



# S E R M O N CLXI.

## QUESTION LI.

**W**HAT is forbidden in the Second Commandment?

### A N S W E R.

THE Second Commandment forbiddeth, the Worshipping of GOD by Images, or any other way not appointed in His Word.

**T**HE right Consideration of what is Required in any Precept, will give us light into those things which are Prohibited by it, or Transgressions of it. And the best way to understand that distinctly, is to consider the Subject about which the Precept is nextly concerned. And we have before observed, that there are two ways in which a Command may be broken, viz by Omission & Commission: Neglect of the Duties required, or doing the Things forbidden by it. And tho' the Answer only mentions the latter, yet both may here come under our Consideration. The Subject-matter of the Second Command, is Instituted Worship, in which it is supposed, that there are Institutions of Worship, and that GOD alone is the Author of them, and that Man is, by vertue of his Authority, under the Obligation of Obedience to them. And tho' the Command is delivered Negatively, yet there is something Positive included in it. There is Duty to be actually done, as well as Sin to be avoided. And not to do those Duties, is equally a Sin, as to do the things Prohibited.

We may therefore take a brief account of each of these.

1. *THIS Command forbids the Neglect or Contempt of any of these Ordinances, which God hath Instituted in his Church.* By such Neglect or Contempt, God's Authority is despised, and those Means which he hath by his Precept made necessary helps to Salvation, are disregarded. And here,

1. *THEY Sin against this Command, who renounce all the Gospel Institutions, under pretence of Spiritual Worship.* There is a Generation of such in the World, who cast all the reproach they can upon the Gospel Ordinances, and scornfully revile those that maintain the Profession and Observance of them: As if the Worshipping of God in the Spirit, superseded and abolished all outward Service, and was to come in the room of it; whereas God requires the whole Man, 1 Cor. 6. 20. *For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.* And these Ordinances are Means appointed on purpose, to be helps in our Spiritual Worshipping of God, and to promote that mediate Communion with him, which is the highest that is allowed us in this Life. When therefore Men do cast off the Ordinances, they lay aside the very form of Godliness, and put themselves quite out of the way of serving God acceptably.

2. *THEY that content themselves to live without any of th. m* Hitherto belong such Societies of People. as live without the settled Gospel Ordinances among them, and can be content

content with a neglect of right Endeavours to obtain it; or, if they have the Word Preached to them, seek not further, but live without the Dispensation of the Seals of the Covenant. Such Persons as do not in an orderly way, seek to participate in these Seals, but live, either without the initiating or confirming Sacrament, or if they are Baptized, they rest here, and are satisfied without the Supper of the Lord. Not that Men are to run rashly upon this, or are to be received without distinction, but when they think it no great matter whether they enjoy it or no, nor seek after a fitness for it, they practically declare it, to be vain or superfluous, contrary to the Command of Christ, who said, *Do this in remembrance of me.*

3. *SUK* *H* as too frequently and easily neglect to attend upon these Ordinances. The Apostle gives his Hebrews warning about this, *Heb.* 10. 25. When, tho' Men do acknowledge it to be their Duty, yet every little thing diverts them. They come when there is nothing to hinder, but every trifling excuse is sufficient to make an excuse of, and possibly they are not sorry to have one. Not but that God's Providence may often prevent them, and sometimes God would have Mercy rather than Sacrifice. But one that hath a due regard to this Precept, will reckon it a rebuke in Providence, when he is thus taken off.

4. *WHEN* they attend upon these Ordinances *perfunctorily*. There is indeed a special Reverence due to the Ordinances, which belongs to, and may hereafter be treated of under the Third Command. But they mistake, who think this Command to have respect only to the outward performance of these Services. It is certain, that every Command requires the Heart, without which, it cannot be performed acceptably to God, who expects it, *Prov.* 23. 26. *My son, give me thine heart.* It is therefore his Complaint of them, *Isai.* 29. 13. *This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear towards me is taught by the precepts of men.* When Men think, that to present a Body at an Ordinance, is enough; and if they can but tarry out the time of it, they have done fairly; and mean while entertain themselves with wandring Thoughts, and vain Objects, and never know what it is to have Communion with God in it, nor seek after it: Possibly are weary of it, and glad when they are dismissed from it: These are here guilty, & offer an horrible slight, to those Holy Appointments of God.

