

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 107-108

Halifax, 28 February 2010

Introduction:

This week, we move along to the second commandment.

- As with the first commandment, I want to spend quite a few weeks looking at it...
 - this week and for one or two more weeks, we will look at what is required in the second commandment (Q. 108).
 - After that, we will look at what is forbidden (Q. 109).
 - And then, we will look at the reasons annexed to the second commandment to encourage us to keep it (Q. 110).

When we looked at the first commandment:

- “You shall have no other God’s before Me,”
- I showed you that the thing that makes the true God unique among the many that are called gods is the fact that He is the Father of Jesus Christ...
 - that He is a God who reveals Himself in history and who comes into history to redeem His people.
 - We begin to drift into the sin of having other gods as soon as we cease to give thanks to Him for our redemption—
 - As soon as we lose Christ, we lose sight of everything about God...
 - His mercy, His holiness and justice, His wisdom, His grace, His power...
 - When this happens, it will not be long before we can see little difference between our God and all the others.
 - Christ must be kept central or we will utterly reject the first commandment.

But now as we move into the second commandment, I want you to know that the same thing is true!

- The second commandment is all about how God is to be worshipped.
 - And when we boil that down to the core of the matter, it is that He is to be worshipped only through our dear Saviour, Jesus Christ.
 - It is through Jesus Christ that we connect with God...
 - And God tells us how Christ is to be set forth to us and how we are to respond to Him in our worship.

- As soon as we deviate from the ways that God has appointed to present Christ to us,
 - we begin to distort Him and lose sight of Him.
 - I hope to show you this as we study this commandment...

But before I go any farther, let's look at question 107 and 108 of the Catechism.

- These questions have to do with the second commandment.

Q. 107 Which is the second commandment?

A. The second commandment is, *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord they God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me, and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.*

You see that like the first Commandment, this Commandment is also stated in the negative—as a prohibition.

- Rather than telling us what to do, it tells us what not to do.
 - The reason is because we are sinners who automatically gravitate to sinful ways and must therefore be restrained.
 - But as with the first commandment, the positive duty of this commandment is necessarily implied.
 - If we are forbidden to worship God by images, how are we to worship Him?
 - Obviously, only as He has commanded or instituted.
- The principle behind this commandment is that we are not to seek out our own way of worshipping God.
 - We are sinners and He is holy.
 - There is a certain humility that we ought to have before Him about this—even if we were not sinners!
 - Who do we think we are to decide how to approach Him?
 - He is our Creator!
 - He is the Lord of Glory!
 - Who are we to barge in before His courts in whatever way we please!
 - We come only by invitation—
 - And when we do, we must follow protocol!

- This is the reverence that we own to Him as our God, our Creator, and our Redeemer.
- And again, I say, at the very root of the matter—at the core—is Jesus Christ.
 - God has told us to come before Him only in Jesus' name!
 - If we approach God on some other terms—some idolatrous terms—we will surely be rejected!
 - It is unacceptable for us to come in our own way—
 - we come only as those who are looking to Jesus who was crucified to cleanse us from our sins.
 - It is our duty to come in this way.
 - Look now at Question 108 where the duties required are spoken of:

Q. 108 What are the duties required in the second commandment?

- A. The duties required in the second commandment are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God has instituted in His word; particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ; the reading, preaching, and hearing of the Word; the administration and receiving of the sacraments; church government and discipline; the ministry and maintenance thereof; religious fasting; swearing by the name of God, and vowing unto Him: as also the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship; and, according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry.**

Our scripture reading is from Deuteronomy 12.

- READ> Deut 12:1-32.

Take a look again at that last verse.

- Deut 12:32: "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.
- You can see that this verse is a summary conclusion of the whole chapter.
 - It is particularly focused on doing only what God has commanded to be done in worship—
 - not adding anything of our own...
 - and not taking away anything that He has appointed.
 - You are to limit yourself only to what God has expressly commanded without bringing in your own embellishments and ceremonies.
 - You are to stick to what He has appointed, and you are to give yourself fully to that.

- Do you see how the concern here is different than the first commandment?
- The first commandment is concerned with *which* God is worshipped.

