

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 103 & 104 Part 2

Halifax, 10 January 2010

Q. 103 Which is the first commandment?

A. The first commandment is, Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

Q. 104 What are the duties required in the first commandment?

A. The duties required in the first commandment are, the knowing and acknowledging of God to be the only true God, and our God; and to worship and glorify Him accordingly, by thinking, meditating, remembering, highly esteeming, honouring, adoring, choosing, loving, desiring, fearing of Him; believing Him; trusting, hoping, delighting, rejoicing in Him, being zealous for Him; calling upon Him; giving all praise and thanks, and yielding all obedience and submission to Him with the whole man; being careful in all things to please Him, and sorrowful when in anything He is offended; and walking humbly with Him.

Introduction:

Last week, we began looking at the duties required in the first commandment (Question 104).

- I pointed out to you that even though the commandment is stated in the negative:
 - “You shall have no other gods before me,”
 - it clearly implies that we must *have* the one true God as our God.

- And I showed you that having the true God as your God involves three things...
 - You must know Him as your God
 - You must acknowledge Him as your God.
 - And you must worship and glorify Him as your God.

- We looked at the first two of those duties last week...
 - I showed you that knowing God is:
 - to understand what He is and how He is distinguished from all other gods...
 - and to live in communion with Him as the one who gives us life and all things and to whom we give back worship and praise.
 - Then we looked at what it is to acknowledge Him...
 - And we saw that essentially, it involves confessing the true God as our God.

- And we saw that our confession is to be a public one in which we enter into His covenant by baptism and then continue in the communion of a congregation that professes His name...
 - And then we saw that it also includes acknowledging Him in our daily lives as we tell others that we know Him and refuse to deny Him...
 - And we saw that it also involves acknowledging Him as the true God and our God in our hearts, for God sees our hearts.
- And now this week, we will look at what it means to worship and glorify Him as the true God and our God.
 - The idea here is that our whole life is to be about living unto the true God.
 - For our scripture reading I have selected 1 Kings 18.
 - The people had been wavering between the service of Baal and the service of Yahweh...
 - so Elijah calls them to make up their minds as to whom they will serve!
 - And He demonstrates to them that Yahweh is the only true God and therefore the one to whom they are to give their whole life.
 - READ 1 Kings 18
 - If Yahweh is the true God,
 - then we must give our lives completely to His service.
 - Now let us look at some of the particular duties that are involved in serving Him as our God.

I. First of all, it is for you to regard the true God as God

- This involves two things:
 - directing your attention to God...
 - and regarding His excellence as God
 - Let's look at each of these
- A. First, you are to regard the true God by directing your attention to Him.
 1. This only makes sense—if He is God, He should never be far from our thoughts!
 - When there is a being so excellent, so powerful, so sovereign, so glorious... the one who made us and who is never far from us—
 - in whom we live and move and have our being...
 - and in whose hands is our destiny...
 - It is only natural and right that we should ever be mindful of Him.

- But because we are fallen into sin, the scripture tells us in Romans 1 that we do not like to retain God in our thoughts...
 - Psalm 10:4 says of the wicked, that “God is in *none* of His thoughts.”
 - This only makes sense because having sinned against Him, it is very uncomfortable for the natural man—the unconverted man—to think about Him!
 - For we are ashamed before His holy presence, having become vile and sinful creatures...
 - sinful creatures who are under His wrath and curse!
 - We would rather put Him out of our minds if we could help it!
 - And indeed, we get pretty good at putting him as far from our thoughts as possible.
 - This is one of the reasons that those who believe and speak about the true God are often hated—
 - they keep bringing up the subject of the true God—and the unconverted don’t want to think about Him.
 - But even after we have come to Jesus Christ and been completely pardoned of our sins and reconciled to Him...
 - so that our thoughts about Him can bring us sweet pleasure, as we sing in Psalm 104:34...
 - when we can even think about His saving grace and mercy and about the wonderful hope we have in Him...
 - yet, we still must be prompted to pay attention to Him.
2. The Catechism mentions these three things to be done:—thinking of Him, meditating on Him, and remembering Him...
- a. Deuteronomy 4:39 calls us to think or consider who God is...
 - De 4:39 "Therefore know this day, and consider *it* in your heart, that the LORD Himself *is* God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; *there is* no other.
 - He is our God—
 - How wrong it is for us to ignore Him as if He were irrelevant and uninteresting!
 - b. Indeed, you ought to meditate on Him—to deliberately consider Him and all that He has done...
 - In Ps 145:5, we commit ourselves to meditate on Him:
 - “I will meditate on the glorious splendour of Your majesty, And on Your wondrous works.”

