

The Picture Puzzle

A friend stopped by two days ago to get some books. While speaking with me alone, he suddenly became impassioned and told me that I was under the curse of God *because the Second Commandment forbids pictures*—and they are in my books.

When he left, he took a large load of one of our books with him. It was not until the next day, that it came to mind that he had to be aware of the fact that each one of the books he had just purchased contained sixty pictures. It says so on the title page. But he is sincere in his belief, and I still consider him a friend. I know he means well and only spoke on the impulse of the moment.

However, his challenge should not be ignored; for this is a very serious matter. I know not what others may do, but I must adhere as close as possible to our Bible/Spirit of Prophecy beliefs. I dare not do otherwise. Pleasing my Father in heaven must remain of primary importance.

Back in the early 1980s, I had overviewed Spirit of Prophecy statements on the use of pictures in publications, and had come to the conclusion that the Spirit of Prophecy only warned against excess cost in producing pictures for the books and against not using pictures of Christ which were of inferior quality.

But I now recognize that I must get to the bottom of this and make a thorough analysis of the entire situation. If pictures are forbidden, then I must strip them out of the books we sell, and remove them from the covers.

Yet principle can be exacting. If the Inspired Writings forbid pictures, then, not only would it be wrong to publish books and book covers containing pictures,—it would also be wrong to own publications containing them. If I have a Creationist magazine containing nature pictures, it must go. Every history book in my library, which has pictures, ought to be discarded. Indeed, a sizeable part of my large library must be trashed. Documentary and nature videos and DVDs; everything must go.

So I decided that a thorough research study was demanded. *We can be deeply thankful that we not only have the Bible, but also the Spirit of Prophecy!* Studied together, they provide us with the most complete understanding of the will of God that mankind has ever had.

I cannot speak for others. You may disagree with my conclusions as given in this present study. But I find the evidence to be remarkably clear.

The entire study naturally divided itself into just

a few major sections. Let us begin.

SECTION ONE

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

Here is the Second Commandment:

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments.”—*Exodus 20:4-6.*

The concluding words of this commandment reveal deep urgency. This is a commandment which must be obeyed!

The two possible meanings of this commandment are these:

Either it forbids the making of a likeness of something *in order that* it may be worshiped *or it also forbids just making likenesses* of anything.

“Graven image” means an object which has had tools applied to it, producing a statue or something similar. A “likeness” could include both a pictorial copy, for example, of a tree,—or even the tree itself. (In some parts of the world, sacred trees are worshiped.)

Once again, the key question is this: Does the forbidding refer only to the worship of objects? Or does it also extend to (1) just having objects around us that we can see or (2) making objects which we do not worship but use in other ways, such as ox carts and houses? Must we eliminate all those objects, so we cannot see them? These are the questions which must be resolved.

How do other Bible passages define the Second Commandment?

The Bible forbids the making of images to worship them. No mention is made of making or having objects for other purposes.

“Ye shall make you no idols nor graven image, neither rear you up a standing image, neither shall ye set up any image of stone in your land, to bow down unto it: for I am the Lord your God.”—*Leviticus 26:1.*

There are 48 other places in the Bible (all but one of them in the Old Testament) which refer to the forbidding of graven images for worship. Deuteronomy

4:19, for example, extends this prohibition to the worship of the sun and other objects in the sky.

(One exception to this list of “gravens” is Isaiah 49:16: Jesus has graven us on the palms of His hands! That is how precious we are to Him!)

We next turn to the Spirit of Prophecy. What do those Inspired books say is forbidden by the Second Commandment?

The Spirit of Prophecy says the Second Commandment does not forbid pictures.

The following statement is so conclusive that we need no others:

“A few condemned pictures, urging that they are prohibited by the second commandment, and that everything of this kind should be destroyed. . . The second commandment prohibits image worship; but God Himself employed pictures and symbols to represent to His prophets lessons which He would have them give to the people, and which could thus be better understood than if given in any other way. He appealed to the understanding through the sense of sight. Prophetic history was presented to Daniel and John in symbols, and these were to be represented plainly upon tables, that he who read might understand.”—*1 Bible Commentary, 1106:1.*

What, then, does the Second Commandment forbid?

The Spirit of Prophecy says the Second Commandment forbids worshipping graven images.

She consistently applies the prohibitions of this commandment only to “worshipping” created or man-made objects. This would mean that it is not owning pictures, but worshipping idols, that is the meaning of the Second Commandment.

In this next quotation is an exact definition:

“To afford converts from heathenism a substitute for the worship of idols, and thus to promote their nominal acceptance of Christianity, the adoration of images and relics was gradually introduced into the Christian worship. The decree of a general council finally established this system of idolatry. To complete the sacrilegious work, Rome presumed to expunge from the law of God **the second commandment, forbidding image worship**, and to divide the tenth commandment, in order to preserve the number.”—*Great Controversy, 52:0.*

“The papacy has attempted to change the law of God. **The second commandment, forbidding image worship**, has been dropped from the law, and the fourth commandment has been so changed as to authorize the observance of the first instead of the seventh day as the Sabbath.”—*Great Controversy, 446:2.*

Why did Satan want to get rid of both the Second and Fourth Commandments? —*Obedience to both of them directs us to the worship of the true God; one by a prohibition, the other by a command.*

“Satan strives to turn men from their allegiance to God, and from rendering obedience to His law; therefore he directs his efforts especially against that commandment which points to God as the Creator.”—*Great Controversy, 54:0.*

The Second Commandment is about worshipping other gods, not having pictures.

“A few extremists prevented the influence of the truth from reaching the people . . . **A few condemned pictures, urging that they are prohibited by the second commandment**, and that everything of this kind should be destroyed. These one-idea men can see nothing except to press the one thing that presents itself to their minds.”—*2 Selected Messages, 319:0-2.*

The Second Commandment also forbids using images or other representations to worship the TRUE God.

Not only are we not to worship false gods, but we are not to use graven images—or even pictures—to worship the Creator God. Notice *the prohibition here is not owning a likeness (picture) of Christ, but worshipping that likeness.* (An exhaustive analysis of statements about pictures of Christ will come in a later section.)

“Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them.”

“The second commandment forbids the worship of the true God by images or similitudes. Many heathen nations claimed that their images were mere figures or symbols by which the Deity was worshiped, but God has declared such worship to be sin.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets, 305:5-306:1.*

In the following passage, notice that *the worship of images was one of the first corruptions which appeared in the early Christian Church.* But it was not pagan gods which compromising Christians were bowing down to, but images representing the true God.

“Satan was insinuating himself into the church, to corrupt their faith and turn their minds from the word of truth.

“Most of the Christians at last consented to lower their standard, and a union was formed between Christianity and paganism. Although the worshippers of idols professed to be converted, and united with the church, **they still clung to their idolatry, only changing the objects of their worship to images of Jesus, and even of Mary and the saints.** The foul leaven of idolatry, thus brought into the church, continued its baleful work. Unsound doctrines, superstitious rites, and idolatrous ceremonies were incorporated into her faith and worship. As the followers of Christ united with idolaters, the Christian religion became corrupted, and the church

lost her purity and power. There were some, however, who were not misled by these delusions. They still maintained their fidelity to the Author of truth and worshiped God alone.”—*Great Controversy*, 43:0-1 [Story of Redemption, 322:4-323:0 is very similar].

The above passage speaks of bowing down before an object or similitude and worshipping it. I do not know of any Advent believers today who are bowing down before a picture, much less praying to it. None are lighting candles as part of their obeisance to it.

“The darkness seemed to grow more dense. Image worship became more general. **Candles were burned before images, and prayers were offered to them.** The most absurd and superstitious customs prevailed.”—*Great Controversy*, 57:1.

However, we are told of a species of idolatry which can be made with pictures:

“I have been instructed that **these pictures are as so many idols**, taking up the time and thought which should be sacredly devoted to God.

“**These photographs cost money.** Is it consistent for us, knowing the work that is to be done at this time, to spend God’s money in producing pictures of our own faces and the faces of our friends?”—*Messages to Young People*, 316:1-2.

An exorbitant outlay of money for photographs of themselves (which, in the 19th century, were extremely expensive) is declared to be a species of idolatry.

“Some are far from God, variable and unstable as water; they have no idea of sacrifice. When they desire any special indulgence or pleasure, or any article of dress, they do not consider whether or not they can do without the article, or deny themselves the pleasure, and make a freewill offering to God. How many have considered that they were required to make some sacrifice? Although it may be of less value than that of the wealthy man who possesses his thousands, yet that which really costs self-denial would be a precious sacrifice, an offering to God. It would be a sweet-smelling savor, and come up from His altar like sweet incense.

“The youth are not authorized to do just as they please with their means, regardless of the requirements of God. With David they should say: ‘Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing.’ **Quite an amount of means has been expended to multiply copies of their pictures.** Could all enumerate the amount given to the artist for this purpose, it would swell to quite a large sum. And this is merely one way in which means is squandered, invested for self-gratification, from which no profit is received.”—2 *Testimonies*, 127:1-128:0.

“We are doing our work here under great pressure for the want of the very money that many of the members of our churches are expending upon their own fancies, in pleasing and gratifying themselves. If they had accepted the testimonies I have

borne to them concerning the great want in these regions beyond, they would not be found expending one dollar in following the example of **those who are multiplying pictures of themselves and their families. You would not be purchasing bicycles, which you could do without**, but would be receiving the blessing of God in exercising your physical powers in a less expensive way. **Instead of investing one hundred dollars [a full year’s wages] in a bicycle**, you would consider the matter well, lest it might be at the price of souls for whom Christ died, and for whom He has made you responsible.”—*Review and Herald*, August 21, 1894; PH084, *Special Testimonies Relating to Various Matters in Battle Creek*, 1894, pp. 23-24.

“The youth have their hearts filled with the love of self. This is manifested in their desire to see their faces daguerreotyped by the artist; and they are not satisfied with being once represented, but **sit again and again for their picture, each time hoping that the last will excel all their previous efforts**, and appear really more beautiful than the original. Their Lord’s money is squandered in this way, and what is gained?”—*Messages to Young People*, 319:2.

I have not taken a picture with a camera in over thirty years. Fortunately, cameras and photos cost very little today.

SECTION TWO

WHEN PICTURES CAN BE USEFUL IN PUBLICATIONS

Books for sale or distribution to common people should have simple language and have many inexpensive pictures.

“In new fields, among ignorant or partially civilized peoples, there is great need of **small books presenting the truth in simple language and abundantly illustrated.** These books must be sold at a low price, and **the illustrations must, of course, be inexpensive.**”—7 *Testimonies*, 160:1.

Seeing a picture helps the mind understand the nearby reading matter. Inexpensive illustrations are as good for common people, as are those in more expensive books. The use of illustrations helps the truth be more convincing and remain in their minds longer.

“I understand that you intend that the colored work in the South will be your first interest. Well, work away. But **you must get out a class of books with many object lessons**, for the colored people must see a thing before they understand it. Small books must be distributed freely . . .

“The publishing at Nashville will have to be done in a way to meet the needs of the very ones for whom you are laboring. Everything must be plain, simple, and illustrated. **Inexpensive illustrations are as good for this field as the more expensive work.** Cheap, simple books must be issued . . .

“The South is a world of its own, and publishing should be done in the field. Without proper books to put into the hands of the people, talking and preaching will lose the hold on the mind. But **if proper reading matter can be placed in their hands, so that they can read the truth and see the pictures accompanying the reading matter, it will stay in the mind and have convincing power.** Then other and larger books should be issued to meet the needs of the better educated classes.”—*Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 146:2-147:0; *Manuscript 28*, 1903.

Pictures can be used to help explain the written material.

