

THE WESTMINSTER STANDARDS

Shorter
CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #36

The Ten Commandments:

Love for God's Day

Catechism Questions 60 thru 62



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Lecture #36

The Ten Commandments: Love for God's Day

Question 60: *How is the sabbath to be sanctified?*

Answer: *The sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except to much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.*

Question 61: *What is forbidden in the fourth commandment?*

Answer: *The fourth commandment forbiddeth the omission, or careless performance, of the duties required, and the profaning the day by idleness, or doing that which is in itself sinful, or by unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, about our worldly employments or recreations.*

Question 62: *What are the reasons annexed to the fourth commandment?*

Answer: *The reasons annexed to the fourth commandment are, God's allowing us six days of the week for our own employments, his challenging a special propriety in the seventh, his own example, and his blessing the sabbath day.*

In our last lesson, we looked at an important part of the fourth commandment. We saw that God has appointed one whole day in seven to be set apart for him. One whole day in seven is a holy day by God's ordaining. We also saw that since the resurrection of Christ, this day is the first day of the week. Well, in this lesson, we're going to look at how we are supposed to keep this day holy. And remember that all of the commandments show us how to love God. So we think of this as showing love for God's day. So as we keep it holy, we're loving God, and honoring him on this day. In other words, one way that we show our love for God is by keeping this day holy to him.

We have three Questions from the *Catechism* for us in this lesson. The first is Question #60. It asks, "How is the sabbath to be sanctified?"—"The sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except to much as

is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.” There’s a lot in this Question, which we’ll cover throughout this lesson. Well, notice that one thing it’s saying is, it’s not that we’re resting from sin—which some people say, “Well that’s how we keep the sabbath; we rest from sin.” No, we are of course to stop sinning, and to put it to death, even by the Spirit. But the way we are to honor God on this day is by setting aside even lawful things from other days: worldly employments, our jobs, and studies, and recreations, our play, and so on. We set that aside in order to spend the whole time in the public and private exercise of God’s worship.

Well, the next Question, #61, asks, “What is forbidden in the fourth commandment?”—“The fourth commandment forbiddeth the omission, or careless performance, of the duties required, and the profaning the day by idleness, or doing that which is in itself sinful, or by unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, about our worldly employments or recreations.” And so, as is common to the other commandments, the *Catechism* tells us what is forbidden. To omit or carelessly perform what God requires, or by profaning the day with idleness, or doing what is of itself sinful.

And the last Question, #62, “What are the reasons annexed to the fourth commandment?”—“The reasons annexed to the fourth commandment are, God’s allowing us six days of the week for our own employments, his challenging a special propriety in the seventh, his own example, and his blessing the sabbath day.” Well, we should note that we can’t go into every detail throughout from these questions, but we do hope to cover the main points that are being made, so as to help you better understand not only what the *Catechism* is saying, but what God in the Bible has indicated is holy will for us.

So let’s look at three things for this lesson. Firstly, *Showing Love to God in Worship on this Day*; secondly, *Showing Love to God in Service on this Day*; thirdly, *The Good Reasons for Showing Love to God on this Day*.

So firstly, *Showing Love to God in Worship on this Day*. Notice the *Catechism* says that we sanctify the Sabbath—that is, we keep it holy; we ourselves approach the holy day in a holy way—“by a holy resting all that day.” Now this is important because it’s not that the day is appointed for our sleep. Sometimes people think that the Sabbath is a day off. Well, it’s a day off from our worldly jobs and our recreations, but it’s not a day just of rest. It’s a day of holy rest, the whole day. What is it we rest from? The *Catechism* says, “even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days.” So, our lawful jobs, or lawful callings in this world, our lawful playing, and sports, and other things that we may be engaged in are set aside, though they are lawful on other days. We say “No” to them, so that, as the *Catechism* says, we may spend “the whole time in the public and private exercises of God’s worship.” So the main focus of the day is that we are spending time with God, to worship him, both in private individually in our secret devotions, private with our families in family worship, but also public with the assembled people of God, we’re focused on this. And this is something we need to emphasize. The Sabbath is stated in a positive way, “Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy.” It’s orienting us toward that positive aspect. And so it’s telling us to remember, to keep it forward in our minds, that this is a day that is holy, and we’re to be engaged in holy things.

Well, some of this is explained quite well in a passage from Isaiah, chapter 58, verses 13 and 14. We read there, “If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the LORD, honourable; and shalt honour him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: then shalt thou delight thyself in the LORD; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken

it.” Do you see this? There is to be delight in this day, because the day is calling us to delight ourselves in the Lord. We get to say no to everything else, that we may say yes to the Lord.