II. *THIS* Command forbids all *Positive Worship*, which is not of *Divine Institution*. By *Positive*, I understand, that which by an Arbitrary Precept, is made a *Medium* of our Worshipping of God; none of which can be Authentick, but such as have the Seal of his Authority upon them: As hath already been evidenced under the Affirmative part of the Command. Our Catechism ranks these under

two Heads: One particular, *the Worshipping of God by Images*; the other general, *or any other way not appointed in his Word*. Whereupon some have ranked these under two Heads, viz. *Idolatry*, and *Superstition*. But if this be allowed, we must take *Idolatry* in a restrained sense. If we take *Idolatry* for the Worshipping of a false Object, so it is equally forbidden in each Command of the First Table; for God is alike the Object of Worship in every one of them: And to pay the Duties proper to any of them, to any else but the true GOD, is gross *Idolatry*: Though it may be more directly aimed at in the First Command, as it is a comprehension of them all; as the Fifth is of all in the second Table. For which Reason we considered God as the only Object of Worship, under the former Command, and ranked *Idolatry* under it, as a Sin forbidden by it. But if we look upon *Idolatry*, as a worshipping of God by Images, making this an *Invented Medium* of paying Divine Honour unto him, so it comes under the second Command, and is forbidden by it. And on this Account, such Worship is in the Scripture called *Idolatry*, though it hath been pretended to be paid to the true God. But I suppose, that because the second Command, doth properly respect instituted Worship, hence all excess in this sort of Worship, is properly called *Superstition*, and the former of these is only one specialty in the Command; and because it was a Sin, which fallen Man was exceeding prone to, it is only named in the Body of the Precept synecdochically comprehending all the rest under it. We may then take a brief Account of each of these.

First, *THIS* Command forbids *the Worshipping of God by Images*. This is expressly mentioned; and that in two Particulars.

1. *THE* Making of them is prohibited. *Thou shalt not make.* And under a graven Image and Similitude is comprehended, every manner of Representation of God, whether in Statues or Pictures: For this general Prohibition, doth not respect things merely Civil, but only a Representation of the Deity, as we may gather from, *Deut.* 4. 15, 16. *Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves, (for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the Lord spake unto you in Horeb, out of the midst of the fire.) Lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image, the similitude of any figure, the likeness of male or female. Isai.* 40. 18, 19. *To whom then will ye liken God, or what likeness will ye compare unto him? The workman melteth a graven image, &c.*

2. *THE* offering of Divine Worship to them, or before them. *Thou shalt not bow &c.* And the latter is *exegetical* to the former. God reckons any religious bowing to an Image or Representation, to be a worshipping it. For tho' Idolaters have been so brutish, as to direct their Worship nextly and immediately to the Image, yea, the wise Heathens themselves were not so gross, as to acknowledge

that they lookt upon their Idols, to be real Deities in themselves, or terminate their Worship on them; but they conceived of a God, whom they represented by the Image, through which they supposed him to communicate himself to them, and in which they adored him, hoping for a better Acceptance. The Egyptians, when they found good or benefit by any Creature, they worshipped God in it, not supposing that the thing itself was God, but that God communicated himself to them, by and through the Creature, and that they ought to worship him in it, and the Creature no further, then they supposed God to be in it. For this End also they made Images, or Portraitsures of these and those Creatures, before which they paid their Devotions, and on which they imposed the Name of their God. And this is represented as sinful and superstitious, Rom. i. 21, 22, 23. *Because when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools: And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things.* Of this Nature was the Golden Calf, which Israel made in the Wilderness, in Imitation of the Egyptians, among whom they had lived and conversed. Nor did they suppose it to be God himself, but a Representation of him, and put his Name upon it, as we do of a Person on his Statue or Picture. Hence they kept the Feast to Jehovah, Exod. 32 5. *To morrow is a feast to the Lord.* Of the same Nature was Jereboam's Calves, which were erected at Dan and Bethel, to facilitate the People's Worship, and was surrogated in the room of the Ark, at the Temple in Jerusalem. Hence that Reason is given of the making of them, 1 Kin. 12. 28. *Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold, and said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem.* It is true, those are called Gods, in the Word of God, and the worshipping of them is called Idolatry, yea, they are named Devils, and their Service Devil-Worship. See, 2 Chron. 11. 15. *And he ordained him priests for the high places, and for the devils, and for the calves which he had made.* Psal. 106. 36, 37. *And they served their idols which were a snare unto them. Yea, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters unto devils.* Partly because the ignorant among them, were become so brutish in their Imaginations, as to terminate their Service on the Idol. Hence that Complaint, Isai. 44. 19, 20. *And none considereth in his heart, neither is their knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burnt part of it in the fire, yea also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof: I have roasted flesh and eaten it, and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? Partly also, because God doth not account himself to be acknowledged as God, if his Laws of Worship be neglected, and o-*

ther Rules be invented in the room thereof, Acts 17. 24, 25. And by this, the horrible Idolatry of the Church of Rome is manifested. Nor will all their Evasions, and copious Distinctions, excuse them from the Guilt of it. False Worship is supposed to be paid to a God that will accept of it, which must be a false God, for the true GOD abhors it.

