

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## Question 112 b

### *Reverent Use of the Means of Grace*

Halifax, 1 August 2010

#### **Introduction**

Today we continue in our study of the Third Commandment:

- Exodus 20:7: "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.

Many people think this command only has to do with cursing.

- It most certainly does prohibit that, but it reaches a lot further than that!
  - As Christians, we should be eager to look beyond the surface.
    - We are forgiven in Christ and have the Holy Spirit who works in us.
    - We ought to be eager for His law to speak into every part of our lives.
  - Instead of trying to avoid God's commandments, we want them to speak fully into our lives.
    - We want to understand the full implications of each commandment and, by God's grace, to have God's Spirit bring us into conformity with all that it says to us.
    - Even though we find that when we look at the full implications of the commandments, we always come short of God's standard,
      - we are not overwhelmed because we know we are pardoned in Christ and that God's Spirit is working in us to make us more and more complete in our obedience.
- So when we look at the third commandment with this attitude,
  - we are prepared to welcome its full teaching when it speaks to us about God's name,
    - We are happy to know that *His name* speaks about all that He has revealed to us about Himself...
    - and that this commandment calls us to have the highest reverence and esteem for it...
    - In how we speak of Him, in how we act toward all that is revealed about Him, and even in how we think of Him.

Last week, we began to look at what is required of us in the third commandment.

- To guide us in our exposition,
  - we used the Larger Catechism which is the summary exposition that the Westminster Divines agreed upon when they met together in the Westminster Assembly.
  - This summary of what the third commandment requires is found in Question 112.

**Q. 112 What is required in the third commandment?**

**A. The third commandment requires, that the name of God, His titles, attributes, ordinances, the word, sacraments, prayer, oaths, vows, lots, works, and whatsoever else there is whereby he makes himself known, be holily and reverently used in thought, meditation, word, and writing; by an holy profession, and answerable conversation, to the glory of God, and the good of ourselves, and others.**

Last week, we began with a scripture reading from Romans 11:33 – 12:2.

- In that text, we saw that God does everything for His own glory,
  - and that it is for us to behold the glory of His name (all that He has revealed to us about Himself) with reverence and to pour out our whole life for Him—as a living sacrifice.
    - He is revealed now, in these last days, by the Lord Jesus Christ.
    - The fullness of His glory is seen in the coming of Christ, and in His work on the cross where we see God’s holiness, justice, love, mercy, and wisdom in all their marvellous fullness...
      - And Romans 12:1-2 tells us how we are to respond to that mercy:
        - Rom 12:1-2: I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.
- When the Catechism says that we are to have a holy profession and answerable conversation with reference to God’s name,
  - it is talking about this very thing.
  - We are to receive and confess the revelation of God in Christ...
    - (that is the holy profession),
      - and then we are live according to that profession...
        - that is the answerable conversation—
          - conversation here means way of life.

- So we are to first have renewed mind about the greatness of our God,
  - and then we are live as those who reverence Him ought to live (and indeed will live).
- After looking at this, we then began to consider how to holily and reverently use God's names, titles, attributes, and ordinances.
  - Those are the first four things mentioned in the Answer to Question 112 that have to do with God's name.
  - This week, I want to move on in the list and look at how we are to more highly reverence the next three ways that His name is made known to us, specifically,
    - His word, sacraments, and prayers...
    - These are the three primary means of grace—things that God uses to communicate His grace to us...
      - We are not to take these things in vain as if they are unimportant, but are to use with the greatest care and reverence.
      - We must not take the Word, Sacraments, and prayer in vain.

Before we look at these individually, I want us to have our scripture reading from Hebrews 12:12-28.

- In this passage, we are called to use the means of grace (to come before God) with an even greater reverence than was called for in the Old Testament!
  - The book of Hebrews talks about the difference in Old Testament worship and New Testament worship all the way through.
    - It speaks of the greater privileges we have now in that we no longer come before God by means of symbols and ceremonies that were appointed until Jesus came,
      - but now we come to Him through the reality of Christ sacrificed!
      - The penalty of sin has been paid and the way of access has been made through His offering for our sins!
        - It is a new and living way, and we can come before God to hear His word, to pray and to receive the sacraments that He has appointed with boldness and confidence!
- But many people in our day miss the fact that this greater access and nearness to God also calls us to have a **greater** reverence!
  - They equate boldness with irreverence.
    - That is not the message of scripture!
  - Hebrews talks about how there is a worse punishment for those who come before God in vain in the NT than there ever was in the OT.

