

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 110-a

Halifax, 4 July 2010

Introduction

Today, we are returning to our Sermon Series on the Larger Catechism.

- Before I went on holidays, we were exploring the Ten Commandments, and in particular the second commandment.
 - Here, let me read it to you once again for our scripture reading this afternoon:
 - Exodus 20:4-6: "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.
- So far, we have spent a lot of time looking at the duties required and the sins forbidden in this commandment.
 - In essence we have learned that when the second commandment enjoins us not to make images or use them in the worship of God,
 - there is a principle that is set forth...
 - namely, that we are not to worship God in any other way than the way which He has commanded.
 - The commandment mentions images in particular because at the time the Ten Commandments were written, that was the most common way the nations worshipped their gods.
 - Because this was so, Israel would be tempted to worship God in that way.
 - This is in fact exactly what they gravitated to almost as soon as God had delivered them out of Egypt...
 - They set up the golden calf—calves were images that were used by the Egyptians to worship their gods...
 - And when they set up this calf, Aaron said that it was “the LORD (Jehovah) who had brought them out of the Land of Egypt.”
 - They were not worshipping the gods of Egypt, but they were worshipping the LORD Jehovah in the *way* that the Egyptians worshipped their gods.
 - And that is what the second commandment is prohibiting in principle—worshipping the true God in the way that the nations worship their gods.

- We have seen that Deuteronomy 12 spells out the principle that God's people are not to worship Him in any other way than the way He has commanded:
 - It says:
 - Deut 12:29-31: When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.' You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.
 - And then in Deut 12:32, the principle is spelled out plainly:
 - Deut 12:32: "Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.
 - That is the principle that we are taught in the second commandment.
- That means that we are not to make up our own ceremonies, our own holy days, our own ordinances or any thing of the kind.
 - We are to sing only the songs that He has given us, to use only the sacraments that He has appointed, to use the instruments that He has specified,
 - It means that we are to pray and read scripture and receive the preaching of God's Word,
 - but we are not authorised to add to NT worship drama or skits or musical performances or dances or additional sacraments or prayers to saints or interviews with famous people or all the things that are so often done in the worship of God.

TRANS> And so, having looked at what the second commandment requires and what it prohibits,

- All that remains now for us in our study of the second commandment is to consider the reasons annexed to the commandment which are spelled out for us in Question 110:

Q. 110 What are the reasons annexed to the second commandment the more to enforce it?

A. The reasons annexed to the second commandment, the more to enforce it, contained in these words, *for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments;* are, besides God's sovereignty over us, and propriety in us, his

fervent zeal for his own worship, and his revengeful indignation against all false worship, as being a spiritual whoredom; accounting the breakers of this commandment such as hate him, and threatening to punish them unto divers generations; and esteeming the observers of it such as love Him and keep His commandments, and promising mercy to them unto many generations.

Isn't our God a gracious God?

- Here, in His kindness, He has given us the Ten Commandments when He really never should have had to...
 - I mean really, the commandments should have been self-evident to us.
 - The only reason they are not is because we are corrupt and fallen and we distort and twist the truth so that we need to have everything spelled out for us,
 - but if we weren't so corrupt, the Ten Commandments would have been perfectly obvious to us from the beginning of the world.
 - The Lord has been so kind to spell them out for us rather than just leaving us in our culpable ignorance.
 - He did this after He redeemed His people so that they would be clear about what is right before Him.
 - Wasn't that kind of Him?
- But I want you to notice that in His kindness to us, He has done even more!
 - Not only has He spelled out for us commandments that we should have already known...
 - but He has gone even a step further in His fatherly concern for us and has attached *reasons* and *incentives* to motivate us to keep them.
 - He shouldn't have ever had to do this either—
 - Once we have been redeemed, we ought to be highly motivated to do whatever it is that pleases Him...
 - but we are not—
 - I mean, the gospel changes us—the Spirit comes to us and writes God's law in our heart so that we do delight in it...
 - but you know as well as I do that we don't have nearly the love for observing God's commandments that we ought to have!
 - So our gracious heavenly Father comes to us with reasons and incentives that He attaches to His commandments to help us along in our service to Him.

