

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 105 Part 5

Halifax, 14 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 seventh sermon on the first commandment, and our fifth sermon on Question 105—“What are the sins forbidden in the first commandment?”

- This section in the Assembly’s exposition of the things forbidden in the first commandment, for the most part, speaks of the sin of being unhappy with God.
- We are at the end of the long list today, and you see that it speaks of different ways that we are sinfully unhappy with Him...
 - unhappy with His commands,
 - unhappy with His Spirit,
 - unhappy with what He has done,
 - unhappy with the afflictions He has appointed for us to bear,
 - and dismissive (as unhappy persons are with those they despise) of all the good that He has done in us and for us.

- I realise that some people may object to the very idea of someone saying that it is sinful for us to be unhappy with God...
 - not that anyone would think it is a good thing to be unhappy with God, but more because it seems there is no way to help it.
 - After all, you really can't control the pleasure you take in another person...
 - either you are happy with them and what they do, or you are not.
 - But you see, if you are unhappy with God, the problem is always with you...
 - It is because of a sinful perverse heart that anyone is unhappy with Him.
 - And though it is true enough that you can no more change your nature than leopard can change his spots,
 - yet you are all the more worthy of condemnation when it is your very nature that is the problem!
 - It is not just that I sin, but that I am a sinner—and that is much worse and much more desperate.
 - It is one thing to do something that is unkind, but it is much worse to be unkind at heart.

Now I want you to turn with me to a passage that tells you that you are not to be unhappy with God:

- Philippians 2:1-18.
 - READ Phil 2:1-18
- Let me draw your attention in particular to Phil 2:14.
 - “Do all things without complaining or disputing.”
 - What things?
 - All things!
 - But in particular, **all things** that Paul has just been telling you to do...
 - He has just been saying that you are to have the mind of Christ, putting the interests of others above your own.
 - And that you are to work out your salvation with fear and trembling.
 - When we look at the goal—which is to be like Christ—we see how far we have yet to go in working out our salvation!
 - Now let me tell you, this is hard work—really hard work.
 - And what do we do when we have hard work to do?
 - We start to complain and dispute about whatever it is we have been asked to do.
 - We say, “But you don't know how hard it is for me...”
 - I have these difficulties that other people don't understand...

- I have a hard background,
- or I have these people who are against me...
- or I have this wife or this husband you see...
- Or we say, “But that seems unreasonable...”
 - How can I possibly love this insensitive husband of mine...
 - or how can possibly honour these dishonourable parents...
 - or how can serve in this church that has so many problems...
 - I might have the mind of Christ if things were different...
 - but... but... but...
- Instead of doing what God has called us to do, you start to complain and dispute with Him about it.
- And that, my friends, is a violation of the first commandment!
 - Because what you are effectively doing when you complain and dispute with God is to deny Him as God.
 - Discontentment with Him and with what He has given you to do instead of gratitude are the early stages of rejecting Him as your God.
 - Is this not what Israel did in the wilderness? They grumbled and disputed.
 - They said it was too hard to serve God.
 - They complained about the wilderness, about their provision, about everything.
 - Instead of engaging with enthusiasm into the hard work of working out their salvation by the grace of God,
 - they complained.
 - They said that what God had given them to do was unreasonable.
 - They said it was unreasonable for Him to ask them to go into the Promised Land and destroy the Canaanites.
 - It was too much for them.
 - Instead of moving out to do what He had called them to do and working out their salvation,
 - they disputed with Him about it and refused to go forward!
 - In this way they rejected Him and took themselves out of His service.
 - They rejected Him as their God by refusing to serve Him.
 - Instead of becoming the children of God, they showed themselves to be the children of the world and the flesh and the Devil.
 - And so do you—when you complain and dispute instead of working out your salvation.

Let us now turn to our list to look at some of the specific ways we do this.

I. First, there is slighting and despising God and His commands.

A. In our introduction to the Ten Commandments I pointed out to you that as those who have been redeemed, we are to love God's law!

