

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 108-b

Halifax, 14 March 2010

Introduction:

Last time, we began to examine the second commandment,

- and in particular, what is required in the second commandment.
 - Even though the commandment is stated in the negative, essentially telling us to abstain from worshipping God by images,
 - The prohibition to worship God in ways that He has not appointed necessarily implies that we *are* to worship Him in the ways that He *has* appointed.
- This is what we are asked about in Question 108 of the Larger Catechism.
 - Here is the question and answer.

Q. 108 What are the duties required in the second commandment?

A. The duties required in the second commandment are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God has instituted in His word; particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ; the reading, preaching, and hearing of the Word; the administration and receiving of the sacraments; church government and discipline; the ministry and maintenance thereof; religious fasting; swearing by the name of God, and vowing unto Him: as also the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship; and, according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry.

This answer to Q. 108 can be divided into three parts:

1. The first part is what we focused on last time:
 - It states in principle what we are required to do in the worship of God:
 - **The duties required in the second commandment are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God has instituted in His word**
 - We looked at Deuteronomy 12 where we are clearly taught that *we* are not to decide how we will approach God in worship,
 - but are to approach Him only in the way that *He* has commanded—without adding anything of our own...
 - The chapter concludes with a clear statement of this in Deut 12:32:

- Deut 12:32: Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it.
- This is sometimes referred to as the regulative principle of worship.
 - The idea is that worship is regulated by God's commands.
 - We are to approach God only as He commands and not as we please.
 - He is the sovereign and we come to Him humbly, according to His directives.
- This is really the essence of the very gospel itself...
 - Jesus Christ crucified and raised for our justification is the way God has appointed for us to approach Him.
 - It is not for us to come up with our own way—Christ is the only way.
 - We cannot set up an image or create some ceremony and ask God to meet us there, as people do when they set up idols....
 - He only meets us through His Son whom He has sent and whom He has revealed to be LORD and Saviour.
- And this whole attitude of approaching as He appoints rather than as we devise carries over into the particulars of our worship...
 - *Everything* we do in worship is to be regulated by God's command.
 - It is not to be according to our wishes or ideas, but according to His divine ordinance.

TRANS> That is what we are taught in the first part of the answer to Q. 108.

2. What are we taught in the second part of this answer?

- The second part tells us what the particular elements of worship are that God has appointed for us in the times of the New Testament.
 - **particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ; the reading, preaching, and hearing of the Word; the administration and receiving of the sacraments; church government and discipline; the ministry and maintenance thereof; religious fasting; swearing by the name of God, and vowing unto Him:**
- You see here that we are given particular things that God has appointed for us to do in our worship...
 - This will be our focus today.

3. Next week, the Lord willing, we will look at the third aspect of the duty we are taught in the second commandment

- The third part has to do with our duty to oppose any worship that God has not instituted:

- **as also the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship; and, according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry.**

TRANS> But now let us turn our attention to our focus for this week—the particular things that God has appointed for us to do in worship in this age.

- As with many things in scripture,
 - we do not have a list of all the things laid out for us,
 - but we learn what is required by looking at examples and various commandments as they are found throughout the New Testament,
 - and also at those things that are continued from the Old Testament.
- God in His wisdom has chosen to reveal His directives to us in this way so that we might receive them in a more organic way that allows us to grow in our relationship with Him.
 - The Bible is not given to us as a check list or a manual, but rather as living revelation.
 - In other words, the elements of worship are presented to us in the context of the life of the church.
 - It should be noted that we are not given all the details either—such as the length of the service or how many songs we ought to include,
 - or the exact arrangement of the service.
 - That is left up to the elders to determine in their various regions and situations, acting according the principles of God's Word.
 - But what we are constantly warned against is devising our own elements of worship.

For our scripture reading today, I want to look at a passage in which we are given the basic elements of worship that the church engaged in from the very beginning.

- Please turn to Acts 2.
 - Most of you know that in Acts 2, we have a record of what happened on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was first poured out on the NT Church.
 - The Jews who, as a body, had crucified Christ were gathered in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost,
 - and suddenly those who had followed Jesus began to speak in the languages of the various nations from which these Jews came—speaking and praising God.
 - It was a miracle that could not honestly be denied,
 - and Peter preached to them that Jesus of Nazareth whom they had crucified had been raised by the Father and declared to be Lord and Saviour...

