

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## *Question 109-c*

Halifax, 25 April 2010

### **Introduction:**

Today we continue our study of the second commandment.

- We spent the first three weeks looking at what is required in this commandment (Q. 108),
- So far we have taken two weeks to look at what is forbidden in the second commandment as outlined for us in Q. 109.
  - Here is the question and the answer:

### **Q. 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 pretense whatsoever; simony; sacrilege; all neglect, contempt, hindering, and opposing the worship and ordinances which God has appointed.**

In the first sermon related to this question, we looked 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; tolerating a false religion...**

- We saw that essentially, the second commandment forbids us to follow our own ideas in the way we worship God.
  - We went to Genesis 4 and looked at the story of Cain and Abel where Cain did not offer what God has commanded in faith and was rejected.
- I showed you that the sin of Cain is still going on today in the worship of God.
  - There are many who try to approach Him in their own way instead of in the way that He has appointed.

- And they become very angry if those who preach the gospel tell them that they and their worship is not accepted because they did not come in the way God has appointed.
- That way, of course, is Jesus Christ.
  - No one can come to the Father but by Him!
  - If we come without faith in His offering to take away our sins, we will be rejected, no matter how sincere and sacrificial our worship may be.
- We learn here the principle that as sinners,
  - we are in no position to decide what is appropriate for us to bring to God.
  - We must get our instructions from God in His word.

In the second sermon on the things forbidden in the second commandment, we more or less considered this part of the answer to Question 109:

- **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 worshiping of it, or God in it or by it;**
- This is the thing that is *expressly forbidden* in the second commandment:
  - the very matter of making images or other likeness of God and using them as aids to our worship.
  - I mentioned to you the curious way that we can say that we are keeping a commandment in the spirit of law even though we are breaking it in the letter...
    - bowing before images of Christ or using pictures of him to excite our affection in worship...
      - all the while claiming that it is not a violation of the second commandments because we are not worshipping the image, but Christ who is represented in the image—
        - but that is precisely what we are commanded not to do here!
        - Its like claiming to be free from adultery because we were thinking about our spouse when we had relations with another.

And now this week, we are going to move on to look at what the Larger Catechism calls:

- **all superstitious devices, corrupting the worship of God, adding to it, or taking from it,**
  - This includes those things that we suppose are going to aid us in our worship or bring God and His blessing near to us.
  - They would include things like praying to the saints, the making of holy days that God has not commanded, engaging in certain postures or making certain motions with our hands, setting up symbols to ward off evil spirits or excite our devotion, making use of certain ceremonies, singing religious songs that God has not

authorised, burning incense, performing dramas, religious processions, holy clothing, using water from the Jordon River to baptise, use of musical instruments in worship, and all other such things.

- These things are superstitious because the worshippers suppose that by using them they will someone enhance their worship...
  - either pleasing God more or enriching themselves more (securing a blessing for themselves).
- And you see that even though the Catechism uses the word *all* in saying that *all* such superstitious devices are forbidden,
  - it goes on to emphasise what is meant by *all* by saying:
    - **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 pretense whatsoever.**
  - You can tell that the men who wrote the Catechism were well acquainted with the arguments that men will use to justify their practices!
    - One person will suppose that his additions to worship are good and pure because he invented it himself—it is not just empty tradition—it is something he came up with entirely on his own!
      - And that is supposed to make it pure—it was out of his own heart...
      - But this is the very thing that is prohibited in Colossians 2 and are referred to as “self-imposed religion.”
      - God is not looking for creativity in worship, He is looking for obedience.
      - It is no good argument to say that you have come up with it yourself.
    - At the same time, another will argue that what he is doing must be right because it has a long history of use in the church.
      - But this is exactly the kind of arguments that were used by the Jews in Jesus’ day.
        - They accused Jesus of transgressing the tradition of the fathers...
          - but Jesus turned it back on them and rebuked them for making the commandment of God of no effect by their vain traditions.

