

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 112 d

Reverent Use of God's Works

Halifax, 22 August 2010

Introduction

Today we continue our study of the Third Commandment:

- Exodus 20:7: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold *him* guiltless who takes His name in vain.

So far in our study, we have been focusing on what is required of us in this commandment.

- Even though the third commandment does not expressly tell us what is required, but rather forbids us to take God's name in vain,
 - it is proper for us to look beyond the letter of the law to what is clearly implied in this prohibition.
 - The Ten Commandments are a summary of God's moral law,
 - so it is not only permissible, but actually necessary for us to go beyond what is expressly stated in each commandment and consider what is implied if we are going to properly understand the commandments.
 - This is the method that the prophets and apostles and our Saviour Himself used in expounding the commandments.
- Obviously, if we are **forbidden** to take God's name in vain,
 - the necessary inference is that we are also **required** to use His name in a holy and reverent way.
 - That is the intention of the commandment—that we should honour God's name.
 - We have also seen that when the third commandment speaks of using His name,
 - it refers to much more than the speaking of His name.
 - When scripture speaks of God's name, it refers to all the ways that God is revealed to us,
 - so the main idea is that rather than taking that which reveals God in vain, we are to highly esteem and reverence it.

In Question 112 of the Larger Catechism, the requirements of the third commandment are spelled out for us in a very helpful way.

Q. 112 What is required in the third commandment?

- A. **The third commandment requires, that the name of God, His titles, attributes, ordinances, the word, sacraments, prayer, oaths, vows, lots, works, and whatsoever else there is whereby he makes himself known, be holily and reverently used in thought, meditation, word, and writing; by an holy profession, and answerable conversation, to the glory of God, and the good of ourselves, and others.**

You see in this answer that God's name refers to:

- His names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word, sacraments, prayer, oaths, vows, lots, works and whatever else there is whereby He makes Himself known.
- And not only that, but that the taking of His name includes more than just speaking it—it involves how we think of His name, how we write of His name, and even how we live with respect to His name.
 - The bottom line is that our whole lives are lived with reference to His name—to His revelation of Himself to us—
 - and our tendency is to disregard Him when we ought rather to reverence Him.
 - We need to have the highest reverence and esteem for all that reveals God to us, and to use all His revelation with respect and honour toward Him.
 - So far in our exposition of the third commandment, we have looked at the holy and reverent use of God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word, sacraments, prayer, oaths, vows, and lots...
 - and it remains for us to look at the holy and reverent use of His works.
 - This is our topic for today: "The holy and reverent use of God's works."

This is really quite a huge topic that we could spend many weeks exploring.

- God's works include both creation and providence.
 - **Creation**, of course, refers to all that He has made.
 - God spoke the world into existence by the word of His power.
 - When He said *dog*, a dog was created out of nothing.
 - When we say *dog*, we are in a sense repeating what God said in creation and calling attention to what God spoke into being when He said *dog*.
 - Hebrews 11:3 remind us that:
 - Heb 11:3 By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God...
 - He spoke and all things came into being.

TRANS> That is **creation**, but there is also **providence**.

- **Providence** refers to that which God does with what He has created.
 - He completed all of His creation in six days, but providence continues as God speaks into history whatsoever comes to pass.

- In Hebrews 1:3, we are told that He upholds all things by the word of His power...
- And in Heb 2:10, He is referred to as the one “for whom are all things and by whom are all things.”
- And in Ephesians 1:11, we are told that He “works all things according to the counsel of His will.”

- Therefore, when a child is born, that child is not a new creation,
 - but that child is brought forth through the working of God in providence—
 - He has spoken it into existence by His decree through the process of the sexual union of man and a woman.

- Likewise, when a nation comes into power and takes dominion over other nations through war or economic prosperity,
 - it is God who brings this about by the mighty working of His providence.
 - As the prophet Daniel put it so well,
 - Dan 2:20-21: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, For wisdom and might are His. And He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings;
 - Whatever changes there are ultimately come from Him.

And so you see that the works of God are all encompassing!

- Everything is His work!
- His works are all around us!
 - We looked at this when we studied about the decrees of God, about creation and providence in questions 12-20.
 - But today as we consider the third commandment, we will look at how we ought to respond to God’s works or creation and providence.

- We have God’s glorious works all around us, but so often we do not regard them.
 - We take it all in vain!
 - We are like spoiled children who have everything and have no regard for it.
 - Here God has lavished us with rich blessings and we are indifferent about it.
 - It ought not to be that way!

For our scripture reading today, I want to go to Psalm 105.

