

Heidelberg Catechism 98 – Using God’s Images to Teach

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: Pretty soon you will see people buying nativity or manger scenes and start decorating their houses for Advent (耶稣降临时season). You will see them set some crèches at the malls, in churches, and in front of homes with statues of the Virgin Mary, Joseph, some sheep, and of course, statues of Baby Jesus. But I hope you remember that it is wrong to make images of any person of the Godhead...it is wrong to worship any such image, and it is wrong to use any image to help you worship God. You must worship God in spirit and in truth!

In today’s sermon, I want to expand on 1 important area of the 2nd law: Is it right to use images of God to teach?

Our headings are:

Some People Use Images To Teach of Christ
God Forbids Using Images To Teach About Christ
How Does God you to teach his children?

Our goals are: **That you will learn to use the lively teaching of the Word of God so that you and your children will be instructed and worship God better.**

98 Q. BUT MAY NOT IMAGES BE PERMITTED IN THE CHURCHES AS TEACHING AIDS FOR THE UNLEARNED?

A. No, we shouldn’t try to be wiser than God. He wants his people instructed by the living preaching of his Word– not by idols that cannot even talk.

Some People Use Images to teach about Christ

1. Michelangelo created the most popular image of Jesus that is widely used today some 1500 years after Jesus lived on earth. It was probably a painting of Ceasare Borgia that he altered. Borgia was a Cardinal红衣主教 around 1500 in Italy. He was a corrupt man who was forced into the priesthood by his father. But the truth is, we have no picture of what Jesus looked like. Historical records put him as short, darker, and not so good looking. The average height of the time was 5’ 1’’ and the average weight was 110lbs. Instead, this man created an image of a white, tall, hippy-like, and handsome man and called him Jesus. Would you want someone to create a picture of you and show it to your children, but the picture does not look like you at all? At best, the common image of Christ is a violation of the 9th command. Yet this image is in story books, on coffee cups, and T-shirts, and art museums all around the world.

3. Consider 2 argument people use to justify using images of Christ?

a. They argue that their image is 2-dimensional instead of 3 dimensional, so that is not an image. In doing this, they ignore the 2nd law which is twofold. You are not to make any image of God. You are not to bow down to that image. Look at it!

Exodus 20:4 "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 nor 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 fourth generations of **those who hate Me.**

Those who make any image of God...show their hate for God. God said so. Note the degree of judgment God put on those who violate this command.

b. Some want to use pictures of Jesus to teach young people or illiterate文盲people. They may argue, for instance, that since some people can’t read, they could watch a movie about Jesus Christ. Many believe that using pictures of Jesus will elicit pious desires for Christ and so they will desire to worship him or worship him better. **So why then do they ultimately use pictures of Jesus? Ultimately they want to help their children to worship God better.** This is the crux症结 of the fault in this argument. The argument might sound reasonable and noble, but the application is sinful, as you will see.

4. But how can anyone faithfully attempt to use an image of Jesus Christ to teach about him when no artist can capture his humanity and his Divinity in an image? Jesus Christ has two distinct natures. An image of his humanity is unfair, as it minimizes his Divinity which cannot be captured by a picture. Furthermore, not one has any direction from the Lord for any such pictures.

God Forbids Using Images to Teach about Christ

1. God forbids using images to teach about Christ because God cannot be characterized by gold, silver, or stone. He must not be reduced to be like the things he created.

Acts 17:29 - "Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising 我们既然是神的子孙，就不应该以为他的神性是好像人用手艺、心思所雕刻的金银石头一样"

What is the difference between using silver and gold to make an image and using graphite or paints to make an image? An image is an image, period.

God unequivocally明确 stated that he did not present himself in any form, and he was careful not to show any form.

Deuteronomy 4:15 "Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, 16 "lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or

female, 所以你们要特别小心，谨慎自己，因为耶利米在何烈山从火中对你们说的那一天，你们没有看见什么形象，恐怕的你们败坏自己，为自己制造偶像，制造任何神像的形像，无论是男像或是女像

God purposely did not show his form to Moses because he knew of man's proclivity 倾向 toward idols.

2. God forbid even using images to help people worship him. No good parent will disagree with that. But King Jeroboam did not make idols of any other gods. He made images of Jehovah in Bethel and Dan and **announced that the idols were the true God.** Jeroboam did not show a strong personal hatred of God, rather, he made his idols as representations of Jehovah and he wanted Israel to worship God with the aid (as RC's do) of the idols.

