

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## *Question 105 - Part 2*

Halifax, 24 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, misbelief, 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:**

Today we continue in our study of the first Commandment.

- I hope that you have it memorised.
- It is: “You shall have no other gods before me.”

Before I do any review, I want to go straight to our scripture reading.

- Please turn to 2 Corinthians 6:11 – 7:1.
- Before I begin reading, let me remind you who the Corinthians were.
  - They were pagans who were well known for two things—
    - the zealous worship of idols...
    - and sexual immorality.

- The Corinthians were so well known for their immorality that the people of the first century often referred to illicit sexual acts as “corinthianising”
  - And boy did they know how to enhance their idol worship!
    - Idol worship itself can be pretty boring on its own,
      - but they turned it into a great party,
        - with lavish feasting, drunkenness, dancing, lively music, shouting and screaming, tongue speaking, and to top it all off—a free flowing sexual frenzy!
    - If someone wanted to make a lot of money, in our society,
      - a great way to do it would be to set up a pagan temple with all this kind of activity.
      - I am really surprised that nobody has thought of this...people made a fortune of this stuff in the ancient world.
- But of course those in Corinth that had come to Christ no longer had communion with idols.
  - They had forsaken idols to serve the living God.
    - Yet, there were some within the church at Corinth who struggled with idolatry...
      - some tried to worship God the way they had worshipped idols...that is a violation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment...
      - and some wanted to continue to worship their idols along with God... that is a violation of the 1<sup>st</sup> commandment.
- Here in 2 Cor 6, Paul addresses those who still wanted to worship their idols after they had confessedly become worshippers of the living God.
  - Look at what he says to them in 2 Cor 6:11 and following.
    - READ 2 Cor 6:11 – 7:1.
  - What does Paul mean in verse 12 when he says,
    - “You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections”?
      - They felt that Paul was too restrictive because he told them not to join themselves together with their unbelieving pagan friends!
      - They had a strong desire to party with them!
    - But Paul is telling them it is those very desires that are restraining them!
      - The very fact that they want to have communion with these unbelieving friends is the thing that is keeping them from the true enjoyment of the LORD.
      - Their own sinful affections were the thing that was restraining them!

- They were missing out on what they might have had in the LORD because they were seeking communion with what was contrary to communion with God.
- They were pulling away from Him to have communion somewhere else.
  - That's what it is to have other gods—it is to have communion with what is contrary to God.
  - Paul says: (v. 14)
    - 2 Cor 6:14-16: For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people."
- They are engaged with what is incompatible with the true God... with that which destroys communion with the living God!
  - He is saying, “don't you see what you have?”
    - God Himself promises to dwell in you and walk among you and be your God!
    - The living God who made heaven and earth even promises to be a Father to you and to make you His sons and daughters—God Almighty Himself!
    - With these promises, you need to cleanse yourselves from all idolatry so that you can live in the full communion of God!
      - Your own stupid affections are preventing you from living in the enjoyment of God! So he says...
      - 2 Cor 7:1: Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

My friends, this is God's message for us also!

- What fools we are to have communion with *anything* that we put up in the place that belongs to God.
- Whenever we have communion with these idols in flesh or in spirit, we become filthy, polluted, defiled...
  - and we lose the sweet communion we might have rather had with God.
  - That is to break the first commandment and have other gods before Him.

Now as we move along today in our study of the first commandment today,

- I want to work through the list of things forbidden in the First Commandment...
  - things that pull us away from the communion with God that He has restored us to and is restoring us to by His saving grace in Jesus Christ.
  - Last week we looked in general at the worshipping of other gods,
    - and at the problem of confusing them with the true God is the redeemer.
    - We saw that any god who is not the Father of Jesus Christ is a false god and so is not to be worshipped.
  - And we saw that we must not ever allow ourselves to lose sight of the uniqueness of the true God, whose uniqueness in particular is that He is the God who is revealed in Christ alone, and who is known only through Christ.
    - We must not, as the catechism says, be guilty of ignorance, forgetfulness, misapprehensions, false opinions, or unworthy and wicked thoughts of Him!
    - For that is to pull ourselves away from communion with the true God.

