

The Principles of Christian Religion

**A Study through the Baptist
Catechism using Benjamin
Beddome's *Scriptural Exposition***

Outline of the BC

- I. Introductory Questions: 1-6
- II. What We are to Believe: 7-43
- III. What Duty God Requires: 44-114
 - A. The Law and our Inability: 44-89
 - B. The Gospel and the Means of Grace: 90-114

Introduction to the Decalogue

- Interpretation

- J. Douma (cf. WLC 99)

1. “The Decalogue must be interpreted spiritually.”
2. “The negative commandments (‘You shall not . . .’) include positive commands, and vice versa.”
3. “. . . [W]here one sin is mentioned, the commandment intends to cover the entire range of related sins.”
4. “Those commandments concerned specifically with love toward God weigh more heavily than those commandments concerned specifically with love toward neighbor.”
5. “The starting point and goal of all the commandments is love.”

Question and Answer 54

Q. 54: Which is the second commandment?

A. The second commandment is, Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or the likeness of anything 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 shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me, and keep My commandments.¹

¹ Exodus 20:3

Question and Answer 54

- Intro to the Second Commandment
 - Questions raised by the Second Commandment:
 - How is this distinct from the First Commandment?
 - Does it forbid making images of any creature or just images of God?
 - Does it forbid just the worshiping of images of God or even the very making of them?
 - Does this include images of Jesus?
 - What is the connection between the commandment and the reasons attached to it?
 - Is there more to it than just the matter of images?

Question and Answer 54

- Intro to the Second Commandment
 - Traditional Reformed Interpretation
 - The distinction between the First and Second Commandments is that between the proper object of our worship and the proper manner of our worship.
 - First Commandment = Whom we should Worship
 - Second Commandment = How we should Worship
 - The Second Commandment is the basis for the broader Regulative Principle of Worship.
 - 2LCF 22.1

Question and Answer 55

Q. 55: What is required in the second commandment?

A. The second commandment requireth the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire all such religious worship and ordinances, as God hath appointed in His Word.¹

¹ Deuteronomy 32:46; Matthew 28:20; Acts 2:42

Question and Answer 55

1. The Duty of Worship

- Civil honor may be given to creatures (Gen. 49:8).
- But divine worship is due only to God (Matt. 4:10).
- The light of nature is not sufficient to direct us in the worship of God (Acts 17:23).
 - Cf. 2LCF 22.1
- We should therefore have recourse to the written word (Josh. 8:31).

Question and Answer 55

2. The Ordinances of Worship

- All God's ordinances should be received (Job 22:22).
- And observed (Lev. 19:37).
- And kept pure without adulteration (Prov. 30:6).
- And entire without diminution (Mal. 2:9).
- This is especially the duty of ministers (2 Tim. 1:14).
- What are these ordinances?
 - Acts 2:42; cf. WLC 108

Question and Answer 55

3. The Rule of Worship

- Our fancies may not be the rule of our worship (Num. 15:39).
- Nor the customs of men (Lev. 18:3).
- Nor the prescriptions of superiors (Dan. 3:18).
- We should therefore keep close to God's Word as our rule (Exod. 25:40).
- Nor be frightened therefrom by the greatest reproaches or sufferings (Acts 20:24).

Question and Answer 56

Q. 56: What is forbidden in the second commandment?

A. The first commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images,¹ or any other way not appointed in His Word.²

¹ Deuteronomy 4:15-19; Exodus 32:5,8

² Deuteronomy 12:31,32

Question and Answer 56

1. No Worshiping Creatures

- It is a sin to worship any creature (Rom. 1:25).
- Or the image of any creature (Deut. 27:15).
 - Can we even make images of creatures?
 - Yes: think of the images in the Temple.
- We may not worship the host of heaven (Deut. 4:19).
- Nor great and good men (Acts 14:15).
- Nor good angels (Col. 2:18).

