

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 109-a

Halifax, 4 April 2010

Introduction:

So far we have had three messages on the second commandment.

- In particular, we have been looking at what is required of us in the second commandment as outlined in Question 108 of the Larger Catechism.

Today we are going to move on to Question 109 and begin to look at what is forbidden in the second commandment.

- But before we do, I want to take a few minutes to review what we have learned from Question 108 about what is required in the Second Commandment.
- I divided the answer to Q. 108 into three sections

1. We began with the first section which is stated in these words:

- **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 turned to Deuteronomy 12 where we are clearly taught that we are to give ourselves to the worship of God in the way that He has commanded...
 - That is our duty—to give ourselves to the worship He had prescribed rather than coming up with some other way of worship.
 - Deuteronomy 12 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.

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

2. Next, 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 that they gave themselves to.
 - 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*.
 - They came together with them, coming to share together in the life of Christ, singing praise for what He has done, coming under the care and discipline of the apostles and those they appointed to rule, and supporting the work of the church financially.
 - 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*.
 - This refers especially to our corporate prayers in the assembly which we offer up to God with one accord.
 - There are also times of fasting when we seek the LORD earnestly.
- 3. And last time, we looked 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.**
 - Although these words may seem harsh to us in our particular society,

- we saw that it is really the most loving thing we can do to oppose false worship.
- We looked at how King Hezekiah was highly commended for removing the high places where Israel worshipped God.
 - The problem with these particular high places was not that they were worshipping other gods there,
 - but that they were worshipping the true God in places and ways that He had not commanded.
 - They were sincere, but they were in error, and good king Hezekiah took action to see that this false worship was stopped.
 - It was his place to do that as king.
 - We looked at the duty that each of us to oppose false worship in our own places and callings and how we must sometimes leave a church that has given itself over to worship that God has not commanded if our gentle appeals are not heard.

Now let us move along to look at what is **forbidden** in the second commandment.

- This is outlined for us in Question 109 of the Larger Catechism.

Q. 109 What are the sins forbidden in the second commandment?

- Before I read the answer, I want to mention to you that there is an error in the copies of the Larger Catechism that we have been giving out on our literature table.
 - Twice there is a place where the word “whatsoever” occurs, and both times it is capitalised and preceded by a colon.
 - The colon is not supposed to be there and the word “whatsoever” should not be capitalised.
 - I just don’t want any of you to be confused by this.
 - Unfortunately, wherever the word “whatsoever” is found in this printing of the Larger Catechism, the same error occurs, so if you are motivated to do so, you can go through and correct your copy.
 - Anyway, here is the answer to question 109—“What are the sins forbidden in the second Commandment?”

A. The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, counseling, commanding, using, and anywise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God Himself; tolerating a false religion; the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever; all worshipping of it, or God in it or by it; the making of any

representation of feigned deities, and all worship of them, or service belonging to them; all superstitious devices, corrupting the worship of God, adding to it, or taking from it, whether invented and taken up of ourselves, or received by tradition from others, though under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretexts whatsoever; simony; sacrilege; all neglect, contempt, hindering, and opposing the worship and ordinances which God has appointed.

This week, we will look at the first part of this answer where it says:

The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, counseling, commanding, using, and anywise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God Himself

- Do you see what the main idea is here?
 - It is coming up with your own ideas about what to do in worship.
- Look at the words...
 - To **devise** is to come up with an idea...
 - “Why don’t we have a Sunday where we all dress up like Bible characters and then we have skits so everybody can learn the stories.”
 - The point is that we are not supposed to be creative in coming up with new ways to worship God.
 - We can be creative in our service to each other, but not in our worship.
 - God tells us what He wants us to do in worship.
 - To **counsel** is to advise someone else...
 - “I heard about a church that did a survey to find out what kind of music people wanted and their attendance increased dramatically... we ought to do that...”
 - “I went to a church that had a beautiful picture of Jesus looking at the congregation. It made you feel like He was right there. We ought to get something like that at our church.”
 - To **command** is to order someone under your authority to do something...
 - The preacher says,
 - “If you know you need Jesus Christ, then come up to the front of the church and pray at this altar,”
 - The worship leader says,
 - “Take the candle that is in your pew and when we turn out the lights, everyone hold up your candle and promise to God that you will let your light shine for Jesus Christ.”

