

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

HAVING SEEN WHAT THE SCRIPTURES PRINCIPALLY TEACH US CONCERNING GOD, IT
FOLLOWS TO CONSIDER WHAT THEY REQUIRE AS THE DUTY OF MAN

QUESTION # 99.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #99. *What rules are to be observed for the right understanding of the ten commandments?*

A. For the right understanding of the ten commandments, these rules are to be observed:

1. That the law is perfect, and bindeth every one to full conformity in the whole man unto the righteousness thereof, and unto entire obedience for ever; so as to require the utmost perfection of every duty, and to forbid the least degree of every sin.¹

2. That it is spiritual, and so reacheth the understanding, will, affections, and all other powers of the soul; as well as words, works, and gestures.²

3. That one and the same thing, in divers respects, is required or forbidden in several commandments.³

4. That as, where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden;⁴ and, where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded;⁵ so, where a promise is annexed, the contrary threatening is included;⁶ and, where a threatening is annexed, the contrary promise is included.⁷

5. That what God forbids, is at no time to be done;⁸ what he commands, is always our duty;⁹ and yet every particular duty is not to be done at all times.¹⁰

6. That under one sin or duty, all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded; together with all the causes, means, occasions, and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto.¹¹

7. That what is forbidden or commanded to ourselves, we are bound, according to our places to endeavour that it may be avoided or performed by others, according to the duty of their places.¹²

8. That in what is commanded to others, we are bound, according to our places and callings, to be helpful to them;¹³ and to take heed of partaking with others in what is forbidden them.¹⁴

¹ Ps. 19:7; Jas. 2:10; Matt. 5:21, 22.

² Rom. 7:14; Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37-39; Matt. 5:21, 22, 27, 28, 33, 34, 37-39, 43, 44.

³ Col. 3:5; Amos 8:5; Prov. 1:19; 1 Tim. 6:10.

⁴ Isa. 58:13; Deut. 6:13; Matt. 4:9, 10; Matt. 15:4-6.

⁵ Matt. 5:21-25; Eph. 4:28.

⁶ Exod. 20:12; Prov. 30:17.

⁷ Jer. 18:7, 8; Exod. 20:7; Ps. 15:1, 4, 5; Ps. 24:4, 5.

⁸ Job 13:7, 8; Rom. 3:8; Job 36:21; Heb. 11:25.

⁹ Deut. 4:8, 9.

¹⁰ Matt. 12:7.

¹¹ Matt. 5:21, 22, 27, 28; Matt. 15:4-6; Heb. 10:24, 25; 1 Thess. 5:22; Jude 23; Gal. 5:26; Col. 3:21.

¹² Exod. 20:10; Lev. 19:17; Gen. 18:19; Josh. 24:15; Deut. 6:6, 7.

Question 1—*What does the first rule teach us concerning the right understanding of the ten commandments?*

Answer—The first rule instructs of several things concerning the nature of the law: 1.) The law is perfect, Ps. 19:7. 2.) This perfection does not allow for our imperfect. However sinful we are, the law demands entire obedience forever, Jas. 2:10. 3.) This perfect obedience does not admit the least degree of sin attaching; though some sins are smaller than others yet the least sin is contrary to the perfection of the law, Matt. 5:21, 22.

Question 2—*What does the second rule teach us concerning the right understanding of the ten commandments?*

Answer—The second rule instructs us that our obedience is not merely external because the nature of the law is spiritual, Rom. 7:14. Thus, we are to worship God in spirit and truth, John 4:24. God demands we do obeisance (*i.e.*, worship) with our spirits without which all worship (*i.e.*, obeisance) is in vain, Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:37-39. Because it is spiritual it reaches to the understanding, will, affections and other powers of the soul, Ps. 119:4-7. Thus, our external obedience, which is also regulated by the law, Deut. 12:32, is made to express a readiness rooted in an inner delight after that law, Ps. 1:2. For this reason, the law regulates our words, works and gestures, Matt. 5:21, 22, 27, 28, 33, 34, 37-39, 43, 44.