And remember, this is what the Lord has appointed. The Lord has cleared a day for us to be with him—a whole day. We can say no to our jobs, to our school, to our schoolwork, our homework, to our recreation and play, because we have a far greater calling and privilege. We get to be with God, by his ordinances, in private and public. It helps correct a dry and outward approach to the Sabbath. The Sabbath is not a day for us just to go through religious motions. And certainly we’re not to do the right things for our own glory. And yet it may be that we’re tempted to think, I’m going to fill my day with prayer, with reading, with worship, with listening to sermons, both with my church, and then I’ll get downloaded sermons and listen to them, and I’ll read the best books, and so on. And yet a person may miss the main point still. In other words, it’s not about mere religious diligence, and mere religious activity, however right and good. It is about seeking God and communing with him. And so we do fill our days, as we’ll see, with private worship, and public worship, and meditation, and prayer, and Christian fellowship, and we’re saying no to other things, and doing all this. But we’re doing it all for a purpose. Even as Isaiah 58 says, we call the Sabbath a delight, and delight ourselves in the Lord. We’ve made a plan, in other words, and we’ve got a full day before us, not to have a full day, but to have a full day, by grace, through Christ, with God.

Notice, the commandment is forbidding “the omission, or careless performance, of the duties required.” And so it’s not just that we’re going to fill the day with these things, but we’re going to be engaged in them. So it would be sinful not to have these things done, but it would also be sinful to have these things in our day and go about it carelessly. We sit in church, and our mind wanders, and we don’t bring it back. We sit down with the Bible in front of us for a private time with the Lord, and we hardly remember anything that’s been read. Those things are profaning the day as well. And so it’s necessary for us to remember that the Lord’s calling us to engage our souls by his grace, through faith in Christ, with the means of grace before us. To omit something is to avoid doing it. To perform something carelessly is to do it, as we might say, half-heartedly. These things, of course, are sinful.

And certainly, to commit sin itself is always forbidden, and it’s forbidden on this day. But also notice, so are our unnecessary thoughts, words, or works about our worldly employments or recreations. And there may be need on the Lord’s Day. Perhaps we’re with brothers and sisters, and there’s need for prayer about things going on at our job or school. We’ve got an exam coming up later that week, and we say, “Would you pray for me this week, because I’ve got an important exam,” or, “I’ve got an important meeting.” And that’s fine, we’re having people pray for us. But it would be wrong to dominate the discussion about all that we’ve done: “Well, I was on vacation, and I saw this, and I saw that, and the other thing.” And you know, “There’s this thing that I participated in,” and all these other ways we talk about. If it’s unnecessary for the promotion of God’s glory or the edifying of the saints, it ought to be set aside.

Now this is taken, as we’ve seen, from Isaiah 58. But why is it—let’s remember this—why is it that we set aside our own thoughts, and words, and works? Because those things distract us from the main thing. What God is saying is that we are to say no to these lesser things, these unnecessary things, that we may say yes to the best thing. To be clear, the commandment’s not demanding that we spend the whole day in the public worship of God, though that is to be a priority. There is, of course, private and family worship to take place. There may be things, of course, that interrupt us gathering in our family during the week. Perhaps there’s a responsibility at work or school that

makes us have to miss a time of family worship in morning or evening. But on the Lord's Day, we're protected from those things. God's securing this day, that we can say, "There's nothing, apart from God's providence, that's going to interfere with these things." And the same is the case with our secret devotion. God has given us a day protected from other things creeping in, so that we can have a full day with him. What a privilege it is that God has thought of us to do these things.

Well, to do that, of course, demands that we prepare. If we're a student, we get our homework done before the Lord's Day. We don't say, "Well, I'll go to church in the morning, and then I have a few hours, and I'll get some studying done, and then I'll come back to church in the evening," or any other ways, no. The Lord's Day is holy. It's set apart. And so we're diligent all the other six days of the week. We're diligent in class. We're diligent in our homework. We're diligent on Saturday. We're doing all of these things throughout the week, so that the whole day is a day to give ourselves without distraction to the Lord. And so we're getting those things finished ahead of time.

Well, of course, in order to fill the day in this way, we need to be well rested. Which means we need to have gone to bed at a decent time, and had a good night's sleep, as the Lord provides that. We should think ahead, as well, to think, Well, are my clothes already, are they presented, are they laid out? So we can have those things established ahead of the time. It's interesting, isn't it? The commandment says, "Remember the sabbath day." And so, we're thinking about it ahead of time. Perhaps we're responsible, and we're able eventually to drive a car, and we have to drive to church. So what do we do? Well, we fill up the tank with gas the day before, so that we have a full tank, so we can travel there and back. All of these things have been prepared, so that the day itself can be full.