- To **use** unauthorised worship is to participate in it.
 - A person buys a cross and rubs it so that they will feel closer to God.
 - Or someone chooses a church because they have a great choir.
- To **approve** of it is to commend the use of it...
 - As when you say, “Oh, what a nice idea!” when you hear about animal blessing Sunday...
 - Or, “I heard a really great solo at the church we were visiting—it was wonderful.”

So you see that the overall sense of this section is that when we are commanded not to make or use graven images,

- it is a command that in principle forbids us to have anything to with worship that God has not commanded...

And in examining this subject,

- I thought it would be good to look at the first time this was done...
 - to look at the first major violation of the of the second commandment recorded for us in scripture.
 - Please turn to Genesis 4.
- Listen now as I read to you from Genesis 4.
 - READ> Genesis 4:

I. With Cain and Abel we have the two different approaches to God...

A. At creation, man was created as the image of God—God looked upon him and was pleased because He saw His glorious image reflected.

1. Before the fall, man lived by **enabling grace**, just as we do now when we have been reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.
 - But it was different because before we sinned, we needed no forgiveness...
 - And because we had no sin nature, we were able to please God.
 - We depended on God for grace to live in righteousness, but we did not need to depend on Him for redemption.
2. But after the fall, **redemptive** grace was needed...
 - *Redemptive grace* is grace that redeems or restores us as sinners...
 - We are ruined by our sin and we are now devoid of righteousness...
 - So we need forgiveness,
 - We need righteousness,

- We an atonement.
- We need grace now not only to help us live for God, but to help us overcome the wickedness that is in us.
- To live in communion with God now involves looking to God for this redemptive grace—not just enabling grace.

B. Under this new arrangement, Cain exhibits the first effort at false religion...

1. And that false religion involves acting as if the fall never occurred...
 - It is the view that redemptive grace is not needed...
 - It is the view that God should accept man for what man is...
 - that God should be pleased with him and his offerings.
2. And so what does Cain offer to God?
 - a. He offers his own works to God...
 - We know this for sure from Hebrews 11:4 because there we are told...
 - Heb 11:4: By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.
 - b. How does this show that Cain was trying to approach God on the basis of his own works?
 - It shows it because of the distinction made in Abel's sacrifice—Abel's sacrifice was offered through faith...
 - In other words, he was depending on God's promise to make him and his works acceptable in God's sight.
 - He offered to God what God had promised to provide through the slaying of an animal...
 - This is what God had appointed—death—to represent the atonement that would be provided to atone for sin...
 - Abel was relying on what God had promised...
 - But Cain brought the fruits of his labour without blood.
 - c. In this way, Cain was very much like a modern liberal churchman...
 - They will have nothing to do with blood sacrifices and atonements...
 - They will present themselves to God!
 - They suppose that God will be pleased with them as they are!
 - They will not serve a primitive God of the ancients who demands blood.
 - They are too sophisticated for that!