This week, the first communion breaker we will look at is:

### **I. Bold and curious searching into His secrets.**

A. You know, of course, that the Bible encourages us to seek God with all our heart.

- Hebrews 11:6 tells us that God is “a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.”
  - It is only right for us to yearn to know our Creator.
  - He delights in revealing Himself to us and commands us, “seek my face!”
    - Our greatest joy comes from seeing and knowing our great God—
      - He is infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth!
      - Seeking Him through the Face of Jesus Christ who is revealed in His Word is our privilege and delight, and is greatly pleasing to our God who shows us His glory in this way.

B. What then is forbidden here? What is meant by bold and curious searching into His secrets?

- It is to go beyond what God has revealed to us.
  - This has been the ruin of many great men in this world!
  - Augustine once said that Hell was made for those who try to pry into God’s secrets.
  - Many are kept from salvation because they insist on having answers to certain questions about God...

- Instead of accepting what He has clearly revealed about Himself, His eternal power and divine nature... His goodness and His wrath against sin... and His redeeming grace...
  - all that we need to know about Him...
    - they spend their time trying to pry into what He has not revealed as if they could.
- Deuteronomy 29:29 speaks plainly about this...
  - It says
    - De 29:29: The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.
  - God cannot possibly reveal everything about Himself to us.
    - We don't have the capacity to contain it all—so He has, as a marvellous gift, revealed what we need to know in order to be saved and to have communion with Him.
    - It is His glory to conceal things from us—so that we might always realise that there is so much more to Him than we can take in!
      - Job 11:7-8: "Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than heaven —what can you do? Deeper than Sheol—what can you know?"
      - This is an anticipation of the great revelation of God to Job at the end of the book—
        - which revelation primarily consists of God telling Job how small he (Job) is and how little he really knows about God and His ways.
  - To try to pretend that we can search out what God has not revealed really amounts to a denial of His deity—
    - and it leads to all sorts of strange distortions about Him and denials of who He is.
      - This is one of the ways that God has often used to humble the proud.
    - Instead of accepting with thanksgiving and delight what He has revealed and searching that out (which will take more than a lifetime),
      - men ruin themselves, pretending that they can peer into His secrets.
      - One is reminded of what happened to those who tried to peer into the ark of God!
        - It is a violation of the first commandment to try to uncover what He has not chosen to reveal.

## **II. All profaneness and hatred of God.**

- A. A profane person is one who has no regard for holy things...
- Something is holy or sacred because it is associated with God—
    - It is to be regarded as “special...” even more than special—sacred!
    - But to the profane, nothing is sacred.
      - A profane person has no sense of awe and reverence for the things that are associated with God.
      - He will mock at God’s word and make light of His worship.
  - Hebrews 12:16 describes Esau as a profane person, who for one morsel of food sold his birthright.
    - His birthright was sacred because of the promises God had made to his father and grandfather of the coming Messiah through his household.
      - They were to esteem their calling as the family that would bring forth salvation to the world—but Esau sold his birthright for a meal!
  - We see increasingly that we are a profane society...
    - Men will scoff at holy things being thought holy...
      - Life is sacred because we are made in the image of God,
        - but increasingly our society is becoming profane in that we disregard the sanctity of life—
        - We destroy unborn children as a matter of convenience, and people who try to take their own lives have no shame—they are not seen as profane.
      - Marriage is sacred for a number of reasons...one of the main being that by marriage God ordained that we should reproduce and train up children who are made in His image...
        - but the profane person makes light of it—
        - He indulges in extramarital sex and pornography and makes jokes about that which is meant to be holy.
  - Even though the sin of profaneness is more particularly the focus of the third commandment than the first,
    - you can see that it is also a violation of the first commandment...
      - Because the profane person acts as if God is not associated with those things that He has especially associated Himself with.
      - He acts as if God is not—he denies God’s association with His worship and with human beings as those made in His image.
- B. Hatred of God is closely related to this...