- As we look at the reasons that are attached to the second commandment, let's make sure that we receive what He says with gratitude!
- What a gracious, helpful Father He is to us!

I. The first thing our gracious Father does to help motivate us to keep this commandment is to remind us again that He is the LORD our God.

A. We have seen before that He declared this in the preface to the Ten Commandments when He said:

1. "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt."

- You see here that He refers Himself as "the LORD your God,"
 - a. He uses the Word LORD (or Yahweh in the original) which speaks of Himself as the self existing one.
 - You will remember that this is the name by which He told Moses He wanted to be called.
 - It was a name that would distinguish Him from all the false gods that had sprung up, showing that He is the true and living God who is over all.
 - It distinguishes Him because the name means "I am that I am."
 - In other words, He simply exists for ever and ever and has always existed as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - He is the only being who has no origin and who is the Creator of all things.
 - b. And you see also that in the preface, He referred to Himself as the LORD *your God*.
 - He reminded them that He was their God in a way that He was not the God of others.
 - They were the people He had called out to be His own—it was He that had made them a great nation.
 - Of course He is in one sense the God of all—of every thing and of every person—in that He made us and preserves us and ought to be obeyed by us and will at last be our judge.
 - But when He calls Himself "the LORD your God who brought you out of the Land of Egypt,"
 - He reminds them that He has redeemed them to be His own people who partake of His salvation and blessing...
 - distinguished from the mass of men who are not redeemed.

- This has something to say to every one of you...
 - If you are among those who are redeemed by Him, how exceedingly grateful you should be!
 - For we are all sinners, cut off from Him by the sin of our first Father Adam which we all are partakers of...
 - but redeemed by His mercy through faith in Jesus Christ who bore the curse for us.
 - And if you are not trusting in Jesus, then He is not your God in this way,
 - and you need to come to God and join yourself to His people whom Christ has redeemed by trusting in Jesus the Saviour and resting in His finished work on the cross.
 - You are in a most dreadful condition if He is not your God!
 - And a most blessed condition if He is!

TRANS> But now you see that

2. He repeats these same words here in the reason annexed to the second commandment.

- After telling us not to make images or to worship Him by images, He says,
 - “For I the LORD your God...”

B. Now I want you to consider how these words impress upon us His commandment to worship Him only as He commands.

1. First of all, by calling Himself LORD, He reminds us of His sovereignty over us!

a. To put it simply, He reminds us that He is in charge of us!

- He is the LORD!
- When He did His wonders upon Egypt (the plagues), He kept on saying that He was doing it to show that He was LORD.
 - He was the self-existing One who is in charge—the sovereign God who rules over all and whose rule cannot be in the least impeded by any other being in heaven or on earth.
- Surely if follow then, that if He is the sovereign LORD, it is His to decide how we are to worship Him!
 - What impertinence for mere creatures like us to take it upon ourselves to decide what we ought to do in our worship!

- Especially when He has instructed us how we are to come before Him!
 - Who do we think we are to come before the Great God of the whole universe according to our own ideas and will?
 - He is the LORD Yahweh!
 - Let us inquire humbly at His Word how we may appear before Him and come only in that way!
- b. What a travesty that over the years,
- a certain malignant spirit began to appear in the church in which men took it upon themselves to decide what they thought might be pleasing to God.
 - Rather than inquiring at His word to see what He had appointed, they began to devise all sorts of ceremonies and rituals—all with rich meaning and beauty!
 - They added gestures and they brought in altars and they dressed themselves in special clothing and they set up images and symbols and all sorts of beautiful things...
 - but it was all things that *they* had devised of their own will rather than things that the Sovereign Lord had commanded.
 - And many of these traditions and ideas were beautiful and rich with meaning,
 - but ironically, they led to a very great ignorance in the church that led to a need for reformation.
 - And the most important aspect of reformation was the return of the church to worship according to what God had commanded...
 - In place of all the incense and idols and ceremonies and musical performances, there was a return to plain preaching, reading of scripture, the simple administration of the sacraments without all the additional ceremonies, simple prayers, and the singing of psalms with grace in the heart.
- c. But in our day, there is a new spirit has appeared in many branches of the church that is even more inappropriate than the one that grew up in the middle ages.
- Today it has become customary for worship to be designed according to what pleases the worshipper!
 - While the middle ages saw worship that was based upon what men thought would please God,

