

Each week of 2019 we will take a brief look at one or more questions from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. To read previous weeks' briefs go to [oakhillpca.com/wsc](http://oakhillpca.com/wsc)

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

A. The second commandment is, *Thou shalt not make unto thee 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: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: 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 shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.*

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.

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.

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.

Some mistaken the Second Commandment as forbidding idolatry. The First Commandment, however, forbids idolatry ("Thou shalt have no other gods..."). This Second Commandment regulates the worship of God. Historically, Presbyterians have called this the Regulative Principle of Worship. In a nutshell, this principle states that God regulates worship in his Word.

The Westminster Confession of Faith summarizes this Principle in 21.1:

*"The acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations and devices of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representation, or any other way not prescribed in the Holy Scripture."*

Let's consider how the Second Commandment leads to this principle.

**1. At face value, the Second Commandment forbids the making of images and using them in worship.**

"God is spirit" (Jn. 4:24). He has no physical form. Any creation of an image of God, whether externally or internally (i.e. mentally), misrepresents God. Every image would "fall short of the glory of God."

**2. Implied in the Second Commandment is the positive affirmation of worshiping God in a "pure" manner.** With each Commandment, the Catechism demonstrates that not only is one activity forbidden, but that right activity is commended. So Q. 50 highlights that the Second Commandment "requires the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship."

**3. The Word of God gives us clear direction on how we ought to worship God.** God cares about the right worship of him. He is a "jealous God," meaning that he is passionate about right worship. He

reveals his will for worship in his Word. We obey the Second Commandment by looking to Scripture for clear direction on how we should worship.