I. The great concern of the second commandment is *how* God is worshipped.

- Once you have settled it that you will only worship the one true God,
 - Then you must commit yourself to the worship that He has expressly appointed or instituted for us in this age.
- A. You can see that this is the difference between the first and second commandment...
1. The first commandment tells us to have no other gods before the face of God.
 - You are not to be like a spiritual harlot who devotes herself to multiple gods, but you are to be devoted to the one true God alone.
 - But the second commandment tells you not make images of the true God...
 - not to worship Him by means of images, which is idolatry.
 2. It is important to understand that there are two ways to be guilty of idolatry...
 - a first-commandment way and a second-commandment way.
 - a. The first commandment way is to worship other gods which are often called idols because they are worshipped by idols.
 - 1) Those worshipping false gods did not ordinarily suppose that the images they fashioned were actually a god they had made.
 - They rather used images of their gods as a way of connecting with their god.
 - The images represented their God in a way that was supposed to honour Him—
 - You have probably seen pictures of pagan idols—
 - some of them depict fierceness by an image with an angry countenance...
 - or strength by the image of a bull...
 - or fertility by a multi-breasted image...
 - It was a way of helping them to focus on their god and think about their god in worship.
 - And the idea was that their god would be present in the place where they had erected an image of it...
 - It was sort of a way of getting their god to come down to them.
 - They would connect with their god in the place where the image was set up.

- Paul tells us (in 1 Cor 10:20) that when the Gentiles offer sacrifices to idols, they are sacrificing to demons.
- They are using the idol as a way to connect with spiritual beings they call gods which are actually demons.

- 2) So often, when the scripture speaks about worshipping idols,
- it is speaking about the worship of other gods...
 - It is talking about a violation of the first commandment.
 - Israel did this when they worshipped images of Baal or when they sacrificed their children to Molech.
 - That was first-commandment idolatry.

TRANS> But then there is second-commandment idolatry.

- b. The second-commandment way to commit idolatry is to make an image to represent the true God.
- An example of this would be Israel's worship of the golden calf.
 - Keep your place in Deuteronomy 16,
 - but turn over for a moment to Exodus 32 and let's look at what happened when Israel made the golden calf.
 - Look at verse 1. It says:
 - Exodus 32:1: Now when the people saw that Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, the people gathered together to Aaron, and said to him, "Come, make us gods that shall go before us; for *as for* this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him."
 - The idea here is that they are making an image of God to go before them... something by which they may visualise God.
 - Something to help them know that He is present with them.
 - But you will notice that they say "gods" here.
 - Does this indicate that they were wanting to worship other gods?
 - No. You must understand that this is the word is *Eloheem* which is usually translated God and is always plural.
 - For example, the first verse in the Bible says,
 - "In the beginning, God (*Eloheem*—it is plural)"

- So the plural does not indicate that they are thinking of a different God than the true God who brought them out of Egypt.
- That this is not the worship of another god becomes much more clear as the passage continues:
 - Look at verse 2 through 4:
 - Exodus 32:2: And Aaron said to them, "Break off the golden earrings which *are* in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring *them* to me." So all the people broke off the golden earrings which *were* in their ears, and brought *them* to Aaron. And he received *the gold* from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, "This *is* your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!"
 - You see here that the people recognised this as an image of the God of Israel who had brought them out of Egypt.
 - They were not attempting to worship a different God.
 - They were attempting to worship the God who had made Himself know to them by delivering them out of Egypt.
- Aaron makes it even more certain that they were intending to worship the true God in verses 5 and 6:
 - Exodus 32:5-6: So when Aaron saw *it*, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, "Tomorrow *is* a feast to the LORD."
 - You see that Aaron speaks of the worship around this image as a feast to the LORD.
 - You remember that when the word LORD is written with all capitals in our English Bibles it is Yahweh or Jehovah!
 - This is God's covenant name, representing Him as the true God who alone is self existing!
 - Israel was not worshipping another god when they made this calf.
 - They were worshipping the true God, Jehovah, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt.
 - They did not break the first commandment, but the second commandment.

TRANS> Now please turn back to Deuteronomy 12, and you will see the very same concern...

B. The concern of Deuteronomy 12 is not the worship of other gods, but the worship of the true God in the way that other gods are worshipped.

1. The opening verses of Deuteronomy 12 show that this is the concern.

a. You know that God, having brought His people out of Egypt, was bringing them into the Land of Canaan.

