

The Shorter Catechism

Question 39: What is the duty which God requireth of man?

Answer: The duty which God requireth of man, is obedience to his revealed will.

Question 40: What did God at first reveal to man for the rule of his obedience?

Answer: The rule which God at first revealed to man for his obedience, was the moral law.

Question 41: Wherein is the moral law summarily comprehended?

Answer: The moral law is summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments.

Question 42: What is the sum of the Ten Commandments?

Answer: The sum of the Ten Commandments is, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind; and our neighbour as ourselves.

Q&A 3 tells us that “the Scriptures principally teach what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.” Up to this point the catechism has dealt with belief; now it turns to duty.

1. The law, Adam and the Fall

Since “duty” and “obedience” so obviously belong together, the accent in Q&A 39 falls on the “the revealed will of God”. (a) It is the will of God that defines our duty; and (b) God has revealed his will. Men are, therefore, duty bound to obey, and without excuse (“we did not know!”) if they disobey.

It has been so from the beginning: “The rule which God *at first* revealed...” In Eden God made his will known to Adam: (a) his responsibility to exercise dominion (Gen. 1:28); (b) the prohibition on the tree of knowledge (Gen. 2:16-17); and (c) writing his law on his heart (Rom. 2:15). The catechism calls this the “moral law” to distinguish it from the “civil law” and the “ceremonial law” which (in addition to the Ten Commandments) God gave to Israel at Sinai.

The Fall did not annul the moral law. Convicts behind bars are bound by the laws of the land no less than law-abiding citizens. “God’s norm for good behaviour was not annulled by sin any more than normative statements about good health are annulled by sickness” (Chad Van Dixhoorn, *Confessing the Faith*, p. 241).

2. One, ten, two (and three)

The moral law is universal (one). It binds all people everywhere irrespective of ethnicity, age, class, education or historical era (Rom. 2:14-15).

However, such is the damage done by sin, the knowledge of the moral law is eclipsed by sin in the minds and hearts of people. Unrighteous people suppress the knowledge of the truth by their unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18).

God therefore republished the moral law “in black and white” at Sinai. God had separated one family from all the families of the earth, and he gave them the Ten Commandments as a summary of the moral law. This summary of the moral law did not save Israel – it did not change individual Israelites from sinners into righteous persons; it did not make Israel a holy nation. But it did mean that Israel knew the revealed will of God in a way that no other nation knew it.

The Ten Commandments are further summarised by the two great commandments: to love God with all your heart, soul and strength (Deut. 6:4-5); and to love your neighbour as yourself (Lev. 19:18): see Matt. 22:37-40.

The law given to Israel included not only the moral law, but also civil and ceremonial law. The ceremonial laws prefigured Christ and all he has done for our salvation, and “are now abrogated, under the new testament” (WCoF 19.3). The civil law applied to Israel “as a body politic”; it comprised “sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require” (WCoF 19.4). But “the moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. Neither doth Christ, in the gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation” (WCoF 19.5).

3. Three uses of the law

Christians are not “under the law” (Rom. 6:14), i.e. we do not relate to the law as something that can justify or condemn us – our relationship with both righteousness and sin has been transformed by our relationship with Christ. What use, then, is the moral law, especially as it is summarised by the Ten Commandments? The Reformed churches have generally identified three uses.

(a) The law teaches us how we should live

The fact that Christ pointed to the two great commandments (Matt. 22:37-40) alerts us to the continuing authority of the moral law. Paul taught a Gentile congregation that what “counts for anything” is “keeping the commandments of God” (1 Cor. 7:19). God’s commands are “holy and righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12) and that we delight in and serve it (Rom. 7:22,25). People who walk in step with the Spirit will fulfil the law (Gal. 5:14-23).

(b) The law drives us to Christ

As soon as we try and walk in the ways of God (the moral law) we find sin at work in us (Rom. 7:7-23). The law promotes conviction of sin, and so drives us to find forgiveness, fulfilment and freedom in Christ (Rom. 7:24-8:4).

(c) The law acts as a brake on sin

It is no small thing that the law forbids sin – and knowledge of this does restrain us from sinning. Even unbelievers do not welcome a bad conscience (Rom. 2:15), and the fear of punishment is a deterrent. This is one of the ways in which common grace prevents society from being as corrupt as it might otherwise be.

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Question 43: What is the preface to the Ten Commandments?

Answer: The preface to the Ten Commandments is in these words, *I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*

Question 44: What doth the preface to the Ten Commandments teach us?

Answer: The preface to the Ten Commandments teacheth us, that because God is the Lord, and our God, and Redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all his commandments.

1. A few preliminaries

(a) The introduction to the preface to the Ten Commandments

Before we come to “the preface”, look at “the introduction to the preface” – “And God spoke all these words, saying...” This is very solemn! Throughout the OT God speaks to Israel through prophets; but here he speaks directly. See Ex. 20:18-21 for the reaction of the people.

(b) The preface to the Ten Commandments

Calling Ex. 20:2 “the preface to the Ten Commandments” is unfortunate because nowadays few people read the preface to anything. But this preface is tremendously significant: it sets out the reasons why we are obligated to obey the voice of God speaking in the Ten Commandments. “The first words of the LORD to Israel are indispensably prior to all that is to follow...the centre and focus of the whole Pentateuch and the very heart of the whole Old Testament.”

(c) The shape of the Ten Commandments

Preface: our relationship with the LORD based on his work of redemption.

Commandments 1-4: How we worship God in our relationship with the LORD

1. The object of true worship: the LORD
2. The manner of true worship: the way to approach the LORD
3. The attitude of true worship: reverence for the LORD in everything
4. The time of true worship: the LORD commands rhythm of life

Commandments 5-10: How we worship God in our relationship with one another

5. The sanctity of authority
6. The sanctity of life
7. The sanctity of marriage
8. The sanctity of property
9. The sanctity of speech
10. The sanctity of the heart

2. We are under obligation because the LORD is God

“And God spoke all these words, saying, ‘I am the LORD...’” (Ex. 20:1-2).

The name “the LORD” is related to the verb “I AM” (Ex. 3:14). So the name of God says to his people, “I AM present with you to keep my promise, to liberate and to bless.” Everything God did for his people was bound up in his name. His name, the LORD, is used more than 6,000 times in the Old Testament. In a sense, the Old Testament is an exposition of what his name means.

“I am the LORD” is “above all a confession of authority, the authority of the real and effective Presence of Yahweh who rescues, sustains, calls, and on the basis of all that, expects a positive response from humankind. As such, the formula is a basic element in the theological rhetoric connected with the special name ‘Yahweh’, which is a confession in and of itself” (JI Durham, WBC, *Exodus*, p. 76).

The declaration “I am the LORD” is often found in assertions about God’s actions which he performs “so that you may know that I am the LORD”. So both Israel and Egypt came to know that the LORD is God through the 10 great signs and the Red Sea crossing (Ex. 6:7; 7:5; 12:12; 14:4).

3. We are under obligation because the LORD is our God

“And God spoke all these words, saying, ‘I am the LORD your God...’”

The phrase “your God” can only be possible because God has given himself to his people. For God to say, “I am your God,” is to speak grace.

The other side of this coin is “you are my people” – hence the obligation. God has acted like a great king, who acts with power to deliver a people over whom he will reign. The King brings those people into relationship with him, and become obligated to him.

This is what we call “covenant”. The phrase “I will be your God and you shall be my people” is the “covenantal correlative” because it expresses the covenant relationship between the LORD and his people.

4. We are under obligation because the LORD is our Redeemer

“And God spoke all these words, saying, ‘I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery...’”

A major consequence of the covenant relationship is that God made those who were no people to be a people – slaves became a holy nation (Ex. 19:6). This obligation is not weaker under the NT dispensation – if anything it is stronger: “You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:19-20)

The order of Exodus events is important. First God redeems Israel (Ex. 20:2); then he gives Israel the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:3-17). The Law is given to redeemed people – this implies that the Law was not given as a means of salvation; rather, it was given to direct how saved people serve and worship God.

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Question 45: Which is the first commandment?

Answer: The first commandment is, *Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*

Question 46: What is required in the first commandment?

Answer: The first commandment requireth us to know and acknowledge God to be the only true God, and our God; and to worship and glorify him accordingly.

Question 47: What is forbidden in the first commandment?

Answer: The first commandment forbiddeth the denying, or not worshipping and glorifying, the true God as God, and our God; and the giving of that worship and glory to any other, which is due to him alone.

Question 48: What are we specially taught by these words, *before me*, in the first commandment?

Answer: These words, *before me*, in the first commandment teach us, that God, who seeth all things, taketh notice of, and is much displeased with, the sin of having any other God.

The first commandment is about who we worship. We are to worship the LORD and we are to worship the LORD alone.

1. The first commandment requires us to know God

This immediately raises the issue of the identity of God.

The God who speaks the commandments from Sinai is the LORD. Previous to the publication of the law at Sinai, the LORD had revealed himself to Moses as “I AM”, and he had demonstrated that he alone is God by means of the ten great signs performed in the land of Egypt. But before this, the LORD had revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – calling and covenanting with them. But before that, the LORD had delivered Noah and his sons from the Flood. But before that the LORD had created the heavens and the earth and walked with Adam in Eden in the cool of the day.

In other words, the God we are to know is not a generic “god”. He is absolutely not the god worshipped by Muslims and Hindus. The God we are commanded to know is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. So Paul wrote, “Although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth...yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor. 8:5-6).

True knowledge of God is possible because the incarnate Son of God makes him known. Jesus said, “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent...I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world” (John 17:3,6). See also John 1:17-18 and Heb. 1:1-3.

2. The first commandment requires us to acknowledge God

The catechism distinguishes between knowing and acknowledging the LORD. This moves us from mere intellectual knowledge to affective knowledge, i.e. we allow the knowledge of the true and living God to penetrate our lives so that “who God is” becomes the foundation for “who we are”. We say with Psalm 48:14, “This is God, our God forever and ever. He will guide us forever.”

Acknowledgment implies confession. And we are confessionally Trinitarian:

- “For us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Cor. 8:6).
- “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses” (Rom. 10:9-10).
- “No one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says ‘Jesus is accursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3).

3. The first commandment requires us to worship and glorify God

The confession/acknowledgement of the one true and living God can never be privatized (no matter how much secular society would want this!).

Jesus Christ is Lord of all (Eph. 1:20-23), and his lordship must be acknowledged in every area of life, public as well as private. This is what it means “to worship and glorify God”. In Israel, the first commandment was not just about the temple ritual – it was also about the rhythm of weekly life, and the agricultural year, and the education of children, and the protection of life, and the sanctity of marriage, and the exercise of justice at the city gate, etc., etc.