- today's worship is based upon what men believe will please men!
 - There are musical performances of all kinds, there are skits, there are multimedia presentations, there is stand up comedy, there are uninspired songs, there are clowns and everything else that you can imagine.
 - I suppose it is the democratic ideal brought into worship, rooted in commercialism and marketing principles!
 - We act as if God is putting on a show and wants to attract people so that they will come and pay some sort of homage to Him.
 - We act as if we need to find out what they want so they will come to the show.
 - That is not it at all my friends!
 - The Sovereign Lord commands us to come before Him and pay homage to Him in the way He has commanded.
 - The way we come is not to be decided by men's tastes and desires!
 - It is to be according to the commandment of the living LORD, the Sovereign one who is Yahweh!
 - He is LORD!
 - And if He is LORD, surely He is LORD of our worship!
 - Let us humbly submit to what He has commanded.
- d. Whenever we disregard the sovereignty of God in how we may come before Him in worship,
- it really strikes at the very heart of the gospel.
 - If, as in the middle ages, we take it upon ourselves to decide what we must do to please Him,
 - it is salvation by our own works.
 - We do what we believe we must to be accepted by Him.
 - We do not come to God on the basis of what Christ has done, but on the basis of what we have done—on the basis of our own works or on the basis of the work of the church for us.
 - If, as in many modern churches, we see the church as there to devise worship that will attract as many worshippers as possible,
 - then we are saying no salvation is really needed...
 - We might need help to get through the day or to handle our problems or to have a better marriage,

- but if this is our model for worship, we are not dealing with a Sovereign God to whom we must be reconciled by Jesus Christ.
- He is just a God who is looking for worshippers however He can get them!
- Christ becomes a fix-it man rather than a crucified Saviour who bears the curse to turn away the wrath of a holy God.

TRANS> Let us therefore humble ourselves and remember that the God we worship is the God we cannot come before except through Jesus Christ...

- and that He is the Sovereign LORD who alone has the right to decide how we may come before Him.
- Let us not come in our worship with our own works instituted by the church, nor with what pleases us...
 - but let us come as our Sovereign LORD has commanded.
 - Let us come in the name of Jesus with faith in Jesus in dependence upon the Holy Spirit to do what He has appointed in the present age...
 - That is our proper place.
 - This is what we learn from the word **LORD** that is presented to us when we are given the reasons that we ought to obey the second commandment.

2. Now let us move on to consider the implications upon worship of the fact that He refers to Himself as “our God.”

- a. You can see right away how this ties in with what we are taught in Deuteronomy 12.
 - If God is our God, why would we worship Him in the ways that the nations worship their gods?
 - What pleases those gods is not what pleases **our** God.
 - Why would we think that it would please Him for us to bring to Him in worship that which those who worship false gods bring to their gods?
 - He has told us what *He* wants, and He is our God!
 - Let us therefore worship Him accordingly.

TRANS> But let us bring this more to the heart!

- b. Consider what a privilege it is that you belong to Him—He is your God because you are, if you are in Christ, His people!

- 1) Even though you are a desperate sinner, just like every other person in the world,
 - He has chosen you to belong to Him.
 - He has sent Jesus to redeem you and Jesus has shed His blood on the cross for your sins—all that you might belong to God.
 - And your gracious Lord brings you into His own household and puts His name upon you.
 - He has even adopted you and made you joint heirs with His own Son Jesus Christ.
 - You are His!