- Like David, we are to say,
 - Ps 119:97: Oh, how I love Your law! It *is* my meditation all the day.
 - As John tells us, in 1 John 5:3,
 - His commandments are not burdensome.
 - They are not burdensome to us when we know the true God through Jesus Christ because we are not longer under condemnation.
- We have been completely forgiven, so we need not be dragged down by our sin, but rather spurred along by gratitude...
 - In our redemption we have also been made new creations in Jesus Christ.
 - Therefore, you ought to be eager to fill ever part of your life, ever fibre of your being with God's way.
 - Something is very wrong with you if you look at His commands as unimportant or even despise them!
 - This is what your now reconciled heavenly Father calls you to be!
 - the way He calls you to live before Him!
 - the life that He empowers you to live by His grace through the working of the powerful Spirit—the same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead!
 - He raises you and fills you with life as New Creation in Jesus!
 - He makes you into one who loves Him and who keeps His commandments!
 - Jesus says that the one who loves Him will keep His commandments, not slight and despise them!

B. But sadly there are many in the covenant who do slight and despise God's commandments.

1. Remember King Saul?

- God commanded him, as His own agent, to kill all the Amalekites and to destroy all their property.
 - Saul was not simply fighting with the Amalekites as a king going to war with another king.
 - No, he was carrying out the vengeance that God Himself had specifically appointed as Joshua did when he led the people into the Promised Land.
 - He was to act as God's agent and therefore special instructions were given that were to be carefully followed.
 - Everything without exception was to be destroyed.

- But Saul looked lightly upon God's commandment...
 - 1 Sam 15:9 But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed.
 - He acted as if he were not God's agent in this matter and could do whatever he wanted!
 - So this is what happened.
 - 1 Sam 15:16: Then Samuel said to Saul, "Be quiet! And I will tell you what the LORD said to me last night." And he said to him, "Speak on." So Samuel said, "When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the LORD anoint you king over Israel? Now the LORD sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' "Why then did you not obey the voice of the LORD? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do evil in the sight of the LORD?" And Saul said to Samuel, "But I have obeyed the voice of the LORD, and gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and brought back Agag king of Amalek; I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the plunder, sheep and oxen, the best of the things which should have been utterly destroyed, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal." Then Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, As in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, And to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, And stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king."
 - You see that it is a rejection of God for us to slight His commandments.
 - God's commandments ought to be very important to you.
 - If they are not, it can only mean that He is not really your God.
2. I am often distressed in our day at how lightly many professing Christians will look upon God's commandments.
- You will see them engaging in fornication without repentance—
 - or completely indifferent about observing the Sabbath...
 - They will say, "We are not under law but under grace."
 - And that is very true—but grace does not mean that we are now in a position to hate God's commandments!
 - Jesus tells us repeatedly that if we love Him, we will love His commandments.

- The idea of grace is that grace changes you from one who is condemned by the law into one who is accepted by God, forgiven and transformed so that you, a once condemned sinner, can now live for God!
 - It means that now have a new heart and that you love His commandments and are given grace to keep them!
 - Instead of just being condemned as you were under the law, you are now saved under grace and able to enter into a commandment keeping relationship with God!
 - Right after saying we are not under law, but under grace in Romans 6:14, Paul says:
 - Rom 6:15-18: What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.
 - We show that we have not yet come to know God through Jesus Christ if we slight or even despise God's commandments!
 - We show that we are not His servants, but are still cut off from Him, still under the law and not under grace!

3. But I must say more...

- Because there are also those in the Christian church who do not claim to slight God's commandments at all...
 - In fact, I am thinking of persons who are *very* concerned about Sabbath keeping and about chastity and how God is to be worshipped and a whole lot of other matters,
 - but who live toxic lives of bitterness and ingratitude—
 - Such persons slight God's commandment to put the interests of others above their own interests...
 - They find comfort in Sabbath keeping and chastity, but ignore the commandment to love their neighbour.
 - The point is not that we are to be perfect with respect to the standard.
 - The point is that we are to love the standard!
 - We are to love it because we know it is from God and we have come to know Him through Christ...
 - and we love Him because He first loved us... and we want to honour Him!

