

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 113 f

A Profession that Profanes God's Name

Halifax, 17 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 eleventh sermon on the third commandment, and our sixth and final 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 unconfordable, unwise, unfruitful, and offensive walking, or backsliding from it.*

Today we are looking at the last part of this answer where it says:

making profession of religion in hypocrisy, or for sinister ends; being ashamed of it, or a shame to it, by unconfordable, unwise, unfruitful, and offensive walking, or backsliding from it.

You can see that this speaks about someone who professes to know the Lord.

- Remember that God makes a covenant with those He redeems...
 - And in that covenant He promises to be their God and to make them to be His people.
 - And when you are baptised (or in the OT when they were circumcised), you enter into this covenant—
 - you profess that God is your God.

- you profess that Jesus Christ has cleansed you from your sins by His suffering on the cross in your place, and that you are looking to Him for salvation.
 - If you continue in the covenant, you call upon His name, professing that He is your saviour and that you belong to God through Him.
- When you make a profession like this,
- you may be said to *take God's name*.
 - You *take His name* in a very deliberate way—an intentional way...
 - You know, in our study of this commandment we have talked about *unintentional* ways that people can *take God's name*...
 - for example, when they curse or swear in a careless way, even without using God's name, "damn this" or "I swear on my mother's grave"
 - They may say that have not taken God's name because they did not mention it...
 - but we have seen that when they curse or swear they cannot avoid taking His name, even if they do not believe in Him...
 - because He is the only one who can uphold their curse or their vow.
 - They drag his name into the matter whether they mean to or not.
 - And we talked about how people *take God's name* when they speak about His word or His works...
 - it can be as mundane as complaining about the weather when they aren't even thinking about God—
 - Still they take His name...because He sent the weather...
 - But when you make a profession of your faith—
 - then you are associating yourself with God's name in a very deliberate and direct way—
 - you are associating yourself with the true God and with His Son and with the Holy Spirit.
 - As a Christian you have God's name upon you!

So now your whole life is, in a very direct way, a reflection on God and on His Son.

- Your whole life now reflects upon God and His salvation.
 - You are constantly showing people what God's redeemed people are like.
 - You either give them an accurate picture or an inaccurate picture...
 - You either bring glory to God in the world by the way you represent Him, or you bring reproach to Him—
 - You either honour His name or discredit His name by your conduct.

Please turn to Romans 2:17-24 for our Scripture reading.

- In Romans 2:17-24, Paul speaks about this problem of dishonouring God's name.
 - He is addressing the Jews of His day who professed to be God's covenant people, but who did not live according to what they professed.
 - Of course this ought to be applied to Christians today who are God's covenant people and do not live up to their profession.
 - It is the old problem of not practicing what you preach!
- Listen now as I read it to you Romans 2:17-24.
 - READ> Romans 2:17-24.

I. What Paul is talking about is all too common

A. It was very common with the Jews.

1. They seemed to confuse *having* God's word with *obeying* God's word.
 - They took a certain comfort in the fact that they knew God's ways, that He had spoken to them,
 - but it did not seem to occur to them that they also needed to keep His ways—to obey and walk according to what He had graciously given them.
 - to believe it and live it!
2. Instead of looking for ways to implement God's word, they had found ways to get around what His word was saying.
 - They did this by taking certain aspects of God's commandments and creating a culture where those certain aspects were followed...
 - but their heart and even their actual conduct was not at all obedient.
 - They were not consciously thinking this—
 - They were felt good about what they were doing.
 - They felt superior to the pagans around them.
 - For example, the Jews were really appalled at the pagan immorality around them—
 - And the conduct of the Greeks was appalling!
 - The favoured sexual partner for Greek men was young boys.
 - This was not even looked at with disfavour among the Greeks—it was just part of life—and the Jews were disgusted...
 - But then they had their crazy legalistic divorce laws that made it perfectly acceptable to them to go from one woman to another—always by marriage of course!
 - They were ready to talk about how wicked their pagan neighbours were, but they were committing the same sins in a different form!

