
MOPC Sunday School - Fall 2010 - *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*

Q49: Which is the second commandment?

A49: The second commandment is. *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image...Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them...*

Q50: What is required in the second commandment?

A50: The second commandment requires the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in his Word.

Q51: What is forbidden in the second commandment?

A51: The second commandment forbids the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his Word.

Q52: What are the reasons annexed to the second commandment?

A52: The reasons annexed to the second commandment are, God's sovereignty over us, his propriety in us, and the zeal he hath to his own worship.

Exploring Why We Do What We Do in Public Worship

First, Biblical worship is GOD-CENTERED.

The church gathers together collectively to meet with our triune God according to His promise. It is a *holy convocation* with God (Leviticus 23:3), a *drawing near* to God (Hebrews 10:19-25), a *response* to God as He has revealed Himself to us and done great things on our behalf (i.e. Psalm 100). Hence we do not worship God in order to influence or persuade Him. Rather, we come because of who He is, because of what He has done for us, and because He promises to meet with us and inhabit our praises (Psalm 22:3). It follows that all right worship must be to the glory of almighty God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

At the same time we must remember that God's glory is not opposed to our good. As we focus upon God the Father, though God the Son, in the power of God the Spirit, He has promised to communicate His grace to us through His appointed means. Therefore, God-centered worship always results in the building up of God's people.

Furthermore, since we are confronted with the living God in our worship of Him we must not forget that this has an evangelistic effect as well. For faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God as it is faithfully preached (Romans 10:13-17; 1 Corinthians 14:25). Consider the Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A 89:

Q89: How is the Word made effectual to salvation?

A89: The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation.

Second, the Scriptures set forth all acceptable ELEMENTS to be included in our worship.

These elements are not to be added to or taken away from. God alone has instituted how He is to be worshipped (Matt. 15.9; Deut. 12.31-32). It is the responsibility of the Session of the Church to be clear on what elements constitute this Biblical worship from the Scriptures. The Westminster Confession of Faith 21.3-5 contains an apt summary of the Bible's teaching here.

We can distinguish between that which is *ordinary* and that which is *occasional* in our worship, and in fact the WCF does just this. That which is *ordinary* needs no special occasion to call it into use. That which is *occasional* requires a specific occasion to be called into use.

Ordinary: WCF 21.3 - "**Prayer**, with thanksgiving, being one special part of religious worship, is by God required of all men: and, that it may be accepted, it is to be made in the name of the Son, by the help of his Spirit, according to his will, with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love, and perseverance; and, if vocal, in a known tongue." WCF 21.5 - "**The reading of the Scriptures** with godly fear, the sound **preaching** and consonable **hearing** of the Word, in obedience unto God, with understanding, faith, and reverence, **singing of psalms** with grace in the heart; as also, the due **administration and worthy receiving of the sacraments** instituted by Christ, are all parts of the ordinary religious worship of God..." We could also include the giving of **monetary offerings** as part of the ordinary public worship of God (1 Corinthians 16:1-2).

Occasional: WCF 21.5 "...beside religious **oaths, vows, solemn fastings, and thanksgivings** upon special occasions, which are, in their several times and seasons, to be used in an holy and religious manner." By definition **baptism** (in contrast to the Lord's Supper) is also occasional. The Scriptures would also include the exercise of **public Church discipline** as another occasional element in public worship (1 Corinthians 5 and 1 Timothy 5:20).

Third, Christ has indwelt the Session with His Holy Spirit to prudently determine and order the CIRCUMSTANCES surrounding the worship of God in each particular congregation.

This distinction between elements and circumstances is taken for granted in the Scriptures and is acknowledged by the Westminster Confession of Faith in 1.6, "...there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God, and government of the church, common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed." These circumstances include answering such questions as: What time? What place? When to stand, sit, kneel? Do we use a microphone? What tune do we sing to? etc.

Fourth, God has appointed SPECIAL OFFICE in His church to lead the assembled congregation in worship.

The Old Testament required the office of the Aaronic priesthood to lead in worship. By good and necessary consequence the New Testament requires the office of Minister (or Elder) to lead in worship.

Fifth, God has NOT PRESCRIBED A RIGID ORDER of worship for His New Testament church - there is therefore some liberty with respect to how the prescribed elements of worship are arranged.

This does not mean that we should pursue novelty for the sake of novelty. Neither does this mean that we should ignore the pious wisdom of our forefathers when it comes to ordering of our worship services. While we must not slavishly follow tradition, neither must we heedlessly jettison that which has gone before us and has been utilized and sanctioned by Christ's church (assuming that it is fully biblical in its content).

Two Questions Arose Last Week after Class:

1. What about musical accompaniment in public worship?
 - A. Historical Theological Arguments of the Reformed Churches

 - B. Arguments from "Circumstantial" Nature of Accompaniment

2. What about the use of a choir or "special music" in public worship?
 - A. Historical Theological Arguments of the Reformed Churches

 - B. Arguments from "Circumstantial" Application of Singing

3. The reality of "intramural" debate within the Reformed and Presbyterian Churches on how to apply the principles of the second commandment.