- and that having been exalted to sit at the Father's right hand,
 - He had poured out His Spirit upon the church and caused this miracle to occur, just as Joel had prophesied!
- Peter then told them that it was for them to repent and be baptised into His name,
 - thereby associating themselves with Him as their Lord and Saviour.
 - And that in so doing, they would also receive forgiveness and the Holy Spirit that He had poured out in order that they and their children might have new life in Jesus Christ.
- And now I want to pick up our scripture reading with verse 40 where we are told what those who believed did...
 - READ> Acts 2:40-47.
 - I would draw your attention in particular to verse 41 and 42.
 - You will see that those who were baptised were added to them—they became part of the great New Testament assembly of those who are called out to worship God through Jesus Christ.
 - I would stress here once again that the very foundation of all acceptable worship is Jesus Christ!
 - We draw near to God by Him as the One who was crucified for us and whose sacrifice was accepted by God for our justification.
 - All of our worship is in His name as those who have been baptised in His name and as those who draw near to God through His cleansing by which we have forgiveness and new life in the Holy Spirit.
 - It will do us no good to keep all the ordinances of God's worship if we do not approach God through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - You must not come supposing that your mere participation in worship makes you acceptable to God.
 - You must come as one who is looking to Christ crucified for your cleansing and for your acceptance with God.
 - But now look at verse 42 and you will see the principle elements of worship, and you will see that those who came to Christ are said to have continued steadfastly in these elements of worship...
 - Acts 2:42: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."
 - I think it is well to emphasise that they are not said to have just done these things,
 - but to have **continued steadfastly** in them.
 - You are not to be casual about worship brothers and sisters!

- You are not to be hit and miss—to show up when it is convenient—to be half-hearted about it...
 - No, no!
 - You are to give it your all and you are to be constant in it!
 - It dishonours God to come into His courts in any frame but that of readiness and full attentiveness.
- Now look at the things they are said to have continued in...
 - The Apostles' doctrine.
 - The Apostles' fellowship
 - The breaking of the bread
 - The prayers.
- I am going to use this as our basic outline as we consider those things that we are given to do in worship.

I. The Apostles' Doctrine

- A. The word doctrine means *teaching*. The church continued in their *teaching*.
- This comes at the head of the list because this is the central feature of the New Testament.
1. The Apostles are called apostles because Jesus sent them out to preach the good news (or the gospel) about Him.
 - a. The word *apostle* means “sent one.”
 - Jesus commanded them to go into all the world and to preach the gospel to every creature.
 - They were to be His official representatives to convey to the world the truth of what He had done.
 - b. The good news they were to preach was that God has sent His Son into the world to redeem the world...
 - And that by His suffering, we who believe the good news have the complete forgiveness of sin and are given new life by His Spirit.
 - By Jesus Christ, we, who were estranged from God by sin, are reconciled.
 - c. The apostles were those whom Jesus had chosen to be with Him,
 - and now He had given them His Spirit, as He promised, so that they could get the message about Him right...
 - They had seen Him and heard Him and touched Him and now it was for them to take all that they had learned of Him and to proclaim it to the nations.

- The Apostles' doctrine was intended to be proclaimed to every nation.
 - Jesus had empowered them and commanded them to be His official messengers so that all the world might know His salvation.
 - The pattern for every member of the church is that we are to continue in the Apostles' doctrine because they are the ones who officially proclaim all that we need to know about Jesus.
 - It was their mandate to teach us to observe all that Jesus has commanded.
2. That the apostle's doctrine is central to NT worship is made evident by many things.
- a. First, what we have just seen—that this is what Jesus tasked them to do—to go out and preach the gospel in all the world.
 - b. Second, that the miracle at Pentecost was essentially a speaking miracle...
 - The Holy Spirit was poured out on them such that they proclaimed the praises of God in the languages of the nations because the good news was intended for the nations.
 - c. Third, because the very way of salvation throughout the NT is said to be faith...
 - It is by believing the message preached that men and women are saved, even as these 3000 at Pentecost were saved.
 - d. Fourth, that the priesthood of the OT that shadowed forth Christ with all its services and ceremonies is done away...
 - And the thing that replaces it is the proclamation of what Jesus did for us when He lived among us.
 - We do not come to God by the works of the law that set forth Christ in the Old Testament,
 - but we come to God by believing the message about Jesus Christ.
 - e. Fifth, because it was prophesied in Psalm 22 that our LORD Jesus, after His self-offering for our sin was accepted,
 - would gather His people in the great assembly to proclaim to them the good news...
 - This is what we do every Lord's Day—we obey His call to gather and He, by the institution of preaching, proclaims to us the good news of salvation.