Question 3—*What does the third rule teach us concerning the right understanding of the ten commandments?*

Answer—The third rule instructs us that one and the same sin may be comprehended under more than one commandment. So, covetousness, which places one's desires in the place of God, is idolatry of the first degree; thereby, the violation of the tenth command involves a violation of the first, Col. 3:5. Likewise, covetousness by impinging upon the Sabbath (*i.e.*, men restrict their time to remember the Sabbath to prepare for commerce), leads to a violation of the fourth command, Amos 8:5. When its actions affect the well-being of our neighbor, we see the tenth as a violation of the sixth command, Prov. 1:19. Indeed, violation of the tenth command leads to those violations of the entire first table of the law, 1 Tim. 6:10.

Question 4—*What does the fourth rule teach us concerning the right understanding of the ten commandments?*

Answer—The fourth rule instructs us concerning the breadth of the commandments: 1.) Where one thing is commanded, the contrary is forbidden, Isa. 58:13. The command to swear by God only and serve God only involves a denial of the contrary, as Jesus notes, Matt. 4:9, 10; Deut. 6:13. Thus, a command to honor demands ceasing from all that is contrary to such, Matt. 15:4-6. 2.) Conversely, when something is forbidden, the opposite is therein commanded, Matt. 5:21-25; Eph. 4:28. 3.) This entails that when a promise is annexed that the contrary threat is included, Ex. 20:12; Prov. 30:17. 4.) Again, if there is a threat annexed there is a contrary promise included, Jer. 18:7, 8; Exod. 20:7; Ps. 15:1, 4, 5; Ps. 24:4, 5.

Question 5—*What does the fifth rule teach us concerning the right understanding of the ten commandments?*

¹³ 2 Cor. 1:24.

¹⁴ 1 Tim. 5:22, Eph. 5:11.

Answer—The fifth rule instructs us that that which is forbidden by the moral law is absolutely prohibitive, Job 13:7, 8; Rom. 3:8; Job 36:21. Neither privilege of birth or office provides an exemption from refraining from what God has prohibited, Heb. 11:25. Likewise, what is our duty is always our duty, Deut. 4:8, 9. Yet, it is not the case that every duty is always to be done, Matt. 12:7; Hos. 6:6; Micah 6:6-8.

Question 6— *What does the sixth rule teach us concerning the right understanding of the ten commandments?*

Answer—The sixth rule instructs us that under one sin or duty is comprehended all like sins or duties. Thus, with the forbidding of murder is forbidden all sinful dispositions and passions which lie behind or cause murder; likewise, forbidding adultery is a forbidding of all that enflames or connives at the sin, Matt. 5:21, 22, 27, 28. We are instructed to avoid all means that detract from duty or distract to sin, Matt. 15:4-6; Prov. 7:10. This means improving all occasions for the doing of duty, Heb. 10:24, 25; yet, avoiding everything which lends the contrary appearance to duty or conformity to sin, 1 Thess. 5:22. In fact, our obligation to duty and our avoidance of sin includes all provocations contrary to the one or encouraging to the other, Jude 23; Gal. 5:26; Col. 3:21.

Question 7— *What does the seventh rule teach us concerning the right understanding of the ten commandments?*

Answer—The seventh rule instructs us that we are obliged to endeavor to prevent sin and encourage duty in others according to our station and calling in what is held forth in the law, Ex. 20:10. Eli's failure to do so in his sons ended with him contracting their guilt and suffering in their punishment, 1 Sam. 2:22-24, 27-29, 34; 4:14-18. Thus, we must not suffer sin upon our neighbor, Lev. 19:17. Rather, according to our stations, whether in home or vocation, whether church or state, we are required to restrain sin and promote duty, Gen. 18:19; Josh. 24:15; Deut. 6:6, 7.

Question 8— *What does the eighth rule teach us concerning the right understanding of the ten commandments?*

Answer—The eighth rule instructs us that, according to our stations and callings, we are to endeavor to be helpful in advancing others in the keeping of the commandments, 2 Cor. 1:24. On the other hand, we must take due care to avoid anything which implies or implicates us in that which is forbidden, 1 Tim. 5:22, Eph. 5:11. Thus, the Psalmist warns against any lending of consent to sin, Ps. 50:18.