We are to worship God in everything we do: “So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31).

This exposes the fallacy of “secular neutrality”. The secularists claim that they want to create in the public square a “level playing field” devoid of all forms of discrimination. Secularists do not acknowledge the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And so they want to remove all refer to him and to his revealed will from schools, hospitals, hotels and government departments. They say that this is only “fair” because they do not want any reference to other “gods” (e.g. Hindu, Muslim) in these places. But that means that they are making two truth claims.

- (a) they are claiming that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is nothing more and nothing less than the “gods” of Hinduism, Islam, etc.;
- (b) and they are claiming that such a “god” is irrelevant to public life.

Neither of these claims is neutral (or true). The secularists don’t want a level playing field – they want a field inclined to their advantage. But in obedience to the first commandment, Christians cannot exclude their confession that Jesus Christ is Lord from their public and profession life (c.f. the Ashers case).

4. The first commandment requires us to know God exclusively

The wording of the commandment (literally, “There is not to be for you [singular] other gods before my Face”) emphasises that:

(a) Israel is not to know even one other god

The lure of other “gods” surrounded Israel. In Deuteronomy Moses admonished Israel 17 times not to follow them (e.g. Deut. 6:14), nor to serve them (e.g. Deut. 13:7-9) nor to take their names upon their lips, i.e. to swear by them (e.g. Deut. 18:20). Instead Israel was to destroy the altars and pillars of the “gods”, utterly blotting out their memory from the land (e.g. Deut. 12:2-3).

The lure of other “gods” remains. It is fashionable to treat all “faiths” as equally valid (or, indeed, equally invalid!).

The Church has a first order duty to see to it that she worships the Triune God of Scripture:

- exclusively – the Triune God is to be worshipped alone;
- explicitly – there must be no doubt that the God we worship is the Triune God;
- extensively – every member of the Church must worship the Triune God.

There is no room for any form of syncretism, e.g. interfaith worship with Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Jehovah’s Witnesses or Mormons. Freemasonry is also forbidden.

But (unlike ancient Israel) the Church is not to destroy the places in which false religion is conducted – instead we want to see them “plundered” of their worshippers. Our warfare is “not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). Consequently our weapons are also spiritual, i.e. the Word of God and prayer.

(b) Every single member of the community is specifically obligated

The importance of the obedience of every member of the community is underlined in the commandment that apostate individuals and towns are to be destroyed out of Israel (e.g. Deuteronomy 13). The defection of individual members of the community threatened the whole nation (c.f. Achan and the “ban” on Jericho, Joshua 7). In fact, the tolerance of the worship of other “gods” led to the downfall of the nation.

“The first of the commandments, in sum, is the essential foundation for the building of the covenant community. Yahweh had opened himself up to a special relationship with Israel, but that relationship could develop only if Israel committed themselves to Yahweh alone. Yahweh had rescued them and freed them, delivered them and guided them, then come to them. The next step, if there was to be a next step, belonged to them. If they were to remain in his Presence, they were not to have other gods” (Durham, WBC, *Exodus*, p. 285).

The mention of Balaam in Rev. 2:14, and Jezebel in Rev. 2:20 is significant: both Balaam and Jezebel encouraged Israel to worship of Baal. Notice that in both cases it is the risen Lord Jesus who says, “I will come...and war against them with the sword of my mouth” (Rev. 2:16), “I will throw her into a sickbed...and I will strike her children dead” (Rev. 2:22-23).

The Church does not use physical force to maintain the purity of the worshipping community. Instead, we use prayer and the Word of God (2 Cor. 10:3-6). We use the disciplinary measures of rebuke and excommunication (Matt. 18:15-17) with a view to the recovery of those who have wandered from the truth (1 Cor. 5:3-5).

(c) *This requirement is valid everywhere*

The phrase “before Me” is literally “before my Face”, i.e. “before my Presence”.

There is no place from which the LORD’s Presence is excluded. Therefore this commandment is permanently and universally valid.

The catechism understands God’s “Presence” as a reference to God’s all-seeing omniscience (“God, who seeth all things, taketh notice of, and is much displeased with, the sin of having any other God”).

But it perhaps better to understand it as a reminder of God’s advent at Sinai. It reminds us that God brought Israel to himself at Sinai and there gave himself to his people. The tabernacle was a means by which “Sinai” (God’s Presence) continued to be with Israel (see Ps. 68:17). Israel must not, therefore, carry other “gods” into God’s presence, either by setting up their altars in his House or by carrying them in their hearts.

God has been so very gracious to give us his presence through the incarnation and at Pentecost – how could we possibly dare to bring other “gods” (including a deliberately defective knowledge of God) into his Presence?

The catechism is absolutely spot on when it says that God “is much displeased with, the sin of having any other God.” Breach of the first commandment arouses God’s jealousy (Ex 34:14; Deut. 6:15) which burns like a fire.

The Shorter Catechism

Question 49: Which is the second commandment?

Answer: The second commandment is, *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.*

Question 50: What is required in the second commandment?

Answer: The second commandment requireth the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath appointed in his Word.

Question 51: What is forbidden in the second commandment?

Answer: The second commandment forbiddeth the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in his Word.

Question 52: What are the reasons annexed to the second commandment?

Answer: The reasons annexed to the second commandment are, God's sovereignty over us, his propriety in us, and the zeal he hath to his own worship.

“The worship required in the first commandment hath a respect unto the object of worship, whereby we are bound to worship the true God, and none else; the worship required in the second commandment hath a respect unto the means of worship, whereby we are bound to worship God according to the way and means of his own appointment, and no other” (Thomas Vincent, *The Shorter Catechism Explained from Scripture*, p. 121).

1. The Regulative Principle

The Reformed interpretation of the second commandment has to be understood in terms of the Regulative Principle, i.e. the view that God is to be worshipped only as God himself has commanded that he be worshipped.

The Reformed view

- True worship is only what God has commanded in the Bible.
- False (forbidden) worship is whatever God has not commanded.

The Non-Reformed view

- True worship is what God has commanded in the Bible PLUS things about which Scripture is silent (i.e. neither commanded nor forbidden).
- False (forbidden) worship is only what is expressly forbidden in Scripture.

The Regulative Principle is expressed in the positive (what is required) and negative (what is forbidden) questions and answers: “The second commandment *requireth*...all such religious worship and ordinances *as God hath appointed in his Word*.” “The second commandment *forbiddeth* the worshipping of God...*any...way not appointed in his Word*.”

(a) *Preceptive evidence for the Regulative Principle*

- The LORD is “jealous” for the purity of his worship.
- God gave detailed instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle (Exodus 25-28). The detail mattered: “Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it” (Ex. 25:9).
- The same was the case in the construction of the Temple – it was God-directed: “All this he made clear to me in writing from the hand of the LORD, all the work to be done according to the plan” (1 Chron. 28:19).
- Israel was forbidden to add to the worship practices commanded by God. “Everything that I command you, you shall be careful to do. You shall not add to it or take from it” (Deut. 12:28-32).
- Paul critiqued “human precepts and teachings” as “self-imposed religion” and “of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh” (Col. 2:20-23).

(b) *Narrative evidence for the Regulative Principle*

- Nadab and Abihu offered “unauthorized fire” during their consecration week, and were consumed (Lev. 10:1-3). The censers and the incense were both as per the instruction of God, and the act of worship performed by the two men had not been explicitly forbidden. But what is not commanded is nevertheless forbidden.
- When David ignored the command of God regarding the transportation of the ark of the covenant, the result was the death of Uzzah (1 Chron. 13:9-14; 15:11-15).
- The Pharisees introduced ceremonial traditions which they substituted for the commandments of God, and they came under the condemnation of Jesus: “In vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men” (Mark 7:7-13).

2. What has God appointed for his worship?

There are express commands in Scripture concerning the following elements of corporate worship:

- Prayer (1 Tim. 2:1-4)
- Reading of Scripture (Neh. 8:1-8; 1 Tim. 4:13)
- Preaching and hearing of the Word (Matt. 28:19-20; 2 Tim 4:1-2)
- Singing of Psalms (Eph. 5:19-20; Col. 3:16)

- The sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper (Matt. 28:19; 1 Cor. 11:23-26)
- Giving of offerings (1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 8-9).

We are not at liberty to neglect any of these elements of worship.

"Nevertheless, we acknowledge...that there are some circumstances concerning the worship of God...common to human actions and societies, which are to be ordered by the light of nature, and Christian prudence, according to the general rules of the Word, which are always to be observed" (WCoF 1:6). For example:

- we may not choose to sing an uninspired hymn, but we are at liberty to sing as many Psalms as are appropriate in a service of worship;
- we may not neglect the preaching of the Word, but the length of the sermon may be determined by the needs of the congregation.

3. What is implicitly or explicitly forbidden in worship?

Answer 109 of the Westminster Larger Catechism says that "the sins forbidden in the second commandment are all devising, counselling, commanding, using, and anywise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself." It proceeds to spell this out in terms of the following:

- (i) the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever;
- (ii) all worshipping of it [i.e. the representation of God], or God in it or by worship of them, or service belonging to them;
- (iii) all superstitious devices, corrupting the worship of God, adding to it, or taking from it, whether invented and taken up of ourselves, or received by tradition from others, though under the title of antiquity, custom, sacrilege;
- (iv) all neglect, contempt, hindering, and opposing the worship and ordinances which God hath appointed."

(i) and (ii) are against all forms of iconography (paintings, stained glass pictures, etc.) depicting God, and especially the Lord Jesus Christ. Likewise, statues and icons of the Virgin Mary and saints are forbidden.

(iii) is against traditions such as the Roman Catholic Church's corruption of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper, and its addition of five other extra-biblical sacraments. It also against:

- the rejection of exclusive singing of Psalms in favour of uninspired hymns;
- the introduction of musical accompaniment to worship;
- the religious observance of Christmas, Lent, Easter, Pentecost, etc.;
- the use of special vestments by ministers of the Word.

(iv) recognizes that while men may try to construct false forms of worship (dealt with in (i) to (iii)), men may also try to destruct true worship. This too is forbidden by the second commandment. (iv) proscribes a “sliding scale” of negative attitudes towards Biblical worship, beginning with a lackadaisical take-it-or-leave-it approach, through to outright opposition.

4. Why does this matter?

It matters because “the LORD is a jealous God.” He is passionate about his own worship because he is worthy to receive “blessing and honour and glory and might forever and ever!” (Rev. 5:13).

