

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 105 – Part 1

Halifax, 17 January 2010

Q. 105 What are the sins forbidden in the first commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the first commandment are, atheism, in denying or not having a God; idolatry, in having or worshipping more gods than one, or any with or instead of the true God; the not having and avouching Him for God, and our God; the omission or neglect of anything due to Him, required in this commandment; ignorance, forgetfulness, misapprehensions, false opinions, unworthy and wicked thoughts of Him;

bold and curious searching into His secrets; all profaneness, hatred of God; self-love, self-seeking, and all other inordinate setting of our mind, will, or affections upon other things, and taking them off from Him in whole or in part; vain credulity, unbelief, heresy, misbelieve, distrust, despair, incorrigibleness, and insensibleness under judgements, hardness of heart, pride, presumption, carnal security, tempting of God; using unlawful means, and trusting in lawful means; carnal delights and joys; corrupt, blind, and indiscreet zeal; lukewarmness, and deadness in the things of God; estranging ourselves, and apostatizing from God; praying, or giving any religious worship, to saints, angels, or any other creatures; all compacts and consulting with the devil, and hearkening to his suggestions; making men the lords of our faith and conscience; slighting and despising God and His commands; resisting and grieving of His Spirit, discontent and impatience at His dispensations, charging Him foolishly for the evils He inflicts on us; and ascribing the praise of any good we either are, have, or can do, to fortune, idols, ourselves, or any other creature.

Introduction:

For the last two weeks, we have been looking at the duties that are required in the First Commandment.

- We saw that as God tells us in the first commandment to “have no other gods before” Him, it follows as a good and necessary deduction that we must therefore have Him.
 - If we are to have no other gods, we must have Him as our God.
- I showed you that mankind was created with the ability and privilege to know God,
 - and that it is only because we were corrupted by the fall that we do not know Him as we should,
 - but that the very purpose of salvation is to restore us to a true knowledge of God through Jesus Christ the mediator, for Jesus says,

- John 17:3: “This is eternal life; that they might know the Father and Jesus Christ whom He has sent.”
- We saw that knowing Him is more than just knowing about Him;
 - it involves living in communion with Him—consciously and thankfully receiving from Him, and then giving praise and thanks to Him.
- We saw further that we must acknowledge Him...
 - that is, we are to openly confess the true God as our God,
 - both formally (through church membership and covenants)
 - and informally (in our daily walk and conversation).
 - And then last week we focused on the duty we have to worship and glorify Him as God.
 - We are to:
 - regard the true God as God,
 - rely upon the true God as God,
 - and serve the true God as God.
 - We looked at this in much detail.

Now, this week, we come to look at things that are forbidden in the first commandment.

- This is the topic of Question 105.
 - As you saw in my reading of the answer to Question 105 earlier, it is very comprehensive.
 - I really do not want to rush through this too quickly,
 - so I am going to consider this topic over more than one week.
 - This week, we will cover the first part of the answer where it says:
 - The sins forbidden in the first commandment are, atheism, in denying or not having a God; idolatry, in having or worshipping more gods than one, or any with or instead of the true God; the not having and avouching Him for God, and our God; the omission or neglect of anything due to Him, required in this commandment; ignorance, forgetfulness, misapprehensions, false opinions, unworthy and wicked thoughts of Him;

For our Scripture reading, I want to look at Deuteronomy 31:30 – 32:47.

- READ> Deut 31:30-32:47.

In this passage, Moses (actually, the LORD through Moses)

- gives this song to Israel to stand as a testimony against them in future generations when they would turn to worship other gods...

I. Sadly God's Covenant people often worship other gods.

- A. The LORD knew Israel would break the first commandment,
- so He prepared this song to witness against them when they did...
 - And this song continues to stand as a witness against us today when we worship other Gods.
1. You can see how the song speaks of God's faithfulness to them as the one who delivered them out of Egypt and then carried them through the wilderness.
- But how He then complains that they have forgotten Him and not been mindful of Him and have even worshipped foreign gods which He also calls demons.
- a. You can see this in Deuteronomy 32:15-18.
- The LORD accuses them of provoking Him to jealousy with foreign gods and of sacrificing to demons.
- b. Paul mentions this in 1 Cor 10 also—that the worship of other gods is really nothing else but the worship of demons.
- In 1 Cor 10:20, He says:
 - 1 Cor 10:20: the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.
2. There are many people in the church today who think we are far from this sin of worshipping other gods.
- They say, "We don't have the sin of worshipping other gods,"
 - but these people are wrong.
 - This is actually one of the biggest problems in the church today!
 - You can understand this if you look at how God describes His people's rejection of Him in verse 15-18.

