makes that kind of distinction.

That said, I will say that we should be much more cautious and hesitant to make symbolic visual images of God that are not derived from Scripture, for the same reason we should be cautious about doing that in our heart, or in our theology – because what we say about God should always be derived from Scripture. So we should be hesitant to present an image of God that is not found in or deduced from Scripture.

But that said, we often use diagrams as visual symbols to help us understand God – to summarize Biblical teaching about God. The Trinity symbol we have on our bulletin covers every four weeks is one example. In a similar way, the Reformed philosopher Cornelius Van Til, in his teaching, often used a diagram in which God was represented by a large circle, and creation was represented by a smaller circle. That larger circle was not a "theophany" – it was a visual symbol representing God. But I don't think it was a violation of the second commandment.

All of which is to say that, at least when it comes to visual representation of biblically-given symbolic pictures, or of visual images deduced from Scripture, I am not convinced that the second commandment forbids such visual representations of God.

Does the Second Commandment Forbid Visual Representations of Jesus?

A follow up question would be: Does the second commandment forbid visual representations of Jesus?

Now, if it does not forbid Biblical images of God, then the answer would seem to obviously be no.

But I raise this question separately because I want to say that even if you disagree with my last point, even if you think that the second commandment does forbid biblically-given symbolic images of God, even then it does not necessarily mean that the commandment would forbid images of Jesus as well.

When we picture Jesus – whether in our minds or in a visual form – we are usually picturing aspects of his human nature. And we maintain that Jesus's human nature was fully human – it wasn't God appearing as a man, but Jesus truly was a man. If then, what we are imagining of Jesus is a representation of his human body, then even if you did believe that the second commandment forbids visual representations of God, it does not follow that it also forbids images of the human nature of Jesus.

In fact, John Frame argues that if we allow images to be made by artists of all other people who have ever lived, but then we forbid such images of Jesus's human body, then we run the risk of inadvertently teaching that Jesus's body was somehow not fully human – that he only appeared to

take on a human body like all other people, but actually, there was something different about his body – it was in a different category … he only appeared to be fully human. [Frame, 485-486]

You might feel like that is a stretch … but I think it at least raises the point that whatever we do with images of Jesus, we run risks of misunderstanding – and avoiding visual art depicting Jesus is not a safer alternative.

If, within Christian artwork and children's Sunday school materials, every other major human being featured in the Bible is visible … every other significant human being in the biblical story can be seen … but in those same materials Jesus cannot be seen … if Jesus remains essentially invisible in our Christian art and in our children's Bibles and Sunday school lessons … it's hard for me to imagine that we are not unintentionally communicating something about Jesus's body being different from a regular human body.

It's something to think about. But at the least, I will say that I do not think that the second commandment forbids visual representations of Jesus.

So far this evening I have argued that the second commandment does not forbid visually representative art in general, it does not forbid visually representative art in places of worship, it does not forbid visual art for spiritual instruction, it does not forbid visual art of Jesus's human nature, and it does not even forbid symbolic images of God that are derived from the Scriptures.

That then leads to our next question…

What Does the Second Commandment Actually Forbid Then?

If all that is true – if the second commandment does not forbid any of those things, then what does the second commandment actually forbid?

Have I just explained it away to mean nothing – to being utterly useless.

Well no, I don't think so.

Hear from the commandment again. It says: "'You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them;'"

Taken in the context of the other Scripture we have considered so far, we see that it is key that we take those two verses together. The second verse helps us understand the intention of the first.

One theologian puts it like this – he writes: "The Second [commandment] prohibits making images for a particular purpose – to bow before and serve them. The two verbs used in Exodus 20:5 [and also Deuteronomy 5:9] are typical words for worship. 'Worship' describes a bodily posture, [to] 'prostrate oneself.' 'Serve' is a general term for the work of Levites and priests. Ancient pagan priests serviced images of their gods. Priests brought meals to the image, cleaned it, bowed before it, praised it. That's the ministry Yahweh forbids in his house." [Leithart, 34]

John Frame, another Reformed theologian, writes this – he says: "What Exodus 20:4-5 [and we would add Deuteronomy 5:8-9 – what this commandment] teaches, […] is that we should not make images *for the purpose of* bowing down to them and serving them. That is plain from the use of the word *pesel* (translated "carved image") in [this verse]. A *pesel* in Scripture is never simply a piece of artwork. It is always an image used for idolatrous purposes. Further the connection between [these two verses] shows implicitly that what God forbids is not art in itself, or even art located in a place of worship, but art made as an object of worship." [Frame, 453; See also Frame 459, 482]

And that emphasis is made even more clear, Frame points out, in Leviticus 26:1, where God says: "You shall not make idols for yourselves or erect an image or pillar, and you shall not set up a figured stone in your land to bow down to it, for I am Yahweh your God."

