

Glad Tidings

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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Pictures of the Cross

(Jerry Fite)

The cross conveys important concepts to the mind of the Christian. They vary from shame to glory. Jesus “endured the cross, despising shame” as he looked unto the joy that was before Him (*Hebrews 12:2*). Jesus was not just obedient to death, but death via the cross, “yea, the death of the cross” (*Philippians 2:8*). The Christian understands God reconciled “all things unto Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross...” (*Colossians 1:20*). With Paul, the Christian says, “But far be it from me to glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom the world hath been crucified unto me, and I unto the world” (*Galatians 6:14*).

Shame, peace, and glory all intersect in the cross. The cross reminds us that we have died unto the world. The cross conveys foolishness to many in the world, but the word of the cross is the power of God that saves us (*I Corinthians 1:18*).

Since the cross conveys important meaning to our minds, even evoking emotion, is it wrong to have a picture of it hanging in our homes?

God commanded His people, “Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image, nor any likeness of anything that is in the heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or in the water under the earth” (*Exodus 20:4*). Ignoring the context, one might conclude that all pictures are sinful. Producing “the likeness of anything” is what a picture is. But all are able to see that such prohibition is centered in the context of idolatry. “Thou shalt have no other gods before me (*Exodus 20:3*)...thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them, nor serve them...” (*Exodus 20:5*). Making an image to bow before, representing a god to worship and serve is what God condemns.

This distinction is further seen in God’s furnishings of His temple in the wilderness with Moses. Images of winged cherubim hovered over the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant, with one cherub of gold facing the other cherub (*Exodus 25:19-20*). The candlestick had cups resembling “almond blossoms” (*Exodus 25:33*). Under Solomon, God’s temple walls were carved with “figures of cherubim, palm trees and open flowers” (*I Kings 6:29*). The massive molten sea for washing sat upon 12 figures of “oxen”

(*I Kings 7:25*). Having images made after the likeness of things on earth or perhaps representing things in heaven were not wrong, even when closely connected with God.

Moses was commanded to set up a brazen serpent upon a standard to set before his people who were bitten, and dying of snake bites. When the people looked upon the raised serpent, they were healed of their snake bites. Later in Israel’s history, godly Hezekiah broke into pieces the historical image. Why? The people were burning “incense to it”. He called it “Nehushtan”, “a piece of brass” (*2 Kings 18:4*). Apparently, before God you could have an image to look upon, without worshipping it, even though the potential for making it an idol is always present.

Having a picture of the Bible or the cross in your church’s advertisement, highlighting the focus of your Gospel Meeting, is not wrong. Yet, they are images to look upon that relate closely to God. A picture of the cross may remind one of shame, peace, glory and the Christian’s separation from the world. It is possible to do so without committing sinful idolatry.