

Shorter Catechism: Questions 45 & 48

No other gods before Him: Secret Sins

You have set our iniquities before You, our secret *sins* in the light of Your countenance. – Psalm 90:8

Word of God (Exodus 20 - KJV)

20 And God spake all these words, saying, ²I *am* the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

³Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

⁴Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of *any thing* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth: ⁵Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me; ⁶And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.

⁷Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

⁸Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: ¹⁰But 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: ¹¹For *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.

¹²Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

¹³Thou shalt not kill.

¹⁴Thou shalt not commit adultery.

¹⁵Thou shalt not steal.

¹⁶Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

¹⁷Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that *is* thy neighbour's.

Shorter Catechism

Question 45 - Which is the first commandment?

A: The first commandment is, Thou shalt have no other gods before me. (Exod. 20:3)

Question 48 - What are we specially taught by these words [before me] in the first commandment?

A: These words [before me] in the first commandment teach us, That God, who seeth all things, taketh notice of, and is much displeased with, the sin of having any other God. (Ezek. 8:5–6, Ps. 44:20–21)

I. “Before my face”

- **WCF 1.9** -
 - The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself: and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly. (2 Pet. 1:20–21, Acts 15:15–16)
- **J.G Vos:** “In the Hebrew the words used mean literally “before my face””
- **Strong’s** - 3942 לִפְנֵי [liphnay /lif·nah·ee/] prep. From the prepositional prefix (to or for) and 6440; TWOT 1782b; GK 7156; AV translates as “before” once. **1 before, to the face of.**
- **UBS handbook** (on translating Exodus 20:3): “**Before me** may be understood as “besides me” (NAB, TAN) or “**in my presence**” (Durham).”

NKJV | Ex 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before Me.

KJV 1900 | Ex 20:3 Thou shalt have no other gods before me.

ESV | Ex 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before me.

NASB95 | Ex 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before Me.

NIV | Ex 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before me.

NLT | Ex 20:3 “You must not have any other god but me.

YLT | Ex 20:3 ‘Thou hast no other Gods before Me.

NET | Ex 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before me.

II. Nothing can be hidden from his face

- **Thomas Watson** - “I fear upon search, we have more idolaters among us than we are aware of.”
- **Hebrews 4** - ¹³ And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things *are* naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we *must give* account.
- **Deuteronomy 27:** ¹⁵ ‘Cursed *is* the one who makes a carved or molded image, an abomination to the Lord, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and sets *it* up in secret.’

III. God: both Witness and Judge

- **Numbers 32** - ²³ But if you do not do so, then take note, you have sinned against the Lord; and be sure your sin will find you out.
- **James Fisher** – “The consideration of this ought to quicken and animate us to every duty, [Gen. 5:22, 24](#); and affright and deter us from every sin, as being an affronting of him to his face, who is our witness, and ere long will be our judge, [Gen. 39:9](#).”

IV. Motives for Hiding from God's Face

- **A Guilty Conscience** - **Genesis 3** - ⁸ And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.
- **Disobedience** - **Jonah 1** - ³ But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord.

V. Performance of our Duty as always before God’s Face

- **Larger Catechism Question 106** - What are we specially taught by these words [before me] in the first commandment?

A: These words [before me] or before my face, in the first commandment, teach us, that God, who seeth all things, taketh special notice of, and is much displeased with, the sin of having any other God: that so it may be an argument to dissuade from it, and to aggravate it as a most impudent provocation: (Ezek. 8:5–6, Ps. 44:20–21) as also to persuade us to do as in his sight, whatever we do in his service. (1 Chron. 28:9)

- **1 Chronicles 28** - ⁹“As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a loyal heart and with a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts and understands all the intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever.

Performing our Duty in Secret – because God sees all

- **Matthew 6**
 - **Good Deeds:** “Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven. ² Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ³ But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ that your charitable deed may be in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.
 - **Prayer:** ⁵ “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. ⁶ 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.
 - **Fasting:** ¹⁶ “Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance. For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. ¹⁷ But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who *is* in the secret *place*; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly.

VI. Jesus and the Law

The Law’s relationship to Jesus as God-Man

- **God – The Divine Lawgiver.**
- **Man – Obeys and Suffers in our place.**
 - **Matthew 5** - ¹⁷ “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. ¹⁹ Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches *them*, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds *the righteousness* of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.

- **Hebrews 2** - ¹⁷ Therefore, in all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

The Law's relationship to Jesus as Prophet-Priest-King

- **King** – Gives us His Law to follow, and rules over our heart.
 - **Isa 32** – ²² (For the Lord *is* our Judge,
The Lord *is* our Lawgiver,
The Lord *is* our King;
He will save us)
- **Prophet** – Reveals the King's Law to us.
 - **Hebrews 1** - God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ² has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;
- **Priest** – Atones for our inability to perfectly keep the Law of the King as revealed by the Prophet.
 - **Hebrews 7** - ²⁵ Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.
 - Also see **Hebrews 2:17** (earlier)