TRANS> Look carefully at these verses (Deut 32:15-18) as I read them again...

- Look at how God describes Himself!
 - Deut 32:15-18: But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; You grew fat, you grew thick, You are obese! Then he forsook God *who* made him, and scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation. They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign *gods*; with abominations they provoked Him to anger. They sacrificed to demons, not to God, *to gods* they did not know, to new *gods*, new arrivals that your fathers did not fear. Of the Rock *who* begot you, you are unmindful, and have forgotten the God who fathered you.
- B. These words show us that God as *redeemer* is rejected when we worship other gods.
1. Did you see that?
- a. He calls Himself **“the Rock of Jeshurun’s salvation.”** (Jeshurun is derived from the word Yahsar—righteous).

- This speaks of God as the one who has saved those who are righteous!
 - He is the Saviour or the righteous ones—the rock of their salvation!
- b. And then He calls Himself: **the Rock who begot you.**
- To beget is to make them His children!
 - This speaks of Him as the One who has adopted us as His own children!

TRANS> And you see, He is telling them that by rejecting Him as He was revealed as their redeemer, they had rejected Him!

2. To put this in New Testament language,
- They had rejected **God as revealed in Christ!**
 - To use the language of Question 104, they were guilty of
 - ignorance, forgetfulness, misapprehensions, false opinions, unworthy and wicked thoughts of Him.
 - They were not recognising God as He is revealed—as our redeemer who saved them and adopted them!
 - They were ignorant, which ignorance was sinful!
 - They were forgetful, which forgetfulness was sinful
 - They had misapprehensions, which misapprehensions were sinful
 - They had false opinions of Him and these false opinions were sinful.
 - They had unworthy and wicked thoughts of Him as something other than a gracious redeemer, and these unworthy and wicked thoughts were sinful.

II. Let me show you how this applies to us today.

- A. A lot of people would say that those who worship one god are worshipping the same God we worship...
- such as those who worship Allah
 - or those who worship the god the apostate Jews who rejected Christ worship,
 - or those who worship the god of the many liberal churches that deny that Jesus is truly God.
1. You need to recognise that just because a person worships one God does not mean he is worshipping the true God.
- The only true God, is God the Father of Jesus Christ!
 - Joh 14:6-10 Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him." Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

- Now that Jesus has come, He is the primary revelation of the Father to us.
 - So anyone that claims to be worshipping the true God must worship God through Christ.
 - No one can say that he knows the true God if he does not know the Son.

TRANS> The only God you are to worship is the God who is the Father of Jesus.

2. This was even the case before Jesus came.

- The only place the true God was known and worshipped was where He was known as the rock of Jeshuran's salvation and the rock that had begotten them...
- They had to know Him as the redeemer, as He was revealed in the Old Testament shadows of Jesus Christ.
 - This is why Deut 32:21 says that any other god is not God at all:
 - Deut 32:21: They have provoked Me to jealousy by [what] is not God; They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols.
 - They may call something else "God," but if it is not God the Father of Jesus, then it is not God.

TRANS> This not only means that you cannot claim to be worshipping the true God if He is not the Father of the historical Jesus Christ...

- It also means that...

B. You deny the true God if you join together to worship with those who deny that God is the Father of Jesus Christ.

- That is, if you act like they are worshipping the same God you are.

1. As soon as the **Rock of our salvation** is set aside, and a generalised version of God is accepted in His place...

- a god that can be approached apart from Christ,
 - we are no longer worshipping the true God but some other god that is really no god at all.
- a. That means that it was wrong for Billy Graham and other evangelical leaders to join with Muslims and Jews and other Unitarians (who reject the deity of Christ) and worship with them in the aftermath of 9/11.
 - That is just one example of course, but Graham clearly broke the first commandment and so did everyone else who joined in worship that day.
 - Assembling for worship (to call on God) is a very serious matter and we cannot pretend that those who reject Christ are worshipping the same God.

