

The Idolatry of the Papal King #3

Daniel 11:38-39; Galatians 3:1

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Greg L. Price

Does the New Testament support the use of images in worship (images of God—Father, Son, or Holy Spirit) or images of martyrs or “saints”? That’s the question we shall seek to answer this Lord’s Day.

We saw last Lord’s Day that God in the Second Commandment forbids (1) the making of images that represent Him; and forbids (2) the bowing down to images or serving them (i.e. honoring or venerating them) as acts of worship. All pictures, images, movies that claim to portray/represent God (the Father, Son, or Holy Spirit) are lies. Finite man cannot with his hands/technology portray the truth about the one true living God that is infinite/eternal (Isaiah 40:18).

How are we to see Jesus presently? By sight, by images, or by faith in the gospel? That is the question before us today.

Our main points are: (1) There Is No Credible Evidence of Images Made or Used for Worship in the New Testament; (2) There is No Credible Evidence of Images Made or Used for Worship among the Church Fathers (before 313—Edict of Milan—Christianity became a protected religion).

I. **There Is No Credible Evidence of Images Made or Used for Worship in the New Testament.**

A. According to Daniel 11:38, the Papal King will “honor the God [a god] of forces” (*mauzzim*, in a religious sense, he will venerate a god of protectors or patron saints). The angel tells Daniel that this is a god that the forefathers of the Papal King (the apostles) did not know. This is a great departure/apostasy from the apostolic faith. Then according to Daniel 11:39, the Papal King will build fortresses (cathedrals/temples) for these patron saints who will become a strange god to be adorned with precious stones—strange (not in the sense of weird) but strange because these patron saints and their images were not known to the apostles or to the church fathers who lived for about 300 years after the apostles.

B. Galatians 3:1 is a passage that the Papal King claims support to make and use images for worship.

1. Paul’s Letter to the Galatian Churches is a clear proclamation of the pure gospel of Jesus Christ that was being perverted by false teachers coming from Judaism into Christianity. These false teachers claimed that one could only be justified before God by faith in Jesus and by obedience to God’s Law (faith plus works). But Paul declares in no uncertain terms that is a false gospel and is no “good news” at all, for once we add any obedience to the Law as a ground for our justification, we are obligated to keep the whole Law (Galatians 5:1-3). This is the gospel of Christ by faith alone (Galatians 2:16).

2. God’s Law is not the problem—the problem is with us. We cannot keep it perfectly. We are all lawbreakers before God—we are not innocent, but guilty and deserve God’s righteous judgment in hell. Thus, God’s Law (whether Ceremonial Law which was nailed to the cross of Christ or Moral Law which is perpetual and is summarized in the Ten Commandments) cannot save us. We need a perfect righteousness which only Jesus can give us (who perfectly kept all of God’s Law in His life and death). We are indeed justified before God on the basis of someone’s obedience to God’s Law (not our obedience, but Christ’s obedience). Jesus paid the debt of guilt for God’s people and purchased forgiveness of sin for all who will receive Him by faith alone.

3. God’s Moral Law is good, holy, and spiritual (Romans 7), and God has written His Law in all of us who trust in Jesus by way of honoring Him and loving Him by our obedience—not in order to be justified, but in order to grow in Him and to know His will for our life. Let’s now consider what Galatians 3:1 is teaching about seeing Jesus.

B. Does this verse teach that the Galatians had made an image of the crucified Christ and that was

how they saw Christ according to the Apostle Paul? I dare say, no, that is not what Paul is saying.

1. Paul calls the Galatian believers “foolish”, not in order to be mean or to call them names because he despises them. Paul was a spiritual father to them, and he is seeking to show them how they have been charmed/deceived by these false teachers to disregard the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is an act of kindness when administered in love and especially where there is a history of love (Psalm 141:5).

2. How was the crucified Jesus set before their eyes? He was set before their eyes in the gospel which was read/preached to them and received by them through faith. “Evidently set forth” (the Greek verb used here, *prographo*, is only used in three other verses in the New Testament, and it does not refer to seeing a literal image or picture of anything, but rather refers to what was written before or decreed before—Romans 15:4; Ephesians 3:3; Jude 1:4). Thus, this verb is not used here in the sense of setting forth an image or picture of the crucified Christ, but is used of setting forth that which was previously written concerning the crucified Christ.

3. What Paul is saying is that Jesus Christ crucified had been previously given to them in writing/preaching and that they had beheld Christ crucified in the gospel with the sight of faith as the gospel was read to them and preached to them—John 6:40; Hebrews 12:2. If one does understand that natural sight is in view here, then it is not a man-made image of Christ crucified that is in view, but is the divinely appointed symbol of Christ’s broken body in the bread and in the divinely appointed symbol of Christ’s shed blood in the Lord’s Supper.

C. Does the Holy Spirit in the New Testament make clear that images that represent God (Father, Son, or Holy Spirit) are considered by God to be idols/idolatry (a violation of the Second Commandment)? Indeed, He does (Acts 7:37-43; 1 Corinthians 10:5-7).

D. Has the incarnation of Jesus Christ (the Word made flesh) altered/changed the Second Commandment so that what was condemned in the Old Testament is now acceptable in the New Testament?

