

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 113 e

Opposing God's Truth, Grace, and Ways

Halifax, 10 October 2010

Introduction

Today we continue 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.

This is our tenth sermon on the third commandment, and our fifth sermon on the sins that are forbidden in this commandment.

- The sins forbidden are spelled out for us in Question 113 of the Larger Catechism.
 - Take a look at it with me...

Q. 113 What are the sins forbidden in the third commandment?

- A.** The sins forbidden in the third commandment are, the not using of God's name as is required; and the abuse of it in an ignorant, vain, irreverent, profane, superstitious, or wicked mentioning, or otherwise using his titles, attributes, ordinances, or works, by blasphemy, perjury; all sinful cursings, oaths, vows, and lots; violating of our oaths and vows, if lawful; and fulfilling them, if of things unlawful; murmuring and quarrelling at, curious prying into, and misapplying God's decrees and providences; misinterpreting, misapplying, or any way perverting the Word, or any part of it, to profane jests, curious or unprofitable questions, vain janglings, or the maintaining of false doctrines; *abusing it, the creatures, or anything contained under the name of God, to charms, or sinful lusts and practices; the maligning, scorning, reviling, or anywise opposing of God's truth, grace, and ways;* making profession of religion in hypocrisy, or for sinister ends; being ashamed of it, or a shame to it, by unconformable, unwise, unfruitful, and offensive walking, or backsliding from it.

In the course of this study on the third commandment, we have learned that God's name has to do with anything by which He makes Himself known—

- His names, His titles, His attributes, His ordinances, His word, and His works.
 - To take His name in vain is to treat or consider His name to be quite ordinary when it is rather a name that is holy and that calls for our deepest reverence.
- In the last couple of weeks,
 - we have seen that we need to be very careful with God's name lest we misrepresent Him by misapplying or misinterpreting His word and His works.
 - We all do this to a certain extent, even after we have been born again.
 - Indeed there is a radical change in us at conversion—so great a change that the Holy Spirit is said to give us a new heart,

- but as we started out with a fallen and corrupted nature and still have remnants of that that remain,
 - we are incapable on this side of glory of perfectly understanding God’s revelation and how it applies to us.
 - We distort it because of our remaining sin and corruption.
- And such inability in way exonerates us,
 - in fact it adds to our guilt because it is an inability that is rooted in our very nature itself.
 - It is an expression of our corruption that we cannot even understand and rightly apply what our Creator has revealed to us!
- This reminds us that even after we are converted, we stand in constant need of the cleansing of Christ for pardon and of the renewing of His Holy Spirit.
 - If you come away from the commandments saying,
 - “I have done that one and that one,” you do not really understand the commandments before your holy God.
 - When David says, “If the Lord should mark iniquities, who could stand?” he does not expect someone one in the church to raise his hand.
 - We misapply and misinterpret His word and for this we need forgiveness and renewal.

And this is also true of the subject we are talking up today...

- although when you first look at it, it appears to be a sin that only those who are the sworn enemies of Christ would commit...
 - We are looking today at the actual opposing of God’s name—of His truth, grace, and ways!
 - In particular, it is the part of Q. 113 that says:
 - *abusing it, the creatures, or anything contained under the name of God, to charms, or sinful lusts and practices; the maligning, scorning, reviling, or anywise opposing of God’s truth, grace, and ways;*
 - And the question might be asked,
 - “How could a born again believer be guilty of actually opposing God’s truth, grace and ways?”
 - I intend to show you how later.
 - but first let’s go to our scripture reading
 - And then we will look at this sin in its darker expression as it is found in those who are indeed enemies of the gospel...
 - Then we will look at how we, as believers, are yet contaminated by this sin,
 - and then we will look at how we are to deal with the prevalence of this sin all around us.

So first our scripture reading.

- We are going to read an entire epistle today—the epistle of Jude.
- Jude is a little book that is found just before revelation.
 - Most believing scholars believe this Jude to be the brother of the Lord.
 - Jesus also had a brother named James and Jude tells us that he is the brother of James.
 - Both he and James never identify themselves as the Lord’s brothers,
 - but authors of scripture do not hesitate to speak of them in this way (see Matthew 13:55 or Acts 1:14).
- This little book was written on one piece of papyrus to deal with what Jude saw as an urgent situation among the churches he was writing to.
 - There were those among them who had arisen in opposition to the truth and grace of God, and Jude is calling for the congregations to contend for the faith that was once delivered to the saints by the apostles!
 - You can see that in verse 3.
 - To *contend* is to fight for it as an athlete would do who was in a contest.
 - They are to exert themselves to defend the truth!
 - Notice that the word *faith* has the definite article (it is *the faith*) which indicates that it is the body of truth—the teaching—that was delivered by the apostles.
 - Defend the fact that you are a believer, but rather defend the truth that was given to you to believe.
 - The truth of God was under attack and Jude is calling for the believers to stand up in defence of it!
 - The opponents were those who were doing the maligning and the scorning and the abusing of God’s word to sinful lusts and practices.
- READ> Jude 1:1-25

I. You see here that there are those actively oppose God’s truth, grace, and ways.

A. The general nature of the opposition is described in verse 4.

1. *Certain men* are set to have crept in...

