

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 105 Part 3

Halifax, 31 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 come to our fifth sermon on the first commandment.

- We have seen in this sermon series how far reaching the first commandment is.
 - It has to do with living in the reality of the One true God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ by the Spirit.
 - For the last two weeks we have been looking at ways that we turn from God and put other things in His place.
 - Those who put the Larger Catechism together have given us a very long list of ways that we can break the first commandment.
 - I am very thankful to have the benefit of a whole assembly of godly men who knew the scriptures so well and who also proved their devotion to

God by their readiness to suffer for him, to provide us this exposition of the first commandment.

- I hope you understand what we are doing in this series on the Ten Commandments.
 - We are doing a very detailed exposition of each commandment.
 - The commandments are a summary of God's law, so they are packed with content.
 - We are drawing forth the implications of each one as we go through, making sure that what we draw forth from the commandment is also from scripture.
 - It is helpful to know that it is the opinion of the whole assembly of godly men that the long list of duties and things forbidden for each commandment is a true exposition of that commandment.
- Last week, we worked through the list to about the half-way point—where it says—“hardness of heart”...
 - In a moment, we will pick up with “pride” and move forward from there until we get to “trusting in lawful means”.
 - The overall theme of this portion is
 - “breaking the first commandment by putting your confidence in the wrong place.”
 - That is one of the things you do when you “have another God before God.”
 - You take something that is not God and you put your confidence in that other thing as if it were God.

But before we turn to the list, I want to go to a scripture reading that is related to our general theme for today.

- Please look with me at 2 Kings 1.
 - In this chapter, we have a very blatant violation of the first commandment:
 - “You shall have no other God's before me,”
 - in that the wicked King Ahaziah turns to Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron, in his distress, as if the true God is not able to help him.
- READ> 2 Kings 1:1-18.
 - What happened to this man—King Ahaziah—is what happens to all who put their confidence in another God—a god who is not the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - They die in their sin...
 - They die under the displeasure of God.

- They die because they have no redemption, having forsaken the true God who redeems and saves and takes away the sin of those who trust in Him.
- You who have come to know the true God through Christ cannot think of putting your confidence any where else...
 - Of course I do not mean to say that you never *do* put your faith that ought to be put in God in other things...
 - but I mean that when you do that, you are being inconsistent with what you have become by God's Spirit—a true believer.
 - At your core, you are like Jesus' disciples in John 6
 - when the 5000 had just walked away from Him, offended because He had told them that they must partake of Him as crucified if they would have eternal life...
 - and Jesus asked His disciples if they were also going to go away, and Peter said,
 - "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."
 - Peter and the others could not put their confidence in another God because they knew that there was no other true God.
 - That is what is at your core, if you are true believer,
 - and because it is at your core, you are ashamed when you put your confidence that ought to be in God in anything that is not God.
 - How ashamed you are at your inconsistencies...
 - But do not wallow in shame my brothers and sisters...
 - Rather lift up your eyes to the true God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and know with assurance that He will have mercy on you according to His promise despite your inconsistency.
 - But if you are not a true believer, then at your core, you are like Ahaziah...
 - Your confidence is not in the true God.
 - You have not come to put your trust in Him as He is revealed in Christ for eternal life.
 - You are not alive in Him through faith, but dead in trespasses and sins—an alien from the true God.
 - You need to repent and turn to the true God.

TRANS> Well now as we turn to look at the list of various ways we take our confidence off the true God and put it in other things,

- Let me encourage you to ask God to search your heart...
 - If you are a believer,

- that you might be ashamed of your foolish inconsistency in trusting what is not God, and might turn to the LORD to change you...
- And if you are not a believer,
 - that you might see your need of salvation—that you might see how you have angered the LORD in putting your confidence in what is not God...
 - and that you might also turn to Christ for forgiveness and mercy.

Well then, let us turn to the list of ways we break the first commandment, beginning with where we left off last time...pride!

I. Pride is confidence placed in self that ought to have been placed in God.

A. You can be proud about the past, and you can be proud about the future...

1. We will look at pride of the past when we talk about
 - “ascribing the praise of any good we either are, have, or can do... to ourselves,” at the end of Answer 105...
 - That is the problem that King Nebuchadnezzar had when he boasted and said:
 - Dan 4:30: "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honour of my majesty?"

TRANS> But as I say, we will look at pride about the past in another sermon.