“The possession of the Word is a talent, a treasure house of knowledge; and in all who believe, it creates a responsibility to impart. Receive the seed in good soil, and then let it spring up, first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear, then the harvest. **You have much work before you, but go no faster than you can move solidly. Teach the Word in the very simplest way possible. You will need to illustrate to many of the colored people with cheap pictures. This will be a necessity. If they had been educated to read, then the illustrations would not be necessary.** May the Lord help the laborers in the South to walk and work, trusting in Jesus Christ. But the fact must be understood that the Scriptures do not depend upon a process of reasoning in bringing souls from darkness to light, from sin to repentance, but it is faith that accepts the divine, God-given testimony that the Scripture is the great power of God. Many things testify that Jesus ‘was the true light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him [by faith as the Son of God], to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.’ John 1:9.

“Believers are to be developed. This is the mission of our publishing work. There is much to be done in this line, especially in some parts of the country. The matter—Bible truth—must go forth as a light that burneth. Gather up the rays of light, put the truth in its simplicity, and carry on your own publishing in the Southern field. You have the facilities, and therefore can do this. It needs talent that has been engaged in making books. You understand this. You know what you need to meet high and low. Well, take hold like men that have souls before you to save, and God will help you. Come up to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty. God will lead you if you fully trust in Him. He will

never leave or forsake a soul who trusts in Him. The Lord give you wisdom and great grace, is my prayer.”—*Southern Watchman*, April 24, 1902 par. 5-6.

Only use pictures which lead to the study of the book itself, but they must not distract from the truth.

“The Lord desires His people to move understandingly and intelligently. They are not to create large expenses; yet everything is to be done in perfect order. Our books should be bound with good, durable covers. The sewing should be firm and strong. This should always be. But care should be exercised in the matter of illustrating. Much money should not be invested in this line. **When there are lessons in the pictures which lead to a study of the book itself, it is well; but when the pictures draw the attention from the truth contained in the book to themselves, the effort to help the book by illustrations is a failure.**”—*Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 167:1; *Letter 75*, 1900.

The truth must be told in simple language, accompanied by abundant illustrations.

“Many lines of business will open up as the work is carried forward. There is much work to be done in the South, and in order to do this work **the laborers must have suitable literature, books telling the truth in simple language, and abundantly illustrated. This kind of literature will be the most effective means of keeping the truth before the people.** A sermon may be preached and soon forgotten, but a book remains.”—*Life Sketches*, 381:4-382:0; *Review*, May 28, 1901.

Pictures and blackboards can be very effective as teaching tools.

“Some efforts have been made to interest children in the cause, but not enough. Our Sabbath schools should be made more interesting. The public schools have of late years greatly improved their methods of teaching. **Object lessons, pictures, and blackboards are used to make difficult lessons clear to the youthful mind. Just so may present truth be simplified and made intensely interesting to the active minds of the children.**

“Parents who can be approached in no other way are frequently reached through their children. Sabbath school teachers can instruct the children in the truth, and they will, in turn, take it into the home circle.”—*4 Testimonies*, 69:4-70:1.

Pictures of Bible scenes are helpful, but must be of good quality.

“**Pictures to represent Bible scenes** must be no cheap designs. True science of all kinds is distinction and power. He who by painstaking effort as-

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**PART TWO
OF THREE**

Continued from the preceding tract in this series

cends step by step the ladder of human progress, must fix his eyes on the One above the ladder.”—*Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 167:2.

But we should not spend a lot of money producing the pictures used in the books. (All of Harvestime Books’ pictures were obtained free of charge, with the exception of the cover of the *Encyclopedia*, which I designed and paid to have painted.)

“The work of illustrating is a constant temptation to tie up money . . . Do not accept the temptations which will come to you with peculiar force to get out books which involve a large investment of money.”—*Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 168:1-2.

“It is too late, altogether too late, to depend upon the expensive covers of a book, or its abundant illustrations, for its sale . . . The books that the people need, should be issued free from all display. The saving of the thousands of dollars expended in illustrations would make it possible for the books to be sold at a price that would enable many to obtain them.”—*Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 169:1.

Only pictures should be used which express our faith.

“Many are attracted into the canvassing field to sell **books and pictures that do not express our faith and do not give light to the purchaser.** They are induced to do this because the financial prospects are more flattering than can be offered them as licentiates. These persons are obtaining no special fitness for the gospel ministry.”—*4 Testimonies*, 604:1.

SECTION THREE

ADDITIONAL COMMENDATION OF THE USE OF PICTURES

Rather than condemning the use of pictures to help tell the truth, mention is made of how it was done in the capital of Bohemia about the year 1405, which made a deep impact on the people and the mind of John Huss. While “a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver” (*Proverbs 25:11*), a picture properly used can speak more than many words.

“A citizen of Prague, Jerome, who afterward became so closely associated with Huss, had, on returning from England, brought with him the writings of Wycliffe. The queen of England, who had been a convert to Wycliffe’s teachings, was a Bohemian princess, and through her influence also the

Reformer’s works were widely circulated in her native country. These works Huss read with interest; he believed their author to be a sincere Christian and was inclined to regard with favor the reforms which he advocated. Already, though he knew it not, Huss had entered upon a path which was to lead him far away from Rome.

“About this time there arrived in Prague two strangers from England, men of learning, who had received the light and had come to spread it in this distant land. Beginning with an open attack on the pope’s supremacy, they were soon silenced by the authorities; but being unwilling to relinquish their purpose, they had recourse to other measures. **Being artists as well as preachers, they proceeded to exercise their skill. In a place open to the public they drew two pictures. One represented the entrance of Christ into Jerusalem, ‘meek, and sitting upon an ass’ (Matthew 21:5), and followed by His disciples in travel-worn garments and with naked feet. The other picture portrayed a pontifical procession—the pope arrayed in his rich robes and triple crown, mounted upon a horse magnificently adorned, preceded by trumpeters and followed by cardinals and prelates in dazzling array.**

“Here was a sermon which arrested the attention of all classes. Crowds came to gaze upon the drawings. None could fail to read the moral, and many were deeply impressed by the contrast between the meekness and humility of Christ the Master and the pride and arrogance of the pope, His professed servant. There was great commotion in Prague, and the strangers after a time found it necessary, for their own safety, to depart. **But the lesson they had taught was not forgotten. The pictures made a deep impression on the mind of Huss and led him to a closer study of the Bible and of Wycliffe’s writings.** Though he was not prepared, even yet, to accept all the reforms advocated by Wycliffe, **he saw more clearly the true character of the papacy,** and with greater zeal denounced the pride, the ambition, and the corruption of the hierarchy.”—*Great Controversy*, 99:3-100:1.