- No one was even suspicious of them at first.
 - They came into the church, giving the appearance that they were zealous Christians who love the Lord.
 - Perhaps some of them thought they were—it is always hard to say.
- But these men were from it.
 - They are ungodly men who are marked out for condemnation.

2. Jude describes their assault on God's name in two closely related aspects:
 - a. First, that they *turn the grace of God into lewdness*.
 - This describes that error that concludes that since salvation is by grace and not by works,
 - we need not even try to keep God's commandments.
 - We can live immoral lives because we have complete forgiveness and God no longer cares if we sin.
 - This teaching does not recognise that when we come to Jesus, we come to Him as those who have seen our sin for what it is—
 - The Holy Spirit convicts us of our sin...
 - and so we come to Him to be saved from our sin...
 - not just from the punishment of our sin,
 - but also from our sinful way of life.
 - We have a new heart that no longer delights in sin.
 - What kind of salvation would it be if you were left unchanged?
 - If you were stuck as you are without the promise of grace to change us?
 - If there were no Holy Spirit to begin to renew us as soon as we come to Jesus so that we can begin to live in conformity to what pleases the LORD?
 - Yes, there is total forgiveness, even for our remaining sins, but there is also radical conversion, even a new birth,
 - so that God's law is written in our hearts and so that we begin to walk in the light and to serve Him.
 - So these men that Jude writes about were turning God's grace into lewdness—unbridled, lawless living.
 - The opposed God's truth, grace and ways!

TRANS> Secondly, Jude shows that this teaching is a direct attack on God—on His name, if you will...

- b. He says that having turned the grace of God into lewdness, they deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.
 - What a God they make our holy God out to be!
 - What a Saviour they make our Lord Jesus to be!
 - One who releases criminals without reforming them!
 - One who sets wicked men free from their punishment while leaving them as wicked men!

- Paul was accused of teaching this by some who opposed the free grace of God that he preached...
 - They accused him of saying “Let us do evil that God may come,” and “Let us continue in sin that grace may abound.”
 - But Paul absolutely denied that this was what he taught.
 - He taught that there was radical forgiveness in Christ, but He also taught that wherever that forgiveness was given,
 - those who were forgiven were united with Christ in His death and resurrection so that they became slaves to righteousness.
 - If a man did not have this change of life, Paul denied that that man had been forgiven.
 - This is the teaching that Jude is defending against these who were opposing the truth, grace and ways of God by their teaching.
 - To use the words of the Catechism,
 - these false disciples were abusing the word of God to sinful lusts and practices.
3. Jude explains that these disciples are apostates—they have left their place as God’s servants...
- a. He gives a number of examples from the OT of those who left their proper places in God’s service...
 - 1) In v. 5,
 - He mentions those who rebelled after coming out Egypt—
 - Perhaps he is speaking of Korah here who withstood Moses by refusing the place that God has appointed for them as his helpers.
 - 2) In v. 6,
 - He mentions the angels who left their proper domain...
 - These angels may be the sons of God mentioned in Noah’s day who took the daughters of men and begot children by them.
 - or perhaps it speaks of the original fall of the angels with Satan at the fore.
 - 3) In v. 7,
 - He mentions Sodom and Gomorrah.
 - These wicked cities had the witness of Abraham and Lot and might have served God,
 - but they gave themselves over to perverted sex, going after strange flesh instead of living in chastity under the bonds of marriage.

- b. Jude's emphasis here is not in detailing all that these ones did, but in reminding us that they were utterly rejected of the LORD.
 - Even though they were in a position where they ought to have served God,
 - they were cut off because they gave themselves over to sin.
 - In verses 12-15, Jude shows that those who practice wickedness,
 - whatever they may profess about grace and forgiveness,
 - will be eternally damned.
 - In v. 13, he says that they are "wandering stars for whom is reserved the blackness of darkness forever."
 - In v. 15, he shows that on the day of judgement,
 - they are going to be convicted of the wrong that they now flaunt in such an ungodly way.
 - Their lie about the grace of God will be uncovered!

