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AN EXPOSITION OF THE MORAL LAW

REFLECTIONS ON THE WESTMINSTER LARGER CATECHISM

JACOB WATSON

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Reflections on the Westminster Larger Catechism

by Jacob Watson

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Foreword

In the pages that follow, you will find not merely a collection of words but an invitation to a profound and transformative spiritual journey. "An Exposition of the Moral Law: Reflections on the Westminster Larger Catechism" is a deep and thoughtful commentary on the doctrines encapsulated within the Westminster Larger Catechism (Questions 91-155), one of the foundational documents of the Reformed theological tradition. Drawing from Scripture, this work explores an understanding of the nature of sin, God's response to our transgressions, and the transformative potential of His Word as a guide to salvation.

The author embarks upon a contemplative endeavor, taking the reader along the pathway of understanding where the edicts of moral law intersect with the realities of human frailty. In its detailed exegesis, this book unveils the richness of Reformed thought, portraying a God who is just in His wrath against sin yet abounding in mercy and grace, offering redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ. Each page is filled with an introspective and deeply pastoral tone, provoking not just the mind, but stirring the heart to seek and savor the truth of the gospel.

The book stresses the indispensable role of ordinances - the Word, sacraments, and prayer - in making the benefits of Christ's mediation effectual to the believer. Likewise the exposition brings forth the comfort and instruction found in God's Word, and the vital need for repentance and faith, presenting them as essential elements of the believer's lifelong journey.

"An Exposition of the Moral Law: Reflections on the Westminster Larger Catechism" serves as more than a theological treatise; it is a sincere and heart-warming invitation to engage in a deeper understanding of God's moral law as well as to experience the beauty

and depth of His grace. The insights gleaned will enrich and edify the reader, challenging and inspiring them to immerse more deeply into the teachings of the Larger Catechism, and in so doing, draw closer to the heart of God.

D. V.

Q91:

What is the duty which God requireth of man?

A91: The duty which God requireth of man, is obedience to his revealed will.[1]

1. Rom. 12:1-2; Micah 6:8; I Sam. 15:22

Divine in essence, sublime in purpose, and profound in implication, the duty which God requires of man, as delineated in Question 91 of the Westminster Larger Catechism, embodies the central ethos of the Christian life: obedience to His revealed will. This succinct but profound truth merits our deepest contemplation and reflection, particularly when regarded through the lens of Reformed theology, which insists upon the grace of God as the foundation for our capacity to respond to His will.

To appreciate the magnitude of our duty to God, we must first discern the nature of obedience as depicted in the Scriptures and

elucidated in Reformed thought. Romans 12:1-2 instructs us to present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, while not conforming to this world but being transformed by the renewal of our minds. Here, the Apostle Paul underscores the fundamental link between genuine obedience and the profound transformation of the believer's mind and life. Obedience is not merely an external, legalistic compliance with a set of divine decrees but the fruit of a renewed mind and heart, shaped by God's grace and reflecting His holy character.

Reformed theology makes clear that this grace-enabled obedience is not a passive response but an active engagement with God's will. It involves an ongoing process of sanctification, wherein the Holy Spirit works to conform us to the image of Christ. Our duty, therefore, is not simply to acquiesce to God's commands but to participate in the transformative process, which includes prayer, self-examination, and the diligent study and application of God's Word.

The prophet Micah echoes this deeper understanding of obedience in Micah 6:8 when he articulates the divine expectation: to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. This encapsulates the essence of our duty as followers of Christ; it is not only about following a set of rules but embodying a lifestyle that reflects God's justice, mercy, and humility.

1 Samuel 15:22 takes this even further, expressing the primacy of obedience over ritualistic observance when Samuel rebukes Saul: "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams." This verse confronts us with the stark reality that God values our heartfelt obedience above outward religious practices. God desires not mere lip-service, but a

spirit and life of obedience which arise from a deep-seated love for Him and His word.

The duty which God requires of man, then, is neither a legalistic obligation nor a passive acquiescence but an active, intentional, and grace-driven endeavor to live in line with His revealed will. It involves the whole of man - heart, mind, and strength - transformed by God's grace and oriented towards the display of His glory in the world.

This understanding calls for serious introspection and an unflinching examination of our hearts and lives. It calls us to recognize our shortcomings, confess our sins, and humbly seek the grace of God to aid us in our quest for faithful obedience. It invites us to embark on a lifetime journey, with God's Word as our compass, God's Spirit as our guide, and God's grace as our sustenance.

The duty which God requires of man, therefore, extends far beyond the bounds of mere moralistic observance and into the depths of divine communion, transformation, and reflection. It is not only our duty but our highest privilege, and in its pursuit, we find our deepest joy and fulfillment, for we are created to live in obedience and communion with our Creator. It is here, in the pursuit of this duty, that we truly come to know God, ourselves, and our place in His grand, redemptive narrative.

Q92:

What did God at first reveal unto man as the rule of his obedience?

A92: The rule of obedience revealed to Adam in the estate of innocence, and to all mankind in him, besides a special command not to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was the moral law.[1]

1. Gen. 1:26-27; 2:17; Rom. 2:14-15; 10:5

To discern the nature and depth of the rule of obedience that God first revealed to man is to delve into the heart of God's righteous standards and our primordial relationship with Him. The 92nd question of the Westminster Larger Catechism grants us this opportunity by drawing our attention to the dawn of creation when God revealed His moral law to Adam, and through him, to all mankind.

Genesis 1:26-27 tells us that God created man in His own image, imparting to us a unique capacity to reflect His moral attributes. This divine image imprinted upon man includes the inbuilt ability to comprehend and adhere to God's moral law. Herein lies the foundation of man's duty to God, rooted not in an external imposition, but in the very essence of our created being. Reformed theology keenly recognizes this intrinsic connection, asserting that our duty to obey God arises from our very nature as God's image-bearers.

Genesis 2:17 provides a specific instance of this rule of obedience, wherein God commanded Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Yet, this specific command should not be viewed in isolation, but as a particular application of the broader

moral law God had imparted to Adam. It served as a concrete expression of the innate understanding of God's moral requirements. This command, while distinct, was an embodiment of the general rule of obedience - a palpable manifestation of the moral law within the paradisiacal context.

The Apostle Paul, in Romans 2:14-15, provides further illumination on this point. He elucidates that even the Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, a testimony to the moral law's universal imprint on all of humanity. Here, the Reformed tradition sees an affirmation of the Covenant of Works, wherein Adam, and through him all humanity, was obliged to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience to God's moral law.

Romans 10:5 furthers this understanding by linking the moral law to the principle of life. Paul cites Leviticus, "The person who does the commandments shall live by them." In doing so, Paul acknowledges the principle that life was promised upon the condition of obedience to the moral law, signaling back to the Covenant of Works.

Hence, from the dawn of creation, God has imprinted His moral law upon humanity. This rule of obedience is not an alien imposition but arises from our very being as creatures made in God's image. Our understanding of this principle must inform our perception of obedience, driving us to comprehend that the call to obey God's commands is a call to align with our true nature as God's image-bearers.

This profound truth serves to deepen our appreciation for God's grace in Christ, who perfectly fulfilled the law on our behalf. Our inability to keep this law, given our fallen nature, underscores the necessity of a Savior who can restore us to our original purpose and

design. Thus, understanding the rule of obedience that God first revealed to man is crucial, not only for grasping the requirements of God's moral law but also for recognizing the beauty of the gospel, where God's justice and mercy intersect in the person and work of Christ.

Finally, such an understanding prompts introspection and gratitude. Introspection, as we reflect on our own inability to fully comply with God's moral law, and gratitude, as we contemplate God's indescribable grace in providing redemption through His Son. Indeed, in recognizing our duty and our inability to fully discharge it, we are led to the cross, where our failures are met with Christ's triumph and our guilt is replaced with His righteousness.

Q93: What is the moral law?

A93: The moral law is the declaration of the will of God to mankind, directing and binding everyone to personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity and obedience thereunto, in the frame and disposition of the whole man, soul and body,[1] and in performance of all those duties of holiness and righteousness which he oweth to God and man:[2] promising life upon the fulfilling, and threatening death upon the breach of it.[3]

1. Deut. 5:1-3, 31, 33; Luke 10:26-27; Gal. 3:10; I Thess. 5:23
2. Luke 1:75; Acts 14:16
3. Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:10, 12

In contemplating the essence of the moral law, we embark on a journey into the divine heart, discerning the righteous will of God, and probing the profound implications for human life. Question 93 of the Westminster Larger Catechism illuminates this path, providing a deeply insightful perspective on what the moral law is.

The moral law, as stated, is the declaration of the will of God to mankind. It is not simply a set of rules or regulations, but the authoritative expression of God's holy and righteous character, serving as a mirror that reflects His moral perfection. Deuteronomy 5:1-3, 31, 33 vividly illustrates this, as God communicates His commands to His people, pointing them towards His holiness and their obligation to reflect it. These laws are not arbitrary but flow directly from God's character, providing the standard for human conduct.

The moral law, however, does more than merely declare God's will. It also directs and binds every person to a personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity and obedience thereto. This binding nature of the law, as indicated in Galatians 3:10, requires a comprehensive obedience, encompassing the entirety of our being, soul and body, as emphasized in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. The Bible underscores this totalizing aspect of the moral law, insisting that true obedience is not merely about outward compliance but involves the complete alignment of the heart, mind, and will with God's commands.

Moreover, the moral law mandates the performance of all duties of holiness and righteousness which humanity owes to God and man. This dual orientation towards God and our fellow humans is exemplified in Luke 10:26-27, where Jesus summarizes the law as loving God with all our heart, soul, strength, and mind, and our neighbor as ourselves. The moral law, thus, not only governs our

relationship with God but also our interactions with others, calling us to a life of love, justice, and mercy, mirroring God's own attributes.

However, the moral law does not merely issue directives. It also delineates consequences, promising life upon fulfillment and threatening death upon breach, as emphasized in Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:10, 12. This dual promise and threat encapsulate the covenantal nature of the moral law, reminding us of the blessings of obedience and the repercussions of disobedience. Yet, in our fallen state, none of us can perfectly fulfill the law's demands, highlighting our profound need for a Savior.

Grasping the nature and demands of the moral law should not lead us to despair, but rather to a deeper appreciation of God's grace in Christ. The moral law, while highlighting our inability to attain righteousness through our efforts, underscores the glorious work of Christ, who perfectly fulfilled the law on our behalf. As such, the moral law drives us to the cross, where our failure is met with Christ's accomplishment, and our sin is replaced with His righteousness.

In essence, the moral law offers a resounding echo of God's character, provides a compass for human conduct, and serves as a signpost pointing us to our need for Christ. The contemplation of this profound truth should move us towards a posture of humility, gratitude, and dependence on God's grace, stirring us to worship, love, and serve our gracious God with all that we are and have. It should inspire introspection, spur repentance, and cultivate a deep desire for sanctification, prompting us to strive, by God's grace, to live lives that reflect His holiness and love, for His glory and the good of others.

Q94:

Is there any use of the moral law to man since the fall?

A94: Although no man, since the fall, can attain to righteousness and life by the moral law;^[1] yet there is great use thereof, as well common to all men, as peculiar either to the unregenerate, or the regenerate.^[2]

1. Rom. 8:3; Gal. 2:16

2. I Tim. 1:8

The 94th question of the Westminster Larger Catechism beckons us into the rich discourse surrounding the function of the moral law after the fall of humanity into sin. It reminds us of our fallen condition, our subsequent inability to attain righteousness through the law, and yet underscores the undiminished significance of the moral law in our lives. This pivotal aspect of Scripture provokes profound reflection on our relationship with God, our fellow human beings, and our desperate need for redemption.

Paul, in Romans 8:3 and Galatians 2:16, definitively asserts that no one can be justified by the law since the fall. The moral law, in all its holy and perfect demands, accentuates our sinfulness, revealing that we are hopelessly incapable of achieving the righteousness it requires. Our fallen nature distorts our desires and actions, leading us to violate God's commands, making it impossible to attain life and righteousness through our own efforts. In this, the law serves as a

relentless mirror, reflecting the stark reality of our sinfulness and our inability to save ourselves.

However, the inability to attain righteousness through the moral law does not negate its significance. As the Apostle Paul affirms in 1 Timothy 1:8, the law is good if one uses it lawfully. Thus, even in our fallen state, there is great use for the moral law, and this use extends to all, regardless of their spiritual condition.

For the unregenerate, those who have not experienced the transforming power of Christ's saving grace, the moral law serves as a schoolmaster, making sin known and convicting the conscience. It reveals God's perfect standard, contrasting it with the reality of human sinfulness, and in doing so, drives the sinner to recognize their inability and the need for a Savior. It also serves as a restraining factor, curbing societal chaos by providing a moral framework that discourages transgressions and encourages civil righteousness.

For the regenerate, those brought from death to life through faith in Christ, the moral law holds a different, yet equally vital function. While they are justified by grace alone through faith in Christ, not by keeping the law, the moral law serves as a guide for their sanctification. It points them towards the character of God and the pattern of holiness they are to pursue, not to earn salvation, but as a loving response to the gracious salvation they have received. The law becomes, for the regenerate, a lamp unto their feet and a light unto their path, guiding them in the way of righteousness and godliness.

Consequently, the moral law, despite the fallen state of humanity, retains a significant role, serving as a mirror reflecting our sin, a curb restraining our transgressions, and a guide leading us in the path of righteousness. It drives the unregenerate to see their need for Christ and directs the regenerate in their walk with Him.

The contemplation of the moral law's function since the fall should prompt introspection, repentance, and a deep appreciation for God's grace in Christ. It should motivate the unregenerate to seek Christ's saving grace and inspire the regenerate to pursue ongoing sanctification, living lives that reflect God's holiness and love. Above all, it should provoke us to look to Christ, the only One who perfectly fulfilled the law, and through whom we find forgiveness, righteousness, and life. Through such contemplation, we can gain a deeper understanding of the depth of our sin, the breadth of God's grace, and the path of righteousness that we are called to walk, all of which are inextricably linked to the moral law.

Q95:

Of what use is the moral law to all men?

A95: The moral law is of use to all men, to inform them of the holy nature and will of God,[1] and of their duty, binding them to walk accordingly;[2] to convince them of their disability to keep it, and of the sinful pollution of their nature, hearts, and lives;[3] to humble them in the sense of their sin and misery,[4] and thereby help them to a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ,[5] and of the perfection of his obedience.[6]

1. Lev. 11:44-45; 20:7-8; Rom. 7:12 2. Micah 6:8; James 2:10-11 3. Psa. 19:11-12; Rom. 3:20; 7:7 4. Rom. 3:9, 23 5. Gal. 3:21-22 6. Rom. 10:4

The 95th question of the Westminster Larger Catechism delves into the use of the moral law to all men, irrespective of their spiritual state. It uncovers a profound reality of our relationship with God's law and reveals six key ways the moral law serves humanity. This exploration draws on the depth of our biblical studies, inviting us into a contemplative understanding of God's holy nature, our human predicament, and the transformative work of Christ.

Firstly, the moral law serves to inform all of humanity about the holy nature and will of God. In Leviticus 11:44-45 and 20:7-8, God repeatedly calls His people to be holy as He is holy. The moral law, therefore, serves as a roadmap, a divine self-revelation, illustrating God's moral perfection and highlighting His expectations from His creation.

Secondly, the moral law delineates our duty, binding us to walk accordingly. As Micah 6:8 profoundly states, God has shown us what is good and what He requires: to do justice, love kindness, and to walk humbly with Him. The moral law thus prescribes our moral obligations and encourages a path of righteousness, justice, and love.

