

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 108-c

Halifax, 21 March 2010

Introduction:

Today we continue our study of what is required in the second commandment.

- This is summarised for us in Question 108 or the Larger Catechism.

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.**

For the purpose of our evaluation of this, I have divided the answer to question 108 into three parts.

1. We focused on the first part two weeks ago:

- It states in principle what we are required to do in the worship of God:
 - **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**
- We looked at Deuteronomy 12 where we are clearly taught that *we* are not to decide how we will approach God in worship,
 - but are to approach Him only in the way that *He* has commanded—without adding anything of our own...
 - The chapter concludes with a clear statement of this in Deut 12:32:
 - Deut 12:32: Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.
 - This is sometimes referred to as the regulative principle of worship.
 - The idea is that worship is regulated by God's commands.
 - We are to approach God only as He commands and not as we please.
 - He is the sovereign and we come to Him humbly, according to His directives.

- This is really the essence of the very gospel itself...
 - Jesus Christ crucified and raised for our justification is the way God has appointed for us to approach Him.
 - It is not for us to come up with our own way—Christ is the only way.
 - We cannot set up an image or create some ceremony and ask God to meet us there, as people do when they set up idols....
 - He only meets us through His Son whom He has sent and whom He has revealed to be LORD and Saviour.
- And this whole attitude of approaching as He appoints rather than as we devise carries over into the particulars of our worship...
 - *Everything* we do in worship is to be regulated by God’s command.
 - It is not to be according to our wishes or ideas, but according to His divine ordinance.

TRANS> That is what we are taught in the first part of the answer to Q. 108.

2. Last week, we looked at the second part of the answer to Q. 108.

- The second part tells us what the particular elements of worship are that God has appointed for us in the times of the New Testament.
 - **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:**
- We turned to Acts 2:41-42.
 - Here we saw that those who had come to trust in Christ were baptised and were added to the church where they began to engage in corporate worship.
 - Acts 2:42 mentions four specific elements of worship which in principle correspond to the things listed in Q 108.
 - The first one listed is *the apostles’ doctrine or teaching*.
 - This includes the reading, preaching, and hearing of the word of God which has been given to us by the apostles.
 - We come to God by faith, and faith comes by hearing and receiving the Word of God.
 - The next element of worship listed in Acts 2:42 was *the apostles’ fellowship*.

- The apostles are in fellowship with Christ in that they are joined to Him as members of His body, and we are built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ being the cornerstone.
 - That means that we are to live in the church or the society that Christ established through the apostles who set up the church according to His directives with elders and deacons who continue until Jesus comes.
 - In the church, we share our lives together, caring for one another, supporting the work of the church financially, and assembling together to praise God with the fruit of our lips, singing psalms of praise to Him.
 - The next element of worship listed in Acts 2:42 is *the breaking of the bread* which speaks of the Lord's Supper.
 - This is to be a regular part of our worship at which time we remember what Christ has done for us.
 - And finally, there are *the prayers*.
 - While we are to have private prayer, there is also to be prayer in the assembly when we gather together in the congregation.
 - By prayer, we call upon the LORD together, asking Him to bless us and to glorify His name and to spread the knowledge of Christ in every place by the working of His Spirit.
 - And there are times when prayer should also include fasting, at which times we lay aside food in order to seek the LORD with our whole being.
3. This week, we will look at the third aspect of the duty we are taught in the second commandment
- The third part has to do with our duty to oppose any worship that God has not instituted:
 - **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.**
 - These words may seem harsh to us in our particular society.
 - We live in a day when the prevailing sentiment is tolerance and a general acceptance of whatever others may choose to do in worship.
 - We consider it, in fact, very rude to speak against the way other people chose to worship God.
 - We see this as something that is very personal, and not the business of anyone else.

- The very idea of disapproving someone’s worship and of even calling it *false worship* makes us cringe...
 - how much more that anyone should detest or oppose the worship of another human being, and should even remove their monuments of idolatry!

TRANS> So I guess the question comes down to this...

- Is this a situation in which the Catechism that was written almost 400 years ago comes to judge the prevailing sentiment within our day...
 - or is this a matter about which we can take the moral high ground and stand in judgement at what was advocated by the Westminster Assembly?
 - Of course we must look at the scriptures to decide the matter.
 - The members of the Westminster Assembly took, and regularly renewed a vow that they would not support anything in the Westminster Confession or Catechism but what they believed to be true to scripture.
 - So this was something they believed to be in accordance with scripture.
 - Let us turn to the scripture to see if this is so.