TRANS> So you see that Jude is showing how wrong these men are in turning the grace of God into lewdness!

- He wants believers to oppose them even as they oppose God...

B. And as you scan over this Epistle, you will find that Jude describes these men as those who (again, to use the words of the Catechism) malign, scorn, revile, and abuse God's truth, grace and ways.

1. I don't mean that Jude specifically uses these categories, but he refers to such conduct as falls under these categories...
 - a. To *malign* is to falsely and maliciously speak evil of something
 - b. To *scorn* is to regard and treat something with contempt, something that is foolish and stupid.
 - c. To *revile* is to denounce something with abusive and scandalous language.

TRANS> In short, Jude shows that the false disciples actively speak against the truth, grace and ways of God!

2. What are some of the ways they do this?
 - a. In verse 8 he says that they reject authority and speak evil of dignitaries (or of glorious things—things that are dignified with glory and honour)
 - They malign the truth of God and those who teach the truth!
 - They mock at the apostles' doctrine and try to make it look ridiculous.
 - You know how those who oppose teaching will do this.
 - They invent ways to speak evil of things that they don't even understand as Jude says in v. 10.

- b. In verse 11, Jude compares them to three notorious persons in the Old Testament...
- 1) to Cain who was devoid of love...
 - He was against the truth and against those who were living the truth...
 - 2) to Balaam who taught that sin does not matter...
 - In the incident with Baal of Peor, Balaam tried to corrupt Israel with temple prostitutes of Baal.
 - 3) to Korah who scoffed at the ordinances of God and reviled Moses and Aaron whom the Lord has appointed.
- c. In verse 16, Jude describes the false disciples as grumbling and complaining—while flattering.
- This is a favourite ploy of false disciples—
 - They malign those who are teaching the truth and try to stir up discontent in the congregation—so people will listen to them!
 - They start a complaining corner, pointing out the faults of teachers, exaggerating them, and making up faults that are not even there.
 - And then having discredited those who are teaching the truth, they can introduce their own doctrines.
 - We need to remember that when they speak against God's true servants that He has appointed,
 - and against what they are teaching,
 - they are in fact attacking the very name of God—His word as it is revealed through teaching.
 - Not that those who represent God have no error,
 - but that these men are not really against error—they are against truth and their attack is in fact aimed at truth.
 - The teacher is mocked and reviled and complained about because he represents the truth...
 - That is why Moses and Aaron and Isaiah and Jeremiah and Paul and all the apostles and prophets and even Jesus Himself were opposed.
 - In v. 17-19, Jude says that these are the mockers that Jesus and His apostles told us would come.
 - Peter speaks about in his second epistle as those who deny the Lord.
 - They do not have the Spirit of God.
 - They are in the church, but they have not been converted.
 - They are in the covenant, but they are not of the covenant.

TRANS> So you see how these false teachers take the name of the LORD in vain by maligning, scorning, reviling and complaining, and such...

- They actively oppose the truth, grace and ways of the Lord...
 - This is what they are all about.
 - These men are devoid of the Spirit... no believer is characteristically opposed to the LORD in this way.

II. But now I do want you to see that believers may indeed be tainted with these sins.

- We are not yet perfectly sanctified and we must never think that we are completely free of even these sins.
 - So people of God, watch out for the remnants of this sinful opposition to God's truth, grace, and ways.

A. First, we must beware if we have a propensity toward anger or bitterness.

1. In a fit of rage, it can be easy to flare up and say things against God's truth and ways that never ought to have been said.
 - This can be done out loud, or it can be done in your thoughts.
 - God sees both.
2. Suppose, for example, that a man is admonishing his wife for worrying in an ungodly way...
 - And let's say that he's a bit irritated with her when he speaks to her about it...
 - What might happen if she is subject to anger?
 - She may flare up and say something like,
 - "How can you tell me not to worry when you just lost your job and we have bills to pay? It's ridiculous to tell me not to worry."
 - But you see, Jesus tells us not to worry, so in fact this woman is saying that Jesus is ridiculous!
3. It would be easy for her to say,
 - "I didn't really mean it, I just lost my focus under all the pressure."
 - And that is true enough—she knows better,
 - but the truth is, she still maligned and scoffed at God's commandment and she needs to repent.
 - Believers who want to do the will of God find that they do evil instead, but the evil is still evil!

TRANS> That is the first example of how a believer may fall into the maligning and scorning of God's truth and ways.

B. Secondly, you need to beware of maligning or scoffing at those who represent the Lord.

1. Jude mentioned the sin of Korah.

- Korah, you know, did not have a problem with the Lord!
- His anger was directed at Moses and Aaron!
 - He accused them of taking too much to themselves in the positions in which they stood over the Lord's people.
 - He accused them of lording it over the heritage of the Lord.

