

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 112 c

Reverent Use of Oaths, Vows & Lots

Halifax, 8 August 2010

Introduction

Today we continue in our study of the Third Commandment:

- Exodus 20:7: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold *him* guiltless who takes His name in vain.

For the past two weeks, we have been looking at the requirements encased in the third commandment.

- I use the word in “encased” because as we have seen in this study, the commandments are packed very tightly with truth...
 - They are loaded instruction that reaches very far into our lives.
 - It is the way of many to look at them in a very superficial manner.
 - I read a piece where Atheist Richard Dawkins was going on in his ignorance about how inadequate they are for us today.
 - He asked the kind of questions like,
 - “What do the Ten Commandments have to say about rape?”
 - Now of course he is not concerned about what they say about our relationship with God because he denies God...
 - But really, based on his understanding, it is very odd that he would have any problem with rape—or any other moral issue.
 - He has no basis, on his principles, to even say that we *ought* to be moral.
 - But if we allow him to enter our world view where things like rape are wrong, then we will find that the Ten Commandments have a whole lot to say about it.
 - If God, who sees our hearts, prohibits murder, then that reaches to hatred in our heart for our neighbour...
 - And rape doesn't happen apart from hatred and contempt of the victim.
 - And the seventh commandment prohibits adultery, and that entails the upholding of marriage as God appointed it and forbids any kind of sexual contact outside of marriage...
 - It even forbids lust in the heart for one that we are not married to!

- But sadly, Dawkin's critique would stymie a lot of Christians who share his ignorance about the scope of the Ten Commandments as a summary.
 - We need to be delivered from such ignorance, and that is why it is good for us to take some time to unpack these commandments under submission to the teaching of the scripture as a whole.

And I think the third commandment is probably the one about which people are generally the most ignorant as to how widely it speaks to us.

- Growing up, I always thought it only had to do with saying curse words.
 - We have seen, however, that in scripture, God's name entails His reputation in the broadest sense... all that is made known about Him.
 - And that being God, it is for us to regard Him and all that reveals about Him with the utmost reverence and honour.
 - The Larger Catechism puts it like that in Question 112:

Q. 112 What is required in the third commandment?

A. The third commandment requires, that the name of God, His titles, attributes, ordinances, the word, sacraments, prayer, oaths, vows, lots, works, and whatsoever else there is whereby he makes himself known, be holily and reverently used in thought, meditation, word, and writing; by an holy profession, and answerable conversation, to the glory of God, and the good of ourselves, and others.

Last week, our scripture reading was taken from Hebrews 12.

- We saw that Esau is presented to us as an example of one who took God's name in vain when he despised his birthright.
 - He took the spiritual inheritance he had from the LORD in vain—counted it as something to be dismissed as very trivial and unimportant!
- We were advised to see to it that such bitterness not be allowed to develop in our hearts...
 - We saw that it is even worse for us to disregard what God has given us because now that Jesus has come, we have a far greater revelation of God's name.
 - In the OT, they dealt with things that could be touched, but Jesus brings us to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem!
 - His sacrifice on the cross is the very thing that God Himself requires to reconcile us so that we are no longer dealing with mere shadows and symbols, but with the very realities of God and our relationship with Him.
 - His name is more fully revealed in Christ than it was every revealed in the OT ceremonies,

- Therefore, we must approach Him with reverence and godly fear, for we see that He is a consuming fire!
 - His own Son was consumed when He became an offering for our sin!
 - There is nothing trivial here!
 - Once we understand this glorious revelation of our God in Christ, we see that it is only fitting for us to approach Him with reverence and godly fear.
- I showed you that in particular, we are to have this reverence and godly fear when we use the means of grace—in particular, the word, sacraments and prayer.
 - God uses the word, sacraments, and prayer to present Christ to us and to connect us to Him and His benefits.
 - They are very much associated with the revelation of His name,
 - so it is for us to esteem them very highly and to come to them with eager joy and reverence.

Now as we move along this week in our study of the things required, we come to reverencing God in oath taking, vows, and the use of lots.

- As we begin, I want to take a look at a passage from Nehemiah that actually speaks about an oath and a vow and even about the casting of lots.
 - It is an example of the reverent use of all of these ways that are associated with God's name.

Please turn to Nehemiah 10.

