

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 115

Introduction to the Fourth Commandment

Halifax, 7 November 2010

Introduction

As most of you know, I am preaching through the subjects that are brought to us in the Westminster Larger Catechism.

- Presently we are in the section where the Ten Commandments are expounded.
 - As we have seen over time, the Westminster divines have given us a very careful and detailed exposition of the Commandments.
 - We can be thankful that here we have not only the exposition of one man,
 - but of a whole assembly of godly and gifted ministers who laboured under the vow that they would bring forth nothing but what they believed to be consonant with the Word of God.

I say that because today we come to a commandment that has been rejected by many modern Christians:

- We have come to forth commandment where we are enjoined to keep the Sabbath Day holy.
- All through history, this commandment has been either neglected or perverted...
 - The prophets complained that the Sabbath was not kept and Jesus had to correct abuses in His day that had turned the day into a burden...
 - But in the last century or so, something far worse than neglect or abuse has swept into the church...
 - In our day, there has been an attempt to toss out this commandment.
 - It is one thing to not keep it well, it is even worse to completely reject it.
 - If you go back a century or two, you will find that Baptists and Wesleyans and Methodists and Reformed Christians and Congregationalists and Anglicans and Presbyterians all agreed that the Sabbath ought to be observed.
 - Certainly there were differences in some of the details about how the day was to be kept, but overall there was so much consensus that even the laws in Christian nations enforced the requirement.
 - It has only been in recent history that these laws have been overturned—and this can hardly be blamed on the secularists!
 - It is the churches that have led the way in tossing out the weekly Sabbath of our God!

- It is rather arrogant to say that for 1900 years our fathers completely misunderstood what the Bible says about the Sabbath Day...
 - especially when we have no solid scriptural arguments to support such a claim!
 - But that is exactly what is being said today by arrogant church leaders.
- This puts a special burden on us when it comes to keeping the Sabbath because we do not have a framework in our society for observing the day.
 - More and more we find ourselves in the position of the believers in the early church who were under who masters had no regard for the day...
 - But for us, it is even among fellow Christians that there is no regard for the Sabbath.
 - And so I want to do all I can to encourage you to keep the day holy and to show you what the Bible says about it as we undertake a study of this commandment.

It is rather difficult to know where to start in my exposition of the fourth commandment because there are so many things to consider...

- We must look at how the day is to be kept,
 - at what day is to be kept,
 - that it is to be kept,
 - at those to whom this responsibility is especially given,
 - at the reasons we are to keep it,
 - at ways in which the day is often profaned, and many other things...
- And the difficulty is that many of these topics overlap...
 - So it is hard to know just where to start...
- But my plan is to begin today with a general introduction—to touch on all these subjects with plans to go into the details in future weeks.
 - In the weeks to come, we will essentially follow the order that is set forth in the questions in the Larger Catechism that have to do with the fourth commandment.
 - Today, for the introduction, I want to read all of these Questions and answers to you.

Question 115: Which is the fourth commandment?

Answer: The fourth commandment is, Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Question 116: What is required in the fourth commandment?

Answer: The fourth commandment requires of all men the sanctifying or keeping holy to God such set times as he has appointed in his Word, expressly one whole day in seven; which was the seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, and the first day of the week ever since, and so to continue to the end of the world; which is the Christian Sabbath, and in the New Testament called the Lord's day.

Question 117: How is the Sabbath or the Lord's day to be sanctified?

Answer: The Sabbath or Lord's day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God's worship: and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day.

Question 118: Why is the charge of keeping the Sabbath more specially directed to governors of families, and other superiors?

Answer: The charge of keeping the Sabbath is more specially directed to governors of families, and other superiors, because they are bound not only to keep it themselves, but to see that it be observed by all those that are under their charge; and because they are prone oftentimes to hinder them by employments of their own.

Question 119: What are the sins forbidden in the fourth commandment?

Answer: The sins forbidden in the fourth commandment are, all omissions of the duties required, all careless, negligent, and unprofitable performing of them, and being weary of them; all profaning the day by idleness, and doing that which is in itself sinful; and by all needless works, words, and thoughts, about our worldly employments and recreations.

Question 120: What are the reasons annexed to the fourth commandment, the more to enforce it?