Commendation is made of a well-known picture, hung on walls of homes, in her day.

“There is a picture representing a bullock standing between a plow and an altar, with the inscription, ‘Ready for either,’ ready to toil in the furrow or to be offered on the altar of sacrifice. This is the position of the true child of God—willing to go where duty calls, to deny self, to sacrifice for the Redeemer’s cause.”—*Ministry of Healing*, 502:5.

It should be noted that, while the above picture of a bullock is recommended, the Second Command-

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ment specifically forbids the making of a similitude or graven image of any beast (*Deut 4:15-18*). Obviously, that commandment is not referring to using pictures of animals to teach lessons.

God Himself used pictures to illustrate the truth.

“The second commandment prohibits image worship; but God Himself employed pictures and symbols to represent to His prophets lessons which He would have them give to the people, and which could thus be better understood than if given in any other way. He appealed to the understanding through the sense of sight. Prophetic history was presented to Daniel and John in symbols, and these were to be represented plainly upon tables, that he who reads might understand.”—*2 Selected Messages, 319:4-320:0*.

In view of what we have read about the immense instructional benefit of pictures, when they are inexpensive, adjacent to the passage they refer to, of a good quality, and illuminate instead of detracting from the message,—pictures are beneficial.

There are over 300 stories and incidents in the Bible, each able to be the basis for a powerful teaching picture. Jesus Himself told over two dozen parables and stories.

What would our books be without pictures illustrating the image of Daniel 2, the beasts of Daniel 7 and 8, and Revelation 12 and 13?

SECTION FOUR

WE SHOULD NOT CONDEMN THE USE OF PICTURES

“There were some who had capabilities to help the church, but who needed first to set their own hearts in order. **Some had been bringing in false tests, and had made their own ideas and notions a criterion,** magnifying matters of little importance into tests of Christian fellowship, **and binding heavy burdens upon others. Thus a spirit of criticism, faultfinding, and dissension had come in,** which had been a great injury to the church. And the impression was given to unbelievers that Sabbathkeeping Adventists were a set of fanatics and extremists, and that their peculiar faith rendered them unkind, uncourteous, and really unchristian in character. Thus the course of a few extremists prevented the influence of the truth from reaching the people.

“Some were making the matter of dress of first importance, criticizing articles of dress worn by others, and standing ready to condemn everyone who did not exactly meet their ideas. **A few condemned pictures, urging that they are prohibited by the second commandment, and that everything of this kind should be destroyed.**

“These one-idea men can see nothing except to press the one thing that presents itself to their

minds. Years ago we had to meet this same spirit and work. **Men arose claiming to have been sent with a message condemning pictures, and urging that every likeness of anything should be destroyed.** They went to such lengths as even to condemn clocks which had figures, or “pictures,” upon them.

“Now we read in the Bible of a good conscience; and **there are not only good but bad consciences. There is a conscientiousness that will carry everything to extremes,** and make Christian duties as burdensome as the Jews made the observance of the Sabbath. The rebuke which Jesus gave to the scribes and Pharisees applies to this class as well: “Ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God” (Luke 11:42). One fanatic, with his strong spirit and radical ideas, who will oppress the conscience of those who want to be right, will do great harm. The church needs to be purified from all such influences.

“The second commandment prohibits image worship; but God Himself employed pictures and symbols to represent to His prophets lessons which He would have them give to the people, and which could thus be better understood than if given in any other way. He appealed to the understanding through the sense of sight. Prophetic history was presented to Daniel and John in symbols, and these were to be represented plainly upon tables, that he who reads might understand.

“It is true that altogether too much money is expended upon pictures; not a little means which should flow into the treasury of God is paid to the artist. **But the evil that will result to the church from the course of these extremists is far greater than that which they are trying to correct.** It is sometimes a difficult matter to tell just where the line is, where picturemaking becomes a sin. **But those who love God and desire with all their hearts to keep His commandments, will be directed by Him. God would not have them depend on any man to be conscience for them.** He who accepts all the ideas and impressions of unbalanced minds will become confused and bewildered. It is Satan’s object to divert the attention from the third angel’s message to side issues, that minds and hearts that should be growing in grace and in the knowledge of the truth, may be dwarfed and enfeebled, so that God may not be glorified by them.”—*2 Selected Messages, 318:3-320:1; Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists, pp. 211, 212. (A portion of this is in Evangelism, 215-216.)*

SECTION FIVE

PICTURES OF CHRIST

We now come to a very important matter: What are we told about pictures of Christ? I have searched for every possible Spirit of Prophecy reference on this,

and here is what I have found:

Of seven statements about pictures of Christ in books in the Spirit of Prophecy, only the first three, below, are negative. All three of them refer to the publication of the first editions of *Mount of Blessing* (1896) and *Desire of Ages* (1898). Ellen White knew that these two books for colporteurs and the general public would need to contain pictures of Christ. Her deep concern was the fact that the pictures the artist, hired for the job, had made for them were of such a poor quality; and, to make matters worse (in some of the *Desire of Ages* pictures), they portrayed Him in a Catholic manner.

One artist, W.A. Reaser, who lived in New York City (*11 WCW*, p. 332), produced the pictures for both *Desire of Ages* and *Mount of Blessing*. So all three statements apply to the poor quality pictures which he produced. Both Ellen's group in Australia and the publishing houses in America (Pacific Press for *Desire of Ages* and the Review for *Mount of Blessing*) were hard at work, trying to hurry both books through to publication. Unfortunately, the printing houses had not hired a good artist to do the pictures.

Of the three statements, below, the first one, penned in 1896, concerned *Mount of Blessing*. The pictures for that one were especially bad. Yet Ellen White did not abandon the use of pictures—including ones of Christ—in her books. She kept pressing ahead, and had pictures produced for both books, just as she had done previously for her 1888 *Great Controversy*. The last two of the three statements below, penned in 1897 and 1899, concerned pictures for *Desire of Ages*. Once again, Reaser was the artist; yet she did not consider the pictures bad enough to have them omitted.