According to the second commandment, to neglect true worship is a mark of hatred towards God, while observing Biblical worship is a mark of love for God.

It must be observed, however, that cold adherence to Biblical forms of worship without a living relationship with God through Jesus Christ is abhorrent.

“Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:28-29).

5. What effect does this have on our children?

God visits “the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate [him],” and he shows “mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep [his] commandments.”

God is not unjust. He does not punish children for the sins of their fathers. But when the fathers neglect the true worship of God, this has an influence on the spiritual development of their children. Children need to see that their parents love the Lord their God with all their heart, and all their soul and all their strength. When word and deed, hand and heart, are in agreement, children are encouraged to put their trust in the God of their parents.

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Question 53: Which is the third commandment?

Answer: The third commandment is, *Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain: for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*

Question 54: What is required in the third commandment?

Answer: The third commandment requireth the holy and reverent use of God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, Word, and works.

Question 55: What is forbidden in the third commandment?

Answer: The third commandment forbiddeth all profaning or abusing of anything whereby God maketh himself known.

Question 56: What is the reason annexed to the third commandment?

Answer: The reason annexed to the third commandment is, that however the breakers of this commandment may escape punishment from men, yet the Lord our God will not suffer them to escape his righteous judgment.

"The first commandment hath a respect unto the object of God's worship; the second commandment hath a respect unto the means of worship; but this third commandment hath a respect unto the manner of worship, requiring that it be performed with humility and holy fear, with sincerity, fervency, and all kind of holy affections" (Th. Vincent, *The Shorter Catechism Explained from Scripture*, p. 133).

1. God's "name" is who he is

In the Old Testament "name" and nature are often correlated. Adam named the animals (Gen. 2:19-20); this implies (a) that he discerned their nature, and (b) that he asserted his dominion over them.

God names himself (Ex. 3:13-15), i.e. he is in and of and for himself; no one exercises dominion of any kind over Yahweh. God's name is wonderful, beyond human understanding (Judges 13:18). When God reveals his name, he reveals himself, and this brings salvation to his people (cf. John 17: 3,6 with Ex. 3:13-15).

The name Yahweh is occurs 6,828 times in the Old Testament. (To put this in perspective: the name "Israel" is used about 2,200 times, "Jacob" about 350 times, "Abraham" 175 times, Moses 770 times, and "David" about 1,000 times. If name frequency is important, then the Old Testament is the story of Yahweh and Israel; other "parts" in the story are played by a "supporting cast".)

The name Yahweh appears to be formed from the Hebrew verb "to be" and is related to God's statement "I AM" – Yahweh is the self-existent, self-determining God. More than that, he is the God who is present with his people – present to save. More than that, he has covenanted to be present with his people – present

to bless by fulfilling the promises he had made when he covenanted with Abraham (Ex. 2:24; 3:16-17).

The Bible is an exposition of the name of God. The meaning of “Yahweh” is revealed through his acts and his words.

The name Yahweh is used of the Father (Ps. 2:7, c.f. Mark 1:11 and Heb. 1:5), the Son (Joel 2:32, c.f. Rom. 10:9-13; also Isa. 6:5, c.f. John 12:41) and the Holy Spirit (Ps. 95:7-11, c.f. Heb. 3:7-9).

The name “Yahweh of hosts” (the LORD of hosts) was used during Israel’s monarchical period and designates the Lord as the true King. Who are the hosts?

- (a) *All creation* This is not favoured as it is supported by only Gen 2:1.
- (b) *The starry host* The host of heaven is always referred to as a singular, never as *hosts* (plural), and never as “the host of Yahweh.”
- (c) *The human armies of Israel* There is some merit in this view. Israel’s army is called *hosts*, and God is even called “the God of the armies of Israel.”
- (d) *The angelic hosts* This is the oldest and best supported option. There are many passages referring to angelic hosts (1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; Isa. 6:2-3; 37:16; Ps. 89:5-8; 103:19-21).

“Yahweh of hosts” seems to be God’s “royal name,” designating him the almighty King over history and redemption (Isa. 6:5; 24:23; Jer. 46:18; 48:15; 51:57).

2. God’s titles

(a) God (El)

“El” derives from the verb “to be strong”. It is used 217 in the Old Testament for the true God and denotes the power or might of God.

(b) God (Eloah)

“Eloah” derives from the verb “to fear or reverence”; hence it means “revered one.” It occurs 57 times in the Old Testament, of which 42 occurrences are in Job.

(c) God (Elohim)

Elohim is used 2570 times in the Old Testament as a title of God. The “im” ending shows that it is plural – but when used of Yahweh it always appears with singular verbs (on the few occasions when it is used of the “gods” it is the subject of plural verbs). The “plural” nature of Elohim as used of Yahweh is the *plurality of majesty*. Thus Elohim means something like “mighty or majestic one”.

(d) God Most High (El Elyon)

Elyon derives from the verb “to ascend, to mount up”. The name is translated superlatively (*most high God*) because of its associations with: (i) El; (ii) “Owner of

heaven and earth” (Gen. 14:19, 22); (iii) Yahweh in Ps. 7:18 and 47:3, and (iv) Elohim in Ps. 57:3 and 78:56.

(e) Lord, Master (Adonay)

Adon means “master” and “adoni” means “my master” and is often used as a term of reverence by one human of another. The special plural form with first person singular suffix “Adonay” (“my Lord”) always refers to God; it is translated “Lord”. Ps. 110:1 is literally “The declaration of Yahweh [the LORD] to Adonay [my Lord]...”

(f) God Almighty (El Shaddai)

The proper interpretation of the name “Shaddai” is disputed. The rabbis understood it to connote “the one who is sufficient”, and the LXX translated it *pantokrator*, i.e. “all powerful”, hence Almighty. Another possibility is that it is related to the verb “to breast-feed” – hence “the one who nourishes” or “the one who provides”.

The title El Shaddai is particularly associated with the Patriarchal period (Gen. 17:1-8; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3, 25; Ex. 6:3). Thus God is revealed as the one who is able to succour his people and provide for their every need.

(g) God (θεός, theos)

The Greek word “theos” means “God”. The LXX uses “theos” to translate El, Eloah and Elohim. It is the natural New Testament term for God. It is almost always used of God the Father, but it is used of God the Son nine times (John 1:1, 18; 20:28; Acts 20:28; Rom. 9:5; Tit. 2:13; Heb. 1:8; 2 Pet. 1:1; 1 John 5:20).

(h) Lord (κύριος, kurios)

The Greek word “kurios” means “lord” and is used a term of deference when a man of low rank addresses a man of high rank. The LXX uses “kurios” to translate Yahweh. Jesus claims to be the second “kurios” of Psalm 110:1 (see Matthew 22:41-46). The authors of the New Testament apply the title “kurios” to Christ, with special significance after his resurrection (Phil. 2:9-11). Thus the Christ is identified with the covenant LORD of the Old Testament.

3. The meaning of “taking the name of God”

The third command is about more than uttering God’s name. The verb translated “take” means “to lift up” or “to carry”. To “take up God’s name” includes:

- calling on him for salvation (Ps. 105:1; Joel 2:32);
- confessing him = fearing and serving him (Ps. 97:12; Mal. 3:16; 4:2 in context);
- swearing oaths in his name (Deut. 6:13; 10:20);
- speaking by his authority (Deut. 18:19);

- bearing his identity (Num. 6:27).

“Taking the name of God” is about requesting, expressing, experiencing or claiming relationship with God.

4. “Taking” the name of God in vain

The expression translated “in vain” = “to a thing of no substance”. This means:

- treating him lightly as though he were not “I AM”;
- transferring his reputation to other “gods” and treating *them* as though they were “I AM”.

This includes:

- calling down a curse in Yahweh’s name (Lev. 24:11);
- worshipping in a half-hearted manner (Mal. 1:6)
- swearing in Yahweh’s name, and then failing to fulfil the oath (Jer. 34:16);
- attributing Yahweh’s authority to something that is not Yahweh (Neh. 9:18);
- bearing the name of Yahweh but living a profane life (Ezek. 36:20).

The commandment is couched in language deliberately chosen to permit a wide range of applications. It prohibits a lack of seriousness about who God is, demonstrated through pointless, misleading, or even false use of his name.

5. Applications: “taking” the name of God in sincerity

Clearly God wants and expects us to use his name. His name (including all his names and titles) must be honoured, blessed, praised, celebrated, invoked, pronounced, and shared. Especially the name of Jesus is to be honoured by being used properly (Phil. 2:9-10).

- Calling on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ marks out Christians (1 Cor. 1:2);
- Baptism is performed (Matt. 28:19) and blessing is pronounced in the name of the triune God (2 Cor. 13:14).
- The Christian bears the name of Jesus Christ – so the Christian endeavours to live a life that is consistent with his profession (Rom. 14:4-8; Col. 3:17; 2 Thess. 1:11-12; 1 Tim. 6:1);
- It is an honour to suffer for the sake of the name of Jesus (Acts 5:41; 1 Pet. 4:14);

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Question 57: Which is the fourth commandment?

Answer: 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 manservant, nor thy maidservant, 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.*

Question 58: What is required in the fourth commandment?

Answer: The fourth commandment requireth the keeping holy to God such set times as he hath appointed in his Word; expressly one whole day in seven, to be a holy Sabbath to himself.

Question 59: Which day of the seven hath God appointed to be the weekly Sabbath?

Answer: From the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, God appointed the seventh day of the week to be the weekly Sabbath; and the first day of the week ever since, to continue to the end of the world, which is the Christian Sabbath.

Question 60: How is the Sabbath to be sanctified?

Answer: The Sabbath is to be sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days; and spending the whole time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy.

Question 61: What is forbidden in the fourth commandment?

Answer: The fourth commandment forbiddeth the omission, or careless performance, of the duties required, and the profaning the day by idleness, or doing that which is in itself sinful, or by unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, about our worldly employments or recreations.

Question 62: What are the reasons annexed to the fourth commandment?

Answer: The reasons annexed to the fourth commandment are, God's allowing us six days of the week for our own employments, his challenging a special propriety in the seventh, his own example, and his blessing the Sabbath day.

1. Why does the fourth commandment still speak with authority?

Our age is characterized by various attempts to obliterate all distinctions, e.g. sexual distinctions between male and female, and distinctions of order between old and young. We have a reflex dislike for the idea that there is one day each week which is distinct from the others. But:

(a) The Sabbath is a creation ordinance

We do not know whether or how the patriarchs, for example, observed the Sabbath. But we do know that God wove the Sabbath into the fabric of the week from the very beginning (Gen. 2:2-3).