- To have them pray to their gods in a common assembly with us is wrong!
- b. This is the very thing that Christians in the early Church in the Roman Empire refused to do...
- And it was for this reason in particular that so many of them were martyred!
 - They kept the first commandment!
 - If they had been like so many evangelicals today,
 - They would have been glad to join with the Romans and add Jesus to the collection of gods that were worshipped...
 - “This is our god, that is your god.”
 - And the Romans would have been very glad to have another god added to the pantheon.
 - They did not persecute the Christians because they worshipped Jesus...
 - They persecuted them because they claimed that Jesus, and the Triune God alone ought to be worshipped...
 - and that all other worship was rebellious worship and something to be condemned.
 - Christians were even called atheists because of this refusal to give any countenance to other gods.
 - not that they tried to force anyone to embrace the true God...
 - It was just that they would not deny Him by worshipping Him in fellowship with those who were worshipping other gods as if the true God was an equal to these other gods!
 - Because of this refusal, they were slaughtered by the thousands...
 - Sometimes all the believers in a city were martyred.
 - Moses’ song did not testify against these holy martyrs, but it certainly does testify against us when we give countenance to other gods in ecumenical worship today!
- c. Some Christians today are up-set because there is no prayer in the government schools...
- But God despised the kind of prayers that were offered in those schools a few years ago—prayers that did not acknowledge Jesus Christ!
 - Don’t get me wrong though, there were Christians that truly did connect to God in such prayers,

- but the corporate event itself was still a violation of the first commandment and Christians were wrong to participate.
 - We have many sins as God's people, even when we pray, but if we are true believers praying in sincerity, our prayers get through.
 - But just because God is merciful does not mean we should be unconcerned about breaking the first commandment in this way!
 - If we love Him, we will never be cavalier about doing those things that caused our Saviour to die on the cross!
 - And breaking the first commandment is certainly one of those things!
 - Generic prayers that can just as well be offered by a Jew or a Muslim or some wretched liberal who denies that Jesus is truly God are worse than no prayers!
 - Christians must abstain from such meetings.
 - The first commandment forbids that kind of prayer.
2. This syncretism is the basic error of such societies as the Masons.
- a. They claim to be (quote):
- "that natural religion in which all men agree."
 - According to them, Christians and Jews and Muslims can all assemble together as a religious fellowship and offer prayer to the Great Architect of the Universe!
 - One of their own said that Freemasonry
 - "in no way conflicts with any other religion, unless that religion holds that no one outside its portals can be saved."
 - Well there you have it!
 - It is not a contradiction to any religion of man; it is only a contradiction to the one true religion!
 - Because the one true religion teaches that God's way is the only way to be saved!
 - 1 Tim 2:5 says, "For there is one mediator between God and man"
 - Acts 4:12: There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."
 - And Jesus Himself said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life—no one comes to the Father but by me."
 - That has always been the teaching for faithful Christians because it is the teaching of the word of God.

- So freemasonry by its own definition excludes the true Christian faith that was once delivered to the saints.
- b. A minister from the PCC once told me about a Presbytery he attended in which a woman was being ordained...
- In her ordination exams, she said that there were many different ways to God...
 - The minister who told me this story did not agree with her about this,
 - so he asked her how she would preach on John 14:6 where Jesus said "I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me,"
 - and she answered: "I wouldn't preach on that verse because I don't believe that verse."
 - She was ordained anyway!
 - That is syncretism and it is a violation of the first commandment.
 - For whatever that Presbytery wants to claim, they rejected and denied the one true God by ordaining that woman!
 - They broke the first commandment.
3. We should shun any kind of neutrality about religion that says there is no difference.
- a. If it really is a matter of eternal life and eternal death,
- what wrong we do to our neighbours if we do not witness against all false religion!
 - It is awful!
 - But even worse is the wrong we do to the honour of God whom we ought to love.
 - Certainly, there are going to be some differences among believers.
 - While we should endeavour to speak the truth to one another and strive to grow in unity,
 - there will be honest differences and in this we should be tolerant...
 - But as soon as someone denies that Jesus Christ is truly and fully God and that He came in the flesh...
 - or that He is the only way of salvation, and that whoever does not believe is condemned...
 - or that the Bible is the very word of God...