- The people have been restored to the land.
- They have rebuilt the temple and the walls of Jerusalem, and now Nehemiah leads them to assemble together to confess their sins and to renew their covenant with the LORD.
 - The confession of sin is presented to us in chapter 9.
 - In it, they express that God has been just in sending all the calamities that He had sent upon them because of their sin.
 - And that He has been very merciful to restore them to the land.
 - And now that they are in the land, they come together to pledge themselves to the faithful service of the LORD.
 - It is a Covenant renewal service in which they swear that they will serve the LORD,
 - and they do this in a solemn manner, asking God to deal with them and to judge them if they do not do what they have promised.

- Listen now as I read to you from Nehemiah 10:28-39 where this covenant is explained to us.
- READ Nehemiah 10:28-39

I. Let us look at reverence God in oaths and vows.

A. First, I want you to consider what oaths and vows are.

1. Look at verse 29, and you can see how the covenant is spoken of.

- It says,
 - Neh 10:29: these joined with their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse and an oath to walk in God's Law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and His ordinances and His statutes:
- By referring to it as a "curse and an oath,"
 - we are reminded that whenever we make an oath, we call upon God to judge us (or to curse us) if we don't do what we have promised.
 - For an oath to have any meaning, there has to be some one in authority by whose name you swear,
 - someone greater than you who is able to back up what you say, someone who is able to judge you if you don't do what you said you would do.
 - You are, in a way, bringing their honour into the matter to verify what you are saying...
 - so that if you do not do what you have said,
 - you bring dishonour upon their name.
 - You have called upon them back you up, and if you don't follow through,
 - then they will be forced to defend the honour of their name by dealing with you for involving them in a lie.
 - There is a sense in which you make the one in whose name you swear a liar if you swear falsely in his name.

2. This idea of having someone greater to back you up is brought out in Scripture

a. Turn over to Hebrews 6 for a moment and I will show you

- Look at Hebrews 6:16:
 - This verse makes a statement of fact about an oath:
 - Heb 6:16: For men indeed swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute.

- In the context, it is being pointed out that when God made a covenant with Abraham, He swore by His own name because there was no one greater for him to swear by.
 - I suppose on those grounds an atheist would have to swear by his own name because he does not acknowledge anyone greater than himself.
 - Today in court, people who submit to no god are sometimes asked to make a declaration that they will tell the truth.
 - Those who serve false gods will swear by their false gods.
 - Such swearing may be recognised by us to confirm the word of another person...
 - Isaac, for example, made a covenant with Abimelech, the King of the Philistines.
 - Isaac swore by the LORD, but Abimelech would have sworn by the gods of the Philistines.
 - It was not wrong for Isaac to enter into this covenant even though Abimelech was swearing by his false god,
 - but of course it was wrong for Abimelech to swear by the false God.
 - His sin was not in swearing, but in swearing by a false God.
- Sometimes, persons will swear by the king.
 - Joseph may have done this in Gen 42:15 with his brothers:
 - Ge 42:15: "In this manner you shall be tested: By the life of Pharaoh, you shall not leave this place unless your youngest brother comes here.
 - When he says, "by the life of Pharaoh," it appears that he is swearing by the name of Pharaoh that he will do what he has said.
 - Pharaoh was greater than Joseph, so Joseph appears to swear by his name.
 - It may be that he was not actually swearing, but just speaking strongly.
 - But if he was swearing by the name of Pharaoh, he shouldn't have.
 - Pharaoh did not know Joseph's heart and had no way to back up what Joseph was saying.
 - Swearing by a prince gives divine honours to the prince that do not rightly belong to him.

- b. Oaths ought to be taken in the name of the true God (the Father of Jesus Christ) and not in the name of kings or idols.
 - This is declared in Deut 6:13-15:
 - Deut 6:13-15: You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name. You shall not go after other gods, the gods of the peoples who are all around you (for the LORD your God is a jealous God among you), lest the anger of the LORD your God be aroused against you and destroy you from the face of the earth.
 - We make God jealous when we swear by kings or false gods because we give them the honour that belongs only to God.
 - It is His place to verify our word, it is not the place of men or demons.
 - Likewise, in Joshua 23:7-8:
 - Josh 23:7-8: You shall not make mention of the name of their gods, nor cause anyone to swear by them; you shall not serve them nor bow down to them, but you shall hold fast to the LORD your God, as you have done to this day.
 - It is in cultures that deify their kings and emperors that oaths are taken in their names.
 - This should not be done by believers.