Thirdly, the moral law convincingly demonstrates our disability to keep it and our sinful pollution. As Paul writes in Romans 3:20 and 7:7, through the law comes knowledge of sin. The law acts as a mirror, reflecting our sinful nature, hearts, and lives, and showing us the breadth and depth of our sin and our inherent incapacity to attain righteousness on our own.

Fourthly, the moral law humbles us with a sense of our sin and misery. As Romans 3:9, 23 underscores, we are all under sin, and all have fallen short of the glory of God. In the stark light of God's perfect law, we become acutely aware of our sinfulness and are led to a place of humility and repentance.

Fifthly, this humbling realization helps us to see more clearly our need for Christ. Galatians 3:21-22 asserts that the law has confined all under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. The law thus serves as a tutor leading us to Christ, making us conscious of our desperate need for a Savior.

Finally, the moral law illuminates the perfection of Christ's obedience. As Romans 10:4 declares, Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. In contrast to our inability to keep the law, Christ perfectly fulfilled the law on our behalf, achieving the righteousness we couldn't, thereby demonstrating the depth of His love and the breadth of His grace.

In essence, the moral law serves a profoundly significant purpose for all men. It reveals God's holy character, outlines our moral duties, underscores our sin and inability, engenders humility, drives us to Christ, and highlights His perfect obedience. This understanding calls for deep introspection, leading us to lament our sin, rejoice in God's grace, and strive to live lives that, by the power of the Spirit, reflect God's holiness and love.

This contemplation should lead us to a place of humility, gratitude, and profound reverence for God. It should stir in us a deep desire for personal transformation and a heart to love and serve God and others better. It should draw us closer to Christ, the only one who perfectly obeyed the law and through whom we find forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life. And it should, above all, inspire us to echo the psalmist's declaration, "Oh, how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day" (Psalm 119:97).

Q96:

What particular use is there of the moral law to unregenerate men?

A96: The moral law is of use to unregenerate men, to awaken their consciences to flee from wrath to come,[1] and to drive them to Christ;[2] or, upon their continuance in the estate and way of sin, to leave them inexcusable,[3] and under the curse thereof.[4]

1. I Tim. 1:9-10
2. Gal. 3:24
3. Rom. 1:20; 2:15
4. Gal. 3:10

The 96th question of the Westminster Larger Catechism pivots towards a particular use of the moral law for unregenerate men, those who have not yet experienced the regenerating grace of God through faith in Jesus Christ. This query peels back layers of profound theological truth that provoke contemplation and reflection on the role of the moral law in leading us to the profound grace of God found in Christ.

The moral law, given by God, serves firstly to awaken the consciences of unregenerate men. Through its perfect and unwavering demands, the law convicts of sin and highlights the dire consequences that sin brings. 1 Timothy 1:9-10 reminds us that the law is made for the lawless and disobedient, providing a clear standard against which actions are measured, thus awakening the conscience to the stark reality of our sinful condition. The law becomes a revealer of the

wrath to come, stoking in the hearts of the unregenerate a desire to flee from the impending judgment that sin inevitably attracts.

Secondly, this law does not leave the unregenerate man in despair but drives them towards Christ. As highlighted in Galatians 3:24, the law serves as a tutor leading us to Christ so that we may be justified by faith. By revealing the impossibility of achieving righteousness through our efforts, the law helps us realize our desperate need for a Savior. It drives us towards Christ, the embodiment of perfect righteousness, who alone can deliver us from the law's curse and grant us the righteousness we cannot attain on our own.

However, there is a solemn consequence for those who continue in their sin despite the awakening of their conscience and the driving force of the law. The moral law, as Romans 1:20 and 2:15 declare, renders all people without excuse. By defining sin, it highlights the deliberate rebellion of those who continue in their sinful ways. The law then leaves them inexcusable, fully accountable for their actions.

Finally, unrepentant sinners remain under the law's curse. Galatians 3:10 confirms that those who rely on the works of the law are under a curse. The moral law not only reveals our sin but also carries a curse for those who fail to uphold it. For unregenerate men who continue in their disobedience, the law pronounces judgment, underlining the gravity of their rebellion and the dire need for repentance and faith in Christ.

The contemplation of the moral law's particular use to unregenerate men should stir a sense of urgency and sober reflection. It should drive us to consider our own spiritual condition and awaken us to the stark reality of sin's consequences. At the same time, it should highlight our dire need for a Savior, reminding us that the law's purpose is not to condemn but to lead us to Christ, who bore the

curse of the law that we might receive the blessing of Abraham—the gift of righteousness by faith. Above all, it should provoke us to ponder the depths of God's grace, the breadth of Christ's love, and our utter dependence on Him for salvation and life.

Q97:

What special use is there of the moral law to the regenerate?

A97: Although they that are regenerate, and believe in Christ, be delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works,[1] so as thereby they are neither justified [2] nor condemned;[3] yet, besides the general uses thereof common to them with all men, it is of special use, to show them how much they are bound to Christ for his fulfilling it, and enduring the curse thereof in their stead, and for their good;[4] and thereby to provoke them to more thankfulness,[5] and to express the same in their greater care to conform themselves thereunto as the rule of their obedience.[6]

1. Rom. 6:14; 7:4, 6; Gal. 4:4-5
2. Rom. 3:20
3. Gal. 5:23; Rom. 8:1
4. Rom. 7:24-25; 8:3-4; Gal. 3:13-14
5. Luke 1:68-69, 74-75; Col. 1:12-14
6. Rom. 7:22; 12:2; Titus 2:11-14

The 97th question of the Westminster Larger Catechism focuses on the special use of the moral law to the regenerate—those who have been monergistically born anew by the Spirit of God giving rise to faith in Christ. This question reveals a distinct facet of the moral law's function and invites us into a deeper exploration of its role in the life of the believer.

For the regenerate, the moral law ceases to be a covenant of works by which they may strive, in vain, for righteousness. Both Romans 6:14 and Galatians 4:4-5 underscore that believers are not under the law but under grace and that Christ has come to redeem those under the law. The believer is not justified—that is, declared righteous—by adherence to the law (Romans 3:20) nor condemned by it (Galatians 5:23; Romans 8:1). In Christ, the believer is set free from the law's power to dictate their standing before God.

Yet, the moral law does not lose its relevance for the regenerate. It acquires a distinct and special use, which illuminates the richness of God's grace in Christ and guides the believer's life of gratitude and obedience.

The moral law, first and foremost, makes manifest the boundless debt of love that the regenerate owe to Christ. As Romans 7:24-25 and Galatians 3:13-14 articulate, it is Christ who has fulfilled the law on behalf of the believer and endured its curse in their stead. The law, in all its unyielding rigor, thereby becomes a poignant demonstration of the lengths to which Christ has gone for their redemption. It shows the believer how deep the well of Christ's love is, how wide the extent of His grace.

From this recognition flows a fervent thankfulness. The believer, beholding the enormous weight of the law and the lengths to which Christ has gone to fulfill it on their behalf, is moved to profound

gratitude (Luke 1:68-69, 74-75; Colossians 1:12-14). The law, then, serves to stoke the fires of thanksgiving in the believer's heart, pointing continually to the great salvation that has been achieved.

Finally, the moral law becomes the rule of the believer's obedience. Regeneration instills a love for God's law in the believer (Romans 7:22). This love, coupled with the knowledge of Christ's fulfillment of the law, moves the believer to greater care in seeking to conform their lives to it (Romans 12:2; Titus 2:11-14). Yet, this is not a return to the law as a covenant of works. Instead, it is the joyful response of a heart transformed by grace—a heart that yearns to reflect the holy character of the God it loves, and to live in a way that is pleasing to Him.

In contemplating the special use of the moral law to the regenerate, we are drawn into a deeper appreciation of God's multifaceted grace. The moral law, while no longer a path to self-righteousness, continues to play a crucial role in the believer's life—as a testament to Christ's love, a provoker of thanksgiving, and a guide for a life of loving obedience.

Q98:

Where is the moral law summarily comprehended?

A98: The moral law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments, which were delivered by the voice of God upon

mount Sinai, and written by him in two tables of stone;^[1] and are recorded in the twentieth chapter of Exodus. The four first commandments containing our duty to God, and the other six our duty to man.^[2]

1. Deut. 10:4; Exod. 34:1-4

2. Matt. 22:37-38, 40

The Westminster Larger Catechism Question 98 seeks to identify where the moral law is summarized or, as it were, distilled to its essence. The answer, following the Bible and emphasized in the broader Reformed theological tradition, is found in the Ten Commandments, which provide a succinct and profound encapsulation of the moral law.

The Ten Commandments, given by God to His people at Mount Sinai, hold a unique position in the biblical narrative and in Christian theology. As Deuteronomy 10:4 and Exodus 34:1-4 illustrate, these commandments were inscribed by the finger of God Himself on two stone tablets, demonstrating their divine origin and permanence. Herein lies the will of God for humanity, not as a series of detached principles, but as a cohesive, integrated law - a divine guide for living.

The moral law, summarized in these Ten Commandments, is bifurcated into two categories. The first four commandments outline our duty to God - they teach us what it means to love, honor, and worship Him alone. These commandments guard the sanctity of God's name, His day, and His exclusive claim to our worship.

The remaining six commandments delineate our duty to our fellow human beings. They establish the sanctity of life, marriage, property,

and truth. They instruct us on how to interact righteously with others, promoting love, respect, and justice in all our relationships.

It is important to note that Jesus Christ, in Matthew 22:37-38, 40, further distills these commandments into the greatest commandment: to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and to love our neighbor as ourselves. The whole law, and the prophets, hang on these two commandments, reinforcing their comprehensive and all-encompassing nature.

The Ten Commandments, then, act as a summation of God's moral law - they offer a fundamental blueprint for human behavior, outlining the boundaries of our relationship with God and with one another. For the believer, they serve not as a means of achieving righteousness, but as a guide to living a life pleasing to God, fueled by gratitude for the grace bestowed upon us in Jesus Christ. As such, they continue to hold relevance for the Christian life, illuminating the path of love and obedience to God.

Q99:

What rules are to be observed for the right understanding of the ten commandments?

A99: For the right understanding of the ten commandments, these rules are to be observed:

1. That the law is perfect, and bindeth everyone to full conformity in the whole man unto the righteousness thereof, and unto entire obedience forever; so as to require the utmost perfection of every duty, and to forbid the least degree of every sin.[1]

2. That it is spiritual, and so reaches the understanding, will, affections, and all other powers of the soul; as well as words, works, and gestures.[2]

3. That one and the same thing, in divers respects, is required or forbidden in several commandments.[3]

4. That as, where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden; [4] and, where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded: [5] so, where a promise is annexed, the contrary threatening is included; [6] and, where a threatening is annexed, the contrary promise is included.[7]

5. That what God forbids, is at no time to be done; [8] What he commands, is always our duty; [9] and yet every particular duty is not to be done at all times. [10]

6. That under one sin or duty, all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded; together with all the causes, means, occasions, and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto. [11]

7. That what is forbidden or commanded to ourselves, we are bound, according to our places, to endeavor that it may be avoided or performed by others, according to the duty of their places. [12]

8. That in what is commanded to others, we are bound, according to our places and callings, to be helpful to them; [13] and to take heed of partaking with others in: What is forbidden them. [14]

1. Psa. 19:7; James 2:10; Matt. 5:21-22

2. Rom. 7:14; Deut. 6:5; Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28, 33-34, 37-39, 43-44; 22:37-39

3. Col. 3:5; Amos 8:5; Prov. 1:19; I Tim. 6:10
4. Isa. 58:13; Deut. 6:13; Matt. 4:9-10; 15:4-6
5. Matt. 5:21-25; Eph. 4:28
6. Exod. 20:12; Prov. 30:17
7. Jer. 18:7-8; Exod. 20:7; Psa. 15:1, 4-5; 24:4-5
8. Job. 13:7; 36:21; Rom. 3:8; Heb. 11:25
9. Deut. 4:8-9
10. Matt. 12:7
11. Matt. 5:21-22, 27-28; 15:4-6; Heb. 10:24-25; I Thess. 5:22-23; Gal. 5:26; Col. 3:21
12. Exod. 20:10; Lev. 19:17; Gen. 18:19; Josh. 24:15; Deut. 6:6-7
13. II Cor. 1:24
14. I Tim. 5:22

The Westminster Larger Catechism Question 99 highlights eight key principles for correctly interpreting and applying the Ten Commandments. This question underscores the necessity of proper hermeneutics (the science and art of interpretation) in understanding God's moral law.

1. **Perfection of the Law:** The moral law as reflected in the Ten Commandments calls for total and perfect obedience. This means the law demands holiness in every facet of our being - in thoughts, words, and deeds. Not only is each command to be fully obeyed, but the smallest transgression is forbidden. This underscores the absolute nature of God's holiness and the perfect standard that humanity, in its sinful state, cannot attain.
2. **Spirituality of the Law:** The law does not merely govern external behaviors but penetrates into the deepest parts of our being - our thoughts, desires, and affections. This reinforces that God is concerned not merely with our actions, but with our

hearts, requiring wholehearted devotion and love for Him and our neighbor.

3. **Multiplicity of the Law:** The commandments are not isolated moral directives, but are interconnected. This means that one action can violate multiple commandments. For example, stealing not only violates the Eighth Commandment but can also violate the Tenth Commandment by expressing a covetous attitude.
4. **Inverse Commands:** Each commandment inherently includes its opposite. For instance, if a commandment commands a particular action, it implies that the opposite action is forbidden. This enriches our understanding of each commandment, pointing us to both positive actions we should embrace and negative actions we should avoid.
5. **Temporal Universality of the Law:** God's commands are not dependent on specific circumstances or time periods. They are always applicable. However, not every specific duty is to be performed at all times. This ensures the moral law's relevance and applicability across different cultural, social, and historical contexts.
6. **Comprehensive Nature of the Law:** Each commandment is not merely about a specific action, but it represents a broader category of related actions, attitudes, and motivations. For example, the commandment "You shall not murder" also includes hatred, unrighteous anger, and anything that harms our neighbor.
7. **Corporate Responsibility of the Law:** Our responsibilities under the moral law extend beyond our personal lives to

encompass our responsibility towards others. This includes encouraging and assisting others in their obedience to the moral law, and seeking to prevent and correct their disobedience.

8. Cooperative Fulfillment of the Law: We're obliged to assist others in their obedience and avoid being complicit in their disobedience. For instance, if someone is struggling to honor the Sabbath, we are obliged to help them understand its importance and, if necessary, alleviate burdens that hinder their observance.

In all, these principles provide a comprehensive and robust understanding of the moral law as encapsulated in the Ten Commandments. They demonstrate the depth and breadth of God's moral law, which not only guide us in our relationship with God and with others, but also underscore our inability to perfectly fulfill these laws in our own strength and our consequent need for Christ's redeeming work.

Q100:

What special things are we to consider in the ten commandments?

A100: We are to consider, in the ten commandments, the preface, the substance of the commandments themselves, and several reasons annexed to some of them, the more to enforce them.

In the framework of the Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 100 asks, "What special things are we to consider in the ten commandments?" and answers, "We are to consider, in the ten commandments, the preface, the substance of the commandments themselves, and several reasons annexed to some of them, the more to enforce them." This response speaks to three essential facets that need to be considered when contemplating the Ten Commandments: the preface, the substance of the commandments, and the reasons attached to some of them.

The Preface to the Commandments

The preface to the Ten Commandments is contained in Exodus 20:2: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." This introductory statement has profound theological significance. It underscores that the moral law is given not by a distant, impersonal force, but by the LORD, the God who enters into a covenant relationship with His people. It reminds us that this is the God who liberates, who delivers His people from bondage. Thus, the law is not an arbitrary set of rules, but it flows from the relational and redemptive nature of God. It signifies that obedience to God's law is a response to His gracious acts of redemption and is an aspect of our covenant relationship with Him.