These are the only statements in the Spirit of Prophecy which are used as evidence that we should have no pictures of Christ. Here are all of them:

The three negative statements:

(1) "The dummy [advance pre-press copy] of *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, with the illustrations, I received. The illustrations I could not possibly accept under any consideration. **Some of them look as if prepared for a comic almanac** [comic book] . . .

"Pictures to represent Bible scenes must be no cheap designs . . . The knowledge which God imparts is not of a character to belittle our ideas of sacred things. The glory of God must be kept before the mind's eye, not the cheap, earthly representations that imprint in the memory scenes which give a false conception of Christ and heavenly things. **A proper illustration of Bible scenes requires talent of a superior quality.** With these cheap, common productions, the sacred lessons of the Bible disdain comparison . . .

"The work before us is great and cannot be done in any cheap style. I am at a loss to know just what to do with the books I am urged to write. May the Lord help me is my prayer. **God forbid that we should please the devil by lowering the standard of eternal truth by using illustrations that men, women, and children will make sport of.**"—*Publishing Ministry*, 217:2-218:0; *Manuscript 23*, 1896. (Part of this is in *Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 167:2-168:0.)

(2) [This first paragraph was written by A.L. White:] "The next few months entailed the checking of proofs of the text of the two volumes [*Desire of Ages* and *Mount of Blessing*] as the type was being set. Ellen White, as well as Marian Davis and W.C. White, gave very careful attention to this. **Close scrutiny was also given to the artwork**, including many new designs. **Let it not be supposed that Ellen White did not concern herself with such details. She was paying for the paintings, and she wanted them right.** On December 20 she wrote to C.H. Jones [Pacific Press manager]:

"[Statement by Ellen White:] 'I wish to say to you that **I am sadly disappointed in the cuts prepared** for such a book as the "Life of Christ" [The tentative, pre-publication name for *Desire of Ages*]. I consider that if Brother Reaser accepts such figures, his eye and taste has lost its cunning. You cannot expect me to be pleased with such productions. Look at these figures critically, and you must see that **they are made from either Catholic designs or Catholic artists. The picture of Mary has a man's face; the representations of Christ with the two fingers prominent, while the others are closed, is wholly a Catholic sign**, and I object to this. I see but very little beauty in any of the faces, or persons' (Letter 81a, 1897)."—4 *E.G. White Biography*, 391:5-392:0.

(3) "Should we not make investigation in regard to the matter of illustrating our books so largely? Would not the mind have clearer, more perfect ideas of angels, of Christ, of all spiritual things, if no pictures were made to represent heavenly things? **Many of the pictures made are grossly false as far as truth is concerned. Do not pictures so far removed from the truth give voice to falsehoods?** We want to be true in all our representations of Jesus Christ. But **many of the miserable daubs put into our books and papers** are an imposition on the public."—*Counsels to Writers and Editors*, 171:2; *Letter 145*, 1899.

Comments about these statements:

In view of the fact that in the other four Spirit of Prophecy statements about pictures of Christ (to be quoted shortly) are very positive, how should we regard these first three negative ones?

Keep in mind that one sloppy artist, W.A. Reaser of New York City (*11 WCW*, p. 332), produced the

pictures objected to by Ellen White in all three negative letters. So all three statements apply to the very low-quality pictures which he produced for the first editions of *Desire of Ages* and *Mount of Blessing*.

But several facts stand out:

(1) Ellen was extremely anxious that *Mount of Blessing* and *Desire of Ages* be printed. Yet she was willing to wait for the pictures to be prepared. It was only after she saw their quality that she complained. After that, she still went ahead and had pictures of Christ printed in both books.

(2) If she had initially required that no pictures of Christ be included in the books, they would not have been made. But she did want pictures in those books, including pictures of Christ. She had such pictures printed in her books eight years earlier, and she would do it again several times later on. (More on this later.)

(3) Think not that she lacked the authority to reject pictures. The first statement, quoted above, concerned the pictures for the first edition of *Mount of Blessing*. The pictures for that book were so bad—they looked like something out of a comic book—that she totally rejected them and required that new ones be made. This was done. Such a rejection does not mean that she rejected all pictures of Christ or Biblical themes in her books.

(4) In spite of the severely negative impression they would make on those who later saw them, she felt that the early release of that first edition was more important than taking time to improve those pictures.

(5) Ellen White had abundant time to consider the matter of whether pictures of Christ should be included in her books—for eight years earlier the publishing house was preparing her 1888 *Great Controversy*—which also contained pictures of Christ. Regarding that edition, she bitterly complained—over and over again—about the slowness of the printing house to release the book. (You will find those many letters in my book, *Defending the Spirit of Prophecy*, pp. 211-233.) Yet not once—before or after—did she complain about the fact that the 1888 edition contained pictures of Christ.

I have an original 1888 edition. Unfortunately, I cannot now tell where in the book the pictures of Christ and other scenes were located, because I carefully cut out all the pictures at the time that I prepared our hardback *Great Controversys*—which are filled with pictures from the original 1888 and 1911 *Great Controversys*, and the original 1888 *Bible Readings*. (I also used pictures from original D'Aubigné and Wiley books, which I also own. It is of interest that Ellen White never complained about pictures of Christ in those books either, although she

referred to two authors more extensively than any others during her preparation of *Great Controversy*. In the *Review*, she recommended the purchase of D'Aubigné's set of history books, with their many pictures.)

(6) A surprising number of pictures of Christ are also to be found in the 1911 edition of *Great Controversy*, preparation of which began in 1909. I also have an original 1911 edition of that book. It contains 94 pictures. Some of its pictures carry the date of preparation as "1909." That gave her two years to reject them, if she had wanted to. She knew of those pictures while she was still quite active, six years before her death—because, as with her other books, she oversaw all aspects of layout, illustration, covers, and binding.

Here is a description of all eight of the pictures of Christ in the 1911 Great Controversy:

The frontispiece, facing the title page, is entitled "*The Real Controversy*," and portrays Christ and Satan standing on the edge of a cliff, as Satan points to the world below them and offers it to Christ.