1. Only if Jesus is only Man and not God. If Jesus is fully God in His incarnation, then He is yet the same divine Person (though having added a human nature to His divine nature) and there is no way that a picture or image can accurately display/represent Jesus as the God/Man (John 1:1,14). Any image/picture/movie is lying in its portrayal of Jesus.

2. Did the apostles (or anyone else recorded in the New Testament) make an image of God (Father, Son, or Holy Spirit) let alone use it in worship? No! The silence of such an image is not God’s approval to make one and then use it in worship, but is rather God’s condemnation; for He has already condemned it in the Second Commandment. That is why no approved images are ever mentioned as being made or used in the New Testament (Romans 1:20-23).

II. There is No Credible Evidence of Images Made or Used for Worship among the Church Fathers (before 313).

A. Sources

1. Even Roman Catholic historians/theologians testify to this as well. Karl Joseph von Héfele, a Roman Catholic bishop and theologian (1808-1893) wrote,

The primitive church had no images of Christ, since most Christians at that time still adhered to the commandment of Moses (Exodus 20:4); the more, that regard as well to the Gentile Christians as to the Jewish [Christians] forbade all use of images (cited in Philip Shaff, *History of the Christian Church*, III:8:110).

2. It is not that the church fathers after the time of the apostles until 313 had nothing to say about religious images. They did write about religious images. However, they do not mention it as an accepted Christian practice, but a practice that had its origins from pagans or gnostic heretics.

Clement of Alexandria (150-215)

Moses... enacted expressly, that neither a graven, nor molten, nor moulded, nor painted likeness should be made; so that we may not cleave to things of sense, but pass to intellectual objects: for familiarity with the sight disparages the reverence of what is divine; and to worship that which is immaterial by matter, is to dishonour it by sense (*Stromata* 5.5).

Origen (185-253)

“[Celsus says that Christians] cannot tolerate temples, altars, or images. In this they are like the Scythians, the nomadic tribes of Libya, the Seres who worship no god, and some other of the most barbarous and impious nations in the world. . . .” [These groups] agree in this with the Christians and Jews [in not having images], but they are actuated by very different principles. For none of these former [pagan groups] abhor altars and images on the ground that they are afraid of degrading the worship of God, and reducing it to the worship of material things wrought by the hands of men. . . . [Christians] not only avoid temples, altars, and images, but are ready to suffer death when it is necessary, rather than debase by any such impiety the conception which they have of the Most High God. . . . [I]t is not possible at the same time to know God and to address prayers to images (*Against Celsus* 7.62-7.65).

Lactantius (250-325)

Wherefore it is undoubted that there is no religion wherever there is an image (*The Divine Institutes* 2.18-2.19).

The eminent church historian, Philip Shaff (*History of the Christian Church*, III:8:110) notes concerning the early church historian, Eusebius (Father of Church History, 260-340) that he

declared himself in the strongest manner against images of Christ in a letter to the empress Constantia... who had asked him for such an image. Christ, says he, has laid aside his earthly servant-form, and Paul exhorts us to cleave no longer to the sensible; and the transcendent glory of His heavenly body cannot be conceived nor represented by man; besides the second commandment forbids the making to ourselves any likeness of anything in heaven or in earth.

3. During the 8th century, there raged battles within the church over the issue of images (some defending the use of images and others denouncing the use of them). At the Second Council of Nicea (787), images of God, angels, martyrs, and saints were fully approved.

If anyone does not salute such representations as standing for the Lord and his saints, let him be anathema.

4. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) cited the acts of the Second Nicea and gave its full approval to the making of images of God and the use of images in worship. This is the official position of the Papal King and Church of Rome.

5. Reformed Protestant Churches historically condemned the making of images to be used in worship and any representation of God (Father, Son, or Holy Spirit). *The Westminster Larger Catechism* (1647) declares that the Second Commandment forbids (Question 109)

the making any representation of God, of all or any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever; all worshipping of it, or God in it or by it.....

6. Sadly, the vast majority of Protestant Churches have sinfully moved away from that biblical/historical position and have come to embrace the position of Rome that since the incarnation, making

images, pictures, movies of God (particularly of Jesus) are acceptable.

B. Application

1. Some of the common objections are: (1) I don't worship the image or picture, but what it represents; (2) The image/picture is only an aid to help me clearly focus my attention on the Lord; (3) The image or picture is to the illiterate and children a tool to teach them about God. But God forbids it regardless of our motives/intentions. We ought never to disobey God and justify it by our "good intentions". To the contrary, images of God teach a lie and lead people to trust in what they can see and touch (John 20:29). We walk by faith, not by sight.

2. When we disregard God's commandments, He turns us over to more serious forms of idolatry and sexual perversity (Romans 1). Idolatry in dishonoring God within a nation will lead to dishonoring one's neighbor (even the neighbor within the womb). The root sin of perverting and destroying the image of God in man is idolatry. Our nation's deepest problem is not inflation, the economy, immigration, sexual perversity, or even abortion, it is that we turned to false gods and to idolatrous worship of the one true God.

3. God is jealous (in a good/holy sense) for our worship of Him alone—not according to our inventions/ideas, but according to His commandment (Exodus 20:4-6). Our great God is to be feared (taken seriously). He threatens judgment to those who dishonor Him and blessing to those who honor Him. Let's honor Him and be blessed.

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