

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 100

Halifax, 6 December 2009

Q. 100 What special things are we to consider in the Ten Commandments?

A. We are to consider, in the Ten Commandments, the preface, the substance of the commandments themselves, and several reasons annexed to some of them, the more to enforce them.

Introduction:

In the last several weeks, we have been considering introductory matters related to the Ten Commandments in our afternoon sermon series.

- Today we are going to take a bird's eye view of the Ten Commandments,
 - and in doing so, I will give a brief summary of each of the three components that make up God's revelation of the ten commandments to us.
- I will begin with a reading of the passage in which they are found... Exodus 20
 - READ> Exodus 20:1-17.

You will notice, that as our Catechism points out,

- there are three things that can be found in this passage.
 - First, there is a preface in verses 1-2
 - where the LORD identifies Himself as the author of the commandments.
 - Second, there are the Ten Commandments themselves in verses 3-17,
 - all but two of which begin with the words "You shall,"
 - and the two which do not begin with these words might just as well begin with them:
 - "Remember the Sabbath Day" might just as well be, "You shall remember the Sabbath Day..."
 - And "Honour your Father and Mother" might just as well be "You shall honour your Father and Mother.
 - Third, there are the reasons annexed to some of the commandments the more to enforce them...

Today we will look at each of these components and at why it is important for us to consider it.

I. First, consider the preface to the Ten Commandments.

- A. The preface is important because in it, God identifies Himself as the author of these commandments!
1. Whenever you are given commandments,
 - You want to know where they came from.
 - a. None of us really like to be told what to do; so whenever you are given orders, you want to know where they came from.
 - I worked in a wood shop where I had a fellow-employ who liked to order people around.
 - But he did not have any authority—he was just another worker.
 - He was not paying us and the person who was paying us had never appointed him to direct us...
 - So we didn't much listen to him.
 - We said, "Who are you to tell us what to do?"
 - b. You children know all about this...
 - If you are busy playing with your Lego and your little brother comes up and commands you to stop what you are doing and take out the garbage,
 - What will you say to him?
 - Probably something like,
 - "Why should I?"
 - or "Who says?"
 - Now if your little brother informs you that your Mom sent him to tell you to take out the garbage,
 - that changes everything.
 - Now it is Mom who has spoken!
 - Your brother is her ambassador, speaking her commandment!
 - Now, if you are wise, you will obey.
2. Our LORD is very good about letting us know that He is the one who has spoken!
 - a. All through the pages of scripture, you have the prophets and apostles constantly saying things like,
 - "Thus says the LORD."
 - And the LORD Himself gives them signs and wonders to confirm that they are His true spokesmen...
 - He actually established death as the penalty for anyone who should ever claim to speak in His name something that He had not authorised that person to speak.
 - He also declared that if a self-proclaimed prophet ever spoke anything that did not come to pass, that prophet was to be utterly rejected...

- There were no 90% accuracy rates for the prophets of the LORD.
 - The standard was 100%!
- And you have the LORD constantly instructing Moses and the others to speak and command nothing but what He had spoken...
 - Never ever were they to speak their own words in their office—only what God had given to them to speak.
 - Even Jesus Himself, in human nature, claimed to speak nothing but what the Father had commanded Him to speak.
- b. God makes it clear that He is the spokesman because He wants us to know that His word is from Him.
- He does not give us scripture that is mixed, partly with His word and partly with the words of men.
 - 2 Tim 3:16-17 tells us that
 - “All scripture is God-breathed... and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.”
 - And Jesus Himself declared that the scripture cannot be broken.
3. And so what do we see here in the preface to the Ten Commandments?
- We see the declaration right from the start:
 - That God is the one who gave us these commandments...
 - Verse 1 says,
 - Exodus 20:1: “And God spoke all these words, saying.”
 - That means that we are obliged to receive these commandments as coming from God.
 - It is not for us to question them or tinker with them, but to humbly receive them as coming from God.
 - Indeed, these are given to us not only as a prophet under the inspiration of God telling us what he has seen in a vision...
 - but here we have a direct quotation of what God said when He revealed the commandments from Mount Sinai!
 - We need to pay extra attention—for the LORD Himself is speaking!