2. The pride we will look at now is pride about the future.
 - It is the pride that is seen in an attitude that you can accomplish things without God’s help.
 - even that you can tie your shoes or that you can take another breath without God’s help.
 - James reminds you that you can’t.
 - In James 4:13-16, he says:
 - James 4:13-16: Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit"; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that." But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.
 - Understand the point here?
 - The problem is not that you make plans and go on a business trip in an effort to make a profit.
 - The problem is that you suppose that you can pull off those plans without the help of God!

- You act like *you* have control of the situation and that it is not all of God's mercy that you can do anything.
 - That is pride and James says it is evil!
 - We don't often think of this as evil, but God is the judge and His word says that it **is** evil.

- When you look at pride from this perspective,
 - you can see that it is not an acceptable thing at all because it is in direct conflict with God!
 - A lot of people look self-confidence as something that you are to try not to have too much of—kind of a balancing act.
 - But as it is presented here by James, it something that is in direct opposition to God.
 - A person who has no self-confidence but who has total confidence in God is not a person who is paralysed at all!
 - He is rather like the Apostle Paul—he has his confidence in the right place!
 - and the right place is not in self, but in God.

- Furthermore, you must not take James as if simply adding the words, “if the Lord wills,” to your plans will make everything okay.
 - It is rather a matter of recognising that without the Lord you can do nothing.
 - It is contrary to the views taught at motivational seminars and in our schools and almost everywhere that “you can do it!”
 - or for those who are more socially conscious,
 - “together, we can do it.”
 - These are ungodly attitudes.
 - Jesus said, “Without Me, You can do nothing.”

- You will say to me,
 - “But people do all sorts of things every day without depending on God, or even acknowledging His existence.”
 - Of course they do—
 - It is not that they are never successful in carrying out their plans.
 - It is rather that they do not recognise that it is only by the grace of God that they are successful...
 - They do not look to Him for help, nor do they thank Him at the end of their endeavour for whatever success He gives them.

- B. When you have pride like this, you put yourself in direct competition with God.
1. James tells us very plainly in James 4:6 that “God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.”
 - The idea here is that when you refuse to recognise that you can’t do anything without God’s help,
 - it becomes necessary for God to show you how wrong you are!
 - It is not just a matter of innocent ignorance.
 - The only way you can miss your constant dependency on Him is by rebellious suppression of the truth.
 2. God does not often judge this kind of pride right away.
 - He often gives men much success even though they refuse to acknowledge Him... even though they elevate themselves into the place that rightly belongs to Him...
 - but He hates such pride and the day will come when He will judge it.
 - They are storing up wrath for themselves every day.
 - Genesis 11 is the classic example of this kind of pride.
 - That is the account of the tower of Babel.
 - The people came together and supposed they could build a great city and make a great name for themselves and be secure...
 - and they supposed that they could do all this without God’s help.
 - You know what happened.
 - God came down and confused their languages and put a stop to their little building project...
 - And this is given to us to show us how much He hates pride and how He will judge it.
 - We are supposed to learn from this example.
 - The LORD has brought down a lot of proud men, even the man who built the Titanic and boasted that it was a ship that even God couldn’t sink.
 - God sank it—all such boasting is evil...
 - But most pride will not be judged until the day that God has appointed for judging sin.
 - The day when Christ returns.
 - Then all the pride that is not looked at as evil by us now will be seen for what it is.

- So my friends, let me urge you to humble yourself and look to Christ for mercy because of your pride...
 - Ask Him to help you stop boasting about what you will do without considering your need of God...
 - And ask Him to pardon you for this sin.
 - Coming to Christ is the first step in humbling yourself before God.

II. Closely related to pride is presumption. This is our second item today.

A. You are presumptuous toward God when you assume that He will be favourable to you without warrant for such an assumption.

- You presume that He will bless you even though you have no promise for Him or assurance from His word that He will.
- An example of extreme presumption is given to us in Deuteronomy 1.
 - Moses tells about the way Israel refused to go into the Promised Land because they did not trust God's promise...
 - but then when God responded to their unbelief by sentencing them to spend 40 years in the wilderness and commanded them to return to the wilderness,
 - Moses tells what they did. Here, I will read to you from Deut 1:41ff:
 - Deut 1:41-44: Then you answered and said to me, 'We have sinned against the LORD; we will go up and fight, just as the LORD our God commanded us.' And when everyone of you had girded on his weapons of war, you were ready to go up into the mountain. And the LORD said to me, 'Tell them, "Do not go up nor fight, for I am not among you; lest you be defeated before your enemies.'" So I spoke to you; yet you would not listen, but rebelled against the command of the LORD, and presumptuously went up into the mountain. And the Amorites who dwelt in that mountain came out against you and chased you as bees do, and drove you back from Seir to Hormah.
- You see how this is very closely related to what we saw in James about saying "I will go to such and such a place and make a profit" without looking to the LORD.
 - But with presumption, God *is* considered.
 - The problem is that it is assumed that He will bless us when there is no reason to assume this.