- They were going to root out the people of Canaan at God's command and in doing so would obtain houses that they had not built and vineyards and olive grooves that they had not planted...
- But they were not by any means to make use of the places of worship that the Canaanites had built!
- The houses of worship and all their accoutrements of worship were rather to be completely destroyed.
 - God does not want to be worshipped in the way they worshipped their gods or with the things they used.

b. Look at the first four verses and you can see this:

- Deut 12:1-3: "'These *are* the statutes and judgments which you shall be careful to observe in the land which the LORD God of your fathers is giving you to possess, all the days that you live on the earth. You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. And you shall destroy their altars, break their *sacred* pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place.'
- Everything that had to do with worship was to be completely destroyed.
 - The Israelites were not to use the shrines (which were often very elaborate and costly),
 - nor the implements of their worship.
- And the reason is clearly stated in verse 4.
 - Deut 12:4: "You shall not worship the LORD your God *with* such *things*."
 - As fine and beautiful as all of their places and implements of worship may have been,
 - God made it clear that He did not want to be worshipped with these things.
 - Instead, He wanted to be worshipped in the place that He would appoint and in the way that He commanded.
- Look at how Moses goes on to explain this:

- Deut 12:5-7: ““But you shall seek the place where the LORD your God chooses, out of all your tribes, to put His name for His dwelling place; and there you shall go. "There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. "And there you shall eat before the LORD your God, and you shall rejoice in all to which you have put your hand, you and your households, in which the LORD your God has blessed you.
 - But if you have read the Old Testament, you will know that when Israel went into the land, one of their most persistent offences was that they worshipped God in the high places...
 - under every green tree (supposed to be a place of fertility) and on every high hill (near to heaven).
 - Sometimes they went so far as to worship other gods in these places,
 - but often it was that they worshipped Jehovah there in violation of the second commandment.
 - And you see that the principle is positively stated in verses 10-12:
 - that they are to worship God as He has commanded.
 - Deut 12:10-12: "But *when* you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit, and He gives you rest from all your enemies round about, so that you dwell in safety, "then there will be the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. There you shall bring all that I command you: your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, and all your choice offerings which you vow to the LORD. "And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God, you and your sons and your daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levite who *is* within your gates, since he has no portion nor inheritance with you.
2. All this is summarised at the end of the chapter where it is made very clear that the issue at hand is not the worship of other gods,
- but the worship of the true God in the way that other gods are worshipped.
 - Look at verses 29-31 and you will see this.
 - Deut 12:29-31: ““When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, "take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, ‘How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.’ "You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.”

3. Learn from this that we are not to use any standard to determine how God is worshipped except for His commandments!
 - It is amazing how clear these commandments are, and yet how persistent God's covenant people have been in basing the standard on something else.
 - a. Over and over again, Israel worshipped at the high places and over and over again, they erected images...
 - Almost all of the kings of David's line—all but two—are charged with allowing this worship at the high places to go on.
 - Jeroboam set up calves at Bethel and Dan for the worship of Jehovah, and the people of Israel persisted in this worship even though the prophets thundered against it.
 - Of course there were false prophets who said it was just fine to worship God in this way, but God's Word was clear that it was not to be done.
 - b. And even after Christ came, the same thing happened again...
 - As the church spread into pagan lands,
 - the leaders in the church were concerned that the gospel was not being communicated clearly enough to the pagans...
 - and that they were having a hard time identifying with God...
 - So they made pictures and images of Christ and of saints that were associated with Him to make worship more relevant to the people.
 - Soon you had Christians bowing to images!
 - All this was done with the best of intentions!
 - The images and icons were supposed to be teachers of the ignorant—they were to help the uninitiated understand.
 - The thought was that if they could see an image of Christ suffering, it would help them to understand what He had done for them!
 - But the problem was, the very thing that needed to be portrayed was the thing that could not be portrayed in images or pictures.
 - They could show that Christ suffered, but they could not show that He suffered in the place of guilty sinners who believe.
 - Soon the whole church was lost in desperate ignorance.
 - But even if the images *had* helped, this was not the way God appointed to be worshipped!
 - c. It was the great concern of the reformation of the 16th century to return worship to only that which God had commanded.