And so today as we consider this topic, I want to consider one particular tradition that has become almost universal in the modern church—

- so much so that most people think it is really strange and even wrong if it is not followed...
  - And that is the tradition of the singing of uninspired songs to the accompaniment of musical instruments.

- I want to address this, not to say that all churches who do not follow the scriptures in this matter are apostate or cannot be true churches of Jesus Christ...
  - We must remember that God was very pleased with men like Asa and Jehoshaphat and the many other kings of whom it is said that they fully followed the LORD *except* in that they did not remove the high places...
    - They were still God's servants and He accepted them, but it was still His desire that they had more completely reformed their worship.
    - It should be our desire not to do what God is willing, in His mercy, to tolerate, but rather to do what is fully pleasing to Him.
  - So my goal is not to trash all of our good brothers who out of ignorance and tradition do not fully reform their worship according to scripture,
    - but rather to strive in a brotherly way to encourage and promote a more complete reformation and resultant unity in our worship.
- There are so many controversies in the churches that arise about worship today and about what sort of music should be used...
  - do we have a symphony? or a brass band? or electric guitars and drums? or a huge pipe organ? or a piano? or a little stringed quartet? or an acoustic guitar?
  - It is a terrible thing to see the church so divided...
    - to have worship for the youth that is different than worship for the seniors.
    - And if we put them together, do we force the seniors to endure heavy metal or do we force the youth to endure the fat lady singing "I come to the Garden Alone while the dew is still on the roses?" to a warbly organ?
    - Of do we just go with what the more refined folks in the congregation want and have a well trained symphony?

My brothers and sisters,

- I submit to you that God has given us a complete book of praises in the Bible for our use when we come before Him,
  - and that He has commanded nothing else but the plain singing of these songs.
  - We have no authorisation from Him either to write our own songs for use in worship or to embellish our songs with all sorts of musical instruments.
    - Many controversies would be avoided if we would simply return to God's Word and reform our worship according to that holy standard, neither adding anything of our own or taking away from it.

- And let me be clear from the outset that I am not talking about a political assembly or an assembly of friends you invite over to your house or a musical concert that is put on by trained artists in our community...
- You can make use of all kinds of instruments and songs as long as they are not wicked songs filled with blasphemy or fornication and idolatry...
  - (I realise I just eliminated an awful lot with that statement—but I will have to say more about that in a future sermon)...
    - but I am speaking of the assembly of God’s people for worship.
  - I would even go so far as to say that it is good for us to write songs for each other about God and about His creation and about beauty and about sorrow and about people...
    - and it is good for us to learn to play to musical instruments for each other and to write songs for each other...
- But when we come together in the Christian Assembly to worship God,
  - It is then that we are called apart to worship Him according to His directives without adding anything of our own (or taking anything away),
    - and He has not authorised us to write our own songs or to embellish our singing with musical instruments in New Testament worship.
    - And that is the key you know!
      - If we are going to do something in the worshipping assembly, we must have warrant to do it from the word of God.
      - It is not for us to just add something to His worship because we like it or think it helps us or will help others.
        - We can add things that are common to all societies like lighting and furnaces and air conditioners and chairs, but we are not authorised to add to the worship itself.

So let us begin with a scripture reading in which we are shown on no uncertain terms that:

### **I. We are called to sing praises in the Christian Assembly.**

- Please turn to Hebrews 2:10-18.
- READ Hebrews 2:10-18.