TRANS> So you see then that an oath is calling upon the one who knows your heart and who is able to judge you to make your words certain.

- B. Oaths are necessary in a fallen world because we are careless in the things we affirm and the things we promise.
 - Let's look at times when an oath becomes necessary.
 - 1. An oath is necessary when there is a dispute, when it is necessary for us to vindicate the truth by swearing to end a dispute.
 - a. This is brought out in Hebrews 6 where it says that:
 - Heb 6:16 "an oath is for them (for men) and end of all dispute."
 - That is the purpose of the oath—
 - You go to court before a judge and you are asked to swear in God's name to tell the truth.
 - And the goal is to be able to settle a dispute—to put an end to it.
 - This is an *assertory* oath, asserting that you are telling the truth.
 - b. Paul makes use of assertory oaths to vindicate what he is saying when men might question it.
 - For example, in 1 Cor 1:23, he says:

- 1 Cor 1:23: “Moreover I call God as witness against my soul, that to spare you I came no more to Corinth.”
- The Corinthians were complaining that Paul had not come to visit them and Paul verifies his reasons for not doing so with an oath.
 - It was not that Paul was not trustworthy, but the Corinthians were calling into question his truthfulness.
 - He judged it to be an occasion for which an oath was necessary and he used one.
 - He did this on other occasions as well.
- c. Jesus himself makes an assertory oath in a court of law in Matthew 26:63-64.
 - It is quite striking that He remains silent in the court until He is asked by the court to assert the truth with an oath.
 - This is what it says:
 - Matthew 26:63-64: But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, "I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!" Jesus said to him, "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven."
 - In answering under oath, Jesus makes it clear that an assertory oath is a proper thing to do.

TRANS> But there are also other kinds of oaths that are necessary...

2. There is the promissory oath.

- a. This kind of oath is made when a person is making a promise in some important matter.
 - This is where vows come into the picture.
 - The person making the promissory oath vows that He will do what He has said He will do.
 - He is essentially backing up his promise by an oath, asking the LORD to back up what he is promising.
 - This is the kind of oath that the LORD made with Abraham as we saw it described in Hebrews 6.
 - He put a curse on Himself if He did not do the incredible things He had promised to Abraham!
 - He promised to bless him and bless all the nations through him—even though he and they were all sinners!
 - For God to bless sinners was inconceivable—

- That is why the LORD graciously condescended to make a promissory oath, a covenant.
 - So that Abraham would have greater reason to believe.
- b. It has been the way of the LORD to deal with His people by means of covenant promises, and He calls us to enter into covenant with Him.
- 1) This happens quite often in Israel's history...
 - a) God commanded Abraham to enter into covenant with Him by receiving circumcision.
 - In this way, Abraham declared that he believed the promise of God and promised that he would follow the LORD.
 - b) Then at Sinai, Israel, having been delivered out of Egypt, was called to enter into covenant with God as a nation.
 - Individuals had already entered into the covenant by means of circumcision...
 - But at Sinai, they entered into covenant with God as a nation.
 - In Exodus 24:7-18, we are told that Moses:
 - Exodus 24:7-8: took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient." And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words."
 - You see here how the people promise that they will keep the laws that the LORD has given them as a nation.
 - c) Joshua has them renew the covenant when they enter the promised land,
 - and in Nehemiah 10, we read how they renewed the covenant again after they were restored from the exile.
 - They make vows to God and take a curse upon themselves if they should fail to do they had promised.
 - 2) But this is also something that is done in the New Testament.
 - a) In the Old Testament, the LORD promised that He would make a new covenant with His people—a covenant that would be different.
 - He promises that He will forgive their sin and that He will write His law on their hearts—giving them the Holy Spirit so that they will follow Him.
 - This is the very covenant that was promised to Abraham when He was given circumcision in its fulfillment.

