

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## *Question 109-e*

Halifax, 9 May 2010

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

### **Introduction:**

I am finding there is a lot to say about the second commandment.

- I was planning to move on to the next section in the answer to Question 109,
  - but as I began working on the message it occurred to me that there is another important matter related to the portion of Question 109 that we have been looking at for the last two weeks.
  - The portion that tells us that the second commandment forbids:
    - **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 pretence whatsoever;**
  - For the last two weeks, we looked at two particular traditions in our own denomination that have arisen in the last century,
    - The singing of uninspired songs...
    - The singing of praise to musical accompaniment.
  - Our denomination decided to allow churches to engage in these practices, despite the opposition of our fathers to this,
    - and with great rapidity these practices became almost universal so that many in the denomination do not even know of our former practice.

- As these are so prevalent even within our own denomination as well as in the church at large,
  - I thought it would be good for me to show scriptural reasons for opposing these practices.
- The matter I am disposed to speak about today is not one that has been accepted within our particular denomination.
  - But it is an errant practice that is wildly popular in the universal church, even among those who profess to adhere to the gospel.
    - And that is the practice of pagan spirituality that has become so common in the charismatic and Pentecostal branches of the church.

As this was a heretical worship practice that arose in the early church and is addressed by the Apostle Paul.

- We are able to turn to the scripture where he addresses this for help.
  - Please turn to 1 Cor 12 and give me your attention as I read to you from 1 Cor 12:1-11.
  - READ 1 Cor 12:1-11.

## **I. Paul is talking here about pagan spirituality.**

- A. It is important to understand that Corinth was a very religious city and a very immoral city at the same time.
1. Just to give you an idea,
    - There were, in this city of 650,000 persons—400,000 slaves and 250,000 free persons,
      - 12 pagan temples!
      - And immorality was so widespread that Greek verb “to Corinthianize” came to mean “to practice sexual immorality.”
  2. And lest you should be confused about the nature of the city’s spirituality,
    - the immorality was an integral part of the religion.
    - Perhaps Corinth’s most famous temple was the temple of Aphrodite which employed as many as 1000 (some say 2000) prostitutes at one time!
    - Aphrodite was the goddess of love, so her worshippers engaged in illicit sex.
  3. The worship at these pagan temples also involved other practices...
    - a. Drunkenness and drug use was a very common feature of pagan spirituality.

- The idea was that coming under the influence of drugs brought you under the influence of the spirit of the god.
- b. There was also the widespread practice of cursing the deity.
- This was a bazaar way to connect with the god—to get his attention.
- c. There was also a lot of tongue speaking and prophecy that went on in these temples.
- 1) This was different than the tongue speaking spoken of in scripture in which persons were enabled to praise God in real languages that foreigners could understand.
    - They would go into a spiritual frenzy and speak in tongues that no one could interpret (they were not real languages),
      - and they would feel that in this way the gods were speaking through them.
      - We have records of this kind of pagan tongue speaking going back 2000 years before Christ.
        - It was done as far back as the time of Abraham in Egypt.
  - 2) And the prophecy was also quite different than the prophets of Jehovah.
    - You know from the scriptures that Baal had prophets in Israel during the time of Elijah.
      - And that in the time of Moses, there were prophets like Balaam.
      - These prophets appear to have had some measure of supernatural power, but they often erred in their prophecies.
- d. Overall, the worship at Corinth was wild!
- The general understanding was that the goal of worship was to have yourself taken over by the spirit of the god.
    - You would know that you were taken over when you began to exhibit bazaar behaviour—shouting, laughing out of control, ecstatic tongue speaking, rolling on the floor, jumping around.
    - There are even accounts of the worshippers getting into such a frenzy that they actually ate an ox while it was still alive...
      - biting into its flesh with their teeth. People acting like wild animals.
    - There wasn't a whole lot of preaching as you might imagine,
      - but no one could say that there was not a lot of participation by all the worshippers in the worship.

TRANS> You need to understand that many of the new believers at Corinth had come from a background in paganism in which a lot of these practices were normal—

- It was what they grew up with in worship.
  - This is also what was going on all around the Corinthians, so none of this would have seemed shocking to them.
- By the time we get to chapter 12, Paul has already dealt with:
  - drunkenness and unruly feasting in connection with the Lord's Supper,
    - and he has told them how displeasing this is to the Lord—so displeasing that some of the Corinthian believers had even been put to death by the Lord!
- Do you see how this relates to Deuteronomy 12?
  - Do you remember Deuteronomy 12 where God instructed His people that they must not look at how the people around them worship their gods and then say,
    - we will do likewise?
  - That is exactly what the Corinthians were doing!
- And so it is that...

