

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## *Question 8*

Halifax, 9 September 2007

**Q. 8 Are there more gods than one?**

**A. There is but one only, the living and true God.**

Scripture Reading: Deuteronomy 6:1-25

In Deuteronomy 6:4, we have given to us a very simple truth that is foundational to our faith:

**I. The LORD our God, the Lord is one.**

A. This simple truth stands in opposition to so many false religions.

1. Israel had just come out of Egypt, and the doctrine of the unity of God stood in direct contradiction to the polytheism of Egypt...
  - a. Here the LORD put into words what was demonstrated upon Egypt—that He alone is LORD.
    - The Egyptians had many gods that were judged when the Lord brought His people out of Egypt.
    - Many of the plagues that were sent upon the land were direct attacks on Egypt's gods...
      - For example, take the first plague...
        - In the first plague, the Nile was turned to blood.
          - The Nile was worshipped by the Egyptians, so this plague humbled this god of Egypt.
      - And take the last plague in which the first born son was killed.
        - The Egyptians worshipped their Pharaohs, and Pharaoh's first born son would have been the next Pharaoh...
          - by judging the firstborn, God humbled another of the gods of the Egyptians, showing that He alone is LORD.

TRANS> But not only was polytheism the religion of Egypt (which Israel had just come out of),

2. It was also the religion of Canaan (where Israel was going).

- When the LORD brought his people into the Land of Canaan, it was as much a judgement on the Canaanites as it was a judgement upon their gods.
    - It was understood in those days that when nations went to war, their gods would fight for them.
      - And so by overcoming all the peoples of Canaan with all their gods
        - the LORD showed that He alone was God.
3. And so here in Deuteronomy, between these two great judgements:
- a. God's judgement on Egypt and God's judgement on Canaan,
    - The Lord declares to His people in the most plain and definite language that He is only one God.
  - b. He solemnly warns Israel not to turn away from Him to worship the gods of the people around them...
    - But you know what they did...
      - They constantly turned to worship the gods of the people around them.
  - c. But why did they do this?
    - 1) Well of course it was because they were rebellious...
      - But what would have been the reason they would have given—what was the reason in their self-justifying minds for looking to other gods?
        - They did it under the notion that these gods would be able to help them in ways that Jehovah was not helping them (or perhaps *could* not help them)
      - It is quite simple...
        - They needed rain and Jehovah was not sending rain,
          - so they would get Baal, the rain god, to help them.
        - Makes sense, doesn't it?
          - If Jehovah does not send rain, maybe Baal will.
          - It seemed perfectly justified to them.
    - 2) But the truth is, of course, that Jehovah alone is God.
      - He is the One who decides if it is going to rain or not.
        - And the reason He was withholding rain was because they were not serving Him.

- It was not because He was not able to send rain if He wanted to.
  - Instead of turning to Baal, they should have humbled themselves and repented of their sin.
    - Then the LORD would have blessed them and sent rain.
      - Of course as it turned out, they did not repent,
        - They worshipped Baal, but still,
          - they had no rain!
          - Jehovah was not about send rain as long as they were worshipping Baal, expecting him to send it!
          - The situation was finally so desperate and rain was so needed, that the LORD sent Elijah to Mt. Carmel to humble Baal...
            - you know the story.
- 3) But I want you to take this account and what is taught about the rebellious men of Israel and see how common this kind of rebellion is.
- a) Is it not safe to say that it was upon the same principles that men began to worship other gods after the flood in Noah's day?
- Was this not the way that polytheism spread into the ancient world?
  - Was it not that the nations of the world were put out with the one true God because He did not always do what they wanted...
    - Because He withheld blessings to chasten them for their sin?
      - And that instead of repenting,
        - they began to fashion other gods who didn't care how they lived—
          - gods who would still bless them anyway so long as they offered the appropriate sacrifices.
- b) And look at us today...
- (i) We are sold out to pluralism in Canada...
- Pluralism is a lot like polytheism...
  - It is the idea that there is no absolute truth, no one true God who judges us all,
    - but that religion is a personal matter for each person to decide...
    - and that whatever works for you is right.