TRANS> But the question might be raised,

B. How are we who have never seen these apostles to continue in their doctrine today?

1. My dear brothers and sisters,

- We continue in the Apostles' Doctrine by continuing in the word that has been given to us in the Scripture which we have through their labours.
- a. God in His wisdom saw to it that their teaching was preserved for His church in written form in the Bible.
 - This was not a new method...
 - Moses and the prophets in the Old Testament also had their teaching preserved for us in written form.
 - And in the Old as well as the New, this teaching was overseen by God's Spirit in such a way that it is without error...
 - It is the very word of God, sufficient and trustworthy.
 - It is His message to us, breathed out by Him, for our instruction and salvation.
- b. This is made clear to us throughout the scripture...
 - For example, in 2 Tim 3:16-17, we are told:
 - 2 Tim 3:16-17: All Scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.
 - It is both sufficient and complete.
 - And the apostles themselves testified that their own speaking and their own writing was the very word of God...
 - Thus Paul says that receiving the word that the Thessalonians heard from him was to receive the word of God:
 - 1Th 2:13: For this reason we also thank God without ceasing, because when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe.
 - And Peter speaks of Paul's writings in 2 Peter 3:16 as part of scripture, equal in authority to the rest of the scriptures...
 - 2 Peter 3:16: as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.
- c. And so we have the word of God now in written form, and we are told that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.
 - We continue in the doctrine (or teaching) of the apostles by continuing in the scriptures that have been given to us by the labour of the apostles.

2. And not only do we have their doctrine, but Christ, speaking through the apostles,
 - also instituted how their doctrine was to be conveyed to His church after the apostles were gone...
 - a. Christ not only gave to His church Apostles and prophets in the first century, but He also gave them pastor-teachers whose task it is to preach His word.
 - In Ephesians 4:11, they are mentioned right along with the apostles and prophets as those He gave to the church to bring His word to His people:
 - Eph 4:11-13: And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;
 - He gave guidelines for how ministers of the word are to be chosen and commanded that they should be provided for—
 - So that they could devote themselves to this work.
 - In 1 Cor 9:14, it says:
 - “Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.”
 - And in Galatians 6:6, it says:
 - Gal 6:6: Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.
 - And in 1 Timothy 5:17, it says
 - 1 Tim 5:17: Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, in particular, those who labor in the word and doctrine.
 - This shows that He has appointed in the church those whose primary calling it is to minister the word.
 - They are to teach the Word that is given to us by Christ through the prophets and apostles so that the God’s people might continue in the apostles’ doctrine.
 - b. And He commanded that preaching and reading of the word should continue in His church, even as it had been continued in the synagogue before.
 - This is brought out in the Great Commission at the end of Matthew where Jesus commands that disciples be made of all nations, and that they are to be taught to observe all that He has commanded...
 - It is enjoined in 1 Timothy 4:13 where the command is to give attention to reading, to exhortation and to doctrine.

- This is according to the pattern that was already established in the Synagogues from ancient times:
 - Ac 15:21: "For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath."
 - This is the pattern that Jesus Himself continued in His own ministry as He went from city to city to preach:
 - In Luke 4:16, it says:
 - Luk 4:16: So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read.
 - And then we are told how He began to preach, explaining the sense of the passage.

TRANS> So you see that Jesus Christ has appointed that we continue in the apostles' doctrine through the ministry of the Word as it is read and preached in the assembly.

