

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 # 107 & 49.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #107. *Which is the second commandment?*

A. The second commandment is, Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.¹

(Shorter Catechism)

Q #49. *Which is the second commandment?*

A. The second commandment is, Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.²

Question 1—*How do we come to know this is the second commandment?*

Answer—Truly the Papists and Lutherans do err counting this as part of the first command and reckoning the third commandment the second, the fourth as the third, &c. Their error is revealed by these several considerations: 1.) The need to establish ten commandments leads them to separate the tenth command into two commands forbidding coveting; one against coveting house and the other against coveting wife, and so on. Yet, the apostle clearly expresses that command as one, Rom. 7:7; 13:9. 2.) The Jews, unto whom the keeping of the oracles was committed, acknowledge this to be the second command, Rom. 3:2. 3.) It confounds the object of the first command which fixes the object of worship and the intention of this command which is to fix the manner, means and ways of worshipping the true God. There is a wrong way to worship the true God, Lev. 10:1-3.

Question 2—*What are the things we ought to observe concerning the second commandment?*

Answer—The first thing we ought to observe is that God expressly prohibits all making of images for religious use and service, Lev. 26:1. Specifically, the command forbids graven, or carved, images (*i.e.*, statutes), including all cast or molten images, Lev. 19:4. This is because men are wont to depict lively images of men, beasts or even parts to be worshipped and adored, though without life, Ps. 115:4-8.

¹ Ex. 20:4-6.

² Ex. 20:4-6.

Second, we should observe that the scope of the command, contrary to the Eastern Orthodox, does not terminate only upon statuary but encompasses all likenesses used or deployed in the worship of the true God, Isa. 40:18-20. All images whether carved in stone, cast in metal, painted, woven or any other way, even by imagination and not fashioned by the hand are prohibited, Jer. 9:14.

Question 3—*How particular is this prohibition against images and likenesses?*

Answer—The particularity is expressed in three departments. *First*, men are prohibited from employing images and likenesses from heaven above for any religious worship. After all, the true God made all these things, Gen. 1:14-18. Thus, God forbids their use in his worship, Deut. 4:19. This includes all animate creatures found in the heavens above, whether birds, angels or saints, Rev. 19:10.

Second, men are prohibited from utilizing images and likenesses of things in the earth, whether they be men, beasts, trees, plants, or dead bodies of men, Isa. 27:9; Deut. 16:21.

Third, men are prohibited from making and using any images or likenesses of anything in the waters under the earth, whether fish or any other creature, 1 Sam. 5:2-5.

Question 4—*What reasons can be assigned for the particularity of this command?*

Answer—There are several reasons which may be noted: 1.) Unlike the first commandment which concerns the object of worship, the light and law of nature provide little help in this point. Nature declares that there is a God, Rom. 1:19; and even that He is to be worshipped and obeyed, Acts 17:23; but, how this God is to be worshipped and obeyed must be learned directly from the true God, Deut. 12:32. 2.) There is a special proneness in the nature of fallen men to corrupt the worship and ordinances of God, Rom. 1:25. Even the nation of the Jews often fell into the idolatrous worship of the nations, but never did the nations fall into the true worship of God, Jer. 2:11. 3.) The peculiar bias of corrupt human nature is to desire to see what they worship, Rom. 1:23; Ex. 32:1. Fallen men are drawn to pompous displays of religiosity, Matt. 23:5. 4.) There is a particular perverse zeal, akin to those who once prostitute their honor in adulterous liaisons, which accompanies idolatry, whereby idols are multiplied, Jer. 50:38. Idolatrous worship inspires a hellish fanaticism which resists correction and is progressively degrading, 1 Kings 18:28; Ps. 106:36-38.

Question 5—*What additionally is prohibited in this command?*

Answer—This command further forbids all worshipping of religious images or likenesses, and this by way of either: 1.) Bowing oneself, whether with the whole body, bowing the knee, bowing the head or any prostrating of ourselves or making any displays of respect toward them, Isa. 2:8; 2 Cor. 6:14-18. 2.) Any kind of serving which implies any kind of service the true God demands, or that pagans gave to their idols, Ezek. 44:12; 2 Kings 17:41.