II. Second there is resisting and grieving of His Spirit.

- Stephen was the first Christian we know of to be martyred.
 - A. He was stoned because he accused the Jews of his day of being just like their fathers were in resisting the Holy Spirit;
 - He said:
 - Acts 7:51: You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you.
 - Before making this statement,
 - Stephen had gone through their entire history showing how at every turn, they had resisted God's call...
 - He tells about how they rejected Joseph and Moses even though they were the ones God sent to deliver them.
 - And then he reminds them how their fathers had rejected all the prophets and how now they have even rejected their own Messiah.
 - Here, I will read verse 51-52 again:
 - Acts 7:51-52: You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become the betrayers and murderers,
 - And now they confirm everything Stephen has said by taking up stones and stoning him!
 - They are just like their fathers!
 - Killing a man who has told them the truth!
- B. From this, you are given a vivid example of what it means to resist the Holy Spirit.
 - The Spirit is the one who brings the truth to us.
 - He is the one who opens our eyes to see the deliverance that God has provided for us—ultimately in Jesus Christ.
 - Joseph and Moses and the prophets were all pointing to Him, and He is the One to whom the Spirit testifies.
 - But the real fact of the matter is, a lot of people just don't want God's salvation.
 - Instead of joyfully receiving it when the Spirit reveals it to them, they do everything they can to push it away—they resist the Spirit.
 - The Spirit is making it all so clear that this is God's salvation and they are so opposed to it that they will even murder the one who speaks by the Spirit.
 - They become like mad men because they cannot stand the message that *they* need God's salvation from sin.
 - They need salvation from their enemies—sure—but not from sin!
 - Look at these mad men:

- Acts 7:54: When they heard these things they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed at him with their teeth.
 - They are going wild, resisting the truth!
 - When it says that they were cut to the heart, that means that they knew that what Stephen was saying was true!
- But look at what they did!
 - Acts 7:57-58: Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; and they cast him out of the city and stoned him.
 - It seems an understatement to say that they resisted the Spirit!

C. But we must all examine and guard our hearts.

- If you have received the truth and yielded to the truth when the Spirit brought it to you,
 - You have no cause for boasting, for you would have resisted but for the grace of God.
 - Jesus says that we will not come to Him unless He draws us.
 - So this resistance is in all of us and until we get to heaven, it will not be entirely ousted from us.
- Even though you may have embraced the truth and become a partaker of the Spirit,
 - There are still those times God's word comes to you and you simply don't like it and you resist the Spirit and try to push Him away...
 - You get mad at the one who brings God's word to you, perhaps your parents who come to correct you—or a friend...
 - That is to resist the Spirit.
 - This behaviour reminds you that the but for the grace of God, you have the same evil heart that resists the Spirit that Stephen's murderers had!
 - Be humbled when you resist the truth like this!
 - You are not just resisting man, but God who speaks through His messenger.
 - God told his messenger Samuel:
 - 1 Sam 8:7: for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.
 - In resisting Stephen, they were resisting God's Spirit
 - They were breaking the first commandment.
 - And grieving the Spirit is very closely related to this...

- The Spirit is the one who brings us together as believers and enables us to speak and live the truth to one another and to receive the truth from each other.
 - He especially works through our brothers and sisters as they use His Word and live His word.
 - God has arranged it that way.
 - But when we pull away from our brothers and hold things against them and refuse to live at peace with them,
 - the Spirit is grieved and His work within the body is obviously hindered.
 - Ephesians 4:29-32 explains this:
 - Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you.
- By pulling away from each other in the body, we pull away from God as our God—
 - We break the first commandment because we sever ourselves from the channel of communion with Him that He uses the most—our brothers and sisters.

