

## —Westminster Shorter Catechism—

### *Lesson 68—What does the Second Commandment Require? Qs.49-50*

If the first commandment respects the *Object* of worship, then the second respects the *manner* of worship, prescribing that it be done according to God's will in all things and according to our own will in nothing. Watson, "In the first commandment worshipping a false god is forbidden; in the second, worshipping the true God in a false manner."

Leighton, "As God is not known but by His own teaching and revealing Himself, so He cannot be rightly worshipped but by His own prescription and appointment. And this is the aim of the second commandment: to bind up men's hands—and the imagination that sets his hands to work, and to teach him to depend upon divine direction for the rule of divine worship, and to offer God nothing in his service but what he has received from Him in command."

#### **The duties required**

- I. The second commandment is written in the negative in order to press the affirmative as absolutely as possible. And the duties required are these: that we *receive, observe, and keep pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God has appointed in His Word*, WSC 50.
  - A. That we receive our direction in the worship of God from God alone, Dt 12.29-32.
    1. We're not to consult the ungodly or imitate their religious worship practices, but are to receive all our direction from God Himself, Dt 4.1-8; 15-27.
    2. God's directions for His worship are either expressly set down in Scripture or may be deduced from Scripture by good and necessary consequence, WCF 1.6. Boston, "the internal worship of God is required in the first commandment, while external worship is required in the second."
    3. If God has prescribed the elements that are to comprise Christian worship, then what are those elements?
      - a) Prayer, Phil 4.6; Eph 5.20; 1Tim 2.8.
      - b) Praise, Ps 100; 149.1.
      - c) The reading of Scripture, Acts 15.19-21; 1Tim 4.13.
      - d) The preaching of Scripture, 1Tim 4.13; 2Tim 4.1-2.
      - e) The administration of the sacraments, Mt 28.19; 1Cor 11.23-26.
      - f) Church government and discipline, Eph 4.11-16; Heb 13.17; Acts 14.23; Tit 1.5; Mt 18.17-18; 1Cor 5.4-5; Acts 15.
      - g) And upon special occasions, "religious oaths, vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings," WCF 21.5.
  - B. That we observe God's direction in worship, Ex 20.8; Isa 58.13-14.
    1. That is to say, the manner of worshipping God is not simply to be received and acknowledged, but faithfully practiced and observed in our lives, both privately, in our families, and publicly, Ps 100.
    2. Yet, we must never forget that He who commands we worship Him only according to His appointed means, also commands that our worship not be a mere matter of outward forms and ceremonies. Ryle, "The heart is the principal thing in all our approaches to God, 1Sam 16.7. The most gorgeous cathedral service is offensive in God's sight if all is gone through coldly, heartless, and without grace. The feeblest gathering of three or four poor believers in a cottage to read the Bible and pray is a more acceptable sight to Him who searches the heart than the fullest congregation which is ever gathered in St. Peter's in Rome." Therefore let us remember that for our external worship to be acceptable to God, it must also internally be:
      - a) In spirit and truth, Jn 4.24.
        - (1) By the Holy Spirit and according to the truth of Scripture, Rom 8.26; Eph 2.18.
        - (2) Or, with sincerity and not hypocrisy, Mt 15.7-9. God will not approve of any worship that does not come from the heart, Joel 2.12-13. In all the ceremonies and services of the

OT, God was never after the mere form or externals of worship but was always calling for the heart, Isa 1.11; Ps 51.16-17; Dt 10.16; Jer 4.4.

- b) By faith, Heb 11.6; 10.19-25.
  - c) Through the mediation of the person and work of Christ, Jn 14.6; Eph 1.6; 2.12-13; Heb 7.25.
  - d) Arising from a love for God and His glory, Pr 23.26.
- C. That we keep God's directions for worship pure and entire, Dt 4.2; 12.32; Lev 10.1-3.
- 1. We must not only do as He commanded, but we must do only as He commanded and all that He commanded, neither adding nor subtracting from it. God is dishonored when we presume to either add to or take away from His appointed ordinances.

### Applications

- I. Why are the second and fourth commandments so much longer than all the rest? For three reasons:
  - A. Because while the duty of worshipping God (first and third commandments) is clear from nature, the manner in which God is pleased to be worshiped must be instituted or directly revealed by God to man, WCF 21.1. Dod, "we see, for the second and fourth commandments, how amply God sets them down, bounding and fencing them on every side with strong reasons, which declares that He knows us to be very willing, upon the least occasion, to break out from the keeping of them."
  - B. Because there's a special proneness in the heart of man to corrupt the worship and ordinances of God. It's telling how in Scripture we often read of God's people imitating the worship of other nations, but we never read of other nations imitating the worship instituted by God.
  - C. Because the hearts of men are biased toward idolatry. We want to see what we worship, Rom 1.23; Ex 32.1-6. Watson, "Our nature is as prone to this sin as dry wood is to take fire; and, indeed, what need is there of so many words in this commandment, but to show how subject we are to this sin of false worship?"
- II. Let us remember that there's no keeping the commandments without love for God, and no love for God without keeping the commandments.
  - A. These two are inseparable and can be used to try the one by the other. The sincerity of your obedience can be seen by examining whether it arises from a love for God, and the reality of your love for God can be seen by whether it's active and fruitful in obedience.
  - B. Watson, "Love and obedience, like two sisters, must go hand in hand, for we show our love by performing the work commanded."
- III. The Roman Catholic church erroneously eliminates the second commandment by joining it with the first and then splitting the tenth into two, to make up the number. This is because the second commandment so clearly exposes and condemns the idolatry which makes up so large a share of their religious worship.
  - A. Watson, "The Church of Rome is reprov'd and condemn'd by this commandment, which, from the Alpha of its religion to the Omega, is wholly idolatrous."
- IV. The only test for true worship is: *Is this what the Lord has commanded?* When churches or denominations begin the design of their worship with questions such as: "What will be most effective? What will be most uplifting? What will be most attractive? What will be most exciting? What will be most acceptable?", they're coming at it from the wrong end and will not be able to avoid the man-centeredness which the second commandment condemns.