B. I am sure you can see what a huge problem this is today!

1. There are millions of people who just assume that God will be merciful to them even though they do not look to Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of their sins.
 - Christ is the way God has provided, but they presume that God will accept them apart from Christ!
 - I wrote to some of my relatives after my conversion,

- and the response I got from my great aunt was very typical of what many in the Christian church believe today...
 - She said, “I am not worried at all that God will judge me because I believe that God is love.”
 - She saw no need to turn to Christ for remission of sins because she presumed that God would not judge people at all.
- Another version of presumption is those who live in rebellion against God’s commandments
 - (I don’t mean that they stumble and repent, but they live in deliberate rebellion)
 - and presume that all is well because they asked “Jesus to come into their heart.”
 - I have been running into people like this a lot lately, it seems—people who think its okay to live in constant rebellion.
 - Yet, the Bible says plainly that those who live in sin will not inherit the kingdom of God.
 - 1Co 6:9-10 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.
 - Sadly, in our city there are many churches that allow members to live in these sins without disciplining them.
 - They are encouraging presumption.
 - A person can be these things, but when they come to Christ, they are changed by His powerful grace that works in their lives...
 - The next verse says:
 - 1 Cor 6:11: And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.
- I might mention that the Old Testament also tells us that there is no forgiveness for presumptuous sins—
 - such persons were to be cut off from the congregation and counted as unbelievers.
 - Nu 15:30: ‘But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the LORD, and he shall be cut off from among his people.
 - We have had to do this before at Covenant Reformed, and it is probably something we will have to do again.
 - It is not right for us to allow people to continue to come to the Lord’s Supper if they are doing anything presumptuously.

2. You can see how presumption is a violation of the first commandment.
 - It is effectively a denial of the true God because the presumptuous person acts as if God is not like Himself.
 - It is about people changing God into what they want Him to be—
 - a god who does not mind what they do...
 - a god the authorises them to do what the true God does not accept.
 - They get rid of the true holy God and fabricate an alternative god.

3. And Christian, you must be mindful of this sin in your own life...
 - Although a true Christian will not live in open rebellion and presume upon the mercy of God,
 - it is very easy for all of us to suppose that God won't mind if we do something that He has forbidden.
 - This is presumption and we need to repent of it.

 - Another way that Christians sometimes break this commandment is by claiming things from God that God has not promised them.
 - If He has promised it, then you can claim it, but if not, it is presumption to claim it.

III. And closely related to presumption is carnal security, the next item on our list.

- A. Carnal security is security people have that everything will be okay when that confidence is not grounded in God.
 - It is different than presumption because it does not assume that God will make things all right—
 - and it is different than pride because it does not put confidence in self...
 - it just assumes that everything will be all right for no particular reason.

 - Sampson is a good example of this.
 - You know who Sampson is—God had given him supernatural strength.
 - And even though Sampson violated the special rules he was given by God from birth on several occasions, he still had his strength.
 - But then the day came when he allowed his hair to be cut—which was one of the special rules God had placed upon him...
 - and Sampson just assumed that he would have his strength when his enemies came upon him—but God had departed from him!
 - He learned in a very hard way that his strength was from God.

 - We saw in Isaiah 32 this morning how some of the women of Jerusalem were at ease, even though Isaiah had been warning them of God's judgement.

- They were living in luxury and ignored his calls to repentance because they just assumed that their life of ease would continue.
 - That was carnal security.
- B. Those who have carnal security deny the true God because they forget that all security is in Him.
- They find security in their present circumstances and just assume that things will go on as they are.
 - How often we all transgress in this way!
 - We act as if there is no God!
 - It should be understood that those who have carnal security may also be great worriers...they may not, in fact, *feel* secure.
 - The very reason they don't feel secure, however, is exactly because they are trusting in the flesh
 - They are worriers because the only security they have is in the flesh.
 - They are not resting in the assurance of God's power and promises.