- B. But the same thing goes on today with Christians—God’s covenant people...
1. You have those who are out railing about abortion who abuse their own children by harshness—
 - Jesus says if you hate your brother in your heart you are guilty of murder—
 - how much more if it is your own child that you hate, and not just in your heart, but by hateful behaviour toward him!
 - I remember some neighbours we had when I was in seminary.
 - They had all sorts of Christian rules that they kept, but we were often embarrassed in hearing them yelling at each other in malice.
 - They were out protesting the murder of unborn children, but they themselves were guilty of murdering their own children.
 - The problem is not even merely that they yelled at their children in such a harsh way...
 - It is that they acted as if it was okay to yell at their children—as if abortion was sinful but as if their own hatred of their kids was okay.
 - The problem is not that they were harsh, but that they kept on being harsh without repentance... and felt themselves to be quite righteous because they would never abort their child!
 - Such conduct takes God’s name in vain.
 2. So what I am saying? that we should not oppose abortion because we sin too?
 - No, we ought to oppose abortion.
 - But we ought also to oppose hatred in every form as it appears in our lives.
 - We need to be humble!
 - If the world does not see us taking our own sins seriously, why are they going to listen to us when we talk to them about their sins?
 - If you want to make your children’s hearts as hard as stone, this is the way to do it.
 - Be harsh toward them about their sins and never confess your own.
 - Harp on them for doing the very same things you are doing.
 - I don’t mean that you should not address the wrongs that they do, but I mean that you need to also address the wrongs that you do.
- C. You see how the name of God is blasphemed by Christians in this way.
1. We represent Jesus Christ and His salvation!
 - We are the light of the world!
 - We are to show people what it means to walk in the light of God’s truth—to truly live before Him!

2. This does not mean that we are perfect
 - But when we walk in the light the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all our sin...
 - The light exposes the sin and we see our need of Jesus forgiveness and help to live in a very different way.
 - Our claim is not that we have no sin.
 - Our claim, as Christians, is that Jesus saves us from our sins.
 - Our claim is that we are finding new life in Him as He transforms us.

TRANS> Now let's look at some of the ways that those who profess to believe can profane God's name...

II. One of the worst ways a person can profane God's name is by a hypocritical profession of faith.

- A. You are a hypocrite if you say that you believe and that you want to follow Jesus when it is all just a lie.
 1. People will do that sometimes because they want to fit in with the crowd.
 - Churches are sometimes the only place that people can find love and acceptance.
 - And so, wanting to fit in, a person will "go along" with all the religious stuff so they can fit in with the crowd.
 - In a similar way, there are those who have joined the church in times when the church is flourishing because it is "the respectable thing to do,"
 - but this is hypocrisy.
 - Or maybe a young man professes his faith because he is interested in a certain Christian girl and knows that she won't be interested in him unless he becomes a believer.
 - Suddenly he becomes very interested in Bible study and prayer and going to church.
 2. Sometimes professions will be made for sinister ends...
 - Perhaps someone lives in the Bible belt and they think it will boost their sales if they are known to be a Christian...
 - or perhaps they see the people in the church as a great market for their product or service.
 - Even worse would be someone who holds to false religion who comes into the church to deliberately try to steal Christ's sheep away to his own religion.

- Paul talks about some of the Judaizers who came in to “spy out our liberty.”
- They hoped to impose all the Jewish ceremonial laws on the believers at Galatia, so they came in to the churches with this sinister purpose.

TRANS> Whatever the reasons may be, a hypocrite does not come in to the church because he is trusting Jesus and wants to serve him and to grow in his grace.

- That is what He says, but that is not what He does.

B. You can see how a hypocritical profession takes God’s name in vain...

1. The hypocrite embraces the precious gospel by profession, but has not true regard for it or for the Lord Himself!
 - It is as if the One who matters most does not matter at all!
 - It is a wicked disregard of the living God.
 - Here He has been gracious to give His only Son for our sins and the hypocrite claims to be thankful for this and to embrace Christ for salvation...
 - and promises to follow Him...
 - and he does all this before God—but he does not mean a word of it.
2. It is bad enough if you do that to another person!
 - Suppose there is a young woman and she wants a man’s riches...
 - So she pretends to love him and she marries him and stands there taking her vows all the while knowing that she is going to leave him as soon as she can.
 - But how much worse it is to play the hypocrite with God when He can see what you are doing the whole time!

TRANS> A hypocritical profession is one of the worst ways of profaning God’s name by a profession of religion.

III. Another way of profaning God’s name by your profession is to be ashamed of the Lord.

A. In Matthew 10:33, Jesus says that if we deny Him before men, He will deny us before His Father.

1. It may seem odd for a person who professes Jesus to be ashamed of Him...
 - I mean, how does that work?
 - How can they be said to profess Him if they deny Him?
 - Ah, there is a very common way that this is done!
 - The human heart is very deceitful!