- The Old Covenant was about Christ promised, the New Covenant is about Christ given.
 - Now the source of the blessing has come, and there is a change so that New Testament believers are called to confess Christ and look to the blood that He shed on the cross to reconcile them to God—
 - and they are to look to Him to cleanse them by His sacrifice and by the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- b) At Pentecost, Peter calls all those who believe to receive baptism, both they and their children.
- This pattern is continued so that all who believe along with their children enter into the covenant.
 - Romans 10 makes confessing Christ with the mouth coordinate with believing in your heart:
 - Romans 10:8-10 But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith which we preach): that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
 - Timothy is said to have (1 Tim 6:12)
 - “confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”
 - The language suggests that this was a one time action, and the “presence of many witnesses” show that it was a solemn testimony.
 - The covenant is also renewed by us whenever we come to the Lord’s table where we show forth His death in the ceremony,
 - and eat and drink the cup which Jesus declares to be the blood of the covenant by which we have remission of sin.
 - In this way, we solemnly declare that we are looking to the blood of the covenant that He shed to be sanctified...
 - and we affirm that He is our LORD whom we are committed to follow and obey.
 - We enter into an “oath and a curse” like the people did in Nehemiah such that invite God to judge us if we are not sincere.
 - Because of the covenantal nature of the LORD’s Supper, we do not allow any one to come who has not confessed their faith in the assembly of God’s people,

- and who is not walking with the LORD, keeping his covenant.
- And in 1 Cor 11, we are told that the LORD does judge those who take His name in vain at the Lord's Supper.

TRANS> Let's look at some other examples of promissory oaths.

c. One of the most common promissory oaths is a vow of marriage.

- The Bible tells us that a man is to leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife... and that the two shall become one flesh.
 - By how is it that he is to be joined to her?
 - It is by a covenant promise.
 - This is affirmed in Malachi when the LORD tells men who have divorced their wives that they have dealt treacherously with them, and adds,
 - Mal 2:24: "Yet she is your companion, your wife by covenant."
 - and then He asks, "Did he not make them one?"
 - God joins a husband and wife together when they pledge fidelity to each other in His name.
 - Therefore, when they break their vows,
 - they dishonour His name by which they have sworn.
 - And so He rejects them.

d. Another common promissory oath is the oath of public office.

- This is rightly done when a person takes a political office or enters into the office of elder or deacon in the church.
 - It is a solemn responsibility and the person who agrees to take up these responsibilities needs to assure those under his care that he means to be faithful.
 - To affirm his fidelity, he asks God to hold him to his commitment when he takes vows for his office.

TRANS> So you see what great use the godly make of oaths and vows in scripture.

3. Oaths and vows are an important part of a society that honours God.

- Deut 10:20 says:
 - Deut 10:20 "You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in His name.

- a. In a society that acknowledges its allegiance to the LORD, the officers see themselves as under His authority instead of supposing the buck stops with them!
 - They put themselves under oath before God, asking Him to judge them because they know that they are *his* ministers.
 - They are conscious of the fact that they will answer to Him and that they need His grace and guidance if they are to serve well in their offices.
 - If they answer to the true God, and not to idols, this keeps them from becoming tyrants.
 - Of course, those who hate God and His laws think them to be tyrants and are terrified that they answer to God.
 - They don't want to have princes that answer to God,
 - but the godly are greatly comforted by rulers who fear God.

 - b. In a god-fearing society, the people as a whole recognise the importance of truth before God...
 - They acknowledge that there are times when we must call God to witness that we are telling the truth,
 - and that lies told in such situations constitute a serious criminal offence.
 - That without honesty and integrity in our courts, we lose the very foundation on which a stable society can exist.
- C. Vows and oaths are to be taken seriously because they involve the use of God's name.
1. God takes the use of His name in this way very seriously.
 - a. In Zechariah 5:4, it says:
 - "I will send out *the curse*," says the LORD of hosts; "It shall enter the house of the thief And the house of the one who swears falsely by My name. It shall remain in the midst of his house And consume it, with its timber and stones."
 - The idea here is that God really will hold you to what you have promised in His name.

 - b. Do you remember the Gibeonites?
 - 1) They are the ones who came with the moulded bread and the old wineskins and pretended to have come from a far country.
 - They volunteered to be slaves to Israelites and asked them to make a covenant with them that they would not harm them.
 - But year later, Saul killed some of the Gibeonites in violation of this oath.
 - The consequences of his action are explained in 2 Sam 21:1:

- 2Sa 21:1: Now there was a famine in the days of David for three years, year after year; and David inquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, "It is because of Saul and his bloodthirsty house, because he killed the Gibeonites."
- 2) Even though men may think lightly of swearing by God's name, the Lord does not think lightly about it at all.
- c. We saw in Malachi how the Lord will not accept the worship of a husband who deals treacherously with his wife by divorcing her.
- Peter points out the same thing in 1 Peter 3 when he addresses husbands who do not keep their vows to their wife:
 - 1 Peter 3:7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honour to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

TRANS> If God takes our oaths seriously, we ought to take them seriously too.