1Kings 12:26 And Jeroboam said in his heart, "Now the kingdom may return to the house of David: 27 "If these people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of the LORD at Jerusalem, then the heart of this people will turn back to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah, and they will kill me and go back to Rehoboam king of Judah." 28 Therefore the king asked advice, made two calves of gold, and said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. **Here are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!**" 29 And he set up one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. 30 Now **this thing became a sin**, for the people went to worship before the one as far as Dan.

On account of his wickedness, Jeroboam was struck with leprosy 麻风病 What happened to the nation was worse. They were then led astray to worship Jehovah God with the help of 2 idols. Now look at the New Testament.

Romans 1:22 Professing to be wise, they became fools, 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.

Today, when you show a child a picture of Jesus, surely you don't tell him to worship the picture. But you want him to have a picture in his mind; you want to help him to worship God better. That is the picture that God forbids. He wants your child to have a spiritual picture of the God-man dying on the cross...

3. God threatens wrath – the worst type of wrath- upon those who use idols to help worship him.

Psalms 78:58 For they provoked Him to anger with their high places, And moved Him to jealousy with their carved images. 59 When God heard this, He was furious, And greatly abhorred Israel 神听见就大怒，完全弃绝了以色列

Remember when Israel made an image of a golden calf 金牛犊 to help them worship what God did.

Exodus 32:20 Then he took the calf which they had made, burned it in the fire, and ground it to powder; and he scattered it on the water and made the children of Israel drink it.

God wanted them to see that images of himself were worthy of nothing less than excretion... fit for the toilet.

4. God is a Jealous God. True jealousy is a sign of care. Jealousy is often translated "zealous." God is zealous for worship.

Exodus 34:14 '(for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God),

You see, God has exclusive right to possess Israel and to claim her love and allegiance for himself alone. No one would want to have his wife become a prostitute 妓女. The wife that truly loves her husband will show it in the right way. The wife that truly loves her husband is safe from adultery... so with spiritual adultery.

How does God want you to teach his children?

1. The alternative to idols of God...even idols that simply aid the worship of Jehovah...must be replaced with the Word of God... the Word that shines...

2Peter 1:17 For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to

Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." 18 And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. 19 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. That Word must be preached and taught in all its richness and fullness...in its purity and power.

Preach the Word of God with passion. Talk of God's goodness and glory with all the delight that is derived from them. Let your children know how excited and blessed you are as a child of the King Jesus. Let them know that all of this good news is wrapped up in God's love letter to his people – the Bible. They should love to mediate on God's Word... even meditate on God's Word.

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? 15 And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!" 17 So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

Hebrews 4:12 For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

神的道是活的，是有效的，比一切两刃的剑更锋利，甚至可以刺入剖开灵与魂，关节与骨髓，并且能辨明心中的思想和意念。

There is no faith that comes by "beautiful pictures" of Jesus – never has, never will. It is condemnation that comes from those so-called "beautiful pictures" of Jesus Christ.

3. Preach and teach about the sufficiency充足性 of God's Word for all your instruction so that you are completely prepared to do all God requires.

2Timothy 3: 16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. 全部圣经都是

神所默示的，在教训、责备、矫正和公义的训练各方面，都是有益的，为要使属神的人装备好，可以完成各样的善工。

Those who say we need pictures to teach our children are attacking the sufficiency of the Word of God. They are saying God's Word is not enough and we need to supplement it with our own ideas to help them come to faith and worship God better. But you will not say that!

Conclusion:

We already considered that idols of any kind (to make, worship, or help worship) are wrong and that the worship of God must be kept pure. You are only to worship God in the way he commands. Today you learned that it is impossible to make an image of the Lord. It is wrong to make an image of God that reduces him to created material and use it as a teaching tool. To do this would endanger your soul and the soul of your family. On the contrary, Christians use the living and lively teaching of God's Word to instruct others about God.

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: **You must make every effort to carefully, lovingly, and passionately teach the Word of God to your children and those around you.** Pictures may help you to read a story about man, but they don't help in the story of Christ. Pictures and images of God confuse the mind. God is a Spirit. **And you are to worship him in your spirit and according to his glorious truth.** Jesus Christ paid a great price for your salvation to make you his child, **surely you would want to honor him and worship him in the way he says.**

Finally, a clear understanding of God's Word is fundamental根本的 to trusting in Christ for salvation. If you are not a Christian, you need to study God's Word so you can see how sinful you are, you need to see your need for Christ, and how you need to know how to receive his benefits. Nothing else would do. May you therefore be moved to study God's Word more and more.