- I want to begin with a scripture reading in which we see clearly:

I. God’s approval of those who disapprove, detest and oppose all false worship, and who, according their place and calling, remove it and all monuments of idolatry.

- **READ> 2 Kings 18:1-6**

A. First, look at what Hezekiah did with regard to false worship in Judah.

1. He removed the high places...

- v. 4: “He removed the high places and broke the *sacred* pillars, cut down the wooden image and broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made; for until those days the children of Israel burned incense to it, and called it Nehushtan.”
- This was both:
 - First Commandment Idolatry: the worship of other gods...
 - and Second Commandment Idolatry: the worship of the true God by idols or other ways that He has not appointed.
- In the day of Hezekiah, Jehovah was worshipped in the high places.
 - This is brought out very clearly by the statement of the King of Assyria.
 - He says:

- 2 Chron 32:12: “Has not the same Hezekiah taken away His high places and His altars, and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, saying, "You shall worship before one altar and burn incense on it?"”
2. This removal of second-commandment idolatry was a very rare thing for any kings of Judah.
 - Some kings were generally faithful...
 - They removed first-commandment idolatry...
 - removed the worship of false gods—but not first-commandment idolatry.
 - Asa is a typical example of this:
 - 1 Kings 15:11-14: Asa did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as did his father David. And he banished the perverted persons from the land, and removed all the idols that his fathers had made. Also he removed Maachah his grandmother from being queen mother, because she had made an obscene image of Asherah. And Asa cut down her obscene image and burned it by the Brook Kidron. But the high places were not removed. Nevertheless Asa’s heart was loyal to the LORD all his days.
 - Such disapprobation for failure to remove 2nd commandment idolatry is repeated again and again in 1 & 2 Kings

B. The big question is, what did the LORD think about Hezekiah’s reforms?

1. Did He rebuke him for being intolerant and unloving?
 - No, He highly commended Him.
 - Right after telling us that Hezekiah removed the high places, he is commended as one who kept all of God’s commandments:
 - 2 Kings 18:5-6: He trusted in the LORD God of Israel, so that after him was none like him among all the kings of Judah, nor who were before him. For he held fast to the LORD; he did not depart from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses.
2. We have been brainwashed into thinking that it is evil to take this sort of action.
 - As we saw last week in Isaiah, this is one of the devices of the enemy to deceive us.
 - Remember how the king of Assyria accused Hezekiah of taking down the high places as if he had done something wrong?
 - How often believers who oppose false worship are made to feel guilty about it!
3. Understand that the LORD Himself hates unauthorised worship has commanded that it should be removed.

- We have seen this clearly in Deuteronomy 12.
 - He absolutely forbids His people to worship Him in the way that the nations worship their God...
 - and He commands them to destroy such places of worship in the land which was to become their own land.
 - Deut 12:2-3: 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.
 - And the reason is clearly stated in verse 4:
 - Deut 12:4: You shall not worship the LORD your God with such things.
- You see here that part of the duty, with respect to the second commandment, is to destroy oppose and remove unauthorised worship.
 - That is why He approves of those who do this.

TRANS> But that is OT

II. Have things changed in the NT?

A. Aren't we supposed to be more loving in NT?

1. Absolutely!
 - Jesus has come and shown us what love is.
 - We are to love as He loved!
 - John 13:34: A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.
 - Love is to be the way we identify ourselves in as His disciples.
 - John 13:35: By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.
2. But—we must never suppose that disapproving, detesting, and opposing false worship is inconsistent with this love!
 - That is not what the NT teaches, but what the world says.
 - You will be accused of being unloving for disapproving, detesting, and opposing unauthorised worship by the world, but not by our LORD.

B. Let me show you from the NT.

1. First, we have the example of our Lord Jesus Himself.
 - a. Jesus consistently refused to conform to those additions to God's law that had been passed down by tradition.
 - Mark 7:5-6: Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, "Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?" He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honours Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.
 - b. Jesus also spoke against these traditions and those who taught them.
 - Was He unloving in Matthew 23 when He spoke to the religious leaders of His day and said:
 - Matthew 23:32-33: "Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?"
 - c. In rage, He drove out the money-changers from the house of God.
 - John 2:13-17: Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the moneychangers doing business. When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, "Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a house of merchandise!" Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."
2. Secondly, we have the recurring testimony of the NT to oppose all that is false in our worship...
 - a. False teaching is particularly the focus.
 - This makes sense because the main focus of NT worship is preaching.
 - As we have seen, in the OT Christ was set forth by shadows and ceremonies (along with the word),
 - But now He is set forth by the preaching of His finished work of redemption.
 - Let me show you two examples of places where false teaching is to be detested and opposed:
 - 1 John 2:10-11: If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.
 - 1 Tim 1:3-4: As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.

