

The main verb of Deuteronomy 4 is the verb “to see” – used nine times.

Verse 3 – “Your eyes have seen what the LORD did at Baal-Peor.”

Verse 5 – “See, I have taught you statutes and rules...”

Verse 9 – “Only take care and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen...”

Verse 12 – “You heard the sound of words, but saw no form...”

Verse 15 – “Since you saw no form the day that the LORD spoke to you...”

Verse 19 – “Beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them...”

Verse 28 – “And there [in exile] you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.”

Verse 35 – “To you it was shown [same verb, “to see”] that you might know that the LORD is God.” (and v36)

We are visual creatures.

Wait, did I say that the main verb of Deuteronomy 4 is the verb “to see”?

Because there is another verb used 9 times:

“to hear.”

Verse 1 – “And now, O Israel, hear the statutes and the rules that I am teaching...”

Verse 6 – when the nations “hear all these statutes” they will call you a great and wise nation.

Verse 10 – the LORD said, “Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words”

Verse 12 – “You heard the sound of words, but saw no form”

Verse 28 – [the verse about gods who do not see, nor hear...]

Verse 30 – after all these things, you will obey [or hear] the voice of the LORD

Verses 32-33 – has any people *heard* the voice of God and lived?

Verse 36 – “Out of heaven he let you hear his voice, that he might discipline you. And on earth he let you see his great fire, and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire.”

Your eyes have seen.

Your ears have heard.

The Image *and* the Word are *both* important to the Christian life.

We’re going through the Ten Commandments as a part of our catechetical series,
looking at the basics of Christian faith and life.

In Deuteronomy 5, Moses repeats the Ten Commandments – that were first given in Ex 20.
Then in Deuteronomy 6-26, Moses expounds the Ten Commandments.

The order of Moses' teaching in the central 20 chapters of Deuteronomy follows the same order as the Ten Commandments.
So what is chapter 4 doing?

Deuteronomy consists of several sermons that Moses' preached.

Chapters 1-4 are his first sermon, which lays out the historical background – reminding Israel of their past.

Chapters 5-26 are his second sermon, which expounds the Ten Commandments.

Chapters 27-34 then conclude with two final sermons and two final songs in preparation for Israel to enter the land.

So chapter 4 functions as the conclusion of Moses' first sermon.

It's worth noting that the *one* commandment that Moses highlights in this sermon is the second commandment.

Q. 49. *Which is the second commandment?*

A. The second commandment is, You shall not make unto you any graven 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: You shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

The first commandment says that we are to have no other god besides the one true God.

The second commandment goes on to say something about *how* we are to worship the one true God.

After all, it is really easy to *say* that you are worshiping the true God.

But *saying* that you are worshiping God is not necessarily the same thing as *doing* it.

As our catechism puts it in questions 50:

Q. 50. *What is required in the second commandment?*

A. The second commandment requires the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God has appointed in his word.

The second commandment focuses on one point:

do not make graven images; do not worship them.

The catechism recognizes that this one point has further implications.

When Jesus comments on the command, "you shall not kill,"

he says that this specific command has a more general application.

Jesus says that "you shall not kill" is not just about the outward act,

but focuses on the heart.

Even being angry with your brother is sin.

Likewise, the command not to make graven images has broader implications as well.
This command has to do with the worship of God.

Question 51 follows up:

Q. 51. *What is forbidden in the second commandment?*

A. The second commandment forbids the worshiping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his word.

God has told us how to worship him.

Therefore we should worship God in the way that he has said.

And the second commandment concludes by giving us reasons:

“for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep my commandments.”

As the catechism puts it:

Q. 52. *What are the reasons annexed to the second commandment?*

A. The reasons annexed to the second commandment are, God's sovereignty over us, his propriety in us, and the zeal he has to his own worship.

1. “Keeping Pure and Entire”: What Is Required in the 2nd Commandment? (v1-14)

A50: The Second Commandment requires the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in His Word.

If the first commandment emphasizes how we should love the Lord our God,
and have no other God but God,
the second commandment shows us our need to worship God in Spirit and in truth.

And we see this in Deuteronomy 4.

This is Moses' introduction to his sermon on the Ten Commandments (chapters 5-26).
He warns the Israelites to “take care, and keep your soul diligently,
lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen,
and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life.” (4:9)

Notice the focus on “the things that your eyes have seen.”

Forty years ago they were children when God delivered them from Egypt.
As wide-eyed children, they crossed the Red Sea,
marveling at the mighty power of God to save.
They grew up eating manna in the wilderness,
drinking water from the Rock.