- because the person who hates God dismisses God from His thoughts...
- In the Bible, hatred has to do especially with not regarding the wishes and interests of others...not doing what is pleasing to them.
  - For example, a son who came to believe in Jesus was said to hate his father if his father was a Christ-rejecting Pharisee.
    - It did not mean that he lost all affection and concern for his father, but it meant that he had to break his tie with his father.
    - This is what Jesus meant in Luke 14:26 when He said:
      - Lu 14:26 "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.
      - He explained in Luke 16:13 that no servant can serve two masters...
        - He will end up having to love one and hate the other.
- Those who hate God have come to find that God's will conflicts with their desires or with the desires of those they wish to please...
  - And so rather than displeasing themselves or others, they hate God—they break their tie with Him.
  - This is usually done by altering the way they think about Him because they don't like Him the way He is...
    - They hate Him, so they pretend that He is different than He is, and in that respect begin to worship a different God—a god of their own making.
    - Or they completely deny Him and claim to have no God.
- We all transgress here, for there are those times when we disregard what God has said (as if He were not God), to please ourselves or to please others.

TRANS> And that is exactly what the Catechism speaks of next...

C. 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.

1. Self-love is a violation of the first commandment when we do not obey Jesus' call to hate our own life when it comes to conflict with God's will!
  - Now there is a sense in which we all love ourselves...
    - No one really ever tries to harm themselves...we want things to go well for us.
      - Even when we are completely bummed out with ourselves, our frustration is rooted in love—we are bummed out because we wanted things to go well for us.
      - Even when a person commits suicide, they are trying obtain relief.

- You don't try to give your enemy relief when you hate him—you try to make him miserable.
    - In fact, suicide is an expression of inordinate self-love because you are hating God (doing what is displeasing to Him) in a desperate effort to make it better for yourself.
  - There is a sense in which we are to love ourselves, because we are made in God's image...
    - and it is very true that we love ourselves best (we do what is most beneficial for ourselves) when we earnestly give ourselves to serve God.
    - Self-love becomes sinful, or inordinate, when we put our own interests above the interests (or revealed will) of God...
    - You are at that point acting as if you are God—you are worshipping another god.
2. But self is not the only one that we put in the place of God...there are other things...
- There is also the inordinate setting of our mind, will, or affections on other things and the taking them off of the Lord...
    - that is, we put other things in the place of God and turn our attention upon them as if they were God.
  - As those created by Him, it is our proper place to be wholly devoted to Him as our God.
    - But according to Paul, there are those whose belly is their God.
      - Such persons have no sense of eating and drinking to the glory of God.
      - They do not eat their food with gratitude to God, and with a yearning to please Him—their whole attention is on the food.
    - There are those who make riches their god—
      - Instead of enjoying their wealth as God's gift and giving thanks, they set their mind, will, and affections on wealth and the seeking of it.
        - Such persons do not glorify God in their acquiring of it—
          - they will neglect other duties—such as the Sabbath, tithing, helping the poor, loving their wives, spending time with their children—etc.
          - they will engage in practices that are not entirely honest or that trample over or oppress their neighbour—all in the name of good business of course...
          - and worst of all, their heart is turned away from God.
    - And there are those who make people their god—



- They are more concerned about pleasing people than pleasing the Lord.
  - Their mind, will, and affections are on their lover rather than God—or on pleasing other people in general as if the human race were their god.
3. This is very common... it is so common I fear we hardly notice it...
- This is what John calls loving the world—
    - In his very blunt way, John says (in 1 John 2:15)
      - If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.
  - It is simply that our focus—the whole focus of our life and the centre of purpose—is not God our Creator in whom we live and move and have our being...
    - The mind, the will, and affections are toward other things!
      - It is the sin of sidelining God.
      - It is the sin of worldliness—our attention is in the wrong place.

