

Catechism Sec. 11: The Worship Of God

by B. S. Poh

Q43. What is the first commandment?

A43. The first commandment is, “You shall have no other gods before Me.”¹

Notes: *Following Spurgeon, we have left out the preface of the Ten Commandments, believing that it is far better for believers to know each of the ten commandments than to be burdened with too many details. We have changed “Which” to “What” in the questions of all ten commandments.*

1. Exodus 20:3

Q44. What is required in the first commandment?

A44. The first commandment requires us to know¹ and acknowledge God to be the only true God, and our God², and to worship and glorify Him accordingly³.

Notes: Since the answer to the next question in the original Catechism only repeats this answer in the negative way, we have chosen to leave it out, as Spurgeon did.

1. 1 Chron. 28:9, As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the LORD searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever.

2. Deut. 26:17, Today you have proclaimed the LORD to be your God, and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments, and that you will obey His voice.

3. Matt. 4:10, Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”

Comments:

1. The first commandment is concerned with the *object* of true worship. We must worship the true God alone. All other gods are from the imagination of man, instigated by the devil and his agents (1 Cor. 8:5-6; 10:19-20). Syncretism is the attempt to combine the worship of various gods. The pagans often find no difficulty worshipping many gods, including that of other religions. There are professing Christians who would gather with others for inter-faith worship, where each prays to his own god, or all engage in “non-sectarian prayers” in which God is addressed in general. Such professing Christians are breaking this commandment.

2. Attempting to worship the one true God is different from worshipping one god who is not the true God of the Bible (Acts 17:22-23). The Jews have an inadequate understanding of the true God, who is trinitarian, and do not know Him personally, i.e. in a saving manner, because

salvation is found in Christ alone (John 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5; 1 John 2:23). The one god of the Jehovah's Witnesses, and of Islam, are not the God of the Bible. We believe in religious liberty, tolerance, and courtesy, but that does not mean we have to compromise the principles of our faith. Aaron attempted to identify the gold calf with the one, true, God and worshipped it in a pagan way, but the whole exercise was severely rejected as idolatry (Exodus 32:5-10).

Q45. What is the second commandment?

A45. The second commandment is, “You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them.”¹

Notes: For simplicity, the reason for the commandment (Exodus 20:5-6) has been left out.

1. Exodus 20:4-5

Q46. What is required in the second commandment?

A46. The second commandment requires the keeping pure^{1, 2} all such religious worship and ordinances as God has appointed in His word^{3, 4}, while forbidding the worshipping of God by images⁵, or any other way not appointed in His word⁶.

Notes: We have combined the answers of this and of the subsequent question of the original Catechism, and simplified the answer in the first part to “the keeping pure” instead of “the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire”. It is sufficient to say “the keeping pure” for that covers “the receiving, observing”, while “the keeping entire” is covered by “*all* such religious worship and ordinances...”

- 1. Exodus 20:5-6, For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.*
- 2. Deut. 32:46, And he said to them: “Set your hearts on all the words which I testify among you today, which you shall command your children to be careful to observe—all the words of this law.”*
- 3. Matt. 28:20, “Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen.*
- 4. Deut. 12:32, Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.*
- 5. Deut. 4:15-16, Take careful heed to yourselves, for you saw no form when the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female.*
- 6. Col. 2:18, Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind.*

Comments:

1. This commandment is concerned with the *manner* of worshipping God. Just as a king is to be approached according to palace protocol, so also God must be worshipped in the way He commanded. In Reformed theology, this is called “the regulative principle” of worship. The non-

Reformed principle, which may be called “the permissive principle” of worship, states that whatever is not forbidden by the Bible is permissible to be practised. This has led to the introduction of images and crucifixes in the Roman Catholic Church, and to dancing, burning candles, and hand waving in many churches.

2. This commandment also forbids the representation of the Lord Jesus Christ with pictures, or in dramas, even in teaching children. Jesus Christ is not just human, but also divine. Since He is perfect Man, we should not represent Him imperfectly by our pictures. The Bible does not give a description of how the Lord looks like. Faith in Christ does not need a pictorial representation of Him. The Holy Spirit uses the truth, not false representations of Christ, to save souls (Rom. 10:17). The second commandment specifically refers to the harm, or blessing, brought to our children by the way we worship God (Exodus 20:5-6).

Q47. What is the third commandment?

A47. The third commandment is, “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.”¹

1. Exodus 20:7

Q48. What is required in the third commandment?

A48. The third commandment requires the holy and reverent use of God's names¹, titles, attributes², ordinances³, word⁴, and works⁵.

