

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 # 100.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #100. *What special things are we to consider in the ten commandments?*

A. We are to consider in the ten commandments, the preface, the substance of the commandments themselves, and several reasons annexed to some of them, the more to enforce them.

Question 1—*What is meant by “special things”?*

Answer—By “special things” the catechism holds out to us those things which command our peculiar attention—things characterized by something distinct or particular which makes it exemplary. It comes from the Latin *speciālis* (individual) of a given *speciēs* (appearance). Thus, it is used to translate the Hebrew word (הַיְחָדָשׁ) used to describe Israel as a peculiar treasure or possession, Deut. 7:6. Likewise, it is used to translate Greek words (lit., “not the ordinary ones;” οὐ τὰς τυχοῦσας) that indicate something out of the ordinary, Acts 19:11. “Special things” are things marked out because they garner attention that invites a deeper contemplation.

Question 2—*What is the purpose of a preface?*

Answer—A preface sets at the beginning of writing and serves to establish the credibility and authority of the author. This is illustrated by Luke, in his Gospel, Luke 1:1-4. It also forms an historical testimony concerning the matter under review, Rev. 1:1-3. It can be considered an apology for the writer explaining and defending the right to presume to comment upon the matter under discussion. In the case of the moral law, the LORD lays forth his claim to credibility and authority by the invocation of the covenant name (הַיְהוָה), Ex. 6:3; as well as his right to presume based upon his redemption of his people, Ex. 20:1, 2; Lev. 26:13. Additionally, it forms the LORD’s own historical testimony upon which all human historical testimony must be founded, Ps. 132:12; 19:7; 1 Cor. 2:1. This historical reality lends its name to the ark into which the tablets of stone were placed, Ex. 25:21.

The preface of the law gives historical testimony that is necessary to the right reception of the substance of the law, *cf.* John 4:39. For this reason, Israel was commanded to give attention to bearing testimony to their children (and others) that they might be instructed to keep the law evangelically, Isa. 8:16; Ps. 78:1-8. As the divine testimony becomes our own testimony, we become conformed to the image of the Redeemer, 1 Cor. 1:6. It is not given as a republication of the Covenant of Works but as a rule of life begotten of thankfulness, Rom. 4:4, 5; John 4:42. Without this historical testimony, men are rendered impotent to keep the law and covenant of God, Ps. 78:9-11.

Question 3—*What is the substance of the commandments themselves?*

Answer—By “substance” is intended the internal framework upon which the whole matter of the moral law is suspended. The word literally means that which *stands under* something in order to its support—Latin *substantia*. Thus, it is used to translate the Hebrew term (יְסוּדָה) meaning skeleton, bones or frame, Ps. 139:15. It may also refer to

something in its embryonic state (יִצְחָק), Ps. 139:16. These are the “ten words,” Deut. 10:4; yet, they support the entirety of the moral law, Mark 12:29-34. The “substance” is that which directs, forms and circumscribes the being of a thing. This is what the law does for the people of God, both individually and corporately, Prov. 3:1-6; Ps. 119:1. This composes the doctrinal testimony of God by which we come to know him by participating in his likeness, Col. 3:10; John 14:15.

Question 4—*What should be understood by the “several reasons annexed” to the commandments?*

Answer—The “several reasons” remind us of the covenantal context of the law to which we are directed, Hos. 8:1. Keeping the law and keeping covenant are often used interchangeably because fidelity to the covenant is displayed in the keeping of the law, Mal. 2:4-9. Blessings and curses are annexed to add teeth to matter of covenant keeping. Blessing for obedience; cursing for disobedience, Deut. 28:1, 2, 15. In both, God displays his faithfulness to his people by schooling them in holiness without which fellowship with the LORD is not possible, Heb. 12:14. The covenant displays practical arguments for the keeping of the commandments in the face of man’s arguments against keeping them, Job 23:3-6. The law provides the facts, or doctrine, from which an evaluation or argument can be made regarding covenant keeping in history, Acts 7:1, 24-26, 51-53.

Question 5—*What is displayed to us in these three “special things” we observe in the commandments?*

Answer—These three things display to us the nature of testimony bearing as exemplified by God to his people in the giving of the law, Deut. 5:31-33; *cf.* 2 Kings 17:13-15. Faithful testimony bearing ought to be composed of history, doctrine and argument, *cf.* Acts 10:42, 43.