

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

HAVING SEEN WHAT THE SCRIPTURES PRINCIPALLY TEACH US CONCERNING GOD, IT
FOLLOWS TO CONSIDER WHAT THEY REQUIRE AS THE DUTY OF MAN

QUESTIONS # 103 & 45.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #103. *Which is the first commandment?*

A. The first commandment is, Thou shalt have no other gods before me.¹

(Shorter Catechism)

Q #45. *Which is the first commandment?*

A. The first commandment is, Thou shalt have no other gods before me.²

Question 1—*Why does this and the rest of the commandments use the singular thou and not the plural you?*

Answer—Just as the sweetness of the gospel consists in the personal pronouns, Gal. 2:20; so, the demands of the law ought to be owned as if they were addressed to each individual by name, Gal. 5:3. Each man has an individual responsibility to uphold the commands under the strictest penalty, Ezek. 18:4.

Question 2—*Why is this the first command?*

Answer—We maintain that the duties first in rank and importance are those we owe immediately to God as our Creator and Redeemer, Ex. 20:3.

The ground of all true religion must begin and end with the one true God, Jer. 10:10; Deut. 32:4. The object of worship must first be known before we can apply ourselves, in a right manner, to perform any duty prescribed, whether to God or man, Heb. 11:6. All duty to both God and man begins with the Lord and, when properly engaged, is performed for his glory, Matt. 22:36, 37; 1 Cor. 10:31. This is grounded in the fact that he is infinitely the greatest and best of all beings, Isa. 46:9.

Question 3—*Why is this framed in the negative?*

Answer—Affirmative precepts lay down what is *always* a duty but yet what we are not at *all times always* to be engaged in doing, Deut. 15:1; Ex. 26:1. The use of the negative gives rise to the prohibition which admits of no exceptions because a prohibition obliges always and at all times in all circumstances in which it is applicable, *cf.* Deut. 25:4 *with* 1 Tim. 5:18. When a prohibition is moral, the obligation incurred is a moral one which obliges to duty at all times, Matt. 5:21, 22.

Question 4—*What is meant by having “other gods”?*

Answer—The verse literally reads “there shalt not be to thee other gods before my face.” “Having” (יָהָיָה) is any kind of acknowledging the existence of such a thing so that it falls out or comes to pass that there is a conception in the mind, *cf.* Isa. 44:8. We are to hold such a conception of the true Deity that all other notions are certainly excluded, Prov. 3:5. Any attempt to “have” “other gods” is, in reality, a rejecting of the true knowledge of God, Job 21:14.

Question 5—*Why is each man warned to have no “other gods”?*

¹ Ex. 20:3.

² Ex. 20:3.

Answer—Such is the condition of fallen men that there is nothing more “natural” than sin, Job 15:16. The root of all sin consists in failing to take proper account of who God is, Ps. 50:21. All of Israel’s apostasies began with heeding “other gods,” Jer. 16:11.

Such is man’s fallen nature that even those amongst the people of God must be diligent to avoid this great sin, Heb. 3:12. Serving “other gods” is a sin that results in many negative consequences: 1.) It provokes the wrath of God, 2 Kings 22:17. 2.) It is a sin that leads to the Divine disinheriting, 2 Chron. 7:19, 20. 3.) It provokes temporal judgments, Deut. 11:16, 17.

Question 6—*Why does the command say “before me”?*

Answer—The command mentions “before me,” not to indicate merely a placing something in a place of priority before the Lord, but because the Lord is everywhere, Jer. 23:23, 24; thus, this prohibits false gods (whether implicit or explicit) from being held anywhere, Ps. 139:7-12. In fact, the recognition of this very fact is a necessary component of the true knowledge of the true God, Deut. 4:39. Furthermore, the use of the personal pronoun “me” places all on notice that this is a sin of which the Lord takes account personally, Ezek. 14:4.