

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 # 140 & 73.

(Larger Catechism)

Q #140. *Which is the eighth commandment?*

A. The eighth commandment is, *Thou shalt not steal.*¹

(Shorter Catechism)

Q #73. *Which is the eighth commandment?*

A. The eighth commandment is, *Thou shalt not steal.*²

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

Answer—This command follows naturally upon the previous two commands in particular—the sixth command secures man in his animal life, Ex. 20:13; and the seventh in his honest, or unadulterated, possession of this life, Ex. 20:14. The eighth commandment moves beyond the immediate possession of honesty in body and respects men's goods and outward estate in this world, Ex. 20:15. Man's soul has priority over the body in the commandments, Ex. 20:3-11; which explains that warning of Jesus with regard to both, Matt. 10:28. Likewise, man's inward estate which is hedged about by his body, Eccl. 12:6, 7; is such that each man feels the priority that soulish life has over his outward estate, Matt. 16:26. This commandment has reference to the outward estate in a way analogous to the sixth command in its reference to the inward possession of life, Deut. 20:19. After all, man's outward estate is an extension of his life and property in this world, Col. 4:8.

These final three commandments, as shall appear, respect the three ways in which most people offend against the outward estates of others, by theft, by deceit, and through covetousness, as John the Baptist warned the soldiers who came to him, Luke 3:14. This command studies a right dealing in civil honesty so that no violence or force is offered to the outward estate of ourselves or others, Phil. 2:15.

Question 2—*What is the scope of this commandment?*

Answer—The scope of this commandment includes as of those things which comprise a man's outward estate, whether: 1.) Lands, which are extensions of the strength, Job 22:8; and represent the descending inheritance of families and nations, Ps. 105:12. 2.) Possessions, which contemplate things of business life and are less fixed and, therefore, ambulatory, 1 Sam. 25:2; 1 Chron. 28:1. 3.) Goods, which encompass those articles of life, the fruit of increase of business, from which we may derive a level of comfort above mere existence, 1 Cor. 13:3; Matt. 25:14. 4.) Good name, which is a mark of identity placed upon a man's outward estate which bears witness of a *prima facie* honesty in society, Prov. 22:1. 5.) Credit, which provides a depth of good will from society toward the increase of the outward estate of a man, Luke 14:28; wherein there is a willingness to

¹ Ex. 20:15.

² Ex. 20:15.

place a trust in another by the placing of goods in their hands for increase of estate, Luke 16:11.

Question 3—*What does this commandment teach us?*

Answer—This commandment teaches us several things:

First, that the Lord is not merely concerned within the inward disposition of things but with their outward ordering as well, Matt. 7:11. Therefore He retains a right to order our use of the things of this world, Matt. 19:21.

Second, the divine law follows us wherever we go commanding our obedience, whether in house or field, bed or board, church or market, Isa. 30:21. Our proper use of these goods is indicative of our spiritual estate, Luke 19:8, 9. Private property, like clothing, is the result of the Fall from the primeval estate in the garden which caused the first division, or boundary, of the land, Gen. 3:23, 24. It is not the possession of, or use of, private property that is sinful but its use in selfishness apart from its proper end, the glory of God, 1 Tim. 6:10.

Third, it plainly establishes distinct properties, and that there is no universal community of goods, but that everyone has his own portion, 1 Cor. 13:3. The mutual consent and exigency of the time moved the church at Jerusalem to a community of goods, Acts 4:32; however, this was not a matter of faith binding the conscience except by reason of that mutual consent binding to that peculiar disposition, Acts 5:4.

Question 4—*What should be our first order to keep this command?*

Answer—In order to keep this commandment, in its proper connection with the glory of God, we ought to look to God for those necessary and convenient things because: 1.) The very power to the possession of the goods of this world is from Him, Deut. 8:18. 2.) Without His appointment our best endeavors will come to failure, Ps. 127:1. 3.) All creatures depend upon God for their care, even as caged birds on those to whom they are committed, Ps. 104:21, 27; Matt. 6:26. 4.) So, our Lord taught us to pray, Matt. 6:11. 5.) This is the special duty with a special promise to those who are the people of God, even a matter of covenant blessing, Deut. 28:11, 12.

Question 5—*What are the lawful means by which men come to possess the things of the outward estate?*

Answer—The lawful means of acquiring and possessing property are primarily two-fold:

First, through a lawful purchase, such as Abraham purchasing the field from Ephron, the seller setting the price and the buyer agreeing the transfer was a legal tender, Gen. 23:14-20. Or, when through a need of adverse taking (*e.g.*, eminent domain) sufficient money is tendered in recompense, 1 Chron. 21:22-25.

Second, through descent, when by course of inheritance property is cast upon us as we have example in the law, whether of a more complex possession, Lev. 25:45, 46; or, a more simple possession, Num. 27:8-11.