- The reformers recognised that we must obey God in this matter.
 - Therefore, they began to exclude the use of images and pictures and ceremonies...
 - and to return to worship only as God had commanded.
 - The result was that in place of all these ceremonies, biblical worship was restored...
 - preaching (which had almost been completely replaced by ceremonies and images which were supposed to tell the story of Christ)
 - reading of the word in the language of the people,
 - simple prayer to God (through Christ, rather than through saints and angels)
 - simple celebration of the sacraments (without all the additional actions and symbols).
- But today we see the church leaving the pure and simple worship of God again...
 - The seeker sensitive movement has the same goals that the ancient church had—
 - How can we make the gospel more relevant and clear to the people of our times who do not quickly understand it?
 - So music is designed to appeal to them...simple Psalm singing is set aside.
 - Preaching in which Christ is proclaimed by a minister speaking in His name is replaced with interviews or dialogue...
 - or drama is used to embellish preaching and set the stage.
 - or music is used to set the mood
 - Images are shown on a big screen to connect people with the message of the gospel...

TRANS> My dear brothers and sisters...

- instead of replacing the simple worship that God has commanded with something else,

II. You are to give yourself wholeheartedly to the worship that God has commanded!

- Deuteronomy 12:11 tells you that you are to do what He has commanded
 - And Deuteronomy 12:12 tells you that you are to do it rejoicing.

- A. One of the reasons we depart from simple worship is because we don't learn to delight in it.
- It is our duty to delight in it and to lead others to delight in it too.
1. But one of the most difficult things for us to do is to focus on the true God, even in worship.
 - We are fallen creatures, and it frightens us to come before Him.
 - It shouldn't if we have Christ as our mediator, but it still does because we have not learned to fully rest in Christ...
 - we are not fully comfortable with it.
 - New Testament Worship is remarkably simple because the focus of it is not the performance of worship itself, but on the One we are worshipping!
 - He is all the glory of our worship!
 - We come directly before His throne and **He** is to consume our attention as He speaks to us and as we sing simple praise to Him and lift up our prayers.
 - Worship is designed to put the attention on Him, not on itself (not on the act of worship)!
 2. Because we are naturally uncomfortable with Him,
 - It is our tendency to always want diversion in worship...
 - We want to shift the focus from Him to the band, to the drama team, to the choir, to the organ solo, to the jokes, to the power-point display...
 - and then we can feel that we have connected with God through these things.
 - But God wants us to connect with Him not through these things, but through His Word and sacrament ministered in simplicity.
 - We are to draw near through Jesus Christ represented to us in the gospel.
 - We can play music for each other all through the week—and engage in entertainment and comedy and such...
 - that is fine—we use the arts for each other in love...
 - but when we are assembled to worship God, we are there to present ourselves before His face through Jesus Christ...
 - not to perform for Him!
 - If people come in who do not know Christ,
 - they ought to be very uncomfortable...because we are before God.
 - And if you yourself are not walking with Christ,

- you ought to be very uncomfortable in true worship.
- It is not good if you can be in rebellion against God and still be comfortable in worship!
- But when we deviate from what God has appointed,
 - anyone can be comfortable—anyone can enjoy the show!
- I should also point out that sometimes, instead of being uncomfortable in scriptural worship,
 - unbelievers and disobedient Christians can be bored with it.
 - They want something to entertain them...and God Himself is of little interest to them.
 - If worship is done in such a way that there is nothing appealing about it except God, they have no use for it.

TRANS> My brothers and sisters,

3. You can and should learn to love the worship that God has appointed.
 - a. You can come to love it by grace!
 - It is an awesome thing to come before this great God and to know that you are accepted before Him through the blood of Jesus Christ.
 - The Holy Spirit can make all this real to you in worship.
 - It is an awesome thing to hear the word of God preached as the voice of God to us, spoken by a minister appointed to speak in His name,
 - declaring with authority His will and His promises!
 - b. But it is hard work to come before God like this because all our life we have been dodging and hiding from Him.
 - We must prepare for worship with earnest prayer—
 - We must pray that we will truly come before Him and hear His voice and praise Him in our songs and connect with Him in prayer and sacrament.
 - We must be alert and attentive to keep ourselves before Him; not to allow ourselves to wonder away in our minds.
 - It is God we are meeting with in the assembly!
 - We are before Him, worshipping Him!
 - We have not come to see a show, we have come to honour Him and to see His glory...
 - not the glory of the choir or whatever else... but of God!

- c. And what an awesome God He is!
 - He is the self-existing One who alone made Heaven and earth!
 - He is the One from whom all of our blessings have come!
 - He is the One who is a consuming fire and who sends the wasting storm and who brings death upon mankind because of our sin, and eternal death upon those who do not repent.
 - He is the One who sent His only Son to die for our sins—to take our place—to bear the curse for us!
 - He is the One whose Son will reign until He has put all things under His feet.
 - He is the God of perfect wisdom and purity and justice, the God of love and power and strength.
 - There is nothing like coming before Him and beholding His glory, revealed to us in true gospel worship...
 - But how rare it is for us to truly come before Him!
 - That is why we want to fill our time in worship with other things that ought to be done outside of the assembly.