Notes: We have left out the next two questions of the original Catechism, as Spurgeon did, since the present answer is adequate. The next two questions are, “What is forbidden in the third commandment?” and “What is the reason annexed to the third commandment?”

- 1. Psalm 29:2, Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.*
- 2. Rev. 15:3-4, They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying: “Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested.”*
- 3. Eccl. 5:1, Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil.*
- 4. Psalm 138:2, I will worship toward Your holy temple, and praise Your name for Your lovingkindness and Your truth; for You have magnified Your word above all Your name.*
- 5. Psalm 105:1-5, Oh, give thanks to the LORD! Call upon His name; make known His deeds among the peoples! Sing to Him, sing psalms to Him; talk of all His wondrous works! Glory in His holy name; let the hearts of those rejoice who seek the LORD! Seek the LORD and His strength; seek His face evermore! Remember His marvelous works which He has done, His wonders, and the judgments of His mouth.*

Comments:

1. This commandment concerns the *attitude* of worship. The actual acts of worship are primarily referred to, but the way we live should be regarded as worship as well (Rom. 12:1-2). To “take

the name of the Lord” is to be identified with Him by faith. It is like when a woman is married, she takes the family name of the husband. Believers should not dishonour God through careless or irreverent use of anything related to Him. Examples are: (i) making loose exclamations like, “My God!” or “Jesus!”; (ii) cracking jokes relating to the Bible; (iii) being lax or inattentive in church meetings; (iv) setting a bad example at the place of work while being known to be a Christian.

2. Based on Matthew 5:33-37, some Christians have wrongly concluded that we should not swear at all. The context, however, shows that the Lord was against indiscriminate swearing. The making of vows and oaths are permitted in weighty matters, e.g. in marriage (cf. Deut. 6:13; Ps. 15:4).

Q49. What is the fourth commandment?

A49. The fourth commandment is, “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates.”¹

Notes: Again, for simplicity, the reason for the commandment (Exodus 20:11) has been left out.

1. Exodus 20: 8-11

Q50. What is required in the fourth commandment?

A50. The fourth commandment requires the keeping holy to God such set times as He has appointed in His Word, expressly one whole day in seven to be a holy Sabbath to Himself¹⁻³, the first day of the week being the Christian Sabbath since the resurrection of Christ⁴.

Notes: The last part of the answer is from the answer to the subsequent question of the original Catechism.

- 1. Exodus 20:11, For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.*
- 2. Lev. 19:30, You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary: I am the LORD.*
- 3. Deut. 5:12, Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you.*
- 4. 1 Cor. 16:1-2, Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.*

Q51. How is the Sabbath to be sanctified?

A51. The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days¹, and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God’s worship^{2,3}, except so much as is taken up in the works of necessity, piety, and mercy⁴.

Notes: We have included the works of piety in the last part of the answer, which is assumed in the original Catechism.

1. *Lev. 23:3, Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation. You shall do no work on it; it is the Sabbath of the LORD in all your dwellings.*
2. *Psalm 92:1-2, It is good to give thanks to the LORD and to sing praises to Your name, O Most High; to declare Your lovingkindness in the morning, and Your faithfulness every night.*
3. *Isa. 58:13-14, If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy day of the LORD honorable, and shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words, then you shall delight yourself in the LORD; and I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the LORD has spoken.*
4. *Matt. 12:3-5, 11-12, But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless?" Then He said to them, "What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep? Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath."*

Comments:

1. This command concerns the *day* of worship. Given a choice, the first day of the week should be kept as the Christian sabbath (1 Cor. 16:1-2; Acts 20:7; Rev. 1:10). Some circumstances do not permit the keeping of Sunday as the Christian Sabbath, e.g. in Muslim states, in which case another day should be used. Some people wrongly refer to passages like Acts 13:5, 14; 17:2 in support of a Saturday Sabbath, when those passages only show that Paul took advantage of the Jewish Sabbath to evangelize the gathered people. Merely attending a worship service on Sunday is not keeping the *day* holy. Daily prayers, and the weekly Bible Study arranged by the church, fall under the category of "such set times as He has appointed in His word" (Acts 2:46; Heb. 10:24), and should be attended to diligently as well.
2. Rest does not mean inactivity, but the stopping of one set of activities to do another. It is the example set by God for His people, for their good, and as a witness to the unbelieving world. Practically, work and recreation that are normally done on other days are stopped, e.g. reading the newspapers, watching t.v., shopping, eating out, washing the car, etc. Instead, time is spent in corporate worship, corporate prayer, evangelism, the Lord's supper, Bible classes, fellowship, etc.. (cf Acts 2:42, 46-47). When kept with the right spirit, the Lord's day and "such set times" will be blessed to the soul, to the extension of His kingdom, and to the honour of His name.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~