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**Briefing 53: Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2021.**

Dear friends,

**New City Catechism Question 9: What does God require in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandments?**

Sometimes, despite the attempts of lawmakers to be as clear as possible, laws and commandments need unpacking so we know what they really mean. Last week we looked at the 10 Commandments, but over the coming few weeks we will be looking at what they mean for us. The answer to catechism question 9 gives us a start:

**First, that we know God as the only true God. Second, that we avoid all idolatry.  
Third, that we treat God's name with fear and reverence.**

Look at a dictionary to define the word 'god,' and you come up with something like this: *"The being perfect in power, wisdom, and goodness, who is worshipped as creator and ruler of the universe."* That gives us a reasonable beginning, but of course it falls far, far short of the description of God we have in the Bible. There's nothing here about his holiness, his love, his compassion, his grace, nor about the way he has revealed himself to us, most wonderfully in the Scriptures and most perfectly in the person of Jesus Christ. Lots of people worship lots of different spiritual gods. Many people who would claim to worship the God of the Bible have reshaped him according to their own designs and desires. But if we are to obey the 10 Commandments, we must start by fully accepting that God truly is who he has revealed himself to be. Of course if this is so, then logically there can be no other God but Him alone. This is often seen as arrogant today, since it means that all other religions are false. But it is clearly what the Bible teaches. Do we believe that? And are we seeking, through studying God's word together and on our own, to know this glorious God who has revealed himself to us?

Once we know who this God is, how great he is, how alone he is in majesty and might, power and glory, how we rely on him for everything we have, then the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment, that we avoid all idolatry, seems obvious doesn't it. If we have got to know the supreme being, the one who is the source of all being and life, then how can we take created things, temporary things, fallible things, and give them the devotion that is due to God alone? It sounds crazy, but we all do it. Tim Keller writes that 'Our hearts are idol factories,' and he's right. He's not talking here about little wooden idols, whether covered by gold or precious stones. He's talking about our desires for good things, perhaps for possessions, pleasures, positions, power or pats on the back, families, fortunes or fame that can so often become things to which we look for our security, our sense of purpose, or our true satisfaction in life. When a good thing becomes a god thing, (an ultimate thing, a supreme thing, something that dominates our time, our energies or our daydreams) it's a very bad thing. That idol can never deliver on its promises, which leaves us empty and frustrated. But what's worse, the God of all glory has been dethroned from his rightful place. What idols lurk in our own hearts, I wonder? Where do our desires need a spring clean?

As Philip mentioned on Sunday, most Christians think that the 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment refers to verbal blasphemy, using the name of God or Jesus as an expletive or swearword. It can include that, and we should avoid it. After all, how can the name of Jesus be anything but precious to the Christian? But the thrust of this commandment goes far wider than that. I think it includes times when we ignore the truth about God, truths that are summed up in his name, and imagine that God will be fine with us living exactly as we like. For those who know we are Christians, this brings God's name into disrepute. For ministers, preachers, evangelists, people who live their faith in the public realm, the danger of breaking this commandment is far greater. Does my life reflect the goodness of God to the world? Do my words and life match up? They should, and if they don't then God's name and character will be maligned because of me.

Over the last few weeks a devastating report has been released about the behaviour of evangelist and apologist Ravi Zacharias. Despite being a wonderful communicator of the Christian faith, Ravi's private life told a different story about his allegiance. He was a liar and a sexual predator, a man who used his position to gain the trust of vulnerable women so they could be exploited. On many occasions he even used religious language to excuse his behaviour and to blackmail and threaten his victims into silence. This was blasphemy. He treated God's name without fear and without reverence. To the world Ravi Zacharias appeared to be a committed Christian, morally upright and a great

example for others to follow, but his secret life showed that his idols were fame and sex, and as his evil behaviour has been made known, the name of the God he claimed to serve has been dragged through the mud.

We don't live or work in the same international arenas as Ravi Zacharias once did, but there should be a clear connection between the things we believe and profess, and how we live. Is that true for you? Is that true for me? If there isn't, and as well as breaking other Commandments we are certainly breaking the 3<sup>rd</sup>.