(ii) How did we ever come to this position?

- Was it not in very similar way to Israel?
  - Do we not hear as one of the chief complaints against accepting the God of the Bible as the only true God something like this:
    - “Well what about all the problems in the world?”
    - “What about the famines and the storms and the sickness and the war and all the sorrow?”
    - “If there is only one God over all, then He is not a very good God—just look at all the problems!”
- You see what we are doing, don't you?
  - We are put out with the One true God because He is not doing what we want.
  - We are put out when we ought to be humbled.
  - We deny Him His place when we ought to be repenting.

B. And so it is, because of human rebellion, that there are many gods...

- In 1 Cor 8:5, the Apostle tells us that there are many gods and many lords...

1. This was certainly the case in the New Testament times.

a. When Paul wrote these words in 1 Corinthians 8:5, the Roman emperor was considered a god...

- And indeed, the LORD tells the rulers of the earth that they are gods...
  - It is given to them to represent Him and to exercise His authority.
  - But then He warns them that they will die like men!
    - They are not really gods.
    - They are to speak nothing but righteousness as His representatives.
    - And inasmuch as they do not, they will be severely judged for usurpation of His throne.

b. Besides this, the Greeks had their temples...

- The one city of Corinth had twelve temples!
  - including the temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, where worshippers practiced religious prostitution,
  - the temple of Apollo,

- and the temple of Asclepius, the god of healing.
  - Paul says that in sacrificing to these gods,
    - the Greeks were in fact sacrificing to demons.
    - These are not really gods at all
2. And so it is in our day...
- There is Allah and there is the impersonal god of the New Age movement and there is the Unitarian god of many protestants—a god who has no divine Son...
  - And though there are many people who claim that these are all the same god, they are not...
    - Jehovah is not like Allah
    - Jehovah is not like the Unitarian god
    - Jehovah is not like the god of the New Age movement...
    - He is only like Himself.
      - He is one—He is not many!
      - Those who worship these other gods are not worshipping the true God.
        - They are worshipping gods who are not really gods at all.
3. That's why Paul goes on to say, that even though there are many gods and many lords in the world (as far as the world is concerned)
- 1 Cor 8:6: **“yet for us** there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we live.”
  - a. You see, for us who believe, it is different...
    - We have been delivered from all this foolishness
    - We are no longer on the run from the one true God.
    - We are not longer trying to resist Him and deny Him because we have been reconciled to Him through Jesus Christ.
      - We have no need to join the world's agnostic pluralistic chorus that says there are many gods and that one is just as legitimate as the other.
      - In fact, we have every reason not to join them...
        - because being reconciled to the true God,
          - we love Him and honour Him and behold His glory revealed in Christ...

- and we have in Him the hope of eternal life...
  - We want Him and Him alone.
  - If He chastens us, we want to learn from it.
  - Rather than being put out by Him, we are drawn to Him.
- b. We have no confidence in demons who lead their worshippers into corrupt practices...
  - demons who are not gods, but who will themselves be cast into the lake of fire with Satan, the god of this world.
  - Nor do we put any confidence in princes and rulers and governors:
    - Though now they use the authority that God has given them to wield great power...
      - we do not fear them because we know that they will all die like men.
      - We know that God raises them up to fulfill His purposes for His kingdom and then brings them down to destruction.

TRANS> **For us**, who are redeemed, there is only one God.

- “The LORD our God, the Lord is one.”
- And now I want to look at the implication of this fact...

## **II. Because there is only one God, all of our devotion is to be directed toward Him.**

A. This is what Deuteronomy 6:4-5 teaches us when it says:

- “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD *is* one!”
- and then adds:
  - “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.”

1. This only makes sense.

- a. If there were many gods, it would be necessary for you to parcel out your commitment...
  - You would have to decide which one to thank for this blessing,
    - which one to obey in this situation or that situation,
    - which one to trust on Tuesday and which one to trust on Thursday.
- b. But since there is only one God,

- you are to love Him with **all** your heart, **all** your soul, and **all** your strength.
  - “all your heart” means that you are to love him with all that is within you—with a sincere devotion.
  - “all your soul” means that you are to love him with your whole life—to live for Him so that everything you do is an act of service...
  - and “all your strength” means that your energy and power is to be used to know Him, to delight in Him, and to glorify Him.
  
