

Q. 107. What is the second commandment?

A. The second commandment is: You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.¹

1. Ex 20.4-6.

Q. 108. What does the second commandment require?

A. 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.¹ These include: prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ;² the reading, preaching, and hearing of the word;³ the administration of and receiving the sacraments;⁴ church government and discipline;⁵ the administration and upkeep of the church;⁶ religious fasting;⁷ swearing by the name of God;⁸ and making vows to him.⁹ Also included are disapproving, denouncing, and opposing

false worship¹⁰ and doing our best, in accordance with our position and calling in life, to eliminate it and all forms of idolatry.¹¹

1. Dt 32.46-47, Mt 28.20, Acts 2.42, 1 Tm 6.13-14.
2. Phil 4.6, Eph 5.20.
3. Dt 17.18-19, Acts 15.21, 2 Tm 4.2, Jas 1.21-22, Acts 10.33.
4. Mt 28.19, 1 Cor 11.23-30.
5. Mt 18.15-17, 16.19, 1 Cor 5, 12.28, Jn 20.23.
6. Eph 4.11-12, 1 Tm 5.17-18, 1 Cor 9.1-15.
7. Jl 2.12, 18, 1 Cor 7.5.
8. Dt 6.13.
9. Is 19.21, Ps 76.11, 116.14, 18.
10. Acts 17.16-17, Ps 16.4.
11. Dt 7.5, Is 30.22.

Q. 109. What particular sins does the second commandment forbid?

A. The second commandment forbids: imagining,¹ recommending,² demanding,³ practicing,⁴ or in any way approving any religious worship not established by God himself;⁵ creating any likeness of God as the Trinity or as anyone of his three persons, either internally in our minds or externally in the form of any kind of image or representation of a created being;⁶ any worship of such created likenesses⁷ as if God were in them or as if they were a means to worshiping him;⁸ the creation of any likenesses of invented gods,⁹ any worship of them or service relating to them;¹⁰ and all superstitious contrivances.¹¹ Also forbidden are: any departure from the true worship of God¹² by adding to or taking away from it,¹³ whether by our own invention¹⁴ or received from some other tradition,¹⁵ and whether justified by antiquity,¹⁶ custom,¹⁷ devotional practice,¹⁸ good intentions, or any other excuse;¹⁹ simony²⁰ and anything sacrilegious;²¹ and finally any neglect of,²² contempt for,²³ hindering,²⁴ or opposition to the worship and regulations established by God.²⁵

1. Nm 15.39.
2. Dt 13.6-8.
3. Hos 5.11, Mi 6.16.
4. 1 Kgs 11.33, 12.33.
5. Dt 12.30-32.
6. Dt 4.15-19, Acts 17.29, Rom 1.21-25.
7. Dn 3.18 Gal 4.8.
8. Ex 32.5.
9. Ex 32.8.
10. 1 Kgs 18.26, 28, Is 65.11.
11. Acts 17.22, 19.19, Col 2.21-23.
12. Mal 1.7-8, 14.
13. Dt 4.2.
14. Ps 106.39.
15. Mt 15.9.
16. 1 Pt 1.18.
17. Jer 44.17.
18. Is 65.3-5, Gal 1.13-14.
19. 1 Sm 13.11-12, 15.21.
20. Acts 8.18.
21. Rom 2.22, Mal 3.8.
22. Ex 4.24-26.
23. Mt 22.5, Mal 1.7, 12-13.
24. Mt 23.13.
25. Acts 13.44-45, 1 Thes 2.15-16.

Q. 110. What reason is added to the second commandment emphasizing how important it is to obey it?

A. The reason added to this commandment to emphasize its importance is in these words: *For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.*¹ In addition to calling attention to the fact that God totally rules over us, so that we belong to him,² these words point to his fervent eagerness to be worshiped correctly,³ and that he is angered and takes vengeance on all false worship, which he sees as spiritual prostitution.⁴ He views breaking this commandment as equivalent to hating him and threatens to punish those who do break it for several generations.⁵ He also equates observing this commandment with loving him and keeping all his commandments, and promises mercy for many generations to those who do it.⁶

1. Ex 20:5-6.

2. Ps 45:11, Rv 15:3-4.

3. Ex 34:13-14.

4. 1 Cor 10:20-22, Jer 7:18-20, Ez 16:26-27, Dt 32:16-20.

5. Hos 2:2-4.