

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## Question 111

### *Introduction to the Third Commandment*

Halifax, 18 July 2010

#### **Introduction**

This afternoon in our study of the Larger Catechism, we come to question 111 which introduces us to the third commandment.

- It says:

#### **Q. 111 Which is the third commandment?**

**A. The third commandment is, *Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.***

- Over the last couple of weeks, I have shown you the dreadful consequences of violating the second commandment.
  - (the commandment about worshipping God by images or any other way that He has not appointed in His word).
  - We have seen that when we try to approach God in our own way rather than as He is revealed, we eventually lose the gospel itself!
    - Christ is the way that we are to connect with God, and idolatry involves all those ways we substitute to try to connect with Him... false ways.
    - Over the generations, Christ is eclipsed by our idolatry and a generation grows up who does not know the Lord!
      - We have seen that God especially visits this sin upon our descendents.
      - Violation of the second commandment is very dangerous to the church and to future generations.
- And if the violation of the second commandment is the most dangerous to the church and to future generations,
  - The violation of the third commandment is the most dangerous to the individual Christian.
  - This is the commandment that distinguishes between hypocrisy and sincerity.
    - Outwardly, an individual may be worshipping God as He commanded (keeping the second commandment)...
      - he may be perfectly confessing Christ as far as the content of what He says...

- he may be doing just what God has commanded in worship...
- but it is of no avail if he does not regard Christ in his heart...
  - He can make a perfect confession with the mouth, but if he does not believe in his heart, he cannot be saved.
- Of course, I do not mean to say that the third commandment has nothing to do with outward behaviour.
  - Usually when there is a lack of sincerity, it will show up in other ways...
    - Usually, a person who does not reverence God will also quickly fall into idolatry...
      - but even if he continues to neither add or take away from what God has appointed, he will become sloppy and careless in the way he carries out those ordinances...
      - But at the heart of it all, there is a lack of sincerity—a sense that He is really dealing with the living God.
- There are millions in the church today who fall into this category!
  - Outwardly, they are fine Christians...
  - But inwardly, they have no regard for the Lord.
    - We know this because our LORD Jesus tells us that on the day of judgement,
      - there will be many who will say, “Lord, Lord”...,”—
        - (they confess the name of Jesus)
      - to whom He will say,
        - “Depart from me, for I never knew you, you workers of iniquity!”
      - Jesus says that there will be **many** who do this!
        - many who enter the church by the wide gate of unbelief rather than the narrow gate of faith in Christ.
        - This is a terrifying prospect—some that we love and have thought to be Christians will be shown to be hypocrites on that day!

If you have been a Christian for long,

- you have no doubt been distressed by news of young people who have apostatised.
- They grew up in good churches that generally obey the second commandment...
  - but they turned suddenly and rejected the Lord.
    - This is, of course, the case with older people as well—even of ministers who seem to suddenly have a change of heart.

- But I would suggest that the change is only sudden on the outside!
  - On the inside, they have been taking God’s name in vain for years...
- They show that all the years they spent in the church, they did nothing but take the name of the Lord in vain.
  - We will look at what this means this afternoon.
  - It is very important for you to consider this matter lest you be found to apostatise in the days to come...
    - or lest you be rejected by Christ at the last day when you say, “Lord, Lord,”
      - and He says to you, “Depart from me, I never knew you.”
- I remember a few years ago when we heard report about young people apostatising,
  - My daughters asked me, “How can we know if we won’t apostatise?”
- Of course there are different ways to answer that question...
  - But one way that it might be answered is by looking at the third commandment...
  - If you are taking the Lord’s name in vain now, you will be cut off from Him in time unless there is repentance.
- So let me encourage you to consider well what this commandment teaches us as God’s people...
  - Remember, all these commandments are given to covenant people—to those who are a part of the people of God, the redeemed.
    - These are people who profess to believe and who are active in receiving God’s ordinances.
    - They apply to all people, but they were given especially to those God has redeemed...

For our scripture reading, I want to read Malachi 1:6 – 2:6.

- Here we have an illustration of what it means to take God’s name in vain...
- READ> Mal 1:6 – 2:9
  - We will return to this illustration from Malachi later, but first I want to look at the commandment itself.
  - It is found in 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.”