Answer: The reasons annexed to the fourth commandment, the more to enforce it, are taken from the equity of it, God allowing us six days of seven for our own affairs, and reserving but one for himself, in these words, Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: from God's challenging a special propriety in that day, The seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: from the example of God, who in six days made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: and from that blessing which God put upon that day, not only in sanctifying it to be a day for his service, but in ordaining it to be a means of blessing to us in our sanctifying it; Wherefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Question 121: Why is the word Remember set in the beginning of the fourth commandment?

Answer: The word Remember is set in the beginning of the fourth commandment, partly, because of the great benefit of remembering it, we being thereby helped in our preparation to keep it, and, in keeping it, better to keep all the rest of the commandments, and to continue a thankful remembrance of the two great benefits of creation and redemption, which contain a short abridgment of religion; and partly, because we are very ready to forget it, for that there is less light of nature for it, and yet it restrains our natural liberty in things at other times lawful; that it comes but once in seven days, and many worldly businesses come between, and too often take off our minds from thinking of it, either to prepare for it, or to sanctify it; and that Satan with his instruments much labor to blot out the glory, and even the memory of it, to bring in all irreligion and impiety.

And now for our scripture reading, we will simply have a reading of the Ten Commandments.

- Please turn to Exodus 20:1-17
- READ> Exodus 20:1-17.

For our introduction to the fourth commandment, let me draw your attention to the words in the Commandment itself—in Exodus 20:8-11.

I. “Remember the Sabbath Day.”

A. In this day when we have not only neglected to keep this commandment, but actually rejected it as a commandment that pertains to us,

- this word “Remember” has a powerful application for us.
- It is the only one of the commandments that begins this way.
 - It seems that the LORD knew we would have trouble remembering the Sabbath.

1. You see, when God gave the commandments at Sinai, the Sabbath had already been mostly forgotten.

- You need to understand that the Sabbath was not instituted by God at Sinai.
 - Like marriage and labour, it was instituted at Creation.
 - It was not given in the form a commandment, per se...
 - God did not say, “Keep the Sabbath Day Holy,” but He blessed the day and set it apart for mankind.
 - Before the fall, we would have had the same kind of attitude about working on the Sabbath that many people have about working on Christmas.
- He did not have to command us to abstain from work on the day because we would not have had any inclination to work on that day that He had set apart.
 - Just as with marriage, He did not have to say, “Do not commit adultery.”
 - All He had to do was institute marriage,
 - declaring that a man should leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and should become one flesh and it was enough.
 - It would never have occurred to man before the fall to tear apart what God had joined together.

2. But of course after the fall, it was a different story!

- a. In their sinful fallen condition men no longer cared about the day that God had set apart.

- neither did they care about the sanctity of marriage...
 - So God had to issue commandments about these things.
- When He called Israel out of Egypt, He gave them the commandments to tell them what we all should have known from the creation of the world...
 - and what we would have known if we had not fallen.
- And in the fourth commandment, He told them to remember the day that He had instituted at creation.

b. Even before Sinai, He had reminded them about this day.

- You may remember what He did when He provided the manna for them in the wilderness,
 - He told them to gather twice as much on Friday so that they would not have to gather any on the Sabbath.
 - He told them that He would not send manna on that day.
 - All the other days, they were only allowed to gather enough for that one day, but on Friday, they were to gather twice as much.
- In requiring this of them, the LORD was already calling them to remember the day of blessing that He had set apart for them at creation.
 - Then, later on, when He said, “Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy,”
 - they knew what He was talking about.
 - They had been reminded—it was not something new.

B. Let’s go back for a moment and look at the original institution in Genesis 2.

1. You see what it says in Gen 2:1-3:

- Gen 2:1-3: “Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.”
- It is very helpful to know that the Hebrew word translated “rested” in verse 2 & 3 is the verb *shaw-bath*.
 - You can immediately recognise the relationship of this word to the noun *Shab-bawth* from which we get our English word Sabbath.
 - This helps you to understand that even though Genesis 2 does not use the word Sabbath, it speaks of the Sabbath...
 - If we could anglicise the Hebrew word, we might say that God “*sabbathed* on the seventh day from all His work which He had done.”