- we must not pretend that we are worshipping the same God as that person.
 - To do so is to deny the true God.
 - To be sloppy about these things is not a little thing...
 - It is a breach of the very first commandment of God!
- b. There is a tremendous pressure upon believers today in N. America to give in on this!
- 1) The reason is because there is so much false religion...
 - And false religion puts pressure on the truth because the truth testifies against it!
 - Those who follow other gods want to silence the true religion!
 - They will even unite together to silence the true religion.
 - That is why Jesus was crucified!
 - That is why the nations surrounding Israel were glad to worship Jehovah along with their gods and why they always pressured Israel to worship their gods—not instead of Jehovah, but along with Jehovah.
 - Too often, Israel gave in to the pressure!
 - And when they did, they broke the first commandment.
 - 2) We must not give way on this—
 - As soon as we do, we deny the true God and scornfully esteem the rock of our salvation!
 - How can we do that to our God who gave Himself for us to redeem us by the blood of His only Son!
 - How can we deny Him as the God who did so much to redeem us!
 - Let us die rather than deny that He is the one true God and that His Son is the only true way to Him.

TRANS> How is it that we could do such a thing?

III. How do Christians ever get to the place where they brazenly join with those who worship other gods?

A. I would suggest to you that it is done one step at a time.

1. Just as a man does not usually fall into open adultery unless he first gives himself over to lust,

- so a Christian does not usually begin to worship with those who worship other gods until he has first neglected the worship of the true God.
 - In other words, he transgresses the commandment in more subtle ways first, and then he moves into more brazen and open violations.
2. How do we begin to transgress?
- a. It is when we neglect and lose sight of the rightful worship of God as the Father of Jesus Christ!
 - as that Catechism puts it, “not worshipping and glorifying the true God as God and our God.”
 - Last week, (when we looked at the duties required in this commandment) I showed you that you ought to worship and glorify Him as the true God and your God...
 - You ought to praise Him as your Creator and Your Redeemer.
 - You must never become “unmindful” of Him as your Redeemer—nor must you become forgetful of what He has done—as Deut 32:18 speaks about:
 - Deut 32:18: Of the Rock who begot you, you are unmindful, and have forgotten the God who fathered you.
 - You see, this *being unmindful* of what He has done, and this *forgetting* of what He has done in our salvation is what causes us to be softer about accepting as god those who are not the Father of Christ who redeems.
 - b. One of the reasons it becomes so easy for us to cave in about upholding the truth that Jesus is the only way is because we cease to give thanks to God for Him as the only way!
 - When church is reduced to a moral pep talk with a little uplifting music thrown in...
 - When there is no clear declaration of the cross by which we are saved—
 - when the worshippers are not filled with gratitude to God primarily for this great salvation...
 - when their assembly is not about giving thanks to God for their salvation and praising God in Jesus Christ...
 - when they no longer pray (as Paul prays for the Ephesians) that they will grow more and more in their understanding and appreciation of what He has done...
 - there is really very little difference from a Unitarian service or the service that woman I mentioned that was ordained to the PCC would lead.

