

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## Question 113 d

### Irreverence for What God Says

Halifax, 3 October 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.

This is our ninth sermon on the third commandment, and our fourth sermon on the sins that are forbidden in this commandment.

- The sins forbidden are spelled out for us in Question 113 of the Larger Catechism.
  - Take a look at it with me...

#### Q. 113 What are the sins forbidden in the third commandment?

- A. **The sins forbidden in the third commandment are, the not using of God's name as is required; and the abuse of it in an ignorant, vain, irreverent, profane, superstitious, or wicked mentioning, or otherwise using his titles, attributes, ordinances, or works, by blasphemy, perjury; all sinful cursings, oaths, vows, and lots; violating of our oaths and vows, if lawful; and fulfilling them, if of things unlawful; murmuring and quarrelling at, curious prying into, and misapplying God's decrees and providences; *misinterpreting, misapplying, or any way perverting the Word, or any part of it, to profane jests, curious or unprofitable questions, vain janglings, or the maintaining of false doctrines;* abusing it, the creatures, or anything contained under the name of God, to charms, or sinful lusts and practices; the maligning, scorning, reviling, or anywise opposing of God's truth, grace, and ways; making profession of religion in hypocrisy, or for sinister ends; being ashamed of it, or a shame to it, by unconformable, unwise, unfruitful, and offensive walking, or backsliding from it.**

As is clear from this answer, taking God's name in vain includes a whole lot more than swearing—it includes the irreverent use of anything by which He makes Himself known.

Last time, (which was two weeks ago)

- we began looking at the part of Answer 113 that speaks about irreverence for what God does and says...
  - but we only covered the part that speaks about irreverence for what He *does*:
    - *murmuring and quarrelling at, curious prying into, and misapplying God's decrees and providences;*
  - and so this week, we will consider irreverence for what He *says*.

- *misinterpreting, misapplying, or any way perverting the Word, or any part of it, to profane jests, curious or unprofitable questions, vain janglings, or the maintaining of false doctrines;*

## **I. Scripture Reading**

A. Last time, we read from Deuteronomy 29...

- Please turn to Deut 29
  - This chapter lays a foundation for us about the purpose of God’s revelation.
  
- 1. He has given His revelation to us and to our children in order that we might “do all the words of this law.”
  - The word “law” that is used here is the word “torah” which is simply the revelation of God to His people—
    - The law (or Torah) set forth Christ to them so that they might live in God’s kingdom through His righteousness and grace.
    - So “doing the law” is to be understood as living in God’s gracious covenant, abiding in Christ by faith as He was set forth to them in the Old Testament and as He is set forth to us now as having been crucified for us.
  
- 2. We noted last time that in chapter 29, the LORD shows the love that He has for His people...for us who know Him...
  - a. His love is seen:
    - in redeeming us, that we might be His people;
    - in providing for us, that we might be His people;
    - and in enabling us to overcome our enemies; so that we might be His people.
  
  - b. And then we saw from verse 9 to the end how He pleads with His people to continue in His gracious covenant...in this gracious relationship with Him.
    - He warns them about the danger of hardening their hearts and rejecting Him and all that He has given to them...
      - It is, to put it in the language of the New Testament,
        - a warning about rejecting Christ—not living in Him by true faith—not abiding in His word so that we bear fruit.

TRANS> How God loves us such that He not only give us His revelation,

- but also pleads with us to abide in it so that we will live before Him!

3. The main point here is this:

- If God has revealed Himself to us so that we might continue in His grace, we must not use His revelation for some other purpose!
  - We must not take it in vain—it is for us!

- It is given to use and to our children that we might serve Him in His gracious covenant.

B. Today, I want to continue our scripture reading with Deuteronomy 30.

1. Here, we will see how the LORD presses upon His people the call to receive His word in faith so that they might be blessed.

- He explains to them that in His covenant, He has placed His word where it is totally accessible to them—
  - It is in their mouth and in their heart!
  - And He urges them to simply receive it!
- In verse 6,
  - He even promises that He will give a new heart to His elect so that they will be able to receive it for their salvation—for their blessing in His grace!
  - All you have to do is receive God’s Word in faith—and you will be saved.

2. Listen now as I read to you from Deut 30

- I will start with Deut 29:29
  - READ> Deut 29:29 – 30:20.