B. Paul begins 1 Corinthians 12 by talking to the Corinthians about what they did when they were pagans—about pagan spirituality.

1. Look at what he says:

a. In verse 1, he begins,

- 1 Cor 12:1: “Now concerning spiritual *gifts*, brethren, I do not want you to be ignorant.”
  - Notice that the word “gifts” is in italics which shows us that it is not actually in the original, but supplied by the translators.
  - It is not so wrong of the translators to add it because Paul is going to talk about spiritual gifts,
    - but I think it is a little clearer to translate this verse without it...
    - to say,
      - “Now concerning spirituality.”
  - In other words, he is not just talking about gifts here, but he is talking about the nature of spirituality.
    - There is a Christian spirituality and there is a pagan spirituality,
      - and Paul does not want them to be ignorant about the true nature of Christian spirituality.
      - He does not want them to follow pagan spirituality from their past.

- b. He makes it clear that this is what he has in mind in verse 2.
- He says,
    - 1 Cor 12:2: “You know that you were Gentiles (or when you were Gentiles is probably the better reading), carried away to these dumb idols however you were lead.”
- 1) Notice first that Paul speaks of them as having been Gentiles.
- That is significant.
  - In the Old Testament you had God’s covenant people Israel and then you had the Gentiles (the Goyeem, the nations—the people who were not part of the Covenant family of God).
    - Paul tells the Corinthian believers that *when they were Gentiles* they did certain things.
    - He is telling them that they are no longer Gentiles...
      - They are, as Phil 3:3 says,
        - “the circumcision, who worship God in Spirit, rejoice in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh.”
      - They are as Gal 3:29 says,
        - “Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”
      - They are, as Gal 6:16 says,
        - “the Israel of God.”
      - They are, as 1 Pet 2:9 says,
        - “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nations, His own special people.”
    - No longer are they strangers to the commonwealth of Israel, but now they are fellow heirs with the saints...
      - no longer Gentiles, but Jews.
      - As God’s people, they must not be ignorant about spirituality, acting like Gentiles.
- 2) And what was their spirituality like when they were Gentiles?
- Well look at what Paul says:
    - 1 Cor 12:2: “When you were Gentiles you were carried away to these dumb idols.”
  - This is a very excellent description of pagan spirituality.

- The words “carried away” translate the Greek word *ap-ag-o* which is a compound word – *apo* which means “from” and *ago* which means “to lead”
  - It is used of being led away by force.
    - 9 of the 16 uses of this word have to do with Jesus being led away to be crucified, as one under arrest.
      - Matthew 27:2 is a good example
      - “And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate, the governor.”
    - It is used of leading a donkey.
  - There are three times when our English Bibles speak of someone being *led* by the Spirit of God,
    - but the compound word that we are looking at (*apago*) is not used so that a person is not said to be led *away* or carried *away* by the Spirit as one that is arrested, but rather guided or directed by the Spirit.
- This is the difference between pagan spirituality and Christian spirituality.
  - In pagan spirituality, you are led away by the spirit—you are possessed or taken over so that the spirit is controlling you.
  - In Christian spirituality, you are given wisdom and grace by the Spirit to serve God, but the Spirit does not take you over.
    - He changes you, but you are the one who is acting.
    - It is you, renewed, rather than the Spirit who is doing this or doing that.
    - You are not led out of your senses, but you are rather into your senses—into a right mind, into self control and obedience.
  - Another way to look at it is that in pagan spirituality, you can say, “that was not me that spoke—or that acted—that was the spirit.”
    - Whereas in Christian spirituality you say, “The Holy Spirit enabled me to believe—or to worship—or to love my enemy.”
      - In the pagan view, the Spirit acts using your body...
      - In the Christian view, you act by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.
  - Even in writing scripture, divine inspiration is organic rather than mechanical...