The Substance of the Commandments

The substance of the Commandments refers to the Commandments themselves, which are divided into two tablets or categories. The first four Commandments concern our duty to God and teach us how we are to love and worship Him. The remaining six Commandments concern our duty to our neighbors and instruct us on how to love and respect them. Each Commandment, in its negative prohibitions and

positive injunctions, provides comprehensive guidance for living a life that is pleasing to God and beneficial to our fellow human beings.

The Reasons Annexed to the Commandments

The reasons annexed to some of the Commandments are additional clauses attached to the Commandments to underscore their significance and to motivate obedience. For instance, the promise of long life attached to the Fifth Commandment (Exodus 20:12), or the reminder of the Sabbath's creation roots in the Fourth Commandment (Exodus 20:11), serve to bolster the importance of these commandments and encourage adherence to them.

In sum, as we ponder the Ten Commandments, it is essential to remember the redemptive and relational context in which they were given (the preface), the specific instructions they provide for loving God and our neighbors (the substance), and the additional motivations for obedience appended to some of them (the reasons annexed). This comprehensive view allows us to better appreciate the depth and breadth of the moral law, and it enhances our understanding of our duty and our relationship with God and others.

Q101:

What is the preface to the ten commandments?

A101: The preface to the ten commandments is contained 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.[1] Wherein God manifesteth his sovereignty, as being JEHOVAH, the eternal, immutable, and almighty God;[2] having his being in and of himself, [3] and giving being to all his words [4] and works:[5] and that he is a God in covenant, as with Israel of old, so with all his people;[6] who, as he brought them out of their bondage in Egypt, so he delivers us from our spiritual thralldom;[7] and that therefore we are bound to take him for our God alone, and to keep all his commandments.[8]

1. Exod. 20:2
2. Isa. 44:6
3. Exod. 3:14
4. Exod. 6:3
5. Acts 17:24, 28
6. Gen. 17:7; Rom. 3:29
7. Luke 1:74-75
8. I Peter 1:15-18; Lev. 18:30, 19:37

The preface to the Ten Commandments, as stated in the Westminster Larger Catechism's Question 101, is found in the words, "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage" (Exodus 20:2). This preface is loaded with theological profundity and possesses rich implications that radiate across the spectrum of Christian life and practice.

The Lord is God

Firstly, God declares, "I am the LORD thy God." In so doing, He identifies Himself as 'JEHOVAH', the eternal, immutable, and almighty God. This is the same God who revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush as 'I AM WHO I AM' (Exodus 3:14), indicating

that He is self-existent, self-sufficient, and unchanging. His being is in and of Himself; He depends on nothing outside Himself for His existence. This assertion underlines God's unique sovereignty and power, not only over Israel but over all of creation, for He gives being to all His words and works (Acts 17:24,28).

God as Covenant Keeper

Secondly, God introduces Himself as the God who has brought Israel "out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage." In this act of deliverance, God reveals Himself as a covenant-keeping God. He is not only the God of Israel but the God of all His people, across generations and geography (Gen. 17:7; Rom. 3:29). This is the same God who delivers us from our spiritual bondage today. He frees us from the slavery of sin and the tyranny of the devil, bringing us into the freedom of the children of God.

Implication for the Christian

Finally, in light of this profound revelation of who He is and what He has done, God calls His people into an exclusive relationship with Him. We are bound to take Him as our God alone, and to keep all His commandments (1 Peter 1:15-18; Lev. 18:30, 19:37). Obedience to His commandments is not an onerous duty but a joyful response to the gracious deliverance He has achieved for us.

In sum, the preface to the Ten Commandments unveils God's sovereign, covenant-keeping character and His redemptive actions. It thus forms a vital context for understanding the commandments themselves, reminding us that these are not mere rules imposed by an impersonal deity but instructions for life given by the God who loves us and has set us free.

Q102:

What is the sum of the four commandments which contain our duty to God?

A102: The sum of the four commandments containing our duty to God is, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength, and with all our mind.[1]

1. Luke 10:27

The Westminster Larger Catechism's Question 102 asks for the essence of the first four of the Ten Commandments, those which pertain to our duty towards God. The answer, drawn from Jesus' own summation in Luke 10:27, is this: "To love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our strength, and with all our mind."

Love: The Heart of Duty

The keyword here is 'love.' These commandments are not dry legal requirements, but a call to a profound, all-encompassing love. The Hebrew word for love, 'ahabah,' used in the Old Testament, implies a deep, affectionate, caring bond, like that which exists between close relatives. Thus, God's commandments invite us into an intimate, familial relationship with Him.

All-Encompassing Love

This love for God is to permeate our entire being: heart, soul, strength, and mind. To love God with all our 'heart' in biblical terminology means to orient our innermost being and affections towards Him. The 'soul' represents our life essence, indicating that our very existence should be directed towards loving God. 'Strength' implies that this love for God must not be passive, but active, engaging our energies, efforts, and resources. Loving God with all our 'mind' means that our cognitive faculties, our understanding, reasoning, and decision-making processes must be submitted to God, informed by His truth, and guided by His wisdom.

Commandments as Expressions of Love

Each of the first four commandments can be seen as an expression of this comprehensive love for God:

1. To have no other gods before Him is to love Him with all our heart, putting Him first in our affections (Exodus 20:3).
2. To make no graven image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth, is to love Him with all our soul, rejecting any false or inadequate representations of God and worshiping Him as He truly is (Exodus 20:4-6).
3. Not taking His name in vain signifies loving Him with all our strength, showing profound respect and reverence in our speech and conduct (Exodus 20:7).
4. Remembering the Sabbath day, to keep it holy, involves loving Him with all our mind, setting aside regular time for worship, rest, and reflection on His Word (Exodus 20:8-11).

In essence, the sum of the four commandments containing our duty to God is a radical, wholehearted, and continual love for Him, affecting every part of our lives. This comprehensive love forms the heart of our covenant relationship with God, and it is the fuel that drives our obedience to His commandments.

Q103:

Which is the first commandment?

A103: The first commandment is, Thou shall have no other gods before me.[1]

1. Exod. 20:3

The Westminster Larger Catechism's Question 103 deals with the first of the Decalogue's ten commandments, found in Exodus 20:3: "Thou shall have no other gods before me."

The Exclusivity of God

The first commandment is foundational and underpins the remaining nine. At the heart of this commandment is the demand for exclusivity in our worship and allegiance. The Lord, YHWH, the one who rescued Israel from Egyptian bondage, is to be acknowledged as the one and only God. This is not a call to rank Him highest among other gods but to recognize that He is the only God. There is no room

for others. God's rightful place is not merely first among equals but solitary in His supremacy.

Understanding 'Other Gods'

What are these 'other gods'? In the ancient context, these referred to the pantheon of deities worshipped by the surrounding nations. Yet, this commandment extends beyond the prohibition of polytheism. 'Other gods' can signify anything that usurps God's rightful place in our hearts and lives. This can include material possessions, career, power, relationships, and even our own ego. In the Reformed understanding, anything that becomes the central object of our affections and loyalties, apart from God, can function as 'other gods.'

Implications for the Regenerate Heart

For those in Christ, the first commandment serves as a potent reminder of their unique relationship with God. They are to echo the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:4—"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one"—and love the Lord their God wholeheartedly. Believers are to guard their hearts against idolatry of any form and ensure that their utmost affections, priorities, and loyalties are centered on God alone. While the regenerate are no longer under the law as a means of justification, the moral law, including the first commandment, continues to guide their lives, showing them how to live as God's redeemed, covenant people.

The Grace of the First Commandment

The first commandment is not merely a command; it is also a proclamation of grace. It reminds us of the unique privilege that we, sinful and finite beings, are invited to know and worship the one, true, living God. It is a call to enjoy the fullest and highest

relationship possible—the relationship with God Himself. It is God saying, "I am your God, there is no other, therefore, look to me, depend on me, love me, worship me."

In Christ, believers are empowered to fulfill this commandment. Christ, in His life, perfectly fulfilled this command, loving and worshiping God alone. In His death, He bore the penalty for our idolatries. And now, in Him, believers are liberated and empowered to have 'no other gods' before the true God. The Spirit continues to work in their hearts, shaping their affections and allegiances according to this first commandment, that God might be all in all.

Q104:

What are the duties required in the first commandment?

A104: The duties required in the first commandment are, the knowing and acknowledging of God to be the only true God, and our God;[1] and to worship and glorify him accordingly,[2] by thinking,[3] meditating,[4] remembering,[5] highly esteeming,[6] honoring,[7] adoring,[8] choosing,[9] loving,[10] desiring,[11] fearing of him;[12] believing him;[13] trusting,[14] hoping,[15] delighting,[16] rejoicing in him;[17] being zealous for him;[18] calling upon him, giving all praise and thanks,[19] and yielding all obedience and submission to him with the whole man;[20] being careful in all

things to please him,[21] and sorrowful when in anything he is offended;[22] and walking humbly with him.[23]

1. I Chr. 28:9; Deut 26:17; Isa. 43:10; Jer. 14:22
2. Psa. 29:2; 95:6-7; Matt. 4:10
3. Mal. 3:16
4. Psa. 63:6
5. Eccl. 12:1
6. Psa. 71:19
7. Mal. 1:6
8. Isa. 45:23
9. Josh. 24:15, 22
10. Deut. 6:5
11. Psa. 73:25
12. Isa. 8:13
13. Exod. 14:31
14. Isa. 26:4
15. Psa. 130:7
16. Psa. 37:4
17. Psa. 32:11
18. Rom. 12:11; Num. 25:11
19. Phil. 4:6
20. Jer. 7:28; James 4:7
21. I John 3:22
22. Jer. 31:18; Psa. 119:136
23. Micah 6:8

In responding to the Westminster Larger Catechism's Question 104 - "What are the duties required in the first commandment?" - we delve into the myriad ways in which our relationship with God, as articulated in this primary commandment, is to be expressed. It's crucial to note that these are not mere obligations, but the natural

responses of the heart awakened to the love and grace of the sovereign Creator.

Knowing and Acknowledging God

The duties begin with the knowing and acknowledging of God as the only true God and our God. Our relationship with God starts with the recognition and acceptance of His identity and our position relative to Him. This includes understanding His character and His works, and acknowledging Him in all our ways.

Worshipping and Glorifying God

Worshipping and glorifying God, as required by the first commandment, is an all-encompassing directive that affects all aspects of our being and conduct. It's a recognition that every facet of our lives - our thoughts, words, and actions - can and should be oriented towards the reverence and exaltation of God.

Our Affections Towards God

The first commandment mandates us to cultivate and express a variety of affections towards God, each one pointing to a different facet of our relationship with Him. We are to highly esteem Him, adore Him, choose Him, love Him, desire Him, and fear Him. These multifaceted affections reveal a relationship that is not one-dimensional but deeply personal and engaging.

Trust, Hope, Delight, and Rejoicing in God

The first commandment also emphasizes the role of trust, hope, delight, and rejoicing in our relationship with God. It is an invitation to find our ultimate security, expectation, satisfaction, and joy in God Himself, and not in the transient and unreliable things of this world.

Zeal, Prayer, Praise, and Obedience

The commandment prompts us to demonstrate zeal for God, emphasizing a passion and eagerness in our pursuit of God and His kingdom. It enjoins us to call upon God, expressing our dependence on Him, and to give Him all praise and thanks, acknowledging His goodness and grace. It further commands us to yield all obedience and submission to God, reaffirming His lordship over our lives.

Pleasing God and Walking Humbly

Lastly, the duties required in the first commandment guide us in the way we ought to live - carefully in all things to please God, sorrowful when in anything He is offended, and walking humbly with Him. This reflects a life that is attuned to God's will and responsive to His moral law, a life that is marked by humility and contrition.

In conclusion, the duties required in the first commandment are manifold, reflecting the depth and breadth of our relationship with God. They call us to an all-encompassing, deeply personal relationship with God, one marked by knowledge, worship, affection, trust, joy, obedience, and humility. And while the duties may seem daunting, let us remember that in Christ, we are not only commanded to live this way, but also empowered to do so by His Spirit.

Q105:

What are the sins forbidden in the first commandment?

A105: The sins forbidden in the first commandment are, atheism, in denying or not having a God;[1] Idolatry, in having or worshiping more gods than one, or any with or instead of the true God;[2] the not having and avouching him for God, and our God;[3] the omission or neglect of anything due to him, required in this commandment;[4] ignorance,[5] forgetfulness,[6] misapprehensions,[7] false opinions,[8] unworthy and wicked thoughts of him;[9] bold and curious searching into his secrets;[10] all profaneness,[11] hatred of God;[12] self-love,[13] self-seeking,[14] and all other inordinate and immoderate setting of our mind, will, or affections upon other things, and taking them off from him in whole or in part;[15] vain credulity,[16] unbelief,[17] heresy,[18] misbelief,[19] distrust,[20] despair,[21] incorrigibleness,[22] and insensibleness under judgments,[23] hardness of heart,[24] pride,[25] presumption,[26] carnal security,[27] tempting of God;[28] using unlawful means,[29] and trusting in lawful means;[30] carnal delights and joys;[31] corrupt, blind, and indiscreet zeal;[32] lukewarmness,[33] and deadness in the things of God;[34] estranging ourselves, and apostatizing from God;[35] praying, or giving any religious worship, to saints, angels, or any other creatures;[36] all compacts and consulting with the devil,[37] and hearkening to his suggestions;[38] making men the lords of our faith and conscience;[39] slighting and despising God and his commands;[40] resisting and grieving of his Spirit,[41] discontent and impatience at his dispensations, charging him foolishly for the evils he inflicts on us;[42] and ascribing the praise of any good we either are, have, or can do, to fortune,[43] idols,[44] ourselves,[45] or any other creature.[46]

1. Psa. 14:1; Eph. 2:12
2. Jer. 2:27-28; I Thess. 1:9
3. Psa. 81:11
4. Isa. 43:22-24
5. Jer. 4:22; Hosea 4:1, 6
6. Jer. 2:32
7. Acts 17:23, 29
8. Isa. 40:18
9. Psa. 50:21
10. Deut. 29:29
11. Titus 1:16; Heb. 12:16
12. Rom. 1:30
13. II Tim. 3:2
14. Phil. 2:21
15. I John 2:15-16; I Sam. 2:29; Col. 3:2, 5
16. I John 4:1
17. Heb. 3:12
18. Gal. 5:20; Titus 3:10
19. Acts 26:9
20. Psa. 78:22
21. Gen. 4:13
22. Jer. 5:3
23. Isa. 42:25
24. Rom. 2:5
25. Jer. 13:15
26. Psa. 19:13
27. Zeph. 1:12
28. Matt. 4:7
29. Rom. 3:8
30. Jer. 17:5
31. II Tim. 3:4
32. Gal. 4:17; John 16:2; Rom. 10:2; Luke 9:54-55

33. Rev. 3:16
34. Rev. 3:1
35. Ezek. 14:5; Isa. 1:4-5
36. Rom. 1:25, 10:13-14; Hosea 4:12; Acts 10:25-26; Rev. 19:10; Matt. 4:10; Col. 2:18
37. Lev. 20:6; I Sam. 28:7, 11; I Chr. 10:13-14
38. Acts 5:3
39. II Cor. 1:24; Matt. 23:9
40. Deut. 32:15; II Sam. 12:9; Prov. 13:13
41. Acts 7:51; Eph. 4:30
42. Psa. 73:2-3, 13-15, 22; Job 1:22
43. I Sam. 6:7-9
44. Dan. 5:23
45. Deut. 8:17; Dan. 4:30
46. Hab. 1:16

The exposition of Westminster Larger Catechism Question 105, "What are the sins forbidden in the first commandment?" demands careful contemplation as we explore the diverse ways in which we may transgress against our primary duty to God. The nature of these transgressions underscores our profound need for the grace of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and applied by the Holy Spirit.