TRANS> And this is closely related to the next thing the Catechism speaks about which can be summarised as:

### **III. Failure to align my thinking with God’s thinking.**

- A. The Catechism speaks of a whole array of behaviours that fit under this category:
- “vain credulity, unbelief, heresy, misbelief, distrust, despair, incorrigibility, and insensibility under judgements, hardness of heart.”
1. Each of these sins involve a disregard for the truth.
    - God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.
    - God is the original thinker and in Him is all truth.
    - As rational creatures, made by Him, living in the world that He created, it is our duty (and wisdom) to conform our thoughts after His.
      - To fail to do so is to embrace lies and live in lies.
        - It is to live in the darkness instead of in the light.
  2. The salvation of Jesus Christ involves, besides procuring forgiveness for us, bringing us from the darkness to the light.
    - When a person is saved, God causes the light to shine in our hearts.

- 2 Cor 4:6: For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
  - Satan had blinded the minds of those who do not believe, but God's Spirit opens our eyes so that we can see the glory of God in Christ.
  - This is the restoration of sinners by renewing them in knowledge according to the image of Him who created us...
    - We come to think straight again—to think true thoughts—thoughts that are conformed to God's thoughts which are always true.
3. But understand that inasmuch as our thoughts are not in conformity with God's thoughts, we are to that extent denying God who is the only source of truth.
- We have corrupted thoughts that have come from some other source, ultimately from the devil who is the god of this world.
  - In John 8:44, Jesus said to the Jews who did not believe in Him:
    - Joh 8:44 "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."
  - Sometimes our wrong thinking is sheer rebellion (as when we are incorrigible or when we harden our hearts)
    - and at other times it is from sluggishness and ignorance, as when Jesus spoke of His disciples' as being "slow of heart to believe all that the prophets had written."
      - In other words, sometimes it is more from honest misunderstanding of things rather than from a deliberate refusal to accept the truth...
        - but we must realise that in every case, it is sinful and has its roots in the rebellion of the human race.
        - 2 Thessalonians 2:11 speaks of God sending strong delusion to His enemies so that they will believe a lie.
          - He does this as a judgement, and He did it to the whole human race at the fall.
          - Holding to what is not true is a violation of the first commandment, and apart from the mercy of God in Jesus Christ, would land us in the Lake of Fire.

TRANS> With this in mind,

B. Let us look at the particular sins that are here named...that we may be humbled by them and seek to be delivered from them.

1. Vain credulity is the first one.

- Vain credulity is gullibility—a readiness to believe anything.
  - That seems to be the character of many in our society today!
    - What kind of gullibility is seen in the classroom these days!
      - Students are told that we are self-created out of unintelligent matter and they actually believe it and defend it!
      - How embarrassed they will be when the day of judgement exposes the lie.
- Vain credulity is a sinful attitude because it suggests that truth is not important enough to bother about.
  - You just kind of believe whatever you are told and don't bother yourself too much about it.
    - We just saw that wrong belief is sinful and the result of the fall, and one of the things that put our Saviour on the cross for us!
      - How can we continue to do that which caused our Saviour's suffering if we truly love Him?
      - Also, how can we be content to go on holding wrong thoughts about God that amount to denying Him as God!
  - Yet, there needs to be proportion about things too...
    - Some people get all focused on the details of faith when they haven't even established the fundamentals...
      - They have an appearance of being concerned about truth when in fact they have omitted the weightier matters and focused on the lighter matters to gain a reputation of being truth-lovers.
      - You need to see that you really are a truth-lover, not just one who wants to make a show of it.
- Indeed, the scripture commends the Bereans as being:
  - Acts 17:11: “more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily *to find out* whether these things were so.”
  - Let that be true of us also.

2. Next on the list after vain credulity is unbelief.

- This speaks of simply not believing the truth...
  - either because of ignorance as the Apostle Paul who said that he violently opposed the church, but did it “ignorantly and in unbelief...”
  - or because of stubbornness, as when Jesus did not do many mighty works in His own country because of their unbelief (Mat 13:58).