- You meditate when you turn thoughts over and over in your mind...
 - What pleasure it gives to consider His greatness and His goodness!
- c. And of course we are always to remember Him...
 - Deuteronomy 8 warns against receiving God's blessings and then forgetting Him...
 - De 8:18 says:
 - "And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth, that He may establish His covenant which He swore to your fathers, as it is this day.
 - How often do we forget Him when blessings come—
 - and sometimes even in our distress,
 - we forget to call upon Him.

TRANS> So you see here that you are to regard God by directing your attention to Him, thinking of Him, meditating on Him, and remembering Him.

B. Second, you are to regard God as excellent.

1. When men think of God, it may be either to curse Him or to bless Him...
 - to think well of Him or to think ill of Him.
 - And of course if you think ill of Him, you are not thinking according to what is true and right,
 - for He is altogether glorious and perfect.
 - There is no blemish or fault in Him and those who find fault in Him do so only because they themselves are corrupt and their minds are defiled and profane.
2. The Catechism gives us seven participles that describe the high regard we are to have of the true God.
 - a. First, that you should be found highly esteeming Him.
 - In Ex 15:11, it says:
 - "Who *is* like You, O LORD, among the gods? Who *is* like You, glorious in holiness, Fearful in praises, doing wonders?
 - This is where your thoughts about God are to lead you!
 - If they do not, you are not thinking rightly about Him and you need to repent of your thoughts...
 - You are to see Him as the fairest of ten thousand—as without rival in beauty, excellence, majesty, and glory!

- b. Second, that you should be found honouring Him.
 - This is very closely related to esteeming Him.
 - When you honour God, you give Him proper regard and respect.
 - King Nebuchadnezzar did not honour God when he boasted about the kingdom without mentioning God who had given it to him...
 - But then God humbled him so that he did honour God...
 - In Daniel 4:37, he said:
 - Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all of whose works are truth, and His ways justice. And those who walk in pride He is able to put down.
 - In Malachi 3, God asked His worshippers why they did not honour Him in their worship...
 - They were negligent about it—they brought lame sacrifices—they acted like it was something unimportant...
 - such disrespect as they would never have brought to their governor.
 - We need to consider how we come before God with the sacrifice of praise...
 - Do we honour God as God? or do we approach Him as if He is one of us?
- c. Third, that you should be found adoring Him.
 - To adore Him is to find delight and pleasure in Him...
 - rather than being disappointed or bummed out with Him—
 - Psalm 32:11 says “Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous.”
 - If you are not glad in His presence;
 - either you are not yet converted or there is something wrong with the way you are thinking about Him.
 - A lot of people go around looking for something to adore—they say, as in Psalm 4, “Who will show us any good...”
 - But we are to say, “Lord, lift up the light your countenance upon us [show us your face]... you have put gladness in my heart more than in the season that their grain and wine increased...”
 - He gives us greater joy by far—when He makes Himself known to us.
- d. Fourth, that you should be found choosing Him as your God...
 - In our scripture reading, we saw where Elijah called the people to choose between the LORD and Baal...