- When a professing Christian is ashamed of Jesus,
 - he denies Him by embracing some sanitised version of Him that is less embarrassing.
 - We saw this when we studied the second commandment...
 - You just pretend that the things you don't like about Him are not so and add a few things that you do like.
 - You come up with a custom version of Jesus, just the way you want Him.

- There are many different versions of Jesus to choose from today... versions that are at least reasonably acceptable to our society.
 - There is the Jesus who does not judge anyone—who does not come with blood stained garments to execute God's vengeance on His enemies.
 - And there is the Jesus who evolves with the culture rather than challenging the culture in every generation.
 - And there is the Jesus who has a social gospel—of feeding the hungry and of delivering those who are subject to political oppression.
 - And there is the Jesus whose main agenda is saving the earth by recycling and cutting down on green house gases...
 - There is even the Jesus who wants to clean up all the filth in society—the drugs and the immorality and the vandalism.
 - All these Jesuses are more or less acceptable in our society.

- 2. But the real Jesus that many professing Christians deny is the Jesus who came to atone for sin.
 - The Jesus who declares that we are cursed and going to Hell apart from faith in His sacrifice.
 - The Jesus who says that without Him, no one comes to the Father.
 - that we are all entirely unfit to come to God apart from His death on the cross to atone for our sins.
 - That is the Jesus that the people of every generation—especially the religious people—want to crucify!
 - That is the Jesus about which the world says,
 - “You mean to tell me that everyone is going to hell who does not believe in this one religion?”
 - And a lot of professing Christians are ashamed to say “yes, that's what I am telling you.”
 - When you don't say “yes” to that question, you deny the real Jesus.
 - You don't want to be identified with Him because you are ashamed of Him.
 - It is the real gospel that causes the most shame.

- B. Paul knew that many people in His day were ashamed for the real Jesus...
- And so Paul declared emphatically that he was *not* ashamed of the gospel because it is the power of God for salvation.
1. That's what you need to remember!
 - The gospel is not something you can just take or leave—just abandon whenever you are around people that don't like it...
 - or water down in some way to make it acceptable.
 2. That is to take God's name in vain!
 - To act as the gospel is just a common thing—that you can take away this and add that like you can with an ice cream Sunday.
 - It is not!
 - It is a holy measure devised by a holy God to reconcile desperately sinful people to Himself.
 - It is precious!
 - When you are ashamed of it, you act like it is not precious—that it is not the power of God to salvation.
 - That is a very shameful way to behave!
 3. And I tell you that every one of us has our moments when we have been ashamed—
 - when we have adjusted the truth because we are ashamed—as if we really could adjust the truth!
 - I don't mean that you have to be obnoxious or that you always have to say everything in every context.
 - Jesus tells us not to cast our pearls before swine...
 - And He tells us to be wise as serpents and harmless as doves...
 - but too often our silence has more to do with shame than it does to do with wisdom.
 - But I do not wish to grind you down in saying this!
 - The thing to focus on is not so much trying to exert yourself to be bolder.
 - The key is to realise more and more that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation...
 - To see how precious it is so that you will love it so much and love your Lord so much that you will never be ashamed of Him.
 - Keep on growing in your sense of His great love, of His great power in saving us and transforming us...
 - Then you will not be ashamed.

TRANS> You see then how being ashamed of the gospel is to take God's name in vain.

- It is to count Jesus and what He did for us as ordinary and unimportant!
- But besides being ashamed of the gospel,

IV. There are those professing Christians who are a shame to the gospel.

A. They are like the Jews we read about in Romans 2 who make their boast in God, but dishonour Him by the way they live!

1. When you profess Christ, you are associated with Him...

- you represent Him.
 - Just the way someone who works at the counter at a hotel represents the hotel...
 - If they are rude or incompetent, it reflects on the hotel.

2. Jesus tells us that we are the light of the world!

- Most people don't discover the gospel itself, they discover Christians.
 - And then Christians proclaim the gospel to them.
- That is why Peter says:
 - 1 Peter 2:9-12: But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvellous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honourable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.
- You can have honourable conduct that brings glory to God...
 - or you can have shameful conduct as a professing Christian that brings shame to the LORD and His gospel.
 - Even though living like Jesus will stir up people's hatred and criticism,
 - Peter points out that if you live for Christ, the enemies of the gospel will be forced to glorify God at the last day because of you.
- How careful you ought to be about your walk!
 - You are here to proclaim God's praises as His own people in the world!
 - You are representing Him and His Son and His grace in this world!