- Well, I guess the modern churchman is not so modern!
 - He goes all the way back to Cain.
3. So the worship of Cain has been continued all through the ages...
- a. It is the worship in which sinful man offers himself to God—what he comes up with that he is sure ought to please God...
 - He approaches God as if he is not fallen—or at least not fully fallen...
 - He devises his own way of approaching God and expects God to accept it.
 - b. This plays out in principle in the regulative principle of worship...
 - The regulative principle is that principle of scripture that forbids us to worship God in any other way than the way he has appointed...
 - not to add or to take away from what He has appointed either by direct command or by good and necessary deduction.
 - We are not to approach Him with our own arts or ideas, but only as He has appointed...
 - This is why churches ought not to devise holy days, symbols, performing arts, musical performances, dance, and all the rest in the worship of God...
 - God does not want our art work—He wants us to present Jesus to Him in the ordinances of worship He has appointed...
 - As soon as we take it upon ourselves to come up with the offering of praise, we have fallen into self-righteousness.
 - c. We must realise that as fallen creatures, we have nothing to bring to God...
 - Oh yes, His image is being renewed in us, but we do not approach Him on the basis of a renewed image...
 - We approach Him on the basis of Christ our righteousness and Christ the crucified One.
 - The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is the central focus of New Testament worship.

TRANS> Cain and Abel had entirely opposite approaches to God...

- Cain came as if there had been no fall...
- Abel came, looking for an alien righteousness promised by God.

II. And here we have the response of self righteous man when his offering is rejected and his brother's is accepted...

- Verse 5 says, "Cain was very angry and his countenance fell."

A. It is a response of bitter indignation...

1. If you want to offend a religious person, just tell him that his worship is not acceptable to God.

a. “The offering you just made—that offering that you spent so much on—it is not acceptable to God...”

- Do you believe that is true of your offerings?
- Do you believe that if you came to God and offered yourself on your best day as a sacrifice to God, that it would be an offering of filthy rags?
 - It would!
 - Isaiah says that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags.

b. But every self righteous person thinks his best should be accepted and he is offended at the very idea that it shouldn't be!

- For God to reject his self-offering would be like a parent rejecting a little child's special gift made just for them with a heart of love!
 - It would be cruel and unjust and unkind!
 - And parents, let me tell you, it would be cruel and unjust and unkind for you not to receive your child's offering to you!
 - You ought to be delighted with such things and you ought to tell your children of your delight in them.
 - But God is holy and our self-offerings are repugnant to Him.
 - They are repugnant if we offer them as if they are worthy of Him because they deny His holy character...
 - and they deny His Son who is the only basis of our acceptance with God.

2. Oh but Cain is offended!

- v. 5: “Cain was very angry and his countenance fell”

a. Cain would quickly point out that Abel is no better than he is, yet God accepted Abel's offering!

- It is true—Abel would agree...
 - Able is no better than Cain, for he is a fallen sinner too.
- But Abel was not offering himself, but Christ...
 - That is why his offering was accepted—it was accepted because it was what God requires and provides.
 - Cain would say, “What's wrong with what I have provided?”

- The answer must be,
 - “Because it’s not what God has commanded!”

- b. This is the same anger you see with people of Israel against the prophets...
 - 1) It is the anger of the Pharisees against Christ...
 - They had their own works and their own system of righteousness and they had no room for a crucified Saviour.
 - They were offended by the cross!

 - 2) It is the anger of the Jews against Stephen...
 - He told them of Israel’s continually rebellion against God’s redemptive grace—of Abraham, of Moses, of the prophets...
 - and now in all its ugly fullness in the rejection of the Messiah!
 - How they rage against him!
 - They are God’s people!
 - How dare that anyone should tell them they are not accepted of Him!

 - 3) It is the contempt of the proud religious man against those who believe the Bible today...
 - I will never forget the blasphemy that was brought forward at the Re-Imagining God” Conference that had liberal ministers from the Presbyterian Church and the United Methodist Church...
 - Aruna Gnanadson, of the World Council of Churches, and Dolores Williams, professor at Union Theological Seminary in New York, both condemned the idea of Christ’s atonement as an abusive patriarchal system with the comment, “I don’t think we need folks hanging on crosses dripping blood and weird stuff.”
 - Such contempt, such venomous hatred toward our LORD Jesus!

