

Each week of 2019 we will take a brief look at one or more questions from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. To read previous weeks' briefs go to oakhillpca.com/wsc

Q. 45. *Which is the first commandment?*

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

Q. 46. *What is required in the first commandment?*

A. The first commandment requires us to know and acknowledge God to be the only true God, and our God; and to worship and glorify him accordingly.

Q. 47. *What is forbidden in the first commandment?*

A. The first commandment forbids the denying, or not worshiping 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.

Q. 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 sees all things, takes notice of, and is much displeased with, the sin of having any other God.

Touching on the First Commandment, the Catechism reveals the pattern it will use for teaching each of the commandments. Each commandment will have at least three questions: one asking what it is, one asking what it requires, and one that asks what it forbids. This pattern will help us understand how these commandments have a broad application in our lives.

Some have said the First Commandment is the fountainhead for all the rest. This means that idolatry, having another god before the true God in our hearts, leads to every other sin. When Paul outlines the downward spiral into depravity, the list begins with "they did not honor or give thanks to God" (Rom. 1:21). Martin Luther considered the First Commandment the fountainhead for justification by faith alone. God declares in Isaiah 45:22, "Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other." If we turn to any other god, we will not be saved.

At first reading, we hear the command forbidding "having" other gods before God. The Catechism keys in on that word to "have." What does it mean to "have" a god or the true God?

1. To have is to "know and acknowledge." James says that the demons "have" God in this sense when he says, "Even the demons believe – and shudder!" (2:19). The demons believe and shudder at God because they know and acknowledge him as the rightful ruler of all creation with the right to execute justice.

2. To have is to be personal. In both Q. 46 and 47 the Catechism adds "and our God." It is not enough to know God to be the true God, like the demons. He must be our personal God, meaning he is the one we hope in, trust, and look to for salvation.

3. To have is to "worship and glorify." Our "chief end" is to glorify God. Calvin taught that we always worship. We worship that to which we look for salvation. Therefore, if we do not worship God, we do not "have" God.