

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

QUESTIONS # 115 & 57.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #115. *Which is the fourth commandment?*

A. The fourth commandment is, *Remember the sabbath-day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work; but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath-day and hallowed it.*¹

(Shorter Catechism)

Q #57. *Which is the fourth commandment?*

A. The fourth commandment is, *Remember the sabbath-day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy man-servant, nor thy maid-servant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath-day, and hallowed it.*²

Question 1—*Why is this the fourth commandment?*

Answer—The reason why this appears as the fourth commandment becomes clear as we contemplate the previous three commands. The first command introduces which God, or who the God is, unto which we are to attend, Hos. 13:4. The second command sets forth how this God is to be worshipped, 1 Chron. 15:13. The third command explains the necessary disposition to that acceptable worship and service which this God requires, Lev. 22:32. This fourth command respects the ordering of time so that this God is made central to the very fact of each man's existence, Ex. 23:12.

This commands teaches us that the time of God's worship is not left arbitrary to the will of man, Ex. 31:15. God, being the sovereign Lord of our time, has the sole power and authority to direct how it should be improved, Isa. 58:13.

Question 2—*Is this commandment founded on the light of nature and, therefore, moral-natural, or upon positive institution?*

Answer—This commandment is founded partly on both. The substance of this command, that as God is to be worshipped, so some stated time should be set apart to this end, is *moral-natural*, Ex. 16:23. This is founded upon the very light of nature, Gen. 2:2, 3. However, that one portion of time should be observed rather than another (e.g., the seventh rather than a third, fourth, etc.) is a matter of positive enactment; it is *moral-positive*, Lev. 26:2.

¹ Ex. 20:8-11.

² Ex. 20:8-11.

This commandment is *positive* because the observance of one day in seven, for a Sabbath, flows from the sovereign will of God in appointing it and could never have been observed, more than any other part, from the mere force of natural light, or law, Lev. 19:30. Yet, we confess this to be *moral-positive* because, though the appointing of the precise time of the Sabbath is positive, nonetheless the reason of the law, rooted in divine wisdom (plainly implied in the law itself), is *moral*, Ezek. 20:12. It is the mark of heathenism to suppress this truth in unrighteousness and to disregard this divine rest, Lam. 1:3.

Question 3—*Wherein, then, consists the morality of the fourth commandment?*

Answer—The morality of the command consists in keeping holy to God any seventh day portion of time which He is pleased to appoint, Ex. 20:11. This is the meaning of the “seventh day” mentioned in the command, Ex. 20:10. Not only shall the seventh in the order from the creation, but any other seventh part of our weekly time, as God determines, Deut. 5:12. The command itself does not ask us to remember the seventh day from the creation, but the Sabbath day, Ex. 20:8.

The command, being placed amongst the Decalogue, or summary of moral precepts, demonstrates that there is nothing either ceremonial or typical in its scope or substance, Deut. 10:4.

Question 4—*What should be understood by the Sabbath of the fourth commandment?*

Answer—The Sabbath, in Scripture, points to a rest, or cessation from labor which is: 1.) Temporal, or a temporary resting from those concerns of this earthly life, Ex. 23:12. 2.) Spiritual, or a resting from our own works in matters pertaining to salvation, Heb. 4:3. 3.) Eternal, or a permanent resting from the conflicts and strivings of this earthly life, Heb. 4:9, 11.

Question 5—*What quantity of time should be understood by the Sabbath of the fourth commandment?*

Answer—The quantity of time is one day in seven consisting of twenty four hours, Ex. 20:9. This requires a care to see that all our work is done during those six days wherein nothing remains to be completed upon the Sabbath day, Ex. 35:2.