- I am going to read from the first six verses of this Psalm where we are instructed as to how we are to respond to God’s wonderful works...
 - Give attention now as I read to you from Psalm 105:1-6.
 - READ> Psalm 105:1-6

- You see in these words that there is a call for us to respond to God in His works!
 - You are to give thanks for His works
 - You are to tell others of His works as you glory in them.
 - You are to seek Him as one rejoicing in and remembering His works.

- We will look at each of these in detail in just a moment.
 - But first, I want you to notice the overall context in which this call to respond to God's works is found.
 - First, look at what comes before our text, in Psalm 104.
 - Here you find a wonderful description of God's works of creation and ordinary providence—
 - The Lord is described as the one who set up the earth so that it would not be moved, as the one who supplies it with water and food, and with living creatures who have life as His gift.
 - And there is a resolution to rejoice in God's works and to sing to Him as long as I live.
 - That is what comes before the verses I just read to you...
 - And now take a look at what comes after...
 - In Psalm 105, verses 7 to the end,
 - there is a focus on God's **redemptive** works—
 - His special acts of providence for the salvation of His people!
 - Verse 8 speaks of how He remembers the covenant He made with Abraham to bless His people for a thousand generations.
 - It details His redemption of them of Egypt and His provision for them in the wilderness and established them in the land as His people.
 - And of course now that Christ has come, we see the fullness of this redemption as accomplished in Him...
 - We see that God has redeemed us and made us His people through His work for us in Jesus Christ.
 - You must never read the Old Testament without having an eye for Jesus Christ...
 - for all of God's works with His people of old are preparing them for Jesus Christ...
 - and when we read of God's works of redemption for them, we must always be mindful of the completion of that work in Christ in whom the nations are called to find salvation!

So as we look at the call to respond to God's works in the first 6 verses of Psalm 105,

- We will consider both God's works of creation and ordinary providence as well as His works of redemption.

First then, you see in our text that...

I. You are to give thanks for God's works...

- Verse 1 begins,
 - Ps 105:1: "Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name."

A. This is just common courtesy.

1. If someone has done all sorts of kind things for you, it is only right for you to say "Thank you."
 - a. It is easy to recognise this when you have gone out of your way to do something for another person...
 - If you see someone stranded on the side of the road and you stop to help them get their car going (and spoil your clothes doing it),
 - and perhaps even spend your own money to buy parts for their broken car,
 - you rather expect that they will express their gratitude to you.
 - b. If they do not even say thank you, their ingratitude is evident to all.
 - I don't mean that you need to be looking for thanks when you serve, but I mean that as far that person is concerned,
 - it is only right for them to thank you if you have gone out of your way to show kindness to them.

2. But just think of all that God has done!

- a. He is the one who created this amazing world...and who upholds it... for us!
 - 1) He is the one who hung the stars in their places, who formed the galaxies and the constellations!
 - There is such an abundance—such an extravagance!
 - There are billions of stars—many that we have yet to discover.
 - 2) And at the same time, He is the one who made us...
 - Here we are with brains that researchers tell us have more reactions going on in a moment of time than there are stars in the heavens.
 - We are fearfully and wonderfully made!
 - It is marvellous to think that inside every cell there is as much activity going on as in a great city.
 - 3) And there are snowflakes...

- God dumps down billions of them and each one is a marvellous masterpiece, different than all the others—and he knows them all!
 - Just think of all that God is doing right now—somewhere, He making trillions and trillions of these masterpieces...
 - and at the same time, He is watching over (and enjoying) every little creature as it lives and works and dies...
- b. Just think of the huge variety of foods we enjoy from him each day, of the seasons, of the scenes, of the friends, of our families, of the many blessings.
- c. But above all, consider that our God has sent His only Son into the world to bear our sin when we are worthy of nothing but condemnation.
- Consider the work of redemption on the cross, the pains He bore for us...
 - Consider the father's acceptance of His sacrifice and His raising up of the Son from the dead for our justification
 - Consider the promise to us of complete forgiveness through faith in Him, the benefits of justification, sanctification, adoption, and eternal life.
 - Consider the everlasting inheritance that is ours as heirs through Christ.
 - Consider that the world will be completely renewed in righteousness so that the groaning of the creation under the curse will cease.
3. With all these wonderful works of God, lavished upon us, it is only fitting that we should be filled with gratitude.
- It is morally wicked for us to take all these things in vain.
- B. You are to be deliberate about expressing this gratitude...
1. Psalm 105:1 says, "Oh give thanks to the LORD," and then adds, "Call upon His name."
- *Calling upon His name* is often used to refer to our set times of worship... when we gather together to give thanks to our God.
 - This is something that we are to do each Lord's Day.
 - We are to assemble together to call on His name, giving thanks to Him for all of His mercy and kindness toward us.
 - We are not to take all of His works in vain, but we are to express our gratitude for what He has done.
 - Especially, we are to thank him for what He has done to redeem us.
 - In Psalm 22, we have the words of Jesus on the cross, given to us by prophecy 1000 years before the event...