**We need to begin by asking, what is a name?**

- A name is that which defines a person...that which distinguishes him from others.
  - If I want to distinguish Kevin Bigney from all the rest of the people in our congregation, I simply give you his name:
    - I say “Kevin” or “Kevin Bigney” and you know that I am talking him rather than about somebody else.
  - If you don’t know his proper name, then there are other ways I can name him...
    - I can say, the guy who helped out with communion this morning and led the prayer time—or the guy who sits over on the right side of the church with several children—
      - Such descriptions are also ways of naming him.
- The Shorter Catechism gives us a very concise definition of God’s name in question 55 where it refers to His name as:
  - “anything whereby God maketh Himself known.”
  - In question 54, it gives a list of examples (just as Q 112 of the Larger Catechism does) of “ways that God makes Himself known.”
    - It speaks of His names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word and works.
    - All these make up God’s name—they are ways that He makes Himself known to us.
  - To illustrate further with Kevin Bigney, just think of how some of the things in this list of things that make up a name apply to him...
    - His names would include Kevin and Bigney...
    - His titles would be elder, father, husband, tradesman...
    - His attributes would be insightfulness, gentleness, faithfulness...
    - His ordinances would include things like requiring his children to obey their mother, gathering his family for worship, etc.
    - His word would include whatever he has ever said—his opinions and promises for example...
    - His works would be the floors he has sanded and finished, his service as an elder, his ministry to his family, etc.
    - All these things together make up the name of Kevin Bigney.
      - They are that which is known about Him.
- The way the Bible uses the word name encompasses all of these things.
  - Thus, when it says we are not to take God’s name in vain,
    - it tells us not to take anything revealed about God in vain.

- It is not merely talking about refraining from using His name as a curse word, although that is certainly included!
- It is talking about reverencing Him in all the ways He is made known.

**But now we need to move on and consider what it means to *take* His name.**

- The word “**take**” (*naw-saw*) simply means to lift up or carry.
  - The word *naw-saw* is a very common work.
    - It occurs over 650 times in the Old Testament.
      - This word is used, for example, of the Noah’s Ark when it was **lifted up** by the floodwaters.
      - It is used of the priests carrying the ark of the covenant.
- There are all sorts of ways that you **take** God’s name.
  - You **take** God’s name when you speak of Him (you take His name in your lips)...
  - You **take** His name when you think about Him (you take what is revealed of Him into your thoughts—you carry his name in your mind)
  - You **take** His name when you confess Him as your God (you become identified with Him as one that is called His own—you are associated with Him).
    - Gal 3:27 says: “For as many of you as were baptised into Christ have put on Christ.”
  - You **take** His name when you do works in His name
    - Matthew 7: “Have we not done many wonderful works in your name?”
  - You **take** His name whenever you receive the benediction.
    - In Numbers 6, the Lord speaks to Moses about this. He says:
      - Num 6:23-27: Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, “This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them: ‘The LORD bless you and keep you; The LORD make His face shine upon you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance upon you, And give you peace.’ So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them.”
      - Receiving the benediction reminds us that as God’s people, we are those who continually bear His name!
        - He has identified Himself with us—that He is our God and that we are a people for His name.
        - This is so important and useful for us that benedictions are continued in the New Testament.
          - Be mindful of the fact that you, as a Christian, are associated with God’s name—it is upon you and you have taken it.

- Taking God's name is something everyone ought to do...
  - In fact, it is what we are called to do in the first commandment...
    - Having no other gods means that we are to have the true God as our God...
      - to take His name; to confess Him, to take Him as our God:
      - The Shorter Catechism puts it plainly:
        - "The first commandment requireth us to know and acknowledge God to be the only true God and our God, and to worship and glorify Him accordingly."
  - What this means is that you are to take all that God has revealed about Himself...
    - And of course, as we have seen, God has revealed Himself in many ways...
      - But central to everything, God has revealed Himself in the person and work of Jesus Christ.
      - This is how He is most clearly revealed to us.
  - We are to receive all that God has given us in Christ, to receive Him as our Lord and Saviour and confess Him before the world.
    - In the New Testament, we are told that those who come to Christ are not only to believe with their heart, but also to confess their lips that He is Lord.
      - Romans 10:8-10 says:
        - "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
    - The NT shows that this is not just a casual confession.
      - Persons were called upon to be baptised into the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and were to continue in that confession at the Lord's Supper.
      - If they did not continue in their profession, they were to be removed from the church.
        - That is why we do not allow those who are not under the care and oversight of a church that confesses the truth about Jesus to come to the Lord's Supper.
        - It is not just private confessing that is called for, but a confession before the elders.
        - You are to take His name and continue in His name.

- Consider how the first three commandments relate to “taking God’s name” in a sort of progressive way...
  - We might say that the first commandment calls us to take the name of the true God and it alone...
  - The Second commandment calls us, in taking His name, not to add or take away from anything that He has made known to us about Himself...
  - And now the third commandment calls us to take His name in a proper manner—not in vain—sincerely.
    - The first is about confessing Him as our God, the second is about the content of our confession, and the third is about the sincerity of that confession.

So you see what a name is and what it means to take God’s name...