This is rather longer than most of the other comments I've made on the catechism questions so far, but I don't want to end on a negative. The commandments are there for us to measure ourselves against, so that we might see our sin and acknowledge our guilt. But the commandments don't stand on their own. They were given as part of a law which made it clear that there were ways for sin and guilt to be atoned for, and for a right relationship with God to be restored. If the season of Lent is one of self-examination, it ends with Easter, and the celebration of the means of our forgiveness.

So if, as we go through these commandments, you find yourself convicted by your failure to live as you should, take those things to God in prayer. Kneel before the cross and lay your burdens of sin and guilt down at Jesus' feet, and receive the pardon, full and free, that Jesus died to win and that he longs to give.

Yours in Christ,

*Dave*

## IMPORTANT STUFF – DON'T JUST GLANCE- TAKE IT ALL IN!

**SONGS AND TALKS FOR YOUR ENCOURAGEMENT:** We've sung at St Nicholas a few new songs lately, and there's another 2 coming up on Sunday. If you want to listen to them yourself, why not look on these links:

More like Jesus: [More Like Jesus - YouTube](#)

Jesus there's no one like you: [Jesus, There's No One Like You • Prayers of the Saints Live - YouTube](#)

The Lord is my salvation: [Keith & Kristyn Getty - The Lord Is My Salvation \(Live\) - YouTube](#)

I found this YouTube film of the great Welsh revival last week and enjoyed it. You might too. [The Story of the 1904–1905 Welsh Revival - YouTube](#) It is wonderfully inspiring. May God move like this here!

If you want to think more about the Ravi Zacharias case, and what it means for local churches, can I suggest these:

[Ravi Zacharias is Amnon — Who Are You In The Story? || 2 Samuel 13 - YouTube](#)

[Interview with Sam Allberry || What Can We Learn from the Ravi Zacharias Scandals? - YouTube](#)

[The Ravi Scandal: Diane Langberg, Glen Scrivener & Steve Baughman on victims, accountability & power - YouTube](#)

Details of the report into his behaviour are here: [Ravi Zacharias Hid Hundreds of Pictures of Women, Abuse Du..... | News & Reporting | Christianity Today](#)

**COME  
and  
PRAY**

**COME AND PRAY TOGETHER! NEXT WEEK** we will be meeting on ZOOM to pray for the church, for the world and for one another between 7 and 8am on Tuesday morning. Do contact Dave for a link. If you want to pray in church, St Nicholas will be open for private prayer for 3 sessions a week: Tuesdays from 2 – 4pm, Wednesdays 12 noon – 2pm, and Thursdays 10am – 12 noon. Why not go along and pray there? (*Perhaps that could be part of your road map for coming back to church?*)

**CHILDREN'S WORK ON SUNDAYS:** Under tier 4, we are unable to hold separate children's work in church. However, activity packs will be available to tie in with the talk and the question from the New City Catechism, so do bring your children along. They are a treasured part of our family and we love to see them. We are now expecting that our children's work will not be able to recommence until after Easter, but if this changes we will let you know.

**THINKING OF BAPTISM OR CONFIRMATION?** If you are considering having your **children baptised**, please do get in touch with me. Our next 3-session baptism preparation course will take place after Easter, but it would be good to get dates booked in the diary. If you are looking to be **confirmed** in the Church of England, St Nicholas will be hosting a confirmation service on the evening of Monday 7<sup>th</sup> June. Do speak to Dave if you'd like to pursue confirmation or would like more details.

**EASTER EGGS:** [www.meaningfulchocolate.co.uk/](http://www.meaningfulchocolate.co.uk/) The Easter Egg that tells the Easter story (fair trade to boot) was available in supermarkets last year, but this year they are only available on line. We need to order 10 for our Easter treasure hunt so if you'd like a number to give away please contact Dave by Sunday 14<sup>th</sup>. They will be £4.50 each.