Secondly, *THE Commandment forbids the Worshipping of God, in any other Way, not appointed in his Word.* Not only is it broken by making Images for Adoration, and building and dedicating of Temples to them, but by making any thing to be a religious Ordinance, by any other Authority whatsoever, besides the Appointment of God. It is not sufficient for any Authority in the World, to enjoy any thing as a Part of Divine Worship, because the thing itself, is not expressly forbidden in the Scripture, because God hath in so many Words forbidden us, either to add to, or diminish from any of his Institutions, Deut. 12. 32. There is therefore Emphasis in that, Jer. 19. 5. *They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt-offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind.* God indeed, hath a sovereign Prerogative to make Ordinances, & to repeal them, yea, to change the whole frame of outward positive Worship, as he did after Christ's coming, in the setting & establishing of the Gospel Church. But he hath reserved this as his Prerogative, and never did, nor will part with it to any Man, or order of Men in the World. And the pretending of such a Power about things indifferent, is a meer begging of the Question. For whatsoever indifferency may be allowed, to the things in themselves, though all sober Divines acknowledge, that there is nothing morally indifferent, yet God hath left nothing indifferent in the Essentials of Worship, but reserved the Power of determining them to himself, and therefore, if he hath not commanded them, they are for that very reason forbidden. And the great Noise which some do make about that Text, 1 Cor. 14. 40. *Let all things be done decently, and in order:* Is but a Noise, and no more. There is indeed an Order and Decorum to be observed in the Worship of God, and there are the occasional, and variable Circumstances, which attend upon Worship, of which, there is nothing in particular determined in the Word of God, but the Light of Nature, and the general Rules of the Scripture, are to direct therein, and these things are to be varied as the Circumstances vary, and the Edification of God's People is concerned therein. But to introduce new Ordinances, or Parts of Worship, under the notion of Circumstances, is a strain, so far beyond Religion, that the Rules of right Reason will not allow the Consequence. It is sinful and provoking to God, being subversive of the Government of Christ in his Church, to call up any of the antiquated Ceremonies and Ordinances of the Levitical Law,

Law, though once the Glory of the Church of Israel, yet being revoked by God himself, they are now become rude and beggarly Elements. *Paul* therefore so deals with them, *Gal. 4. 9. But now after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage?* And assures them, *Chap. 5. 2. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.* And if that which was once glorious, when it had the Stamp of Divine Authority upon it, hath now lost its Glory, when the Seal is torn off from it, shall that which can pretend only to an humane Original, stand in Competition with God's Institutions? How unreasonable? If *Christ* may be believed, all such Worship is vain, *Mat. 15. 9.* And needs must it be so, because it wants that Approbation of God, whence alone Men can expect a Blessing upon it, without which, it can never reach to the End of an Ordinance. It would be endless to enumerate all the Particulars, wherein this Precept is on this Account transgressed, by making Additions to the Worship of God; so fertile have been the Inventions, and so arrogant the Attempts of vain Men upon this Account. Hitherto belong, the almost uncoun- table Forgeries and Fopperies of the mystical Babylon, or the Church of *Rome*, who have partly expunged, and partly depraved, the whole Order of Worship appointed by *Christ* in the Gospel Church, and introduced an Hectrionecal and Idolatrous Worship instead of it. Nor are these only Guilty on this Account, but this Sin is to be found among those who have protested against this Mother of Harlots, and attempted towards a Reformation of these Abuses, who yet notwithstanding do retain among them, some Relicks of the Superstition, or have taken up others as truly forbidden by this Command, though possibly not so notoriously Scandalous and Idolatrous. And though some do practice more of it than others, yet probably, there is not that Church, this Day upon the Earth, which hath not more or less of the Guilt of this Sin upon it. Especially if we allow, as we ought to do, the pleading of meer Prudentials to be Institutions, and taking up of traditional Practices, upon no other Foundation, but because their Fathers practiced so before them, not enquiring whether they were ordained by *Christ* for such, hitherto belong all those Ecclesiastical Offices, which are set up in the Church, with new Names, and new Powers, not only *circa sacra*, but in *sacris*, which *Christ* never gave Order about, nor were they his Ascension Gifts, *Eph. 4. 10.* Hitherto also belong, all those significant Ceremonies, which are obtruded on the Church of God, besides such as *Christ* himself hath ordained. There are indeed two Sacraments given by *Christ*, which are mystical Ceremonies, to be used for spiritual Edification, in which, under outward Signs, spiritual Blessings are signified, and a Blessing is promised to the right using of them. And these *Christ* thought sufficient for Gospel Times, and hath given us no Licence to add any more to them. Furthermore, to this belong all uncommanded Terms of Communion, or Tests by which Men are to be received into Fellowship in the Ordinances, which are not commanded. *Christ* indeed hath declared, as that all ought not to be promiscuously received, so what are the Rules of Trial, under which Men are to pass, in order thereto; and whatsoever is more, is Sin, and a Snare to Men's Consciences. Hitherto likewise belongs, a scrupulous Abstinence; from any of the Creatures of God, under a Pretence of Conscience, either altogether, or at these and those Seasons: And the Injunction of such Abstinence, under a Pretence of Worship; or Imitation of *Christ's* Fast in the Wilderness. And many more things of a like Nature, might be instanced in, but these may suffice. Nor will all the Pleas brought to excuse these things, vindicate them, since that one thing stands against them all, God hath nowhere required and therefore it is unlawful: Which Unlawfulness is not removed by any thing else but a Precept of God, making it a Duty. Nor, that the things are in themselves indifferent, because as so, they are no fit Media of Worship, and if they become Expedient, they belong to Prudentials, and are so far a moral Duty to be used, but because that is mutable, they may not be fixed. Nor because there is a Decency supposed to be in them, or because they are thought to be orderly, for those things may be so in Men's esteem, which are lightly accounted of by God. Besides, these things, under this Notion, belong not to the Ordinances of the Church, but the Prudentials. Nor because they have been practiced by these and those eminent Persons, or famous Churches, for they also have had their Errors and Mistakes; and when they have at first come out of Apostasy, they have neither seen every wrong thing, nor been able to reform all that are seen, at once. Not because Men suppose they may have a rational Tendency to Edification, as being apt to move Affections in Men, or on Supposition, that Men have received Edification by them; for all that moves the Affections doth not truly promote Piety in Men, which is the only right Edification, but rather stirs up a superstitious Devotion, which is indeed destructive to true Godliness. As also because the Blessing and good Success of Ordinances depends on God, and our using of them in Faith, must derive from a Promise made to be with us, and bless us in them. Whereas God hath made this Promise to no other Ordinances, but such as he himself hath appointed. Nor a Pretence hereby to win Unbelievers, to have a good Opinion of the Christian Religion, who are apt to take Prejudice, and despise the Gospel Way, because of the plainness of