Atheism and Idolatry

At the extreme end of disobedience to the first commandment are the sins of atheism and idolatry. Atheism, in denying or not having a God, rejects the very existence of God. It is an outright rebellion against the Creator and sustainer of the universe. Idolatry, on the other hand, involves worshiping more gods than one, or any with or instead of the true God. Both are direct affronts to the divine

command and demonstrate an appalling disregard for God's exclusive claim to deity and worship.

Neglect of Duties and Misapprehensions about God

The commandment not only forbids outright disbelief and false worship but also condemns neglect of duties towards God and misapprehensions about Him. This includes the neglect of worship, ignorance of God's character and commands, forgetfulness of His works, and the harboring of unworthy and wicked thoughts about Him. Such actions betray an insufficient regard for God's glory and a lack of reverence for His divine majesty.

Profanity, Hatred of God, and Self-Centeredness

Additionally, the first commandment prohibits profanity, hatred of God, and an inordinate emphasis on self. Profanity treats the sacred as commonplace, thus devaluing God's sanctity. Hatred of God, often expressed indirectly through a dislike of His laws, is a rebellion against His sovereignty. An excessive focus on self can lead us to prioritise our desires over God's will, leading us astray from our duty to love Him above all else.

Unbelief, Heresy, Distrust, and Despair

The commandment further warns against unbelief, heresy, distrust, and despair. These sins challenge the truth of God's revelation, His good promises, His wisdom and power, and His faithfulness and love. They are a refusal to accept God's word and character as He has revealed them.

Disregard for God's Commands and Grieving His Spirit

The first commandment also condemns the slighting and despising of God and His commands, resisting and grieving His Spirit. Such behavior reveals a heart hardened against God's will and insensitive to His guiding presence.

Taking Glory Away from God

Finally, the first commandment stands against any attempt to ascribe the praise due to God to fortune, idols, ourselves, or any other creature. This is a direct contravention of our duty to acknowledge God as the source of every good gift and the One who alone is worthy of all praise.

In conclusion, the sins forbidden in the first commandment encompass a wide range of attitudes and actions, all of which detract from the honor and worship due to God alone. They underscore the deep-seated rebellion of the human heart and our profound need for the transforming grace of God. Yet, as we are reminded in the gospel, there is abundant mercy available in Christ for those who have transgressed this commandment. His perfect obedience and sacrificial death provide the only solution for our failure to fulfill the requirements of the first commandment. By His Spirit, we are enabled to begin to love and serve God as we ought.

Q106:

What are we specially taught by these words before me in the first

commandment?

A106: These words before me, or before my face, in the first commandment, teach us, that God, who seeth all things, taketh special notice of, and is much displeased with, the sin of having any other God: that so it may be an argument to dissuade from it, and to aggravate it as a most impudent provocation:[1] as also to persuade us to do as in his sight,: Whatever we do in his service.[2]

1. Ezek. 8:5-18; Psa. 44:20-21

2. I Chr. 28:9

The exposition of Westminster Larger Catechism Question 106, "What are we specially taught by these words before me in the first commandment?" prompts a solemn introspection of God's divine omnipresence and His intimate awareness of our spiritual state. The phrase "before me" serves as a stark reminder of God's ever-watchful gaze, underscoring both the gravity of transgressing this commandment and the reverence required in our service to Him.

God's Omniscience and Displeasure with Idolatry

The words "before me" emphasize God's omnipresence and omniscience. God sees all things; there is no deed, thought, or motive that escapes His observation. This comprehensive knowledge includes a special awareness of, and a profound displeasure with, the sin of having any other God.

In the prophet Ezekiel's vision, God shows him the abominable idolatries being committed in Jerusalem, declaring, "You will see them doing things that are even more detestable" (Ezek. 8:6). The language of "before my face" underscores the audaciousness of the

people's idolatry, conducted as it was before the very face of the God they were betraying. In His holy and righteous anger, God takes note of these affronts to His sovereignty and responds in righteous judgment.

The Seriousness of Idolatry

The phrase "before me" serves not merely as a statement of fact about God's omnipresence, but also as a dissuasion and an aggravation of the sin of idolatry. Idolatry is not a minor infraction but a most impudent provocation before the face of the Almighty. God uses the knowledge of His vigilant observation as a deterrent against such sin, underlining its gravity and its consequential severity.

Living Coram Deo – Before the Face of God

Moreover, the words "before me" are a compelling summons to live 'Coram Deo', a Latin phrase meaning "in the presence of God" or "before the face of God". This phrase encapsulates the idea of living in the conscious presence of God, under His authority, and to His honor and glory. Every action, every word, and every thought should be performed as if in His immediate presence.

In 1 Chronicles 28:9, King David advises his son Solomon, "And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches every heart and understands every desire and every thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you..." Thus, the concept of "before me" should motivate not only our abstention from idolatry but also our enthusiastic dedication to serving God sincerely and earnestly.

In conclusion, the words "before me" in the first commandment are a sobering reminder of God's ever-present gaze, His displeasure with idolatry, and the impudence of such sin. But they also serve as a call to live our lives *Coram Deo*, fully aware of God's omniscient presence, prompting us to serve Him with reverence and godly fear. With the aid of the Holy Spirit, we can live lives pleasing to Him, ever mindful of our calling to worship and serve Him alone.

Q107:

Which is the second commandment?

A107: The second commandment is, Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything 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.

[1]

1. Exod. 20:4-6

This commandment, as the succeeding injunction to the first, broadens the scope of our understanding of God's nature and His expectations for our worship. It expands the prohibition of idolatry, not just in terms of allegiances, but also in worship practices. It

addresses the means and the manner in which we are to worship God, outlining the extent to which the Creator rejects the creation's wrongful representation and service.

The Prohibition of Images

The second commandment explicitly forbids the manufacture of graven images, of any likeness of anything, be it in heaven, on earth, or in the waters. This prohibition reflects the incomprehensibility and immeasurability of God's being. To create an image or likeness of God is to attempt to capture and constrain His infinite majesty within the finite parameters of the created order - an act of irreverence and folly. It's a diminution of His divine nature and an affront to His holiness.

The Warning Against Idolatrous Worship

The commandment extends its prohibition to the adoration or service of such images. The Israelites were surrounded by cultures that used idols in their religious practices, whether as representations of their deities or as focuses of worship. By this commandment, God sets His people apart, emphasizing that He alone is to be worshipped, and that worship must accord with His revealed will, not human invention. This commandment's clear instruction underscores the absolute importance of pure, undefiled worship in the sight of God.

The Declaration of God's Jealousy

Furthermore, the commandment speaks of God's jealousy. This is not the petty, self-centered jealousy of humans, but a zeal rooted in His holy nature. It is the jealousy of a Creator who is worthy of all honor and glory, and who rightfully refuses to share His glory with

any created thing. It is the protective jealousy of a God who loves His people and seeks their highest good, knowing that their well-being is found only in undivided devotion to Him.

The Announcement of Retribution and Mercy

Finally, this commandment declares both the consequence of disobedience and the reward of obedience. The Lord warns that He will visit the iniquity of those who hate Him, even onto the third and fourth generations, underscoring the severe consequences of idolatrous sin. However, there is also a promise - mercy to thousands of generations of those who love Him and keep His commandments. This vast disproportion between judgment and mercy illuminates the heart of God, abundant in mercy and steadfast love.

In conclusion, the second commandment is a profound call to proper worship, a stern warning against idolatry, and a comforting assurance of divine mercy. It reminds us of the seriousness of idolatrous worship and the great lengths to which God goes to maintain the purity of the relationship with His people. As Reformed believers, we must heed this call, acknowledge the gravity of idolatry, and continually seek to worship God in spirit and truth, just as He requires.

Q108:

What are the duties required in the second commandment?

A108: The duties required in the second commandment are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God hath instituted in his word;[1] particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ;[2] the reading, preaching, and hearing of the word;[3] the administration and receiving of the sacraments;[4] church government and discipline;[5] the ministry and maintenance thereof;[6] religious fasting;[7] swearing by the name of God,[8] and vowing unto him:[9] as also the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship;[10] and, according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry.[11]

1. Deut. 32:46-47; Matt. 28:20; Acts 2:42; 1 Tim. 6:13-14
2. Phil. 4:6; Eph. 5:20
3. Deut. 17:18-19; Acts 15:21; II Tim. 4:2; James 1:21-22
4. Matt. 28:19; I Cor. 11:23-30
5. Matt. 16:19; 18:15-17; I Cor. ch. 5; 12:28
6. Eph. 4:11-12; I Tim. 5:17-18; I Cor. 9:1-15
7. Joel 2:12-13; I Cor. 7:5
8. Deut. 6:13
9. Isa. 19:21; Psa. 76:11
10. Acts 17:16-17; Psa. 16:4
11. Deut. 7:5; Isa. 30:22

The Westminster Larger Catechism Question 108 asks, "What are the duties required in the second commandment?" The answer is a comprehensive and nuanced outline of our responsibilities in relation to the commandment against idolatrous worship. Let's unpack these duties.

Receiving, Observing, and Keeping Pure Worship

The first part of the answer highlights the responsibility to receive, observe, and maintain the purity of all forms of religious worship and ordinances that God has instituted in His Word. This implies not only active participation in worship and adherence to the practices instituted by God, but also a conscious effort to protect the integrity and purity of these practices, resisting any form of corruption or distortion.

Participation in Specific Practices

The catechism goes on to highlight specific elements of religious practice: prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ, reading, preaching, and hearing the Word, administering and receiving sacraments, church government and discipline, religious fasting, swearing by God's name, and making vows unto Him. These elements encompass both personal and communal aspects of worship, and form the backbone of a vibrant Christian life grounded in the truth of God's Word.

Opposing False Worship

The third part of the answer speaks to the believer's responsibility to actively oppose false worship. This duty extends beyond merely refraining from participating in false worship, but includes active disapproval, detestation, and opposition. In the Reformed tradition, this opposition is not merely a matter of personal conviction but also extends to the collective responsibility of the Church to uphold true worship and oppose distortions.

Removing Monuments of Idolatry

The catechism concludes with the responsibility of each believer, according to their place and calling, to remove false worship and all

monuments of idolatry. This duty underscores the proactive role that each believer plays in promoting true worship and combating idolatry. It acknowledges the differing roles and capacities within the body of Christ, but emphasizes the shared responsibility of all believers.

This exposition of the duties required in the second commandment underscores the comprehensive nature of the commandment. It is not simply a prohibition against creating physical idols, but an all-encompassing call to uphold the purity of worship, participate actively in the practices instituted by God, oppose false worship, and actively seek to eradicate idolatry. It is a call to a life of worship that is informed by the truth of God's Word, marked by active participation, characterized by discernment and opposition to falsehood, and committed to the eradication of idolatry in all its forms. This call demands our serious consideration and wholehearted commitment.

Q109:

What are the sins forbidden in the second commandment?

A109: The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising,[1] counseling,[2] commanding,[3] using,[4] and anywise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself;[5] tolerating a false religion;[6] 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;[7] all worshiping of it,[8] or God in it or by it;[9] the making of any representation of feigned deities,[10] and all worship of them, or service belonging to them;[11] all superstitious devices, [12] corrupting the worship of God,[13] adding to it, or taking from it,[14] whether invented and taken up of ourselves,[15] or received by tradition from others,[16] though under the title of antiquity,[17] custom,[18] devotion,[19] good intent, or any other pretense whatsoever;[20] simony;[21] sacrilege;[22] all neglect,[23] contempt,[24] hindering,[25] and opposing the worship and ordinances which God hath appointed.[26]

1. Num. 15:39
2. Deut. 13:6-8
3. Hosea 5:11; Micah 6:16
4. I Kings 11:33; 12:33
5. Deut. 12:30-32
6. Deut. 13:6-12; Zech. 13:2-3; Rev. 2:2, 14-15, 20, Rev. 17:12, 16-17
7. Deut. 4:15-19; Acts 17:29; Rom. 1:21-23, 25
8. Dan. 3:18; Gal. 4:8
9. Exod. 32:5
10. Exod. 32:8
11. I Kings 18:26, 28; Isa. 65:11
12. Acts 17:22; Col. 2:21-23
13. Mal. 1:7-8, 14
14. Deut. 4:2
15. Psa. 106:39
16. Matt. 15:9
17. I Peter 1:18
18. Jer. 44:17
19. Isa. 65:3-5; Gal. 1:13-14

20. I Sam. 13:11-12; 15:21
21. Acts 8:18
22. Rom. 2:22; Mal. 3:8
23. Exod. 4:24-26
24. Matt. 22:5; Mal. 1:7, 13
25. Matt. 23:13
26. Acts 13:44-45; I Thess. 2:15-16

The Westminster Larger Catechism's question 109 asks, "What are the sins forbidden in the second commandment?" The commandment itself, forbidding the creation of idols and the worship of anything other than God Himself, is straightforward, yet this question unpacks the deep and diverse implications of this decree, in light of our human propensity to create and worship false gods.

Devising, Counseling, Commanding, Using, and Approving False Worship

The catechism first identifies the sin of crafting, endorsing, ordering, employing, and in any way sanctioning religious worship that is not sanctioned by God Himself. From a biblical perspective, every act of worship ought to reflect what God Himself has commanded in His Word. Any deviation, be it born from personal imagination, cultural norms, or the allure of convenience, is a transgression against God's specific commands regarding His worship.

Tolerating False Religion

The catechism next identifies the sin of tolerating false religion. This sin encompasses not only participation in false worship, but also passive acceptance or endorsement of it. For the Reformed believer, the tolerance of falsehood is not a sign of goodwill or open-

mindedness, but a violation of the duty to uphold truth and condemn deception in matters of faith.

Making Any Representation of God

The catechism highlights the sin of making any representation of God or any of the three persons of the Holy Trinity, either in our minds or in any outward form. This refers to the creation of any physical or mental images that claim to represent God, a practice which ultimately limits the infinite nature of God and attempts to confine Him to human comprehension or artistry. The act of creating such images, or worshiping God through such images, is a breach of this commandment.

Creating Representations of Feigned Deities and Worshiping Them

The commandment also forbids the creation of any representation of feigned deities, and all forms of worship or service directed towards them. This prohibition extends to the pantheon of man-made gods, mythical beings, and symbols of fortune or power that people often revere. The Reformed tradition understands such worship as not merely misguided, but as a direct violation of God's command.

Corrupting, Adding to, or Subtracting from Worship

Next, the catechism forbids all superstitious devices, corrupting of God's ordained worship, adding to it, or taking from it, even if these changes are made under the guise of tradition, devotion, good intent, or any other pretext. This recognizes that even seemingly harmless alterations or additions to God's prescribed worship can be a form of disobedience, reflecting a desire to conform God's commands to our preferences rather than submitting ourselves to His revealed will.

Simony, Sacrilege, Neglect, Contempt, Hindering, and Opposing Worship

Finally, the catechism identifies various ways in which we can sin against the second commandment through acts of simony (buying or selling ecclesiastical privileges), sacrilege (violating what is considered sacred), neglect or contempt of worship, and hindering or opposing the worship and ordinances appointed by God. These sins, ranging from commercialization of sacred offices to active resistance to God-ordained worship, illustrate the manifold ways we can contravene the second commandment.