- It was a terrible thing in those days to draw near to God with the lips when the heart was not mindful of being before God...
- But it is a much worse thing to do this now when we come nearer to God through the blood of the New Covenant!
  - Hebrews 10:26 says that we trample the blood of Christ underfoot when we do this—as if it that blood that sanctified us to come before God, even the precious blood of Jesus, were an unclean thing.
- We act as if it is no great thing to be in His holy presence!
  - That is to take God’s name in vain!

Well let me go to our reading about the greater reverence we are to have as it is told to us in Hebrews 12:12-29.

- This passage opens with a warning that we be not like Esau in coming before God—full of bitterness...
  - and then it explains the difference in the old and new covenant...
    - In the old, they came to a mountain that could be touched—it was all symbolical things representing the holiness of God.
    - But now that Jesus has come, we come to that which we cannot touch!
      - We come before God in heaven!
        - Our reverence in doing so should be far greater, for our God is a consuming fire.
- Here, let me read to you from God’s holy Word:
  - READ> Hebrews 12:12-29.
- O that we would learn to more highly esteem His name when we come before Him to use the means of grace!
  - Let us turn now to look at how we might do this with each specific means that is here mentioned—beginning with the word...

## **I. How are to reverence God’s word?**

A. We might begin by looking Ps 138:2 where it says:

- Ps 138:2: I will worship toward Your holy temple, And praise Your name For Your loving-kindness and Your truth; For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.
1. As we have seen, God has revealed His name in many different ways to us.
    - “names, titles, attributes, word, and works... and many others...

- But this verse suggests that the pre-eminent way He has revealed Himself is through His Word.
  - This is the highest, most complete form of His revelation to us.
    - Creation reveals Him, but the Word reveals Him in a much fuller way.
2. This is certainly the case with the Word incarnate.
- And we have every reason to believe that the Holy Spirit was thinking of that in Psalm 138:2.
    - As we are told in the first chapter of John,
      - John 1:14: And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.
    - And then in verse 17, it says
      - John 1:17: For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.
  - The idea here seems to be that in the law, Moses faithfully told us what is required of us...
    - but then Jesus came and actually brings into flesh and reality what God requires of us!
    - When it says “grace and truth” came by Him, it does not mean that what Moses said was false...
      - it rather means that it was symbolic—all the service of the tabernacle was symbolic of what must be done for us...
        - but Jesus did it in truth!
        - It was in Him that the grace of God was manifested in actually doing for us what we could not do for ourselves!
3. And so in the coming of Jesus, the Word incarnate,
- We behold the glory of God in its fullest expression!
    - Looking at Him, we see the height and breadth and depth of the love of God that He should give His Son for us!
    - We see His holiness and righteousness that requires no less sacrifice than His own Son.
    - We see His mercy and grace in providing for us and accepting for us the Son’s sacrifice.
    - We see His wisdom and power in overcoming sin for His people, in conquering death, Hell, and the Devil.

TRANS> God has magnified His Word above all other ways of His revelation.

- And we must not for a moment separate the written word from the Word incarnate.
  - In the written word, God has given to us the revelation of the glory of Jesus Christ the incarnate word.
  - It is through the written word that God sets Christ the incarnate word forth to us so that we may behold His glory...
    - John, who saw and heard and handled the incarnate word, tells us that he has written to us about Him in order that we might have fellowship with Him and with the Father.
    - You cannot separate the one from the other.
    - In fact, if we only *saw* Christ and were not give the interpretation of what He did (say, if we were not told *why* He died on the cross),
      - we would not have the fullness of God's revelation to us in Christ.
      - The written word is essential in the revealing of God's name to us.

B. How are we to reverence and esteem the word?

1. First of all, we must receive all that the Word says to us and treat it as that which truly comes from God Himself.
  - a. There is a tendency in our day to sort of pick and choose what you want from the word.
    - People are very careless about the word—and will just ignore things that they don't like.
      - If there is a commandment that is not pleasing, that commandment will be ignored.
        - There are professing Christians who are living in sexual immorality—just ignoring the prohibition against fornication.
    - If there is something about God's character that is not pleasing, that also is ignored or at least not taken seriously.
      - When we looked at the second commandment, we talked about the way people will make idols—they will pretend that God is what they want Him to be instead of believing what is revealed...
        - Most people today want a God who is without wrath and who does not need to be propitiated, so that is what they imagine God to be.
  - b. This is to play fast and loose with God's Word!
    - We must rather recognise that it is the very word of the living God to us.
    - It is not to be trifled with!