- c. See how God approaches Cain and tries to reason with him...
 - Gen. 4:6-7: So the LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire *is* for you, but you should rule over it.”
 - You see what the Lord is says here:
 - “Why are you angry?—do well, you will be accepted...”
 - “Offer what I have commanded with faith in what I have promised...”
 - God often reasons with sinners...

- Isaiah said, “Come now, let us reason together, though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.”
 - Why would you resist the radical cleansing you need?
 - Why would you oppose this instead of rejoicing in it?
 - These is but one reason—
 - wounded pride!

B. It is a response of wounded pride and envy that leads to murder of the woman’s seed by Cain...

1. You can see it in verse 8:

- Gen 4:8: “Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.”
 - This is exactly the problem the Pharisees and all their religious counterparts have with Christ...
 - They want to kill Him because He exposes them...
 - He exposes them as unacceptable to God and they won’t have it!
 - It is so foolish because He is the very one who can save them...
 - If they would only humble themselves and look to him, all would be well!

2. You see God’s rebuke of Cain...

- Cain is cut off from communion with God...
 - Without redemption, we cannot have communion with God...
 - Reject God’s way and you will be cut off from Him forever.
 - God’s judgement falls upon him.
 - Cain wants to disappear—
 - I talked to a man who told me he had made an agreement with God that they would just leave each other alone.
 - I told him that such an agreement was not possible and he actually said he knew that—but that he could not bear to bow down to God.
 - that at least he would have the satisfaction for all eternity of knowing that he never did bow...
 - I told him that would be his greatest torment for all eternity, but he said,
 - “I could never bow down to anyone.”
 - Cain, like my friend, wanted to just disappear...
 - but God assures him that he will not be able to escape his punishment.

3. Cain goes forth now and makes a life for himself...
 - He fills himself with this world...settles into his alienation from God.
 - And it seems that in a worldly sense, he does quite well!
 - When righteous Seth comes along, he is known for the fact that he calls upon the name of the Lord...
 - but Cain and his family are known for their many achievements in this world...
 - I wonder, what is that characterises you?
 - And what do you want your children to be characterised by—first and foremost!
 - That they call upon the name of the Lord—or that they achieve great things in this world?
 - I do not mean to say that it is wrong to achieve great things...
 - David and Job and Nehemiah were great men in this world, but they were known first of all for their godliness.

TRANS> And now I want to conclude with...

III. A Warning to Covenant Children and their parents

A. I want to speak very frankly to you who are second or third generation believers.

1. You have tremendous privileges as did Cain and Abel.
 - Redemption had been revealed to Adam and Eve, and Cain and Abel had the tremendous privilege of knowing the way of reconciliation with God.
 - Abel was happy with that way.
 - He rejoiced in the shedding of blood to atone for His sins and was happy to approach God on the basis of sacrifice rather than merit.
 - But Cain found that way distasteful.
 - I suppose there is a certain sense in which we all do.
 - It would be must nicer, in many ways, if God accepted us without a mediator...
 - I mean, if we were not sinful human beings who are continually reminded of our sin when we worship Him.
2. Of course we *ought* to be very grateful to God for redemptive grace...
 - and it is a measure of where our heart is with God to what degree we are grateful.

- a. For the first generation that is often delivered out of a life of extreme rebellion and distance from God,
 - redeeming grace is wonderfully amazing...
 - You know what you are by nature and you know that all that you are as a new creation in Christ is by redemptive grace...
 - And you are so thankful for Jesus and for the forgiveness of sin that comes through Him...
 - And you can't imagine approaching God on the basis of your own works and merit.
 - You are so thankful to be reconciled and to have God's acceptance of you in Christ and to have Him at work in you!

- b. But what can happen when the second generation comes along?
 - If you are second generation, you are born into a covenant home...
 - Right from the start, you are told of the grace of God and you are trained up in His way.
 - And by the grace of God, you are able to walk in His way.