They had seen for themselves the greatness of God,
as the Spirit of God led them through the wilderness in the pillar of cloud and fire.
They had also seen the judgment of God at Peor,
when some of their own friends and relatives worshiped the Baal of Peor,
and God had brought judgment upon them – and they died in the wilderness.

God's works in history are at the heart of what we do in worship.
As Christians, this is centered on God's mighty deeds in Jesus Christ:
his incarnation, ministry, death, resurrection, ascension,
and his pouring out the Holy Spirit on Pentecost.
But of course, all this only makes sense
because of the whole history of redemption revealed in the OT.

Of course, we only know of these mighty deeds because God has also *spoken*.
The *word* of God is equally important with his *works*.
Remember also, Moses says, how God spoke to you at Mt Sinai (verse 11):
“You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain,
while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven,
wrapped in darkness, cloud and gloom.
Then the Lord spoke to you out of the midst of the fire.
You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice.
And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform,
that is, the Ten Commandments.” (v11-13)

Verse 13 gives the Ten Commandments a unique place in the law.
The Ten Commandments is referred to as “the covenant” that Israel must perform.
Verse 14 will go on to talk about statutes and rules.
It would be a bit simplistic to say that “statutes” refers to the religious laws,
and “rules” refers to the civil laws,
but that *is* the basic idea.

Do not forget God's works—do not forget God's word.
Indeed, vv 6-8 point out that when the nations around you hear all these statutes and rules
they will marvel at the righteousness of these statutes and rules.
“For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us,
whenever we call upon him?” (v7)

When the people of God live according to God's statutes and rules,
then the nations say,
“Wow! That's amazing!
That's a community that is characterized by justice and wisdom.”

Notice something:

it doesn't say that the nations will want to be ruled by the same laws!
Notice something else:
it doesn't say that Israel should seek to impose their laws on others.

We *should* expect people today to be *impressed*
by the wisdom and justice of the Christian community.
The world should say about the Christians, "See how they love one another!"
They may hate us for that –
they may seek to destroy us –
but they should never be able to call us hateful and bigoted.

Why are they doing that today?
Because too many Christians are trying to impose God's law on the world.
We are trying to use political *power* – we are trying to use the weapons of the world –
in order to accomplish what only the cross can do.
Yes, every knee *should* bow and every tongue *should* confess that Jesus Christ is Lord –
and one day *they will* –
but the only way to that day is the way of the cross.

That was true for Israel – and it is true for us,
because, as Paul says, it was true for Jesus.

And that's really what we need to see in our second point:

2. Word and Image: What Is Forbidden in the Second Commandment? (v15-31)

A51: The Second Commandment forbids the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in His Word.

In verse 15 Moses highlights the fact that Israel "saw no form
on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb."

You cannot worship God by means of an image—
whether the figure of a male or female, or that of an animal or any other creature.
You cannot worship God through the sun, moon or stars.
Do not confuse the Creator with the creature.

Why are images condemned so thoroughly?
Because no creature fully reflects God.
These creatures are things
"that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven."

Notice that there are two reasons given in Deuteronomy 4 for the prohibition of images.

- 1) because you saw no form at the mountain (v15)
- 2) because you heard a voice (v36)

There is no image at Mt Sinai—only the Word.

“You saw no form” therefore do not make any carved image.

And to make a carved image is to “forget the covenant of the LORD your God.”

You are to remember the Word of God and the works of God—

what he has said, and what he has done.

But why was there no image at Mt. Sinai?

Every other god in the ancient near east had images.

A god without an image was unheard of!

Why was there no image at Mt. Sinai?

To understand this, we have to go back to Genesis 1.

Because God once had an image.

His name was Adam.

In Genesis 1:26, God said, “let us make man in our image.”

And so God created man in his own image and likeness.

“God created man, male and female, after his own image,

in knowledge, righteousness and holiness, with dominion over the creatures.”

Man’s knowledge reflected God’s infinite knowledge.

He was righteous and holy—as God is righteous and holy.

And as God rules over all things,

so man ruled over the creatures as the steward of God.

In the Garden of Eden, word and image came together.

God created man in his image, and he spoke to him his word.

Indeed, we are told that God walked in the garden with Adam,

suggesting that God took some kind of visible form.

But Adam was not content to remain the image of God, his Father.

And through his sin and rebellion, he exchanged the glory of the immortal God
for the image of the serpent.

Adam had been created as the image of God.

He was created to look like God.

But now that image was twisted and distorted.

When you look at man today, you see a perversion of the image of God.

Our knowledge has been mixed with folly and ignorance,

so that our communication has become filled with half-truths.