- 2. And this same whole-hearted commitment is to spill over from you to your children...
  - a. This is brought out in verse 6-7:
    - “And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.”
    - We are to make it our business (as we saw this morning)
      - to train up our children in the way of the Lord...
      - We are to constantly impress upon them love for the Lord who redeems us and gives us our inheritance...
        - and love for Him expressed not with mere sentiment, but with obedience...
    - This love for the one true God is to be the theme that runs through all our instruction in our homes...
      - we are to talk of His way when we sit down—for instruction...
      - we are to talk of His way when we walk by the way—when we are about our work...
      - we are to talk of His way when we lie down—to rest at the end of the day, looking back on all His goodness...
      - we are to talk of His way when we rise up—to go about our business—our purpose is to be to honour Him and to love Him who is the only God.
  - b. Each generation does not have to come along and figure out a new way for themselves...
    - There is only one God and He never changes, never loses His power, never gets unseated by another or overpowered by another...
    - There is only one God for future generations and He is the same who was God in past generations.

3. Everything we do is to bear the marks of commitment to Him as our God...we are to be seen as belonging to Him and to none else.
  - Deut 6:8-9: You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.
  - a. It says to bind them on your hands because God's commandments are to characterize what your hands do—your work in this world...
    - Yes believer, your commitment to the one true God is to show at work!
      - It is a sad thing to see a Christian who cheats his employer by loafing while he is being paid...
        - He has just taken the god of covetousness who is not like Jehovah.
      - or does not do his work with a view to loving his neighbour and representing the LORD who had done so much for us.
        - such a one is worshipping the god of self rather than the god who tells us to love our neighbour—and certainly not the God who came from heaven to die for our sins!
  - b. You are to bind God's commandments between your eyes because they are to characterize your eyes, the way you look at the world.
    - You are not to just fall into the vain, God-denying thoughts of this world...
      - They do science with the presupposition that there is no God—they try to account for their existence without Him...
    - Your eyes are to judge what is done around you with righteous judgement that is informed not by your own tastes or by the tastes and preferences of the people around you,
      - but by the word of God.
      - It's to affect the way you look at everything.
  - c. You are to bind the commandments of the one true God upon your doorposts, because your home is to be a place where the true God is loved and served.
    - Your home is to be a place of peace, where each member of the family lives according the maxim of Christ,
      - “my life for yours!”
      - It is to be a place of warm and gracious hospitality...
        - a place of generosity and joy
        - a sanctuary where God is worshipped.
          - His way is to permeate the halls.



- d. You are to bind the commandments of the one true God on your gates because they are to characterize the city in which you live.
  - Of course you may not always have the power to effect this, but in as much as you are able, you are to strive that God's way be honoured in your city.
    - And perhaps this could be applied to us today in our churches...
    - The elders who sit in the gate are to be devoted not their own agenda, but to the one true God.

B. Consider what other passages of scripture teach us about having only one God.

1. There is but one God to adore and worship as God

- Psalm 73:25: Whom have I in heaven *but You?* And *there is* none upon earth *that I* desire besides You.
- Matthew 4:9-10: And he [Satan] said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

2. There is but one God to thank for all things (creation and providence)

- James 1:17: Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights,
  - He is ultimately responsible for making everything and then for distributing everything to His creatures.
- There is no one else to give credit to—
  - It is God who is ultimately responsible for every blessing you have.
  - The beginning of idolatry is ingratitude (you do not give thanks to God because you begin to attribute your blessings to some other source—your own skill and prowess, your neighbour, nature...)
    - Romans 1:21-23: because, 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.