- He has provided that this should be continued until He returns.
 - Reformation can only come when there is a serious return to the Word instead of to all the things that are substituted in its place—
 - interviews, dramas, ceremonies, skits, dialogue, musicals, etc.
 - We must continue in the Apostles' doctrine in the way that Christ appointed.
- That is the first thing. Next there is:

II. The Apostles' Fellowship

A. The word "fellowship" is *koinonia*.

1. This word speaks of having a share in something—of having things in common with others.
 - In 1 John,
 - John explains that as an apostle who saw and heard and touched Christ, He writes in order that those who read might have fellowship with him and his fellow apostles...
 - and then he says, "and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ."
 - Through the apostle's doctrine, we are brought into the apostles' fellowship.
 - The two are closely related.
2. The idea in Acts 2:42 of "continuing in the apostles' fellowship" seems to be that the believers entered into a formal association with them which they continued in.

- The apostles were members of the body of Christ and partakers of the Holy Spirit,
 - and when persons were baptised, they were “added to them”
 - They entered into this glorious fellowship or communion with all its responsibilities and privileges.
 - The responsibility was to live as the followers of Christ, to love and serve their brothers and sisters in the church, to support the ministry financially, and to represent Christ in the community at large.
 - And the privilege was that of being cared for by the other members, of receiving the word and sacraments, of joining in the worship of God, and of having the oversight and discipline of those who were set apart to rule in the church.

B. When it comes to public worship in particular,

1. Those who are in the fellowship of the Apostles are called together to worship God in the assembly.
 - Once again, we may look at Psalm 22 where our LORD Jesus is said to gather His people in the great assembly after His sacrifice for our sin is accepted...
 - We have seen in particular that He gathers them to declare His word to them—the gospel—the good news of accomplished salvation...
 - But Psalm 22 also says that He gathers them to sing praise to God, to give thanks to His name.
 - In Hebrews 2:12, Psalm 22 is quoted and we are told expressly that it is Jesus who gathers us together to sing psalms of praise to God in the assembly.
 - The word assembly is *ekklesia* which is often translated by the word *church* in our English Bibles.
 - It is the assembly of called ones—called out by Jesus Christ to come before God in Jesus’ name as the one who has sanctified us by the blood of the cross.
 - We are commanded not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together if we have come to know Him.
 - We are to join together at Jesus’ command in the fellowship of praise.
 - Hebrews 12:22 says:
 - Heb 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the

new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

2. And that fellowship involves supporting the work of the church with our tithes as well as offering praise and thanksgiving to God.
 - These are the sacrifices and offerings of the New Testament.
 - Both of them are mentioned in Hebrews 13:15 &16:
 - Heb 13:15-16: Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.
 - And notice that these verses are followed by the command to:
 - Heb 13:17: Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.
 - This shows us that the fellowship of praise and giving is to be carried on under the oversight of those Christ has appointed to rule in the church...
 - Government under elders who lead according the word of the apostles...
 - Thus we continue in the fellowship of the apostles as we follow their directives in worship and submit to the leaders they appointed.
3. And I should point out that Hebrews 13:15 tells us in what our praise should consist...
 - It is to be “the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name.”
 - In the OT, the Levites were commanded to play musical instruments in the temple to accompany the sacrifices they offered...
 - Only the Levites were to do this because it pertained to the offering of sacrifices.
 - But Hebrews makes it clear that all that pertains to the offering of sacrifices is fulfilled in Jesus Christ so that the Levitical functions cease.
 - This is why we are told that praise consists in the fruit of our lips giving thanks—no longer the playing of musical instruments, but simple singing.
 - Now *we* are the instruments.
 - This is also brought out in Ephesians 5:19 where we are told literally to “pluck the strings of our hearts” when we sing to the Lord.

- It is for this reason that the church used no instruments except the human voice for the first seven centuries...
 - and that when the church was reformed in the fifteenth century, most of the reformers removed not only images but also instruments and unauthorised ceremonies.
- Sadly, there has been the re-introduction of musical instruments in the last couple of centuries in many reformed churches.
 - But we need to understand that instruments belong to the shadows of temple worship, not the New Covenant Church.

TRANS> What a privilege it is for us to continue in the fellowship of the apostles, for truly this fellowship is with Jesus Christ, the Head of the church.

