LD 35; Matthew 15:1-9; John 4:21-24; The Second Commandment I. Negative- Avoid False Worship II. Positive- Pursue True Worship III. Grounds for this Command

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, why don’t we have images and statues in our church? I imagine that most of us have seen the giant statue of Mary on US 41- so why don’t we take a field trip as a church to go visit the Shrine of Christ’s Passion? Well today, we answer that question as we consider the 2nd commandment- you shall not make for yourself an idol- or make a form of anything to bow down and worship it. Last week we considered the 1st commandment- who shall you worship? The one and only true God. This week we look at the 2nd commandment- how shall you worship this One God? Now there are many different opinions and ideas about worship today. Many false religions have their own holy places and objects. The Buddhist have their own phrases they chant- and their buddha statues before which they burn incense. The Muslims have their holy places like the Dome on the Rock along with their own rituals and places of prayer. But what about us? Do we have holy places and holy objects that help us? Well, today we are going to consider this theme: Jesus Christ sets us free to know and rightly worship the One true God as He is revealed in His Word.

**I. Negative- Avoid False Worship**

In our first point, we start with the negative aspect of this command. You shall not make an idol or have any graven image of God. Again, this commandment is dealing with idols and images as a way of worshipping the one, true God. An example of this commandment being broken is the golden calf that Aaron made in Exodus 32. The Israelites were growing restless because they had not heard from Moses for 40 days, so in order to keep the people from getting out of hand, Aaron made an idol or an image for the people to see and worship. To be clear, Aaron said that this idol was the God who brought you out of Egypt. Behold, your God- he said. So, it was not another god- but rather an image by which you could approach God. As QA 96 expands, this commandment is dealing with the way in which we worship God. We cannot make an image of God because that image is an attempt by man to contain or describe God in a way that He has not authorized. This commandment is warning against viewing, approaching and worshipping God in the wrong way. Thus, we are not free to come up with our own ideas of what God is like, nor are we free to invent our own ceremonies by which to worship God. We need to be clear here- we are not free to make up things about God. We must guard against turning God into man’s image- or using our creative talents to picture or describe God. Even in our thoughts- what we think about God must be true. Do we imagine that God is wish granted or a task master. Is he some doting grandfather in the sky or a cruel judge? Do you see Him as someone who is indifferent and unconcerned? All of these are false ideas about God- so what we think about God must align with the truth of God’s character. And when it comes to the worship of God, we are not to invent our own ceremonies and rites. No one would dare to invent their own sacrament. The focus is on the manner and forms of worship. What do we do when we gather together for worship? There is always a danger of the church patterning its worship after what we see in the world instead of aligning our worship with what we read in His word. God is not pleased with everything that that is passed as worship today. God does not delight in the things that man does. Any worship that starts with what man wants- with what is pleasing to man- has already missed the mark. For example, some people think that our churches should include movies or interpretive dance. Others would have our worship resemble a rock concert with strobing lights and fog machines. Anything that will get people excited- give the people what they want! But should worship start with what man wants- is our desire to please God or man? So every aspect of the worship service should be pointing to God and not to man- not onto us, O Lord of heaven, but unto you be glory given! QA 98 then applies this principle to books and pictures of God. Should we have pictures of God in our catechism books? In our children’s literature or Bible Story books? Well, if God is Spirit and He forbids images in this command, then it follows that we will not condone pictures of the Father nor of the Son. So books, movies and statutes that portray Jesus would be contrary to God’s design for worship. God does not want us watching a movie about the life of Jesus to learn about His ministry- He would rather us read His inspired and infallible Word! He does not want us to visit a shrine in order to have our hearts moved- but rather He would have you sit in church to be instructed by the living word of God. For the word is living and active- a double-edged sword. All these other things are the dead inventions of man. So we will seek to avoid all forms of false worship.