- It is to be taken seriously!
  - When you remember that it comes from Him who knows your heart, it changes the way you look at it!
- c. Think about it...
- If an officer comes by your house and warns you that you need to evacuate because of a spreading fire,
    - you take his word much more seriously than that of a five year old who tells you that aliens are coming.
    - God's warnings in His word ought to be taken even more seriously than that of an officer.
  - To illustrate again,
    - There is a difference in the way you receive a promise from a good and trusted friend verses a promise from a used car salesman!
    - I am telling you that there ought to be an even greater difference in the way you receive a promise from God!
      - You have not warrant for questioning it!
        - You rather live your life around it!
2. If you have this attitude of reverence toward the word, it will affect the way you handle the word...
- a. First, that you will be very eager to receive it—
- As in Proverbs where you search for wisdom as for hidden treasure,
  - Or as in Psalm 19 where you esteem it more highly than gold and silver.
    - If that is true, you will spend time in the word—
      - You will give full attention to it...
      - You will prepare yourself to receive it with prayer...
      - You will search the scriptures and yearn to understand.
- b. And then having received it, you respond to it appropriately!
- 1) You will give thanks for what you have heard—for the warnings and the promises and for things you have learned about God.
  - 2) And you will remember what you have heard.
    - We forget things that we don't have much use for.
      - It is amazing how we can remember all the details of things that are important to us—kids can even remember dates and names and all sorts of details about their favourite hockey player,
        - but then they have trouble memorising their catechism.

- Memory comes from meditation—running stuff over and over in your mind. That’s what you do when something is important to you.
- 3) And they you will apply the word—believing the promises, submitting to the commandments, heeding the warnings...
- That is how meditation happens best
    - You are not just memorising it say you did...
      - You run it over in your mind because you are looking to apply it to your life.
    - People are dull to the word when they don’t connect with it and they don’t feed upon it to guide them through life...
      - to fill up their lives with the beauty of God’s way.
- c. When the word is received and applied by you, you will then proclaim it to others.
- I don’t mean that everyone has to become a preacher, but if you believe it to be the very word of God,
    - You will be very concerned for others to understand it and not to miss out on it...
      - just as you would if the officer came to call you to evacuate.
      - You will tell your children and you will tell your neighbours who may not have heard.
  - If God really has declared to us that He is reconciled to us through Jesus Christ and that we are to repent and believe on Him to be saved,
    - this is a message of highest importance!
    - You will want to do all you can to spread the word to those who are ignorant and blind.

TRANS> So you see then that reverencing God’s name certainly includes reverencing His word.

- Now what about the sacraments?

## **II. How you are to reverence God’s Sacraments?**

A. First of all, we must understand what the sacraments are!

1. We have already spoken about reverencing all of God’s ordinances, and sacraments are ordinances that the LORD Himself has given us.
  - They are treated separately in the Catechism because of their importance among God’s ordinances.



2. A sacrament is that which visibly shows us the application of Christ and His benefits of salvation to us!
  - There is a washing that God gives us through faith in Christ,
    - but it is a washing that cannot be seen—
      - It is a washing away of our sin and guilt through Jesus Christ and it is washing of our filthy sinful hearts that reject God—even when He offers mercy to us in the gospel.
      - This is represented to us in baptism by ceremonial washing with water in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
      - This portrays to us how Christ cleanses us when we trust in Him.
  - And then there is the Lord’s Supper in which we are commanded to take bread to represent Christ’s body, and wine to represent His blood that was shed for the remission of our sins...
    - And then we eat the bread and the wine to show that we have communion with Christ who was crucified for us...
      - that His sacrifice nourishes us and cleanses us and imparts new life to us.
      - And we come looking to God to give us these things even as we partake of the bread and wine.
        - This is truly an awesome thing!
          - When we receive the sacraments we are actually connecting to Christ through the sacrament for our spiritual blessing and nourishment.
          - 1 Cor 10:16 makes this plain:
            - 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?

TRANS> So in the sacraments, God is visibly showing us how He connects with us through faith in Christ.

