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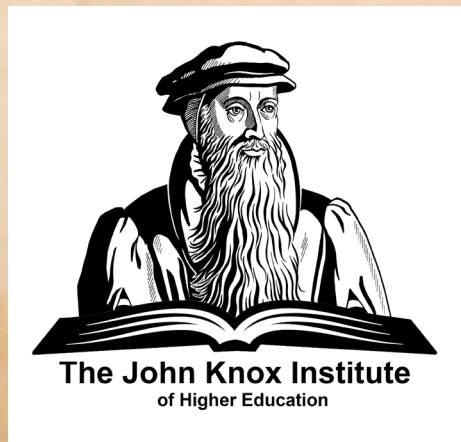
by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #32

The Ten Commandments:

Love for God

Catechism Questions 45 thru 48



John Knox Institute of Higher Education

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by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

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Lecture #32

The Ten Commandments: Love for God

Question 45: *Which is the first commandment?*

Answer: *The first commandment is, Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*

Question 46: *What is required in the first commandment?*

Answer: *The first commandment requireth us to know and acknowledge God to be the only true God, and our God; and to worship and glorify him accordingly.*

Question 47: *What is forbidden in the first commandment?*

Answer: *The first commandment forbiddeth the denying, or not worshipping and glorifying, the true God as God, and our God; and the giving of that worship and glory to any other, which is due to him alone.*

Question 48: *What are we specially taught by these words before me in the first commandment?*

Answer: *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.*

With the foundation of grace established, God now sets before his people his holy will, the Ten Commandments. Remember, these summarize for us, his will for us. And remember as well, each of these is an expression more focused and concrete of how it is that we are to love God. Well, these Ten Commandments, of course, start with this first, which is not just first, as it were, in number, but as well as, in priority. Christ said that the greatest commandment is to love God, and the second is to love your neighbor. We can see this order throughout the Ten Commandments. As you look through the *Catechism* and its treatment of the Ten Commandments, you'll notice a standard approach for each question. Each commandment is first identified, and the text of Scripture is presented to us. Then it considers what the commandment requires, and then it moves on to consider what is forbidden. Then, as appropriate, it handles any reasons that the commandment supplies.

And so, in our lesson today, we deal with all four of these related Questions from our *Catechism*. All of these touch on the first commandment—what it is, what it requires, what it forbids, and what reasons are given to obey it. Well, here they are, Questions #45 through #48 of the *Shorter Catechism*.

Question #45: “Which is the first commandment?”—“The first commandment is, Thou shalt have no other God’s before me.” These are the very words from Exodus 20, verse 3. You will find also these are recorded in Deuteronomy chapter 5, where the Ten Commandments are also recorded, in verse 7 particularly, regarding the first commandment.

Then there’s the next question, #46: “What is required in the first commandment?”—“The first commandment requireth us to know and acknowledge God to be the only true God, and our God, and to worship and glorify him accordingly.” This identifies duties, responsibilities, requirements, and we’ll consider these in the main part of our lesson.

And Question #47: “What is forbidden in the first commandment?”—“The first commandment forbiddeth the denying or not worshipping and glorifying the true God as God, and our God; and the giving of that worship and glory to any other, which is due to him alone.” These are the sins that the commandment forbids us to commit. They are obviously related to the duties. If we worship and glorify God as we should, we not give his worship and glory to any other. Now that provides us help, because in showing us, as it were, both sides of the commandment—what it requires, what it forbids—it clarifies, and more clearly crystallizes in our minds exactly what God demands.

Question #48: “What are we specially taught by these words *before me* in the first commandment?”—“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.” Here we find a special reason we should keep this commandment. There are many reasons, of course, but this is one that God himself supplies, and calls us to consider. The words “before me” are not talking about order, as if God is saying, “You can have another god that’s second to me.” Rather, these words mean “in my presence”—before me, as in my presence.

So for our lesson, we’ll look at three things: firstly, What Loving God Does; secondly, What Loving God Avoids; and thirdly, What Loving God Remembers? In other words, If we love God, what will we do? If we love God, what will we avoid? And if we love God, what will we remember?