- In other words, when you are filled with the Spirit, you are not like a robot, but you are transformed into a new creation, one who now lives for God.
- 3) You can see what Paul adds in his description of Pagan spirituality...
- In verse 2 he says
    - 1 Cor 12:2: You were carried away to these dumb idols *however you were led*.
    - The spirit took them over so that they did all sorts of bazaar things—falling on the floor, laughing uncontrollably, ecstatic tongues, etc.
      - *however they were led...*
2. In verse 3, Paul refers to one of the bazaar things they did as pagans when the Spirit led them away...
- a. He speaks of the pagan practice of cursing the deity.
    - He refers to it by telling the Corinthians that no one who speaks by the Spirit of God will curse Jesus.
      - He states this in a very official, formal sounding way...
    - Look at verse 3:
      - 1 Cor 12:3: Therefore I make known to you that no one speaking by the Spirit of God calls Jesus accursed, and no one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit.
  - b. Does this suggest that some of the Corinthians had actually imported this pagan ritual of cursing the deity into Christian worship?
    - It is certainly not impossible—they were getting drunk at the Lord's Supper—why not curse the deity while under the influence of the spirit?
      - Origen, one of the church fathers, tells about one of the Christian Gnostic denominations that would not admit anyone to their fellowship until they had cursed Jesus.
        - People will do crazy things in the name of religion and they will even bring it into connection with Christianity.
    - But surely most of the Corinthian believers would have agreed that cursing Jesus was not appropriate to Christian worship...
      - Paul is using this extreme illustration to impress upon the Corinthians that Christian spirituality is not like pagan spirituality.

TRANS> If you look over his entire discourse in chapter 12, 13, and 14,

- you can see that he has a very clear point that he makes.

- It is important to look at the passage as a whole because it is very easy to get caught up in the details.
  - But there is an overall theme here about Christian spirituality.

- And that theme is that:

## **II. Christian Spirituality is about loving your neighbour.**

- In pagan spirituality, everyone wants to have an experience.
- They do things in the public assembly that draw attention to themselves—that make a big show—
  - but that really have nothing to do with helping other people.
- Being carried away by the spirit into bazaar behaviours does not really help anyone.
  - It just draws attention to you.
  - Pagan prophecies and the tongues are about you and what happened to you, but they are not really about helping others.
- But Christian spirituality is about laying down your life for others—giving of yourself in service...
  - And Christian worship is therefore not about individuals making a disturbance and drawing attention to themselves.
  - It is about engaging in corporate worship that is mutually beneficial.
- **Look at the flow of these chapters and you can see this.**

A. As chapter 12 continues, Paul talks about diversity in the body and about how there are different gifts in the body.

1. He talks about how some people are given very prominent gifts in the body—look at 12:28...
  - He even ranks them—Apostles being first, Prophets second, teachers third, then all the sign gifts.
  - But then he stresses that while these gifts are desirable,
    - not everyone has them.
2. In fact, the implication of chapter 12 is that the most important people are not the ones with the most important gifts,
  - but the ones who are weak and less prominent and honourable.
  - The point is that the main purpose is to serve, not to draw attention to yourself.
    - There are gifts that are more visible in the church, but the goal is not be visible but to be helpful.

B. Then in chapter 13, Paul moves into the very core of Christian Spirituality—it is love.



1. He says that even if a person has tongues or gives everything he has to the poor or has all kinds of knowledge,
  - it is nothing in itself.
    - If he has these showy gifts but does not have love, it is nothing!
  - And that is what pagan spirituality is like!
    - It is all about what happened to me when I was carried away by the Spirit instead of about loving your neighbour.
  
2. Paul goes on to stress that the sign gifts are only temporary anyway—
  - Love is the thing that remains.
    - In 13:8, he says that prophecies and tongues and revelatory knowledge are all going to vanish...
      - but love will remain forever!
  - Once that which is perfect (or complete) comes,
    - the gifts that were just used for the purpose of bringing the revelation will be gone.
      - Then we will have God's perfect or complete revelation and we won't need the gifts that have to do with verifying what He has spoken.
      - The word "perfect" that is used in verse 10 does not speak of a person or of heaven, but of completeness.
        - It is the completeness of revelation.
  - It's like this,
    - In the Bible, all the miracles and such are done to verify that revelation from God is being given.
      - Once we have the completed word, we don't need the miracles any more.
      - They are not given for show, they are given to confirm that the word of the apostles is from the Lord.
        - And they were given to help the church until revelation had been complete.
    - This is how it was in the OT and this is how it was in the NT.
      - Moses did not do signs to show off or to have an experience,
        - He did signs to show that God was speaking through him.
      - Now, we no longer have the sign gifts.

