

THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

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

QUESTIONS # 133 & 66.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #133. *What is the reason annexed to the fifth commandment, the more to enforce it?*

A. The reason annexed to the fifth commandment, in these words, *That thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee*,¹ is an express 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.²

(Shorter Catechism)

Q #66. *What is the reason annexed to the fifth commandment?*

A. 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.³

Question 1—*What reason is annexed to this commandment?*

Answer—The reason annexed provides an express promise of long life in the possession of the land which God bestows, Ex. 20:12. Death possesses, even for the saints, something frightful about it, Ps. 55:4; because the soul yearns to be clothed with the body, 2 Cor. 5:1-4. Therefore, though it is but a temporal mercy, long life is ordinarily a much desired thing which is held forth as the fruit of obedience to God, Prov. 4:10.

Question 2—*What blessings are to be contemplated in this promise of long life?*

Answer—The blessings to be contemplated are twofold: 1.) The actual lengthening of days, or long life, which is promised to the keeping of the commands of God, Deut. 4:40; is especially to be studied in this command which epitomizes the second table, Eph. 6:2. 2.) The prosperity to accompany that long life, without which length of days is more a continued death, Gen. 15:15. This is what the apostle intends in those words, *that it may be well with thee*, Eph. 6:3. Wherein we may see that the Lord, in linking our duties and our interests, does hold forth temporal benefits to those who obey, 1 Kings 8:25.

There are several things which tend to make long life happy and comfortable: 1.) When we experience a growth in grace which stands in proportion to our advances in age, Ps. 92:14. 2.) When we retain our natural abilities together with that strength and vigor of mind which we possessed in previous years, Deut. 34:7. 3.) When we use the position of old age to show forth the praises of God to the generation to come and provide a usefulness to others even to the end, Josh. 24:25, 29, 31.

Question 3—*Does the reason annexed apply to us now under the New Testament?*

Answer—The reason annexed, *That thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee*, was given to Israel when they were constituted a nation prior to their possession of the promised land, Deut. 5:16; therefore, this question is not without

¹ Ex. 20:12.

² Deut. 5:16; 1 Kings 8:25; Eph. 6:2, 3.

³ Deut. 5:16; Eph. 6:2, 3.

merit, Eph. 2:12, 13. Accordingly, Paul alters the words somewhat in order to make clear the applicability to us as well as them, Eph. 6:2, 3.

Question 4—*What are the ends for which this promise is appointed?*

Answer—The *first* end for which this promise is made is the glory of God because: 1.) All temporal blessings, including length of days, are appointed for the glory of God, 1 Cor. 10:31. Length of life, in particular, is conducive to increasing our service to Christ in this world, Phil. 1:23, 24. 2.) They are to be desired and sought with an entire submission to the will of God, Jas. 4:13-15. 3.) They are to be desired and sought from God as pledges of eternal happiness and not in wrath, Ps. 4:6.

The *second* end for which the promise is made is our good because: 1.) For those who found it in righteousness, it is a crown of glory, Prov. 16:31; thus, God commands a peculiar respect and reverence to be paid to such old men, Lev. 19:32. Although old age is no blessing unless found in the way of righteousness, sin and wickedness destroy what should be great glory, yet the child which dies in Christ is said to die an hundred years old, Isa. 65:20. It is a sign of honor which the Spirit of God bestows upon Mnason, Acts 21:16. Godly old men are, therefore, most like unto the Lord Himself, Dan. 7:9; Rev. 1:14. 2.) It is profitable for the exercise of godliness, in so far as it brings with it many antidotes to youthful lust and temptations, 2 Tim. 2:22. Youthful grace is often rough and unpolished, Luke 9:54; whereas, with age, grace often breathes with an ease not present in youth, 1 John 2:1, 2. 3.) Long life allows a progression in grace that demonstrates more proofs and experiences of the goodness of God on earth, 1 John 2:13.

Question 5—*To whom is this promise made?*

Answer—The promise is made to those who, particularly with a conscientious performance of relative duties, seek to maintain a holy walk, Deut. 6:18. The keeping of this command, and its attendant holy walk, carries more weight than any other schemes for improving health and extending life, Dan. 1:15; Matt. 4:4. Godliness carries with it this general promise of bodily, or temporal, profit, 1 Tim. 4:8. Indeed, it brings the promise of all good things in this life, Prov. 3:7-10, 16. Inordinate affections devour the constitution, Jas. 5:3.

Question 6—*How then does it come to pass that the wicked often enjoy long life and prosperity but the righteous are consumed in the dew of their youth?*

Answer—This question troubled Job, Job 21:7. However, we must be careful not to misread the providence of God, Eccl. 9:1. For, 1.) Although the wicked possess long life and prosperity, yet they do not hold these by the promise of God and so they bring only a curse, Prov. 1:32, 33; 10:22. 2.) It is sometimes the case that God takes his saints out of this world when young as an act of peculiar compassion toward them, in taking them away from the evil to come, 2 Kings 22:20. So, too, in the case of Abijah, 1 Kings 14:12, 13. 3.) Sometimes a short and afflicted life is more for their good than a long and prosperous life, Ps. 119:7; Isa. 57:1. 4.) It may be that many of the saints of God fall short in this matter of relative duties and lose the mercy promised, Ps. 99:8.