- and we see that He makes a vow that after He is heard from the cross, He will gather His brethren together in the church and declare to them what God has done...
 - and will give thanks to Father for accepting His sacrifice for their salvation.
 - If we do not gather for worship in the assembly on the Lord's Day, we do not obey His call to give thanks.
2. But this gratitude is not only to be expressed publicly, but also privately.
- We are to give thanks to Him in secret, as we walk about through the day receiving his blessings...
 - As we wake up in the morning to a new day with all of its new mercies from God,
 - and as we retire at night looking back on a day that has been filled with His kindness,
 - it is for us to say "thank you" to the LORD, lest we take His works in vain.
3. And in all these expressions of gratitude, both public and private, you must see that you speak not only with the lips but that you mean it with the heart...
- You must stir up your heart to gratitude by considering all that the LORD has done for you!
 - It is so easy to go through the motions of thanking God as a bare ritual without a true sense of gratitude.
 - See to it that you are sincere!

C. What rich examples of gratitude we have given to us in scripture...

1. We may think of David who penned so many of the psalms, and at almost every turn in his life poured out expressions of thanksgiving to God.
- When the LORD established his covenant with him, promising him a son that would reign forever, David responded:
 - 2 Sam 7:18-20: "Who am I, O Lord GOD? And what is my house, that You have brought me this far? And yet this was a small thing in Your sight, O Lord GOD; and You have also spoken of Your servant's house for a great while to come. Is this the manner of man, O Lord GOD? Now what more can David say to You?"
2. And then there is the example of Paul
- You cannot read any of his epistles without running into expressions of gratitude.
 - He often thanks God for those persons He has redeemed...
 - He thanks Him upon every remembrance of the Philippians...

- He thanks Him for putting him into the ministry, though he had been a wicked and insolent man.
 - He thanks Him for the riches of His grace.
 - He thanks Him for His mercy.
 - He thanks Him for having preserved His life.
 - He thanks Him for providing all things through Christ.
3. And likewise, we find many expressions of thanks in the words of Jesus.
- His prayers very often begin with thanksgiving.
 - Should it not be all the more so with us when we are the undeserving recipients of God's mercies?
 - Should our Saviour be filled with expressions of heart-felt thanks for our salvation while we remain silent?
 - We are the beneficiaries!
 - Oh brothers and sisters,
 - If we pray at all, our prayers are filled with supplication and requests;
 - but how devoid they are of expressions of thanks to our God!

TRANS> See that you do not take the works of God in vain—but that you give thanks for them!

- But this is not all that you will do when you reverence God's works...

II. You are also to promote the glory of His name by making His deeds known to others!

- Verse 1, as it continues, makes this very clear...
 - Ps 105:1-2: Make known His deeds among the peoples! Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; Talk of all His wondrous works!
- A. These words show us that God's works are something we are to talk about to others!
1. It is our duty to stir each other up to behold what God has done.
 - We can be grumblers, like the Israelites in the wilderness who grumbled even as they dwelt under the glory cloud...
 - Or we can be those who talk of all the excellent things that God had done.
 - Think about it...
 - Are you a catalyst among others of gratitude for God's works?
 - or are you a catalyst of grumbling and complaining?

- Do you give God the glory for what He has done when you speak to your neighbour,
 - or do you diminish his glory in their eyes by ignoring the fact that He has done it?
 - You know, you can say, “I am thankful for thus and thus” or you can say, “The Lord has been so good to us...”

TRANS> It is sadly the characteristic of our society to deny God as the author of His works—

- In other words, we act as if things just happen and as if God had nothing to do with it.

2. But it is our duty to promote the glory of God revealed in His works.

- a. We can look at the heavens and ignore the fact that God made them!
 - We need scientists who will study the works of God in creation for the promotion of His glory!
 - We need those who will honour God’s name as it is revealed in His works of creation.