Question and Answer 56

2. No Worshiping Images

- It is a sin to plead for idols (Jud. 6:31).
- Or pray to them (Isa. 46:7).
- Or trust in them (Isa. 42:7).
 - Cf. HC 95
- Or attribute anything to them (Isa. 48:5).
- Or give them any part of religious worship (Job 31:27,28).

Question and Answer 56

3. No Worshiping God by Images

- It is a sin to worship the true God by images (Deut. 4:15,16).
 - This is really what the Second Commandment is about: cf. Deut. 4:15-18; Exod. 32:4-5; 1 Kings 12:28; Judges 17 and 18.
- We cannot form any image of God in our minds (Isa. 40:18).
- It is impossible then to form it with our hands (Acts 17:29).
- Those therefore that attempt it put great affront upon him (Rom. 1:23).

Question and Answer 56

3. No Worshiping God by Images

- Why do people want to make images of God?
- Why no images of God?
- Does this include images of Christ?

Question and Answer 56

3. No Worshiping God by Images

– Why do people want to make images of God?

• Exod. 32:1-6

– Why do they ask Aaron for an idol?

» To “go before them”

» To replace Moses

– Why a calf?

» Did they think that Yahweh actually looks like a calf?

» No: they were trying to represent certain aspects of Yahweh’s being.

• His power, His ability to provide and bless

Question and Answer 56

3. No Worshiping God by Images

– Why do people want to make images of God?

- Exod. 32:1-6

- This passage reflects two related motivations for the making and worshiping of a deity by idols:

- » It is an attempt to make the deity less intimidating.

- Cf. Deut. 5:22-27

- To make the invisible visible, the intangible tangible, the incomprehensible comprehensible, the foreign familiar, etc.

Question and Answer 56

3. No Worshiping God by Images

- Why do people want to make images of God?
 - Exod. 32:1-6
 - This passage reflects two related motivations for the making and worshiping of a deity by idols:
 - » It is an attempt to make the deity less intimidating.
 - » It is an attempt to control the deity's power.
 - Cf. I Sam. 4:1-11
 - In the ancient world, an idol was a way to harness and manipulate a deity, to get it to do what you wanted.

Question and Answer 56

3. No Worshiping God by Images

– Why no images of God?

- God's Invisibility/Spirituality
 - Deut. 4:15-18; John 4:24; I Tim. 6:16
- God's Sovereignty over the Revelation of Himself
 - Deut. 4:1-2, 5-6
 - Calvin: "God is the sole and proper witness of himself."
- The Sufficiency of Scripture
 - Deut. 29:29; I Pet. 1:3
 - Seeing vs. Hearing; Image vs. Voice

Question and Answer 56

3. No Worshiping God by Images

– Why no images of God?

- Douma:

- To capture Yahweh in an image is to misunderstand His *freedom*.

- » I Sam. 4; Isa. 46:1-4 ff.

- To capture Yahweh in an image is to misunderstand His *majesty*.

- » Isa. 46:5; Rom. 1:23

- » Calvin: “God’s glory is corrupted by an impious falsehood whenever any form is attached to him.”

- To capture Yahweh in an image is to misunderstand His *covenant*.

Question and Answer 56

3. No Worshiping God by Images

– Why no images of God?

- The Danger of Idolatry

- If worshiping an image of God distorts our perception of Him, then we're not really worshiping the true God at all: a Second-Commandment violation results in a First-Commandment violation (cf. I Kings 12:28; 14:9).

- The True Image of God

- Man (especially Redeemed Man) – Gen. 1:26-27; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10
- Ultimately, Christ – Col. 1:15; John 14:8-11
- Attempts to make images of God reverse this entire dynamic: we try to make God into our image.
 - » Rev. 13:14-15

Question and Answer 56

3. No Worshiping God by Images

– Why no images of God?

- Do we still struggle with these same deeper tendencies? In what ways?
- Mental Images vs. Physical Images
 - Cf. Psalm 50:21; WLC 109
 - Douma: “Today the second commandment applies to us as much as the other nine. As long as human understanding serves as the workshop where images of God are crafted according to our own imagination, we are summoned by the second commandment to return to the Word of God – *the* image that will continually destroy and cast down our images of God and of His service.”