I'll give you an illustration. Perhaps you've been to a wedding before, and there, the groom and the bride are standing before this assembly. And there, they've made a plan so that nothing else is going to interrupt on that day. And so, they've been planning it perhaps for weeks or months, and now the day has come. And they're standing there, and they're about to exchange vows, and you'd be shocked if either the man or woman reached into his or her pocket, and pulled out their phone, and said, "Hold on, I've got to take care of a few things." It would be astounding for such a thing to happen. Why is that? Because the nature of what's going on is special—it is to be protected. Well, the same should be true of our approach to the Lord's Day. We're saying no to everything else, in order to say yes to God. And so we're diligent to turn off certain things. We're diligent to put away certain things, in order that we can focus on the Lord. That's what the day is about—to delight ourselves in the Lord: "Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy." Well, what is it to keep it holy? It is to devote ourselves to God, that we would not treat the day as a common day, as the rest of the days are, but that the whole of the day would be given to the Lord, in both public and private exercises of God's worship.

Well, second, we're to be *Showing Love for God in Service on this Day*. God will certainly have us worship him, and this is, of course, the priority of the day. The psalmist says, "I joy'd when to the house of God, go up they said to me" (Psalm 122, Scottish Metrical Psalter). And in some sense, every Lord's Day comes, and the believer says, "I joyed that this day has come." Another Psalm tells us that "This is the day which the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24). And particularly and interestingly, it's indicating that it is the day that Christ arose.

Well, though these things are true, God will not have us ignore the needs that either we have, or that others have. God is a merciful God and remembers our frame. And he would also have us remember the needs of others. We'd be mistaken to think that we should ignore those who need

our help. Notice, the *Catechism* says that, of course, we're to keep these things and abstain from others, "except to much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy."

Well, what is a work of necessity? If something is necessary, it must be done; it's not optional. Well, there are activities that must be done for our earthly continuance in this world, to have strength and health. For instance, we need to eat; we need to drink. These things are needed. Well, someone might argue and say, "Well you can go a day without eating," and that's true; there are days of fasting. And yet, this day is a day of rejoicing. And so it's a day where our bodies need strength, which is normally supplied by a regular intake of food and drink, so we eat. We shouldn't be surprised when Christ and his disciples were walking on the Sabbath day through a field of grain. Mark 2, verse 23 tells us, "And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn." It was the custom in Israel to leave the edges of fields unharvested, so that the poor could grab a handful of grain to eat for their necessary provision. Well, Christ and his disciples were poor. You'll remember, Christ said, "The Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). Thus, they were not working the fields as farmers. They weren't bringing in a harvest. They were gathering a handful of grain for their necessary food.

Now this is the idea for us today. We don't go to the grocery store on the Lord's Day, in order to buy a bunch of food. We don't go to a restaurant, in order to force others to work so that we can be having our ease. But we do need to eat. And so, on the Lord's Day, we don't hesitate to have a meal at home, or perhaps at church if we have a fellowship meal there, or in another person's home. It may be necessary to clear a driveway or walkway, if snow comes on a Saturday night or Sunday morning. It may be necessary to set up chairs in a room where we meet on the Lord's Day. Now certainly, these are necessary things. They have to be done if we're going to gather for worship. If it can be done on a different day, it ought to be done on a different day. But if it can't be, well then we have need to do those things. And so, a necessary thing is not necessary for my work, but necessary for my life, or for another's life or safety.

Well, what are works of mercy? They're related, of course, to works of necessity, but they're focused more on the work showing compassion to those who are in need. I'll give you an illustration. If we were on our way to church on the Lord's Day, and we saw someone along the side fall and injure themselves, we wouldn't think in our minds, Well, it's the Lord's Day, the Sabbath, I'm not going to help them. No, we would go over and see if there's something we could do—perhaps help them up if they were on the ground. Or maybe it was such a serious way that we would have to then call an ambulance and have them help them. Why is that? Well, the Lord is merciful, and he would have us show mercy. Remember that Christ, again and again, was willing to heal those who came to him on the Sabbath day, and he corrected and reproofed the Pharisees, who were trying to judge him for doing so. The Sabbath is a day for mercy. This is why we may visit those who are sick at home, or those who are shut in and can't make it out to church. We visit them, and encourage them, and pray with them, or bring them a meal. Or we would visit those who are in the hospital on the Sabbath. We're showing mercy.

This is also why some jobs are lawful on the Sabbath. We need firefighters, and we need doctors, we need policemen, because they provide a necessary service to the well-being of people. But most jobs are not necessary. Most jobs are not actually needed for life to continue. Most jobs may take a day off. Why is it then that most don't today? It's because most today do not love God enough to stop all else that they're doing, in order to honor God and the day he set apart.

Well this is reminding us then that we need to remember others and serve them. It's very sad

that we see this commandment broken by many who profess Christ. It's common to see people who are going out to eat on the Lord's Day. And Christians might say, "Well, I'm not working, and it's needed that I eat," and so on. But they're missing the fundamental point. It is needed that we eat, but we can plan by going to the store on Friday or Saturday, and having our meal planned at home, or with other Christians, on the Lord's Day.