3. Do you see what gracious words these are?

a. The LORD has revealed Himself to us and He has made His revelation accessible to us,

- And He tells us that He will give us a heart for it so that we might continue to love Him as those who are redeemed through faith in His promises.
  - His Word is right there for us to believe!

b. Paul picks up on the words of verse 11-14 in Romans 10, applying it to us now that Christ has come...

- Especially he picks up on verse 14 where Moses said:
  - Deut 30:14: “But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.”
  - It is not about us going or coming or doing some great work to get to God, but about us receiving His word.
    - We do all that is required of us by faith in Jesus Christ whom God set forth of old under the statutes and ceremonies of the Old Covenant—
      - and now has fully revealed in the coming of Christ crucified.

- We either come to Him on the basis of His promise and embrace the life He has for us, or we reject Him.
- In Romans 10:5-10, Paul says:
  - Rom 10:5-10 For Moses writes about the righteousness which is of the law, "The man who does those things shall live by them." But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, "'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
- Do you see?
  - God's revelation is for us and for our children!
  - We must not take this revelation in vain.
  - What contempt we show for the LORD if we do!

## **II. Review from last week—Irreverence for God's decrees and providences.**

- I showed you last time that there are things that are revealed and things that are not revealed...(secret things that belong to the Lord our God like the day of Christ's return)
  - and we saw that among the things that are revealed, there are two types...
    - First, those things revealed to us through the plans and acts of God...
    - And secondly, those things revealed to us in His Word.
  - And we looked especially at the first of these...
    - as the abuse of those things that are revealed to us of God's plans and acts—"His decrees and providences" to use the language of the Catechism.
    - Let me quickly review some of the ways that we misuse this aspect of God's revelation:
- A. We show irreverence for God's decrees and providence when we murmur and quarrel about them...
  - as Israel did when they grumbled in the wilderness because they did not like the way God was doing things,
  - or as we do when we complain about sickness or about a difficult husband or wife, or about our lack of giftedness or our lack of money or whatever.
  - Neither is it for us to complain about the way the Lord is doing things in the big picture—such as that He sends people to Hell...

B. Secondly, we show irreverence for God's decrees and providences by curiously prying into them.

- This is what we might call an irreverent curiosity about the LORD.
- He has chosen not reveal to us the day and hour of His return, and those who have tried to figure it have been exposed as fools.
- There are those who claim to know God's mind about the salvation of a relative...
  - But God has not revealed that
    - It is your business to be a faithful witness
    - It is His business to save them.
  - He has given you all that you need to know to serve Him... we do not need to try to pry into the things He has not revealed. He is the LORD.

C. Third, we show irreverence for God's name by misapplying God's decrees and providences.

- Like Job's friends who concluded that Job was rebelling against God when suffering came upon him...
  - that was a misapplication of what God had done to Job.
- Or if we assume that the Lord must not mind if we run our business on the Lord's Day because we know a Christian who is very successful and does that.
  - That is a misapplication of God's providence... perhaps the man is blessed because he is a hypocrite whom God is hardening by prosperity.
- And in the area of guidance—an opened door is an opportunity, but it is not God telling you to go through the door.

TRANS> So there you have irreverent abuses of God's plan and acts (His decrees and providences) that we looked at last time...

- murmuring and quarrelling at them...
- curious prying into them...
- and misapplying of them...

### **III. Now let us look at ways of showing irreverence for His Word.**

- which is also given to us and our children that we might serve the LORD.

A. First, consider that the misinterpretation of His word is a violation of the third commandment.

1. It may seem a bit unfair to call this a violation of the third commandment... assuming that our misinterpretation is not intentional.
  - There are things in God's word that are hard for us to understand, and while we try to do our best, we certainly cannot have perfect understanding.
  - Even our teachers cannot agree on many particulars of the scriptures.