- A. You can see that the overall thrust of this is that Jesus, because He has reconciled us to God by His own self-offering, is not ashamed to claim us as His own even though we are by nature sinners.
- He calls us His brothers and He worships with us before God's throne because He has sanctified us to God by His own blood.
    - He is the one who sanctifies us so that He can present us to the Father without shame.
- B. And you see in particular that in verse 12, He quotes from Psalm 22:22 where He speaks about singing with those He has reconciled to God in the assembly:
- Heb 2:12: "I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to you."
    - What a beautiful picture this is!
      - Psalm 22 is, of course, about the cross.
        - And from verse 21 on, Christ is telling about the wonderful things that will follow that acceptance of His sacrifice for His people's sins.
        - He says that He will declare God's name to His brethren and that in the midst of the assembly He will sing praise to God.
      - The picture of that of the resurrected Christ, risen for the justification of His people after pouring Himself out as an offering for them,
        - gathering them together to sing praise to God for their salvation!
          - the salvation that He has just accomplished for them!
        - It is a beautiful, touching, glorious picture!
          - Our risen LORD is the Head of the church.
          - He is the One who calls the assembly together and who has appointed the preaching of the gospel and the singing of praise.
          - He Himself sings with us, as it were.
            - He is our leader in worship, giving thanks to God for accepting His offering so that we might all be pardoned and reconciled.
            - How He loves us!

TRANS> But now the great question that concerns us must be asked.

- Singing of praise is clearly authorised for New Testament Worship,
  - but what songs are we to sing?
  - And are these songs to be accompanied with the playing of musical instruments?
- In order to answer these two questions, we must obviously look beyond this passage.
  - We will take up these two questions one at a time.

## II. First, what songs are we to sing?

A. All we are told in Heb 2:12 is that we are to “sing praise.” (ὕμνεω hoom-neh’-o)”

1. This is helpful because a hymn is a song of praise to a god or to a hero.
  - So we know that it is a song of *praise*,
  - and because it says “*to you*” it tells us that it is a song of praise to God.
2. The word ὕμνεω is a verb here.
  - It is also used as a noun in scripture—the word ὕμνος from which we get our word *hymn*.
  - Let’s look at some of the places where this word is used...
- a. Two of these are in the gospels when we are told that after the Last Supper,
  - Jesus concluded the celebration by the singing of a *hymn*.
  - Traditionally, the hymn that was sung after the Passover was the great Hallel which includes Psalm 113-118.
  - And as these Psalms are very suited to what Jesus was about to do, we have no reason to suppose that Jesus did not follow this tradition.
  - It is very important for us to understand something here as modern Christians.
    - We often speak of psalms as the inspired songs in our Bibles and hymns as songs that written by men who are not inspired.
    - It is fine to use this conventional way of speaking, but we must realise that the Bible does not have a distinction like this.
    - But we must understand that in the language of the NT,
      - The word “hymn” is not used in distinction from “Psalm,”
      - It simply refers to a song of praise to God.
- b. Another place where this word is used is in the parallel verses found in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16.
  - In these nearly identical verses, the word *hymnos* is used as part of a triad...
    - We are told to speak to one another (or admonish one another) in “psalms, hymns (this is ὕμνος), and spiritual songs—singing...etc.”
- 1) We need to consider what each of these terms involves and how they are being used:

- a) The word “psalms” is used to refer to the book of psalms, for example, Jesus speaks of “the things that are written in the psalms concerning me.”
  - And Paul, in 1 Cor 14 uses the verbal form to speak of “psalming” or singing to God with both the spirit and the understanding.
  - So the term can be used of the book of psalms or more broadly simply of singing.
  
- b) And the two words “spiritual songs” are also two words in Greek.
  - The word *song* is *odee* (like our word ode)
    - and it speaks simply of words that are sung,
  - And of course with the word “spiritual” modifying it,
    - it speaks of those songs that are either about spiritual things or that originate from the Holy Spirit.
    - A spiritual man, for example, in Scripture, is one who has the Holy Spirit dwelling within.
  
- 2) There is no indication that these three words, as used together like this, are speaking of three different types of song.
  - It is more likely that it is simply the stylistic way that the Hebrews often speak...
    - for example, they take of “statutes, ordinances, and commandments”...
    - In Exodus 1:7, we are told that the children of Israel were
      - “fruitful and increased abundantly, multiplied and grew exceedingly mighty; and that the land was filled with them.”
      - Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual songs appears to be just a stylistic way of telling us to sing a lot.
  - But whatever the case, there is one thing that is absolutely certain:
    - All three of these terms can be used to refer to the Psalms.
    - In fact, all three of these terms are used in the Greek translation of the Psalms that was used by Paul and by the Gentile churches of his day.
    - Sometimes one or them, sometimes two of them, and in Psalm 76 all three of them are used in the titles of the psalms.
      - So it is certain that when we are told that we are to sing Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs,
      - Paul could very well refer to the book of Psalms found in our Bibles.