(b) The Sabbath commandment is as valid as the other commandments

The Sabbath commandment was given by God at the same time as he gave the other nine commandments.

The Ten Commandments comprise the Moral Law as opposed to Israel's civil law or the ceremonial law. The civil law was for Israel as a nation, and the ceremonial law was fulfilled by the coming of the Christ; but the moral law is for all people everywhere in all ages.

We can no more dispense with the fourth commandment than we can dispense with first or the fifth commandments.

(c) The Sabbath commandment is nowhere abrogated by the New Testament

It is true that Jesus drew the attention of the Jewish leaders to the Christological nature of the commandment (Mark 2:23-28).

It is true that the Christian church very early on (and seemingly without any dispute) adopted the first day of the week for its Sabbath (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2), and designated it *the Lord's Day* (Rev. 1:10).

It is also true that Paul warned the churches about a slavish adherence to Jewish regulations concerning Sabbaths (Rom. 14:5; Gal. 4:10-11; Col. 2:16-17).

But the New Testament does not say anywhere that the divinely commanded week comprising six days of work and one day of rest has been abolished. Rather, the moral law remains valid (Matt. 5:17; Rom. 3:31).

2. Why is the Sabbath now observed on the first day of the week?

The Sabbath is now observed on the first day of the week because that is the day on which Jesus rose from the dead (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1).

There is a sense in which the crowning work of Christ was to put the old man to death on the sixth day of the week. He rested from the work of "de-creation" on the Sabbath, and rose again on the first day of the week to begin the work of re-creation. This work will be complete at his return, and then creation will enter into the perpetual "Sabbath rest which remains for the people of God" (Heb. 4:9).

3. Why are we to “remember” the Sabbath day?

The fourth commandment is the longest of the commandments. In Hebrew it opens with an emphatic imperative (none of the other nine commandments opens this way). Thus the fourth commandment stands out as different.

The emphatic imperative conveys a sense of presence and permanence to the commandment – it is to be observed without lapse; kept as a present and continuing priority.

The reason attached to the commandment indicated that the actions of God are to shape the pattern of human life. In particular, human time is patterned on God’s great works of creation and redemption.

(a) Time is patterned on the work of creation (Ex. 20:11)

The word “Sabbath” is from the Hebrew verb “shabbath” which means “to cease”. A very literal translation of Genesis 2:3 is “And God blessed the seventh day and he sanctified it, for in it he ceased [“shabbath”] from all his work which God had created to do.”

Ex. 20:11 uses a different word – it uses the verb “nuach” (the verb from which we get the name “Noah”, which means “Rest”). So Ex. 20:11 says, “For six days Yahweh made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and he rested [the verb is “nuach”] in the seventh day; therefore Yahweh blessed the day of the Sabbath and he consecrated it.”

We remember the Sabbath by treating it the same way as God treated it – as a day set apart from the other days to rest from our weekly work. We also remember the Sabbath by treating the other six days of the week the way God treated them, by using them to do our work.

(b) Time is patterned on the work of redemption (Deut. 5:15)

The Sabbath commandment is repeated in Deut. 5:12-15. Verse 15 gives a different reason for the Sabbath: “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.”

“Keeping the sabbath...is a testimony of Israel’s election and deliverance...proclaiming not only their dependence upon Yahweh but also their independence of all other peoples and powers” (Durham, *WBC Exodus*, p. 290).

John Goldingay writes that the Sabbath is a sign that “the whole of time is not the same and does not belong to us in the same way.” He also says, “We are normally masters of our time, free to decide how to use it. ‘The Israelite is duty-bound, however, once every seven days to assert by word and deed that God is the master of time.’ Every seventh day Israelites renounce their autonomy and affirm God’s dominion over them.”

4. How do we remember the Sabbath day?

The Sabbath is about enjoying the presence of God. This is evident from the content of Exodus 25-31. First God gives Moses instructions about how the Tabernacle is to be constructed. This is all about where and how God is to be worshipped. And then at the end of chapter 31 God gives Israel time to worship him. The Sabbath was given to Israel so that the people could stop and reflect on the reality of the presence of the LORD among them.

(a) The Sabbath is about relationship with God

In Ex. 31:13 God says, “Above all you shall keep my Sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you.”

Notice that God calls the Sabbaths “*my* Sabbaths”. God has a special ownership of the Sabbath. But he gave it to Israel so that Israel could come and spend time in his presence. Hence the need for holiness.

In v. 16 God says, “Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant forever.” Covenant is about relationship (e.g. marriage is a covenant). So the Sabbath is a way in which we experience our relationship with God.

(b) The Sabbath is about rest from labour

No ordinary work is to be done on the Sabbath day. But rest from labour isn't an end in itself – it points forward to the Person who fulfils the day. Jesus said, “Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:28-29).

If the Sabbath is about rest, it's a rest that cannot really be found outside of the Lord Jesus:

- Jesus has taken the burden of the law off us, and given us rest through the promise of the gospel.
- Jesus has prepared for us eternal rest. Hebrews 4:9 tells us that “there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God.” The word used for “Sabbath rest” emphasises the aspect of festivity and joy expressed in the adoration and praise of God. This is what Jesus has redeemed us for.

(c) The Sabbath is about release from bondage

In Deut. 5:12-15 God says that he gave the Sabbath as a reminder that he had released Israel from servitude in Egypt. And because of that God requires employers and heads of households to follow his example and release employees and animals from their servitude on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is about release from burdens.

Jesus demonstrated this vividly. On the Sabbath day he was teaching in a synagogue, and there was a woman present who had for 18 years been bent over by a disabling spirit. And when Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, "Woman, you are *freed* from your disability." And he laid his hands on her and immediately she was made straight. When challenged by the synagogue rulers that this constituted work on the Sabbath day, he replied, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his donkey from the manger and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?" (Luke 13:15-16).

That is why do we object to shops opening on the Lord's Day – because businesses that open on the Lord's Day bind employees whom God has set at liberty. Non-essential work places on people a burden God did not intend them to bear. It places them under the yoke of men rather than under the yoke of Christ.

But there is another form of bondage on the Lord's Day which we need to watch out for – the bondage of human rules and regulations. Jesus was sharply critical of the religious leaders of his day who tied up "heavy burdens, hard to bear, and [laid] them on people's shoulders," while "they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger" (Matt. 23:4).

We must be careful that in our zeal for the Lord's Day we do not burden one another with manmade regulations.

5. How do we keep the Sabbath day holy?

The Sabbath laws in the Bible are actually quite sparse – don't gather manna on the Sabbath, don't kindle a fire, don't do any work. How was it to be applied to the full range of life? So the rabbis developed a system of 39 regulations to flesh out the meaning of the law – about what constituted work; how much you could write; how to keep food warm; what works of necessity and mercy were allowed (and which were forbidden); how far you could walk, what you could carry, and how far you could carry it.

The rabbis were confident that if a man kept their regulations, then he was also keeping the Sabbath holy. But their regulations concerned only external affairs. Alfred Edersheim says that "in all these wearisome details there is not a single trace of anything spiritual – not a word even to suggest higher thoughts of God's holy day and its observance."

It is important that we do not fall into the same trap.

Chad Van Dixhoorn has provided a helpful summary of the Westminster Assembly's teaching on Sabbath observance (*Confessing the Faith*, pp. 293-295).

We start by planning ahead. Make sure you use days 2-7 to do your work so that your mind can be at rest and able to focus on the Word of God when you come to worship.

Do the same thing with recreation. You need recreation. Make sure you get what you need during days 2-7 so that your natural need is not a distraction on the Lord's Day.

Settle your heart on the promises of God. God has promised that if we honour his day by resting on it, he will honour us by blessing our honest labour on the other six days (Ex. 16:23-30). Isa 58:13-14 says, "If you turn back your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight and the holy day of the LORD honourable; if you honour it, not going your own ways, or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly; then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride on the heights of the earth; I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

The day is also an opportunity for acts of mercy. Richard Alderson writes that in the first centuries of the Christian church, on the afternoon of the Lord's Day "some believers would take the opportunity to engage in works of mercy and necessity. With zealous benevolence they would visit absent church members and others to bring comfort and cheer to the disconsolate and gifts of food and other physical sustenance to the poor and needy – widows, orphans, the aged, the sick and housebound, prisoners and strangers. They knew that the Lord himself had sanctioned such acts of kindness even on the Jewish sabbath – and Christians were enjoying much greater freedom under the New Covenant."

Van Dixhoorn concludes:

A day with morning and evening worship, and fellowship and hospitality in between, tends to answer most Sabbath practice questions. Indeed we would do well to avoid being over-prescriptive in defining the structures and activities of that day...Let us be aware of our own needs and strengths and those of others, and then remember the maxim that our Lord left with the Pharisees: 'it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath' (Matt. 12:12).

If we remember the Sabbath day, worshipping our Lord and aiming to do good – if this is the longing of our hearts, with God's help, we cannot go far wrong. And if we do err, we can turn to the Lord of the Sabbath, who rose one Sunday morning so that sinners would find life and look forward to an eternal rest with him and all his people.

The Shorter Catechism

Question 63: Which is the fifth commandment?

Answer: The fifth commandment is, *Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.*

Question 64: What is required in the fifth commandment?

Answer: The fifth commandment requireth the preserving the honour, and performing the duties, belonging to everyone in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals.

Question 65: What is forbidden in the fifth commandment?

Answer: The fifth commandment forbiddeth the neglecting of, or doing anything against, the honour and duty which belongeth to everyone in their several places and relations.

Question 66: What is the reason annexed to the fifth commandment?

Answer: The reason annexed to the fifth commandment is, a promise of long life and prosperity (as far as it shall serve for God's glory and their own good) to all such as keep this commandment.

1. Why is this the fifth commandment?

It is important to notice that commandment five marks a transition in the Decalogue. If commandments one to four are about our vertical relationship (with God), then commandments five to ten are about our horizontal relationships (with one another). Commandments one to four are concerned in one way or another with honouring God; the fifth commandment follows naturally from this because it is concerned with honouring one's parents, who represent God to their children.

"With the fifth commandment, the second basic direction of the commandments as the fundamental principles of life in covenant with Yahweh is taken. The first four commandments set forth the principles guiding Israel's relationship to Yahweh; the last six commandments set forth the principles guiding Israel's relationship with the covenant community, and more broadly, with the human family" (J.I. Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Exodus, p. 290).