2. And you know that there were a lot of others who joined in with Korah's complaints.

- That's the way it almost always is.
 - Once the scoffers start pointing out all the problems with the church, or with this or that preacher or elder,
 - it is very easy to join in the complaining.
 - Not that our leaders are above any objection, but there is constructive criticism and then there is that which borne of a spirit of rebellion.

3. Such sentiments often flare up if you have received hard counsel from a pastor or an elder, something you have been avoiding that they have uncovered...

- or perhaps something that has been taught in a sermon...
 - And you start to ridicule and to pick and to look for objections because you are offended with the message that the Holy Spirit has convicted you about.
 - So you start to look for faults in the messenger—and of course you can find some—and then you start malign him and ridicule his teaching.
- I have seen people who had every appearance of being earnest Christians,
 - and who raised their objections as those who were truly concerned about the kingdom of God...
 - and who are now no longer walking with the LORD at all.
- But the point I am making here is that believers can also fall into this kind of sin—not unto the same degree...
 - not unto apostasy by the grace of God,
 - but in a way that can damage the church, their children, and the cause of Christ,
 - and in a way that can wound their consciences, and bring dishonour to the Lord.

C. A third way this sin can appear in a believer's life is connected with the problem we looked at last week—the problem of misinterpretation and misapplication.

1. Sometimes when we are in error about the teaching of the scriptures,
 - we can malign, scoff, and revile the truth in ignorance.
 - Even though we may be ignorant that we are speaking against the truth and grace of God,
 - we still are maligning His truth.

2. For example, a believer might have been nurtured in a church where infants were excluded from baptism—
 - and running across Christians who practice household baptism,
 - that believer might mock and ridicule the practice and speak about how stupid it is.
 - Such a person is maligning God’s truth, albeit in ignorance.

3. Now of course you do not know what you may be ignorant about.
 - But you can be certain that there are things that you are ignorant about.
 - And until you have thoroughly investigated a matter (like the Bereans), it is wise to withhold your stronger comments lest you be found at last to be speaking against the very truth and grace and ways of your Lord!
 - Then you will have to bear the shame of your behaviour.
 - There is need for humility and reservation in all of us.

 - Some would say that we ought to never ridicule what others believe.
 - While their sense of gentleness and courtesy ought to be applauded,
 - this is to go beyond scripture—for we see Isaiah and Elijah and even Jesus Himself ridiculing those who bow before an idol that is made out of the same block of wood that they cook on or those who “strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.”

TRANS> Perhaps that is enough to show you that even as believers,

- we are all guilty at times of maligning, scoffing at, or reviling God’s truth, grace, and ways,
 - And whether we have done it
 - in a fit of anger,
 - as aimed at people rather than God,
 - or in ignorance,
 - it is a violation of third commandment.

 - We are not righteous because we have never violated the third commandment,
 - but only through our LORD Jesus who died for this sin.
 - Let us give thanks and rest in Him and walk carefully and humbly before Him.

- And now, I want to consider one more thing this afternoon...

III. I want to show you how to handle it when you live among those who malign and scoff and revile the truth, grace, and ways of the LORD.

- This sort of thing has become more and more common in our society.
 - I grew up in a church where the preacher himself did this kind of thing.
 - He was an unbeliever and he opposed the truth of God.
 - Students often have to deal with this sort of thing in the classroom...
 - God's ways are made to look silly and those who believe are scorned.
 - This goes on at work and in the neighbourhood and even when we are with family members who reject the Lord or His ways.
- You are all exposed to this sort of behaviour and Jude tells you how to deal with it in verse 20-23.

A. First, you see that Jude tells you to "build yourselves up in your most holy faith."

1. This is talking about growing in your understanding of the faith—
 - You need to be an eager, regular, disciplined student of God's Word.
 - If you neglect personal Bible study—eager study...
 - and regular family worship...
 - and if you day dream at church,
 - and if you do not meditate on the word and apply it in your life,
 - You are not building yourself up in your most holy faith.
2. And if you do not build yourself up in the faith, what will happen when false teachers come on the scene with their false doctrines?
 - You will have no ability to discern whether what they are saying is true or false.
 - You will be easily deceived by them.
 - You will not be able to defend your family against their teachings.
 - And you will not be able to refute them—to speak God's truth in refutation of their error!
 - I don't mean to say that you will always know all the answers!
 - But if you are eager to build yourself up in the faith, you will care about it when you don't know how to answer them...
 - You will get help from another believer or from an elder, or you will study that matter out.