B. The Catechism gives us a good list to think about ways that we may be a shame to the gospel.

1. First, by unconformable walking.

- In Romans 12, we are told not to be conformed to this world,

- but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds that we may prove what the good and acceptable and perfect will of God is.
- When you come to Jesus Christ and profess Him, you come looking to be saved from your sin...
 - and to be conformed to the beautiful ways of God’s household—to be transformed and renewed.
 - You are to conform to *His* ways, putting off your own ways.
- And what are *His* ways?
 - It is to love as Jesus loves, to obey as Jesus obeys.
 - Jesus was conformed to God’s ways and He taught us to follow Him.
 - We are to give our lives for others in obedience to God the way He did...
 - to have a love so deep that we will sacrifice for others—my life for yours!
- Moses describes what the reaction of the people around us will be when we do God’s will.
 - Deut 4:5-8: Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to *them* in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?
 - When the pagans observed the church in the first century, they admired them, saying, “See how they love one another!”
 - It was a new thing to them that they had never seen.
 - May it be so with all of us by the grace of Jesus and by the working of the Holy Spirit.

TRANS> When you are not conformed to the gospel, you bring shame to the gospel.

- That is the first way.

2. Secondly, you can profane the gospel by unwise walking

- Wisdom begins with the fear of the LORD.
 - That is the starting point for wisdom.
 - You fear the LORD when you are more concerned about pleasing Him than you are about pleasing anyone else.

- And of course when that is the case, you come to love His Word...
 - You begin to meditate on it day and night, looking to apply what He says to all of life—
 - to see things from the perspective of His holy Word.
 - to see His hand in all of life—so that you are always responding to Him.
- When this is so, you become one who walks in wisdom, understanding what the will of the Lord is.
 - You see the way to go—
 - You see the destruction that comes from the wrong path—and you learn to walk in the right path.
 - You don't do a bunch of stupid things that you will later regret!
 - The fool's way is like a hedge of thorns—
 - He goes along trying to take the easy way and it ends up being the hard way as he gets himself into one tangle after another!
 - Let me give you an example...
 - The fool wants something he can't afford, say, a certain car...
 - so the fool goes out and gets a high interest loan (because no one trusts him for a low interest loan)...
 - And before all the payments are made, the car is toast (partly because it wasn't taken care of)...
 - and now the fool is making big payments and is without a car to get to work.

TRANS> When people look at us—we who profess the gospel—they need to see wisdom and discernment that comes from above—not folly!

- We have the word of God to guide us.
- Do not be fools, but be wise, understanding what the will of the LORD is.

TRANS> So we have seen that you can profane the name of the Lord by unconformed and unwise walking as a professing believer.

- Those are the first two ways...

3. Third, you can profane the gospel by unfruitful walking

- a. In Isaiah 5, the LORD described His people as a vineyard that did not bear fruit.
 - He did everything for it—it was in a fruitful place, He provided everything that was needed for growth and protection...

- But it did not bring forth good grapes.
- It was unfruitful and God said that He was going to lay it waste!
 - The unfruitfulness brought reproach to the LORD.
 - These were His people and there should have been much fruit!

TRANS> So what can be done about unfruitful walking?

- b. In John 15, Jesus tells us that if we abide in Him, we will bear much fruit...
 - and that our fruit will glorify our father who is in heaven.
 - The fruit He is talking about is the fruit of the Spirit.
 - This fruit grows when we are looking to Him and living by His grace and power—abiding in Him.
 - Paul names the fruit of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.
 - If these things are lacking, you need to turn to Jesus for the grace of life—He will give you the Holy Spirit if you will ask Him.

TRANS> So we have seen unconformable walking, unwise walking, and unfruitful walking as ways that we can profane the gospel...