In the contemplative analysis of this commandment, we discover that our duties stretch far beyond merely refraining from creating physical idols. Rather, we are called to a vigilant, active commitment to uphold God's prescribed worship in all its fullness and purity, to reject all forms of false worship, and to resist any inclination to modify God's commands to suit our own preferences. In short, we are called to a life of obedience that reflects the reverence and love we owe to our God, who is infinitely above and beyond any image or idea that we can conceive.

Q110:

What are the reasons annexed to the second commandment, the more to enforce it?

A110: The reasons annexed to the second commandment, the more to enforce it, contained in these words, 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 showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments;[1] are, besides God's sovereignty over us, and propriety in us,[2] his fervent zeal for his own worship,[3] and his revengeful indignation against all false worship, as being a spiritual whoredom;[4] accounting the breakers of this commandment such as hate him, and threatening to punish them unto divers generations;[5] and esteeming the observers of it such as love him and keep his commandments, and promising mercy to them unto many generations.[6]

1. Exod. 20:5-6
2. Psa. 45:11; Rev. 20:3-4
3. Exod. 34:13-14
4. I Cor. 10:20-22; Jer. 7:18-20; Ezek. 16:26-27; Deut. 32:16-20
5. Hosea 2:2-4
6. Deut. 5:29

The second commandment of the Decalogue not only prohibits idolatry but annexes specific reasons to strengthen its injunction. The Westminster Larger Catechism's 110th question asks, "What are the reasons annexed to the second commandment, the more to enforce it?" The profound theological, pastoral, and contemplative implications of this query merit a careful unpacking.

God's Sovereignty and Propriety Over Us

The reasons accompanying the second commandment are grounded first in the notion of God's sovereignty. The God who speaks in this commandment is not a distant, impersonal deity but "the Lord thy

God." The use of "thy" underscores a personal relationship between God and His covenant people. He is their God by sovereign choice and redemptive act. Moreover, His "propriety in us" reminds us of the unique claim God has upon His people. They are His treasured possession, set apart for His glory. As a loving Lord, He seeks their highest good, which is realized in true worship of Him.

God's Zeal for His Own Worship

The phrase "For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God" conveys the profound emotional depth of God's commitment to His own glory and the worship due to Him. God's "jealousy" here is not a petty human emotion but a righteous and fervent zeal for His worship to be undivided and pure. It's a divine passion for His people's hearts to be wholly devoted to Him. In the Reformed tradition, this zeal is understood as God's intense love for His glory and His desire for His people to experience the fullest joy in Him.

God's Indignation Against False Worship

False worship is described in the Scriptures as a "spiritual whoredom." It is an act of unfaithfulness, likened to the deepest kind of relational betrayal. When the Israelites turned to idols, they were not merely adopting cultural practices of their neighbors; they were committing spiritual adultery. This is a profound reason for the prohibition against idolatry. God's "vengeful indignation" against idolatry serves as a stern warning to deter His people from the paths that lead away from Him.

The Consequences of Breaking and Keeping the Commandment

The commandment is accompanied by a sobering promise of retribution: God will "visit the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." This does not suggest that children are punished for their parents' sins, but rather that the consequences of idolatry can ripple through generations. Idolatry can introduce patterns of thought and behavior that persist, perpetuating estrangement from God.

Conversely, the promise of God's mercy to those who love Him and keep His commandments is profound. This mercy extends "unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments." The expansive scope of God's promised mercy in comparison to His judgment underscores His gracious disposition and desire to bless His covenant people.

Conclusion

The reasons annexed to the second commandment serve as a solemn reminder of the weightiness of our worship. The Reformed tradition understands that right worship is not a mere matter of external conformity but of the heart's orientation. To worship God aright is to align oneself with the grain of the universe, to find one's place in the grand story of redemption, and to know the joy of communion with the Triune God. The reasons accompanying this commandment beckon us into this joy and warn us of the perils of settling for anything less.

Q111:

Which is the third commandment?

A111: 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.[1]

1. Exod. 20:7

The Decalogue, given by the Divine hand to Moses atop Mount Sinai, forms the cornerstone of the moral law in the Judeo-Christian tradition. As we navigate our way through these commands, the third commandment arises, pulsating with sacred gravity. The Westminster Larger Catechism, in its 111th question, queries, "Which is the third commandment?" The answer, rooted deeply in Exodus 20:7, 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." This commandment offers profound implications for our understanding of the sacredness of the Divine name and our duty towards it.

The Weight of the Divine Name

In the biblical worldview, a name is not a mere label. It is emblematic of character, nature, and essence. When Scripture speaks of the "name" of the Lord, it touches upon the very being, attributes, and acts of God. Within Biblical Christianity, there is an acknowledgment that the name of God encompasses all that He is: His power, His holiness, His justice, and His mercy. To invoke the name of God is to draw near to the mystery of the Divine.

The Sin of Taking God's Name in Vain

To "take in vain" translates a Hebrew phrase that conveys emptiness, falsehood, or deceit. To take God's name in vain is to treat it as trivial, worthless, or deceptive. This can manifest in thoughtless oaths, irreverent speech, or false teachings. In a deeper sense, it is about a casual, careless, or even deceitful approach to the things of God.

John Calvin, a stalwart of the Reformed tradition, remarks that this commandment forbids all profanation of the name of God, and by a synecdoche, it condemns all irreverence and falsehood in religion; because the Lord calls himself by this title, in so far as he manifests his glory to men, in doctrines, precepts, exhortations, and other means of salvation, which he has prescribed.

The Gravity of the Transgression

The commandment carries with it a dire warning: "the Lord will not hold him guiltless." The emphasis here is not mere retribution but the sacredness of God's name. The transgression of this commandment isn't simply a lapse in etiquette; it's a profound violation of the relationship between Creator and creature. The gravity is such that God explicitly states that the offender will not be held "guiltless."

Pastoral Implications

From a pastoral perspective, this commandment beckons believers to tread with reverence in their speech and actions concerning God. The name of the Lord should inspire awe, reverence, and deep contemplation. For believers, this isn't merely about avoiding careless oaths but cultivating a heart attitude of profound respect and devotion.

Conclusion

The third commandment, as expounded in the Reformed theological tradition, calls the faithful to a deep reverence for the Divine. It's a reminder of the weightiness of God's name and our duty to uphold its sanctity. To approach God's name with care is to acknowledge His holiness, His majesty, and His rightful place in our lives. It is an invitation to align our lives with the reverent worship of the God who reveals Himself to us, urging us to echo the Psalmist's sentiment: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" (Psalm 8:1).

Q112:

What is required in the third commandment?

A112: The third commandment requires, That the name of God, his titles, attributes,[1] ordinances,[2] the word,[3] sacraments,[4] prayer,[5] oaths,[6] vows,[7] lots,[8] his works,[9] and whatsoever else there is whereby he makes himself known, be holily and reverently used in thought,[10] meditation,[11] word,[12] and writing;[13] by an holy profession,[14] and Answerable conversation, [15] to the glory of God,[16] and the good of ourselves,[17] and others.[18]

1. Matt. 6:9; Deut. 28:58; Psa. 29:2; 68:4; Rev. 15:3-4
2. Mal. 1:14; Eccl. 5:1

3. Psa. 138:2
4. I Cor. 11:24-25, 28-29
5. I Tim. 2:8
6. Jer. 4:2
7. Eccl. 5:2, 4-6
8. Acts 1:24, 26
9. Job 36:24
10. Mal. 3:16
11. Psa. 8:1, 3-4, 9
12. Col. 3:17; Psa. 105:2, 5
13. Psa. 102:18
14. I Peter 3:15; Micah 4:5
15. Phil. 1:27
16. I Cor. 10:31
17. Jer. 32:39
18. I Peter 2:12

The Decalogue, as encapsulated in the Ten Commandments, illuminates our understanding of God's moral expectations, shaping our relationship both with the Divine and our fellow man. Delving into the third commandment, the Westminster Larger Catechism's 112th question ponders, "What is required in the third commandment?" The response, which emerges from a rich tapestry of biblical passages, invites us into a profound understanding of reverence and holy usage of the Divine name in every facet of our lives.

The Sacredness of God's Name and Everything That Represents Him

The commandment's expansiveness is striking. Not only is God's direct name to be held in reverence, but so are His titles, attributes,

the sacraments, His word, and all means by which He is made known to humanity. From a biblical perspective, there is a profound appreciation for the idea that God's revelation of Himself is intrinsically sacred. John Calvin, in his Institutes, delineates that when it comes to any utterance or thought of God, utmost reverence is essential, as it reflects our acknowledgement of God's immeasurable holiness.

An All-Encompassing Reverence

The commandment doesn't merely pertain to speech. It mandates reverence in thought, meditation, the written word, and indeed, in all manners of expression. Such a command invites deep introspection. For how often, even subconsciously, do individuals trivialize or misuse the sacred? Each medium through which God's name or attributes are conveyed becomes a sacred trust, a vehicle of grace, and a means of communicating the ineffable.

A Call to Holiness in Profession and Life

In the Reformed tradition, orthodoxy (right belief) and orthopraxy (right action) walk hand in hand. This commandment, too, accentuates this by coupling a "holy profession" with an "answerable conversation." It's a summons to congruence between creed and conduct, between what one professes about God and how one's life radiates that profession. As the Apostle Peter exhorts, believers ought to be ready always to give an answer to every man about the hope they have, but this in gentleness and reverence (I Peter 3:15).

The Ultimate Aim: God's Glory and Mutual Edification

The third commandment's essence is crystallized in its telos, its ultimate aim: everything done to the glory of God and for the

edification of oneself and others. The Reformed tradition, echoing the Apostle Paul's words in I Corinthians 10:31, emphasizes the universality of this call – in all things, believers are to glorify God.

Pastoral Reflection

This commandment serves as both a challenge and an invitation. It challenges believers to introspect, to recognize the moments of casualness or irreverence in their approach to the Divine. Simultaneously, it invites believers into a deeper reverence, a more profound appreciation for the sanctity of God's revelation of Himself.

For pastors and spiritual leaders, this commandment becomes a tool of gentle correction and profound teaching. By embracing and embodying the spirit of this commandment, the church is led into a deeper love for God, expressed through a profound reverence for His name.

Conclusion

The third commandment, as elucidated by the Westminster Larger Catechism and the broader Reformed tradition, stands as a sentinel, guarding the sanctity of God's name and everything associated with Him. It's not merely a call to verbal caution; it's an invitation to a lifestyle, a posture of the heart, a continual worship where every thought, word, and deed is imbued with reverence for the God who has chosen to make Himself known.

Q113:

What are the sins forbidden in the third commandment?

A113: The sins forbidden in the third commandment are, the not using of God's name as is required;[1] and the abuse of it in an ignorant,[2] vain,[3] irreverent, profane,[4] superstitious,[5] or wicked mentioning, or otherwise using his titles, attributes,[6] ordinances,[7] or works,[8] by blasphemy,[9] perjury;[10] all sinful cursings,[11] oaths,[12] vows,[13] and lots;[14] violating of our oaths and vows, if lawful;[15] and fulfilling them, if of things unlawful;[16] murmuring and quarreling at,[17] curious prying into,[18] and misapplying of God's decrees [19] and providences;[20] misinterpreting,[21] misapplying,[22] or any way perverting the word, or any part of it,[23] to profane jests,[24] curious or unprofitable Questions,[25] vain janglings, or the maintaining of false doctrines;[26] abusing it, the creatures, or anything contained under the name of God, to charms,[27] or sinful lusts and practices; [28] the maligning,[29] scorning,[30] reviling,[31] or any wise opposing of God's truth, grace, and ways;[32] making profession of religion in hypocrisy, or for sinister ends;[33] being ashamed of it, [34] or a shame to it, by unconformable,[35] unwise,[36] unfruitful, [37] and offensive walking,[38] or backsliding from it.[39]

1. Mal. 2:2

2. Acts 17:23

3. Prov. 30:9

4. Mal. 1:6-7, 12; 3:14

5. I Sam. 4:3-5; Jer. 7:4, 9-10, 14, 31; Col. 2:20-22

6. II Kings 18:30, 35; Exod. 5:2; Psa. 139:20

7. Psa. 50:16-17

8. Psa. 50:16-17

9. Isa. 5:12
10. II Kings 19:22; Lev. 24:11
11. Zech. 5:4; 8:17
12. I Sam. 17:43; II Sam. 16:5
13. Jer. 5:7; 23:10
14. Deut. 23:18; Acts 23:12, 14
15. Esth. 3:7; 9:24; Psa. 22:18
16. Psa. 24:4, Ezek. 17:16, 18-19
17. Mark 6:26; I Sam. 25:22, 32-34
18. Rom. 9:14, 19-20
19. Deut. 29:29
20. Rom. 3:5, 7; 6:1-2
21. Eccl. 8:11; 9:3; Psa. ch. 39
22. Matt. 5:21-48
23. Ezek 13:22
24. II Peter 3:16; Matt. 22:24-31
25. Isa. 22:18; Jer. 23:34, 36, 38
26. I Tim. 1:4, 6-7; 6:4-5, 20; II Tim. 2:14; Titus. 3:9
27. Deut. 18:10-14; Acts 19:13
28. II Tim. 4:3-4; Rom. 13:13-14; I Kings 21:9-10; Jude 1:4
29. Acts 13:45; I John 3:12
30. Psa. 1:1; II Peter 3:3
31. I Peter 4:4
32. Acts 4:18; 13:45-46, 50; 19:9; I Thess 2:16; Heb. 10:29
33. II Tim. 3:5; Matt. 6:1-2, 5, 16; 23:14
34. Mark 8:38
35. Psa. 73:14-15
36. I Cor. 6:5-6; Eph. 5:15-17
37. Isa. 5:4; II Peter 1:8-9
38. Rom. 2:23-24
39. Gal. 3:1, 3; Heb. 6:6

Within the rich depths of the Westminster Larger Catechism, the 113th question beckons us to introspect upon a landscape of human failures regarding the third commandment. By delineating the array of sins forbidden therein, the Reformed theological tradition brings to light the vast implications of not revering the name of God, which is a nexus of faith and action.

A Multifaceted Transgression

From the outset, it becomes manifestly clear that the third commandment's prohibitions are multifaceted. Beyond the obvious act of blasphemy, the Catechism warns against an array of more subtle and insidious forms of disrespect: from the "ignorant" mention of God's name to "superstitious" uses, from "murmuring" against His decrees to "curious prying" into them.

John Calvin, in his commentaries, often expounded on the profound sanctity of God's name and the dangers of treating it lightly. He opined that even if one doesn't audibly utter blasphemies, harbouring irreverent thoughts or fostering attitudes that malign the Divine is equally grievous.

Misuse of God's Word: A Profound Misdeed

The Catechism lays emphasis on the reverence of Scripture. Misinterpreting, misapplying, or perverting God's word is seen as a violation of the third commandment. This is a clarion call for believers to approach the Scriptures with both reverence and diligent study. As the reformer Martin Luther once said, the Bible is the "cradle wherein Christ is laid." To misuse it is to dishonour not just the text but the very Logos it contains.

Superficiality and Hypocrisy

The Catechism's mention of making a "profession of religion in hypocrisy" is particularly poignant. In the Reformed tradition, the external observance of religious practices without internal piety is not just seen as empty but as a direct violation of the third commandment. It's a stark reminder that genuine reverence for God's name demands congruence between inner faith and outward actions.

The Walk of Faith: Its Sacredness and Pitfalls

Being "ashamed" of faith or being a "shame" to it through unwise or unfruitful behaviour is underscored as a transgression. Here, the Catechism not only calls for a vibrant proclamation of one's faith but also for a life that complements such proclamation. The Reformed tradition is rife with warnings against "offensive walking," an idea rooted in the Apostle Paul's teachings about not causing others to stumble.