Firstly then, What Loving God Does. The commandment itself says, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me.” If we are to avoid having other gods, then we, of course, must know the true God. We must take him as our God. And we must give him the honor he deserves. If we don’t know the true God, we may be worshipping a false god. If we know the true God, but we don’t take him as our own, then we’re not having him as our God. If we do not give him the honor that he deserves, how can we be said to love him? “Thou shalt have no other gods before me”—no other gods. And so, God is calling us to have him.

We find these requirements provided in the Answer to Question #46: “The first commandment requireth us to know and acknowledge God to be the only true God, and our God; and to worship and glorify him accordingly.” Well, let’s look at these ideas in a bit more detail.

The first commandment requires that we know and acknowledge God to be the only true God. To know God means that we understand him as he is, that is, as he has revealed himself to us in the Bible. To know God does not mean we follow our own imagination, and it certainly doesn’t mean we follow others’ thoughts. Rather, it means we know him as he’s made himself known to us. It’s true, we cannot know everything about him, but we can know the truths about him that he’s revealed to us. And at the very least, we can understand the basic ideas of what he’s told us. You’ll

remember when we thought on “God is eternal.” There is a thought there that is far beyond our ability fully to comprehend. And yet we can understand and acknowledge that he is eternal.

Additionally, we are to acknowledge him. This idea of acknowledging God to be the only true God means that we confess or profess that the God of the Bible is the only true God. So you can go back to those early Questions, “What is God?” “How many persons are there in the Godhead?” These summarize what God is, who God is. And to acknowledge him is to say, “That God, the God of the Bible, God who is a spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, and all that follows, God who is triune, and all that is expressed of that—that is the only true God.

The idea of acknowledging him to be the only true God means that we are ready to tell others that the triune God of the Bible is *the*, and *the only* true God. This is not a popular thought in most cultures today, but it is what God requires of us. It is what people who love God do. We don’t have to be mean about it, or bitter about it. Rather, with delight in God, and concern for others, we may tell, and ought to tell others about the one true God.

If we love something, we love to learn about it. We also like to tell others about it. I’ve met people who enjoy certain parts of history. They are careful to learn about the people and events that took place. They take time to read books about that time, and even to read books from that time. Sometimes they study artifacts, or even visit the places where that history took place. They do not find it to be a difficulty to talk about these things. They actually enjoy telling others about the people and events, and the importance of these things in history. And they do this because they enjoy it.

Well, the same is true for those who love God. They want to learn about him, so that they may know him. And as we have already learned, this is primarily done by reading and hearing the Bible, and also hearing it preached. These who love God focus on what God says about himself. They learn about his glorious works and what he has done. They study his promises and his commands, and they do so regularly and with some degree even of self-sacrifice, because they want to know him. But they also like to tell others about the true God. Why do they do this? They do it because they love God.

You’ll notice that the commandment also requires that we know and acknowledge God to be *our* God. This is related to knowing and acknowledging him to be the true God, but it adds a personal aspect to it. To know him as *my* God means that I understand his promises to save me, and I trust him to do so. Well, if this is going to happen, I need to see clearly his promises, and understand that he indeed is saying to me, “I will be your God.” Oh, what a blessing then to have the gospel preached to us, wherein the good news is announced and proclaimed! The true and triune God has made known this great privilege to us in his Word. Moreover, he has given us his eternal Son incarnate, the Lord Jesus Christ. And it is through Christ that we come to know, in fact, it is only through Christ. Because, you’ll remember, in John 14, verse 6, Christ says, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.” This is why we are uncompromising in our continued contention that there is no knowledge of the one true God unto salvation, except by Jesus Christ.

Among other things, the commandment is calling us to acknowledge this God, not only to be *the* true God, but to be *our* God through Jesus Christ. To acknowledge God to be the only true God is to stand before others and say, “Jehovah, the God of the Bible, he is the only God.” Allah is not God, Krishna is not God. But to acknowledge him as my God means that I take him as my God, as he promises to be my God through Jesus Christ. We say, “Not only is Jehovah God, but I trust him, and he is my God.” We do this privately in the exercise of faith, but we also do so publically,

professing our faith before others. Perhaps we meet with the elders at our church, and we say, “I’ve read the promises, and I see he’s promising these things to me, and by his grace, I’m taking him as my God.” And those elders then help us think through and work through questions. And then by God’s blessing, we’re brought and given the privilege, by his great grace, to come to the Lord’s table, and to take hold of that precious sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, whereby we again profess before others that this is our God. Oh, that there’s much bound up in this! But see that this commandment is calling us, yea, demanding that we take him as our own. Well, if we know God and acknowledge him both as God and our God, then of course we would love to give him the worship and glory he deserves, and it will be our delight to do so. Oh, he is my God! Why would I give to anyone else what belongs to him?

