

Are Images of Christ Sinful or Acceptable?

This essay is dealing with the issue of whether images of Jesus Christ are sinful or acceptable. They are often found in Christian books for children, paintings, and other various places. I have heard godly men land on both sides of this issue.

This is dealing with the 2nd Commandment-

Exodus 20:4 “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.”

Of course, I would begin by saying that all images of the first and third person of the Trinity are certainly sinful, but the issue can be a little more complex dealing with the second person (Jesus Christ) because He permanently added a created human nature at the incarnation.

A brief summary of the Trinity & Christology will be helpful here-

The Trinity: One God fully shared by 3 distinct, co-equal, co-eternal, fully Divine persons: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. The Eternal Son **added** flesh (wasn't diminished) to permanently become the God-man Christ Jesus. So....The **Lord Jesus Christ** (Jesus of Nazareth) is: one person with two natures. He is the one true God & truly man (human). He has a divine nature and a human nature.

So I think the deciding factor is whether an image of Christ is considered a depiction of the *Person* of Christ or of His created *humanity*. If the former, then were dealing with His divine nature & that would likely cause it to be sinful. If the latter, then it would be ok as it is depicting something created (His human nature in the womb of Mary). You can see we're splitting hairs here theologically, but I think that's the core of this matter. I tend to land on being against images of Christ for the most part, but it's certainly a secondary & debatable issue.

A related matter is how we are to *think of Him*, since we are clearly called to:

Hebrews 12:2 NASBS

fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Colossians 3:1-2 NASBS

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. [2] Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth.

Since Jesus Christ is truly human (as well as being truly God), it's impossible to think of Him without thinking of a human being or a man. So how are we to think of Him? Biblically, we only know a few things of His physical description...

What we know about Jesus' appearance is He had a beard (Isaiah 50:6) and was Jewish (and able to be identified as one: John 4:7-9): but that's about all Scripture gives us. So we ought to be very careful in how we depict Him in our minds and even more so in creative illustrations (And we should never use an image of Christ in a worship service to enhance worship). It should also be mentioned that, obviously, Christ is now glorified and ascended. When He appeared to Paul (Acts 9) and the Apostle John (Rev 1:13-15), He was presented in His glory (like He was at the mount of transfiguration): so that's another variable to consider.

Again, to me paintings and sculptures of Jesus Christ should probably be avoided, but I do think it's ultimately a matter of liberty to be approached carefully as with how we view our glorious Savior in our mind.