B. The receiving of the sacraments ought to be done with the highest reverence and awe!

1. Come to the Lord’s Supper with extreme thankfulness that you have an interest in Christ, the very Son of God!
  - Come with thanksgiving and with eagerness to have from Him the fullness of the salvation that He offers.
    - This is no trivial thing—it is something to prepare for, something to yearn for, something rejoice in!
    - You have connected with this great Saviour, even the Son of God!

- To come in any other way is to come in an unworthy manner.
2. And with baptism—
- Baptism only happens once in a person’s life, but it is to be improved by us.
    - That is, we are to remember our baptism and we are to reverence it.
    - You have been baptised into the very name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
      - You are identified with Him in the reconciliation that Jesus gives to us.
  - And you are to live in accordance with that identification.
    - You are to recognise that what you do as a baptised person reflects upon His holy name!
    - You are to recognise that you have a relationship with Him in the covenant of redemption,
      - and that it is yours to believe and receive this salvation.
      - If you don’t, you take His name in vain.
3. And as we recognise the holy nature of the sacraments,
- a. We must not receive them in a vain way.
    - In 1 Cor 5, Paul says that you are to purge out the malice and bitterness in your heart before you come...
    - It is no time to be flippant or cold—you are connecting with your dear Saviour who was crucified for you.
  - b. We are also to uphold the discipline of the church so that none who are unworthy will partake.
    - That’s right—the scripture teaches that we all have a duty to admonish one another and to go to our brother or sister if we see them caught in sin.
      - We are to go to them and to try to restore them, and if they will not hear us, we are to make every effort—
        - we are to take someone with us to help us—and if they still will not repent,
          - we are to take them to the elders so that they may not be allowed to continue partaking of the Lord’s Supper until they repent.
    - In 1 Cor 5, Paul accuses the Corinthians of pride for their refusal to remove the impenitent sinners in their congregation.

- There, and in 1 Cor 11, he warns that God's judgement falls on congregations and individuals who take His name in vain at the Lord's Supper.
- The admonition in 1 Cor 5:8 is for us.
  - 1 Cor 5:8: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

TRANS> Prayer is next on the list.

### **III. How are you to reverence prayer?**

A. We must see that in prayer we are actually talking to the living God!

1. We are encouraged to approach Him as our Father—even as our daddy—but this is not all to be confused with a lack of reverence.
  - He is Almighty God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, and the Judge of angels and man.
  - He is the one whose appearance caused men like Isaiah, Daniel, and John to tremble in terror because of His great glory and majesty.
  - Prayer is not a time for flippancy or lightness.
    - We are actually approaching the very throne of God and presenting our petitions before Him!
2. We lose sight of what is actually happening in prayer...
  - We are before the throne of the One whose presence would envelop us in flames of eternal vengeance if we were not redeemed through the blood of His Son.
  - We need to be mindful of what a privilege it is for us to be cleansed and pardoned so that we can come before God!
    - This is a place for reverent gratitude in the highest degree.

B. That means that we need to think about how we approach God in prayer.

1. In the scriptures, worshippers either bow their knees, fall prostrate before Him, or stand in prayer.
  - When Paul speaks of his prayers, he says things like:
    - Eph 3:14 I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
    - In Acts 20, we are told how after meeting with the elders at Ephesus, they knelt down to pray.
    - We are told that Daniel was in the custom of keeling down on his knees in prayer to God three times a day.

- Jesus indicates that standing was customary in prayer in Mark 11:25 when He is speaking incidentally about public prayer and says:
    - Mark 11:25: “And whenever you stand praying...”
  - It is not necessary to insist that we must always either kneel or stand in prayer because this is not expressly commanded,
    - but it being the case that scripture always refers to assuming a certain posture in prayer certainly reminds us that it is good to show reverence in such ways, and that reverence is always to be shown when we address God!
  - Prayer is to be a deliberate thing you do, with full realisation that you are before the very face of God.
    - Of course it is proper to pray ejaculatory prayers all through the day,
      - but even then we are to be mindful of His majesty...
      - and there must also be times we set aside to bring our supplications before our Maker... when we put aside everything to focus on that.
2. We also need to use words that are reverent and respectful when we address God in prayer.
- In the 1960s or 70s it became popular to speak to God in ways that were not reverent.
    - Part of this was because of an unbiblical formalism that was sometimes assumed by ministers and others who put on artificial voices of reverence, but did not walk with God.
    - But indeed, we are coming before the King of Glory and we need to be impressed with the reality of what this means!
  - Not “Hi God, it’s me again,” or such rot...
    - But as our Lord Jesus teaches us, something like,
      - “Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be your name.”
    - Or in Acts 4:24, we have the example of the faithful church under persecution, led by the apostles, addressing God in this manner:
      - Acts 4:24: “LORD, you are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them.”
      - These are examples of Spirit filled prayers of the New Testament!
    - Nehemiah’s was a man who had a very regular prayer life.
      - He knew what it was to be very close to God in prayer, but he does not speak to God as a peer or as a friend next door.
        - He speaks to Him as the LORD of Lords and King of kings!