Yes, we still do good things,

but our ‘righteousness’ is mixed with wickedness.

Is there any person on earth of whom you could say,

“Ah, that’s what God looks like!”?

What dominion we still have over the creatures

is turned to manipulation and destruction.
No, when Israel comes to Mt. Sinai,
there is no one and nothing that is worthy of being held up as the image of God.
And so God speaks from the fire—
a warning of the judgment that will come upon the earth
The Word of God comes to Israel without an image.
For Israel to make an image is to repeat the sin of Adam —
to exchange the glory of God for the creature.

And the warning is given to them and to their children (4:25-28).
“When you father children and children’s children, and have grown old in the land,
if you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything,
and by doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God,
so as to provoke him to anger,
I call heaven and earth to witness against you today,
that you will soon utterly perish from the land
that you are going over the Jordan to possess.
You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed.
And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples,
and you will be left few in number
among the nations where the LORD will drive you.
And there you will serve gods of wood and stone,
the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.”

If Israel turns to images, then God will hand them over to their idolatry.
Now, I want you to notice something.
God does not say, “If you worship other gods, I will send you into exile.”
God says, “If you make images, I will send you into exile.”

At Sinai, Aaron made a golden calf,
and he identified the golden calf with Yahweh.
King Jeroboam did the same thing —
golden calf worship was always the attempt to worship Yahweh with images.

You can successfully keep the first commandment (have no other gods),
but yet fail to keep the second commandment.

You can say that you are worshiping the Triune God,
when in fact you are worshiping a figment of your own imagination.

I once heard a pastor say that “my god would never command Israel to slaughter people,”
so therefore various parts of the Bible could not be inspired by God.
That pastor was violating the second commandment.

3. The Jealousy of Our God: Why We Should Keep the 2nd Commandment? (v32-40)

In verses 32-40, Moses reflects on *why* we should keep the second commandment.

Our Shorter Catechism covers the same ground:

Q52: What are the reasons annexed to the Second Commandment?

A52: The reasons annexed to the Second Commandment are, God's sovereignty over us, his propriety in us, and the zeal He has to His own worship.

God's sovereignty over us is intimately bound up with his propriety in us.

What does it mean that God has "propriety" in us?

We don't use the word "propriety" in this way,
but we still use the word "proprietor."

A proprietor is an owner –

and in the same way, God has ownership of us – we are his –
he has *proprietary* rights in us,
because he made us in his own image.

God took Israel out of Egypt by his mighty hand –

because he loved your fathers – and he promised to give their offspring the land.

And God really cares how he is worshiped.

He let you hear his voice from heaven (v36) that he might discipline you.

He let you see his great fire and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire.

Yes, he will discipline you (and even exile you) if you worship images –

but if you repent and return to the Lord, he will deliver you (v29-30).

So the Second Commandment declares that you cannot use images in the true worship of God.

God has spoken by his Word.

To use images is to draw your eyes, your heart, and your mind
away from what God has done in history.

Now the use of images was a regular problem for Israel.

During the time of the judges as well as the kings

Israel frequently turned to the use of images in worship.

You can understand why.

We *were* created in the image of God.

We understand intuitively that there *should be* an image of God.

But sin has so corrupted that image, that from Adam to Christ,
there was no image worthy of God.

Isaiah reflects on this in Isaiah 44.

Isaiah portrays idolatry as a communal endeavor.

The ironsmith fashions the idol with hammers.

The carpenter shapes it into the figure of a man.

Idolatry doesn't look so bad because everyone's doing it.

So long as everyone is a part of it, it can't be all that bad, right?

Idolatry is always a communal effort.

It makes no difference what the idol is.

What do you think will deliver you?

That is the cry of the worshiper: "Deliver me, for you are my god!"

What is going to bring you peace and happiness?

What is going to allow you to master your destiny?

For some it is money—if only we made another \$10,000...

For others it is status—if only I had that job...

For many it is a spouse—if only I were married...

And children,

where is your heart set?

Getting a certain toy?

Getting the best grades?

Getting away with something you know is wrong?

No matter how individualistic we are,

idolatry is always a communal event.

If no one else valued what we value,

we might see our idolatry for what it is.

But when everyone else is pursuing the same sorts of idols,

it becomes normal, rational, and as Isaiah says

¹⁸ They know not, nor do they discern, for he has shut their eyes, so that they cannot see, and their hearts, so that they cannot understand. ¹⁹ No one considers, nor is there knowledge or discernment to say, "Half of it I burned in the fire; I also baked bread on its coals; I roasted meat and have eaten. And shall I make the rest of it an abomination? Shall I fall down before a block of wood?" ²⁰ He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?" (Isaiah 44:18-20)

The basic question when dealing with sin (for idolatry is at the root of all sin) is this one:

"Is there not a lie in my right hand?"