Well, secondly, What Loving God Avoids—when we love God, what is it that we avoid? Notice the answer to one of our questions: “The first commandment forbiddeth the denying, or not worshipping and glorifying, the true God as God, and our God; and the giving of that worship and glory to any other, which is due to him alone.” Today, there are those who deny Jehovah to be God. When they do so absolutely, saying there is no god, this is a person we call an “atheist”—someone who says that there is no god. There are others who deny that Jehovah, the triune God, the God of the Bible is the true God, and they contend that something else is God. These are called “idolaters.” This kind of idolatry believes that the God of the Bible is not the true God, that something else, whether an impersonal force, or even self, or what we see as traditional false religions and their gods, these contend that something other than the Biblical God is God. We see this in Islam. We see this in contemporary Judaism. We see this because both Muslims and Jews deny that the true God of the Bible is triune. They both reject that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God incarnate. Well, the truth is, any religion, or any philosophy, or any personal belief that contends that the God of the Bible is not *the* and *the only* true God, is breaking this commandment. Some false religions do not permit actual idols or images in their conception of God, however they’re still idolaters, because though they’ve refrained from making a physical idol, in their imagination they’ve imagined something that is not true, and they worship that thought. Even if they never bring up an image of their false god in their mind, their understanding of their false god is idolatry.

But the commandment also forbids mankind from not worshipping and glorifying him as the true God. I’m sure it’s true in many nations, as it is in my own that there are plenty of people who would say that they believe the one true God is the God as revealed in the Bible. They would reject Mormonism. They would reject Islam. They would reject Hinduism and other false religions. However, they themselves do not actually give to God the worship he deserves. Their understanding is primarily theoretical, that is, it’s just an idea that has no real impact upon their lives. We must not keep back the worship and glory that belongs to the true God. If we do that, even though our profession may be true, there is one true God, who is Father, and Son, and Holy Ghost, yet our worshipping of him not being given to him is a great sin.

Another thing forbidden is the giving to any other worship and glory due to God alone. While this is certainly done by those who oppose the true and triune God, it may also be done by those who claim to worship the true God of the Bible. You see this most clearly in Roman Catholicism. Roman Catholics certainly claim to worship the true and triune God. They confess to do so in their official documents quite plainly. However, they also give religious adoration to angels, to Mary, and to others whom they call “canonized saints.” While they may deny that they are giving these divine worship, their action actually proves otherwise.

We don’t have time to go into all of the details. But take as one example the fact that Roman

Catholics actually pray to Mary. Now we want to be clear, we do not deny that Mary was an honorable woman, highly favored by God. The Scriptures plainly teach this. However, she was a sinner in need of salvation. For instance, in her own words, in Luke chapter 1, verses 46 and 47, she says, “My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.” Mary was not sinless. She was not conceived sinless. She herself, as a descendent of Adam, was one who was born with sin, and committed sin. And yet, by God’s grace, she was brought to rejoice in her God and Saviour. But more than this, however holy Mary became by God’s grace, she was still a human, and only a human.

God, who is infinite, of course, can hear all prayers of all people at one and the same time, and understand every particular request, and see into the thoughts and hearts of all that are praying. No mere human, no mere mortal can do this. To believe that a mere human, as Mary is, can do this, is to believe a lie. And to pray to a mere human that is now dead, is to give to that human the worship and glory due to God alone. And so, whereas, for instance, Roman Catholics are right to acknowledge that the God of the Bible is the only true God, and that he is triune, as so on, through their act of adoring Mary, the saints, and angels, actually praying to them, they’re actually giving worship that cannot be given to men or angels. And this is a great sin.

Sometimes we ourselves experience sinning against God in this commandment. When, for instance, we may enjoy a particularly kind providence. God does something very generous to us. He brings us into a risky situation and yet he protects us. We may be tempted to say, “Well, that was lucky.” However, we should remember that this is actually failing to give God the honor that is due to him for his kindness. If he’s delivered us from temporal danger, we shouldn’t attribute that to an impersonal force. Rather, we should explicitly say, “Thank you, God for your mercy,” giving him the worship and glory that is due to him. We should see that one who loves God desires to give all credit to him for all good that ever comes to us. When the rains come in a drought, we don’t just say, “Well, the weather did this;” we say, “God brought the rain.” And so we learn to give God all the glory due unto him alone.

Well, thirdly, What Loving God Remembers—it reminds us that we are to have no other gods in the presence of the true God. “Before me,” says God. The Answer to Question #47 helps to clarify the meaning of these words: “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.” We should remember this. However idolaters are honored by men, however successful they become, however religious they are thought to be, when God sees men having other gods, or giving to other things the worship and glory due to him alone, he sees it, and is much displeased by it. Well, one who loves God remembers this. God sees me. It would be a good thing for each of us to take heed of those words, and apply them to us at all times. She said to God, “Thou God seest me” (Genesis 16:13). There might be times when we are tempted to think that no one knows what we are doing or saying, because no one else is around. What we need to remember is that it might be true that no other mere human knows what we are doing, because no other human is around. We may think, My, mom and dad may not be around, so they don’t know. My Pastor isn’t around, so he doesn’t know. My teacher isn’t around. My brother or sister or friend, they are not around, so they do not know. However, let us always remember that God sees us.

This commandment includes this argument or reason to help us, to support us, to remind us that God does see. God sees whether we acknowledge him as God and as our God. God sees whether we give him the worship and glory due to him alone. It’s true there may be many people who do not care about whether we do this or not. It is even true that there are some people who would

rather have us not give glory to God, not worship him. But whatever it is that others do, we need to remember that God sees, and is much displeased with the sin of having any other god.

Well, do you struggle with this? Because it's easy to struggle with this. We look around, and we see people who put pressure on us, and the culture puts pressure on us. Well, here's a help for you. Set it before your understanding: *God sees all*. We think of what those who have died for the cause of God ever had before them. They knew that there were men who came with very painful things against them. But God saw. And so you see those who would not bow to an idol. And it was said they were going to be thrown into a furnace—of course, Daniel's friends, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. And yet, they remembered that God had told them they were not to give worship to any other thing. And so they were willing to suffer rather than to sin, and why?—because God saw. Well, though you may be away from others, you will never be away from God.

Well, if we're going to obey this commandment, one thing we must do is become diligent students of God's Word. Why is that the case? Because the commandment is calling us to know him. And if we're to know him, we have to study his Word. And so we read through it regularly. We give attention to the preaching of it in our church. Perhaps we listen to lessons like this, and sermons online. But we're diligently studying the Scriptures, so that we may better know him. Remember that—that the reason for those things is the better to know him. So be encouraged, as you study God's Word, you are in that way, obeying this commandment.

But if we're going to obey this commandment, we must also understand his promises and the warrant he gives to us to take him as our God. We're not just to know and acknowledge him as God, but also to know and acknowledge him as *our* God. And to do that, we must know the promises of God. In one sense, you could think of this—the commandment is, as it were, directing us, saying, “You must become familiar with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.” Now let's be clear. The first commandment is not the gospel. The first commandment doesn't save us. But it's telling us that God is commanding us to take him as our own, and then the gospel, the good news of Christ comes and says, “Here's the good news: God is pleased to receive us to himself by the work of Christ believed upon.” And so the commandment is directing us to the gospel. And so, learn well those gospel promises. Become more familiar with Christ Jesus, and see indeed that it is he who says, “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). And the commandment says you must go to him. But oh, blessed be God, the gospel says, “You may come to me; I offer you myself.”

Well, if we're going to obey this commandment, we must take him then, the true and triune God, as our God, through Jesus Christ. Let us not be ashamed of him. Let us take hold of him, and let us tell others of him, to the glory of his name, as we love him, the one true, and triune God, as we know and acknowledge him, not only to be God, but our God, and as we then give him the worship and glory that is due to him alone.