- We have his personal address to God in prayer recorded in Nehemiah 1:
  - Neh 1:5-6: "I pray, LORD God of heaven, O great and awesome God, You who keep Your covenant and mercy with those who love You and observe Your commandments, please let Your ear be attentive and Your eyes open, that You may hear the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You now, day and night..."

TRANS> You show honour to God and that you are aware what is actually happening in prayer when you address God in this way.

3. Jesus gives us counsel about other ways that we honour God's name in prayer.
  - a. In the Sermon on the Mount, He speaks of those who pray to make a show before men.
    - He says:
      - Matthew 6:5-6: "And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly."
    - The principle here is clear!
      - We ought to be in awe before God when we pray—we are addressing His majesty! We are actually standing before the living God!
        - But to these men, God was not the most important thing.
        - To them, it was more important what other people thought of them when they were praying.
        - God was not real to them—they took His name in vain!
    - I find this very convicting!
      - How often am I more mindful of the people who hear me pray than I am of God to whom I am praying!
      - And this "not being mindful of God" stretches beyond public prayers...
        - for we are often not mindful of him in our private prayers!
        - We start praying and we forget that we are talking to God and we start thinking about things that have nothing to do with praying to Him.
        - Some people find it helpful to pray out loud in private prayer so as to stay focused.

- b. Jesus goes on to speak about prayers that take God's name in vain in which persons use vain repetitions.
- When you do this, it is as if you have completely forgotten that He is a wise and holy God who already knows your needs...
    - and as if repetition will some how get His attention.
    - Matthew 6:7-8: And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.
  - Jesus is not saying that we should not pray for things repeatedly in the way that we do when we are earnest and pray for something several times a day.
    - In fact, He *commends* that kind of repetition in the parable of the unjust judge—
      - you know, where the widow keeps going to ask for justice until the judge finally answers?
    - God often waits to answer us so that we will come to the point that we are really mindful that He is our only hope and don't assume that whatever we were asking just happened when He does it.
      - He has all sorts of good reasons for delaying and He encourages us to keep on asking if we are asking for that which is agreeable to His will—
        - say for the salvation of someone we love!
          - or for patience in our trials,
          - or for growth in holiness,
          - or even for our daily bread—our daily needs and our healing from sickness or injury.
        - It honours Him for us to cast ourselves upon Him and to acknowledge that He alone is our helper.
    - But our LORD is condemning vain repetition—the mindless kind that acts like prayer is magic...
      - or that God is impressed with lots of words.
      - This includes things like saying the rosary or using a prayer wheel where you write prayers on a wheel and spin it supposing that the prayer is offered each time the wheel goes around.
      - Rather than honouring God, that dishonours Him.

- Probably the most common way we use vain repetition is when we repeat prayers without even thinking about what we are saying or that we are addressing the most High God...
  - we say a blessing over our food or we begin our prayers with the same old words without thinking about what we are saying.
- It does not necessarily safeguard against this help to pray extemporaneously...
  - It is easy to get little phrases and things to say in a way that is mindless and disconnected from a consciousness that you are addressing God.

**Conclusion:**

So my brothers and sisters,

- you see how we are honour God's name in our use of the means of grace.
- And in seeing this, you surely see how we come short of God's requirement!
  - Who among us can say that we do not take the name of the LORD in vain every time we come to His word or pray or receive the sacraments?

But I remind you that we are justified by faith, not by works...

- faith in Jesus Christ who has shed His blood for us on the cross!
  - Do not pretend that you don't take God's name in vain.
  - Instead, come to Him resting in your Saviour and asking Him to work in you to will and to do of His good pleasure