- But just because you are unable to have a perfect understanding does not excuse you for misinterpreting God's Word.
    - It is still a sin and a violation of the third commandment to misinterpret the word.
    - Don't ever suppose that just because you are not able to do something, you are not responsible to do it.
2. Do you not understand why it is that you misinterpret the word?
- It is because you are a sinner, and sin darkens your understanding.
    - People will misinterpret what the Bible says about women's ordination.
      - It says that women are not to teach or exercise authority in the church—they are not to be ordained as elders or ministers.
      - But there are many in our day who don't like this, and because they don't like it, they misinterpret it!
        - They feel that it must be wrong—so they convince themselves of another way to interpret things.
  - A person will wrongly interpret what the Bible says about sexuality or the Lord's Day because it seems too restrictive...
    - or a man will misinterpret a wife's call to submit to her husband because he wants to have justification for oppressing his wife...
    - or he will misinterpret it about tithing because he wants to excuse himself...
    - or he will misinterpret it about God's promises to our children because promises make him responsible...
      - Remember when Israel questioned God's promise to give them the land?
        - They did not want the responsibility the promise gave them to go in and take the land.
        - Parents don't want the responsibility that goes along with God's promise to bless their children.
  - But this is also true about even the more difficult things... like eschatology.
    - One of the reasons we have a hard time figuring out what scripture says is because there are things we don't want it to say or things we don't believe could be possible.
    - We all have many misinterpretations... and it is all because of sin!
3. But don't let this discourage you.

- Let it rather remind you how important it is to be like the Bereans and to search the scriptures to see what is true...
- Let it encourage you to ask God to examine your heart and show you if there is any wicked in way you...
  - And let it remind you of how much you need a Saviour!
  - But don't be discouraged!
- You are not justified because your interpretation of scripture is flawless.
  - If that was required, none could be justified!
    - We are sinners as long as we are in this world and we stand in constant need of God's mercy in Christ.
    - Let no one think himself to be without sin.
      - You break the third commandment all the time... when you misinterpret the scripture.
      - God is holy and it is a sinful misuse of His word.
        - But His mercy is greater than our sin.

TRANS> Closely related to this is the next item on the list...

B. Secondly, consider that the misapplication of God's word is a sinful abuse of it.

1. One form of misapplication occurs when we apply what was written to others as if it were written to us—when it is not warranted for us to do so.
  - An extreme version of this would be the Judaizers in the early church who wanted to impose the Jewish holy days, the food laws, and circumcision on the Gentiles.
    - These were ceremonies that applied to God's people until the coming of Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.
  - We see this kind of misapplication today by those who have introduced priests, musical instruments, the burning of incense, and such things into New Testament worship.
    - These are things that belong to the Old Covenant.
    - They do not belong to us.
  - Yet another example of misapplying words written to others can be seen in the contemporary tongues movement.
    - There are those who take passages addressed to the apostles and apply them in a wooden way to themselves...
      - for example, those in our day who claim to speak in tongues which was a special sign of the apostles,

- even though their modern version of tongues are languages that no one understands.
- And then there are those applications of things written to others that are just plain silly...
  - I have known those who will take something random, like the story of Jacob and his twelve sons,
    - and then say that God has promised to give them twelve elders for their congregation... or twelve leaders for their new ministry.
    - Or who read how Job's fortunes were restored and take it as a promise to them that God will restore their business that has failed.
  - Or there are those teachers who take the book of revelation and find Soviet spies and apache helicopters...
    - It makes for interesting talks, but it is an abuse of scripture...

TRANS> So we must be careful lest we apply what is written to others to ourselves when there is no warrant for doing so.

2. But we equally err when we *do not apply to ourselves* what *ought* to be applied, just because it was written to others.
  - a. Many in our day completely disregard the Old Testament as irrelevant.
    - But instead we ought to follow the example of the apostles in their use of the Old Testament.
    - Jesus and Paul and the other apostles continually expound the Old Testament scriptures in their teaching...
      - They do not apply ceremonies, which are fulfilled in Christ, but they apply the principles that set forth Christ.
      - Jesus makes it clear in His teaching that He did not come to abolish the OT, but to fulfill it.
        - He is the Lamb of God who takes the place of all the OT lambs.
        - He also expounds the moral law, applying it to his hearers, as do His apostles who even tell us that the law is now written on our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

TRANS> But we must also be careful about how we use God's moral law.

3. One very common form for misapplication is legalism...
  - Legalism makes a show of zeal in the application of God's Word,
    - but it actually is a way of dodging the true implications of God's law by making a bunch of outward rules...



- Jesus did a splendid job of exposing this kind of thing when He explained, for example,
  - that one who violates a minced oath is no better than one who violates an oath that actually uses God's name...
  - or that hating your brother in your heart was the same as murder...
  - and that the Sabbath was violated by those who made so many rules in a superstitious way that they missed that the day was made for man to worship God... that it was meant to be a blessed day with His Creator.