3. There is but one God to please (and obey)

- a. Romans 14:6-8 shows that everything you do is to be for the Lord.
  - He who observes the day, observes *it* to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe *it*. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we

live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

- b. You do not have two or three or four gods to please—only one.
    - Thus Paul says to those would be judges:
      - Romans 16:4: Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls.
  - c. There is a beautiful simplicity about having one God.
    - You don't have to decide who to please and who to obey at every turn.
      - When your neighbour wants you to enter a shady business deal, you have your answer—there is only one God, you don't need to please your neighbour.
      - When your lust calls you to some sinful excess (greed, immorality, rage, bitterness, worry, gluttony, drunkenness)
        - you know that your lust is not God—He is the only one you are to please.
4. There is but one God to believe in
- a. There is only one true religion, and it is given by God:
    - Eph 4:4-6: *There is* one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all.
  - b. Since there is only one true religion,
    - Your goal ought to be to bring your faith (what you believe) into line with that one true religion.
  - c. After Jesus descended and ascended, we are told that He revealed this one true religion for us to follow:
    - Eph 4:11-13: And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith [there is only **one** faith] and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ
    - The one true faith has been once delivered to the saints by the prophets and the apostles that Jesus sent...
      - We are to listen to them...
      - All these—the prophets and apostles and pastor teachers—cannot have a different message to bring—they must all bring the same message of the one faith.

- And it is not the apostles and prophets who must conform to the pastors and teachers that teach today, but the other way around—
  - In other words, the pastor teachers teach only according to the apostles' doctrine.
- d. When they do, the result will be that there will be unity about what we believe.
  - Eph 4:14-16: that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.
  - Disharmony is the characteristic of the Gentiles who have many gods and so who follow their own desires:
    - Eph 4:17-20: This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ,
      - There is no one source to refer to—no basis for judgement—so everyone ends up following his own feelings.
- 5. There is but one God to trust (Isa 44:1-28, 45:14 – 46:13)
  - a. Augustine once made fun of polytheists:
    - He told them the only god they need to worship is the god of happiness.
      - If they worship the god of gold to gain gold, what good is it if they get their gold and are not happy anyway?
      - And if they do not have gold, but have happiness, what need is there for gold?
    - You only need one God—the true God who is able to bless and to curse.
  - b. Isaiah stresses that Jehovah is the only God we need
    - Isa 44:6-8: Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts: 'I *am* the First and I *am* the Last; besides Me *there is* no God. And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me, since I appointed the ancient people. And the things that are coming and shall come, let them show these to them. Do not fear, nor be afraid; have I not told you from that

time, and declared *it*? You *are* My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed *there is* no other Rock; I know not *one*.' ”

- A god you make cannot be trusted in:
  - In Isaiah 44:9-21,
    - Isaiah makes fun of them for supposing that a god made out of a block of wood, the scraps of which are used to build a fire,
      - is able to save.
      - He chalks it up to extreme blindness that they should fall down and say to block of wood,
        - “You are my god, now deliver me.”
  - But you see, this is exactly what people do all the time...
    - Instead of trusting in the true God, they trust in whatever they have imagined God to be—what they want Him to be...
      - But how can you trust in something you made up in your head any more than you can trust in a block of wood?
- Look at Isaiah 45—
  - In verse 5, we have the admonition to trust in the one true God because he is over all
    - He is the one who ultimately decides what happens
    - He is the One who ultimately blesses or curses.
      - Isa 45:5-7: *I am* the LORD, and *there is* no other; *there is* no God besides Me. I will gird you, though you have not known Me, that they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting that *there is* none besides Me. *I am* the LORD, and *there is* no other; I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these *things*.
  - Therefore the only reasonable thing to do is to trust in Him alone.
    - Isa 45:20-22: “Assemble yourselves and come; draw near together, you *who have* escaped from the nations. They have no knowledge, who carry the wood of their carved image, and pray to a god *that* cannot save. Tell and bring forth *your case*; yes, let them take counsel together. Who has declared this from ancient time? *Who* has told it from that time? *Have* not I, the LORD? And *there is* no other God besides Me, a just God and a Savior; *there is* none besides Me. Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For *I am* God, and *there is* no other.”

### **Conclusion:**

So you see that scripture plainly teaches that there is one God...

- And that because there is only one, that we are to be wholly devoted to Him...
- You are to adore and worship Him alone...
- You are to thank Him alone...
- You are to please Him alone...
- You are to believe Him alone...
- and You are to trust Him alone.