"Here again," Frame writes, "what God forbids is not the making of any image for any purpose, but rather the making of an idol […], an object to be worshiped." [Frame, 453]

So what God is forbidding here is the worship of an image made to represent him.

And we should note that this is consistent with our theme from this morning. This morning we considered how we might, in our hearts, create a false image of God, and project it onto God, and then worship and serve that image rather than worshiping and serving God as he truly is – we might relate to the image we have made rather than to God himself.

And now we see that when it comes to the external practices forbidden in the second commandment, the same thing is in view: the second commandment forbids the worshiping of images we have made of Yahweh, rather than worshiping Yahweh himself.

Why Would Anyone Bow Down to and Serve an Image?

But this then leads to another question: Why would anyone bow down to and serve an image?

We might understand the tendency on the heart level, as we discussed it this morning. But why would anyone do this externally? Why was this a temptation? Why was this a problem?

John Frame explains it like this. He writes: "In paganism, the relationship between the image and the god is more than merely pictorial, or even representative. Something of the sanctity of the god attaches to the image itself. The connection between the image and the god can be so close that the worshiper regards the material object as itself divine in some way. […] The image may be thought of as a sacramental conduit of divine influence." [Frame, 454]

In such paganism, the image functioned as something like a "sacrament" – a means, or as Frame puts it, a conduit through which the deity could be worshiped. By honoring the image, you honored the deity. By praying towards the image, your prayers more effectively reached the deity. The deity was, in some mysterious way, more present because of the presence of the image. [Leithart, 34-35]

This was a common view of how one approached a god in the world Israel lived in. But it was not how Yahweh would be reached. It was not how Yahweh would be worshiped and known. And that is much of the point being made here.

Did Israel Make this Mistake with Yahweh?

This then may lead us to ask: Did Israel struggle with this – did Israel make this mistake with Yahweh?

And the answer is yes. And while that reality is tragic for them, it's actually instructive for us. Because we see that they did this both with images of their own devising, and also through the misuse of images that God himself gave them.

We see this first with images not given by God in Exodus 32, when Aaron makes the golden calf that Israel will worship. We should note that the emphasis there does not seem to be on Israel worshiping other gods through the golden calf, but worshiping Yahweh through the golden calf. Centuries later, Jeroboam does the same thing in Israel [1 Kings 12:28]. In both cases, the people first create a symbolic image of God that is not given or deduced from Scripture, but then they also seek to worship Yahweh through that image – as if the image were a sacramental conduit to the Lord's presence. [Frame, 455-456]

But we also see Israel break the second commandment with images that were given to them by God. Remember the bronze serpent that God ordered Moses to make, as a way of healing and providing spiritual instruction for Israel? In 2 Kings 18, centuries later, we learn that the people of Israel had taken that bronze serpent and had begun making religious offerings to it. They had begun, in other words, to worship it – to use it as a sacrament or a conduit through which they would worship God, so that by worshiping it they worshiped God. And this was a violation of the second commandment. And so King Hezekiah had the bronze image destroyed.

Similarly, in 1 Samuel 4 Israel treats the ark of the covenant – that box on which God had ordered the two golden cherubim to be made – they treat that object and image given to them by God as a way to direct and manipulate Yahweh's presence, and his power. In response, Yahweh not only allows Israel to be defeated by their enemies in judgment, but he has Israel's enemies take the ark of the covenant away from Israel for a time.

There are a couple implications of all this.

The first is that if images – even images described by or given by God – are being misused in violation of the second commandment, then even though the images may not be bad in themselves, they may need to be taken away from God's people for a time, to prevent such sin. I think we may see something of this, in some cases, at the time of the Reformation.

Second, we see especially in the judgment that God brings in 1 Samuel 4, that such false worship has consequences. False worship – worship that is contrary to God's commands, and that twists and misshapes our relationship to him – leads to wrong views of God, and a breakdown in our relationship to him. And that sin and its consequences can be contagious.

We see them spread in communities in Israel during certain periods of its history. And we can deduce that like a disease, it often moves from one person to another through pre-existing relationships.

In fact, this may be what's in view in verses nine and ten. There we read God say: "You shall not bow down to them or serve them; for I Yahweh your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments."