TRANS> Now let's look at the next way we show our dissatisfaction with God.

III. Third, there is discontent and impatience at His dispensations.

A. God's dispensations are simply what He dispenses to us—what He doles out to us.

- So when we are discontent or impatient with His dispensations it means that we do not like what He has brought into our lives.
 - We whine and we complain and we feel sorry for ourselves.
 - We feel that we have had our share of suffering already.
 - We feel that we don't have enough of this world's goods.
 - We feel that we did not get the spouse that we deserved.
 - We feel that our parents are too severe or too unloving or too something...
- We already saw this kind of attitude in the introduction...
 - We are told to work out our salvation with fear and trembling because God is at work in us to will and to do of His good pleasure!
 - He is at work in us to work into us the very mind of Christ!
 - We are in association with our glorious Creator!

- And here we are grumbling and complaining even though we are living under God's glory cloud!
 - We are just like Israel!
 - We have been brought into communion with God and with His Son, but we are complaining about our food and about the hard things He has given us to do!
 - What do you expect!
 - You are coming from a life of sin into a new life of holiness!
 - You are being brought out of a kingdom that hates God and there is going to be persecution and opposition...
 - Of course it is going to be hard
 - God never said it would be easy!
 - But He said He would be with us and it is a most glorious thing!
 - He is working in us to prepare us for glory—
 - He is bringing us from glory to glory.
- Part of that work involves suffering.
 - Paul says:
 - Eph 4:16-17: Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,
 - Of course it does!
 - Pride has to be broken!
 - Even Paul was given a thorn in his flesh to keep him from boasting.
 - Covetousness has to be stripped from us!
 - And that involves deprivations and struggles.
 - Love has to be developed in us—love like Jesus' love that even loves our enemies and those who are unlovely...
 - We must learn to love people in a fallen world when we are tired and when they are not what we want them to be.
- This is why the Bible tells us that suffering is a gift...from God... that we should glory in!
 - It is a gift that produces greater glory in us!
 - How can you expect to have the mind of Christ if you don't partake of His sufferings?

- But you see, we decide that God ought to have a better method!
 - and we become discontent and impatient with what He has brought into our lives.
 - And inasmuch as we do, we break the first commandment...
 - We pull away from God at the very time we ought to be drawing near to Him.
 - We are grumbling and disputing with Him when we ought to be working out our salvation with joyful and sweet fellowship.
 - We are cutting ourselves away from Him as our God when we ought to be embracing Him all the more.

TRANS> The next item on the list of ways we break the first commandment is very closely related to this...

IV. Next, there is charging Him foolishly for the evils He inflicts on us...

A. I really like the way this is worded.

- It doesn't just say, "charging Him foolishly for the evils we have,"
 - But "charging Him foolishly for the evils **He inflicts on us.**"
 - There is an acknowledgement in this that everything—including the evils that come into our lives—are ultimately from God.
 - They may come to us through all sorts of various agents—
 - nature, enemy nations, persecutors, the devil, accidents, any number of things—
 - but ultimately it is the LORD who works all things after the counsel of His will.
- Scripture makes this very clear.
 - For example, in Isaiah 46:9-11, the LORD says:
 - Isa 46:9-11: Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure,' Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man who executes My counsel, from a far country. Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it.
 - When Job was afflicted by the agency of Satan, Job knew that ultimately his affliction was from the hand of God.
 - His wife told him to curse God and die—to charge God with evil,
 - But he said to her (Job 2:10), "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?"
 - And then the scripture says:

- “In all this Job did not sin with his lips.”
 - Job recognised that God had sent the evil, you see,
 - but he did not foolishly charge God as if the LORD had done wrong to him by inflicting him with evil
 - We are assured that Job did not err in what he said because it says,
 - “In all this Job did not sin with his lips.”
 - He did not sin in saying that God had afflicted him...
 - but neither did he sin by charging God with wrong in afflicting him with evil.
- B. As the story unfolds, we can see that Job does sin because at the end of the book, God confronts him and Job repents...
- But he did not sin the sin of apostasy.
 - In his weakness he questioned God and His justice, but he continued to trust Him and would not curse Him or reject Him as his God...
 - Not at all!
 - Job had been given true life with God and he could not do that!
 - And so it is with you if you are a believer.
 - In your weakness you may to a certain extent charge God with doing wrong—and that is a violation of the first commandment...
 - but you will not reject God as your God on account of the evil He has afflicted you with.
 - You cannot reject Him because His seed is in you and you have been given eternal life.
 - But like Job, you ought to be deeply humbled and repent in dust and ashes for daring to even suggest that God has done you wrong!
 - God cannot do evil, and He has promised to work all things for the good of those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.
 - Don’t pull away from Him when He afflicts you.
 - Rather run to Him and seek Him and pour your heart out to Him as our Lord Jesus did in His affliction.
 - It is very foolish to charge God as if He has done wrong!

TRANS> And now we come to the last item of the list of sins forbidden in the first commandment.

V. Ascribing the praise of any good we either are, have, or can do, to fortune, idols, ourselves, or any other creature.

- A. This one is not so directly about discontentment with God as the other violations of the first commandment we have looked at today.
- But it does speak about something that leads to discontentment with Him...
 - Obviously if you are going to ascribe praise of any good that we are, have or can do to something other than God,
 - you are going to pave the way for discontentment with Him.
 - By your failure to acknowledge His blessing of you and His work in you, you lose sight of all that He has done—
 - all that would surely have made you grateful if you had acknowledged that He did it.
 - And not only that, but if you already are discontent with Him,
 - you won't be able to see any of the good that He does.
 - You know how that is, don't you?
 - If you are having problems with another person, you look at everything they do with a jaundiced eye.
 - The poison of bitterness is there so that you cannot see anything good about them.
 - You turn a blind eye to the good that they do and see only evil.
 - This is a good thing to examine yourself about.
 - Do you acknowledge the work of God in your life?
 - or do you attribute the good that you have to fortune or to idols or to yourself or to some other creature?
 - To ascribe it to fortune is to act as if it just happened without a personal agent—without your heavenly Father whose love to you has been displayed...
 - How sad it is to have all the blessing that we are loaded with each day and have no one to thank for it!
 - To ascribe it to idols is to ascribe it to some false God that men have made up in the effort to avoid the true God.
 - They don't want to deal with the true God because He is holy and they are not holy, so they put up idols in His place.
 - A god like Allah to whom sinners do not need to be reconciled, only to perform rituals before.
 - To ascribe it to yourself is to claim for yourself power that you just do not have.
 - Paul goes after this problem in 1 Cor 4:7:

- 1 Cor 4:7: For who makes you differ *from another*? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive *it*, why do you boast as if you had not received *it*?
- It is okay to acknowledge your gifts, but it is wicked to ignore the fact that they came from God.
 - It is to act as if there is no God!
 - Everything you have is from him!
- Do you ignore the fact that:
 - Jas 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.
 - And not only ought you to acknowledge the *fact* that this is so...
 - but when those good gifts come, you ought to acknowledge the hand of God as the one who gave them!
 - Oh, you miss so many opportunities to return thanks to God!
 - to receive His love, to know Him in His goodness and kindness.
 - Ac 14:17: Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without witness, in that He did good, gave us rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.
 - But if you do not recognise His hand, His witness goes right past you and you remain cut off from Him.

Conclusion:

So my brothers and sisters, do not be alienated from God by unhappiness with Him!

- Do not become dissatisfied with Him and push Him away...
 - Draw near to Him, receive His goodness!
 - Most of all, receive Christ who is the fullest expression of His goodness and fill your heart with gladness in your God.
 - We were made to enjoy Him, and it is only because of our sin and corruption that we don't enjoy Him.
 - There is so much here for you to delight in if only you will.