- Even Jesus Himself did miracles to attest that what He was saying was true...
  - For example, in Acts 2:22, Peter described Jesus as:
    - Acts 2:22: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—”
  - And in Hebrews 2:3-4 the gifts are spoken of as having this purpose for the apostles:
    - Heb 2:2-3: “For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*,”
  - You can see why they are called “the signs of an apostle.”
    - They were given to show that the apostles were apostles (men who were sent by God and who spoke for God).
    - Apostle means “one sent on official business or as an official representative of an authority.”

C. Chapter 14 carries the theme forward by applying it specifically to the Corinthians.

1. It is very obvious from what Paul says that the Corinthians were using tongues and prophecy in the pagan way in their public worship.
  - They were using their gifts in ways that did not edify anyone.
  - Their focus was on the fact that “I was filled with the spirit and I did this or I did that...”
    - but they were not concerned about helping each other—about edification and being a blessing to the weaker members.
    - In their minds, if you did not have these gifts, you were nothing.
      - Instead of the ones with the gifts being there to minister to others, they were just there making a show.
2. But Paul knows what people are like.
  - He knows that this is not something that those who were doing this would readily admit.
    - Everyone would say, “Oh but we are doing this for edification.”
    - So he puts specific rules on them to distinguish true spiritual gifts from false spiritual gifts that were not helping anything but the egos of those who were using them.

TRANS> As our focus is in particular on public worship and the second commandment,

- I want to show you some of the specifics of what Paul says in chapter 14 to eliminate pagan worship from the church.
- And I would suggest that if his directives were followed, there would be no worship or spirituality such as we find in many Pentecostal or Charismatic churches today.

### **III. Look at how Paul so masterfully rules out all worship that imitates pagan spirituality in chapter 14.**

#### A. He begins by showing that prophecy that edifies is the gift to be sought.

##### 1. This can be seen in the first five verses...

- 1 Cor 14:1-5: “Pursue love, and desire spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy. For he who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God, for no one understands *him*; however, in the spirit he speaks mysteries. But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men. He who speaks in a tongue edifies himself, but he who prophesies edifies the church. I wish you all spoke with tongues, but even more that you prophesied; for he who prophesies *is* greater than he who speaks with tongues, unless indeed he interprets, that the church may receive edification.”
- Prophecy is better than tongues because prophecy edifies the church.
  - The implication is that when love is the goal, we don’t want to merely experience a gift for the experience of it—we want to edify others.
  - Unless tongues are interpreted, they cannot edify the congregation.

##### 2. Paul’s words here also indirectly rebuke pagan prophecy—

- In pagan prophecy, everyone is just speaking out prophecies, but not particularly for anyone’s benefit or edification but that of the one who is speaking.
  - He draws attention to himself—
    - “Hey, look at me, I’m in the spirit! I’m prophesying.”
    - But there is no real interest in building up others.

##### 3. Paul makes it perfectly clear in verses 6 and following that he is talking about pagan style tongues

- a. The tongues that were spoken in Acts 2 were tongues in which the persons speaking were understood by the people that were around them...
  - Acts 2:6-8: the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marvelled, saying to one another, "Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? "And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?"
  - And then a bunch of different languages are listed off.

- It was a true miracle because they actually spoke in languages that they did not understand...
- And it was edifying because the things said were understood.

b. But the Corinthian's were speaking in tongues that could not be understood.

- Look at verses 6-11 and you can see this:
  - 1 Cor 14:6-11: "But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you unless I speak to you either by revelation, by knowledge, by prophesying, or by teaching? Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. There are, it may be, so many kinds of languages in the world, and none of them *is* without significance. Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks *will be* a foreigner to me." (1Co 14:6-11 NKJV)
- Such tongues cannot edify because no one can understand...
- So in verse 12—Paul tells them to only seek gifts that will edify, not pagan gifts that do not edify.

B. Paul points out to the Corinthians that in Christian worship, the goal is not for everyone to do something showy, but for edification to occur.

1. Look at verse 26—He says:

- 1 Cor 14:26: "How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification."
- Paul says, "How is it?"
  - "How did you come up with such a practice in which everyone is doing his own thing like this in the church?"