- B. I submit to you that Paul *was* referring to the Psalms that we have in our Bibles.
1. This must be so because God had given us these songs to sing.
    - What other songs would He be thinking of when He commands us to sing than the songs that He Himself has given us in His word?
    - a. If He has given us a collection of praises in our Bibles,
      - songs that are inspired by the Holy Spirit and given to us to sing,
        - what possible reason do we have for writing our own songs to be used in the worship of God?
        - What authority do we have for such an undertaking—
          - for me to write a song and expect other people to use in the worship of God?
          - Unless I have been expressly appointed by God to do such a great undertaking,
            - how could I take so great a thing to myself?
    - b. Consider how careful the Lord has been in giving us the scriptures.
      - He has sent forth His prophets and His apostles and He has given them signs and wonders to accompany their ministry—to show that they are sent by Him.
      - And He has told us that these men speak by the Holy Spirit so that they do not speak the words of men, but very word of God.
        - He has made a great difference between the word of man and the word of God.
        - And He is so zealous that we recognise the different between His words and man's words that He even commanded death for those who claimed to speak His word if their signs and prophecies did not come to pass.
          - There was no trifling about this!
  - He even commanded that those who preach His word in the church much be carefully selected.
    - They are to be disciplined and trained and carefully examined by the Presbytery.
    - They are to exhibit Christian maturity and meet all the qualifications outlined in Timothy and Titus for those who desire the office of elder.

- They are commanded not preach their own doctrine, but to preach only from the holy Scriptures,
- and the people are commended for searching the scriptures to see if what they preach is true.

TRANS> God has been very careful about guarding the integrity of His holy Word.

- c. And amidst all the revelation that He has given us in His word, we have a collection of inspired songs that are part of the revealed scriptures.
    - 1) If there were no such collection and we were commanded to sing,
      - we would then take the command to sing to be a command to compose songs for singing.
      - But where there is a complete collection of songs given to us in the Word of God,
        - why would we not automatically assume that it is this inspired collection from which we are to sing?
        - God hands us an inspired song book and tells us to sing—and then we take it upon ourselves to go and write our own songs!
    - 2) We have no more authority to write our own songs for use in worship than to write our own scriptures for use in public worship.
      - No one would think of taking a collection of his own writings and attaching them to scripture to be read in place of or alongside scripture.
        - But we have an inspired song book and we write another book of our own songs and bring it to church in place of the inspired book—or in addition to it.
        - And then people are taking the words of men and offering them as praise to God rather than the words of God.
2. As a secondary argument, I would point out that our own compositions are greatly inferior and have often been the seed bed of heresy in the church.
    - a. That the words of man are inferior to the word of God, of course, goes without saying.
      - We all know that, yet strangely it has become the prevailing practice in the modern church to use what is inferior!
      - Even though we *know* that man's words are inferior, there is yet a preference for them.
      - Why would we choose what is inferior over what is superior?