- Yet, whether unbelief is in ignorance or from stubbornness,
  - the scripture tells us the unbeliever will have his part in the Lake of Fire if He does not repent of it.
  - In Hebrews 3:12, the brothers in the church are warned,
    - Heb 3:12 Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God;
    - In this you can see why unbelief is a violation of the first commandment—
      - It is a departure from the living God—
        - We know God through faith—through what He has revealed both in creation and in His word...
          - and if we do not believe, we do not know Him.
  - Of course, there is unbelief that is not damnable, as when, for example, Jesus’ disciples did not believe certain things.
    - We are to be ever growing in the grace and knowledge of the LORD, and of course growth takes time...
      - but inasmuch as we are yet unbelieving, we violate the first commandment.

### 3. Heresy is next—

- Heresy has to do with the maintaining and propagation of error—that which is not in conformity with God’s Word.
  - Heresies can, of course, be very serious—it can be what Peter calls, “destructive (or damnable) heresies” of false prophets who even deny the Lord who bought them.
  - They can also be less serious, but heresies always separate people from God...
    - because they separate people who embrace them from the truth about God—
      - In that way, they always deny the true God in some way and so violate the first commandment.

### 4. Next we have misbelief. Misbelief has to do believing the wrong things.

- In John, Jesus told his disciples that men would reject them and their doctrine, all the while believing that they were pleasing God.
- From this you can see that simply having faith is not enough...
  - Faith must be grounded in the truth of God’s revelation to us in Christ.

- A person who believes something else has put denied the true God because He has rejected God's revelation of Himself to us in Christ.
5. Distrust and despair are next. These are related to each other...
- They both have to do with doubting what God has said—doubting His promises or distrusting them.
    - When distrust becomes all consuming, it gives way to despair such that a person gives up.
  - A serious example of this can be found among the Israelites when they were commanded to enter the Promised Land.
    - You know what happened—they sent in twelve spies ahead of them to spy out the land, and ten of those spies brought back a bad report...
      - bad in that it was a distrusting report.
      - Having seen the fortifications of the cities and the strength and size of some of the people, they concluded that Israel would not be able to enter the land.
      - Joshua and Caleb insisted that God would give Israel the land and defeat their enemies before them...
        - but Israel distrusted the promises of God and this gave way to despair such that they refused to even try.
        - This was a denial of God as God!
  - The same is done whenever you distrust what God has promised.
    - Do you distrust God's promise to work all things together for good to those who love Him?
      - When trials come, do you suppose that there is a different God in heaven than the One who promises that He will work all for good in the lives of His people?
6. Next is incorrigibility and insensibility under God's judgements.
- This also seems to fit under the category of aligning our thoughts with God's.
    - It speaks of a refusal to look at things in God's way when He sends correction.
    - You may remember the Lord's complaint against His people in Isaiah 1 when He says,
      - "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me."
      - And then He says,

- Isa 1:4-5: Alas, sinful nation, A people laden with iniquity, A brood of evildoers, Children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, They have provoked to anger The Holy One of Israel, They have turned away backward. Why should you be stricken again? You will revolt more and more.
- The LORD had chastened them and they kept coming back for more, as it were...
  - Instead of yielding to His truth, they continued to be incorrigible.
    - A person is incorrigible when they refuse to be corrected, despite all the chastening.
    - If a child is defiant, even after chastening, it is far worse than defiance before chastening.
    - If you are willing to be corrected, there is hope for you...
      - but if you harden your heart, even under correction, you put yourself beyond remedy.
      - If you knew who it is that is chastening you, you would gladly receive it and it would lead you to repentance...
        - But to go on without repentance is to deny the true God.
- It is easy to think of Pharaoh in the days of Moses as an example of this incorrigibility and refusal to be corrected...
  - He said, “who is the LORD that I should obey Him?” and his heart was so hard that He would not even yield to Him after Egypt was nearly destroyed by plagues...
    - Even after he let the people go, he changed his mind and pursued them.
    - This man could not bring himself to admit that he was dealing with the true God.
      - Instead he denied Him.

**Conclusion:**

With that we will conclude for today...

- But let me do so with an encouragement to all of you...
  - Do not pull away from the true God as if there were some other God!
  - No my brothers and sisters, He is the true God, revealed in Christ.
  - Come to Him, deal with Him, respond to Him...