2. Lets look at four things you will do if you take oaths seriously
- a. First, if you take oaths seriously, you will only use them for important matters, not for frivolous things (Matt 5)
- 1) Jesus addresses this problem in Matthew 5, in a passage that some have misunderstood.
- Because there was dishonesty among them,
 - the Jews had devised a way to swear that was less official—it was what is sometimes called a minced oath.
 - Instead of using God's name, they would use something associated with His name,
 - such as swearing by heaven or by Jerusalem—or upon their own head—
 - People do this today when they swear on their mother's grave or when they "upon my soul" or something like this.
 - The Jews considered such oaths to be less binding because they were not actually using God's name...
 - but Jesus tells them that they are still associated with God's name and so profane His holy name.
 - Swearing in any way should always be done before God.
 - Some intermediate form of swearing should not be allowed.
 - This is what Jesus says in Matt 5:33:
 - Matt 5:33: "Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.'

- This, of course, was true, but the Jews had put a twist on it and had said that if you swore by heaven or Jerusalem, it was not an oath to the LORD.
- So Jesus says:
 - Matt 5:34-36: But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.
 - Such intermediate kinds of oaths should not be used—all oaths should be seen as joined with God's name.

2) Then He addresses the problem that made this intermediate grade of oaths necessary—

- Matthew 5:37: "But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.
- The problem is that they told lies and made false promises in their everyday conversation,
 - and this created a need to have a way to make sure that people knew when they *really* meant something.
 - You know, it is like the worker that tells you that he will be at your house "first thing on Monday morning," and doesn't show up.
 - Such a fellow will feel compelled to back up his word when he promises to come first thing on Wednesday morning because you might not believe him.
 - He will be tempted to say, "I swear it."
- In a society where there is a lot of dishonesty, there will be a lot of swearing like this—light swearing—going on...
 - But this is not a light matter!
 - It degrades God's name because it involves His name.
 - The very fact that a person does not take it seriously and says he did not really mean to be calling God to back up what He says is what makes such swearing so wrong!
 - You can't swear without involving God in it!
 - That is why you should save your swearing for great matters.
 - I don't have time to deal more fully with this passage in Matthew, but if you would like a fuller treatment, I would refer you to the message from Matthew 5:33-37 on our website.

TRANS> So if we take God's name seriously, we will only swear in matter of great importance.

b. Secondly, taking oaths seriously means that you do not swear falsely—saying something you do not really mean!

- This is quite obvious...
 - Lev 19:12: 'And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.'
 - When you ask God to affirm the truth of what you say, you had better be sincere about what you say.

c. Thirdly, taking oaths seriously means that you keep what you say, even if it hurts

- It is possible that you might have meant what you said when you bound yourself to a promise or an obligation,
 - but then that you have run into difficulties in keeping the promise.
 - Maybe you are finding it hard to live with that husband or that wife.
 - Or maybe telling the truth on the witness stand is going to cause hard feelings between you and your friend.
- Unless it was something sinful that you bound yourself to do, you are to keep what you have said, no matter how hard it may be.
 - Sticking with what you swear when there are difficulties is spoken of as a mark of the man who dwells in God's tent in Ps 15.
 - Psalm 15 says: "In whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honours those who fear the LORD; He *who* swears to his own hurt and does not change;"
 - Jesus is that man, for He promised to come and redeem us and that meant going to the cross.
 - And as we saw recently in Isaiah 42,
 - Isa 42:4 He will not fail nor be discouraged, Till He has established justice in the earth;

d. Fourthly, taking oaths seriously means that you hold other to their vows.

- It means that you support strict penalties for perjury.
 - Perjury is when a person lies in court after having sworn to tell the truth.
 - In the Old Testament, the penalty for perjury when it involved bearing false witness against your neighbour was that you would be punished with the same punishment that he would have been punished with had he done the deed you falsely accused him of.

- That meant that if you falsely accused someone of committing a capital offense, the false accusation was a capital offense!
- One of the reasons perjury is taken so lightly in our day is because the people want it that way.
 - We take oaths very lightly because we do not fear God and we do not see how perjury and other forms of oath breaking destroy the very foundation of our society.
 - We ourselves take God's name in vain if we do not do our part in seeking to uphold a high standard—
 - even in our day to day conversation with friends at work or wherever we may be.