What lie am I believing?

Sin claims to bring happiness—but it only brings misery.

Why do you believe it?

When was the last time that sin gave you what it promised?

"A deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself."

But now, in Jesus, Word and Image come together.

John's Gospel begins,

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”

“The Word became flesh and dwelt among us.”

Paul speaks likewise in Colossians 1:15

“He is the image of the invisible God,
the firstborn of all creation...the firstborn from the dead.”

Jesus is the image of God in two respects.

First, he is the image of God as the eternal Son of God.

If Adam was created in the image of God as the Son of God,
how much more is the eternal Son the true image of the Father,
because the eternal Son resembles the Father in every way.

But second, he is the image of God because he is the firstborn from the dead.

Because Jesus has been raised from the dead,
man is restored to God's image.

Jesus Christ is the embodiment of Israel.

He was exiled to Egypt as a child, and out of Egypt God called his Son.

He wandered in the wilderness for 40 days (even as Israel for 40 years),

He endured the temptations of Israel in the desert:

longing for bread,

taking the easy route,

idolatry/worshipping false gods,

and where Israel had failed, Jesus succeeded.

As the Image of God,

Israel was to make all nations ooh, and ahh over their righteous laws.

That didn't happen very often!

As the Image of God,

Jesus declared, "when I am lifted up I will draw all men to myself"

And he has gathered the nations together in His Name.

It is precisely in the cross that Jesus succeeds where Israel had failed.

In Jesus we see the true image of God.

The Image is the Word.

The Word is the Image.

What are the implications of this?

Paul says in Romans 8:29

that God predestined us “to be conformed to the image of his Son,
in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.”

God restores us to his image through conforming us to the image of Jesus.

Likewise, in 1Cor 15:49, Paul says that

just as we have borne the image of the man of dust,

so also we shall bear the image of the man from heaven.
Just as we have shared in Adam's sin and misery,
so also we share in the glory of the resurrected Christ.

The admonition to the Israelites in the wilderness is somewhat different for us.
We cannot say "you saw no form."
No!
Paul tells us that though the Son of God was in the form of God,
he took to himself the form of a servant.
We have seen Jesus,
the one in whom the Word of God and the Works of God are united.
He is the Image of God and the Word of God,
and through his Word we are being renewed after his Image.

So some might say that we could make pictures of Jesus –
because he is both the Image and the Word.

But what can you craft that could depict this?
Any artistic depiction of this can only give us half of the story.
The movie, "The Passion of the Christ," gives a graphic portrayal
of the sufferings of Jesus.
And it may have some educational value.
I know that it has driven many to read the scriptures,
to find out who this Jesus was.
But an artistic depiction is only as powerful as the artist.
It can only give us a human Jesus.
It cannot give us the whole Jesus—the one who was God and man.

The incarnation *must* affect the way we read the Second Commandment.
But it does not change the Second Commandment.
God has come in the flesh.
The Word has been revealed in the flesh.
The Image of God has walked among us.
There is now an image through which we must worship God!
But that Image sits at the right hand of the Father.
And the only place on earth where you can catch a glimpse of that Image,
is in the faces around you—
in those who are being conformed to likeness of Christ.

Therefore we must remember what God has done in Jesus Christ,
and we must teach them to our children, and our grandchildren.
We must teach them the Word of God and the works of God.
That is one of the reasons why we have the catechism quiz each week.

We are teaching our children what God has done in Jesus Christ.
The catechism is designed as a summary of basic biblical teaching.

I know that some of you have difficulty memorizing.
As we get older our brains get slower.
But when each child is baptized, we as a congregation promise to support and encourage
the parents in training their children in the way of Christ.
One way you can do that is by learning the catechism with them.
Another way is simply to be present when they are quizzed.

Every child who grows up at MCPC should have a thorough understanding of the catechism.
Our Sunday school classes are designed to do precisely what Dt 4 commands,
as our children study the scriptures to learn the story of redemption,
including two years on study of the shorter catechism
to understand the basics of the faith.

We are called to remember what God has done, and what God has said.
In Jesus Christ we hear God's Word, and we behold God's Image.
Therefore let us worship him in Spirit and in truth,
that we also might be conformed to the image of Christ through his Word.

Let us pray.
Almighty God, as we look into the face of your beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who is your
true image, we beseech you, in whom is all fullness of wisdom and light, to guide us by your
Word and Spirit that we might bear the fruits of righteousness to the glory and exaltation of your
holy name. Amen.