2. And then he puts some rules on them that would basically eliminate the pagan style of worship...

a. Rule number 1 is given in verse 27:

- He says:
  - 1 Cor 14:27: "If anyone speaks in a tongue, *let there be* two or at the most three, *each* in turn, and let one interpret. But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in the church"
- He tells them that only two or three should speak in tongues—and not at the same time—and only when there is an interpreter!

- No more of this practice of everyone muttering at once!
  - And no more tongues that cannot be understood by anyone!
  - The implication is that if these rules were followed, there would not be very much tongue speaking in Corinth at all!
- b. Rule number 2 is given in verse 29:
- He says:
    - 1 Cor 14:29-33: “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if *anything* is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”
  - Here he is eliminating pagan style prophecy where everyone is going on and nobody is listening.
    - He says that there should only be two or three who speak and that others are to judge what they say.
      - They are only to speak one at a time and they are to be subject to one another, the idea being that they are not to be taken over by the Spirit, or carried away however they were led as they were when they were pagans.
  - If these rules were applied,
    - It would eliminate a whole lot of the prophesy that was going on at Corinth.
    - Many times, they were not saying anything that could hold up under scrutiny or that would be worthwhile if the whole congregation were actually listening to them.
      - There is a pretty good chance that included with prophecy was preaching and teaching.
- c. Rule number 3 is given in verse 34
- He tells the women that they are not to prophesy at all in the church, but to keep silent!
    - How could Paul say such a thing if the women at Corinth were being given a message to speak for God?
      - How could he tell them to keep silent if God was speaking to his church through them by divine revelation?
    - Well that is just the point...
      - They were not really prophesying by the Holy Spirit.
        - They were prophesying the way pagans prophecy.

3. You see in the conclusion that Paul speaks to anyone who *thinks* he is a prophet.
- Verse 37 says:
    - 1 Cor 14:37: If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.”
      - The obvious implication is that there were a lot of people in Corinth who *thought* they were prophets and were not.
  - Such persons were ignorant about the nature of true spirituality.
    - In verse 38, Paul says,
      - 1 Cor 14:38: “But if anyone is ignorant, let him be ignorant.”
      - This certainly seems to tie in with how Paul began this discourse in chapter 12 when he said,
        - 1 Cor 12:1: Now concerning spirituality, I do not want you to be ignorant.
          - and then, as we saw, he describes the spirituality they had “when they were Gentiles.”
          - Well here in 14:38, Paul is recognising that some of them would still be ignorant, even after what he has written...
            - They would still cling to their pagan spirituality...
            - So Paul says, “If they don’t get it, let them be labelled as those who don’t get it...”
  - Yet, at the same time, we need to see that there were true spiritual gifts at Corinth at this time.
    - The structure within the churches was not yet as developed as it was when Paul wrote Timothy and Titus—when teachers were ordained.
    - The churches were still mainly dependent on the Apostles and teachers from outside, and they had spiritual gifts to help them in their weakness.
      - When Paul wrote this, it was only about 55 AD.
        - And so though he has told them that the sign gifts will not continue when God’s revelation is complete,
          - and though he has put severe limitations on the way they used the gifts, he concludes with these words:
            - 1 Cor 14:39-40: “Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.”

## **Conclusion:**

So what is the conclusion for us today as we see Pagan spirituality practiced in certain quarters?

- It is for us to understand what God's word says about such worship and to gently instruct those who practice it.
  - It is a violation of the second commandment because it involves the imitation of pagan worship.
  - The sad thing is that some, reading what the Corinthians were doing,
    - make this a model for their worship!
      - They look at and they say, "look, we can learn about how the early church worshipped by what Paul says here. Everyone spoke and participated."
      - But this is only about how the Corinthians worshipped and they did not do it in the right way!
    - Paul was correcting the Corinthians, not condoning what they were doing.
      - They got drunk at the Lord's Table—should we do that too?
      - Some of them denied the resurrection—should we do that?
        - Of course not.
        - They practiced pagan worship—
          - but that does not mean we should.
- Now that which is perfect has come,
  - And that means that tongues and prophetic revelation are long past.
    - They went out with the apostles because they were the signs of the apostles, needed for a time, but no longer needed today.
      - They continued for a time after the Apostles died by those who had received the gifts during the days of the Apostles, but they died out because they were no longer needed.
    - Let the churches of Jesus Christ then put away these childish things and serve God according to His will in this present age,
      - rejoicing that we have God's complete revelation revealed in Scripture...
      - and that scripture is sufficient to fully furnish us with all we need to know.