"Just as the relationship with Yahweh is the beginning of the covenant, so this relationship is the beginning of society, the inevitable point of departure for every human relationship...The fifth commandment is thus both as foundational to commandments six through ten as the first commandment is to commandments two through four, and also is the logical link from the relationship of Israel to Yahweh to the relationship of Israel to humankind" (Durham, p. 290).

"There is...no such thing as a concern for God that ignores our relationships with people. Think of the way the Decalogue is structured: responsibilities towards God – thoughts, words, deeds; responsibilities towards people – deeds, words, thoughts. It belongs together as one rounded, indivisible whole which cannot be

sundered... [O]ur attention to the outward and visible realities of the second section of the law reveals how seriously we take the spiritual realities of the first... [O]ur 'vertical' relationship to God and our 'horizontal' relationship to those around us must be in harmony" (Alec Motyer, *Bible Speaks Today*, Exodus, pp. 226-7).

The fourth and the fifth commandments are alike in a number of important ways:

- They are both positive commandments (the only two such).
- Commandment 4 looks back to Creation Week (in which God prepared Eden for humanity's abode) and Commandment 5 looks forward to the Conquest (when God would give the Promised Land to his 'new creation' humanity).
- Commandment 4 speaks of God blessing the Sabbath, and Commandment 5 promises the blessing of long life in the land God was giving to Israel.

2. Who is to be honoured and who is to honour?

(a) Relationships of honour within the family

The commandment speaks explicitly of children honouring their parents. The commandment speaks directly to the family unit.

Notice that not only father but also mother is to be honoured – mother is not to receive any less honour than father – reverence, love and support are hers by right, and she must not be denied them.

It is a mistake to think that the commandment is concerned with children who are in their minority, and then to ask "what application does the commandment have for adult children?" Rather, the commandment addresses adult children who have been trained in the art of parent-honouring through the years of their minority so that when they come of age they will know how they are to behave (a) towards their parents and (b) towards their own children.

(b) Relationships of honour outside the family

The catechism understands that the family is the basic unit of humanity, and that therefore the commandment must have application to all human relationships ("everyone in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals").

So not only are children to honour parents, but fathers are to raise their children in the fear of the Lord, not provoking them to anger (Eph. 6:4); and slaves (employees) are to obey their masters (employers), while masters (employers) are to treat their slaves (employees) with humanity (Eph. 6:5-9).

3. What does "honour" mean?

The Hebrew word translated "honour" means "to give weight to, to glorify, to esteem." The same word is used of honouring God (e.g. Prov. 3:9; Isa. 24:15).

(a) *Giving honour within the family*

If honouring is an attitude of mind, it must be expressed in action. The catechism speaks of “performing the duties” which belong to those who are to be honoured.

To honour father and mother means more than being subject to them, or being respectful of their wishes; it means acknowledging the importance which is theirs by right – esteeming and loving them simply because God has given them this priority. Leviticus 19:3 even uses the word “fear” of the esteem in which we are to hold our parents: “Every one of you shall revere [literally ‘fear’] his mother and his father.”

This honour includes the following:

- Children must listen to their parents’ instruction (Prov. 4:1; 5:1).
- Children must receive the discipline of their parents (Prov. 15:32; Heb. 12:9).
- Children must obey their parents, except when this would mean disobeying God (Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20).
- Children must care for their parents when they are old (Prov. 23:22; 1 Tim. 5:4,8).

(b) *Giving honour outside the family*

Thomas Vincent, in his explanation of the Shorter Catechism, outlines what Scripture teaches about relationships of honour outside of parents and children:

- servants to their masters and masters to their servants;
- people to their ministers and ministers to their people;
- subjects to their magistrates and magistrates to their subjects;
- the younger and inferior in gifts and graces to the aged and superior;
- the aged and superior in gifts and graces to the younger and inferior;
- equals to one another.

In effect, the fifth commandment concerns the stability and fruitfulness of a well-ordered society. It is hardly surprising that when the most fundamental relationships in the home break down, society begins to break down too.

4. What does the promise annexed to the commandment mean?

(a) *Positively*

The promise annexed to the commandment cannot simply be a promise of enduring healthy life – there are too many examples to the contrary of ungodly people who live long and prosperous lives, and of faithful, godly people who are cut off in their youth (see Psalm 73 for the grief this gave Asaph).

“Length of days” in the land of promise is not to be understood as a promise made to individuals, but to the community.

The land of promise was like a second Eden. While God’s people obeyed God’s rule (of which the fifth commandment stood as the centrepiece) they would enjoy possession of God’s land (Deut. 32:46-47) – but when they showed themselves irremediably disobedient, they would be ejected from the land (Deut. 20:17-20). This was in fact the case – rebellion resulted in captivity and exile.

So for Israel the promise annexed to the fifth commandment amounted to a promise of perpetual possession of Canaan subject to covenant faithfulness. In New Testament parlance we would call this the enjoyment of the kingdom of God.

This suggests that as Christians observe this commandment we may expect to experience more deeply the blessing of the rule of God in our lives, both individually and as a community.

(b) Negatively

Disrespect for parents was a serious offence, punishable by death (Ex. 21:15,17; Lev. 20:9; Deut. 21:18-21; 27:16). The individual who was persistently disrespectful towards his father and mother could expect his possession of the land to be cut short!

Likewise Paul says that “anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household...has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Tim. 5:8).

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Question 67: Which is the sixth commandment?

Answer: The sixth commandment is, *Thou shalt not kill.*

Question 68: What is required in the sixth commandment?

Answer: The sixth commandment requireth all lawful endeavours to preserve our own life, and the life of others.

Question 69: What is forbidden in the sixth commandment?

Answer: The sixth commandment forbiddeth the taking away of our own life, or the life of our neighbour unjustly, or whatsoever tendeth thereunto.

It's worth beginning by observing that the basis for commandments 5 to 9 can be traced back to the creation of mankind in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27):

- We honour our parents because they begot/bore us in their image, and this lineal propagation of "image" is traceable back to God's image (Gen. 5:1-3).
- We protect human life because humans are "image bearers" (Gen. 9:5-6).
- We protect marriage because it is as "male and female" – not apart but together – that we are "image bearers" (Gen. 1:27; 2:20-25).
- We protect property rights because this concerns the dominion aspect of bearing God's image (Gen. 1:27-28).
- We protect reputation because in this way we acknowledge that the people of whom we are speaking are "image bearers" (Jam. 3:9-10).

1. The Bible treats all bloodshed as serious

Death is an intruder into God's creation. The Bible therefore treats all bloodshed most seriously – animal on animal, man on animal, animal on man, and man on man. Whether blood is shed for food, for sacrifice, in war, by accident or with malice aforethought – bloodshed is polluting. (This casts an interesting light on Nimrod the *hunter*, Gen. 10:9 – is his soubriquet actually a bad name?)

The first bloodshed was the killing of animals to provide coverings for Adam and Eve after the Fall (Gen. 3:21). The second bloodshed was Abel's sacrifice of the firstborn of his flock (Gen. 4:4). The third and fourth sheddings of blood were the murders committed by Cain and Lamech – see especially Gen. 4:10-11. Blood is thus set in the context of sin and atonement.

The next mention of blood is post-Flood. Noah was forbidden to eat blood because the blood is the animal's "life" (Gen. 9:4). In the same context God forbids man-killing because this would be to despise the image of God: "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image" (Gen. 9:6).

The next mention of blood shedding is in the story of Joseph – even though the brothers did not kill Joseph, they expected his blood to be required at their hands (Gen. 37:22,26; 42:22).

Even the shedding of animal blood potentially polluted the Promised Land, and so it must be covered with earth (Lev. 17:13).

2. What does “kill” mean in the fourth commandment?

The word translated “kill” is the Hebrew word “ratzach”. It is important to know what this word means, not least because Exodus 20:13 is the first time it occurs in the Old Testament.

“Ratzach” is used 46 times in the OT – far less frequently than the two primary words for killing (“to kill, slay” about 160 times; “to cause to die” about 200 times). 27 occurrences of “ratzach” are in the Pentateuch; 8 in Joshua; 7 in the other historical narratives, Psalms and Wisdom literature; and 4 in the Prophets.

“Ratzach” always refers to the killing of people – it is never used of the killing of an animal. It can refer to capital punishment (“If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the evidence of witnesses,” Num. 35:30). It is never used of killing in war. In Isaiah 1:21 “ratzach” is the basis of the word translated “murderers”: “How the faithful city has become a whore, she who was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers.”

However, “ratzach” is broader than murder – it includes manslaughter.

Of the 27 occurrences in the Pentateuch, 20 are in Numbers 35 and concern the cities of refuge in which a “man slayer” could find refuge from the “avenger of blood” until it was determined whether his “man slaying” was murder or manslaughter. Five other occurrences in Deuteronomy and all 8 in Joshua (chapters 20 and 21) also concern the provision of the cities of refuge.

Thus the great majority of the uses of “ratzach” concern the law regarding “man slaying” but they do not necessarily distinguish between what we call “murder” and “manslaughter”.

“[Ratzach] is an act of killing, premeditated or not, related to vengeance or not, that violates the standard of living Yahweh expects of those who have given themselves to him” (J.I. Durham, *WBC*, Exodus, p. 293).

So, in addition to murder, “ratzach” includes:

- causing death by thoughtlessly dropping building materials (Num. 35:23);
- failing to build a parapet on a flat roof, with the result that someone falls off the roof and dies (Deut. 22:8);
- improper use of a tool which results in a fatal industrial accident (Deut. 19:5);
- keeping a dangerous animal which kills someone (Ex. 21:28-29);
- striking a pregnant woman so that she miscarries (Ex. 21:22-25).

Thus we find application to:

- *Health and safety legislation* There is Biblical warrant for the legal requirement to do all that is necessary for the safety of workers. It is an interesting fact that countries in which there is a gospel foundation are at the forefront of this sort of legal requirement.
- *The control of dangerous animals* The banning of the breeding of vicious dogs may be seen as a proper application of the sixth commandment.
- *Abortion* It is not necessary to stigmatize abortion as murder in order to regard it as contrary to Biblical ethics. It is by its nature a violation of the sixth commandment.
- *Unnecessary risk taking* Some sports are inherently dangerous – and yet they can be engaged in with proper training and practice. But stupid risk-taking (e.g. driving at excessive speeds; rock climbing without training, supervision or equipment; hill walking without any preparation) runs counter to the commandment.

Question: Is it right for Christians to be spectators of sports in which there is a high fatality rate, such as motorbike racing and boxing?