- And he said, “If the LORD is God, serve Him...”
 - There was a choice between Baal and the true God.
- There are times when we are brought to such choices...
- Moses had the opportunity to be a leader in Egypt as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, but He chose for His God—
 - which meant 40 years in exile on the backside of the wilderness, and 40 more wandering about in the wilderness with an ungrateful people.
 - And even today—even right this very hour, we have brothers and sisters in the world who are being tortured and killed because they choose God rather than their life,
 - which life they could easily have with a simple denial of their God.
 - But they make an excellent choice!
 - And you...
 - do you choose your God when it will bring laughter? or scorn? or loss of society? or loss of opportunity?
 - May it ever be so!
- e. Fifth, that you should be found loving Him, for He is God...
- As we recently saw in Deut 6,
 - We are to love Him with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength, and all our mind.
 - Everything about Him is lovely...
 - it is only because we have no taste or sense that we do not love Him with our all...
 - but by His grace that renews us, we are able to love Him even as His own dear Son loves Him.
 - It is our duty to do so—we *will* do so by His grace...
- f. Sixth, that you should be found desiring Him...
- God has given the words of Psalm 73 to sing as our own words...
 - Psalm 73:25-26 Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
 - Is this true of you? Not always, is it?
 - In this Psalm, we confess the envy that arises in us as God’s people when we see those without Him prospering in this world...

- And we are tempted to say:
 - “What use is it to serve God if this is all I get?”
- But you see, it is not all you get!
 - You get Him as your portion!
 - What a marvellous thing it will be for us to see Him as He is and to be brought into His very presence!
 - He is God! What else have we to desire besides Him?
 - Though all the earth should be removed, if we have Him, we have all that we could ever desire!

g. Seventh, that you should be found fearing Him, for He is God!

- He is the judge of all the earth and has power to destroy both soul and body in Hell forever...
 - To think rightly about Him is to fear Him more than you fear man.
 - But how often we have a greater fear of man.

TRANS> So there you see that we are to constantly regard God, both His person and His excellence.

II. Second, I want you to see that it is for you to rely upon the true God because He is God.

A. You are to believe Him to be all that He has revealed Himself to be...

1. As we saw last week, He has revealed Himself through creation, providence, and scripture.
 - a. In creation, you see His eternal power and divine nature.
 - Do not deny what is revealed here...
 - Do not be afraid to believe that He is able to call into being the whole universe by the word of His power...
 - It is clearly not self-existent...
 - How unlike us He is!
 - How divine and powerful!
 - b. In providence, you see His goodness and His severity...
 - His wrath is revealed against our ungodliness and unrighteousness by death the curse of God upon the creature...
 - If there is calamity in the city, has the LORD not done it?
 - But behold His goodness—who...
 - Acts 14:17: did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

- And who, above all, sent His Son in the fullness of time to redeem His elect...
 - even delivering Him up the cross for us.
 - Behold His severity in pouring out His wrath on Him on account of our sins when He became our surety...
 - but behold His goodness in giving Him up for us and accepting Him for our sins...
 - c. And in scripture, you have His very Word, given to us by prophets,
 - prophets who are confirmed by signs and wonders and by the very words they spoke that bear witness to their divine origin...
 - by the message that comes to us with such power when the Spirit of God opens our hearts to receive it.
 - You are to believe all that is written of our great God!
2. He is God—believe Him to be so!
- There is no deception in His revelation—either in creation, providence, or scripture...
 - The only cause of deception is our own sin and stubbornness that keeps us from receiving His revelation...
 - You can absolutely rely on all that He has said...
 - You can believe Him because He is God.
 - Do not be afraid to believe Him...
 - no, no!
 - It will not hurt you at all!
 - Be afraid rather of **not** believing Him—
 - It is not belief, but unbelief that will be your ruin!
 - Don't be afraid of the commitment that comes from belief...
 - You will lose nothing at all.
- B. This believing Him, this believing Him to be all that He says He is as God will bring about trust, hope, delight, and joy in Him...
- These are mentioned in the Catechism ...
1. Because He is God, you are to absolutely trust Him...
- Isaiah 26:4 says: Trust in the LORD forever, For in YAH, the LORD, *is* everlasting strength.
 - You can rest yourself upon Him in all that He has promised...