**But now let’s look more closely at what it means to take His name *in vain*?**

- You see that it is not a question of *taking His name* or of not taking His name, but of taking is name *in vain* or *not in vain* that is the issue here.
  - Something is done **in vain** when it is empty, worthless, useless, or meaningless.
    - The same word translated “vain” (*shav*) is used in Psalm 60:11 when it says:
      - Ps 60:11: “Give us help from trouble, for the help of man is **useless**.”
        - The word **useless** is the word **vain**.
        - He comes to help you, but the help is worthless.
      - So applying this to the third commandment, it means that you take God’s name in a useless manner...
    - Hosea uses this word *shav* of a false promise:
      - Hosea 10:4: “They have spoken words, swearing **falsely** in making a covenant.”
        - In other words, it was an empty promise, a worthless promise.
        - We have just had three marriages in our congregation...
          - In each case, a man and a woman entered into a covenant, but if they swore in vain, they took their vows, but they did it falsely—
            - Their promises were empty, worthless, meaningless, vain!
          - This is exactly parallel to taking God’s name in vain—you confess His name, but you do it falsely, without meaning it.
  - The key ingredient required to reverence God’s name is faith!
    - Heb. 11:6 “But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”
      - You take God’s name in vain when you don’t believe that He **is**.

- that is, you don't believe that He is all that He says He is.
- You don't really believe that He is Holy, or all knowing, or all wise.
- You take God's name in vain when you don't believe that **He rewards those that seek Him.**
  - You don't **really** believe the gospel (don't take it to heart)
  - You don't **really** believe in heaven (don't take what God says about it seriously)
  - You don't **really** believe in the judgement to come (there is no trembling, no repentance, no humility)
- To put it together,
  - You take God's name in vain when you do not give to His name (to all that He has revealed) your sincere attention and interest.
  - You simply don't take God and His revelation seriously!

**Consider how widespread and all encompassing this problem is!**

Is this not the real problem with every false religion?

- I have never met a Muslim or a Jehovah Witness or a Jew or a Hindu who really takes God seriously!
  - Some of them have all sorts of rituals that they perform—they say their prayers and they do their works,
  - And sometimes they put believers to shame by their total devotion and commitment!
    - but at the bottom of it all, they simply don't take God seriously—they take His name (what He has revealed) in vain!
- Think about it... I mean,
  - that they should maintain even the possibility that things even might be all right between them and God when they have no Saviour to atone for their sins!
    - They are trifling with God!
    - I don't mean to say that this is obvious to everyone...
      - It's not—but as we saw this morning, it ought to be obvious.
        - The reason it is not obvious is because we take God's name in vain.
        - We don't take seriously what He has revealed about Himself.
          - And this becomes even more the case when a person is exposed to the gospel which ought to jolt them to face the truth about God and about themselves.



- God's wrath is revealed from heaven to all men—
  - we can see that He is very displeased with us because we all die...
  - and we can see all the miseries of this world—the whole creation is groaning under His judgement...
- But instead of being terrified of His judgement,
  - those devoted to false religion suppose that He will accept them.
  - They don't take His revelation about the fall seriously—
    - they don't take **Him** seriously.
    - They take His name in vain.
  - The very idea that sinful human flesh could be accepted of Him!
    - How could this be when we all know how unworthy we are, how ungrateful we are toward our Maker?

But this is also true of millions who name the name of Christ...

- Millions who are baptised in His name and who know the story of the crucifixion don't take it seriously!
  - They have the commandments of God that expose their sin and their need...
  - And they have revelation that God's own Son was sent from heaven to die for them and to make atonement for their sins...
    - But they don't take any of this seriously.
    - They suppose that they will be accepted by their good deeds, or even that everyone is just automatically accepted by God!
      - They do not take God's name seriously.
      - The full revelation of God in Jesus Christ is right there—the truth is right there—but they do not regard it.
        - They don't even make a clear profession of the gospel, but trifle with God.
- And then there are in the church those who make a proper profession...
  - They are members of a church that stands for the truth and that consistently practices the truth,
    - and they profess to believe it all and even defend it in the public square.
  - Whether they grew up surrounded by the truth or came to confess it in later years, they can explain the gospel and they understand it.
    - The word is on their lips and they know what it says in their hearts.
  - But they don't really believe this revelation.