TRANS> But notice that the LORD has yet more to encourage us to obedience in this preface.

- Not only does He tell us that He is the spokesman here...

B. But to further encourage us to obedience, He reminds us who He is and of the special relationship He has to us as our God and Redeemer.

- vs. 2 says:
 - Ex 20:2: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

- 1. In these few words of introduction, our Lord declares to us who He is and what He has done!
 - a. First, He declares that He is the LORD.
 - When LORD is written with all upper case letters, as it is here, it refers to God's official name by which He wished to be known...
 - Yahweh or Jehovah!
 - It is the name that speaks of Him as the one who is self-existing!
 - Everything else is created, but the Triune God is self-existing!
 - As such there is no one who has authority like His authority!
 - In fact, there is no one who has **any** authority outside of the authority He gives them...
 - All authority comes from Him
 - Romans 13 says:
 - Rom 13:1: For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.
 - So when He commands, we ought to listen!
 - Poor Pharaoh, when first told through Moses that Yahweh had said, "Let my people go" made the great mistake of saying,
 - "Who is the LORD that I should obey Him?"
 - After ten plagues that nearly wiped Egypt out, He had his answer to that question!
 - Don't be so foolish as to question the words of the LORD!
 - When He commands, obey!
 - b. Second, He declares that He is our God...
 - He says, "I am the LORD **your God**."
 - This is a tremendous statement that speaks of God's election of His people and of His making Himself to be their God by covenant!
 - All through the Bible, He declares to those He has taken to be His own that "I am your God and you are my people."
 - By this, He is not just saying that He is our Creator...
 - He is saying something much grander than this!
 - He is telling us that He has taken us as His own possession and has purposed to bless us and make us great.

- This should encourage us with the great privilege it is for us to be His!
 - He is there to help us and to defend us and to bless us...
 - And so it is for us to serve Him as willing servants and children!
- c. Third, He declares that He is the One who has redeemed us...
- For His covenant people at the time of the giving of the Ten Commandments,
 - the latest stage of His redemptive work was their deliverance out of Egypt from the house of bondage.
 - This was His active work of deliverance that He had wrought concerning them to set them free to serve Him.
 - Now, His redemptive work has come to a much great stage!
 - Now He has sent Jesus who has come and fully atoned for our sins, so securing for us complete pardon of sin by His own blood...
 - And He has poured out the Holy Spirit upon us in fullness so that we are able to serve God with a new heart and new life.
 - Now we await the redemption of our body which will come at the last day when we will be transformed to serve God without sin and will be fully delivered from all sorrow and suffering.
 - But the latest stage of redemption is the glorious appearing of our LORD Jesus Christ, so for us, the preface to the Ten Commandments might say,
 - “I am the LORD your God who brought you out of condemnation by the shedding of my son’s blood, and who freed you from bondage to sin through Jesus Christ.”
 - Just as was the case for the covenant people when the Ten Commandments were first given,
 - this gives us a double incentive to obey God!
 - First, because of our gratitude for His mighty work of redemption...
 - And second, because of His redemptive freeing grace that puts us into a place where we are enabled to serve Him.
2. My brothers and sisters, I have only scratched the surface here in explaining to you what God has revealed about Himself in this preface...
- a. I trust that you can see how important it is to consider this preface when we look at the commandments!
- We are not coming to God to obtain eternal life by keeping the commandments...

- We are coming to Him as the one who has already taken us to be His people and to the one who has already redeemed us!
 - We obey Him because of His grace—because we are His—because He is God!
 - not that He might become our God!
- b. There is so much more to be said about this preface—and this is only an introduction...
 - Next week, the LORD willing, I will attempt to unpack more of the richness of this preface...
 - and the following week, we will look at what it means to us.

TRANS> But now we must move on to look at the second component of God’s revelation of the Ten Commandments to us.