In the *Light through Darkness* chapter, facing page 345, are two pictures above the caption, "*The Disappointment of the Disciples*." The upper one shows Christ descending the stairs of the Temple as children in front of Him wave palm branches. The second picture, beneath it on that page, portrays Him hanging pitifully on Calvary, almost naked, alongside the other two thieves. He is surrounded, on the left by soldiers with spears; on the right by the onlooking multitude; and in the foreground by six of His disciples.

In the *Origin of Evil* chapter, facing page 501, is a picture entitled "*Christ and the Pharisees*." It portrays Him standing on a slightly raised portico, with people all around Him. Some trying to listen to His words, while others point their arms toward Him in denunciation.

In the *Agency of Evil Spirits* chapter, facing page 514, is the picture, "*Christ Healing the Demoniac*." It shows Christ with one arm raised, about to pronounce healing on the boy before Him, groveling in the dirt and partly lifted by two men. All about, amid palm trees, the wondering crowd is watching intently.

In the chapter, *God's People Delivered*, facing page 636, the picture is captioned "*The Great Earthquake*" and portrays a vast, in-depth panorama of people; fires; distant sea; and, above it, Christ is coming in the clouds.

In addition to the above six larger pictures of Christ, there are also two smaller pictures. One at the beginning of the *Agency of Evil Spirits* chapter,

The Picture Puzzle

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on page 511, shows Christ healing the demoniacs.

Another, at the beginning of the *Time of Trouble* chapter on page 613, has a second view of Christ's return in the clouds.

Other pictures in the book portray angels, heaven scenes, and the priest standing before the Shekinah in the Most Holy Place, plus several Bible scenes.

(7) After its publication, Ellen once again carefully examined the 1911 *Great Controversy*, which she had spent so much money paying to have printed,—and, once again, fully approved of it. *Yet it had eight pictures of Christ in it.* But not once during the two years of its production, did she ever complain about those pictures of Christ.

“A few days ago, I received a copy of the new edition of the book *Great Controversy*, recently printed at Mountain View, and also a similar copy printed at Washington. **The book pleases me. I have spent many hours looking through its pages, and I see that the publishing houses have done good work.**

“**The book *Great Controversy* I appreciate above silver or gold,** and I greatly desire that it shall come before the people. While writing the manuscript of *Great Controversy*, I was often conscious of the presence of the angels of God. And many times the scenes about which I was writing were presented to me anew in visions of the night, so that they were fresh and vivid in my mind.

“**Recently it was necessary for this book to be reset, because the electrotype plates were badly worn. It has cost me much to have this done, but I do not complain;** for whatever the cost may be, **I regard this new edition with great satisfaction.**”—*3 Selected Messages, 123; 6 E.G. White Biography, 336:1-3; Letter, July 25, 1911.*

(8) Not once did Ellen White ever complain—before or after—about the inclusion or quality of these eight pictures of Christ in the 1911 *Great Controversy*.

(9) The three negative quotations about pictures of Christ, quoted earlier, are referring solely to the poor quality of the pictures and the Catholic bias of some of them in the 1896 *Mount of Blessing* and the 1898 *Desire of Ages*. She said nothing negative about any of the pictures of Christ in her other books;—all of which she requested, carefully inspected before publication and paid for.

(10) She also had pictures of Christ placed in three other books she issued after the publication of *Mount of Blessing* and *Desire of Ages*. These three are *Christ's Object Lessons* (1900), *Education* (1903),

and *Ministry of Healing* (1905). All three had pictures in them, including some of Christ. Repeatedly, we are told, in the *E.G. White Biography*, that Ellen White was deeply involved in the production of all of her books. No pictures were included of which she did not approve. She not only wrote the books, but the publishing houses required that she personally pay for all costs to print them! This included the cost of the illustrations. Pictures were in her books because she wanted them there.

“But there was more to do than prepare the manuscript. Denominational publishers in 1904 were not in any position to make the large investment called for in typesetting, illustrating, and plate making for such a book as *The Ministry of Healing*. These expenses would run about \$3,000. Ellen White herself approached Seventh-day Adventist acquaintances for loans to help capitalize the project.”—*A.L. White, 5 E.G. White Biography, 379:3.*

Over two years earlier, she wrote to a friend and ask for a \$1,000 loan to help her print *Christ's Object Lessons*.

(11) No book of hers included more pictures of Christ than *Desire of Ages*. We know that the original edition of the 1911 *Great Controversy* had 94 pictures; so *Desire of Ages* probably had about the same number—with nearly all of them of Christ.

(12) She wanted pictures of Christ in it; yet finding the money to pay for those pictures, and all the other publication expenses, was extremely difficult.

[A.L. White writing:] “At the time *The Desire of Ages* was published, Adventist publishing houses had limited capital to invest in large books, and **the authors at times assisted in providing funds for illustrations and initial expense such as typesetting and the making of the printing plates.** With the decision that the book would be published by the Pacific Press, in Oakland, California, interest at both the author's end and the publishing house turned to these arrangements. With *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, handled by the General Conference Association as publishers and the Review and Herald as printers, the results as far as illustrations were concerned proved disappointing; **many of the cuts [picture plates] had to be made over.** With *The Desire of Ages* there was, over a period of months, quite a volume of correspondence, the examining of proofs, etc., **for it was determined that the illustrations had to have the author's approval.**

“On July 16, 1896, Ellen White wrote of the financial side in a letter to Mrs. Wessels in South Africa:

[Ellen White's statement:] “The manuscript for

the “Life of Christ” is just about to be sent to America. This will be handled by the Pacific Press. I have employed workers to prepare this book, especially Sister Davis, and this has cost me \$3,000. Another \$3,000 will be needed to prepare it to be scattered broadcast through the world in two books. We hope they will have a large sale.”—*Letter 114, 1896; 4 E.G. White Biography, chapter 32.*

(13) In summary, Ellen was so shaken by the twisted presentations of Christ in the first edition of *Mount of Blessing* and *Desire of Ages*, that she commented at the time that it would be far better to have no pictures of angels or Christ, than to have such “miserable daubs.”—*She was not against pictures of Christ, but against such extremely poor ones.* We can be sure because she included pictures of Christ in her 1888 *Great Controversy*, her 1900 *Christ’s Object Lessons*, her 1903 *Education*, her 1905 *Ministry of Healing*, and her 1911 *Great Controversy*. We can also be sure because of her other most favorable statements about pictures of Christ.