- c. If you are not regularly giving thanks for Jesus and for what He has done for you on the cross...and growing in your gratitude...
 - you can be sure that it won't be long before you will find it easy to deny Him...
 - and to think that the false religions that deny Christ are worshipping the same God you are...
 - And when that denial happens,
 - the worst thing about it is that it might be true!
 - It might be true that there is no difference in the god you are worshipping and the god the Unitarians or pagans are worshipping!
 - Perhaps you have taken the wide gate that leads to destruction.
 - You have lost your ability to discern...
 - You need to repent!
3. One of the reasons we have the Lord's Supper every week is so that we will not forget to thank God for sending Jesus to die on the cross...
 - a. It helps me to keep the cross central in my preaching,
 - and I hope it helps you to keep the cross of Christ central in your faith and life!
 - The Lord's Supper is called the Eucharist which means "thanksgiving."
 - It is a service in which we give thanks to and for our Redeemer who saves us.
 - It helps us to remember our Rock of salvation!
 - It helps us to guard against becoming unmindful of Him as the one who is the rock of our salvation and rock who begot us.
 - b. The Supper alone cannot safe-guard us from ingratitude,
 - for the service itself can become the thing we trust in instead of the Saviour and His work on the cross to which the supper points—
 - that is what has happened in the Roman Church where they regard it as a sacrifice that is offered by the priest to God to atone for sin.
 - We must be careful that for us it remains a service of thanksgiving and of looking to Jesus in faith to nourish us and cleanse us.
 - It is not a sacrifice, but a thanksgiving service of communion with our Lord for the sacrifice He offered two thousand years ago.
 - Be careful that it also remains a service of true thanksgiving in your heart that affects you all through the week.

- c. It is only as you worship God who redeems you that you worship the One true God...
 - As soon as you forget Jesus and His redemptive work, you are no longer worshipping the true God as God and your God...
 - as it says in Deut 32:15,
 - “You scornfully esteem the rock of your salvation”...
 - and in Deut 32:18:
 - “Of the Rock who begot you, you are unmindful, and have forgotten the God who fathered you.”
 - Let this never be the case with any of you!

TRANS> But now I want to mention another more subtle violation of the first commandment that leads us to greater transgressions...

- Namely,

B. We allow false opinions, and unworthy and wicked thoughts of God.

1. In the song of Moses, Moses has much to say about the goodness of the Lord.
 - He speaks of God’s faithfulness to His people, and how he cared for them.
 - Much of this is summarised in verse 4 where it says:
 - Deut 32:4: “*He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He.*”
 - It says that, but then in the next verse it speaks of how His people have corrupted themselves and made themselves a perverse generation.
2. But how did this start?
 - It started when they were tested in the wilderness and began to grumble against God.
 - In Philippians, Paul picks up on the language and advises the saints to do all things without grumbling and complaining or murmuring.
 - This is a serious problem.
 - We start to question the goodness of God in our testing—the very thing that Job refused to do when wife tempted him to just “curse God and die.”
 - Job refused to charge God with evil.
 - But Israel was not at all hesitant to charge God with evil when they were in the wilderness.
 - They continued to grumble and to charge Him with evil, as the catechism puts it:
 - to hold false opinions about Him and to have unworthy and wicked thoughts about Him,

- as if He were not the Rock whose work is perfect and whose ways are all justice—a god of truth and without injustice who is righteous and upright.
 - What causes this problem?
 - You might say, “Well it is all the hard things they had to bear!”
 - But Job had to bear hard things and he did not charge God with evil.
 - Jesus Christ had to bear hard things, and he did not charge God with evil.
 - So while the hard things are an occasion for this sin, that not cause it.
 - The problem is that we lose sight of the goodness of God.
 - Job remembered that His redeemer lives and that he would be raised up so that though the worms destroy his body, in his flesh, he would see God.
 - He knew God as His redeemer!
 - He knew Him in Christ!
 - He knew how much he had in Christ and that kept him from grumbling.
 - Jesus knew the goodness of God and the justice of God, and knew that His sufferings were all in the cause of justice as He had become the surety of a fallen people...
 - So instead of falsely charging God, a violation of the first commandment, Jesus continued to see Him as He truly is...
 - the rock whose work is perfect and whose ways are all justice. A God of truth and without injustice, righteous and upright in all His ways.
3. Beware brethren, of a grumbling spirit!
- I was convicted on Friday of how much I have been grumbling about things this winter.
 - It is a violation of the first commandment to charge the true God with evil, for He is not evil.
 - He is just the opposite of evil—He is good—all His ways are perfect.
 - Let us be mindful of Him as He is, and let us remember Him as He is,
 - not some false caricature of Him that we make up in our perversity.
 - Let us focus on Him as the Father of Christ, our redeemer.
 - For that is the true God whom we are called to worship!
 - Praise Him that as our redeemer, He will deliver us from having other gods.
 - Rejoice and look to Him with hope and thanksgiving for your deliverance.