- b. Other forms of false worship (besides doctrinal error per se) are also to be opposed.
- In Colossians 3,
 - Paul calls upon the believers to oppose:
 - the worship of angels,
 - religious abstinence from foods,
 - the observance of Sabbaths (holy days) that God has not commanded,
 - and other such things that are taught by the commandments of men.
 - The whole book of Galatians is a sharp rebuke against those who were adding circumcision as a requirement for NT worship.
 - Paul says that he did not subject himself to those teaching this error for even an hour—
 - And he rebuked Peter for his complicity with those who were shunning Gentiles that had not yet been circumcised.
 - In 1 Corinthians we have another example of opposition to disorderly worship.
 - Paul devotes much attention to the problem.
 - The Corinthians had imported elements of pagan worship into their assembly—
 - the very thing that is forbidden in Deut 12!
 - They had imported a pagan style celebration of the Lord’s Supper such that it was a big feast in which they even got drunk and excluded those who were poor from the feast!
 - 1 Cor 11:20-22: Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?
 - In chapter 12-14, he accuses them of having pagan style spirit-filling.
 - At the beginning of the discourse in 1 Cor 12:2, he says:
 - You know that you were Gentiles, carried away to these dumb idols, however you were led.
 - In Pagan spiritually that they practiced before their conversion, the spirit would take the worshipper over so that the worshipper would be “carried away”—
 - carried out of himself to behave in exotic ways.

- They would all do their own thing—each with a song or a tongue or a prophecy or an interpretation.
 - Paul explains that the Spirit of God does not work that way.
 - He calls them to a much more orderly worship.
3. Third, we have Jesus' express condemnation of those who were too tolerant in His letters to the New Testament churches of Revelation...
- There was in the area a group of Christian libertines called the Nicolaitans who allowed things like sexual immorality and certain forms of idolatry as part of our Christian liberty.
 - Jesus commends the church at Ephesus for hating their deeds...(Rev. 2:6)
 - and He rebukes the church at Pergamous for having in their midst those who held to the doctrine of the Nicolaitans,
 - They were to oppose and to remove such things from their churches or else they would lose the gospel
 - It would be taken away as a judgement!
 - Do we not see the gospel lost in many churches today?
 - How did this begin?
 - Was it not through second-commandment idolatry?
 - They approached God in their own way in their worship and it was not long till Christ Himself had been replaced as the way to God.

TRANS> So we may conclude that the tone of the NT is the same as the OT.

- The Lord is intolerant of idolatry and He calls us to be intolerant of it also.
- We are to disapprove, detest and oppose it, even as He does,
 - and we are to remove it inasmuch as it is our place to do so.

III. Now we need to consider how this applies to us practically.

- **How do we live this out**

A. First, it **does not** mean that we become dour, critical Christians with a chip on our shoulder who are always going about with long faces looking for idolatry to purge.

1. This whole matter requires a lot of wisdom because we have to apply everything the scripture says in this matter...
 - We are to be gentle and gracious and we are not strive...
 - and we are to be patient where we have minor differences with other believers, seeking to preserve unity with them in the truth.

- Eph 4:1-3: I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
 - But the unity we are to pursue is unity in the truth.
 - Eph 4:13: till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;
 - Our goal is nothing less than perfection for all of us, but seeing not one of us has arrived, we must be patient and allow each other to grow.
2. That means that we must learn how to speak gracious words and live gracious lives that will edify and point others to the truth.

B. So how do we go about opposing idolatry?

- Well, there are four levels of opposition that we find in the scripture.
1. The lowest level is *non-participation* in idolatrous worship practices.
- a. This seems to be what Jesus practiced with regard to the traditions of the Jews that were based on the commandments of men.
 - It does not seem that He approached them to rebuke them for some of the more minor issues, such as their traditions of washing everything.
 - He simply did not submit to these practices.
 - Of course they noticed this, and they asked Him about it—and then He had something to say to them.
 - It was not good that they did these thing at all,
 - but it worse that they commanded others to do them.
 - Jesus waited until they complained and tried to bind Him and His disciples to these vain traditions—then He spoke against them.
 - b. It is sometimes difficult to know what to participate in and what to refrain from participating in.
 - We need to realise that when Jesus went up to the temple to worship, or when He worshipped in the synagogues,
 - there were no doubt things that were done in public worship that He would not have fully approved of.
 - Nevertheless, He did not commit personal sin by His participation.
 - Those who are leading have the greatest responsibility and if you are looking for absolute purity, you cannot worship at all.