- b. The news is broadcast every day with no mention that the events that are spoken of were the judgements and mercies of God.
 - Instead of God being known through these works, He is denied and relegated to irrelevancy.
 - This is nothing new of course!
 - We saw that even with Israel (who ought to have known better) at the end of chapter 42...
 - Remember, it said that even though God had punished His people, they did not take it to heart.
 - They acted as if the chastisements that fell upon them did not come from the LORD.
 - They were just like us.

- c. We have the same problem in our art.
 - We have artists who present to us the world as they see it—often attempting to show that it is all meaningless and random as they splash paint on the canvas...
 - but they cannot escape the reality that they are still an artist—they can’t escape meaning...
 - But we need painters and poets and designers whose aim it is to show forth the beauty of God’s works in creation and providence for His glory.

- We need those who realise that their words are reflections of His words as the one who first called all things into being!

TRANS> This is the work of artists and scientists and historians...but

3. This is the work of all of us as we attempt to awaken a sleeping world—even a dead world—to the reality of God’s works...

- Paul’s message in Acts 14 ought to be our message in our society when we see them filled with the worship of everything but the true God...
 - In Acts 14:15-17, Paul said:
 - Acts 14:15-17: "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men with the same nature as you, and preach to you that you should turn from these useless things to the living God, who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and all things that are in them, who in bygone generations allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness."
 - You see here that Paul is pointing out to them the works of God so that they will not take God’s works in vain...
 - but will worship Him as they behold His works!
 - He is showing them that God’s works for them witness to His being which they have foolishly ignored.

B. But above all, we need to proclaim to the nations God’s work of salvation in Jesus Christ!

1. In Mark 16:15, Jesus tells us to

- “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature.”
 - a. God is revealed to all people through His works of creation and providence.
 - As Psalm 19 says, there is no place where the language of creation is not heard—
 - All men ought to worship God because all men see His works in the creation.
 - b. But the gospel is only known through proclamation.
 - Nobody has access to the gospel until it is presented to them...
 - And the church is commanded to give them access by preaching the gospel to them.
 - The church is the pillar and ground of the truth, the great depository for the oracles of God.
 - We have the good news.

- We are to tell the nations what God has done to save us as His people.
 - And we are to tell them that Jesus is reigning until He brings the whole world under His dominion...
 - And that He commands them to repent and believe in His name in order that they might be blessed in His kingdom, receiving the complete forgiveness of sins.
 - We are to tell them how He died on the cross to atone for His people's sins...
 - and that if they will repent and believe, they too can be numbered among His people and receive His salvation.
2. Redemption is God's greatest work, so it needs to be spoken about.
- a. In it, He reveals the glory of His name—
- His mercy is seen as it is not seen anywhere else—
 - that He is a God who saves undeserving sinners!
 - His justice is seen as it is not seen anywhere else—
 - that only by the shedding of the blood of His Son could we be justified...
 - His love is seen as it is not seen anywhere else—
 - that He has sent His Son for us, even to bear the curse...
 - His power is seen as it is not seen anywhere else—
 - He was revealed as Lord when He overthrew Egypt, but how much more in overthrowing Satan and conquering death!
 - His wisdom is seen as it is not seen anywhere else—
 - in that He devised such a marvellous way to reconcile sinners to Himself.
- b. It is for us to talk of what He has done! of this marvellous work of redemption.
- We are to sing psalms to Him and to glory in His name
 - We are to encourage one another by talking of this wondrous work of redemption...
 - and we are to proclaim it to the nations!
 - This is a task we carry out together as a church—from the scholars who translate the Bible for us...

- to the preachers who are set apart to proclaim it...
 - to the man in the work place who speaks to his co-worker about his hope in Christ during break time...
 - to the woman in home who speaks of the glory of God's saving work to her babe while changing his diaper...
- c. The good news is news that is worthy to be proclaimed!
- We must not take this news in vain, as if it were irrelevant or unimportant.
 - That is to dishonour God.
 - Of course this does not mean that we pretend to suppose that the world will always welcome this news...
 - it is just that we must not allow their contemptuous thoughts to colour our own thoughts about the glory of the gospel.
 - Do not let them cause you to take God's work of creation or redemption in vain and to be ashamed of declaring it!

TRANS> So then you see that we are to reverence God's name by thanking Him for His works and by proclaiming His works.