Pastoral Implications

For those entrusted with shepherding God's flock, Q113 serves as both a diagnostic tool and a guide for pastoral exhortation. Spiritual leaders are called to gently steer believers away from the myriad pitfalls associated with the misuse of God's name and attributes, urging them towards a life of deep reverence and genuine piety.

Conclusion

The expansiveness of the sins forbidden in the third commandment, as delineated by Q113, brings to light the profound gravity the Reformed tradition places upon the sanctity of God's name and everything associated with it. Far beyond mere words, the commandment addresses attitudes, actions, and the very essence of

one's walk of faith. It's a call to profound introspection, urging believers to guard against both overt and covert irreverences, fostering a heart and life that continually honours the Divine.

Q114:

What reasons are annexed to the third commandment?

A114: The reasons annexed to the third commandment, in these words, The Lord thy God, and, For the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain,[1] are, because he is the Lord and our God, therefore his name is not to be profaned, or any way abused by us;[2] especially because he will be so far from acquitting and sparing the transgressors of this commandment, as that he will not suffer them to escape his righteous judgment,[3] albeit many such escape the censures and punishments of men.[4]

1. Exod. 20:7

2. Lev. 19:12

3. Ezek. 36:21-23; Deut. 28:58-59; Zech. 5:2-4

4. I Sam. 2:12, 17, 22, 24; 3:18

The 114th question of the Westminster Larger Catechism directs our attention not just to the prohibitions of the third commandment, but to the profound reasons underpinning them. In delving into these reasons, we are beckoned into a richer understanding of the gravity

of God's name and the deep responsibility that accompanies our relationship with the Divine.

The Identity of God: "He is the Lord"

The phrase, "The Lord thy God," emphasizes two foundational theological concepts. Firstly, God's sovereignty: He is the "Lord." In the Reformed tradition, God's sovereignty is the bedrock upon which every doctrine rests. The Bible consistently emphasizes God's absolute lordship over all creation. It's this sovereign God whose name is placed in our trust, making any casual or irreverent usage a violation of the very order of creation.

Secondly, the phrase emphasizes God's covenantal relationship with His people: "thy God." It is a gentle but profound reminder of the intimate relationship that believers share with the Almighty. As our God, His name carries the weight of His promises, His love, and His grace towards us. Profaning His name is akin to betraying this sacred relationship.

The Divine Justice: Inescapable and Impartial

"For the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." These words serve as a solemn warning, underscoring the gravity of the commandment. In the Reformed theological milieu, the justice of God stands as an unwavering pillar. While God's grace is abundant, His justice remains uncompromised. As the scriptures warn in Ezekiel and Deuteronomy, God will neither acquit nor spare those who profane His name.

Interestingly, the catechism adds a deeply pastoral dimension by noting that while many might "escape the censures and punishments of men," none can escape God's righteous judgment. This is a call to

introspection and repentance, urging believers to recognize the Divine gaze that beholds all actions, both public and private.

The Implications for Earthly Governance

Lastly, the acknowledgment that many transgressors "escape the censures and punishments of men" presents a subtle challenge to the church and society at large. It is a call for earthly authorities, especially those within the church, to be vigilant in upholding the sanctity of God's name. It serves as a reminder that laxity in addressing irreverence can lead to spiritual decay within the community.

Conclusion

The reasons annexed to the third commandment, as presented in Q114, invite believers into a deeper reverence for the Divine Name, rooted not just in fear of judgment but in profound love and respect for the God of the covenant. They serve as a compass, guiding us towards a life of fidelity to the God who is both our sovereign Lord and loving Savior. It is an exposition that calls for both introspective humility and a commitment to uphold the sanctity of the very name that offers salvation, grace, and eternal life.

Q115:

Which is the fourth commandment?

A115: The fourth commandment is, Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, 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.

[1]

1. Exod. 20:8-11

The fourth commandment, enshrined in Exodus 20:8-11, calls to mind not merely an ordinance but a profound theological rhythm embedded within the very fabric of creation and covenantal history. It offers an invitation to both contemplation and rest, marking a divine cadence by which God's people are beckoned to live. Let us more deeply explore a scriptural understanding of this commandment.

Cosmic Rhythms: Creation and Rest

At its core, the fourth commandment hearkens back to the primordial narrative of creation. The six days of labor followed by the day of rest mirrors the divine choreography depicted in Genesis. In the grand panorama of the biblical narrative, God's acts of creation aren't merely historical events but patterns for human existence. John Calvin, in his magnum opus, "Institutes of the Christian Religion," highlighted the sabbath's connection to creation, positing it as a reminder of our dependency on God and the rhythm He set in motion.

Covenantal Rest: A Holy Invitation

While the commandment instructs a cessation of labor, it is far from a mere pause in activity. It is a sacred invitation to communion. The term "keep it holy" is a clarion call to consecrate the day, setting it apart for divine communion and reflection. It's a day when God's covenantal promises, His acts of old, and His future redemption are to be pondered upon deeply.

Communal Implications: Beyond Individual Piety

In the intricate detailing of who should rest— "thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates" — the commandment extends its scope beyond individual piety to societal righteousness. In the Reformed tradition, community and covenant are inseparably linked. Thus, the sabbath becomes not only an individual respite but a communal celebration of God's benevolence, underscoring the egalitarian ethos that all, irrespective of societal hierarchy, deserve rest and divine communion.

Rest as Resistance: Against the Profane

In an era where incessant labor and ceaseless striving are often glorified, the sabbath serves as a profound act of resistance against the profane. It is a weekly declaration that our worth is not tethered to our productivity but rooted in our identity as God's beloved. The Heidelberg Catechism, another foundational document of Reformed theology, elucidates this by emphasizing the sabbath's role in fostering gratitude, rest, and trust in God's provision.

Conclusion

The fourth commandment, as articulated in Q115 of the Westminster Larger Catechism, beckons us into a rhythm of divine rest and

reflection. It serves as a reminder of God's providence, His desire for communal flourishing, and the sacred cadence by which humanity is invited to live. This commandment isn't merely a rule but a gracious invitation into the heart of divine communion, urging God's people to rest, reflect, and rejoice in the God of the covenant.

Q116:

What is required in the fourth commandment?

A116: The fourth commandment requires of all men the sanctifying or keeping holy to God such set times as he hath appointed in his word, expressly one whole day in seven; which was the seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, and the first day of the week ever since, and so to continue to the end of the world; which is the Christian sabbath,[1] and in the New Testament called The Lord's day.[2]

1. Deut. 5:12, 14, 18; Gen. 2:2-3; I Cor. 16:1-2; Acts 20:7; Matt. 5:17-18; Isa. 56:2, 4, 6-7
2. Rev. 1:10

The fourth commandment, as expounded in Q116 of the Westminster Larger Catechism, pierces through the veil of mere ritualistic observance and ushers us into a deeper understanding of sacred time. It beckons us to reflect upon what it truly means to sanctify time in devotion to the Almighty, especially within the context of

Reformed theology. The essence of this commandment touches not only the sanctity of the sabbath but the continuum of God's salvific history, anchored from creation to eschaton.

The Holiness of Time: Beyond Chronos to Kairos

Time, in the Hebraic and subsequently Reformed understanding, is more than a mere succession of moments (chronos); it possesses sacred moments of divine encounter (kairos). The mandate to sanctify "one whole day in seven" transcends a mere duty; it becomes a holy privilege, a sacred interlude, where mortal time intersects with divine eternity. It emphasizes its purpose as a means for man to meditate on God's works and for society to hear God's Word and partake in the sacraments.

From Creation to Redemption: The Transition of the Sabbath

The delineation in Q116 from the "seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ" to the "first day of the week ever since" is profoundly theological. It underscores the movement from God as Creator (anchored in the seventh-day Sabbath of Genesis) to God as Redeemer (embodied in the resurrection of Christ on the first day). This transition encapsulates the grand metanarrative of salvation history, from creation's perfection to the Fall's fracture, culminating in redemption through Christ.

The Lord's Day: New Creation and Eschatological Hope

Referred to as "The Lord's day" in the New Testament, the Christian sabbath stands as a testament to the new creation inaugurated by Christ's resurrection. Drawing from the rich wellspring of Reformed eschatology, the celebration of the Lord's day becomes not only a

commemoration of the past but an anticipatory gesture towards the future. As the Heidelberg Catechism rightly puts it, the Sabbath is a prelude to that eternal rest which the true people of God shall enter.

Pastoral Implications: The Sabbath in Christian Living

From a pastoral perspective, the fourth commandment is a divine remedy for the restless human soul. In an age marked by ceaseless striving and relentless pursuit, the sanctity of the Sabbath serves as a sanctum of solace. It is a haven where the believer finds rest in God, renewed in spirit, and reoriented towards divine purposes. It is a momentary pause, where the cacophony of worldly clamor is silenced, and the symphony of divine praise resounds.

In Conclusion

Q116 of the Westminster Larger Catechism illumines the multifaceted richness of the fourth commandment. Rooted in the rhythms of creation and reaching towards the horizon of new creation, the Christian sabbath serves as a testament to God's unwavering faithfulness and the believer's hope in Christ. It stands as a sacred beacon, guiding God's people from temporal toil to eternal rest, from fleeting moments to timeless eternity.

Q117:

How is the sabbath or the Lord's day to be sanctified?

A117: The sabbath or Lord's day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day,[1] not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful;[2] and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy)[3] in the public and private exercises of God's worship:[4] and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day.[5]

1. Exod. 20:8, 10

2. Exod. 16:25-28; Neh. 13:15-22; Jer. 17:21-22

3. Matt. 12:1-13

4. Isa. 58:13-14; 66:23; Luke 4:16; Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:1-2; Psa. ch. 92; Lev. 23:3

5. Exod. 16:22, 25-26, 29; 20:8; Luke 23:54, 56; Neh. 13:19

In the panorama of God's ten commandments, the fourth commandment – concerning the sanctity of the Sabbath or the Lord's day – holds a unique place, harmonizing our relationship with God and rhythm of life. Question 117 of the Westminster Larger Catechism explores the sanctification of this day, unearthing the deep spiritual and practical implications of its observance.

Sanctification of Time: A Divine Pause

At the heart of Q117 lies the notion of "holy resting." This is not mere inactivity, but an intentional pause, a God-infused cessation. Theologians of the 16th century saw this "rest" as double-fold: a cessation from one's labor, echoing God's own rest on the seventh day of creation, and more profoundly, a rest in God, symbolizing spiritual repose in Him. This dual-rest is not just an avoidance of sin

but a proactive sanctification, a separation from even lawful worldly engagements.

A Day Distinct: Beyond Mundanity

The wisdom of the Reformed tradition is that it does not merely delineate sins to avoid, but it paints a positive vision of how to cultivate holiness. On the Lord's day, even activities deemed "lawful" on other days are set aside. This offers a profound statement about the Christian life. It implies that sanctification requires not just abstention from evident evils but a deeper, deliberate consecration that sometimes means refraining from goods, to prioritize the Greatest Good—God Himself.

Delight in Devotion: Worship as the Heartbeat

Central to the sanctification of the Sabbath is the engagement in both public and private exercises of God's worship. This communal and individual worship becomes the heartbeat of the Sabbath. In Isaiah 58:13-14, the notion of "delight" in the Lord underscores the joyful nature of this worship. The Christian Sabbath is not merely a day of obligation but of celebration, not a burdensome yoke but a freeing embrace. In the words of John Owen, the Puritan theologian, the Sabbath provides spiritual feasting for the soul.

Works of Necessity and Mercy: The Compassionate Exceptions

The Reformed tradition, rooted deeply in biblical exposition, recognizes that there are times when acts of necessity and mercy must occur on the Sabbath. Jesus Himself, as seen in Matthew 12:1-13, emphasized that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. Acts of genuine need and mercy, far from violating the

Sabbath, capture its essence—they reflect God's own compassionate heart.

Preparation and Foresight: Entering the Sabbath Rightly

The commandment's contemplative depth is further seen in the emphasis on preparing our hearts. Preparation is a posture of expectancy and honor. It demonstrates the value and weight given to the day of the Lord. As the Heidelberg Catechism posits, preparation implies not just a looking forward to the day, but a laying aside of hindrances and distractions. It's about aligning one's heart, soul, and actions with the sanctity of the day.

Concluding Reflections

Q117 presents the Sabbath not as a mere day of rest but a divine invitation to rhythm, reflection, and relationship with God. It beckons believers to a higher plane of existence, one where time becomes sanctified, worship is a joyful refrain, and life aligns with divine priorities. The sanctification of the Sabbath is more than ritual; it is a profound intertwining of the divine and human, the eternal and temporal, the Creator and the creature. The Reformed theological tradition, through its profound reflection on this commandment, offers a timeless blueprint for a life lived in rhythm with God's own heart.

Q118:

Why is the charge of keeping the sabbath more specially directed to governors of families, and other superiors?

A118: The charge of keeping the sabbath is more specially directed to governors of families, and other superiors, because they are bound not only to keep it themselves, but to see that it be observed by all those that are under their charge; and because they are prone oftentimes to hinder them by employments of their own.[1]

1. Exod. 20:10; 23:12; Josh. 24:15; Neh. 13:15, 17; Jer. 17:20-22

The commandments of God, while personal, have a communal aspect that touches every dimension of society. This is vividly seen in the Sabbath commandment, where its observance, though individual, has ramifications that ripple through families, communities, and entire nations. Question 118 of the Westminster Larger Catechism uniquely focuses on this communal dimension, shedding light on the role of family governors and superiors in the sanctification of the Sabbath.

The Divine Mandate: Not Just Personal, but Communal

When God gave the command to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, He was not merely speaking to isolated individuals but to a collective - to families, clans, and tribes. At the heart of the fourth commandment is a corporate call to worship, rest, and reflect. The Reformed tradition, ever conscious of the covenantal nature of God's dealings with His people, recognizes that in the fabric of society, certain figures bear a heightened responsibility. These figures, such as heads of families and superiors in various capacities, act as covenant representatives.

The Weight of Leadership: A Dual Responsibility

Governors of families and superiors, by virtue of their position, have the dual duty of personal observance and the ensuring of observance by those in their sphere of influence. Just as priests in the Old Testament were not merely responsible for their own piety but also for leading and instructing the people, so too are modern-day leaders in their respective domains. The Puritan Richard Baxter once remarked that the head of a family is both a king, in exercising rule and protection, and a prophet, in guiding his family in the ways of the Lord. This is not a mere responsibility but a sacred charge, an entrustment from God.

The Peril of Position: Potential Hindrances

Q118 insightfully observes that these very leaders are sometimes prone to inadvertently lead others astray, specifically in the realm of Sabbath observance. By imposing or allowing unnecessary work or distractions on this day, they can become stumbling blocks. John Calvin, in his commentaries, often warned of the dangerous tendency of those in power to prioritize their worldly affairs over divine commands, emphasizing that the gravity of their position means the repercussions of their actions echo far and wide.

The Pastoral Heart: Protecting the Vulnerable

Beyond the duties and perils of leadership, there's a deeply pastoral concern in this question. It recognizes that those under the care of governors or superiors, be they family members or subordinates, are often vulnerable. They might not have the agency or authority to prioritize Sabbath observance if their superiors do not. Hence, leaders are not just called to passive non-interference, but active facilitation of Sabbath sanctity. The emphasis on leaders in the

Reformed tradition, as illuminated by figures like Jonathan Edwards and Charles Hodge, is to be shepherds - to guide, protect, and nurture those under their care, especially in matters of the soul.