There are four other statements by Ellen White about pictures of Christ. All are very positive. Here is the first one:

Although quoted earlier, here it is again—for it is a very clear commendation of a picture of Christ painted for the general public to view:

“Being artists as well as preachers, they proceeded to exercise their skill. In a place open to the public they drew two pictures. One represented the entrance of Christ into Jerusalem, ‘meek, and sitting upon an ass’ (Matthew 21:5), and followed by His disciples in travel-worn garments and with naked feet. The other picture portrayed a pontifical procession—the pope arrayed in his rich robes and triple crown, mounted upon a horse magnificently adorned, preceded by trumpeters and followed by cardinals and prelates in dazzling array.

“Here was a sermon which arrested the attention of all classes. Crowds came to gaze upon the drawings. None could fail to read the moral, and many were deeply impressed by the contrast between the meekness and humility of Christ the Master and the pride and arrogance of the pope, His professed servant. There was great commotion in Prague, and the strangers after a time found it necessary, for their own safety, to depart. But the lesson they had taught was not forgotten. The pictures made a deep impression on the mind of Huss and led him to a closer study of the Bible and of Wycliffe’s writings. Though he was not prepared, even yet, to accept all the reforms advocated by Wycliffe, **he saw more clearly the true character of the papacy,** and with greater zeal denounced the pride, the ambition, and the corruption of the hierarchy.”—*Great Controversy, 99:3-100:1.*

Here is the second positive statement about

a picture of Christ:

“The grace of God sustained him [John Huss]. During the weeks of suffering that passed before his final sentence, heaven’s peace filled his soul. ‘I write this letter,’ he said to a friend, ‘in my prison, and with my fettered hand, expecting my sentence of death tomorrow . . . When, with the assistance of Jesus Christ, we shall again meet in the delicious peace of the future life, you will learn how merciful God has shown Himself toward me, how effectually He has supported me in the midst of my temptations and trials’ (*Bonnechose, Vol. 2, p. 67*).

“In the gloom of his dungeon he foresaw the triumph of the true faith. **Returning in his dreams to the chapel at Prague where he had preached the gospel, he saw the pope and his bishops effacing the pictures of Christ which he had painted on its walls.** This vision distressed him: but **on the next day he saw many painters occupied in restoring these figures in greater number and in brighter colors. As soon as their task was ended, the painters, who were surrounded by an immense crowd, exclaimed, “Now let the popes and bishops come; they shall never efface them more!”**’ Said the Reformer, as he related his dream: ‘I maintain this for certain, that the image of Christ will never be effaced. They have wished to destroy it, but it shall be painted afresh in all hearts by much better preachers than myself’ (*D’Aubigné, b. 1, ch. 6*).”—*Great Controversy, 107:3-108:1.*

This third positive statement concerns the instructional value of pictures of Christ: The use of a wide variety of pictures of Christ, showing various events in His life, to teach moral lessons, is encouraged.

“The teachings of Jesus unfold to the father modes of reaching the human heart, and impressing upon it important lessons of truth and right. Jesus used the familiar objects of nature to illustrate and intensify His meaning. He drew lessons from everyday life, the occupations of men, and their dealing with one another.

“The father should frequently gather his children around him, and lead their minds into channels of moral and religious light. He should study their different tendencies and susceptibilities, and reach them through the plainest avenues. Some may be best influenced through veneration and the fear of God; others through the manifestation of His benevolence and wise providence, calling forth their deep gratitude; others may be more deeply impressed by opening before them the wonders and mysteries of the natural world, with all its delicate harmony and beauty, which speak to their souls of Him who is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and all the beautiful things therein.

“Children who are gifted with the talent or love of music may receive impressions that will be lifelong, by the judicious use of those susceptibilities

as the medium for religious instruction. They may be taught that if they are not right with God they are like a discord in the divine harmony of creation, like an instrument out of tune, giving forth discordant strains more grievous to God than harsh, in-harmonious notes are to their own fine musical ear.

“Many may be reached best through sacred pictures, illustrating scenes in the life and mission of Christ. By this means truths may be vividly imprinted upon their minds, never to be effaced. The Roman Catholic Church understands this fact, and appeals to the senses of the people through the charm of sculpture and paintings. **While we have no sympathy for image worship, which is condemned by the law of God, we hold that it is proper to take advantage of that almost universal love of pictures in the young, to fasten in their minds valuable moral truths, to bind the gospel to their hearts by beautiful imagery illustrating the great moral principles of the Bible.** Even so our Saviour illustrated His sacred lessons by the imagery found in God’s created works.”—*Health Reformer, October 1, 1877, paragraphs 4-7. (A very similar statement appeared in Signs of the Times, Dec. 20, 1877, and was partly reprinted in Reflecting Christ, 175:1-4. Ellen was so concerned about this that she wrote twice concerning it.)*

Here is the fourth, very positive statement about pictures of Christ: This unusual statement, by Ellen White is nestled amid a comment by A.L. White, which provides the historical background for a letter she wrote in 1889. After James’ death in 1881, she had moved to Healdsburg, California; for a very brief time, in the summer of that year, she had to live in a house in Battle Creek. While there, she wrote her daughter-in-law, Mary, that she had lost a prized picture of Christ which had hung on the wall of her various homes for decades. True, it had sentimental value because it had been given to her by her father, Robert Harmon. Yet Ellen had very strong principles and would not keep it if she was as opposed to pictures of Christ as some today suggest. Although that very large picture had been displayed in her home for years, when she moved to California in 1881, she was constrained by shipping limitations to temporarily leave it—along with several others—in the *Review* office. But now, eight years later, she discovered that in the interim, someone had taken it. She had wanted to collect all her pictures, so she could soon take them out West with her to her Elmshaven home. Here is the complete statement:

[A.L. White writing:] “At the time of the General Conference session of 1889, Ellen White was residing in Battle Creek. This was quite contrary to her anticipation when she left California in early October, 1888, to attend the session in Minneapolis. It will be recalled that in a letter written on the last day of the meeting she had indicated some uncer-

tainty about the plans for the immediate future.