Commentator Daniel Block writes this – he says "While the idiom 'to the third and fourth generation' is commonly interpreted vertically, the phrase should be understood horizontally. In the ancient world a domestic unit could consist of up to four generations, all under the leadership of the 'father.'" [Block, 162]

In other words, the phrase is not warning of punishment that will be administered to later generations, but to the spread of sin from an individual to their household and their community, which would often include multiple generations living together.

Where our passage does become obviously vertical in its promises is in verse eleven, where the Lord promises to show "steadfast love" "to the thousandth generation" of those who love him and keep his commandments. [ESV marginal translation]

All of which reminds us that the misuse of images in worship needs to be taken seriously.

Even so, we need to acknowledge that such abuse does not outlaw proper use of images along the lines that we also see in Scripture.

In all this, we see some of the ways that Israel broke the second commandment.

Does This Commandment Really Apply to Us Then?

With all that considered, we might then be tempted to ask: Does this commandment really apply to us then? For a lot of people, worshiping God through images doesn't feel like a regular struggle. Is this commandment irrelevant to such people?

I would say no for at least three reasons.

First, we should acknowledge that there are Christians, and there are churches and theological traditions that do seek to worship God through images – that treat images as something like a sacrament, and who therefore venerate the image as a way of venerating the one pictured. What I'm saying tonight is that that is the sort of thing that I think this commandment forbids. [Leithart, 35]

To be sure, some Christians merely use images pedagogically, or to direct their thoughts. But a lot of Christians do venerate images. And I'd argue that the second commandment applies to such practices.

Second, I would say that what we spoke about this morning is relevant here. The commandment is focused on crafting an image of God that we bow down to, instead of bowing down to God himself. We may not do that externally, but we often do that in our hearts and minds. If you weren't here this morning, I encourage you to visit our website to listen to this morning's sermon.

The sixth commandment says we shall not murder. But Jesus tells us that even if we would never actually try to kill someone, we can be guilty of breaking this commandment in our hearts through sinful anger. In the same way, while you may never prostrate yourself to an image and try to worship God through it, you may turn to an image you have made in your heart that is contrary to God. That sin is real, and this commandment applies to all of us in that way.

Third, I am no prophet, but even if treating objects or images as sacramental is not a common practice in our culture today … it may be a more common temptation in the decades ahead. A number of thinkers have supposed that our secular age is transitioning towards a revival of some of the habits of paganism – at least among some. In an increasingly post-Christian world, the concrete requirements of the second commandment may become more and more relevant.

And so this commandment is relevant to us, both now, and in the future.

Has God Left Us Without His Image?

With all this talk about the dangers of images, we may also want to ask: Has God left us without his image? Is this something other ancient gods gave, but our God does not?

And actually, the Bible tells us that God has given us images of himself.

He has given us his image in the Scriptures – especially as they tell us of Christ.

He has given us his image in the Lord's Supper, pointing to bread and wine as signs of Christ's body broken and his blood shed.

He's also given us his image in every human being. It is true that due to the fall, that image is marred in us and in every person we meet. But the image is not eliminated. It is damaged, but it is still present. [Frame, 461; Leithart, 39]

And yet, even as God gives us his image, his call is not for us to worship the images, but him.

We are to hear, and to read, and to study the Scriptures – not treat them like a talisman.

We are to take and eat the elements of the Lord's Supper – not bow to them.

And we are to honor and recognize dignity in other people, who all bear God's image – but we're not to worship other people.

God has given us images. We should receive them as he has offered them, and then direct our worship to him.

What Broad Lessons Should We Take from This About Scripture & Worship?

This sermon has, in some ways, been a case study in a whole-Bible regulative principle. It is an attempt to take all of Scripture into account as we consider what God forbids and what he calls us to. It is an attempt to interpret Scripture in light of other Scripture. It is an attempt to be careful not to add restrictions or commands to God's word.

Obviously, Christians can come to the Scriptures with those same values and end up with different conclusions. That is where our humility must come in. Let us place full confidence in God's word, while always exercising humility towards our own reasoning.

But that should not lead us to relativism, but instead to ongoing engagement with the Scripture, asking God to continue to guide us by his Spirit.

And as we approach questions about images that way, so we should approach questions about all of worship that way: taking the whole Bible into account, interpreting Scripture in light of Scripture, being careful not to add to or take from God's Word, and being cautious about manipulating Scripture to fit our systems.

Conclusion

After all, it is God who gets to tell us how he wants to be worshiped, how he wants to be known, how he wants to be understood. And so, putting no confidence in our own inventions or our own prohibitions, let us look to God's Word – for he will tell us who he is, and what he would have us do.

Amen.

This sermon draws on material from:

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