TRANS> Legalism is dangerous because it prevents us from seeing our true need of justification through Jesus Christ crucified.

4. There are those who misapply the whole teaching of scripture about salvation.
  - They use the Bible as a mere moral book...
    - They see it as essentially the same as other religious books.
    - They miss the very heart of the message that God is in the business of redeeming a people out of this sinful fallen world as His own.
      - They see Jesus as a moral teacher and an example,
        - but they do not see Him as a redeemer who bears the curse of His Father for His people.
  - Such persons will say that there is really no difference between Christianity and all the other religions...
    - that all are aimed at helping us to become better people and that all have their place.
    - This is a complete misuse of scripture!
      - It is a fatal violation of the third commandment because it is a misapplication of the Word of God that keeps people from salvation.

TRANS> Such a misapplication sends many to hell because it keeps them from having Jesus as the Saviour He was sent to be.

5. But of course we are all guilty of misapplying the word at some level.
  - Just as we saw with misinterpretation, we are not justified because of our perfect application.
    - We are saved by the righteousness of Jesus Christ.
    - But we must see to it that we have at least understood the gospel so that we are indeed resting on Him as the Saviour of our sins.
      - If we have, we will be eager to endeavour to apply His word rightly, all the while resting in His mercy for whatever failings we have.

TRANS> History is filled with sad examples of how God's word has been misapplied.

- But we must move on to the third way that the word is abused...

C. The perverting of God's word to profane jests, curious or unprofitable questions, vain janglings, or the maintaining of false doctrines.

- God's word is holy because it is given to us and to our children from God, as we have seen in Deuteronomy 29-30, that we may live in His gracious covenant.
  - We pervert it when we use it for other purposes.
  - Several such perversions are listed in the Catechism...

1. First, the word is sometimes perverted to profane jests.

a. There is a lot of humour in scripture, and it is right for us to join in the laughter.

- You have the account of the man born blind whom Jesus healed, asking the Pharisees if they want to be his disciples—
  - and telling them that it is a curious thing that here a man has given sight to a man born blind and they don't know where he is from.
- You have Jesus asking His disciples "who touched me" when there is a crowd pressing in from all sides,
  - or asking His disciples to feed the multitude when they have no food.
- Or you have Isaiah's humorous descriptions of idolatry that we saw recently.
  - There is nothing wrong about laughing at the humour in the Bible.

b. But profane jests involve making a mockery of God's holy word.

- I have heard men mock at the account of Noah and the ark because they think the story to be preposterous.
- There are those who ridicule the teaching of the Virgin Birth or of the Resurrection because they are too sophisticated to believe such accounts.

c. Profane jests would also involve jokes about Hell, as if it were a laughing matter.

- There is a grey area about which we may not agree when it comes to the appropriateness of certain religious jokes—
  - but suffice it to say that care must be exercised—and we must love and respect our brothers where there are smaller differences.
- Certainly it is not proper to pervert the word to crude or sexually inappropriate jests.
  - And when this is done, a rebuke is in order!

2. Secondly, God's holy word is sometimes perverted to curious or unprofitable questions.
  - a. There are those who have a love for theology as a mere scholastic game, who enjoy asking questions about such things as
    - the nature of angels—
      - How many can dance on the head of pin?
    - I remember at a creation seminar some of us attended,
      - there was a man there who kept asking about Ezekiel's vision and insisting that this was an alien visitation.
        - He was not looking to know God or serve God by raising this issue—it was just a curious matter of interest to him that was a diversion from what was really important.
  - b. It is one thing to have honest questions...but these must not be just curious and unprofitable questions that distract us from serving God.
    - There are men who just live to speculate...
      - In the early church, a lot of heresies arose by those in the east who began to speculate about the trinity...
        - While the scriptures clearly teach that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God,
          - And that there is only one God...
          - And that the three persons are distinct persons,
        - These men could not accept this teaching and began to speculate and come up with theories that denied one or the other of these truths that are clearly taught...
      - While the doctrine of the Trinity is largely settled in our day,
        - There are many who speculate about the Bible's teaching that God is 100% sovereign and that man is 100% responsible.
        - Because it does not make sense to them, they speculate and become confused.
    - We may answer questions of those who are struggling to understand with a view to serving God,
      - but the word is abused when it is reduced to a subject of sport for vain speculation or for raising of doubts.
3. Closely related to this, God's holy word is perverted to vain janglings
  - Vain janglings are arguments and debates about these curious and unprofitable questions.