Concluding Reflections

Question 118 casts a spotlight on a profound truth: the call to Sabbath holiness is not just an individual endeavor but a collective journey. In this journey, some have been given the weighty role of leading, instructing, and facilitating. The Sabbath, in this light, becomes not just a day of rest, but a testament to the nature of God's kingdom, where leaders are servants, responsibility is a form of worship, and the well-being of the community reflects the heart of God. Through the lens of the Reformed tradition, we see a vision of society where the observance of the Sabbath is a communal symphony, harmonized by the diligent and caring leadership of its appointed stewards.

Q119:

What are the sins forbidden in the fourth commandment?

A119: The sins forbidden in the fourth commandment are, all omissions of the duties required,[1] all careless, negligent, and unprofitable performing of them, and being weary of them;[2] all profaning the day by idleness, and doing that which is in itself sinful;

[3] and by all needless works, words, and thoughts, about our worldly employments and recreations.[4]

1. Ezek. 22:26
2. Acts 15:7, 9; Ezek. 33:30-32; Amos 8:5; Mal. 1:13
3. Ezek. 23:38
4. Jer. 17:24, 27; Isa. 58:13

The Sabbath, as enshrined in the fourth commandment, is a potent testament to God's sovereignty, our human finitude, and the sacred rhythm of creation. To understand the sins forbidden in this commandment, as delineated by Question 119 of the Westminster Larger Catechism, is to grapple with a profound theological truth: The way we treat the Sabbath is a reflection of our reverence for God, our stewardship of time, and our commitment to holy living. Exploring the Reformed theological tradition offers illuminating insights into the contours of these prohibitions.

Neglecting the Divine Mandate

The first sin pinpointed by Q119 is the omission of the duties required by the fourth commandment. This isn't merely a passive oversight but an active disregard of God's command. The Scripture emphasizes God's covenants with His people, underscoring the relational dynamic of obedience. When Ezekiel laments the priests who "have hidden their eyes from my Sabbaths" (Ezek. 22:26), it points to a heart that turns away from God's gracious provision of rest. Reformed theologians often reflected on the profound spiritual detriment of neglecting the Sabbath, seeing it not merely as legal infraction but as forfeiting a divinely-appointed means of grace.

Apathy in Worship

The catechism's reference to "careless, negligent, and unprofitable" performance of Sabbath duties casts a spotlight on mere externalism. Throughout the annals of the Reformed tradition, from the Puritans to the Princeton theologians, there's a consistent emphasis on the heart's posture in worship. Mere ritual without heartfelt engagement is a hollow enterprise. The prophets' rebuke, such as Malachi's castigation of those who say, "Behold, what a weariness is it!" (Mal. 1:13) regarding God's service, underscores the tragic irony of finding weariness in what God designed for refreshment.

Profanity through Idleness and Sin

The Sabbath's desecration by idleness or overt sin is an affront to its sanctity. Idleness is not genuine rest; it is a spiritual lethargy, a squandering of sacred time. Further, to engage in acts that are inherently sinful on the Sabbath is to doubly profane the day. The Reformed confessions, such as the Heidelberg Catechism, delineate the positive duties of the Sabbath, implying that to waste this day or sully it with sin is to reject God's gracious invitation to commune with Him.

Worldliness on the Sabbath

The final point of Q119 draws attention to "needless works, words, and thoughts" about worldly matters. Isaiah's exhortation to turn one's foot from doing their own pleasure on the Sabbath (Isa. 58:13) points to the heart of the matter. The Sabbath calls believers to a different rhythm, a sanctified tempo where the clamor of the world is muted, and the voice of God is amplified. John Owen, a luminary in the Reformed tradition, writes extensively on the importance of guarding the mind and heart from worldly intrusions on the Sabbath, recognizing that true rest is not merely physical but profoundly spiritual.

Concluding Reflections

In contemplating the sins forbidden in the fourth commandment, the Westminster Larger Catechism offers a mirror to the soul. The Sabbath's violation is not merely about breaking a rule; it's about neglecting a relationship, misusing a gift, and diminishing our humanity. As the Reformed tradition has consistently affirmed, the Sabbath is a treasure, a sanctuary in time, inviting us into deeper communion with God, rest for our souls, and reorientation towards the eternal. To forsake its blessings is not merely to transgress a command but to impoverish our spiritual lives. The question, then, beckons each believer to a reverent introspection: How do we honor God's time, and in doing so, find our true rest?

Q120:

What are the reasons annexed to the fourth commandment, the more to enforce it?

A120: The reasons annexed to the fourth commandment, the more to enforce it, are taken from the equity of it, God allowing us six days of seven for our own affairs, and reserving but one for himself, in these words, Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work:[1] from God's challenging a special propriety in that day, The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God:[2] from the example of God, who in six days made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and

rested the seventh day: and from that blessing which God put upon that day, not only in sanctifying it to be a day for his service, but in ordaining it to be a means of blessing to us in our sanctifying it; Wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.[3]

1. Exod. 20:9
2. Exod. 20:10
3. Exod. 20:11

In the vast expanse of God's revelation to His people, the fourth commandment stands as a unique thread of divine wisdom and grace. The Sabbath, as it is presented in the Decalogue, is not just a mere directive; it is fortified with reasons, illuminating its deep theological and existential significance. By pondering the reasons annexed to the fourth commandment, as delineated in Q120 of the Westminster Larger Catechism, we dive deep into the heart of God's intentions for human flourishing and His glorious design for creation.

Equity and Divine Generosity

The first reason underscores the sheer generosity of God. By setting apart six days for our endeavors and reserving only one for Himself, God showcases His magnanimity. In a cosmos where He rightfully could demand all our time, He gifts us with the majority. John Calvin, in his commentaries, frequently spoke of God's beneficence towards humanity, and here in the fourth commandment, it is luminously displayed. Six days we are given to labor and engage in the multifaceted affairs of life, underscoring the Reformed principle of the goodness of creation and the dignity of human work. But then comes the Sabbath, a day set apart, reminding us of the source of every blessing.

A Day Marked as God's Own

The second reason emphasizes God's special claim on the Sabbath: "The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God." This is a profound theological declaration. Just as God claims the Israelites as His chosen people, distinguishing them from all other nations, He claims the Sabbath as His designated day, setting it apart from all other days. The Reformed confessions and catechisms echo this idea, emphasizing God's sovereign prerogative to consecrate time and command our observance.

God's Exemplary Rest

The third reason draws our gaze upward to the divine pattern itself. The Creator of the universe, in His cosmic work of fashioning everything from galaxies to grains of sand, set a rhythm – six days of creative activity followed by a day of rest. This is not because of divine fatigue, for God does not grow weary, but to set a precedent. As Herman Bavinck eloquently states in his *Reformed Dogmatics*, the Sabbath rest of God serves as a pattern and promise for humanity, beckoning us to participate in the restorative rhythm of creation.

Blessing and Sanctification

Lastly, the Sabbath is not merely a day of cessation from labor; it's a divinely-blessed and hallowed day. When God blessed the Sabbath, He infused it with a sanctifying potency, making it a means of grace. The Westminster Divines recognized the Sabbath as a conduit of divine blessing. By sanctifying it, we are not merely obeying a command but positioning ourselves to receive the spiritual blessings God has attached to this day.

Concluding Reflections

The reasons annexed to the fourth commandment serve as divine amplifiers, magnifying its significance and urging its heartfelt observance. In a world frenetically racing against time, the Sabbath stands as God's oasis in time, inviting us to pause, reflect, worship, and be renewed. The Reformed tradition, with its robust theology of grace and creation, beckons us to embrace the Sabbath not as a burdensome yoke but as a gracious gift. For in this sacred rhythm of work and rest, we find a reflection of the divine, an echo of Eden, and a foretaste of eternity.

Q121:

Why is the word Remember set in the beginning of the fourth commandment?

A121: The word Remember is set in the beginning of the fourth commandment,[1] partly, because of the great benefit of remembering it, we being thereby helped in our preparation to keep it,[2] and, in keeping it, better to keep all the rest of the commandments,[3] and to continue a thankful remembrance of the two great benefits of creation and redemption, which contain a short abridgment of religion;[4] and partly, because we are very ready to forget it,[5] for that there is less light of nature for it,[6] and yet it restraineth our natural liberty in things at other times lawful;[7] that it comest but once in seven days, and many worldly businesses come

between, and too often take off our minds from thinking of it, either to prepare for it, or to sanctify it;[8] and that Satan with his instruments much labor to blot out the glory, and even the memory of it, to bring in all irreligion and impiety.[9]

1. Exod. 20:8
2. Exod. 16:23; Luke 23:54, 56; Mark 15:42; Neh. 13:19
3. Psa. 92:13-14; Ezek. 20:12, 19-20
4. Gen. 2:2-3; Psa. 118:22, 24; Acts 4:10, 11; Rev. 1:10
5. Ezek. 22:26
6. Neh. 9:14
7. Exod. 34:21
8. Deut. 5:14-15; Amos 8:5
9. Lam. 1:7; Jer. 17:21-23; Neh. 13:15-23

The Sacred Charge to Remember

Embedded within the very architecture of the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue's divine prescription for human flourishing, we encounter a singular exhortation: "Remember." This imperative serves as the preamble to the fourth commandment and beckons our attention to the weighty significance of the Sabbath. To fathom the profound depth of this solitary word, we embark on a theological exploration, with the Westminster Larger Catechism as our guide.

The Beneficial Act of Remembrance

"Remember" is not merely an instruction; it is an invitation. By heeding this call, we do not simply recall a commandment but position ourselves for spiritual enrichment. As the Reformed tradition, echoing the likes of John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards, consistently emphasizes, intentional remembrance aids in preparation. By actively recalling the Sabbath, we are galvanized to

make ready our hearts and minds for holy observance. Furthermore, the act of remembering this day serves as a catalyst, enabling us to better observe all of God's commandments. It's akin to a spiritual ripple effect: by cherishing one command, we find ourselves drawn into deeper obedience to the entirety of God's law.

A Synopsis of Redemptive History

Furthermore, in the act of remembering the Sabbath, we are not merely reminiscing about a day but are invited into the grand narrative of redemptive history. The Sabbath is a memorial of both creation and redemption – the two monumental acts of God that form the bedrock of our faith. Creation, where God sculpted the cosmos with words of power, and redemption, where Christ, the Word made flesh, re-sculpted our fallen condition through His redemptive work. Both are intricately woven into the fabric of the Sabbath, rendering it a synopsis of the entire Christian religion.

The Human Predicament of Forgetfulness

Yet, why the need to remember? Precisely because we, in our frailty, are prone to forget. This forgetfulness is not merely an oversight but a symptom of our fallen condition. While other commandments might resonate with the inherent moral compass the Reformers acknowledged as the "light of nature," the Sabbath, unique in its construct, does not. Moreover, our intrinsic love for autonomy makes the Sabbath – a day that restricts our so-called liberties – an easy target for neglect.

Additionally, the rhythm of life, with its cacophony of responsibilities and worldly concerns, can drown the silent yet insistent call of the Sabbath. The once-a-week cadence of this day, coupled with the myriad distractions of our existence, can eclipse its significance.

The Adversarial Assault on Remembrance

Lamentably, it's not just our nature or worldly preoccupations that lead us astray. The forces of darkness, ever at odds with the divine design, labor intensively to obliterate the Sabbath's splendor. The Adversary, and his worldly instruments, strive to efface its memory, seeking to instate irreligion and impiety in its stead. As we discern from the annals of Biblical history, especially in texts like Nehemiah, the battle for the Sabbath's observance has always been fierce.

Concluding Reflections

In conclusion, the command to "Remember" is God's gracious tool, a divine mnemonic, if you will. It aids us against our propensity to forget, invites us into the depths of redemptive history, and fortifies us against the wiles of the enemy. In the vast expanse of God's revelations, this solitary word stands as a lighthouse, guiding us towards the sanctity of time, a foretaste of eternal rest in God. And so, with hearts attuned to divine wisdom, let us remember.

Q122:

**What is the sum of the six
commandments which contain our duty
to man?**

A122: The sum of the six commandments which contain our duty to man is, to love our neighbor as ourselves,[1] and to do to others what

we would have them to do to us.[2]

1. Matt. 22:39

2. Matt. 7:12

The Heart of Human Relationships: Love and Reciprocity

As we journey through the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments, we transcend the threshold from our duties toward God in the first four commands to our responsibilities toward fellow humans in the ensuing six. The Westminster Larger Catechism, steeped in the profundities of the Reformed theological tradition, illuminates the essence of these latter commandments with laudable clarity in its 122nd question. What, it asks, is the core, the sum, of these six directives?

The Primacy of Agape Love

"Love our neighbor as ourselves." This phrase encapsulates an entire theological universe. Drawn from the words of Jesus in Matthew 22:39, it finds its roots deep in the Old Testament (Leviticus 19:18) and has been meditated upon by Reformed luminaries ranging from John Calvin to Herman Bavinck. At its heart, this commandment summons us to an *agape* love – a selfless, sacrificial love that seeks the highest good of another.

Such love is not merely an emotion but an orientation, a disposition, a commitment. As Calvin observed, it's not merely about loving those who love us; that is easy. True Christian love extends even to those who might be deemed our enemies. It's a love without conditions or limits, reflecting the very love God showers upon us.

The Ethical Imperative: The Golden Rule

The subsequent ethical directive is the universally acknowledged Golden Rule: "Do to others what you would have them do to you." This isn't just an ethical maxim; it's a theological principle rooted in the character of God and reflected in Christ's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. The Reformed tradition, understanding the pervasive influence of sin, recognizes that this command is not natural to the fallen human heart. It's a counter-cultural, counter-intuitive directive that goes against the grain of our self-centered tendencies.

Yet, it provides a concrete embodiment of the prior command to love. If *agape* love outlines the heart's disposition, the Golden Rule provides the hands and feet. It provides a practical litmus test for our actions: Would we want this done to us? If not, we have no business doing it to another.

Toward a Theocentric Human Ethic

To sum up these commandments is to affirm a theocentric human ethic. We love because God first loved us. We treat others with dignity, respect, and kindness because we recognize in them the *imago Dei*, the image of God. This is not a call to a superficial morality but a profound transformation of the heart, leading to a life that reflects God's own character.

To embrace these twin principles is to embark on a lifelong journey. It is a journey toward holiness, shaped not merely by external actions but by the internal renewing of the mind. It is a path illuminated by Scripture, paved by grace, and made possible only by the indwelling Spirit. For the Reformed believer, these six commandments are not a burdensome yoke but a joyous response to God's immense love, a reflection of our union with Christ, and a testament to the Spirit's transformative work within us.

Q123:

Which is the fifth commandment?

A123: The fifth commandment is, Honor thy father and thy mother; that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.[1]

1. Exod. 20:12

The Fifth Commandment: The Sacredness of Honor

As we embark on the second table of the Decalogue, we confront a foundational principle in God's ordained order: "Honor thy father and thy mother." The fifth commandment, as illuminated by the Westminster Larger Catechism, transcends mere familial respect; it enfolds within its simple phrase profound theological, societal, and existential depths. Drawing from the rich theology of the Reformed tradition, we shall contemplate its essence and ramifications.

Theological Roots: Reflection of the Divine Order

The command to honor parents is not arbitrary; it is deeply rooted in God's character and His design for creation. The family, as Calvin and many Reformed theologians have noted, is a divinely instituted unit, a microcosm of God's covenantal love and faithfulness. By instating parents as authorities within this unit, God provides an earthly reflection of His heavenly fatherhood. To honor parents is, thus, to recognize and revere this divine structure.

The Depth of "Honor": Beyond Mere Obedience

While the term "honor" in contemporary parlance might evoke mere respect or deference, its biblical richness goes deeper. The Hebrew

kabed encapsulates weightiness or significance. To honor one's parents is not just to obey them out of duty, but to accord them a weighty significance, acknowledging their God-given role and the sacrifices they make. It's an honor born out of love, gratitude, and reverence.