TRANS> The root of the problem is very serious indeed...

- The root of the problem is that we want to decide how we will approach God in worship rather than letting Him decide.
 - And do you see where that leads?
 - It leads at last to rejection of Christ as Saviour—because that is how God has commanded that we approach Him—through Christ crucified.
 - As soon as we start to incline toward our own way of drawing near,
 - we are on the path to the rejection of Christ Himself.
- B. The Catechism gives us an excellent summary of what it is for us to (using the language of Deut 12:32) “be careful to observe” all that God has commanded.
- It says that we must receive, observe, and keep pure and entire all such religious worship and ordinances as He has instituted in His Word.
 - Let’s look at this outline...
1. First, that we are to **receive** it the worship He has appointed.
 - a. Obviously, you must find out what the Lord requires and commands in worship before you can worship Him as He desires.
 - And much of that has more to do with your attitude than with your study.
 - It is really not that complicated to figure it out—
 - False worship is much more involved and complicated than true worship (there is the golden calf and or the drama team or the musical performance)
 - But Biblical worship is pretty simple and straightforward.

- Of course we need to learn what scripture says, but if we are first committed to do what it says, it will not be so difficult.
- b. And then when you have found out what is required, you must accept it...
- You have not received it if you only *know* what is required—you must *accept* what God requires...
 - This is a matter about which there is much stubbornness!
 - The Jews had a whole bunch of traditions—practices of worship that God had not commanded—things they had added...
 - and it was very difficult for them to let go of these things.
 - Jesus said they worshipped God in vain because their worship was by the commandments of men.
 - If you ever want to get someone cross, just tell them that God is not pleased with what they are doing in worship!
 - You will stir up a hornet's nest!
 - How dare you even suggest such a thing!
 - But I am talking to *you* about *your* attitude...
 - *You* have to be willing to accept what God commands and set aside your own ideas about what you might like.
 - After all, He is the one who calls the assembly together.
 - We are there to do what He wants, not what we want.
2. Next the Catechism explains that you are to **observe** what God has instituted in worship.
- After you have received it, you must begin to practice it!
- a. On the one hand, this is very easy to do...
- As I have been saying, Biblical worship is not complicated—it is not hard to do the things that God has asked us to do...as far as the actions...
 - hearing His word, praying, receiving the sacraments, singing psalms...
 - You can observe these things easily enough in one sense...
- b. But on the other hand it is very difficult to observe what He has instituted...
- Our tendency is to just go through the motions of worship and still not to connect with God in it.
 - And when we are just going through the motions, we are not really worshipping, are we?
 - This is what I spoke about before—it is something we must give ourselves to wholeheartedly.

3. And lastly, the Catechism says that you are to **keep pure and entire** all that God has appointed in worship.
 - a. The record of the history of God’s people testifies that we are always wanting to add something—
 - you know, just to embellish the worship a little—or to make an adjustment here or there.
 - We are not content with what God has given us in worship,
 - and I have explained why—it is because we are not connecting with the living God and we want something more to stimulate us.
 - We assume that the problem must be the worship rather than us.
 - b. But it is your duty to do all that you can to continue in the pure and whole worship of God and to see that those under your care do as well.
 - If you do not or if they do not, you are beginning to depart from Christ.
 - It is always a disaster!
 - c. Why can’t we just learn to love what God has instituted and quit trying to dress it up?
 - 1) We are the bride of Christ!
 - And when we start to add all these things, we become gaudy in His eyes.
 - We think we are so beautiful with all this adornment.
 - We look at each other and what we are doing in His worship, and we are impressed,
 - but He is disgusted with us.
 - We have laid aside what He has commanded and replaced it with what we think He ought to like.
 - 2) Brothers and sisters, get this straight!
 - Our worship is supposed to please Him!
 - Not each other!
 - Not those outside the church!
 - But Him!
 - Let us be careful, therefore, to do what He has appointed and to do it with zeal and joy.
 - He says to us:
 - “Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.” (Deut 12:32).
 - Next week, we will look in detail at what He has commanded us to do in NT worship.