IV. Next on this list of things prohibited is tempting God.

- A. The word "tempt," as it is used in the Bible, is closely related to the word "test."
- In fact, in the OT the same Hebrew word is sometimes translated "tempt" and sometimes translated "test",
 - and in the NT the same Greek word is sometimes translated "tempt" and sometimes translated "test."
 - You can see how these words are related because when you are tempted, you are tested to see if you will sin.
 - In English, we often use the word "tempt" to refer to those who are trying to get us to fall...
 - and the word "test" for a test that comes from God who is putting an occasion before us to sin, but who never personally encourages us to sin.
 - It is a legitimate distinction to make because it is a distinction the Bible makes,
 - but we need to understand that in the original language, there is no such distinction in the words themselves.
 - Therefore, when we read of people tempting God, it does not mean that they are trying to get Him to sin, but that they are testing Him.
 - This was done ten times by Israel in the wilderness when the people questioned whether God was among them and could take care of them.
 - In Exodus 17:2 it says:

- Ex 17:2: Therefore the people contended with Moses, and said, "Give us water, that we may drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you contend with me? Why do you tempt the LORD?"
- And then in 17:7 it says:
 - Ex 17:7: So he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the contention of the children of Israel, and because they tempted the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"
- Satan called upon Jesus to prove that He was the Son of God by casting Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple...
 - He quoted the passage from Psalm 91 about God sending His angels to take bear us up, lest we dash our foot against the stone...
 - He wanted Jesus to prove that God was with Him and would take care of Him.
 - But Jesus refused, saying,
 - "It has been said, you shall not tempt the LORD your God."
 - Jesus knew God was with Him.

B. But why is wrong to ask God to prove His care of us like this?

1. It is wrong because God has already made Himself sufficiently plain to us.
 - When we tempt Him, we ignore all the testimony that He has given us and act as if it is not sufficient.
 - We want Him to do something to prove Himself to us!
 - This is always borne of rebellion—rebellion against the clear revelation that has already been given.
 - Instead of joyfully receiving and deeply appreciating God's clear revelation to us, we demand that He give us more proof!
 - We are too easy on this sin... but God is not easy on it!
 - It was shameful the way Israel, whom God had shown himself to so clearly in delivering them from Egypt,
 - should then question if God was going to take care of them every time there was a need in the wilderness.
 - They were like a wife who keeps questioning her husband's love and doubting it even though he has never given her any reason to question it.
2. Jesus had to contend with those who kept demanding signs of Him.
 - Remember in John 6 when they wanted to make Him king because He had fed all 5000 of them...
 - And then when He told them they must receive Him as crucified (eat his body and drink His blood),

- they said, “Show us a sign!”
 - It wasn’t a problem of a lack of signs—
 - it was a problem of rebellious hearts that did not want to accept God’s terms of salvation.
 - It is always a problem of rebellion when people tempt God.
3. It is fine for you to ask God to make Himself known to you, to remove your blindness, and to show you His glory...
- You ought to ask for these things...
 - But it is wrong to question Him and require that He prove Himself to you by the terms that you set.
 - When you do this,
 - you are questioning the very existence of God...
 - It is a denial of Him as the God He reveals Himself to be—and so a violation of the first commandment.

V. Using unlawful means is next on the list.

- A. You use unlawful means when you violate God’s commandments in order to obtain some end...
1. For example...
- A person tries to increase his wealth by stealing, by deceit, by oppression, by accepting bribes, by playing the lottery, by prostitution, by working on the Sabbath, by cheating on his taxes.
 - A woman tries to win a man’s heart by giving body to him before he marries her.
 - A church tries to gain new members by using drama in worship, or by putting on a musical performance, by setting aside unpopular commandments, by ignoring certain aspects of God’s character that are not popular, or by making false promises about prosperity in this world.
 - A man tries to get a job by lying about his credentials.
 - A man tries to gain respect by resorting to violence.
2. There are many examples in scripture of this kind of thing...
- In Isaiah 30 & 31, we have recently seen how King Hezekiah turned to Egypt for help against Assyria because they had horses and chariots and strength.
 - This was expressly forbidden by God.
 - Ananias and Sapphira tried to get a good name for themselves by lying about the percentage of the proceeds they had given...
 - Their judgement was death.