- Now lets move along to the next element of worship that is named in Acts 2:42 is:

III. The Breaking of the Bread

A. I have translated this phrase, “*the* breaking of *the* bread” in keeping with the original.

- The definite article used twice—*the* breaking of *the* bread.
 - This indicates that this is speaking of the Lord’s Supper.
 - Down in verse 46, it mentions how the daily broke bread from house to house.
 - This may refer to the Lord’s Supper as well,
 - but the phrase can have the meaning of simply eating meals together.
 - But when the definite article is used as it is in verse 42,
 - it suggests that the Lord’s Supper is what is referred to.
 - That the phrase, “breaking of bread” was used to refer to the Lord’s Supper is absolutely certain from 1 Corinthians 10:16 where Paul says:
 - 1 Cor 10:16: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?”
 - So we may conclude that when we are told that the disciples continued in the breaking of the bread,
 - it is the Lord’s Supper that is referred to.
 - This was a regular element of their worship.

B. Of course, Acts 2 refers to what was done in the very first days of the church during the feast of Pentecost when Jews from all over the world were visiting at Jerusalem.

- But we need to also know what was done when the church had settled into a regular routine.

1. In Acts 20, we are given an indication of what the pattern was in the regular life of the church...
 - There we are shown that it was customary for the church to gather to break bread on the first day of the week.
 - We are taught that Paul, having come to Troas, waited for seven days until the first day of the week came round, because that was the day when the church gathered together to break bread.
 - Acts 20:7 speaks of it as a customary thing for them to gather on the first day of the week to break bread.
 - Acts 20:7: “Now on the first *day* of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.”
 - It appears that they did not meet until the first day of the week, being busy with their daily labours,
 - and that on that day, they gathered to break bread, that is, to eat the Lord’s Supper, and to hear preaching.

2. In 1 Corinthians 11:20, we have further support that the Lord’s Supper was a regular feature of the church’s gatherings.
 - Here, Paul complains at the Corinthians for coming together as if their purpose was to eat a common meal rather than to eat the Lord’s Supper.
 - He rebukes them for turning the sacred meal into a common meal.
 - He says,
 - 1 Cor 11:20: “Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper.”
 - They were forgetting that their purpose in the assembly was to eat the Lord’s Supper, not to fill their bellies!

 - So we conclude from this that the Lord’s Supper should be a regular part of our assembly—whenever we gather together to worship the Lord.
 - Our weekly assembly is to be focused on the gospel of Jesus Christ and on what He has done for us on the cross to save us from our sins.

TRANS> Now let us consider the fourth element of worship mentioned in Acts 2...

IV. The Prayers

A. Once again, the definite article is used here.

1. It is not just that they continued in steadfastly in prayer, but in the prayers...

- This suggests that it refers to stated times of prayer.
 - In other words, it is not just that the individual disciples prayed, but that they gathered together as a body for corporate prayer.
 - Or more accurately, that when they gathered together for worship, prayer was a part of what they did along with the ministry of the word and sacraments.
2. This is not to say that private prayer in families and as individuals is not important.
- In the sermon on the Mount,
 - Jesus condemned the scribes and Pharisees for making a show of prayer—for praying on the street corner to be seen of men.
 - He instructed us not to make a display of prayer, but to enter into our closet and shut the door and to pray to our Father in secret.

TRANS> But He did not mean that there were to be no corporate prayers in the church.

3. This is certain because our Lord in Scripture calls us to lift up prayers when we come together in the church.
- a. In the book of Timothy where Paul talks about how we are to behave in the church which is the house of God—that is, in the Christian assembly,
- He calls upon us to lift up public prayers.
 - In 1 Tim 2:1, he says:
 - 1 Tim 2:1-3: “Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks be made for all men, “for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,”
 - You see that Paul says that this is acceptable to God.
 - In verse 8, he goes on to say that the men in particular should be the ones who pray— everywhere.
 - The verse reads,
 - 1 Tim 2:8: “I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;”
 - and then he speaks of the conduct of the women in the assembly, and enjoins that they are not to lead in the church.
 - The word *men* here is not the general word *anthropos* which means *people*, but *aner* which refers to men in distinction from women.