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it. For God hath no need of such Tricks to inveigle Men withal, but can, and doth when he sees meet bless the despised Gospel to the Conversion of Sinners, 1 Cor. I. 21, 23, 24. *For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks foolishness: But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the power of God, and the wisdom of God.* As for other things they are but a pompous shew at the best. Not finally, a Love to preserve the Purity of the Church, and preserve the Worship of God from Pollution. For besides that all Additions to the Divine Ordinances, are in themselves a Pollution of God's House, and a Depravation of his Worship, this is to impeach Christ himself, for want, either of Wisdom or Fidelity, as if he knew not what was sufficient for the guarding of his Worship, but needed the Wisdom and Counsel of Men to help him; or that he had not Care for his Church, which belonged to the great Shepherd & Bishop of Souls; than which, nothing can be more dishonourable to him, who is the Head of his Church: And of whom we have that Assurance given us, Heb. 3. 2. *Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house.*

U S E. I. *SEE here the Danger of taking up Ordinances upon Trust.* It is not a Matter of light Concern, whether we keep God's Commands or no. If then this Precept hath limited us in the Ordinances with which we are required to serve God; and either to neglect them, or to join others with them, be a Trans-

gression of it; it must needs reprove the Carelessness of those, who do not enquire what footing every such Practice hath in the Word of God. For, not only are we to do the things, but to do them in Faith, which requires our Conviction that God hath ordained them.

U S E. II. *WE hence learn, what is the only Rule, by which to reform the Abuses, which at any Time creep into the Church of God, with respect to the Ordinances, and the Administration of them.* If we would do this aright and to Purpose, we must reduce all to the Pattern given by Christ. We must search the Scriptures, to see whether those things do agree to the Command of Christ, and reduce all exactly hither. When there was an Abuse crept into the Church of *Corinth*, about the Administration of the Lord's Supper, *Paul* useth no other Rule to reduce them, but only by telling them, what he had received of Christ, 1 Cor. II. 23. *For I have received of the Lord, that which also I delivered unto you.* And if this be not laid in the bottom, all other Attempts will but tend to a greater Depravation.

U S E. III. *THIS may exhort us to be very careful to ourselves, how we carry ourselves, with respect to the positive Worship.* In a Word, let us take heed that we be not Careless, or Slighty about our attending on the Ordinances, and take Care that we keep close and entire to those which are commended to us by Christ's own Authority; else we shall bring on our selves the Guilt of breaking this Command. And of how great Moment this is, will be considered under the next.

[ JANUARY 13. 1701. ]

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