**II. Positive- Pursue True Worship**

But rather, we are to pursue the right and true worship of God. The opposite of false worship is not the absence of worship- but rather we are to positively and rightly worship the One true God! As we read in John 4:24- this is the very kind of worshipper that God is seeking! True worshippers are to worship in spirit and in truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship Him. As a Spirit- God cannot be visibly portrayed. He is beyond limit and cannot be contained in a picture or statue. Added to this, there is no such thing as a holy place or holy objects on this earth. Rather, God has made us to be a holy people! Because the Holy Spirit is now residing in our hearts, we are free to worship God in every place and at all times. There are no holy cities or holy relics here below. No location on earth gets you closer to God. The true church can gather in a sanctuary or at the river’s side or in the prison’s dungeon! In each of these places, true and right worship can be offered to God! And that right worship is the worship that comes from a heart of faith- it is worship offered in fear, reverence and awe. A humble and contrite heart God will not despise. Trusting in the Savoir and His works to be the grounds of our salvation- as we offer our lives as a living sacrifice of praise! The fact is, God expects and deserves our worship! Not just the leftovers- but the first fruits! He is not content with lip service- as we read in Matthew 15. Vain worship is that which simply goes through the motions. No love, no reverence, no joy! Vain worship puts the laws of man above the Law of the Lord. And God does not delight, nor does He receive these empty words. He closes His ears to the prayers of the wicked. But rather, God’s people will abide by both the Word of God and they will have a heart than has been moved! Rejoicing in the Lord- bowing in worship- kneeling at His feet- honoring Him with their lips. This is the kind of worship and worshipper that is pleasing to our God! It will therefore be the desire of God’s people to give Him the worship that He deserves and delights in- and to be the kind of people that please Him. This is, after all, the life that is for His glory and for our good. What I mean is this, God wants to be worshipped rightly because His glory is at stake! How He is worshipped is a display of what we think about Him! Added to this, right and true worship is ultimately for our good! If we consider that Rom. 10 clearly says that faith comes by hearing the Word as it is proclaimed in preaching, then it stands that if we want to be people of the faith we will be committed to right worship were the word of God is central! Anything that competes with the Word of God in the worship service- anything that man introduces- actually robs God of His glory and removes the chief means of grace from His people! So I point to QA 98 again- God wants His people instructed by the living preaching of His word. For it is by this Word that we can know God so that we might praise and worship God as is fitting! There is also a positive promise affixed to this commandment. Our God will show love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments. There is a generational blessing affixed to right worship. Where you go to church and how you worship has an effect- for good or ill- on your children and grandchildren after you! But what if I don’t feel like worshipping? What should I do then? Well, the fall into sin affected our feelings and desires as well. When we don’t feel like worshipping God- when we don’t feel like going to church- we have to confess this lack of desire as a sin. Pray that the Spirit would give you and your family joy- that we would be glad when we are called to worship! Pray that the Spirit would make you into the kind of worshipper that God is seeking. Remember who God is and what He has done for you- then rise and give Him the glory He deserves!

**III. Grounds for this Command**

Now that we have considered both sides of this commandment, in our last point we consider the grounds for this commandment. Why does God demand that we worship Him rightly? Well, He is God! He alone has the right and authority to dictate what true and pleasing worship is! Enter my presence with thanksgiving- come into my courts with songs of praise. Know that the Lord is God- and worship Him! We are not free to invent our own forms or patterns of worship. Everything we do in our worship service finds its source in God’s word. The 2nd commandment is why we have a Regulative Principle in worship. Basically, the Regulative Principle states that the worship of God must be founded upon specific direction given by God’s Word. In other words, the Bible is our guide in worship- specifically what we are to do and how we are to do this thing called corporate worship. So worship is to be Christ centered and Spirit empowered. Worship is engaging to be sure- but the heart of the people must rooted in reverence and awe. God speaks- and we respond as a people. The shepherd calls and the sheep follow. Even the various moments of the worship service are found in God’s Word. Our call to worship, confession of dependence, reading of the law, confession of sin, prayers, songs of praise, the reading and preaching of God’s Word, gathering of our offering, and the parting blessing are all found in God’s Word. Not only the words spoken themselves, but the actual actions as well. I think we could use a little encouragement here- what we do here matters! Your being here specifically is important! We need not be embarrassed by our simple and spiritual worship. We do not need the bells and whistles of society to draw people in. Rather, we could simply invite our neighbors to come and meet the one who told me everything I ever did! Or, I want you to join me in worshipping God. Trust the God-given means and leave the results to the Him. It is our calling to be faithful in worshipping God as directed in His word. It is not man’s felt needs, but God’s declared rule that dictates our actions today. We are prone to forget this- we are coming into the presence of a holy God- worship is the gathering of a holy people before a holy God! Our society has lost all forms of respect- all sense of awe and wonder. What is this think called “informal worship” you find in so many churches? Should we come to worship as we would go to the beach for a holiday- or like Moses who took off his shoes or Elijah who covered his face! This should be an awe-inspiring fact- we are meeting with a holy God! We are reading the very Word of God! And the wonder of it all this – God is pleased with us! The good news is that we get to worship God- and our worship is pleasing and acceptable to Him! You are granted access into the most holy place! It is a great privilege- a new and living way has been opened! It is a source of great blessing- we are in the very place where God promises to grant His grace and Spirit! Most people don’t think it matters how you come. Just go through the motions- say the prayers- and that’s good enough. But God wants more- He wants your lips to match your heart! He wants you to worship Him in Spirit and in truth!

To conclude, ask most people about God and they will start by saying- “well, I think God is like or I like to think of God as.” Ask them about worship, and they will say, “well, I like worship that is more like this or like that.” But when talking about God- we do not start with what we think! And when it comes to worship, it is not about what I like! My preferences do not have any bearing on what God says is pleasing to Him! The LORD is in His temple, let all the earth keep silent before Him! He is holy! Jesus Christ sets us free to know and rightly worship the One true God as He is revealed in His Word. So come into His presence with fear, reverence and awe! The LORD reigns; let the nations tremble! To Him who sits on the throne be all glory honor and praise forever! He is worthy!