“She soon discerned that she could not leave Battle Creek in the near future. She stayed at the Sanitarium for four months and then, sensing no early release, moved into a nearby home.

“Whether it was this same house that she was living in, in July, is not known today, but her residence at that time has been identified as 303 West Main Street. It was described by one who was at that time a member of her office family as a long office building that extended to the street. Her room was the ‘front room on the second floor’ (*DF 107b, Edna K. Steele to A.L. White, Aug. 11, 1946*). This will give us some orientation for Ellen White’s description of the home situation as she wrote to her daughter-in-law, Mary, in mid-July, 1889:

[Ellen White’s statement begins:] “ ‘Sister Uriah Smith has just called on me for the first time. We had a good social visit. I was pleased to show her all through both houses, the working rooms above the office, six in number, and the new-made house proper where the cooking is done and the family meet. She thought everything was so healthy and convenient that there could not be such a place found even in the grand houses in Battle Creek.

“ ‘Sara [McEnterfer] has just brought from the office [in the publishing house] my pictures which have hung there for years—more than eight years. One large one, of Christ blessing little children, has not been found . . . Father gave it to me just before he died. Well, we shall get everything together before long and shall keep a place here where we can call it home.

“ ‘Everyone who comes into my room any time of the day exclaims, “Why, how nice and cool you are here.” I feel very thankful for this home here in Battle Creek, for I never expected so good a home.

“ ‘Now is the golden opportunity for me to get out [complete] my books, and I shall try to make the most of it. We are within a few steps of the office. No delays to annoy us by copy passing through the mails. Here proof can be passed in without any delay of time (*Letter 72, 1889*).’ ”—3 *E.G. White Biography, 452:3-453:2.*

CONCLUSION

It is of interest to note that Ellen White carefully differentiated between “images” and “pictures.” This greatly helps us in understanding her statements.

If she had wanted to *forbid* pictures in general, Bible scene pictures, or pictures of Christ, she had abundant opportunity. Yet she never did. However, she did speak quite negatively of poor-quality pictures of Bible scenes and Christ.

Until further light from God’s Word comes, the facts which I have discovered in this research will guide my decisions as to the use of pictures in later books which we publish here.

**APPENDIX
MORE ABOUT PICTURES**

The excessive destruction of pictures and a definition of an "idol":

"It is a difficult matter for men and women to draw the line in the matter of picture-making. **Some have made a raid against pictures, daguerreotypes, and pictures of every kind. Everything must be burned up, they say, urging that the making of all pictures is prohibited by the second commandment; that they are an idol.**

"An idol is anything that human beings love and trust in instead of loving and trusting in the Lord their Maker. Whatever earthly thing men desire and trust in as having power to help them and do them good, leads them away from God and is to them an idol. Whatever divides the affections, or takes away from the soul the supreme love of God, or interposes to prevent unlimited confidence and entire trust in God, assumes the character and takes the form of an idol in the soul temple.

"The first great commandment is, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind' (Matt. 22:37). Here is allowed no separation of the affections from God. In 1 John 2:15-17 we read, 'Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever.' **Now if the pictures made have a tendency to separate the affections from God, and are worshiped in the place of God, they are idols. Have those who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ exalted these things above God and given their affections to them?** Has their love for treasures filled a place in their hearts that Jesus should occupy?

"Have those who have burned up all their pictures of friends and any kind of pictures they happened to have, come up to a higher state of consecration for this act, and do they seem in words, in deportment, and in soul, to be ennobled, elevated, more heavenly-minded? Is their experience richer than before? Do they pray more, and believe with a more perfect faith after this consuming sacrifice which they have made? Have they come up into the mount? Has the holy fire been kindled in their hearts, giving new zeal and greater devotion to God and His work than before? Has a live coal from off the altar of sacrifice touched their

hearts and their lips? **By their fruits you can tell the character of the work.**"—3 *Selected Messages*, 330:1-331:1; *Manuscript 50*, 1886.

Pictures and the danger of fanaticism:

"There were some who had capabilities to help the church, but who needed first to set their own hearts in order. Some had been bringing in false tests, and had made their own ideas and notions a criterion, magnifying matters of little importance into tests of Christian fellowship, and binding heavy burdens upon others. **Thus a spirit of criticism, faultfinding, and dissension had come in, which had been a great injury to the church. And the impression was given to unbelievers that Sabbathkeeping Adventists were a set of fanatics and extremists,** and that their peculiar faith rendered them unkind, uncourteous, and really unchristian in character. Thus the course of a few extremists prevented the influence of the truth from reaching the people.

"Some were making the matter of dress of first importance, criticizing articles of dress worn by others, and standing ready to condemn everyone who did not exactly meet their ideas. **A few condemned pictures, urging that they are prohibited by the second commandment, and that everything of this kind should be destroyed.**

"These one-idea men can see nothing except to press the one thing that presents itself to their minds. Years ago we had to meet this same spirit and work. **Men arose claiming to have been sent with a message condemning pictures, and urging that every likeness of anything should be destroyed.** They went to such lengths as even to condemn clocks which had figures, or 'pictures,' upon them.

"Now we read in the Bible of a good conscience; and there are not only good but bad consciences. **There is a conscientiousness that will carry everything to extremes,** and make Christian duties as burdensome as the Jews made the observance of the Sabbath. The rebuke which Jesus gave to the scribes and Pharisees applies to this class as well: 'Ye tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass over judgment and the love of God' (Luke 11:42). One fanatic, with his strong spirit and radical ideas, who will oppress the conscience of those who want to be right, will do great harm. The church needs to be purified from all such influences."—2 *Selected Messages*, 318:3-319:3.

We live in a time when there is a great diversity of viewpoint on so many issues. To those not continually studying the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, it can seem bewildering. Yet we will be safe to the very end if we will remain with those books! —*vf*