

Instruction In The Westminster Standards

The Historic Standards of Presbyterian Denominations.

STUDIES IN THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 52. What are the reasons annexed to the second commandment?

A. 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.

Scripture References: Ps. 95:2, 3; Ps. 45:11; Exod. 34:14.

Questions:

1. How many reasons are there involved in the second commandment and of what use are they to us?
There are three reasons: (1) God's sovereignty over us. (2) God's ownership of us. (3) God's zeal regarding his worship. They are of great use to us for all three can have great influence in our obeying the Lord our God.
2. What do we mean by God's sovereignty over us?
We mean that by His sovereignty He has the sole authority over us and has the right to make laws for worship. He alone has the right to decide what is good for us. We have the responsibility to worship Him only in the way He appoints for us in His Word.
3. When we speak of God owning us what do we mean by it?
We mean by this that we belong to Him through the right of redemption and therefore, we should cleave to Him and be careful that we do not follow after any sin that would drive us away from Him, especially idolatry and superstition. (Ps. 95:6, 7; Ps. 106:19, 21).
4. What has God said regarding the zeal he has to his own worship?
He has said, "I am a jealous God."
5. What effect should this have upon us as born-again believers?
It should give us a great fear of offending Him in any way and especially in the area of false worship. We should pray that we never fail Him as Nadab and Abihu did (Lev. 10:1-4).
6. If we worship Him in a false way what will our punishment be?
His punishment will not only be upon us, but He will visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation.
7. How can God, who has the attribute of justice, do this?
If the children do not follow their father's sins He will not punish them (Ezek. 18:14, 17). If the children do follow their father's sins they deserve punishment.

GODLY PARENTS AND THEIR CHILDREN

This particular question of the catechism with its emphasis on God being a jealous God, visiting iniquity on the children of wicked parents, has a converse lesson in it for godly parents. The children of godly parents could be the recipients of the promise, "I will be a God to thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Gen. 17:7). There is much for which the children of godly parents should thank God and there is great responsibility on the part of godly parents in order that their children may enjoy the great benefits involved.

Whenever those giving allegiance to the Reformed Faith mention the covenant promises though, there are two important facts that should always be remembered. If these two important facts are forgotten there is always the danger of displeasing God. These two facts are: (1) God does not show mercy to children simply because they are the children of godly parents. (2) The promise God utters is a promise dependent upon the keeping of the promises of the godly parents.

God does not show mercy to children simply because they are the children of godly parents—He shows mercy to children simply because it pleases Him, (Rom. 9:15). We can never take the mercy shown to children of godly parents out of the framework of the whole counsel of God and forget that He is the Almighty, Sovereign One and will not be manipulated or forced by the promises or ways of men. What He does is for His glory and is consistent with His character, that of being Sovereign in all things.

The promise God utters is a promise dependent upon the keeping of the promises of the godly parents—salvation and all its benefits is not an automatic thing that happens to the children of godly parents (or godly parent—I Cor. 7:14; Acts 2:38, 39). John Murray's statement here is well taken: "Covenant privilege always entails covenant responsibility." There are conditions that must be kept by the godly parents, promises that are made at the baptism of the infant and promises that must be kept if the parents expect God to keep His promises.

When the godly parents do their part there are indeed great benefits, the benefits of a Christian education, prayers, even the expectation that God will effect their conversion. To be reared by Christian parents bent on keeping their covenant promises is a blessing for which all children should thank God.

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