- If He says you can cast your care upon Him because He cares for you, you can utterly rely on Him...
 - If He tells you He will keep you and guard you in all your ways, you can count on it.
 - If He says your sins are removed as far as the east is from the west, you can count on it—you need not worry about them ever again...
 - If He says He will provide for you—all that you need to serve Him and to do His will—you are to trust Him to do it.
2. And because He is God, you can put all your hope in Him...
- In Psalm 42, David talks to Himself and says,
 - Psalm 42:5 & 11: Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall yet praise Him For the help of His countenance.
 - It is your duty to hope in God—
 - To worry, is to suggest that God will not make good on His promises!
 - If He says that He will crush the serpent's head and bring down all our enemies, you can make it your hope.
 - If He says that all things work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His promise, you can rely on it!
 - If He says that He is preparing a place for you and that where He is, you will be also, you can count on it to be so!
 - What can you do but yearn for Him—
 - In John 17, Jesus makes known to us through His prayer that we will see the glory that He had with the Father before the world began!
 - We will see the love of the Father and the Son, and we will be brought into that love...to live in that love and to share in that love
 - It is inconceivable!
 - It is marvellous!
3. He is God—it is for you to delight in Him and rejoice in Him...
- Over and over the scriptures call us to be glad in Him and to find our joy in Him.
 - Moses got to see a glimpse of Him
 - Exodus 34:6-7: And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of

the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

- And after seeing this, Moses took such pleasure in Him that he absolutely refused to go to the Promised Land unless the LORD went with him...
 - He had no use for the Promised Land if the LORD were not there.
- And now we have seen much more of His glory in Jesus Christ than Moses did!
 - We see just how merciful and gracious He is—that He gave His Son—
 - How good and true...that He gave His Son...
 - How faithful to His covenant... that He gave His Son...
 - How truly that He is the one who visits iniquity and will by no means clear the guilty!... so truly that He gave His Son...
- Abraham and Moses rejoiced to see His day—
 - They took delight in Him...
 - How much more should we!
 - How much we miss out on when we do not obey this commandment—and delight and joy in Him as the God He is revealed to be!

TRANS> So then, we have seen that we are to regard Him as God and that we are to rely on Him as God...

III. Third, it is for you to serve the true God as God

A. Because of who He is, it is your duty to be zealous for Him...

1. Elijah is a great example to us in this...

- 1Ki 19:14 And he said, "I have been very zealous for the LORD God of hosts; because the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword.
 - What a commitment Elijah had—being hunted and hated—and yet always preaching the LORD's Word.
 - What a good example he is!
- But our LORD Jesus is an even better example who said, "Zeal for your house has eaten me up."
 - Like David, He would take no rest until He had established a dwelling place for the LORD among His people...
 - He gave Himself completely to the service of His Father.

2. It does not do to serve Him in any other way—
 - To be lackadaisical and cold toward Him when He is such a great God is entirely out of line.
 - You are to present your bodies as a living sacrifice...
 - this is your *reasonable* service according to Romans 12:2
 - Zealous service that sacrifices all is the only reasonable service...

TRANS> There are two aspects to this reasonable service of God...

- Worship and obedience...

B. Worship involves calling upon Him, and giving all praise and thanks to Him.

1. Calling upon God refers to prayer, both corporate and private.
 - We are told in Gen 4:26 that in the days of Seth, when Enosh was born, men began to call upon the name of the LORD.
 - This does not mean that they had not prayed and offered sacrifices in their families, for Cain and Abel did that...
 - but it refers to families gathering together with each other to seek the LORD in public worship.
 - After this, we are told several times that Abram build altars and called upon the name of the LORD.
 - He was establishing corporate worship in various places he went and teaching people to call on the true and living God.
 - The scripture promises that whoever calls upon the LORD will be saved...
 - And this is quoted several times in the New Testament with reference to calling upon the LORD for salvation in Jesus Christ...
 - This is what you do when you acknowledge Him to God.
 - You look to Him for help because you know that your help is in the name of the LORD who made heaven and earth.
 - Those who do not call upon the LORD in their need are acting the part of atheists.
 - It is part of your proper service to Him to express your dependency on Him by calling upon Him.

TRANS> But that is not all that is involved in proper worship.