The catechism extends the commandment to “whatsoever tendeth” unto the taking away of life. The proof text (“Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, ‘Behold, we did not know this,’ does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work,” Prov. 24:11-12) suggests that the commandment forbids us from taking a *laissez faire* attitude towards the welfare of others

3. What are the positive applications of the commandment?

The catechism says, “The sixth commandment requireth all lawful endeavours to preserve our own life, and the life of others.”

The catechism uses Psalm 82:3-4 as a proof text for the positive application of the commandment: “Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked.”

This suggests (in addition to the *health and safety* matters noted above):

- the care that parents and guardians bestow on their children/charges (feeding, clothing, housing, educating, disciplining so that they will live and live well);
- a care for the welfare of the poor, the elderly, the vulnerable in our sphere of influence (this is a major theme in the prophetic writings which receives considerable emphasis in New Testament ethics);
- appropriate lobbying of political representatives on matters that concern the physical welfare of the vulnerable (e.g. health service funding; changes to abortion legislation; welfare reform).

The positive applications also include:

- the right of self-defence, especially the obligation to defend the lives of those under your care;
- the obligation of government to raise armed forces in defence of the nation.

4. What about Matthew 5:21-22?

No discussion of the sixth commandment could be complete without reference to the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:21-22: “You have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.’ But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, ‘You fool!’ will be liable to the hell of fire.”

Notice what sort of anger this concerns – it is anger that erupts in insults and invective. This is the anger of hatred towards another person – it is not the anger of the hatred of injustice or unrighteousness (which Jesus expressed, e.g. Mark 3:5; John 2:13-17).

But the anger of hatred of another person is directed against an image bearer. Such anger is contemptuous of the image of God. This is the root of murder, which is an attack on the bearer of God’s image (Gen. 9:6).

R.T. France comments, “Murder is only the outward manifestation of an inward attitude which itself is culpable, whether or not it actually issues in the act of murder. Angry thoughts and contemptuous words...deserve equal judgment. Jesus...[turns] attention also to the motives and attitudes which underlie the act, and which are not susceptible to judicial process” (*NICNT*, Matthew, p. 199).

The anger of hatred of another person has no place in the church (2 Cor. 12:20):

- it runs counter to the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:20; Jam. 1:20);
- it disrupts the prayers of the Christian community (1 Tim. 2:8);
- it must be rooted out of the life of the disciple (Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8).

The Shorter Catechism

Question 70: Which is the seventh commandment?

Answer: The seventh commandment is, *Thou shalt not commit adultery.*

Question 71: What is required in the seventh commandment?

Answer: The seventh commandment requireth the preservation of our own and our neighbour's chastity, in heart, speech, and behaviour.

Question 72: What is forbidden in the seventh commandment?

Answer: The seventh commandment forbiddeth all unchaste thoughts, words, and actions.

1. The Bible provides the normative account of marriage

The Biblical norm for marriage is the lifelong union of one man and one woman. God has invested much of himself in marriage (cf. Eph. 5:32), and the seventh commandment concerns God's honour as much as it concerns ours.

The Bible provides us with a vision of marriage as something good. In the Hebrew Bible the story of Ruth is set between Proverbs and the Song of Solomon. So anyone who reads the Hebrew Bible reads first the praise that Proverbs 31 accords to the good wife; then he reads Ruth, the story in which God's steadfast, covenant love is embodied by the commitment and faithfulness of Boaz and Ruth; and then he reads the Song of Songs and its celebration of the desire of the lover and the beloved for one another.

It is true that the Bible also records polygamous marriages, and that Biblical law includes legal provisions for cases of polygamy and divorce. But such statutes are an attempt to impose some order on sinful disorder, and they reflect the hardness of our hearts (Matt. 19:8) rather than the approval of God. God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16), and Biblical narratives demonstrate the harmful effects of polygamy (see Gen. 4:19-24 for the first instance of bigamy).

To understand marriage we need to go back to the origin of marriage in Genesis 1-2 (cf. Matt. 19:4-6). If we do so we find that marriage has three primary purposes: (a) for bearing the image of God; (b) for monogamous companionship; (c) for bearing children. It is usual to say that marriage is also for "preventing uncleanness" (WCF 24.2, cf. 2 Cor. 7:2,9). However, the first marriage was contracted in Eden before the Fall when "uncleanness" was not an issue; so this additional "use" is not essential to marriage, and marriage is no absolute safeguard (else, why would there be the seventh commandment?).

(a) Marriage is for bearing the image of God

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27).

We bear the image of the Triune God and the Triune God is fundamentally relational (sharing knowledge, love and communication). So it is fundamental to us as image-bearers that we also exist in relationships of knowledge, love and communication. No relationship is more expressive of this than marriage. “The declaration that humanity intrinsically comprises male and female directly follows on the affirmation that humanity reflects the image of God...Only when men and women are together do we have God imaged” (John Goldingay).

This does not mean that single people fall short as image-bearers. It is ultimately the whole redeemed human family that bears the divine image.

(b) Marriage is for companionship

“Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him’” (Gen. 2:18).

When the first woman is presented to the first man, the man’s excitement and wonder are unmistakable. In Gen. 2:23 the man says: “This time! Bone from my bones and flesh from my flesh! This one! She shall be called Woman, for from Man she was taken – this one!”

God created the woman to be “like the opposite” of the man. She was made like him, but also unlike him: she is his complement, not his duplicate; his companion, not his clone; she has strengths that supply his weaknesses; she has potential that only he is able to unlock. Both supply the wholeness that the other needs.

(c) Marriage is for having children

“God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth’” (Gen. 1:28).

God’s will is for children to be born into homes where mother and father love one another, because such homes are stable and provide ideal platforms for the children to grow into adults who are equipped to fulfil their calling in life. The “dominion” of which God speaks in Genesis 1:28 includes every legitimate cultural development (e.g. agricultural, art, craft, medicine, music, science, technology).

Mal. 2:15 makes explicit another aspect of “dominion” – God’s purpose in marriage is “godly offspring”. The image of God (knowledge, righteousness and holiness) in the parents is to be reproduced in the children.

2. The Bible provides the normative account of sexual relations

The Bible affirms that sexual union within marriage is one of the things “that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving” (1 Tim. 4:3-4).

It is intrinsic to the Biblical norm for marriage that we are sexual beings. That is how God created us; and our sexuality is expressed in the three purposes of marriage:

- sexual differentiation is built into our being (“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them,” Gen. 1:27);
- sexual union is a normal ingredient of psychological health (“Then the LORD God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’...Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh,” Gen. 2:18,24);
- sexual reproduction is necessary for our existence (“And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply...,’” Gen. 1:28).

We therefore protest against the misrepresentation of Biblical religion as sexually repressive and psychologically damaging. It is sexual expression outside of the Biblical norm that is psychologically damaging and enslaving. The practical outworking of this is to be seen everywhere in contemporary society.

3. Putting names on sexual sins

The seventh commandment deals overtly with adultery: the crime in which a man has sexual relations with the wife (or the fiancée) of another man. In the ANE adultery was called “the great sin”. A wife was the body of her husband (Gen. 2:23; Eph. 5:28): to have sexual relations with her was an assault on the person of her husband.

The Bible includes the following under adultery:

- sexual relations between a man and the wife of another man (Lev. 18:20; 20:10; Deut. 22:22);
- sexual relations between a man and the fiancée of another (Deut. 22:23-27);
- sexual relations between a married woman and another man (Ezek. 16:32);
- marriage to the guilty party in a divorce (Matt. 5:32);
- re-marriage of either party after an illegitimate divorce (Matt. 19:9).

Fornication occurs when a man has sexual relations with a woman who is neither married, engaged to be married or divorced. Biblical law does not treat this the way it treats adultery. A man who had sexual relations with an unmarried woman was required to marry her, and was forbidden to divorce her (Deut. 22:28-29).

Biblical law recognizes other forms of sexual sin: incest (Lev. 18:6-18); homosexuality (Lev. 18:22); and bestiality (Lev. 18:23). While not directly covered by the seventh commandment (also mentioned in Lev. 18:20), these are understood as being comprehended by it. They each threatened to pollute the Promised Land (Lev. 18:24-29).

Israel's sanctity as the people of God was also threatened by the cult prostitution which was prevalent among the pagan nations (Deut. 23:17).

4. Acknowledging the seriousness of adultery

The OT treats adultery as a breach of covenant (Mal. 2:14). It frequently uses adultery to convey the horror of idolatry (Isa. 57:1-13; Jer. 3:6-9; Ezek. 23:36-49). Its "attitude to adultery is fully understandable only in view of the fact that more than the integrity of marriage and the home and more than the integrity of personal honour were at stake in the covenantal setting of Yahweh's 'ten words.' The integrity of the Israelite's relationship with Yahweh himself was at stake. Everywhere in the ANE, Israel included, adultery was a crime against persons; but in Israel it was first of all and even more a crime against Yahweh...Most telling of all in this connection is the use of adultery as a description of Israel's obsession with idolatry...Adultery with the husband or the wife or the betrothed of another was, like idol worship, a turning away from commitment to Yahweh" (Durham, WBC, *Exodus*, p. 294).

The NT likewise regards adultery as very serious. The adulterer and the sexually immoral come under the judgement of God and will not inherit the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Eph. 5:5-6; Heb. 13:4; Rev. 21:8; 22:15). Sexual immorality and impurity attract the wrath of God (Eph. 5:5-6).

5. Recognizing the course of sexual sin

The catechism recognizes that the positive and negative applications of the commandment concern "heart, speech, and behaviour", "thoughts, words, and actions".

- "Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life...Let your eyes look directly forward, and your gaze be straight before you" (Prov. 4:23,25). It is necessary for us to guard our thoughts. Jesus warns us that the sin of adultery cannot be externalized, as though it was in the act only – adultery comes from the heart (Matt. 5:28; 15:19).

As with all sin, this requires the grace of God. Our responsibility is to use the means of grace (the Word and prayer), e.g. Ps. 119:9-16.

- "Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you" (Prov. 4:24). Eph. 5:4 forbids "filthiness...foolish talk...crude joking." Crude talk cheapens the gift of God and is associated with its abuse.
- "Ponder the path of your feet; then all your ways will be sure. Do not swerve to the right or to the left; turn your foot away from evil" (Prov. 4:26-27). Paul commanded Timothy to "flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart" (2 Tim. 2:22). Notice the balance of negative and positive action: flee what is wrong and pursue what is right.

Sometimes radical action is necessary (Matt. 5:29-30).

The Shorter Catechism

Question 73: Which is the eighth commandment?

Answer: The eighth commandment is, *Thou shalt not steal.*

Question 74: What is required in the eighth commandment?