- It is also helpful to understand that *shaw-bath* means *rested* in the sense of *ceasing* or *desisting*.
 - Often, we rest because we are tired—we take a *Sabbath* from our work because of fatigue...
 - But we also stop our work because we are finished—we have completed whatever it was that we were doing.
 - That is the idea here in Genesis 2.
 - God *rested* or *stopped the work of creation* after six days because He was finished—He had created all that He was going to create.
 - This means that God is no longer creating new kinds of plants or animals—or elements.
 - He has *rested* or *ceased* the work of creation.
 - We cannot expect that God will suddenly create a glocktus or cause glubic to fall from the sky. He finished His work of creating.
2. It is important to recognise that in the fourth commandment...
- (keep your place in Genesis 2, but look back with me at the Exodus 20:11 for a minute)
 - It is important to recognise that in the fourth commandment, the LORD mentions creation as one of the reasons the Sabbath is to be remembered.
 - Look at verse 11:
 - 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 (*shaw-bath-* or *sabbathed* to use our anglicised Hebrew word) the seventh day.
 - You see that the LORD Himself connects our rest on the seventh day to His rest at creation...
 - We are to stop (to *shaw-bath*) our work every seventh day because the Lord stopped (*shaw-bathed*) His work on the seventh day.
3. But notice that more is said...
- a. Not only does it say that He rested;
 - it also says, at the end of verse 11, that
 - Exodus 20:11: “the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.”
 - This is mentioned in Gen 2:3...
 - Gen 2:3: “Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested (*sabbathed*) from all His work which God had created and made.”
 - b. But what does this mean... that He blessed and sanctified (or hallowed) it?

- 1) That He *blessed* the day means that He made the day to be a blessing—a day of special joy and benefit for us.
 - Of course, as Jesus points out to the Jews,
 - Man was not made for the Sabbath, but the Sabbath was made for man...
 - the day was not made for itself, but for us—it was made to be a blessing for us!
 - Whenever God blesses something (like a day or like your business), He does not bless it for its own sake...
 - He blesses it for your sake.
 - He made the day to be a blessing for us!
- 2) And that it is *hallowed* or *sanctified* (these words are synonyms) means that it is set apart from other days—set apart by God and unto God.
 - Just as we are sanctified by God’s Spirit and so are called saints when we are in Jesus Christ,
 - we are His people in distinction from other people who are not His people;
 - so this day is His day in distinction from other days...
 - Not that all days are not His, but this day is set apart especially for Him—it is a holy day.
 - We are to remember it as a holy day to the LORD.
 - “Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy.”

TRANS> Now let us turn to consider what these words mean...

II. “To keep it holy”

- **How is this day to be sanctified or hallowed or kept holy by us?**

A. The LORD tells us right in the fourth commandment:

1. He says, “In it you shall not do any work.”
 - Do you see that in verse 10?
 - It is pretty clear, isn’t it?
 - It is a day when we are to stop our work just as God stopped His work of creation.
 - It is a day off work for us—a vacation!
2. So what are supposed to do?
 - Are we just supposed to stay in bed all say, or sit around and do nothing and think nothing?

- Or is it a day for us to hang out at Disney World or play checkers or go rock climbing or whatever we are into?
 - It is set apart from work, but what is it set apart to... if anything?
 - Are we told in scripture?
3. Yes we are—in the word “hallowed” or “sanctified”...
- a. Whenever anything is hallowed or sanctified or made holy it always means that it is set apart to the Lord...
- For example, when a pot was made holy, it meant that you could no longer use it for your drinking water...
 - It was to be used exclusively for the Lord—in direct connection with His service in the sanctuary—having to do with the sacrifices and such.
 - It no longer had a common, everyday use.
 - Not that what is common and everyday is evil—it is just that it was set apart for a special purpose and was to be devoted to that special purpose alone—
 - It was put into service for God in a way that ordinary pots were not in His service.
 - We take a rest every day at the end of the day when our daily work is done—
 - but the rest in view here is a *holy rest* rather than a *common* or *ordinary rest*.
 - Don’t think about holy in this case as “not sinful” as opposed to “sinful.”
 - Before the fall, no day was sinful (and no day ought to be put to sinful use now),
 - but by declaring one day to be holy,
 - the LORD was setting it apart as a day that was *for Him* in a way that the other days were not.
- b. This is like a busy son who is running the farm for his father because his father is injured...
- and his father tells him that he wants him to plan to take Wednesday off for a special family event.
 - Now this son is labouring for his parents all week on the farm and his father is not telling him that his labour is bad...
 - he is telling him that he wants to have a special time with him on Wednesday.

