

## The Only True God

### Knowing God, chapter 4

#### Discussion Questions

1. Describe a iced caramel macchiato to someone who has never had coffee.
2. What are some common stereotypical caricatures of God?
3. How would you describe God to a small child who has never heard of God?

#### **Idols: not just false gods**

Most people today think of idols as statues or totems of common pagan religions. More popularly, others have helpfully pointed out that an idol anything you base your life upon more than God. (E.g., see Tim Keller's recent book, *Counterfeit Gods*.) The idea of actually Christians using man-made idols seems the least relevant of such discussions. But historically, many Christians (like Packer) have cautioned against the use of idols not just by those in pagan religions, and not just for false God, but images of the true God.

#### **Another look at the second commandment**

*Look at the second commandment. It runs as follows, "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" (Ex. 20:4-5). What is this command talking about?*

*If it stood alone, it would be natural to suppose that it refers to the worship of images of gods other than Jehovah—the Babylonian idol worship... or the paganism of the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day...*

*But in its context the second commandment can hardly be referring to this sort of idolatry, for if it were it would simply be repeating the thought of the first commandment [of having no other gods before Him] without adding anything to it.*

*Accordingly, we take the second commandment—as in fact it has always been taken—as pointing us to the principle that (to quote Charles Hodge) "idolatry consists not only in the worship of false gods, but also in the worship of the true God by images." In its Christian application, this means that we are not to make use of visual or pictorial representations of the triune God, or of any person of the Trinity, for the purpose of Christian worship. The commandment thus deals not with the object of our worship, but with the manner of it; what it tells us is that statues and pictures of the One whom we worship are not to be used as an aid to worshipping him. (Packer, *Knowing God*, 1993 edition, pp.43-44)*

#### **The Danger of worshipping the true God with false images**

##### **1. Images dishonor God, for they obscure his glory.**

*In a similar way, the pathos of a crucifix obscures the glory of Christ, for it hides the fact of his deity, his victory on the cross, and his present kingdom. It displays his human weakness, but it conceals his divine strength; it depicts the reality of his pain, but keeps out of our sight the reality of his joy and power. In both these cases [of the crucifix and Aaron's golden calf], the symbol is unworthy most of all because of what it fails to display. And so are all other visible representations of deity. (Packer, *Knowing God*, 1993 edition, p.46)*

*Whatever we may think of religious art from a cultural standpoint, we should not look to pictures of God to show us his glory and move us to worship; for his glory is precisely what such pictures can never show us... Isaiah 40:18... "To whom, then, will you compare God? What image will you compare him to?"...*

*Left to ourselves we tend immediately to reduce God to manageable terms. We want to get Him where we can use Him, or at least know where He is when we need Him... If all this sounds strange to modern ears, it is only because we have for a full half century [by 1961] taken God for granted. The glory of God has not been revealed to this generation of men. The God of contemporary Christianity is only slightly superior to the gods of Greece and Rome, if indeed He is not actually inferior to them in that He is weak and helpless while they at least had power. (Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 1961, p.8)*

## **2. Images mislead us, for they convey false ideas about God.**

*Psychologically, it is certain that if you habitually focus your thoughts on an image or picture of the One to whom you are going to pray, you will come to think of him, and pray to him, as the image represents him. Thus you will in this sense "bow down" and "worship" your image; and to the extent to which the image fails to tell the truth about God, to that extent you will fail to worship God in truth. That is why God forbids you and me to make use of images and pictures in our worship. (Packer, *Knowing God*, 1993 edition, p.47)*

## ***Molten Images and Mental Images***

*Just as it forbids us to manufacture molten images of God, so it forbids us to dream up mental images of him. Imaging God in our heads can be just as real a breach of the second commandment as imaging him by the work of our hands. (Packer, *Knowing God*, 1993 edition, p.47)*

*It needs to be said with the greatest possible emphasis that those who hold themselves free to think of God as they like are breaking the second commandment. (Packer, *Knowing God*, 1993 edition, p.47)*

*When we try to imagine what God is like we must of necessity use that-which-is-not-God as the raw material for our minds to work on; hence whatever we visualize God to be, He is not, for we have constructed our image out of that which He has made and what He has made is not God. If we insist upon trying to imagine Him, we end up with an idol, made not with hands but with thoughts; and an idol of the mind is as offensive to God as an idol of the hand. (Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 1961, p.9, emphasis mine)*

## ***Not just limited images, but limited concept of God***

*When the Scripture states that man was made in the image of God, we dare not add to that statement an idea from our own head and make it mean "in the exact image." To do so is to make man a replica of God, and that is to lose the unicity of God and end with no God at all. It is to break down the wall, infinitely high, that separates That-which-is-God from that-which-is-not-God. To think of creature and Creator as alike in essential being is to rob God of most of His attributes and*

*reduce Him to the status of a creature. If is, for instance, to rob Him of His inifinitude: there cannot be two unlimited substances in the universe. It is to take away His sovereignty: there cannot be two absolutely free beings in the universe, for sooner or later two completely free wills must collide. (Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, 1961, pp.7-8)*