II. Second, consider the commandments themselves.

- A. Of course it goes with saying that in considering the Ten Commandments we must look at the commandments themselves...
1. In doing so, we must consider what each commandment means.
 - If this is indeed a summary of the moral law that God has given to us as His people,
 - it behoves us to be certain that we understand what He is saying to us.
 - Sometimes, people have a wrong idea about what the words actually mean...
 - For example, when it the first commandment says, “you shall have no other gods before me,”
 - some people think that means we should not put other gods before god in importance...
 - but the words in the Hebrew mean “before my face.”
 - We are to have no other gods before God’s face.
 - And in the third commandment when we are told not take God’s name in vain,
 - there are a lot of people who think that only applies to using God’s name to curse, or as an explicative.
 - But we will see that when scripture speaks of God’s name, it speaks of all that He has revealed about Himself...
 - The idea is that we are to take lightly what He has revealed about Himself.
 - We will see that we take God’s name in vain when we worship and do not really pay attention to what we are saying or hearing.

2. In considering the commandments, we will endeavour to look at how they apply.
 - In general, how they apply to everyone,
 - but then more specifically how they apply to us.
 - When we get to murder, we will talk about things like abortion, but we will also talk about all our attitudes that are first steps to murder...
 - or things we say and do that provoke others to want to get rid of us.
 - Always, always our goal must be to see what God is saying to us so that we may stop doing what He hates and start doing what pleases Him.
 - And always we will see our need for Christ to have mercy on us,
 - to cleanse us from the guilt of our sin and to strengthen us by His Spirit to walk in the way that He has appointed.
 - If we understand the commandments aright,
 - they will draw to Jesus Christ and make us humble before Him and before our neighbours.
 - Rather than being shocked when we hear of horrendous things that are done,
 - we will see that we are partakers of the very same species of sin and we will be humble.

TRANS> We will look at each of the commandments in much detail in the weeks to come, but for now, I want you to...

B. See briefly what each commandment entails...

- The first four speak especially of our duty to God.
 - These are often referred to as the first table.
 1. The first commandment teaches us to delight in the only true God and despise all that claims the place that belongs to Him.
 2. The second commandment teaches us to delight in the worship that God has given us, and to despise all that deviates from what He has appointed.
 3. The third commandment teaches us to delight in God's name (all that He has revealed about Himself) and to despise irreverence and indifference toward Him.
 4. The fourth commandment teaches us to delight in devoting the day God has appointed for Himself to Him, and to despise all that distracts us from focusing on Him.
 - So those are the first four commandments that speak of our duty to God.
 - The remaining six speak particularly of our duty to man

- Of course you understand that these are also our duty to God—but indirectly in the sense that they have to do with how God has called us to treat our neighbour.
5. The fifth commandment teaches us to delight in the distinctions God has made in authority, and to despise those wicked ways in us that tear down those distinctions,
 - either by not honouring those who are over us or by not being honourable when we are in authority.
 6. The sixth commandment teaches us to delight in life and to despise all that tends to the destruction of life, including all malice and bitterness and hatred.
 7. The seventh commandment teaches us to delight in marriage and to despise all that goes against God’s appointed relationship for sexual intimacy and fruitfulness.
 8. The eighth commandment teaches us to delight in service and all that promotes the prosperity of our neighbour, and to despise all that unjustly impoverishes and diminishes his wealth—laziness and stealing.
 9. The ninth commandment teaches us to delight in the truth and in words that edify and bless, and to despise all lies and destructive words.
 10. The tenth commandment teaches us to delight in the prosperity and success of our neighbour and to despise the envy and greed and selfishness and discontentment that so often wells up in our hearts.

TRANS> There is a very brief summary of each commandment.

- We will have at least two sermons on each one when we come to consider them in the future.
- But now lets move on to the third thing we must consider as we study the Ten Commandments.

III. Third, we must consider the reasons annexed to some of the commandments.

A. I want you to notice, that some of the commandments have reasons attached to them.

1. Most of the commandments with reasons attached are found in the first table (the commandments that speak of our duty to God)...
 - You see that there are reasons attached to the second, third and fourth commandments.
 - In the second table (the commandments that pertain to our neighbour), only the first one (the fifth commandment) has a reason or in this case, an incentive attached.
2. This may be the case because the incentives given with these commandments spill over onto the ones that come after...

- What I mean is, the things that are threatened and promised in them in many cases apply to the other commandments as well as to the ones to which they are specifically attached.
- This is especially the case with the reason attached to the second commandment...
 - Look at what it says in verse 5 and 6:
 - Exodus 20:5-6: 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.
- Now of course you can see how God's jealousy has a lot to do with idolatry...
 - Because when we worship idols, we are worshipping our own revision of God—
 - instead of bringing to Him the worship He wants, we have changed the truth about Him and are bring worship to our revision of Him.
 - He is jealous for our worship that He is not getting.
 - I might add here that this is no petty jealousy as jealousy so often is with us...
 - This is the jealousy of a sovereign to whom grave injustice is done when we pour out our allegiance on idols as if what God Himself wants is irrelevant.
 - But look at what He says...
 - He visits the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Him...
 - and shows mercy to thousands of them who love Him and keep His commandments.
 - Now of course, as Jesus told us, if we love Him, we will keep His commandments...
 - And you see here in this reason that a general statement is made.
 - Mercy is promised to those who love God and keep His commandments...any of his commandments.
 - so this promise applies to all the commandments.
 - It is not just for the second commandment, but it is for all of the commandments.
 - Therefore, when you get to the sixth commandment—or the seventh or the eighth or any of them...
 - God does not need to add a reason or incentive to it...

- He has already said that He shows mercy to thousands who love Him and keep His commandments.
 - So that applies to all ten of the commandments.
3. Something similar can be said of the reason annexed to the fifth commandment.
- This is the promise given to children who obey their parents that they will live long in the land...
 - Now you know that when this commandment was given, the land was synonymous with the covenant community.
 - When someone turned from the Lord and His ways, they were cut off from God's covenant.
 - They did not have the privilege of continuing in the land where God had placed His blessing and His promises and fellowship.
 - They were cut off and did not live long in it.
 - And if the church neglected to cut them off for their apostasy, God Himself said that He would cut them off.
 - And if that did not happen in this world, it would happen at their death when they would not be gathered to their people as the faithful were.
 - You know how it is often the case that children will grow up in the covenant community and reject their parent's covenant nurture and then have to be cut off from the church.
 - And that is what this promise is about—
 - that the children who continue in the faith they were incorporated into will live long—yes—even forever—with God and His people in the place where He makes Himself known.
 - And this promise can be expanded to the other commandments also...
 - For although it has special application to the honour of parents and those in authority,
 - it is also true that those who keep the other commandments will live long in the land...
 - In fact, they cannot be said to honour their parents and those in authority if they transgress the other commandments...
 - because if you kill and steal and worship false gods and idols and commit adultery,
 - you are not honouring your parents, but you are bringing dishonour upon their name...
 - even if they do these things themselves...

- you are carrying on their bad name instead of doing what you can to change it.
- And so the promise that you will live long in the land if you obey the fifth commandment also applies to all the other commandments.

TRANS> So you can see why it is that when you get to the sixth commandment, additional reasons do not need to be added.

- The reasons that were already given spill over and apply to these last five commandments.
 - They are an incentive to us to keep them all!
- 4. As for the reason annexed to the fourth commandment,
 - It is more narrowly confined to the Sabbath,
 - It reminds us that God made the Sabbath day holy and blessed it, and that He Himself set the example for us.
 - As He blessed the day, not of the sake of the day, but to be a blessing to us, it is an incentive to us to keep it—that we may obtain the blessing that He has put into the day.
 - But even here, there is some spill over to the other commandments,
 - as this promise reminds us that there is a blessing to be found in whatever God has blessed...
 - Just as we find His blessing when we observe the Sabbath day since He has blessed it for us,
 - so we will also find blessing when we honour marriage which is an institution that He has blessed for us...
 - or when we labour faithfully because He blesses the work of our hands.
 - And likewise,
 - when we are here commanded to follow his example of rest on the seventh day,
 - we are reminded that we also follow His example in the other commandments...
 - God speaks the truth, and it is our privilege to speak the truth after Him...
 - God the Son honours God the Father and it is our example to honour our fathers...
 - God's Son has loved us and served us, and did not come to be served, but to serve,

- and it is our privilege to follow His example in serving others instead of stealing from them.

TRANS> So you see how the reasons annexed to some of the commandments are incentives to keep the particular commandments to which they are attached...

- but they are also reasons to keep all the commandments!
- But in this overview of things, there is something I need to say about these promises and threats that are attached to the commandments.
 - Sometimes there is a question that arises in the minds of believers about this, and now I want to address that question...
 - What is the question?

B. How is it not works salvation to say that those who keep God's commandments are blessed and those don't are cut off?

1. Are we in danger here of embracing a works salvation?

- Well, I suppose we are always in danger of embracing a works salvation...
 - but not as a result of embracing God's promises given to obedience.
 - These promises are found from Genesis to Revelation and God has not given them to us to harm us!
- Even in Revelation 22, the very last chapter in the Bible, our Lord Jesus declares,
 - Revelation 22:12-15: ""And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to give to every one according to his work. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End, the First and the Last." Blessed *are* those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside *are* dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie."
- It is never dangerous to take what He says here about blessing on obedience, for all that He says is good and true.
 - There are blessings pronounced on obedience in Exodus 20, and there are blessings pronounced on obedience in Revelation 22 by our Lord Jesus.
 - Such blessings are found throughout God's Word.

2. But how are we to understand this in connection with Paul's words in Titus 3:5 where he says,

- Tit 3:5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,
- or in Galatians Ga 2:16 where he says:

- Gal 2:16: "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.
- And of course we have the same thing in the Old Testament...
 - In Psalm 130:3-4, David says,
 - Ps 130:3-4: If You, LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with You, That You may be feared.
 - And in Psalm 32, he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity...
 - We have seen how even in giving the Ten Commandments themselves,
 - the LORD made sure the people did not wrongly suppose they could be accepted of Him through commandment keeping.
 - He told the people that they dare not come near to Him lest He break out in wrath against them—
 - And He appeared to them with thunder and dark clouds and an earthquake to show them that they must have a mediator to approach Him, because God is holy and we are not holy...
 - The Law condemns all of us as guilty before God on the basis of our own law-keeping.
- 3. You must understand that the promises and threats attached to God's commandments are not in contradiction to this...
 - Have we not already seen how God presents Himself in the preface to the Ten Commandments?
 - He does not say that He is the LORD who will be their God and who will redeem them if they keep His commandments.
 - He tells them that He is their God who has **already** redeemed and so calls them to keep His commandments because He has **already** redeemed them.
 - If you have been made one of God's people and have been redeemed, then you will keep His commandments!
 - Your commandment keeping will not save you, but if you are saved, you will keep His commandments because part of what He does when He saves you is to write His commandments in your heart!
 - He puts a love for His law in you so that you will not depart from Him.
 - Your obedience is yet far from perfect—but it is still there and it is the mark of the person that God has blessed.
 - It is an evidence of your salvation.
 - It is by observing God's commandments that we make our calling and election sure.

- Look again at Titus 3:5 again.
 - Tit 3:5 not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit,
 - Do you see what it says?
 - It assures us that we are not saved on the basis of works of righteousness that we have done...
 - It is all of God's mercy—His mercy in Christ...
 - But look at what that mercy involves!
 - It involves the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Spirit.
 - The washing and renewing of the Holy Spirit is that which transforms us from rebels into commandment keepers.
 - And from Genesis to Revelation,
 - those who keep the commandments of God are those who obtain the blessing.
 - Their commandment keeping marks them out as those who have received the Holy Spirit who washes and regenerates.

TRANS> So I hope that explains to you that these promises that are annexed to the Ten Commandments are for us.

- They are given by God to motivate us to greater obedience now that we are His people.
 - All the more now that Christ has come and has told us that the one who loves Him is the one who keeps His commandments.

Conclusion...

- So there you have the three component parts that make up God's revelation of the Ten Commandments to us.
 - In the weeks to come, we will study about each of these various parts in detail.
 - This is one of the most important parts of scripture.