- 2) Surely, as one who has been brought into God's house, you want to do in His house what pleases Him!
 - Surely you do not want to live in a disorderly manner in His house!
 - Surely you want to live according to the statutes and ordinances of His house!
 - Surely you want to follow the directives of your wise and holy Father who has been so kind to you.
 - And surely, the most important thing we do in His house is worship.
 - How good it is to belong to God!
 - So do what He wants in worship because He is your God and you love Him!

TRANS> So you see how these words, "I the LORD your God," ought to motivate you and stir you to obey the Second Commandment.

- And now I want you to consider what the LORD adds here to this self description that ought to motivate us even more...

II. Secondly, we see that our Lord declares to us that He is jealous.

- Before we consider how much the knowledge that He is jealous ought to motivate us to be pure in our worship,
 - A. I want to first show you in what way He is jealous—
 - Why does He reveal Himself as jealous with in connection with the second commandment?
 1. It will help us if we remember that in worship, we connect with God.
 - We come together as an assembly to bring homage to God and to receive His Word.
 - And however much we devise our own way, we distort that connection.

- And then, rather than worshipping God as He is,
 - we are worshipping our own distorted perception of God.
 - Isaiah points out that idols are teachers of lies...
 - because idols that represent the LORD to us actually misrepresent Him.
 - We are not capable of deciding what is appropriate and what is not appropriate to bring before Him,
 - no matter how smart we may be or may suppose our leaders to be.
2. So what I am saying is that God is jealous when we devise our own worship because we are not worshipping Him as He is,
- but we are worshipping Him as we have wrongly supposed that He is.
 - He is jealous of the distortion of Him that we are worshipping and wants us to worship Him instead.
 - You are loving God as you suppose Him to be (and perhaps as you want Him to be) rather than as He is.
 - Let me see if I can illustrate this...
 - Suppose you had a fifteen year old daughter that you had been separated from for some reason, and you were now going to be reacquainted with her...
 - and suppose that you came to discover that she was very excited about seeing you because she had heard so much about you and she really liked what she heard...
 - but suppose that the things she heard were not true...
 - suppose she thought you were devoted to the Virgin Mary, that you loved rap music, and that you thought the greatest concern of the day was global warming...
 - And so upon your arrival, she has planned to take you to a site where the Virgin Mary was last seen, to take you to a rap concert, and to attend a rally about reducing greenhouse gasses.
 - Her devotion to you would not mean very much.
 - She would be loving a distortion of you, not you.
- TRANS> So you see then why God refers to Himself as jealous when He speaks about the second commandment.
- He wants us to find out what truly pleases Him and bring that to Him, not what we think may please Him.

- Now let me show you how God’s use of the word jealous ought to motivate us to be diligent to see that we worship Him only as He commands.
- B. This really ought to motivate us because the word jealous (אִנְיָ (quanna’) in the Hebrew) refers to passion that is very strong.
1. It would be the opposite of being indifferent or unconcerned about a matter.
 - a. In Proverbs 6:32-35, we are told:
 - Prov 6:32-35: Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; He who does so destroys his own soul. Wounds and dishonour he will get, And his reproach will not be wiped away. For jealousy is a husband’s fury; Therefore he will not spare in the day of vengeance. He will accept no recompense, Nor will he be appeased though you give many gifts.
 - And in Proverbs 27:4, the we are given a question about jealousy to ponder:
 - Prov 27:4: Wrath is cruel and anger a torrent, But who is able to stand before jealousy?
 - If the jealousy of man is such a powerful force, what does this leave us to say about the jealousy of God?
 - b. The root of this word means “ardent zeal”—something that a person is wildly passionate about...
 - something that is going to stir them to action.
 - For example, in Zechariah 8:2-3, the word quanna is translated zealous and it says:
 - Zechariah 8:2-3: "Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘I am zealous for Zion with great zeal; With great fervour I am zealous for her.’ Thus says the LORD: ‘I will return to Zion, And dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, The Mountain of the LORD of hosts, The Holy Mountain.’
 - The text goes on to describe all the great things that the LORD will for His people because of His *quanna* (zeal or jealousy)
 - He is stirred to action because of His zeal or jealousy for His people.
 - He cannot remain idle.

