

# Worship According to the Word

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## **Q. What does the second commandment forbid?**

**A.** The second commandment forbids our worshipping God with images or in any other way not established in His word.

(Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A #51)

*“And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.”*

(Matthew 15:9)

Back in 2012 I remember reading an article in the New York Times which was titled, *“Innovations That Will Change Your Tomorrow”*. And over the course of that article, the writer had compiled thirty-two different innovative inventions that were created by various scientists and engineers from all over the world. These inventions included many things which were intended to enhance or simplify the way that we live our lives. I remember that the invention that was the most interesting to me was one created by a team of Physicists at Wake Forest University, who had developed a form of clothing that could double as an electrical outlet by converting our bodies naturally produced heat into usable electricity. So if you were in a pinch and your cell phone was running out of battery, you could actually charge it, simply by placing the phone in your pants pocket and going on a quick walk or a jog so that you could produce some extra body heat. I’m not sure if I really like the idea of wearing an electric shirt around (*especially if I was caught in a rain storm*), but still, you’ve got to hand it to those physicists for coming up with such an innovative and interesting idea.

It shouldn’t come as a shock to us, that in our world, we have an enthusiasm and a determination to be more and more innovative. We are constantly chasing after new methods and fresh ideas to improve the way that we work and play and enjoy the world that is around us. And we need to understand that creativity and innovation is a great thing! In fact, God created us to be creative! Our desire to be innovative stems from the fact that all of us as human beings are created in what theologians refer to as the *“Imago Dei”* or the *“image of God”* (According to Genesis 1:27). When we create and innovate, and build and produce, we are reflecting the very nature of our Creator God, the One who designed and created all things. You see, human invention and human innovation are not bad things in and of themselves. The human ability to create and innovate are gifts that have been given to us by our Creator God. However, just as with any good and perfect gift that God has given to us, we, as fallen sinful human beings, have the propensity, or the inclination, to use the good gifts that God gives us for sinful and distorted purposes. And one of the ways that human beings have abused the good gift of creativity and innovation is in regards to how we worship the God of the universe.

You see, as fallen and sinful human beings, our natural tendency is not to come to God on His own terms or to live and worship according to His commands, but instead, we are in fact bent towards idolatry. The French theologian John Calvin, in his most famous work, *“The Institutes of the Christian Religion”* written in 1536, says this in chapter 11 in regards to man’s sinful nature, that *“the human mind is, so to speak, a perpetual forge of idols”*. In other words, what Calvin is saying is that instead of using the good, pleasing and perfect gift of divine creativity

and innovation to please the Lord, we instead use those same creative abilities to manufacture false gods, false belief systems and false ways of worshiping the God of the universe.

And it's with this in mind that we come to the second commandment in the Decalogue, the second of the commands given to us in the 10 commandments. In **Exodus 20:4-6**, God tells us, *"You shall not make for yourself a carved image—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; 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 upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments."* What is God trying to tell us in this commandment? In **Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A #50** our catechism answers this question by stating, *"The second commandment requires us to receive, respectfully perform, and preserve completely and purely all the regulations for religion and worship that God has established in His word."*

You see, the first of the 10 commandments reveals to us the OBJECT of our worship. The first commandment tells us WHO we are to worship. But the second commandment goes a step farther by revealing to us not only WHO we are to worship, but HOW we are to worship. We are not permitted by God to worship Him any way that we choose. We are not given creative or innovative license when it comes to HOW we are to worship the Lord. No, God is Holy, and as such we are called to worship Him according to the regulations for worship that He has clearly established in the Bible. And that means that the Christian church will always look and operate differently than the rest of the secular world. Even though the culture around us may be obsessed with images and videos, smoke machines and entertainment, self-expression and creating events geared toward target markets, we as Christians are called to worship God, not according to the patterns of this world, but according to the elements of worship that are prescribed to us by God in the Scriptures, namely: prayer, the administration of the sacraments, the singing of Psalms, Hymns and spiritual songs, the giving of our tithes and offerings and the preaching of the Word of God.

Our catechism goes on to say, not only what this commandment REQUIRES, but also what this commandment FORBIDS. In **Q&A #51** we read, *"The second commandment forbids our worshipping God with images or in any other way not established in His word."* The second commandment is all about HOW we worship the God of the universe. And that means that we need to be asking the right kind of questions. Instead of asking, *"What do I want worship to be like?"* we need to be asking, *"God, how is it that You desire to be worshiped?"*. Worship is not about what we want, it's about what God wants. Worship is not about being innovative or creative...worship is about meeting with God on His own terms, according to His Word, in order express our praise and adoration for all that He is and all that He's done for us in Christ.

## Dig Even Deeper into God's Word!

Leviticus 10:1-2

2 Samuel 6:3-7

Deuteronomy 4:15-24