- And now thirdly, our text tells us that

III. We are to seek God as those who rejoice in and who remember His works.

- Verse 3-5, from the middle of verse 3, say:
 - Ps 105:3-5: Let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD! Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His face evermore! Remember His marvellous works which He has done, His wonders, and the judgements of His mouth.
- A. If you truly reverence God's works, and God as the one who works,
- you will seek Him.
1. When you see that He is the source of every blessing and every curse,
- the creator of all things,
 - the one who works all things after the counsel of His will,
 - who raises up nations and who destroys nations...
- I say, when you truly regard Him in this way and honestly believe that He is the God of creation and providence,
 - when you truly accept this about Him,
 - you **will** seek Him.
 - You will seek him for your daily bread,

- you will seek Him when your nation is threatened by war or economic collapse,
 - you will seek Him when you are sick or when you are threatened...
 - And in doing so you honour His name as the One who acts for you.
 - Instead of burying your head in the sand and trying to pretend that God really has nothing to do with all that is happening around you,
 - You will begin to respond to Him, and to seek Him as the God who works!
2. This also means that when He sends chastisements,
- Instead of denying His agency or getting mad at Him and deciding that He cannot exist,
 - you will humble yourself before Him and plead for His mercy and forgiveness.
 - You will even complain to Him in a humble godly way as the one who is able to change your condition if He wills to do so.
 - One of the prophets' chief complaints against God's covenant people is that even after the Lord chastens them, to get their attention, they still don't respond!
 - Instead of seeking Him, they ignore Him!
 - We have seen this a lot in Isaiah:
 - In chapter 1, he told of how Israel had been practically destroyed and had not repented, and he says, "Why will you be stricken any more?"
 - Recently, at the end of chapter 42, we read how the prophet said of the Lord concerning Jacob:
 - Isa 42:24-25: Who gave Jacob for plunder, and Israel to the robbers? Was it not the LORD, He against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in His ways, Nor were they obedient to His law. Therefore He has poured on him the fury of His anger And the strength of battle; It has set him on fire all around, Yet he did not know; And it burned him, Yet he did not take it to heart.
 - The LORD was already angry with them,
 - but they provoked Him to even greater anger by refusing to acknowledge His works of judgement upon them!
3. But of course most important of all, we are to remember His work of redemption,
- and to seek Him as the one who saves us through these mighty works.
 - a. What else can you do when you see what God has done to save but look to Him to apply that saving work to you?

- How can you not seek Him if you see what He has done unless you take His work in vain!
- b. If we take this great work in vain, we cannot be saved.
- We are to highly esteem the offering of Christ on the cross and the pouring out of the Spirit as our only hope of salvation.
 - Apart from this mighty work of Jesus Christ, there is no salvation.
- c. Any one that believes that is going to seek the LORD as the one who has done this work.
- You will put your faith in what he has done, and you will rejoice in it.
 - It will be your very life.
 - You will seek forgiveness of sins in the cross,
 - you will seek new life by the outpouring of the Spirit,
 - you will seek eternal life through Jesus as given for you.

B. Remembering what God has done is crucial

1. God has given us the word and the sacraments to keep before us the memory of what He has done for us.
 - Romans 1 shows us that the first step toward apostasy is ingratitude...
 - it is a disregard for the works of God.
 - a taking all of His works in vain.
2. When you are a regular recipient of another's kindness, your sinful human heart finds it easy to slip into ingratitude without even noticing it.
 - A child who receives food from his parents every day does not appreciate all that is involved in providing, purchasing, and preparing his meals.
 - He will whine and complain if they are not delivered to him, but he will rarely give thanks when they are provided day after day.
 - Because he comes to expect it, he is no longer grateful for it.
 - Too often that is the way we are with the LORD.
 - In Deuteronomy, the LORD warns the people about forgetting Him when they come into the Promised Land and start living in the abundance of His gracious provision.
 - He warns them that if they forget, He will have to chasten them to get their attention.
 - Does this warning not also apply to us?

- Is it not written for us who have the fullness of Christ's blessing?
 - Forgetfulness can be fatal.
 - Do we not see churches today that have forgotten the gospel?
 - that take the cross in vain?
 - that take God's sovereign hand of chastisement in vain?
 - that no longer regard His works with reverence?
 - This puts them outside of His salvation!
3. Let us the rather *increase* our esteem of God's works than it to be diminished!
- Let us join Paul in his earnest prayer for the saints—
 - Eph 1:15-23: Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.
 - If you thus grow in your understanding and appreciation of the work that God has done to save you,
 - you will not take His work in vain—you will not forget it and become indifferent about it.
 - Make it your prayer for yourself and for this congregation and for all the saints—
 - that we would see the glory of God's work and esteem it with appropriate reverence and respond to it with appropriate gratitude and seek it with appropriate rejoicing.

So we conclude that when it comes to God's works, it is for us to:

- to give thanks for what He has done...
- to declare what He has done...
- and to seek Him as the one who does great things for us.