- The fact that the son works hard for his father all week will make that special time all the more precious.
- c. And scripture bears this out as the intent of God's hallowing the Sabbath day.
- God instituted lots of Sabbaths in the Old Testament (days of rest from ordinary work), and in all of them, the people were to come before Him.
 - They were to spend time with him in a way that they were not able to when engaged in their daily labours.
 - Even the weekly Sabbath is referred to in Leviticus 23 as a "holy convocation."
 - You might want to turn to Lev 23 in your Bibles and see for yourself.
 - In Lev 23:3-4 it says:
 - Lev 23:3-4: '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. These are the feasts of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at their appointed times.
 - A convocation is a calling together of the people in assembly, a formal summons to worship and to feasting!
 - Of course there were morning and evening prayers each day at the time of the morning and evening sacrifices,
 - but on the Sabbath days, the holy day was to be kept holy to the Lord, a whole day was to be set apart for communion with Him.

B. We see this pattern followed all through the scripture.

1. In Exodus 20, as we have already seen, the reason for the Sabbath was because God completed His work of creation...
 - The day is the Sabbath of the LORD our God because He rested (ceased—sabbathed) His work of creation.
 - We are to gather in a holy convocation to give thanks to Him and to remember all that He has done for us as our Creator.
2. But interestingly, in Deuteronomy 5 where the commandments are restated as Israel prepares to enter the Promised Land, a different reason is given for observing the day...
 - Turn to Deuteronomy 5:15 and you can see this...
 - Deut 5:15 says: And remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there by a mighty hand and by an

outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

- This does not mean that they are no longer to remember God as their Creator.
 - It means that now they are also to remember Him as their redeemer who set them apart to be His own people.
 - Now they have an even greater reason to thank Him and to seek His blessing on the Sabbath Day.
 - After they had been redeemed, the Sabbath had a marvellous additional component!
 - The Sabbath is not a wooden thing.
 - It is a day set apart to God our creator to turn our eyes upon Him and remember all that He is to us, what He says to us, and what He has done for us!
 - Once He had redeemed His people, it was only natural that they should praise Him for this!
3. But now God has done an even greater work for us to remember on the Sabbath Day!
- a. God has sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem us from sin, Satan, and death!
 - He died on the cross to atone for our sins and poured out His Spirit to give us new life!
 - He has begun a whole new creation—He came to establish a kingdom of righteousness in this sinful world!
 - And He Himself is the first-fruits of that new creation, being risen from the dead!
 - He offered Himself as a sacrifice for our sins and God accepted His sacrifice and proved that He accepted it by raising Him from the dead and declaring Him to be Lord and Christ...
 - As Lord and Christ, Jesus has sent us out into the whole world to proclaim that He is Lord and to call the nations to repentance...
 - to tell them the good news that He was crucified to take away our sins and that whoever believes in Him will be saved.
 - We enter into this new creation, this kingdom of righteousness, by faith in Him and in His finished work!
 - b. Now more than ever we have reason to set apart the Sabbath to remember what God has done!

- 1) Jesus began the pattern of meeting with His disciples on the first day of the week—the day He rose from the dead...
 - Turn to John 20 and you can see this...
 - Look at John 20:19:
 - John 20:19: Then, the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, "Peace be with you."
 - You see how John emphasises that it was still the first day of the week, the day that Jesus rose, when He met with them.

- 2) And now look down at John 20:26 and you will see that He met with them again on the next Sunday...
 - John 20:26: And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, "Peace to you!"
 - Now you know how the Jews count days—
 - Unlike us, they include the day that the event started in the count...
 - That is why even though Jesus was crucified on Friday and rose again on Sunday, the Jews say that He rose on the third day and even that He was in the tomb for three days...
 - They count Friday, Saturday, and Sunday.
 - So when John says that Jesus met with them after eight days, he means that He met with them on the first day of the week again.
 - After His resurrection, Jesus began the pattern of meeting with His disciples on the first day of the week...
 - This is what was prophesied in Psalm 22 where our Lord says that after God accepts His sacrifice,
 - “I will declare Your name to My brethren, in the midst of the assembly I will praise you...” and...
 - “My praise shall be of you in the great assembly; I will pay My vows before those who fear Him...”
 - and then He goes on to talk about how the whole world will come to worship because of what He has done.
 - Jesus instituted this worship when He met with His brethren on the first day of the week to declare what God had done and to give thanks.