Question and Answer 56

3. No Worshiping God by Images

– Does this include images of Christ?

- Traditionally, Reformed Christians have agreed that the Second Commandment also forbids the making and worshiping of images of Christ.
- Some today, however, argue that the Incarnation complicated things and that it is permissible to make images of Christ for educational purposes (though still never to be used in worship).

Question and Answer 56

3. No Worshiping God by Images

– Why no images of Christ?

- None can be authentic/accurate, thus risking a distortion of our overall understanding of Christ.
- They could be a slippery slope into idolatry.
 - Why have an image of Christ unless it is intended to draw your thoughts to Him? If it draws your thoughts to Him, how can you help but worship Him?
 - Even learning about Christ is an act of worship.
- We must believe in the sufficiency of the means of grace.
 - Above all hearing the Word of God, but also the already visible/tangible means of the Supper.

Question and Answer 56

3. No Worshiping God by Images

– Why no images of Christ?

- The rationale is the same for the prohibition of images of God.
 - There has been a visible revelation of God (e.g., Exod. 24:9-11).
 - Yet, we have not seen that visible revelation ourselves: it has been mediated to us through the written Word which is sufficient – indeed, better!
 - » Deut. 4; cf. I John 1:1-4; II Pet. 1:16-19
 - » It is part of our present suffering that we don't see Christ (John 16:16; I Pet. 1:8) but part of our final hope that we will (I John 3:2).
 - » II Cor. 5:7; John 20:29!

Question and Answer 56

4. No Worshiping God in Any Way that He has Not Expressly Commanded

- This commandment forbids all superstitious practices in worship (Acts 17:22).
- And all sinful compliances with the invention of men (Col. 2:21,22).
- It particularly condemns the idolatry of the papists in worshipping a consecrated host (1 Cor. 10:16).
- It is not enough that these things are expressly forbidden (Lev. 10:1).

Question and Answer 56

4. No Worshiping God in Any Way that He has Not Expressly Commanded

- This is the Regulative Principle of Worship.
 - In contrast with the Normative Principle
 - RPW = can worship only in those ways that God has expressly commanded in Scripture
 - NPW = can worship in any way that God has not expressly prohibited in Scripture
- Is this a legitimate extension of the Second Commandment?
 - Deut. 12 (especially v. 32)

Question and Answer 56

- The Regulative Principle of Worship
 - Does the RPW still apply today?
 - Is the Second Commandment still binding?
 - Is God still sovereign over His worship?
 - Has God still given commands about how He is to be worshiped in the NT?
 - What has He commanded? The elements of worship:
 - » Reading the Word – 1 Tim. 4:13; Col. 4:16
 - » Preaching the Word – Acts 2:42; 2 Tim. 4:2
 - » Praying – Acts 2:42
 - » Singing – Col. 3:16
 - » Celebrating the Sacraments – Acts 2:42
 - » Giving – Acts 2:42; 1 Cor. 16:1-2

Question and Answer 56

- The Regulative Principle of Worship
 - Is the RPW a restriction of Christian liberty?
 - No: it is actually a protection of Christian liberty!
 - It frees you from being forced to do or endure anything in worship that God has not already commanded.
 - Hart and Meuther: “Properly observed, [the RPW] liberates worshipers from the tyranny of churches that impose on their people elements of public worship that have no biblical warrant. When churches engage in unbiblical practices (whether for the sake of tradition or innovation), they usurp the lordship of Christ, and automatically bind in an illegitimate fashion the consciences of believers.”

Question and Answer 56

- The Regulative Principle of Worship
 - We must still be on guard against the allure of man's ways of worship (Deut. 12:30).
 - What are some of these ways?
 - We must believe that God's way of worship is best: He knows best what is pleasing to Him.
 - HC 98: "We must not pretend to be wiser than God."
 - We must strive to keep our worship as pure (i.e., as compliant with God's instructions in His Word) as possible.
 - We must always look to Christ to perfect what is still lacking in our worship and make it acceptable before God (Exod. 28:38).