- King Solomon sought to make alliances with the nations around him by marrying foreign wives...
 - While this policy seemed to be working, it was actually the very thing that brought about Israel's downfall.
 - Rebecca and Jacob used deception to gain the blessing that God has promised to Jacob.
 - While it was right for them to desire the blessing, it was wrong to use this means of deception.
- B. It is obviously wrong to do these things, because they are violations of God's commandments, but how is it is violation of the first commandment?
1. Using unlawful means is a violation of the first commandment because you act as if every blessing does not come from God.
 - The Bible tells us in James 1:17 that:
 - Jas 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.
 - When you resort to the use of unlawful means, it is as if you suppose that you can obtain what you want by those means,
 - and that God really has nothing to do with it.
 - You act as if they world can run independently of God...
 - As if you can trick the system to get it to give you what you want.
 - That is a denial of God as the source of every thing that we have!
 2. Of course it is easy to be deceived because God does not judge sin immediately.
 - If He did, we wouldn't be around very long...
 - But as He does not, that means that you can indeed obtain things by sinful means—
 - but in doing so, you are denying God as the one who governs the world and gives you everything that you have.
 - That is a violation of first commandment.

VI. Very closely related to this, our next item on the list is trusting in lawful means.

- A. This is to look to lawful means to obtain what we want as if they can provide what we want apart from God's blessing.
1. King Asa is charged with this sin in 2 Chronicles 16:12.
 - 2 Chronicles 16:12: And in the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa became diseased in his feet, and his malady was severe; yet in his disease he did not seek the LORD, but the physicians.
 - His problem was not that he used a physician,

- but that did not seek the Lord.
 - He acted as if the physician could heal him apart from God's blessing.
2. Ephesians 4:28 makes it clear that God is not against the use of means.
- Here, the Apostle commands those who stole before they were converted to now obtain their daily bread by means of labour.
 - He says:
 - Eph 4:28 Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with *his* hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.
 - So the problem is not that people work to obtain their daily provision...
 - The problem is that they look at their work as operating apart from God's personal blessing.
 - Such persons suppose that they live by bread alone rather than by
 - "every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" as it says in Deut 8.

TRANS> Now let's take a look at Deut 8. It is often misunderstood...

B. In Deuteronomy 8, God gives a clear warning about relying on lawful means.

1. He is speaking to Israel about the danger of forgetting Him when they have entered into the Promised Land and have prospered from food grown in their fields and vineyards.
 - He explains to them that when they were in the wilderness, He had clearly taught them that man does not live by bread alone,
 - but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.
 - This verse is not meant to teach that we need God's word to instruct us and guide us (although we do of course)
 - It is rather teaching us that the bread we eat does not exist or come to us on its own...
 - God speaks it onto our tables!
 - The word that proceeds out of His mouth in this case, is
 - "Let there be bread on Joe's table," and there was bread.
 - It got to Joe's table by all sorts of means, but none of these operated but by the hand of God.
2. So Deuteronomy 8 warns against this sin of supposing that we have within ourselves the power to get bread apart from God giving it to us.
 - a. Moses tells them to be careful that they don't forget the LORD who alone gives them the power to get wealth...

- He says that there is danger that after a time of extended prosperity, we might say in our heart:
 - Deut 8:17: My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.
 - He commands us, saying:
 - Deut 8:18: 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.
- b. When God consistently prospers us and our labour, it becomes a real danger to suppose that this is so.
- But as God's people, we are to live in communion with Him,
 - receiving all that we have as coming from His hand...
 - giving thanks for every crumb that we receive and recognising it as an expression of His kindness and mercy to us.
 - That is why we give thanks when we eat.
 - Paul emphasises this to Timothy when he explains that every kind of food is sanctified by the word of God and prayer...
 - 1 Tim 4:4-5: For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.
 - In other words, food (if it is in accordance with God's word) is unclean only when we do not receive it with thanksgiving.
 - When we receive it without thanksgiving, we receive it as if God had nothing to do with it.
 - We deny Him as the author of every good and perfect gift.
- C. I think you can see how this is virtually the same thing, when it comes to violating the first commandment, as using unlawful means...
- In both cases, the person using the means assumes that his bread or his health or his safety or whatever it is he is trying to obtain is from the means instead of from God.
 - That is to deny God.
 - That is to put your confidence in something other than God.

Conclusion: So my brothers and sisters,

- let us not act so wickedly as to put our confidence in what is not God...
 - in ourselves, which is the way of pride...
 - in God's supposed acceptance of us without warrant which is presumption...
 - in the hope that things will be okay which is carnal security
 - in the idea that God will deliver us if we put him to the test
 - and in either lawful or unlawful means.