- 3) And that is not all...the day of Pentecost was also on the first of day of the week.
- And of course that was the day that Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit upon His church.
 - The prophets had promised that the Spirit would be poured out on God's assembly to give them new life...
 - And the day that the LORD chose to give life to His assembly was Sunday, the first day of the week, the day that He had risen from the dead which is also called the Lord's Day.
- c. But how do we know that this pattern of keeping the Sabbath on the first day of the week is to continue?
- We know because the church under the leadership of the apostles, who did nothing but what the Lord commanded, began to meet on the first day of the week.
 - We will look at this in more detail in the future,
 - but Acts 20:7 shows us that after the churches were established, it was their custom to gather on the first day of the week.
 - Paul extends his stay until the first day of the week so that he can meet with them.
 - Also, in 1 Cor 16:1-2, he calls upon the churches to take up their collection for the poor in Jerusalem on the first day of the week.

TRANS> With Jesus' great work of redemption now accomplished, there is a new rest (a new Sabbath) for us enter into...

- God has now completed His work of redemption through Jesus Christ!
 - Jesus has *rested* in that He has now completed this great work!
 - There is a new heaven and a new earth, and Jesus is the first fruits of that new creation and He gives us eternal life and an everlasting inheritance in that kingdom through faith!
 - Now all those who serve God no longer merely remember creation and Egypt...
 - now they remember the work of Jesus for eternal redemption.
 - This was such a great work that the day was changed to the first day of the week which is also called the eighth day!
 - But more about that next week.
 - The point for us now is that we keep the Sabbath day holy to God each week by remembering all that He has done for us...
 - He created the world for us, and has rested from that work...

- And now He has redeemed us by the sacrifice of Christ and has rested from that work.
 - This is what we remember each Lord's Day!
 - This is why we gather for a holy convocation and break bread and offer up praises to our God.
 - It is a day set apart from ordinary things to remember our gracious Lord, to commune with Him in worship, giving thanks to His name.

Conclusion: That should probably about cover it for an introduction.

- We will look at the details in the weeks to come...
 - Next week, we will look more closely at the day change...it might take us a couple of weeks to cover the details...
 - This is the subject of Q. 116.
 - When we finish that, we will look specifically at *how* we are to keep the day holy.
 - We have seen briefly that we are to set aside our normal activities and devote the day to God, but we will look more particularly at what that entails...
 - And we will look at some of the things that we *are* permitted to do on the Sabbath—works of necessity and mercy.
 - That is the subject of Q. 117.
 - After that, we will take up the subject of those who are specifically addressed in this commandment...
 - You notice how it says that you are not to do any work, and then it says, “you nor your son, nor your daughter, or your male servant...” and so on...
 - Obviously sons and daughters are to keep the day holy, but God specifically calls upon the head of the household to see that this is done.
 - And when it speaks of the strangers who are within the gates, this would put the responsibility on the magistrates of the city.
 - We will see how Nehemiah took on this responsibility to cleanse Jerusalem from Sabbath breaking.
 - This is the subject of Q. 118.
 - And then we will look at different ways of profaning the day.
 - We will see that neglect and distractions and bad attitudes and failure to prepare for the day are all ways of profaning God's holy day.
 - This is the subject of Q. 119.
 - And then with Q. 120, we will look at the several reasons we have given to us to keep the day...

- We have looked at these a little in our introduction today—
 - that we follow the pattern of God’s ceasing or resting from His work with our own rest as He commands us...
 - and that we look for a blessing from Him on this day because He has blessed the day, not for its own sake, but for the sake of those who keep it.
 - We will also consider that He has given us plenty of time for our own activities so that it ought not to be burdensome to set a day apart for Him.

- And finally, we will look in greater detail than we have done today at why God begins this commandment with the word *remember*.
 - This is the subject of Q. 121.
 - The bottom line, as we saw today, is that ever since the fall,
 - mankind has been guilty of forgetting to keep the day...
 - Even Israel had almost completely forgotten it by the time of the captivity...
 - And in Jesus’ day, they had almost buried the proper observance of the day under all sorts of paralysing regulations.
 - And then there is our day when we see that believers, who ought to be so glad to have a day set apart to the Lord,
 - are almost completely forgetting the day that Lord has sanctified for our blessing.

And with that note I will conclude—

- Admonishing all of you to remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.
 - It is not your place to set aside what God has appointed.
 - It is rather for you to receive it with gratitude as God’s gift to you and to keep it with joy and gladness.
 - It is the day that the Lord has made for you.
 - Let us rejoice and be glad in it!