2. Proper worship of God also involves praising Him and giving thanks to Him.
 - He is our God, and all we have come from Him...
 - Paul puts it well in Acts 17:24 and 25 to the men at Athens when he says:

- Acts 17:24-25: "God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.
- In our worship, we do not provide God with any thing that He needs as in pagan religion...
 - We rather praise Him and give thanks to Him...
 - We praise Him for His excellence and virtue...
 - And we thank Him for His blessings in this life and most of all for His blessings in salvation.

TRANS> Do not look at our corporate worship as only a time of instruction...

- It is also a time when we come together to call upon Him, to praise Him, and to give thanks to Him.
 - This is our reasonable service of worship...
 - And it is to carry over into our private lives as well so that we are characterised as a people who call upon Him, praise Him, and thank Him...
 - But of course our reasonable service does not end there...

C. It also involves obedience to Him because He is God...

1. As the catechism puts it, we are to yield all obedience and submission to him with the whole man.
 - Jeremiah 7:23 shows that this is part of what it is to have Him as our God...
 - Jer 7:23: But this is what I commanded them, saying, 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the ways that I have commanded you, that it may be well with you.'
 - In Romans 6, Paul points out that you can tell whose servants we are by looking at whom we obey...
 - If you have God as your God, you will do what He commands...
 - In Luke 6:46, Jesus said,
 - "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?"
 - So ask yourself,
 - "Does my life show that God is my God?"
 - "Do I obey Him as my God?"
 - Remember that the chief substance of obedience to the true God is obedience to the gospel...
 - It is coming to Christ for mercy and pardon, and for grace that we may serve God.
 - but make no mistake!

- This certainly involves a complete turning from your own way to follow Him in all of life...
 - There must be a universal repentance in which you submit all to Him.
 - This is your reasonable service to the true God.
2. It involves a carefulness on your part to please God in all things, and a sorrow when you have offended Him in any way.
- When He is your God, you live to please Him...
 - In Colossians 1:9-10, Paul prays that the church will be filled with the knowledge of knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding...
 - that they might walk worthy of the LORD, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work.
 - All that is involved—you must find out what pleases Him—what His will is—how He wants you to live before Him...
 - and then you must walk in that way, bearing fruit that pleases Him!
 - You, who once produced only sin and death that brought His wrath upon you...
 - now in Jesus Christ are able to fully please Him, being fruitful in every good work!
 - Christ restores you and gives you His Spirit so that you may please Him...
 - What a marvellous thing it is!
 - But there are times when you don't...
 - And when you don't, you are to lament.
 - You are not to be flippant or trivial about your sin, but you are to bemoan yourself as Ephraim did when they came to repentance.
 - The Apostle Peter, having denied Christ, went out and wept bitterly...
 - Paul commends the Corinthians in 2 Cor 7 because they sorrowed with a godly sorrow on account of their sin...
 - It was a godly sorrow, he says, not because there were so many tears, but because there was a zealous change in their behaviour!
 - Their sorrow was a godly sorrow because it produced repentance.
 - 2 Cor 7:11: For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what

zeal, what vindication! In all things you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

- This is the way you are to respond to *God* when you know Him as the true God.

3. Finally, you see that your reasonable service to Him involves walking humbly.

- We are called to walk humbly before Him in Micah 6:8...and James tells us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God.
 - This is an essential feature of life with God, for we are but creatures and have nothing at all, either in common blessings or spiritual blessing, but what He gives to us.
 - It is not for us to dictate to God how things should be done,
 - or to suppose that we can manage apart from Him.
 - This morning we saw in Isaiah 28 the folly of pride that makes men drunken so as to suppose that they can live their lives without God!
 - This is one of the saddest things about so much of the world
 - There is this living as if God has nothing to do with us—as if He is irrelevant and as if the fact that we are fallen sinners does not matter.
 - But it does matter and it is to humble you before Him so that you depend upon him for His promised mercy and for everything else.

Conclusion

With that we conclude our summary of the things required in the first commandment.

- Before we can have no other gods,
 - we must first have Him as our God.
 - We must know Him
 - We must acknowledge Him
 - We must worship and glorify Him as the one true God...
 - regarding Him as God
 - relying on Him as God
 - and serving Him as God.