- That is how you can even use the false teachers to good advantage—to drive you to dig deeper in the word.
- In fact, that is one of the reasons God brings false teachers around His people...
 - So that they will be more diligent about searching the scriptures.

TRANS> Of course there are a lot of other reasons for building yourself up in your holy faith besides enabling you to contend for the faith,

- but as far as Jude’s purpose, he is saying to do it for this reason.
- But there is more...
 - Not only does he advise you to build yourself up in the faith...

B. Secondly, you are to pray in the Holy Spirit.

1. The Holy Spirit is the one Jesus gives us to wash us and to renew our minds.
 - And one of the main ways He transforms us is by stirring up in us a desire for God’s kingdom to come and His will to be done...
 - And when the Spirit gives us such desires, He also enables us to see that this desire must be sought in prayer...
 - He works in us so that we are stirred up to pray for the things that we ought to pray for!
2. Such Spirit-wrought prayer is important...
 - Don’t you know that without prayer, all your contending for the faith will accomplish nothing?
 - The problem with man is spiritual and that you cannot change him by mere words apart from God using those words.
 - Don’t you know that without prayer, you will not be able to rightly contend for the faith?
 - You will lose your focus and start aiming to win arguments in pride rather than to honour the LORD...
 - Or you will become discouraged and give up for lack of success...
 - Or you will become angry and misrepresent the LORD.
 - You need God’s grace and His grace when false teachers are about, and His grace is obtained through earnest, Spirit-wrought prayer!

C. Thirdly, Jude advises you to keep yourself in the love of God.

1. This is what the false disciples have lost—the love for God!
 - As those who looked at grace as a way to enjoy sin without consequences, they were very obviously strangers to the love of God.
 - Jesus told us that if we love Him, we will keep His commandments.

- False disciples do not love God.
 - They criticise his truth and His grace and His ways by setting up their alternative truth and grace and ways...
 - They want to make God look as distasteful as possible and they try to draw you in to those sentiments...
 - to make you dissatisfied with the truth so that you will embrace falsehood.
- Think about this...
 - Isn't that how most people fall into error?
 - Is it not simply that they do not love the truth? that they do not love God's grace and God's ways?
 - They want an alternative because God does not please them.

TRANS> So Jude is saying—keep on loving God—keep yourself in the love of God.

2. And our love is both begun and maintained by a clear sense of what God has done for us in Christ.
 - When you see how the Father sent the Son to redeem you,
 - and how Jesus came and actually bore the full penalty of your sins on the cross,
 - When you ever keep this before you and rejoice in it...
 - you will be kept in the love of God!
 - In His love in that you will be living with a clear sight of His great love for us...
 - And in His love in that you will be loving Him and wanting to please Him...
 - His law will not be burdensome to you as it is to the false teachers—you will yearn to be conformed to His beautiful ways!
 - Instead sacrificing your life for others being a pain, it will be a joy and a delight to you.
 - The false teachers will have no power in stirring up discontent.
 - They will not be able to gain your support when they speak against God's truth, grace and ways!
 - 3. Jude explains that when we are in the love of God, we will be looking for God's mercy.
 - Rather than trying to avoid what He has for us...as if it were a bitter pill to swallow...
 - We will be craving His mercy that gives us eternal life—

- That mercy which takes us, who are dead, and restores us to His image!
- We will want all the fullness that God has for us!
 - Instead of lusting for sexual immorality, we will lust for God's will.
 - Instead coveting our neighbour's house, we will be coveting a heart that serves and gives to others the way Jesus did.
 - Instead of advancing our own honour, we will be yearning to make our God known.

TRANS> How excellent is Jude's advice when we are surrounded by those who malign, scorn, and revile God's name!

- Build yourself up in the faith,
- Pray in the Holy Spirit,
- And keep yourself in the love of God!
- But there is one more thing that Jude says

D. He shows you that you are to deal with these false disciples...

- This is brought out in verses 22 and 23.
- These verses are difficult to interpret because there is a lot of variety in the manuscripts...
 - but the main ideas seem to be that you are to...
 - do what you can to rescue those who are falling into, or already sunk into error...
 - recognising that they are in a very perilous condition, ready to fall under the dreadful judgement of God so that you see the urgency of rescuing them...
 - all the while watching to see that in reaching out to them you are not drawn in by them—you must see that you keep on hating their sinful ways by which they are defiled.
- If we are not doing what is in our power to win them, we can hardly be said to be contending for the faith...
 - If God's name is maligned and scorned and reviled, we need to take appropriate action lest we also be guilty of taking His name in vain.
 - His name matters—see that it matters to you!