TRANS> So let us be careful that we do not take God's name in vain when it comes to oaths and vows.

II. And now quickly, I want to say a few words about lots.

A. What is casting lots?

1. Casting lots was mentioned in the passage we read from Nehemiah 10.
 - In verse 34 it says:
 - Neh 10:34: We cast lots among the priests, the Levites, and the people, for bringing the wood offering into the house of our God, according to our fathers' houses, at the appointed times year by year, to burn on the altar of the LORD our God as it is written in the Law.
 - The lot was cast to decide which of the Levites would perform the service of bringing the wood offering into the house of God.
 - The casting of a lot was a way to decide which of the Levites the LORD would choose for this service.
 - Proverbs 16:33 explains that the LORD communicates choices to His people through the use of lots.
 - Pr 16:33: The lot is cast into the lap, But its every decision is from the LORD.
2. Lots were used for all sorts of purposes...
 - a. They were used to divide the land among the tribes when Israel came into Canaan...
 - To this day, we often call property a lot because of this connection.
 - Inheritances are sometimes divided by lot.
 - It is a way of letting the LORD decide so that a quarrel will not ensue.
 - Pr 18:18 says: Casting lots causes contentions to cease, And keeps the mighty apart.

- Instead of fighting about it, lots are cast to decide who gets what.
- b. Lots were used to determine who had offended the Lord and brought His displeasure upon Israel on several occasions...
 - When Achan stole the gold that was supposed to be dedicated to the LORD, he was found to be the guilty party by the casting of lots, narrowing down to his tribe, to his family and then to him.
 - Lots were used in a similar way when Jonathan unwittingly violated the foolish vow that Saul had made.
 - c. Lots were used to select which goat was to be sacrificed and which was to be the scapegoat...
 - Le 16:8 "Then Aaron shall cast lots for the two goats: one lot for the LORD and the other lot for the scapegoat.
 - d. Lots were used to select leaders...
 - We saw how this done in determining which Levites were to bring the wood offering—it was used to determine other functions as well.
 - In Acts, Peter led the people to use lots in selecting an apostle to take the place of Judas after he had apostatised.
 - The lot fell on Matthias.
 - Some have questioned if this ought to have been done.
 - We hear nothing more about Matthias after this, and the LORD later appoints Paul.
 - Moreover, this was done before the Holy Spirit came upon the church.
 - It is difficult to say for sure.

B. But how are we to honour God's name in the use of lots?

1. We need to realise that casting lots to make decisions is a way of turning a matter over to the LORD to decide.
 - In His providence, He determines what the outcome of every roll of dice will be, of every lot that is cast.
 - It dishonours His name for us to make decisions by casting lots when those decisions ought to be made by other methods...
 - In doing so, we drag God's holy name into a decision that He has not authorised us to ask Him to make.
2. So, for example,

- We should not use lots to decide who to marry, where to work, who ought to serve as an elder.
 - God has given us other ways to determine these things, and we are to be diligent to do hard work to make responsible decisions.
 - We are not to commit these things to God and tempt Him—obligate Him—to give us an answer about them.

- 3. I would even question if there is any warrant for using lots as a way of deciding the will of God now that we have God's completed revelation to us in scripture.
 - In the OT, the land was portioned out by God through lots, and elements of the sacrificial system and the work of the Levites were determined by lots...
 - But now we have guidelines about how to select elders and deacons, and we no longer have property in a special land that God has given to His people.

 - If persons want to use lots to divide an inheritance or to end a dispute about some other matter,
 - there is nothing expressly wrong with that,
 - And of course it is true that the LORD does decide the outcome of every coin toss, and in that sense He makes a decision,
 - but I do not think we should look at such matters as a way of forcing Him to reveal His will to us.
 - In these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son, who is revealed to us in Holy Scripture.
 - Things like lots are, from the best that I can tell, childish things that are put away now that God's complete revelation has come.
 - We certainly do not see their use sanctioned after the Holy Spirit is poured out on the church.
 - With that, I will conclude about the use of lots.

Conclusion

As we close, let us consider once again our LORD Jesus who committed to the Father that He would come to do His will for a sinful church that needed to be redeemed.

- We see what great pains He went to keep His word of promise!
 - He was obedient even to the point of death on the cross.
 - Let us look to Him for mercy as we look to fulfill the vows we have made to the LORD in His church—membership vows, vows of office, vows of marriage.