4. Fourth, we can profane God's name by offensive walking as professing believers.
 - This is the kind of walking that we read about in Romans 2 when Paul said that the Jews caused the nations to blaspheme.
 - They looked at how God's people were living and it gave them cause to speak against God.
 - a. But what about Jesus?
 - We are told that both Jews and Greeks were highly offended with Him!
 - He caused offense wherever He went.
 - You must understand though, that Jesus did not walk in an offensive manner...
 - People were offended with Him, not because He did anything wrong, but because the vileness and corruption that is in man.
 - In other words, they had no just cause to be offended with Him.
 - So you must not suppose that you have done something wrong just because people get offended with you.
 - Jesus rather tells us that if we follow Him faithfully, many people will be offended with us without a cause.
 - You see, those who do not believe are trying to suppress the truth.
 - When faithful believers are around, their consciences are disturbed.

- That is what fuels persecution.
 - Jesus says to rejoice when you are persecuted because your reward in heaven will be great.
 - You are in the company of prophets and righteous men who also were persecuted for righteousness sake.
 - And most of all you are in His company.
 - He said, “if they have persecuted Me, they will persecute you.”

TRANS> So don't ever suppose that anyone is guilty of offensive walking just because people are offended with him.

- b. You are only guilty of offensive walking when you do things that cause others to be justly offended—to think ill of our faith...
 - 1) What a shameful thing it is when professing Christians are slack at work, or when they stretch the truth to make a sale...
 - or when they are always themselves getting offended—having a chip on their shoulder.
 - I have met Christians who think they are being persecuted when the truth is they are just being difficult to get along with.
 - 2) And then, of course, there is the offense that comes from scandalous sins.
 - We all know how Christ's name has been dragged through the mud by evangelists who turn out to be visiting prostitutes or cheating on their taxes...
 - And we constantly hear of the scandals of abusive priests in the Roman Catholic Church.
 - The media and the world loves these stories because it gives them occasion to discredit the truth—again to ease their troubled consciences.
 - 3) We must also think of offensive walking as that of those who lead others astray and cause them to stumble.
 - Parents can be guilty of provoking their children to wrath...
 - Ministers can teach error and cause believers to stumble.
 - Christians can set a bad example rather than a good example that causes others to follow... to stumble.

TRANS> So you see that professing Christians can bring shame to the gospel by unconfomable walking, unwise walking, unfruitful walking, offensive walking,

- And lastly,

5. Professing believers can bring shame to the gospel by backsliding.
 - a. In Hebrews 6, persons who draw back from the gospel are said to have put Christ to open shame!
 - This is a terrible thing—to come and profess the gospel, to understand it, and then to reject it as a worthless thing!
 - The LORD does not take this lightly! The gospel is the most precious thing in all the world!
 - In Hebrews we are given these fearful words about this sin...
 - Heb 10:26: If we sin wilfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The LORD will judge His people."
 - b. Understand, of course that those who are truly born again will never reject the truth because the seed of new life is in them and they cannot sin like this.
 - The epistle of first John makes it clear that those who go out from us were never really of us—for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us, but they went out that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.
 - Those who are truly regenerate are kept by the power of God through faith.
 - c. But that does not mean that true believers are never guilty of backsliding in lesser ways—ways that are not unto complete apostasy...
 - True believers can begin to grow cold toward God's word, can begin to lose their first love,
 - can lose their zeal for the things of Christ and grow slack in their service.
 - They can dry up their soul by giving themselves over to drink, to lust, to bitterness, or to ingratitude and self pity.
 - They can even commit grievous sins the way King David did when he committed adultery,
 - or the way the Apostle Peter did when he denied Christ.
 - When they do, they are, by their actions, declaring that the gospel is not worth much...
 - that Jesus Christ is not worth expending much energy for or laying down ones live for...
 - They are taking the gospel and all that God has done for them in vain!

Conclusion

Oh my brothers and sisters!

- Has your heart grown cold to the things of the Lord?
 - Do you love the Lord Jesus?
 - Are you taking the gospel of our dear Lord in vain?
 - Let it not be so!
 - How wrong it is of you to do that!

- Renew your zeal!
 - Consider who He is that you serve!
 - Consider what He has done!
 - Walk in a way that brings honour and glory to Him and that shows your appreciation for all that He has done!
 - Do not be ashamed of the gospel or a shame to it!
 - It is a glorious gospel.
 - Do not take the name of the LORD in vain.

- And if you have...
 - Be broken and repent...
 - Return to Jesus Christ and find His full forgiveness in that very gospel that you have been despising!
 - For Paul declares to us in 1 Tim 1:15:
 - 1 Tim 1:15: This is a faithful saying worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief.