

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 105 Part 4

Halifax, 7 February 2010

Q. 105 What are the sins forbidden in the first commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the first commandment are, atheism, in denying or not having a God; idolatry, in having or worshipping more gods than one, or any with or instead of the true God; the not having and avouching Him for God, and our God; the omission or neglect of anything due to Him, required in this commandment; ignorance, forgetfulness, misapprehensions, false opinions, unworthy and wicked thoughts of Him; bold and curious searching into His secrets; all profaneness, hatred of God; self-love, self-seeking, and all other inordinate setting of our mind, will, or affections upon other things, and taking them off from Him in whole or in part; vain credulity, unbelief, heresy, misbelief, distrust, despair, incorrigibleness, and insensibleness under judgements, hardness of heart, pride, presumption, carnal security, tempting of God; using unlawful means, and trusting in lawful means;

carnal delights and joys; corrupt, blind, and indiscreet zeal; lukewarmness, and deadness in the things of God; estranging ourselves, and apostatizing from God; praying, or giving any religious worship, to saints, angels, or any other creatures; all compacts and consulting with the devil, and hearkening to his suggestions; making men the lords of our faith and conscience; slighting and despising God and His commands; resisting and grieving of His Spirit, discontent and impatience at His dispensations, charging Him foolishly for the evils He inflicts on us; and ascribing the praise of any good we either are, have, or can do, to fortune, idols, ourselves, or any other creature.

Introduction:

Today we come to our sixth sermon on the first commandment, and our fourth sermon on Question 105.

- This section in the Assembly's exposition of the first commandment addresses the problem of a defective commitment and devotion to the true God.
- In the Old Testament ceremonies, one of the offerings that was required was a burnt offering.
 - In the burnt offering, the entire sacrifice was to be offered—nothing was eaten by the worshipper or the priest.
 - This offering represented the obligation every human being has to be entirely committed and devoted to the LORD.
 - He is God, and if we are to treat Him as God, it is required of us to give our whole selves to Him—to be a whole burnt offering!

- But because we fail to do this,
 - the Lord appointed the whole burnt offering in which the worshippers offered the animal as a substitute because of their failure.
 - And of course those animals were a type of Jesus Christ who wholly gave himself to the Father as our representative.
 - We rise from death to life with God by faith in Him as the One who does what we have failed to do.
- And now that we have been made righteous in Him, it is for us to endeavour to give ourselves wholly to God...
 - not as a way of fulfilling the righteous requirement of the law, for that has already been done by Christ,
 - but rather as way of expressing our gratitude,
 - and because it is right for us to do so, and we can see that,
 - and because we love God now and want to be all that He has called us to be,
 - and because of God's promise to so work in us that we will at last be wholly devoted to God—
 - He is at work in us to purge us from all of our idolatry!
 - To repair our corrupted hearts so that they are totally devoted to Him!
 - How excellent it is my brothers and sisters!

As I have been doing for the last couple weeks,

- I want to begin with a look at a scripture passage that relates to this theme of the particular aspect of the first commandment that we are looking at today...
 - Namely, devoting ourselves entirely to the one true God rather than to idols.
 - Please turn with me to 1 John 5 where we shall find such a call.
 - Please listen now as I read to you from 1 John 5:18-21.
 - READ 1 John 5:18-21.
- I want to draw your attention in particular to the last verse:
 - 1 John 5:21: "Little children, keep yourselves from idols."
 - Why does John stick this verse on at the end?
 - Is this just a random thought he tacks on at the end of his epistle, or is this something that he has been talking about all the way through?
 - It seems clear that it is what he has been talking about the whole way through!
 - All the way through this letter he is concerned with the question:
 - "How do we know that we know the true God?"

- He begins the letter by declaring how he (and the other apostles) have seen and heard and handled the word of life—
 - even the very Son of God who was manifested in the flesh and who reveals the One true God.
 - And how He is writing to us that we might have joyful fellowship with the One true God who is revealed in Jesus Christ.

- And he goes on to explain that in Christ, we see that God is light and that in Him there is no darkness at all—
 - and that if we know Him, we cannot pretend that we have never sinned, but we must look to Jesus Christ who is the only advocate and the only propitiation, not only for our sins, but for the sins of the whole world!

- And he explains that if we really know the one true God,
 - It will totally change the way we live—
 - we will no longer continue in sin
 - we will no longer love the world
 - we will not be able to reject the true God anymore but will live in the joyful hope that we will see Him and will be like Him as promised...
 - and we will love our brothers and sisters...
 - You see, John is showing us that if we have eternal life, we will live before the face of the true God.
 - Instead of idols that are substitutes for the true God, we will live before Him!
 - John doesn't just command us to love our brothers, but he rather tells us that if we have come to know the true God as He is revealed in Christ,
 - we can't but love our brothers and sisters!
 - It is impossible to know Him and not love!

- And so you see that John's whole epistle is about having the true God as our God.
 - His whole purpose is to tell us what those persons are like who have the true God as their God...
 - It is not that they are perfect, but it is that they are reconciled to the living God in truth, and because they are reconciled and God's grace is working in them, they can never be the same.
 - They can never reject Him, they can never hate, they can never love the world more than they love Him.
 - They can struggle with these sins—but they will never give themselves over to them.

- He doesn't mean that there is no such thing as apostasy—those who enter into His covenant and depart from Him...
 - but He means that if we **truly** know Him, we can reject Him:
- Look at 1 John 5:18-20 again and you will see that this is exactly what it says:
 - 1 John 5:18-20: We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him. We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.
 - Now that we have been reconciled to the One true God, we ought to have nothing whatever to do with idols...
 - It is for us to be totally devoted to the One true God!
 - And so John concludes his whole letter with the words,
 - “Little children, keep yourselves from idols!”
 - His whole epistle is a call to keep the first commandment!
 - To have no other gods before the face of the One true God.
 - To be totally devoted to Him as those who have been given eternal life through Jesus Christ.

TRANS> With this in mind, let us turn to the portion of our exposition of the first commandment where we stopped last week.

- We ended with “using unlawful means, and trusting in lawful means;”
 - so we begin with

I. Carnal delights and joys.

A. The word “carnal” is the same as the word “fleshly” or “of the flesh”

1. This word (sarx in the original) refers to man as distinguished from God by the fact that he has a body of flesh.
 - Thus, sometimes the word is simply used to distinguish between God and man as when the Bible speaks of Jesus as coming in the flesh or as when Paul tells the Galatians that he did not “confer with flesh and blood” or when he speaks about physical infirmities as a thorn in his flesh.
 - And of course our body of flesh has no life apart from our human spirit.
 - In this usage, flesh is not sinful per se, but simply human—Jesus came in the flesh, but was not sinful.
 - Our flesh will be raised up to live forever at the last day, but without sin.

- But the word “flesh” is also used to refer to what we are before conversion, that is, before we receive the Spirit of God—the Holy Spirit who transforms us into the followers of Christ and who brings spiritual life to us.
 - Thus, Romans 8:5 says:
 - Ro 8:5: For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit.
 - And the passage goes on to say:
 - Ro 8:6-9: For to be carnally (fleshly) minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal (fleshly) mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His.
 - This obviously is not simply referring to the fact that we have bodies, but is speaking of “flesh” as opposed to the Spirit of God.
2. So when we speak of carnal delights and joys as that which is violation of the first commandment,
- we are talking about the desires of that which is of the fallen sinful nature inasmuch as it has not been renewed by the Holy Spirit.
 - Thus we are admonished not to walk according to the desires of the flesh.
 - Galatians 5:16-23: I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.
- B. Now you can surely see how taking delight in the things of the flesh is a violation of the first commandment...
1. There is a certain pleasure in many of the works of the flesh.
 - They are temptations to us because there a certain delight that we have in these things.
 - This is why the Lord calls us to deny ourselves and not to give in to our lusts, but to resist temptation and flee from it.

2. Those who give themselves to drunkenness or drugs or pornography must push God aside...
 - They are not dedicated and devoted to Him because they are dedicated to something else.
 - They must either deny Him or they must deny the flesh.
 - You cannot give yourself to carnal delights and joys without rejecting the living God.
 - That is why Paul speaks of covetousness as idolatry.
 - You are devoting yourself to the idol of fleshly joys instead to the Lord.
 - Those who do indulge their flesh in this way—or perhaps I should say, inasmuch as you do set your mind on the flesh,
 - you estrange yourself from God—you eat away at your soul!
 - You can even see how those who give themselves to gambling or to drugs or to pornography estrange themselves from their own family...
 - How much more from God!

II. Next on the list is improper zeal.

- The Catechism first speaks of zeal that is wrongly directed,
 - then of the problem of a lack of zeal for the things of God.
- A. Zeal that is wrongly directed is referred to as: “corrupt, blind, and indiscreet zeal”
- Such zeal is not properly connected with the true God.
1. Corrupt zeal is zeal that is corrupted by sinful passions and motives.
 - It may actually be zeal for the right things, but it is fuelled more by pride or by hurt feelings and bitterness than by love for God.
 - For example, Paul speaks about those who preach the gospel out of envy.
 - It is great that they are preaching the gospel, but it is not great that they are doing it for selfish motives.
 - Elizabeth Elliot wrote a very interesting book on this subject called “no graven image.”
 - It is about a missionary who was very zealous, but whose motives were to receive acclaim from men.
 - I have often observed that there are some who take up the cause of the suffering out of bitterness and resentment toward God...
 - Rather than humbly recognising that God has sent suffering into the world because of our sin,

- they take it upon themselves to try to fight against the curse.
 - Jesus came to redeem us from the curse, and we are to be zealous for those who suffer under its effects,
 - but we are not to do so in resentment toward God,
 - but rather in thankfulness for His mercy that shall redeem us from the curse if we look to Christ.
2. Blind zeal is zeal that is not according to knowledge.
- Jesus told his disciples that they would be persecuted and put out of the synagogue by men who believed that they were serving God.
 - And Paul tells us that he was one of those men.
 - He believed that he was serving God when he persecuted the church until God dramatically opened his eyes...
 - You remember how Paul was blinded on the Damascus road, calling attention to his blindness,
 - and then given his sight when the Holy Spirit was given to him so that he could see the Kingdom of God revealed in Christ.
3. And then there is indiscreet zeal.
- This would be like the disciples of Jesus who wanted to call fire down from heaven on someone who did not follow Jesus...
 - or like those who would go into a school and stand up in the middle of class and start shouting forth the gospel...
 - or a college student who comes to know Christ and goes home and begins to strive with his parents and friends rather than gently testifying to them of God's work in his life.
 - 2 Tim 2:24-26: And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.
 - Sometimes I cringe to see where someone has defaced property by writing "Jesus Saves."
 - This is indiscreet zeal.
 - Of course we need to be careful when we render judgement in such matters.
 - When we lack zeal, it is easy to criticise those who have it!

TRANS> But you see, all zeal that is corrupt, blind, or indiscreet, although it is meant to be for God,

- is actually a denial of the true God because it misrepresents Him as if He were another God.
- But this does not mean zeal is bad!

B. In Gal 4:18, Paul makes the simple statement that “it is good to be zealous in a good thing always.”

1. There are some people, especially in our day, who think that zeal for almost anything is bad.

- It is understandable how they come to such a position.
 - If no one is zealous for any cause, you have peace.
 - If nobody cares about anything, everybody gets along with each other quite fine—
 - There are no quarrels.
- There are two forms that tyrannical governments take...when it comes to controlling the populace, with regard to education.
 - One is, to force everyone to be zealous for their cause, so that everyone is indoctrinated in the cause of the state.
 - In other words, they want everyone to be zealous...
 - The other is to dumb down education so that nobody cares about anything or cares to oppose anything because they are ignorant of the issues.
 - In our society, there is an amazing promotion of drugs and immorality to numb the minds of the population.
 - Students are educated in such a way that they are not encouraged to really think and explore, lest they form opinions that are contrary to the state.
 - This will disrupt the peace.
 - This is why there is such a lack of great books that have shaped civilisation in our libraries.
 - This has led to populace that is indifferent about many things

2. And that deeply affects the way we relate to God.

- Titus 2:14 tells us that Jesus:
 - Tit 2:14: gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.
 - But most people in our day are not zealous.
 - Such persons are lukewarm and dead in the things of God.
 - To have a God as great as our God and yet be cold and indifferent toward Him is to deny Him!

- It is only fitting that if we know Him, we ought to be very zealous for Him.
 - How Jesus excelled in this.
 - Jesus said that zeal for God's house has eaten him up.
 - That was how ought to be for us!
3. The best way to renew our zeal is to truly consider who God is and what He has done for our redemption and how worthy He is of our service and praise and that of all other men!
- You can't just put on zeal, but zeal is something you grow in to.
 - It grows as you walk with God and come to know Him more and more to grasp what He has done for you.
 - We should join with Paul in praying that God would give those who know the Lord:
 - Eph 1:17-20: the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places...

TRANS> The next violation of the first commandment listed is:

III. Estranging ourselves, and apostatizing from God

A. This is a huge problem in our day— in the corporate church.

1. There are many congregations that begin to modify their doctrine and their worship so that it is not in accordance with scripture...
 - And in doing so, they are moving away from the true God.
 - Just look at how many apostate churches there are in our city that have completely departed from the true gospel of Jesus Christ!
 - The majority of the members do not even know why Jesus died on the cross!
 - And conduct is accepted in these churches that is complete contrary to the gospel!
2. Individuals within these churches have a duty to pray for the purity of the congregation they are a part of and eventually to depart if the church departs from the gospel.
 - If they remain in without protest, they are estranging themselves and apostatizing from God.

- Jesus addressed several congregations in Revelation and threatened them that if they did not repent, He would remove His lampstand,
 - that is, that they would lose the very gospel itself that connects them to the true God!
- B. And of course individuals also estrange themselves from God and apostatize from Him...
- They do this when they start to neglect worship and service to God, either publicly or privately,
 - or when they begin to depart from pure doctrine and obedient living.
 - There is an attitude toward God and His word such as we saw in Isaiah...
 - an attitude that really boils down to wanting the holy God to depart.
 - Rather than eagerly welcoming the truth about Him and eagerly seeking to grow in an understanding of his will,
 - such persons start to pull back.
 - Hebrews warns all believers to be careful about this...
 - Heb 3:12-13: Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

IV. Praying or giving any religious worship to saints, angels, or any other creatures.

- A. Whenever persons do this, they are transferring worship that belongs to God to something that is not God.
- This problem seems to arise when worshippers do not have a clear understanding of the gospel.
 - They lose sight of the fact that they have full acceptance with God through the blood of Jesus Christ and can draw near to God by the blood of Christ.
 - Hebrews 10:19-22 says this.
 - Heb 10:19-22: 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.
 - When worshippers lose sight of this, they are afraid to approach God directly, and feel more comfortable looking to a departed saint or an angel for help.
 - Of course it is true that angels, at least, do help us, for they are ministering spirits that God sends for this purpose.

- The problem is, God has appointed that prayers should be made to Him directly and has never authorised us to communicate with angels.
- The only time we have any indication of speaking to angels in scripture is in poetry when we call upon them to worship God (along with the rest of creation),
 - but this is far from praying to them for help or worshipping them.
- This has especially been an error in the Roman Catholic Church...
 - even an error that is promoted by that branch of the church.
 - The reason for this is that the church transfers mediation away from Jesus Christ to the pope and priests who offer the sacrifice of Christ (as they claim) for worshippers.
 - This takes away from the assurance that we have who rightly understand that Christ has already offered Himself for us and that we have no need of a priest to offer Him again.
 - And this insecurity causes the Roman worshippers to cry out for additional mediators and the church supports this by allowing prayers to angels and saints, and especially to the Virgin Mary.
 - When the gospel is understood and we know that we are totally accepted in Christ,
 - this frees us to come directly to God.
- It should also be understood that the true God is perfectly capable of fielding all the requests that are brought to Him at once.
 - He does not have the limitations that His creatures have.
 - He even knows all the things that we even think about saying:
 - Psalm 139:4: For there is not a word on my tongue, But behold, O LORD, You know it altogether.

B. The scripture expressly forbids the worship of saints and angels.

1. In Revelation, the Apostle John bows before an angel, supposing the angel to be divine, and the angel strictly forbids it:
 - Rev 22:8-9: Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. Then he said to me, "See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."
 - The implication here is clear.
 - Worship does not belong to angels, but to God.
 - To worship an angel is to transfer worship to the wrong place.
 - It is an insult to the living God.

- In Colossians 2:18-19,
 - Paul says that those who promote this sort of thing are
 - cheating God’s people “of their reward”,
 - and are not “holding fast to Christ the head.”
 - Instead encouraging the saints with the very full and free access they have to Christ, they are furnishing them with substitute mediators!
2. As far as praying to or worshipping departed saints, the very same thing applies to them as to angels...
- If angels are not to be worshipped or prayed to, how much less departed saints!
 - To give this devotion to them is to give to the creature what belongs to God.
 - The Roman Catholic Church attempts to make fine distinctions between the type of worship offered to saints and that to Christ,
 - but the real issue is that they have deprived their members of the true comfort that comes through the gospel.
 - Devotion is offered to saints and angels because the worshipper is alienated from the true and living Good.

TRANS> Next on the list of things forbidden in the first commandment is

V. All compacts and consulting with the devil, and hearkening to his suggestions.

- A. Even the very attempt to obtain advice or make some sort of agreement with the Devil is strictly forbidden in scripture.
- Deuteronomy 18 calls such practices an abomination.
 - Deut 18:10-12: There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you.
 - If something is an abomination to the Lord,
 - we are to stay as far away from it as we can...
 - using horoscopes or going to a palm reader or visiting a fortune teller—all such things are to consult with the devil and are not to be done.
 - It is to act as Ahaziah did when we consulted with Baal-Zebub as if there were no God in Israel.

B. Sadly, there has been a rise in so-called “white-magic” within the church.

- There are those who have books containing formulas and methods to ward off evil spirits.
 - But if such formulas are not from scripture, they are not of God.
 - It is rather the suggestion of the Devil.
- This is to shift our devotion from God to Satan! The very thing that caused the fall in the first place.

TRANS> The last way we shall look at of shifting our devotion from God is by:

VI. Making men the lords of our conscience.

A. The Jews in the day of Christ’s tenure on earth had become very corrupted by this.

1. Jesus speaks of them setting aside the commandments of God to follow the traditions of men.
 - Matthew 23:6-9: He answered and said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: ‘This people honours Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do." He said to them, "All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.
 - These Jews were so busy following their traditions that they lost sight of some of the most basic commandments of all!
 - I am sure you must have met Christians like that.
 - Their focus is not on God and His word, but on following some teacher or another.
 - Teachers are meant to point us to God and His Word, not to themselves.
 - They are sent by the LORD to open the word to us,
 - not to lead us into vain traditions that have nothing to do with the true God and that take our focus off of Him.
2. When people follow teachers like this, there is something wrong in their relationship with God.
 - They are seeking to comfort themselves in following a substitute instead of the LORD Himself.
 - Rather than yearning to be filled with His truth and to have His wonderful word fill their beings,
 - they distance themselves from Him by taking comfort in the word of man.

- They comfort themselves that if so-in-so says it's okay to do this, then it must be okay...
 - or if so-in-so says it is wrong to do this, it must be wrong.
- God is put on the sidelines.
 - And I will say again what I keep saying—the reason we do this is because we are not clear about Christ and all that He had done for us.
 - We distance ourselves from God because we don't see that we have been reconciled to Him.
 - If we could see this, how happy we would be to deal directly with Him.

B. We do this far more than we realise in our society.

- after all, we live in a time when most people despise authority and refuse to submit to those who are over them.
 - Even in the Roman Catholic Church which encourages their adherents to make the pope the lord of their conscience,
 - we see increasingly that his orders are disregarded.
- Yet, in our democratic society, it is amazing to see how much we yield our consciences up to what is the politically correct agenda of the day!
 - There are those who feel guilty about fulfilling God's call to be fruitful and multiply.
 - They are bound by the current opinions of the day that are promoted on television and elsewhere.
 - There are those who feel guilty about opposing same-sex marriage or the ordination of females or sexually immoral persons to the ministry...
 - Such persons are making men the Lord's of their conscience rather than following God and His Word.
- You must not fear what man thinks.
 - Everything must be done to please God, not man.
 - Jesus said,
 - Joh 5:44 "How can you believe, who receive honour from one another, and do not seek the honour that comes from the only God?"
 - This is to give the devotion that belongs to God to man.
 - It does not mean that we are to despise those God has put over us. No, we are to submit to them for His sake...
 - but it means that we are not to make them the Lords of our conscience.

Conclusion:

So my brothers and sisters, we have seen some of the ways that we take our devotion off of God and put it on idols.

- You have no reason to do this!
 - The Word of life has come into the world, and He had been revealed to us as eternal life for us.
 - He brings us to the true God by His blood,
 - so it is for us to come to the true God with joy and comfort that we might be filled with all that pleases Him.
 - Little children, keep yourselves from idols!