- So when it is a questionable matter, your participation becomes a matter of conscience...
- But when it is something clearly not authorised by God in worship, something like praying to angels or saints,
 - that is clearly something that you should not participate in.

TRANS> And now let's consider the second level of opposition to idolatry...

2. It is when we speak against certain practices.

- a. If you are set apart by God to teach or lead in the church, it is your duty to speak against idolatry within the church you are serving.
 - It is your responsibility to see that idolatry is not practiced in those that you are given to oversee.
 - This is true in the family as well...
 - The head of the home is responsible for how his family worships at home and at church,
 - and his wife and children are to submit to him.
 - If they are practicing idolatry, they must answer to god for it, but so must you!
 - You may remember how Jacob had his family put away their idols when they were preparing to worship God.
 - That is what he should have done.
- b. And if you are under authority and you see unauthorised worship,
 - then it is your place to appeal to those who are in authority.
 - to the elders in the church or to your father or husband in the home.
 - You can express your concern and ask them questions and give them a book to read about the matter...
 - and you can appeal to them and ask them to change those things that are being done that have no warrant from scripture.
 - And if they will not hear you,
 - it is right for you to appeal to the higher courts of the church if this has not already been done by others with no success.
 - Then you have to decide if this is something about which you need to break fellowship with them over.

TRANS> This is the third level of opposition:

3. You leave the congregation and go to join another, or you cease to worship with your household.

- a. Two things about this.
 - 1) First, it should never be done lightly...
 - It is not a good thing to move about from one church to another, and you should not leave unless you have very good reasons for doing so.
 - You have taken vows before God to labour to preserve the peace, purity, and prosperity of the congregation you are a part of.
 - 2) Second, you should never leave the visible church entirely—
 - If it comes to the place that you feel you must leave a congregation, it is very important that you find another congregation to affiliate with.
 - No Christian is to try to function outside the visible church that Jesus established on the earth.
 - The church is not a voluntary organisation like a club...
 - It is the church He organised and appointed with officers and members and commands us to be a part of—submitting to those He has appointed.
- b. Your decision to leave often has a lot to do with what those who lead in the church are doing.
 - Paul was a leader...
 - When Paul went into the synagogues to preach, his goal was to show the members of that synagogue that Christ had come.
 - But whenever they rejected his teaching and threw him out of their synagogue,
 - it was the duty of those who had come to believe to leave that synagogue also.
 - In other words, every believer did not have to preach Jesus until they were thrown out,
 - but if those who were preaching Jesus were removed because of that, it was their duty to go with them.
 - If you are in a church where ministers are thrown out for refusing to participate in women's ordination,
 - you need to leave when those ministers are forced out.
 - We need to understand this principle with the reformers as well.
 - They did not leave the church, but sought to reform it, but when the leaders opposed them for speaking the truth and kicked them out,
 - It was the duty of all who believed to follow them, thus bearing the reproach of Christ with them.

- c. You also ought to leave if you are choosing not to participate in certain things of which you do not approve, and the particular church will not allow your non-participation.
 - For example, if the church wants to have a Christmas service and you do not want to participate and they tell you must participate,
 - it is probably time to find another church.

- 4. The fourth level of opposition is that you refuse to attend a particular church any more because of their unauthorised worship.
 - a. Of course you can go to a church as an observer or visitor and not participate in the worship...
 - but when you stop and think about the fact that the LORD Jesus is the One who calls us together for worship each Lord's Day,
 - it becomes a matter of disobedience to Him if you attend an idolatrous service that you cannot participate in rather than in one that does what He has commanded.
 - You could put it like this:
 - Jesus does not merely call us together, but He calls us together to worship Him in a certain way;
 - so if you gather with those who are not worshipping as He commands, you not obeying Him.

 - b. Paul puts it like this in 2 Cor 6:
 - 2 Cor 6:16-18: 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." Therefore "Come out from among them And be separate," says the Lord. "Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty."
 - This is how the separation commanded in the OT is carried over into the New.
 - You see how he uses OT principles to teach this...
 - What was true with regard to the OT is all the more true in the New now that we ourselves are the temple with Christ as the chief cornerstone!
 - And what a precious promise is attached here...
 - that God Almighty will be a father to us...
 - all to encourage us to disapprove, detest, oppose, all false worship; and, according to each one's place and calling, remove it.