Answer: The eighth commandment requireth the lawful procuring and furthering the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others.

Question 75: What is forbidden in the eighth commandment?

Answer: The eighth commandment forbiddeth whatsoever doth, or may, unjustly hinder our own, or our neighbour's, wealth or outward estate.

We have seen previously that the “second table” of the Decalogue presupposes that mankind was created in the image of God. Thus the eighth commandment requires us to protect property rights because this concerns the dominion aspect of bearing God's image (Gen. 1:27-28).

Durham (WBC, *Exodus*, p. 295) comments that “we need look no further than our own experience of life to know how disruptive of relationships stealing can be”. However, he proceeds to note that the main force of the commandment is not that breach of it imperils human relationships but that it imperils our relationship with the God who dwells among us.

1. The breadth of the commandment

The prohibition of theft is deliberately quite general.

“The command ‘simply transcends any conditions or circumstances’, whether it is a matter of carrying off goods or kidnapping people and whether the thing stolen is valuable or trivial. In a word, Scripture respects private property and demands integrity over the whole range of personal, economic and commercial relationships” (Motyer, BST, *Exodus*, p. 229).

The command against stealing is reinforced repeatedly in the New Testament: Matt. 19:18; Rom. 2:21; 13:9; 1 Cor. 6:10; Eph. 4:28; Titus 2:10; 1 Pet. 4:15.

2. The commandment implies the right to hold private property

It seems self-evident to us that we have a right to hold private property. But this “self-evident” truth is actually the result of living in a gospel-based culture which implicitly acknowledged that the right to private property is founded on the gift of God (Gen. 1:27-28).

While Canaan was ruled by pagan kings, the land was owned absolutely by the king of each city-state; and the right to private property was severely limited. But when God dispossessed the nations and gave the land to his people, he was the

sole Landowner, and the people were his tenants – with the result that each family enjoyed security of tenure of their inheritance (at least, that was the idea – see the Minor Prophets for denunciation of its breach). The revealed religion of the Bible introduced a radically different view of property.

This radically different view of property is illustrated by the story of Abram in Genesis 14-15. In this context notice that:

- God is called “Possessor of heaven and earth” (Gen. 14:19-24);
- (b) Abram rejects the offer of wealth from a human king;
- (c) Abram is given property by the divine King (Gen. 15:7).

Had Abram accepted property from the king of Sodom, his possession of the promised land would have been provisional – it would have been his only as a vassal of a human king. But because Abram waited and was given possession by “God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth”, his possession of the land was permanent and based on a covenanted relationship with Yahweh (Gen. 15:8-21).

So the right to private property is built into the revealed religion of the Bible – it is a gospel-based right.

Where the gospel is rejected, totalitarianism arises – and totalitarian regimes (e.g. the Canaanite kings of little city-states; Napoleonic France; Communist and post-communist Russia) reject the right to private property. Under totalitarianism property is only “possessed” by permission of the state, and the state can always take back what it gives out.

The fact that right of private property is widely acknowledged is a consequence of the wide influence of the gospel.

3. Private property must be obtained and used lawfully

“The eighth commandment requireth the lawful procuring and furthering the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others.”

Clearly the eighth commandment forbids gaining wealth by unlawful means, e.g.:

- usury (Ex. 22:25; Prov. 28:8);
- bribery (Ex. 23:8; Amos 5:12);
- fraud (Lev. 19:36; Prov. 11:1);
- oppression/extortion (Lev. 19:13; Jam. 5:1-6).

Amos 2:6-8; 4:13; 8:4-6 is particularly strong against extortion and exploitation. The unjust accumulation of wealth comes at a terrible human cost (including human trafficking = “man-stealing”) – and this suggests that if wealth is accumulated at human cost it is, by definition, unlawfully gained. God does not turn a blind eye to this (Revelation 18)!

The Bible does not talk directly about gambling (though it does mention the casting of lots, and it seems a fair inference that people did gamble). Nevertheless, gambling involves greed for what the Bible calls “unjust gain” (wealth accumulated by unlawful means) and that is strongly condemned by Scripture (Prov. 1:9; 15:27; Jer. 6:13).

Wealth may be obtained lawfully by work, inheritance or gift. Thomas Vincent (*The Shorter Catechism Explained*) enumerates several eight ways in which we can endeavour to procure and preserve our property. He says, in effect:

- Choose a lawful job for which you have the aptitude, and stick at it in dependence on the grace of God. Work at it diligently and laboriously – but be moderate in your labour!
- Be wise in your career development (e.g. broadening or deepening your skills).
- Be careful in the way you spend your earnings (don’t waste them on unnecessary and extravagant expenses) – but it’s proper “to provide such things of this world’s good things for ourselves, as are honest and decent, and useful for us.”
- Ask God to bless your work, and depend on him as you do your job.
- Be cheerful in your use of the good things which God gives – both as you use them for yourself and as you use them to help others who are in need.
- It is proper to use the courts (moderately!) to keep or recover what is lawfully yours.

4. We have a duty of care towards the property of other people

“The eighth commandment forbiddeth whatsoever doth, or may, unjustly hinder our own, or our neighbour’s, wealth or outward estate.”

There are several regulations in the Old Testament which concern our duty of care towards the property of others. E.g.:

- Exodus 22:1-15 teaches that:
 - a thief must make restitution for any property he steals (v. 1);
 - a man who damages the property of another man through neglect must make restitution for the damage (vv. 5-6);
 - the restitution which must be made when property which was entrusted by its owner to a third party is subsequently damaged, lost or stolen varies according to the circumstances of the damage, loss or theft (vv. 7-13);
 - the restitution which must be made when property which was borrowed by a third party from its owner is subsequently damaged or lost varies according to the circumstances of the damage or loss (vv. 14-15).

- Lost property is to be returned to its owner (Deut. 22:1-3).
- If a man finds his neighbour's animal fallen under a burden, he is to help the animal up (Deut. 22:4).
- Boundary stones which mark out property are not to be moved (Deut. 19:14).

This is sufficient to demonstrate that we have a duty of care towards our neighbour's property. We are not to damage it ourselves either deliberately or by neglect; nor are we to connive in damage done to it by others.

The Shorter Catechism

Question 76: Which is the ninth commandment?

Answer: The ninth commandment is, *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.*

Question 77: What is required in the ninth commandment?

Answer: The ninth commandment requireth the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man, and of our own and our neighbour's good name, especially in witness bearing.

Question 78: What is forbidden in the ninth commandment?

Answer: The ninth commandment forbiddeth whatsoever is prejudicial to truth, or injurious to our own, or our neighbour's, good name.

Remember that the basis for commandments 5 to 9 can be traced back to the creation of mankind in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27). The ninth commandment concerns the protection of reputation ("our own, or our neighbour's, good name"). We protect reputation because in this way we acknowledge that the people of whom we are speaking are "image bearers" (Jam. 3:9-10).

1. The standard of truth

"The standard of truth is God himself for he is called the 'God of truth' (Isa. 65:16), which can be literally rendered as 'the God of amen.' This attribute of truth is ascribed to him as the 'God of truth' in Psalm 146:6 and Jeremiah 10:10. Moreover, God's speech is 'trustworthy' (2 Sam. 7:28)" (Walter Kaiser, *Tough Questions about God*, p. 51).

Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

When Pontius Pilate asked, "What is truth?" he may have been expressing cynical scepticism about the possibility of true knowledge. True knowledge is not possible without knowledge of the God of truth.

The Hebrew concepts of (and words for) truth and faithfulness and reliability are related (and they are the source of our word "amen"). For example, the AV translates Exodus 34:6 "abundant in goodness and truth" while the ESV translates it "abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness". Paul writes in Titus 1:2 that God never lies – hence his promises are always reliable.

The truth-faithfulness-reliability of God the Creator is foundational to modern science. It is no coincidence that modern science developed in the deeply gospel-influenced nations of Europe.

God's truth-faithfulness-reliability is the reason he requires his image-bearers to speak the truth at all times and to all people. God says, "You are my witnesses" (Isa. 43:10; cf. Luke 24:48). The witnesses of the God of truth must not lie.

2. The father of lies

In John 8:39-47 Jesus says that our relationship with truth is a litmus test for our paternity! We are either “of the devil” (v. 44) or we are “of God” (v. 47). We cannot believe or hear the truth unless we are “of God” (vv. 43, 45-47).

Satan is the “father of lies” and when he lies he is speaking his native language; he stands apart from the truth because there is no truth in him (v. 44).

People who lie habitually lose the ability to perceive the truth. They get to the point where they believe that everyone else is lying to them. “He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, ‘Is there not a lie in my right hand?’” (Isaiah 44:20).

3. Lying is forbidden

The ninth commandment is a kind and gracious commandment – it puts clear blue water between God’s people and the world that lies “under the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19).

The ninth commandment says (literally), “You shall not answer against your neighbour [as] a witness of deception.” The last word might also be translated “lying” or “falsehood” or “fraud”.

The immediate application is in the law court. We are forbidden to bring false charges or false testimony against anyone. Remember that “neighbour” means “anyone with whom I have dealings”.

Deut. 19:16-21 calls a “witness of deception” a “witness of violence”, i.e. he bears false witness with a view to doing harm to his neighbour. The stricture against this was severe: “you shall do to [the false witness] as he had meant to do to his brother.”

The parallel in Deuteronomy 5:20 replaces the word “deception” with a word that means “nothingness, emptiness, worthlessness, something vain.” This broadens the application of the ninth commandment to include any evasive or worthless testimony.

Augustine defined a lie as “a voluntary speaking of an untruth with an intent to deceive.” There are three elements to this:

- speaking an untruth,
- ...that is known to be an untruth,
- ...with the intention of deceiving the hearer.

It is interesting that both the words “deception” (Ex. 20:16) and “worthless thing” (Deut. 5:20) are used in the Old Testament to refer to idols. Idolatry leads inevitably to lies – and the worship of the God of truth is the only sufficient foundation for truthful speech.

4. Justified lies?

It is hardly surprising then, that false thinking and false speaking go hand-in-hand.

We have seen before that the revealed religion of the Bible – the gospel – is the only grounds for virtuous living. Where the gospel has not been known, or where it has been known and then rejected, the Biblical revelation of man as the “image of God” is unknown. This is disastrous for the proper exercise of authority (5th commandment), sanctity of life (6th commandment), sexual ethics (7th commandment), property rights (8th commandment) and truth (9th commandment).

Endemic truthfulness in private and public life (or at least a nod in the direction of this as an ideal) is found only in gospel-based cultures.