TRANS> So you see that by using the word quanna (jealous) to tell us how God relates to the second commandment we are shown that how we worship Him is very important to Him!

2. Consider what this means...
 - a. I meet many Christians today who have a very lackadaisical attitude about how God is worshipped.

- They say that it makes very little difference to Him.
 - They say that as long as we are sincere (we will talk about sincerity when we get to the third commandment—of course sincerity is important...)
 - but they say that as long as we are sincere, it doesn't matter *how* we worship Him.
 - They say that as long as you are sincere, it doesn't matter what you do.
- b. But I am here to tell you today that the Lord Himself, by saying that He is jealous, makes it very clear that it matters very much!
- Most people who worship God in ways He has not appointed are sincere about it.
- 1) Those in the middle ages (along with their successors today) can be very sincere about bringing to God what they have thought ought to please Him.
- They really do want to please Him.
 - A person may go to a church with all sorts of ceremonies that have been added to the worship He has commanded...
 - and they may do this because it makes them feel closer to God and they may be very sincere about it...
 - but the LORD is not pleased with it because He did not authorise those ceremonies.
- 2) And those in our day who design their worship based on what they think will please men are often doing this because they honestly believe it to be what God wants them to do.
- They don't get together with their worship team to come up with new approaches in worship with any intent to provoke the Lord.
 - Their heart is often right and pure...
 - We have seen how many of Judah's kings worshipped at the high places and how God complained about this,
 - but nevertheless he said that their heart was right toward Him.
 - But even though their heart was right, He was highly displeased with the worship that He had not commanded!
 - Never suppose that the LORD does not care about how we worship.
 - He is very zealous about this!

C. Now once you realise this, you ought to devote yourself to purity in worship.

1. You ought to do this because you fear Him.

- The last thing you should want to do is to provoke our holy God to jealousy!
 - What a dreadful thing it is to think that you should bring before Him—in your very acts of worship—that which greatly provokes Him!
 - Next week we will look at the fearful punishments that He brings on those who worship Him falsely...
 - but just knowing that He is jealous about it ought to make you fear—not so that you avoid Him,
 - but so that you will be careful to follow what He has revealed about worship and neither to add to it or take away from it...
 - knowing that as He is greatly displeased with false worship,
 - so He is greatly pleased with the worship that He has appointed.
 - Indeed, let this be a tremendous encouragement to think that God greatly delights in our worship when we come in the name of Christ...
 - and bring to Him the things that He has appointed!
 - And remember in doing this that it is not that we ever get it perfect in this life—...
 - but as we do what He has appointed in the name of Christ, He is highly pleased with it!

TRANS> And now let's look at the second reason you ought to devote yourself to purity in His worship when you consider that He is jealous about it...

2. You ought to do this because you love Him.

- He is the God who has, as we already saw, redeemed you and taken you to be His own and to live with Him forever!
 - If you have come to Him for salvation, you greatly love Him!
 - And if you are now told that He is very jealous to have us worship Him in the way He has appointed...
 - you will want to worship Him in the way He has appointed!
- Nobody likes to provoke the one they love!
 - You want to please Him!
 - You see that the LORD Himself makes the connection between your love for Him and your keeping of this commandment...
 - for He says that He shows mercy to those who love Him and keep His commandments...

- and those who don't,
 - He describes as those who hate Him.
- We will have more to say about his next week as well.
 - But for now it is enough to know that He is the LORD our God and that He is jealous about the way we worship Him.
 - Let this motivate you to worship Him according to what He has appointed.