 - And it can be easy for you to grow weary of being told that you are sinner who cannot approach God without an atonement...
 - You too wish that you could be accepted on your own merit.
 - And perhaps your parents, unintentionally, reinforce that because they want you to follow their Lord and they commend you when you do well (which they ought to do),
 - and they see how much they have been saved from, but they do not see how much you have been saved from...
 - because God's grace has prevented you from rebellion...
 - and because of their own experience,
 - they are not as skilled at helping you to understand the grace of God quite so fully.

B. And here is the great danger...

1. You come across some teaching that tells you that emphasises God's acceptance of you—
 - and while it *says* that His acceptance is all of grace,
 - there is a subtle shift away from the basis of that acceptance being Jesus Christ.
 - Instead of the glory being in the fact that I, a wicked sinner, am accepted through the blood of my dear Saviour who bore the curse for me,
 - the focus is just that you are accepted by God and that He delights in you and in your works.

2. Now I want to say that God does delight in us and in our works when we have been redeemed.
 - And that is a wonderful thing
 - We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works...
 - and He takes pleasure in the fruit that we bring forth for Him, by His gracious working.
 - and He is going to reward us for those works that He has given to us.
 - All of this is taught in the Bible and it is meant to encourage us...
 - And if we don't teach this, then we withhold the necessary encouragement of the scripture from our children
 - and do not encouragement ourselves in it...
 - God is at work in you, and He is pleased with the fruit that you bring forth for Him!
3. But... the foundation of your acceptance is the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 - You are a sinner, and even though you have been changed by the grace of God,
 - your acceptance is all on account of the lamb who was slain for you.
 - And when you come to worship God,
 - you are not there to present your own good works before Him!
 - You are not the burnt offering that is presented to God in worship...
 - The lamb is presented in your place!
 - When we assemble together, we do not come to present ourselves or our own works before God—
 - we come primarily to rejoice in Jesus Christ who is our righteousness.
 - We present Him and we preach Him, not ourselves!
 - We realise that the God we worship is the one who is so holy and so righteous that when He revealed Himself to the holiest people who ever lived,
 - they are overwhelmed by their sinfulness and cry out with Isaiah,
 - “Woe is my, for I am undone. I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips!”
 - And then we are so very thankful for the Lamb of God who takes away our sins and our joy and rejoicing is in Him.

- C. And you see, the focus shifts away from Christ to our own works when we start to present our own works to God worship...
- The beautiful singer wants to perform his music in the public assembly as an offering to God in that assembly...
 - in gratitude to the Lamb, and because of the Lamb—indeed...
 - but it is the worshipper is offering himself instead of the Lamb to God for acceptance.
 - The painter wants to have his painting at church as an offering to God in the assembly...
 - And so does the sculptor and the dancer and the actor.
 - And all these are gifts that are to offered to God—
 - our whole lives are to be such...
 - but not in the assembly because in the assembly it is Jesus Christ who is the offering we present by which we are accepted of the Father.
 - And yes, I consecrate myself and dedicate myself to God,
 - but I do not present myself to Him as the offering.
 - I look to Christ who was offered 2000 years ago.
 - My singing and my dancing and my painting and my acting is all given to God and used for the glory of God all through the week...
 - and even your school work if done properly is done with praise to God as you learn of the marvellous world that He made—
 - I mean, school teachers are worship leaders in that sense!
 - And when you build things and grow things and cook things and deliver things and fix things and serve in all your various callings all through the week,
 - you are a priest and all you do is done for the Lord and in the sense is indeed an offering for Him...
 - But when we gather in the Christian assembly as an assembly to worship God,
 - we do only what He has appointed for that assembly.
 - We keep it simple.
 - It is not time for the school teacher or for the musician or the mechanic for that matter to present their offerings to God...
 - It is time to glory in the Lamb who takes away the sin the world and to praise God for His grace and to receive His word and to give thanks to Him in the simple manner He has appointed.
 - It is in the assembly that we focus in particular on the whole basis of our acceptance with Him.
 - It is not you and your works—it is Christ and His sacrifice.