- That is the reason we have only the men lead in prayer.
 - It should also be noted that the word *everywhere* is in fact a technical phrase in the original that was used to refer to the places where the churches gathered.
 - In other words, it refers to a stated meeting or called meeting of the assembly.
- b. As we might expect, we are given a number of examples of corporate prayer.
- 1) Right from the beginning of Acts, we have the church gathered for prayer, and note the although the women did not lead in prayer, they were certainly present for the prayers:
 - Ac 1:14: These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.
 - 2) In Acts 6:6 we have the church praying for the deacons as they ordain them, and in Acts 14:23, we have Paul and Barnabas leading in prayer in every church as they go about to ordain elders.
 - Acts 14:23 says:
 - Acts 14:23: So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.
- B. And we might note here that fasting is also mentioned as something that was done in connection with prayer by the church.
1. The Jews had kept regular fast days, praying for the Messiah to come...
 - In Luke 5:33, they criticised Jesus for not keeping these fast days,
 - but Jesus explained to them that His disciples could not fast because He had come!
 - Why should they fast for the Messiah to come when He was there with them, healing people, and preaching the kingdom of God?
 - That would be like fasting at a wedding banquet!
 - He also criticised them for fasting and praying and giving to be seen of men.
 - Some people today seem to use this to say that ought not to fast in the New Testament...
 - Would these persons also say that we ought not to pray and give alms since Jesus also criticised these?
 2. But Jesus also said that He was going to go away, and that when He did, His disciples would fast (Luke 5:35).

- Fasting is a way of devoting ourselves to concentrated prayer.
 - Fasting should be done publicly, at times,
 - as with the ordination of elders and deacons, as we saw in Acts 14,
 - or when the church comes together in repentance or to pray for reformation...
 - as in Joel 2:12: “Now, therefore,” says the LORD, “Turn to Me with all your heart, With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.”
 - It should be done privately, both as families and as individuals.
 - In 1 Cor 7, Paul mentions times of fasting that involve abstaining from sexual relations between a husband and wife for an agreed upon, but brief period of time, that a couple might devote themselves to prayer.
 - Sometimes the best fast is the one in which you are so burdened to pray that you simply forget about eating.
 - We need to have the kind of relationship with the LORD that causes us to leave off our normal activities at times—even eating—to look to the Lord.
- C. And finally, in connection with prayer, we might also speak of oaths and vows we make to the LORD.
1. It is a feature of our modern society to disparage swearing and oath taking as a worthless formality...
 - And because we look at it that way, it does indeed become for us a worthless formality—we do not take it seriously.
 - Wedding vows, swearing to tell the truth in court, vows of office, vows of membership or allegiance...
 - all of these, if done at all, have come to mean very little among us.
 2. But it ought not to be that way!
 - When you swear or make an oath or a vow, you call upon God to bear witness to what you have said and to judge you if you do not fulfill what you have spoken.
 - When a person comes to the LORD, he enters into covenant with Him, confessing that Jesus is LORD and Christ and that he will follow Him.
 - We are commanded to hold fast our confession without wavering.
 - When a person enters into a marriage, a husband and wife make promises before God to be faithful and devoted to each other.
 - That is why marriage is called a covenant of companionship in Proverbs and Malachi.
 - A man has no right to take a woman sexually until he has first taken her to be his lawfully wedded wife.

3. This is a big topic and there is much more that could be said,
 - but I will leave it with Isaiah 19:21 where Isaiah speaks of the time of the Messiah (these NT times) and says:
 - Isa 19:21: “Then the LORD will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day, and will make sacrifice and offering; yes, they will make a vow to the LORD and perform *it*.”
 - That is what the nations do when they turn to the Lord.
 - They come to swear by the name of the LORD.

Conclusion

And indeed, that brings us around to where we began...

- As those who have come to the LORD and been baptised in His name, it is for us offer to God that which He commands us in this present age...
 - We are to keep what we vowed when we confessed Him as Lord and Christ and entered into the New Covenant with Him...
 - It is for us to continue, not carelessly, not intermittently, but steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers...
- Give yourselves wholeheartedly to what God has appointed, and always remember,
 - Unless you come to all of these elements of worship in the name of Jesus Christ who was crucified,
 - your worship will not be accepted by God.
 - But how wonderful that through Jesus Christ, we are able to come as those who are clothed with His righteousness...
 - and that coming as God commands, our worship is pleasing to Him.