- It is always very sad when believers quarrel,
    - There are matters about which we must step forward in an attempt to correct our brothers who are in error—in gentle and humble manner.
    - But there are other matters that we ought not quarrel about and that are nothing more than vain janglings that cause unnecessary division in the church.
4. And then lastly, there are those who pervert the word to maintain their false doctrines.
- a. We may think of the Roman Catholic Church and their doctrine of transubstantiation...
- the view that the bread and wine is turned into the actual body and blood of Jesus at the Lord's Supper...
    - They dreamed this up to maintain a dependency of the people on their priests for salvation.
  - They base this on a false interpretation of Jesus' declaration when He took the bread and said, "This is my body, given for you."
    - This is a perversion of scripture.
    - Jesus did not say that the bread turned into His body.
      - He was sitting right there with them when He said it.
      - He was declaring that the bread *represented* His body.
        - His language is no different than someone drawing a map and placing an X on the paper and saying, "
          - "Okay, this is my house..."
    - They do not mean that this X somehow transforms itself into their house!
      - They mean that it represents their house.
      - It is just foolish to say that if Jesus were drawing the map and said this, the X would actually turn into the house because He can do anything—even though the X is still only an X on a page.
      - When He said, "this is my body," the bread in His hand still looked like bread and tasted like bread—it did not turn into something different, but it was set apart to represent His body.
- b. Cults will often pervert the word to maintain their false doctrines...
- They will take hold of obscure passages and make significant doctrines out of them...

- Such as the Mormons with their teachings on the Baptism of the dead...
- They develop a whole doctrine out of one obscure verse from 1 Cor 15:29 and come up with a whole elaborate system in which genealogies are studied and persons are baptised in place of the dead.
- This gives them the appearance of wisdom because they claim to understand a verse that others do not understand...
  - They want people to conclude:
    - “Wow, these guys must really be close to God because they understand stuff that nobody else has a clue about.”
  - But their perverse doctrine is easily overthrown by the clear teachings of scripture—
    - Those who have died cannot be rescued by the living.
    - Our desire to rescue our dead relatives is understandable, but the Scripture closes the door to such desires...
      - This is not something that God has given to us and it is not for us to try to distort the scriptures to allow for it.

TRANS> We must not distort the scriptures about anything.

c. But here again, we must be humble and apply this to ourselves.

- 1) For we have all maintained doctrine that we thought was scriptural, only to find out later that we were maintaining error...
  - And it is certain that every one of us maintains various errors at this very hour—in ignorance—but still, it is error...
  - This is still sin!
    - This means that we need to be humble and teachable,
      - realising that we may have misunderstood...
      - We need to be eager to learn from others and to hear what they have to say.
    - And it means that we need to be patient with those who may not understand what God has made clear to us.
- 2) It is important to distinguish between the seriousness of various misinterpretations.
  - a) There are some errors that would exclude a person from church membership—
    - such as a denial of the deity of Christ—or a denial of Christ as the only way of salvation.

- We ought to patiently instruct those who hold to such errors, but we cannot admit them to membership.
- b) There are other errors that would exclude a person from eldership, but not from membership.
- Titus 1:9 says that an elder must be one who:
    - Titus 1:9: holds fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.
  - We may admit a person to membership is not clear about election or about church government.
    - But we will not allow them to serve as an elder or a deacon until these errors are corrected.
- c) We also need to distinguish between errors that need to be addressed right away,
- and others that we may bear with until there is more growth in a person.
    - Jesus told His disciples that He had many things to say them, but that they were not able to bear them now.
    - He had to wait for further growth and maturity before they would be ready to receive certain teachings.
  - Whatever the case, we should all be like the Bereans who searched the scriptures to see that what they were taught was true.

## **Conclusion**

My dear brothers and sisters,

- God has been very gracious to us, to reveal Himself to us by His mighty acts for us and by His word.
  - Let us see to it that we receive this precious revelation from our heavenly Father with gratitude and eagerness to serve.
  - It is given to us so that we may abide in our Father's wonderful house.
    - It is holy and pure revelation.
      - See that you do not receive it in vain or pervert it to vain uses.
      - It is for you and your children that you may do His will.