Four examples of how false speaking follows false religion:

- The Jesuits were notorious for their use of “mental reservations”. Mental reservations enabled them to justify lying. Mental reservation and equivocation allow the speaker to employ double-speak, i.e. to employ words with more than one meaning so that they can simultaneously tell one truth and conceal another. The result is speech that is ambiguous, tangential, obscure and evasive.
- Hinduism is polytheistic. Polytheism is essentially polyvalent, i.e. there is no single, absolute system of values. The result is equivocal language – words do not have stable, reliable meanings. Unsurprisingly India is rife with corruption. (Western postmodernism entertains a similar approach to language without the polytheism. Power and not truth is the law of postmodernism.)
- The Koran teaches that Allah is supremely deceitful. Islam has no absolute foundation for truth. So Islamic scholars only teach that Muslims should be generally truthful to each other, and that lying is justified if its purpose is to smooth over differences. Meanwhile, lying to non-believers is permitted if it advances the cause of Islam, and in order to gain the trust of non-believers with a view to exposing their vulnerability and defeating them.
- Secularist have no absolute reason for embracing truth and abhorring lies. In fact secularists have repeated known falsehoods in school textbooks in an effort to promote evolutionary dogma – the ends justify the means. This is a warning to Christians – we should never knowingly use bad arguments against falsehood – lies will never defeat lies.

5. Living as well as speaking truth

The emphasis in the ninth commandment is on the heart of persons rather than on mere outward modes of speech (e.g. “you...your *neighbour*”; “witness of falsehood” rather than “false witness”). Truth is lived as well as said – we are to be faithful as well as truthful.

- **Negatively**, lying destroys people. “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (1 John 1:5-7).

Jeremiah describes graphically the very real, even violent and vindictive harm that is done by lying.

“They bend their tongue like a bow; falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land; for they proceed from evil to evil, and they do not know me, declares the LORD... Heaping oppression upon oppression, and deceit upon deceit, they refuse to know me, declares the LORD” (Jer. 9:3-6).

He was so distressed by the chaos caused by the torrent of lies in Jerusalem society that he wanted nothing more than to get away from the city. “Oh that I had in the desert a travellers’ lodging place, that I might leave my people and go away from them! For they are all adulterers, a company of treacherous men” (Jer. 9:1-2).

- **Positively**, truth in the heart is the result of a living connection with the God of truth: “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all...If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:5-7).

“When ‘truth’ was connected to ‘the word of God,’ Scripture taught that men and women were to ‘speak truth one to another’ (Zech. 8:16). This relation of truth to words, and especially to the word of God, was the primary focus of the word ‘truth’ in the Old Testament. But ‘truth’ could also be related to the *character* of persons, as in ‘persons of truth,’ i.e. persons characterized by integrity and reliability (Exod. 18:21; Deut. 1:13; Neh. 7:2). It was used also to characterize the behaviour of mortals, ‘to do the truth,’ or even to ‘walk in the truth’ (Ps. 86:11; cf. Ps. 25:5; 43:3), which depicted a whole person’s lifestyle and character of a person” (Walter Kaiser, *Tough Questions about God*, p. 51).

The Shorter Catechism

Question 79: Which is the tenth commandment?

Answer: The tenth commandment is, *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.*

Question 80: What is required in the tenth commandment?

Answer: The tenth commandment requireth full contentment with our own condition, with a right and charitable frame of spirit toward our neighbour, and all that is his.

Question 81: What is forbidden in the tenth commandment?

Answer: The tenth commandment forbiddeth all discontentment with our own estate, envying or grieving at the good of our neighbour, and all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his.

In a sense the tenth commandment brings us full circle. Just as the first commandment prohibits the worship of any god other than the LORD, so the tenth commandment prohibits the most subtle form of idolatry: worship of self.

1. What is covetousness?

The verb translated “covet” means “to desire, yearn for, lust after” someone or something, specifically for one’s own gratification.

The root of the word translated “covet” does not always point in a bad direction. When used to describe *things* it can carry positive overtones. So the first use of the word is to describe the desirability of the trees in the garden of Eden (“And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is *pleasant* to the sight and good for food,” Gen. 2:9). Also, the law and judgements of the LORD are “more *to be desired*...than gold, even much fine gold” (Ps. 19:10).

However, every time (with the exception of Sol. 2:3) the subject of the verb is human, its meaning is negative. The tone is set by the second use of the verb in the Bible. Genesis 3:6 says that when Eve saw “that the tree [of knowledge] was *to be desired* to make one wise” she took and ate its fruit. She conceived a covetous desire towards the fruit of the tree, and set in motion a train of events which resulted in the Fall.

So when the tenth commandment says, “You shall not covet”, it is speaking of “inordinate, ungoverned, selfish desire.”

2. Where is covetousness found?

Covetousness resides in the heart, just where God desires obedience, and where he alone is able to see. So although Paul’s life conformed *outwardly* to the law, the tenth commandment exposed the lawlessness *within* him: “I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet’” (Rom. 7:7).

GI Williamsons says that the tenth commandment “takes us down to the fountains of desire, and touches the most secret sources of unholy actions, words, and thoughts” (*The Westminster Shorter Catechism*, p. 272).

It “is the function of the final commandment to make explicit the internalizing of the whole law and the dire reality of sin in the heart” (Motyer, p. 230).

3. What will covetousness do?

An inward covetous disposition will lead to outward acts of sin.

Covetousness is the gateway to the violation of every other principle in the Ten Commandments. It is the embryonic stem cell of sin. Just as stem cells can specialize to become as different as brain, heart and liver, so covetousness can produce every sort of sin. That is why the commandment heaps up possible objects of covetous desire – to drive home the breadth of its application.

Sin begins with “inordinate, ungoverned, selfish desire.”

So James says that “each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death” (Jas 1:14-15). Desire is the start of the process; sin and death are its consequences. “The tenth commandment is where the Decalogue ends, but it is, in fact, the point at which every breach of the law begins” (AJ Motyer, *Exodus*, BST, p. 230).

For example:

- Before Ahab’s obsessive desire for Naboth’s vineyard was satisfied, the sixth and ninth commandments had been broken (1 Kings 21).
- David’s selfish, ungoverned desire for Bathsheba led him (and others) to break the sixth, seventh and eighth commandments (2 Samuel 11-12).
- The merchants of Amos’s day broke the fourth and the eighth commandments in their fervour to possess (Amos 8:4-6).

“The tenth commandment thus functions as a kind of summary commandment, the violation of which is a first step that can lead to the violation of any one or all the rest of the commandments. As such, it is necessarily all-embracing and descriptive of an attitude rather than a deed. It was perhaps set last in the Decalogue precisely because of this uniquely comprehensive application” (JI Durham, *Exodus*, WBC, pp. 298-9).

4. How can covetousness be purged out?

The experience of Eve illustrates how covetousness works. (a) Covetousness is excited by the false belief that God is against us and not for us. (b) But if God is not for us, then we have to make our own way in the world. (c) Covetous desire will then alight on whatever we think will promote our happiness and wellbeing. (d) The result is that we will take what we can, i.e. we will perform acts of sin.

The only antidote to this is a good relationship with God, i.e. (a) one which expresses confidence that God is for us and not against us. (b) Such a life says, "I am not alone in the world. God is good, and I am his, and I am satisfied." (c) We then rest in what God gives us because we know that he cares for our happiness and welfare. (d) And we are then able to focus on what we were made for, i.e. God's glory.

That is what Jesus said: "Do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Matthew 6:31-33).

In this way our lives conform with the first commandment: "I am the LORD your God... You shall have no other gods before me."

The New Testament calls this frame of mind "contentment." It is not a psychological technique – it is the result of a good relationship with God – but it must be cultivated. So Paul (writing from house arrest in Rome) says, "I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content" (Phil. 4:11).

So how is contentment cultivated? Through confidence, thanksgiving, godliness, generosity and meekness.

(a) *Be clear about the way you think about God*

Don't allow sin to cloud your thoughts about God. God is good and he does what is good. He is faithful, and he keeps all his promises. He is for us and not against us. He never abandons his people.

"Keep your life free from love of money, and be content [literally, *be those who are sufficed, who have enough*] with what you have, for he has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5).

(b) *Be confident in the way you pray*

In a fallen world, anxiety is inevitable. The question is, what are you going to do about it? You can decide to try and make your own way, or you can entrust yourself to God. It is only the latter course of action that will help you cultivate contentment.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7).

(c) *Be careful in the way you look at and handle "things"*

Discontentment is quick to stir when we put our focus on "things". Has there ever been a period of history in which we have had so many high resolution images of desirable "things" put before our minds? We are warned that "the love of money is

a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” (1 Tim. 6:10).

How can we effectively neutralize this? Jesus speaks, metaphorically, about plucking out eyes and cutting off hands (Matt. 18:8-9), i.e. careful discipleship is necessary. Paul tells us to “flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called” (1 Tim. 6:11-12).

This is “godliness with contentment” and it “is great gain”. It is the perspective that recognizes that “we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.” Given this perspective we should be able to say, “If we have food and clothing, with these we will be content” (1 Tim. 6:6-8).

Perhaps the touchstone of our progress in this lesson is our generosity. Paul says that wealthy people are not “to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy”, i.e. live out point (c) because you are exercising points (a) and (b). But for wealthy people (which means most people in 21st century Northern Ireland), (a) plus (b) plus (c) means that we “are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for [our]selves as a good foundation for the future, so that [we] may take hold of that which is truly life” (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

(d) *Be meek in the way you view your own life*

This brings us back to the link between commandments one and ten. Discontentment says, “I am worthy! Worthy of more pay, more pleasure, more health, more popularity, more influence, more...worship!” But the LORD alone is worthy – he alone is to be worshipped. So discontentment-covetousness is a form of idolatry.

So the only way, really, to deal with covetousness is to know the great, good, glorious and gracious God:

- He is great – and therefore is absolutely in control of the circumstances of my life (my health, employment, status, etc.) – and that means that I am not in control, and do not have to be in control, and should not want to be in control.
- He is good – and therefore he has an absolute care for my wellbeing – and that means that I do not have to worry about grasping at happiness, etc.
- He is glorious – and therefore he has an absolute right to be the end for which everything is made and happens – and that means that I must worship him alone, and that if I do worship him alone I not only lose nothing but I also gain everything because I attain to the end for which I was made.
- He is gracious – and therefore he accepts me absolutely because of who he is and not because of who I am – and that means that I don’t have look at myself or to myself, but can rest in Jesus Christ alone.