We also notice that we need to care for others who are under us. So the commandment talks of our children, and our servants. And so we need to be careful to care for them, so we're not causing them to have too many things to do on the Lord's Day. There may be necessary chores that need to be done. Perhaps we have chickens, and they need to have food given to them. But we aren't doing a lot of work, and certainly not unnecessary work on the Lord's Day. And we're not making others do it either. It does us no good to say, "Well, I'm going to keep the Sabbath by making others work." No, the commandment actually tells us that neither we, nor our children, nor our servants are to do those things.

Well, let's look then, third, at *The Good Reasons for Showing Love to God on this Day*. The commandment directs us to several reasons to keep this day holy and give God our love, and enjoy his. Notice the *Catechism*, "God's allowing us six days of the week for our own employments, his challenging a special propriety in the seventh, his own example, and his blessing the sabbath day." Well, God has given us six days out of seven—six out of seven for our own employments. In fact, he says, "Six days shalt thou labour and do all thy work." And so, step back for a moment and think of this. God has given us six days to do out work, to have our recreations, to do our study—everything in six days. And he gives us one day, and he says, "None of that, but give yourself to me." So surely, all arguing should stop, for God has given us six days for all other things, and has required but one for the setting aside of our other things to worship him.

Notice, his "special propriety"—this refers to the commandment as it says, "the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God." Notice this, it is his. Just as under the New Testament, it's called "The Lord's Day." It's not our day. It's not the church's day. It's *his* day. And so he's told us what he wants us to do on his day, which is to keep it holy unto him. So remember that as you come to the next Lord's Day, the next Sabbath day. It's *his*, and so give yourself then to him.

Notice also, "his own example." "For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth" (Exodus 20:11). And what did he do? He rested on the seventh. And so God was patterning for us, much like a wise father patterns behavior for his children, so God was patterning the same for us. That we have a whole six days to do all our work, but the Lord saw that we needed one day for our spiritual concerns.

Well, lastly, his blessing—"Wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it." Think of that. This commandment tells us that he's placed a blessing upon this day, and oh, then that we would consider that well and think, if we want God's blessing, then we ought to make a good use—not only filling it full—but by his grace, through faith in Christ, seeking God on this the Lord's Day.

Some may say, "This all sounds quite demanding, or boring, or dull." Well, I imagine it's very possible to make the Sabbath dull and boring. However, the Sabbath itself and its purpose is far from dull or boring. It is a day of great joy, of gladness, a day to enjoy the Lord without distraction. And, if you can see it, it's a foretaste of heaven—that lasting day that knows no end, where the focus of everything will be consumed with God. Every Sabbath day is, as it were, a new whisper, a fresh breeze from heaven.

Well, let me close by giving you some practical helps. If we're going to keep this day holy,

notice the following things. First, we need to prepare. Remember the Sabbath day. Chores, and laundry, clothes ready, gas in the vehicle—everything should be prepared ahead of time. And what that does is it helps us be ready for the Lord's Day. Perhaps there's a special thing that has to take place on Monday—get it ready on Saturday. So throughout the Lord's Day, you're not thinking about Monday coming up. All is ready. So prepare.

Second, we need to plan on filling the day. Private devotions, and family worship, and books to read. We're committed to attending both services of worship, morning and afternoon or evening. This is the main focus—the worship of God. Perhaps we need a twenty to thirty-minute nap in order to refresh our bodies. But we keep it, as it were, short, so that we can give ourselves to filling the day with his worship. Perhaps we schedule a visit to a nursing home, or somebody in our congregation who's unable to get out. We're planning to fill the day. But we're not just filling it; we're filling it in order to seek the Lord. You see, if we don't plan to do this, we'll be tempted to look at the day as long. "What am I going to do now? What am I supposed to do to fill a day?" If we plan on it, it helps us then, say yes to God. When you plan on it, it makes it far easier to say no to distractions and unlawful things.

Yet, third, we need to be sure that we are focusing on the main thing. We don't just want to fill the day. We don't just want to be busy. We don't just want to be one who is going about, cumbered about with much serving. Rather, we want to fill the day with those things that help us keep the day holy, and delight ourselves in God. Our purpose in all of it is to seek the Lord. Oh, see then what a privilege God has given us in giving us the Christian Sabbath, the Lord's Day. What a wicked sin it is to despise such a day. And oh, how it injures our own souls if we profane this day.

Well, once you see the Lord's Day for what it is, you'll see why the Christian is to call the Sabbath a delight, and delight himself in God. Well, may it be so to each of us, by God's grace, through Jesus Christ.