- They don't embrace it as their own.
- They just conform to the gospel outwardly, perhaps to be part of the group, but they don't really deal with God in their soul.
  - They don't come to Him, confessing their sin and looking to Jesus.
  - It is all distant to them and does not really grip them or engage them as reality.
- That is true of every one of us to a certain extent...but for some it does not even grip them enough that they ever turn to Jesus Christ to embrace Him as saviour.
  - This was this case with the priests in Malachi.
    - They did not think that God *really* required a perfect sacrifice.
      - They thought they could approach Him with a lame one.
      - That's what everyone in the church who does not truly come to Christ believes—
        - They think God doesn't mean it when He tells us what is required, so they think God will accept them without Christ...
- The people in Malachi's day did not believe what He said about Himself, or that He was holy and just—they took His name in vain—
  - Turn to Malachi 1 and you can see this.
    - You see in 1:6 that the Lord accuses them of not honouring His name!
      - Mal 1:6: "A son honors his father, And a servant his master. If then I am the Father, Where is My honor? And if I am a Master, Where is My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts To you priests who despise My name.
    - They respond in their typical manner:
      - Mal 1:6 (end of verse) Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?'
    - And the Lord tells them that it is by offering blind and lame sacrifices on His altar!
      - Think about this!
        - These were supposed to be unblemished because they were supposed to represent Jesus Christ, the holy Lamb of God who alone is able to take away our sins!
        - Their offering of lame sacrifices shows what they thought of God.
          - They thought what most people think about God.
          - They thought He was a God who did not require a perfect sacrifice.
          - This is why people offer their works, their religion, their heart,
            - whatever it is—to God and think He will accept them.

- All these things are blemished!
  - We must come to Him through Christ, the perfect sacrifice!
  - He is a holy God and we must esteem Him with proper reverence and fear!
- You see that the LORD is very much concerned here for the honour of His name!
  - He tells them that He cannot accept them because they do not honour His name!
  - Look at verse 9-11 and you can see this:
    - "But now entreat God's favor, that He may be gracious to us. While this is being done by your hands, will He accept you favorably?" says the LORD of hosts. "Who is there even among you who would shut the doors, so that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you," says the LORD of hosts, "Nor will I accept an offering from your hands. For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; In every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; For My name shall be great among the nations," says the LORD of hosts.
  - And in verse 14, He says,
    - "But cursed be the deceiver Who has in his flock a male, And takes a vow, But sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished—For I am a great King," Says the LORD of hosts, "And My name is to be feared among the nations.
    - It was, you see, as if they did not even believe that God was real.
      - They were not dealing with *Him* in reality, but in falsehood.
- But look!
  - In verse 5-6, He reminds these priests how it was that they had ever become priests in the first place...
    - It is because their fathers (from the tribe of Levi) had indeed revered His name.
    - They took God seriously.
    - They did not trifle with Him.
  - Look at how the Lord praises Levi in verses 5-6:
    - Mal 2:5-6: "My covenant was with him, *one* of life and peace, and I gave them to him *that he might fear Me*; So he feared Me And was reverent before My name. The law of truth was in his mouth, And injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with Me in peace and equity, And turned many away from iniquity.
    - Notice the key difference here from the priests Malachi rebukes:

- The priests Malachi rebukes had profaned God's name, but when God made His covenant with the tribe of Levi...
  - "He feared Me and was reverent before My name."
  - In other words, he truly believed God...
- That is the opposite of taking God's name in vain.
  - He knew that God was real.
  - He knew that God was holy.
  - He knew that God meant what He said.
  - He knew that God was not to be trifled with.
  - He took the whole idea of an atoning sacrifice seriously!

To put this in the language of the New Testament...

- He believed on the LORD Jesus Christ as the only sacrifice for sin!
  - He took the gospel seriously!
    - He believed that we are desperate sinners, that God is a holy God, and that Christ is the perfect sacrifice that takes away sin.
    - He had reverence for all that God had revealed about Himself.

### **Conclusion:**

That is what is required of you in the third commandment!

- To fear God and be reverent before His name!
  - You are headed for a dreadful future if you are sitting here cold and indifferent before the Lord...
  - If you do not regard all that He has made known about Himself through His Son with true reverence and awe, you are undone and you will be ruined!
    - He will declare that He never knew you on the day of judgement.
    - You were never truly connected to Him through faith in Jesus Christ.
    - You did not take His name with reverence and fear.
- You can see why the Lord adds the words "he will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain" to the third commandment.
  - If we do not regard God's name, which is most fully revealed in Jesus Christ, then we have disregarded the only provision for reconciliation with God.
    - There is no other way for us to obtain the forgiveness of sin.
    - There is only condemnation!
- The foundation of the third commandment, (as well as the foundation of the first and second) is Jesus Christ.

- If you do not worship the God who is the Father of Jesus Christ, you are worshipping another God...violating the first commandment.
- If you do not worship God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ—if you try to come to Him in some other way, you worshipping idolatrously... violating the second commandment.
- And if you come to God in the right way as far as the form of your worship and the things you confess, but do not do so with reverence and sincerity—if it is only a show... then you violate the third commandment.

Let us draw near to God, therefore, with reverence and fear, through Jesus:

- Heb 10:19-27: Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching. For if we sin willfully 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.

We will look more at how we are to take God's name with reverence and fear next week.