- b. And if we look at the hymns that have been written over the last three hundred years of so and we compare them to the psalms, we can see a glaring deficiency in them.
- There is very little emphasis on the wrath and judgement of God against sin and against sinners.
    - And the think that makes it all the worse is that we have left this out because this is something we do not like about God.
    - It is an aspect of His glorious character that He wants to be praised for that we don't find praiseworthy.
      - When believers who have sung human hymns all their lives first start singing psalms, they find it difficult to praise God for His wrath and judgement.
      - Sometimes those who compile the Psalms for singing are so uncomfortable with this that they edit these parts out of the psalms.
  - And what has been the fruit of withholding the praise of God that is due to Him?
    - The church has, by and large, embraced a foppish, effeminate view of the living God!
    - Even an excellent expositor like John Stot can now question if Hell is eternal.
      - And in many parts of the church, the cross is no longer seen as an outpouring of God's wrath upon His Son...
        - It is only about unjust suffering for a cause in which Jesus is held up as an example to inspire us.
        - In trying to focus only on the love of God, we have lost the highest expressing of His love in that He poured out His wrath upon Christ as our substitute so that we might be pardoned!
      - And even among those who still hold to the cross,
        - there is a reluctance to praise God for His wrath and judgement and a tendency to be embarrassed about Hell and about the exclusivity of the gospel.
  - This is the sin of idolatry as it is described in Romans 1!
    - Rom 1:21-23 although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things.
    - They worship God as they wish Him to be rather than as He is.

- c. Just think about this as far as His glory!
    - When we are worshipping Him in song, more than any other time perhaps, we are praising Him for who He is.
      - Isn't it vitally important that we get it right?
      - How improper it is—even insulting—to come before our sovereign ascribing our own distorted ideas about Him to Him.
        - Would you like for someone to be praising you and to misrepresent you?
        - We saw a monument in Woodstock of a man named George Leslie Mackay who was used greatly to bring the gospel to the Taiwanese.
          - Pastor Kingswood told about how at the dedication to the monument, liberal ministers misrepresented the work of the great man, describing him as a revolutionary sort, but that there were Taiwanese people there who spoke of how he had brought the Word of God to their ancestors.
      - God knows how prone we are to misrepresent Him because of our human sin and weakness.
        - That is why He has given us an inspired word in writing complete with an inspired song book.
3. Having heard my arguments, you will say to me,
- “But what is your scriptural argument for singing only from the collection of songs that God has given us in His word.”
    - “You have not given us a verse that says we must only sing inspired songs.”
- a. And I will admit that I have not.
    - The argument for this is that God has commanded us to sing praise to Him and that He has given us book of inspired praises.
      - I do not have an absolute proof text that says to only sing psalms.
      - All I have is a God who has given me a command to sing praise to Him and who has also given me a book of inspired praises.
        - That's really all there is to it!
  - b. But I would ask anyone who wants to sing other songs besides the ones God has given to us to show me where there is a command for that.
    - Where are we commanded to compose songs of praise or to sing uninspired songs of praise that we have written?
      - If you don't have a command, what warrant do you have to do it?

- 1) Sadly, there are some who argue that we need new songs of praise now that Jesus has come and finished His word on the cross.
  - I have actually had people tell me that the Psalms do not speak of Christ!
    - This betrays a grossly deficient understanding of the Psalms, for they are full of Christ.
    - They are fuller than many of the songs that are sung today that repeat His name again and again without setting forth His true glory and character.
  
- 2) There are Psalms like Psalm 2 or Psalm 110 that expressly speak of the Son of God, but there is much more of Christ than this!
  - In Psalm 23, he is the one we speak of as our Shepherd.
    - In Psalm 1, He is the righteous man who meditates on God's law day and night and does not walk in the counsel of the ungodly—
      - and every righteous man who sings that psalm has righteousness in Christ alone.
  - In Psalm 32, He is the one who is groaning under the burden of sin (the sin of His people) and who has paid the penalty of that sin so that it is no longer imputed to Him or to us.
    - In Psalm 45, He is the glorious bridegroom who goes forth to take His bride and establish her in His glorious household...
    - We could go on and on—
      - Even in Psalm 88, He is the man who is despised and rejected without friend, cut off under the wrath of God, when He went to the cross.
  - Christ is everywhere in the Psalms—beautifully, gloriously, and purely presented to us in our praises and as the one who praised with us as our Mediator and head.

### **III. Now consider the use of instruments.**

- A. Are we to accompany our songs with musical instruments, and if so, what instruments are we going to employ?

This is something we will have to consider next time...