

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 # 134 & 67.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #134. *Which is the sixth commandment?*

A. The sixth commandment is, *Thou shalt not kill.*¹

(Shorter Catechism)

Q #67. *Which is the sixth commandment?*

A. The sixth commandment is, *Thou shalt not kill.*²

Question 1—*What reason is this commandment the sixth?*

Answer—Though the fifth commandment stands at the head of the second table of the law, Eph. 6:2; its primary thrust is concerned with the general soulish existence of persons in their several stations and relations, Mal. 1:6; Rom. 13:7. Indeed, the promise of long life being annexed, Eph. 6:3; the fifth command presumes a superiority of position and relative importance over the sixth due to its centrality to societal life, Lev. 20:9; Ex. 21:15; Deut. 21:18-21. The sixth command in its approach respects this present life both of ourselves and others contemplated as individuals, Gen. 9:5.

Question 2—*What life does this command seek to denote as worthy of this prohibition?*

Answer—The life circumscribed by this prohibition is that of both the body, Heb. 11:35; as well as that of the soul, Jas. 5:20. A man's life does not consist in the abundance of things he possesses, Luke 12:15; including his body, Matt. 10:28. In light of the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, 1 Cor. 15:44; and the longing of unembodied souls to be clothed upon, 2 Cor. 5:4; Rev. 6:9, 10; the life in view should be understood to be that life as God intended for man in his creation, both body and soul, Gen. 2:7; Mark 8:36.

Question 3—*Wherein does the valuableness of the life of man appear?*

Answer—The valuableness of human life appears in several things: 1.) It is the result of the union of the soul with the body, which is the principle of those actions put forth by men as intelligent creatures, Ezek. 18:20. Therefore, life ought to be esteemed in proportion to the excellency of it, Eccl. 7:12; Phil. 1:9, 10. The intelligent life that is natural to man is the noblest part of the creation, angels only excepted, Ps. 8:5. 2.) Nothing can compensate or satisfy for the taking away the life of man, Num. 35:31, 32; although much satisfaction may be given for the loss of other things, Ex. 22:3-6, 12. Innocent blood defiles the land in which it is allowed to fall unavenged, 1 Kings 2:31. 3.) Man is the subject of the divine image, Gen. 1:27. This supposes he possesses a more excellent life than any other of the creatures in this lower world, Gen. 1:28. This image is assigned as the reason of our obligation to protect and preserve this life, Gen. 9:6. 4.) This life is given and continued to men that they might attain those ends conducive to the glory of God, 1 Cor. 10:31; the advancement of true religion in the world, 1 Pet. 4:11; and, promoting of their own eternal happiness, Ps. 73:24. Life is the appointed time of the service we are to

¹ Ex. 20:13.

² Ex. 20:13.

render to God, John 9:4. All of which points to the excellency of this command, Matt. 19:17.

Question 4—*Does this command forbid all killing?*

Answer—The sixth commandment, Ex. 20:13; is, in the Hebrew very terse, אֱלֹהֵי יְהוָה יֹאמַר. The word translated “kill” (הֲרַגָה) may denote either murdering or simply killing; Num. 35:6; Deut. 22:26. The Old Testament makes a clear distinction between murder and manslaughter (*i.e.*, the unintentional act of taking innocent life)—the former can be atoned only by executing the murderer, Ex. 21:12, 14; the latter was afforded the right to asylum in a sanctuary or free city (*i.e.*, city of refuge), Ex. 21:13; Num. 35:12. The LXX uses the word (φονεύω) to describe both wilful and unintentional killing. The intention of this command is to prohibit all wilful killing or taking of innocent life, as appears from Jesus’ antithesis in the Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5:21 (Οὐ φονεύσεις). With this intent, the same word is thus translated once “murder,” Matt. 19:18.

Question 5—*Does this apply to all life or only the life of man?*

Answer—Although this command applies especially to human life, Deut. 5:17; yet, the life of lower sentient beings is not entirely overlooked, Prov. 12:10. It is clearly indicated in Scripture that man is for his good vested with authority over the lower animals, Ps. 8:6-8. This authority extends to the use of these animals for food, Gen. 9:2, 3; clothing, 2 Kings 1:8; 3:4; work, Gen. 45:17; and, for sacrificial worship, Gen. 8:20. Nonetheless, this is not an authority given for license but a limited use that does not extend to a right to treat them with wanton cruelty or to torture them for amusement, Deut. 22:6, 7; 25:4; Gen. 33:13, 14. The Lord shows Himself concerned in the plight of the animals that men use, Jon. 4:11; Deut. 22:10; Ex. 23:5; 1 Cor. 9:9; even so far as to provide for them a sabbatical from their labors, Deut. 5:14.