A Promise Attached: The Blessing of Longevity

Uniquely among the commandments, the fifth comes with a promise: "that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." This isn't a mechanistic guarantee but a profound principle. Societies that uphold the family unit, that respect the wisdom of elders, and that instill in the young a sense of gratitude and duty tend to thrive and endure. This commandment, thus, serves as a linchpin for societal stability and flourishing, a truth acknowledged by Reformed luminaries like Bavinck and Kuyper.

Pastoral Implications: Healing and Wholeness

From a pastoral vantage, this commandment has profound implications for individual and communal well-being. In an age that often pits generations against one another, the call to honor provides a counter-cultural corrective. It beckons us towards reconciliation, mutual respect, and a deep recognition of the interdependence of generations.

Moreover, for those bearing the wounds of familial discord or parental neglect, this commandment doesn't mandate a blind subservience. Rather, through the lens of the gospel, it invites healing. It prompts the believer to see their earthly parents in light of their heavenly Father, finding in His perfect love the strength to honor even when it's hard.

In Conclusion: A Call to Relational Holiness

The fifth commandment stands as a sentinel at the gateway of our duties to fellow humans. It reminds us that before we venture into the vast arenas of society, we must first navigate the intimate corridors of family with honor and love. Grounded in the eternal wisdom of God and resonating through centuries of Reformed reflection, this commandment beckons us to a life of relational holiness, pointing us always back to our perfect Heavenly Father.

Q124:

Who are meant by father and mother in the fifth commandment?

A124: By father and mother, in the fifth commandment, are meant, not only natural parents,[1] but all superiors in age [2] and gifts;[3] and especially such as, by God's ordinance, are over us in place of authority, whether in family,[4] church,[5] or commonwealth.[6]

1. Prov. 23:22-25; Eph. 6:1-2
2. I Tim. 5:1-2
3. Gen. 4:20-22; 45:8
4. II Kings 5:13
5. II Kings 2:12; 13:14; Gal. 4:19
6. Isa. 49:23

Expounding the Depth of Honor: Beyond the Natural Bonds

The fifth commandment, with its elegant simplicity, unfurls a sweeping tapestry of obligations that extend well beyond the natural familial boundaries. “Honor thy father and thy mother,” it decrees. Yet, as the Westminster Larger Catechism insightfully notes, the realm of ‘father and mother’ is not limited to mere biological lineage. This commandment brings to light the intricate web of relationships and authorities ordained by God.

Theological Implications: God's Hierarchical Design

The divine blueprint for human interactions is one of ordered relationships. In His infinite wisdom, God has fashioned an intricate hierarchy for the flourishing and governance of human society. This hierarchical structure, discerned and delineated by Reformed luminaries from Calvin to Turretin, manifests itself in various spheres: the family, the church, and the commonwealth.

Natural Parents: The Primary Sphere of Authority

Firstly, the immediate understanding of ‘father and mother’ pertains to our natural parents. Proverbs 23:22-25 and Ephesians 6:1-2 firmly ground the honor we owe to those from whom we have received life. They have been entrusted by God with the sacred duty of nurturing and guiding their offspring, and in honoring them, we affirm God’s design and express gratitude for their sacrificial love.

Elders and the Gifted: A Broader Family

The commandment's scope extends further, enveloping those advanced in age and wisdom. The Apostle Paul's words in I Timothy

5:1-2 exhort us to treat elder men as fathers and elder women as mothers. In the richness of Reformed thought, this signifies a recognition of the wisdom, experience, and guidance that elders bring into our lives.

Moreover, those endowed with unique gifts, as showcased in Genesis 4:20-22 and 45:8, emerge as spiritual or societal forebears, deserving of honor. Their contributions to society and the broader Kingdom serve as beacons that illuminate the path for others.

God-Ordained Authorities: The Pinnacle of Honor

Beyond the realms of age and talent, the commandment reaches its zenith in addressing those placed in positions of God-ordained authority. Whether in the confines of a household, the sacred assembly of the church, or the vast expanse of the commonwealth, those invested with authority are to be revered. Their roles, as echoes of God's sovereignty, stand as testament to His divine ordinance.

Pastoral Insight: Navigating the Tensions

In a pastoral light, this expanded understanding of 'father and mother' presents both opportunities and challenges. It fosters a communal spirit, urging believers to recognize and honor the various figures of guidance in their lives. Yet, it also calls for discernment, especially in scenarios where earthly authorities might deviate from God's righteous standards. The believer, armed with the rich insights of Reformed theology, is thus encouraged to navigate these relationships with a heart grounded in love, respect, and unwavering allegiance to God's Word.

Concluding Reflections: A Symphony of Honor

The fifth commandment, through the contemplative lens of the Westminster Larger Catechism and the broader Reformed tradition, emerges not as a mere familial directive but as a symphony of honor. It paints a portrait of a believer interwoven in relationships, each demanding a unique hue of respect and reverence, all harmonizing to the grand design of the Creator.

Q125:

Why are superiors styled Father and Mother?

A125: Superiors are styled Father and Mother, both to teach them in all duties toward their inferiors, like natural parents, to express love and tenderness to them, according to their several relations;[1] and to work inferiors to a greater willingness and cheerfulness in performing their duties to their superiors, as to their parents.[2]

1. Eph. 6:4; II Cor. 12:14; I Thess. 2:7-8, 11; Num. 11:11-12

2. I Cor. 4:14-16; II Kings 5:13

The Theological Ground of Familial Titles for Superiors

Titles are more than mere appellations; they carry the weight of meaning, purpose, and responsibility. The Reformed theological tradition, grounded in its commitment to Scripture, offers profound insights into the terminology employed in our ecclesiastical and societal hierarchies. The title of 'Father' and 'Mother,' as conferred

upon superiors, is particularly rich in significance, drawing from the intricate blend of love, authority, nurture, and reverence that these roles epitomize.

A Pedagogical Instrument for Superiors: Reflections on Parental Duty

The designation of superiors as 'Father' and 'Mother' primarily serves a didactic function. By styling them thus, Scripture endeavors to mold the heart and attitude of those in positions of authority. As delineated in Ephesians 6:4 and II Corinthians 12:14, leaders are exhorted to mirror the love, compassion, and care characteristic of natural parents.

The Apostle Paul, a stalwart of the faith, exemplifies this paternal affection in his epistles. His heartfelt words in I Thessalonians 2:7-8 and 11 bear testimony to a shepherd's tender love for his flock, likening it to a nurse cherishing her children and a father exhorting his offspring. Like Moses, who likened his pastoral care for the Israelites to a nurse carrying suckling children (Numbers 11:11-12), those in superior positions are reminded that their leadership is not a mandate for domineering control but a sacred trust to nurture, guide, and protect.

Eliciting Respectful Obedience: The Pastoral Imperative

On the other side of this coin, addressing superiors as 'Father' and 'Mother' serves a deeply pastoral purpose. For the subordinate, it engenders a spirit of respect, reverence, and willing obedience, akin to the honor children naturally owe their parents. The reference to II Kings 5:13 is particularly poignant in this regard, showcasing the respectful counsel of servants to their master, Naaman, likened to a child's earnest plea to a father.

Moreover, the apostolic exhortation in I Corinthians 4:14-16, where Paul refers to himself as a spiritual father to the Corinthians, underscores the idea that superiors, when they exude genuine love and care, can evoke a filial kind of loyalty and devotion from those under their charge. It prompts inferiors to not just mechanically obey, but to do so with heartfelt cheerfulness and gratitude, recognizing the sacrificial love and concern their 'parental' superiors hold for them.

Introspective Contemplation: The Harmony of Authority and Affection

The Reformed tradition invites us to a contemplative realization: the divine wisdom behind the familial titles for superiors. In God's grand design, the hierarchies of church and society are not meant to be cold, transactional structures. Instead, they should echo the warmth, love, discipline, and nurture found within the hallowed bonds of family.

Thus, in the dance of relationships, as superiors and inferiors engage in their respective roles, they are beckoned to transcend mere duty and to embrace the deeper, richer connections that God has ordained – connections rooted in love, respect, and mutual edification.

Q126:

What is the general scope of the fifth commandment?

A126: The general scope of the fifth commandment is, the performance of those duties which we mutually owe in our several relations, as inferiors, superiors, or equals.[1]

1. Eph. 5:21; I Peter 2:17; Rom. 12:10

The Fifth Commandment, nestled amidst the Decalogue, stands as a testament to God's blueprint for order and harmony within human relationships. Yet, the command to "Honor thy father and thy mother" transcends the immediate context of familial relations, casting a wider net, encompassing the myriad relationships we navigate in our sojourn on earth.

The Divine Mandate: Order and Respect in All Relations

The very essence of the Fifth Commandment, as expounded upon in the Westminster Larger Catechism's Question 126, pivots on the understanding of mutual duties. Every relational dynamic, be it in family, church, or society, operates within a spectrum of hierarchy—some are superiors, others inferiors, and yet others stand as our equals. Yet, each of these positions, sanctioned by divine design, carries with it distinct duties and responsibilities.

Drawing from Ephesians 5:21, the Apostle Paul exhorts believers to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. This mutual submission, grounded in Christ's lordship, serves as the bedrock of all human interactions. Our relationships, therefore, are not to be marked by domineering authority or resentful subservience, but by a spirit of mutual respect and deference, acknowledging the divine imprint upon each individual.

Inferiors, Superiors, Equals: Navigating the Dance of Duties

As inferiors, the call is to honor and obey, recognizing in our superiors the delegated authority of God Himself. It is a call to humility, understanding, and trust, following the example of Christ, who, though being in the form of God, took on the nature of a servant.

For superiors, the commandment becomes an exhortation to lead with love, compassion, and justice, reminiscent of the heart of our Heavenly Father. They are reminded to bear the mantle of authority with grace, ever aware of the weight of their position, and to mirror God's protective, nurturing care.

And in relationships with our equals, Romans 12:10 calls for a spirit of brotherly affection. It's a reminder that we stand together, side by side, as co-heirs of the kingdom, beckoned to outdo one another in showing honor.

The Pastoral Heartbeat: Reflecting God's Relational Design

The introspective believer is led to perceive the vast interweaving of relationships as divinely orchestrated symphonies, each note vital, each rhythm ordained. The Fifth Commandment, in its expansive scope, is a pastoral plea to recognize the sacredness of these relationships, understanding that in honoring one another, we honor the God who has intricately woven us into this web of relational dynamics.

As we navigate the complex corridors of human relationships, may we ever be reminded of this overarching divine mandate, finding in it both a challenge and comfort, and in doing so, mirror the harmony of the Triune God in our interactions with one another.

Q127:

What is the honor that inferiors owe to their superiors.?

A127: The honor which inferiors owe to their superiors is, all due reverence in heart,[1] word,[2] and behavior;[3] prayer and thanksgiving for them;[4] imitation of their virtues and graces;[5] willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels;[6] due submission to their corrections;[7] fidelity to,[8] defense [9] and maintenance of their persons and authority, according to their several ranks, and the nature of their places;[10] bearing with their infirmities, and covering them in love, that so they may be an honor to them and to their government.[11]

1. Mal. 1:6; Lev. 19:3
2. Prov. 31:28; I Peter 3:6
3. Lev. 19:32; I Kings 2:19
4. I Tim. 2:1-2
5. Heb. 13:7; Phil. 3:17
6. Eph. 6:1-2, 5-7; I Peter 2:13-14; Rom. 13:1-5; Heb. 13:17; Prov. 4:3-4; 23:22; Exod. 18:19, 24
7. Heb. 12:9; I Peter 2:18-20
8. Titus 2:9-10
9. I Sam. 26:15-16; II Sam. 18:3; Est.. 6:2
10. Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:6-7; I Tim. 5:17-18; Gal. 6:6; Gen. 45:11; 47:12
11. Psa. 127:3-5; Prov. 31:23

At the heart of the Fifth Commandment lies the concept of honor. But what does it mean, truly, for inferiors to offer this elusive essence of honor to their superiors? The Westminster Larger Catechism seeks to unfold this mystery in Question 127.

Reverence: The Heart's Posture

Scripture establishes that true honor begins internally, as a disposition of the heart. When the Prophet Malachi chastises the priests of his day by asking, "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor?" (Mal. 1:6), he points to a profound internal posture of respect. Honor, in its purest form, emerges from an authentic reverence within, which invariably shapes our words and actions.

Speech and Conduct: External Expressions of an Internal Reality

Proverbs 31:28 and 1 Peter 3:6 underscore that this internal reverence finds its voice in words of respect, and its hands in gestures of deference. The virtuous woman's children "rise up and call her blessed," and Sarah, the matriarch, is highlighted for calling Abraham "lord." Both instances encapsulate the essence of honor expressed through speech. Moreover, behavior too becomes a canvas upon which the art of honor is painted—whether in standing for the aged (Lev. 19:32) or in the depth of obeisance as shown by Bathsheba to King David (I Kings 2:19).

Prayerful Intercession and Thankful Acknowledgment

The Pauline injunction to offer "supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings...for kings and all who are in high positions" (1 Tim. 2:1-2) emphasizes another crucial dimension of honor: spiritual

support. Interceding for superiors is not just an act of piety; it's a profound acknowledgment of their God-ordained role.

Imitation, Obedience, and Submission: Emulating and Yielding

The Epistle to the Hebrews (13:7) and Paul's letter to the Philippians (3:17) beckon inferiors to regard the virtues and graces of their superiors as models worthy of emulation. Furthermore, in relationships of hierarchy, the ethic of honor is deeply enmeshed with the spirit of obedience (Eph. 6:1-2, 5-7) and a submission, even when faced with correction (Heb. 12:9).

Protective Fidelity and Empathetic Understanding

To defend the reputation and authority of superiors, as seen in the valorous acts of David and his warriors (I Sam. 26; II Sam. 18), and to be loyal in service, as commended by Paul in Titus 2:9-10, is to envelop them in the protective cloak of honor. Yet, this honor is not blind; it also calls for empathy, acknowledging the imperfections and infirmities of superiors, and covering them in love, ultimately uplifting their governance.

Conclusion: A Tapestry of Respect

From a biblical perspective, honoring superiors is a multifaceted obligation—a tapestry woven with threads of reverence, expressed through words and deeds, interwoven with prayerful support, obedience, protective fidelity, and understanding. It's a rich, deeply pastoral call to recognize the divine image in every superior and to approach each relationship with a profound sense of respect and responsibility, mirroring the honor we owe to our ultimate Superior, the Lord Almighty.

Q128:

What are the sins of inferiors against their superiors?

A128: The sins of inferiors against their superiors are, all neglect of the duties required toward them;[1] envying at,[2] contempt of,[3] and rebellion [4] against, their persons [5] and places,[6] in their lawful counsels,[7] commands, and corrections;[8] cursing, mocking, [9] and all such refractory and scandalous carriage, as proves a shame and dishonor to them and their government.[10]

1. Matt. 15:4-6
2. Num. 11:28-29
3. I Sam. 8:7; Isa. 3:5
4. II Sam. 15:1-12
5. Exod. 21:15
6. I Sam. 10:27
7. I Sam. 2:25
8. Deut. 21:18-21
9. Prov. 30:11, 17
10. Prov. 19:26

The intricate balance of relational harmony in the biblical worldview is beautifully encapsulated in the structure and teachings of the Fifth Commandment. The Westminster Larger Catechism, following this trajectory, draws our attention to the responsibilities of inferiors

towards their superiors, and, in Question 128, it delves deeply into the transgressions that mar this balance.

The Core Sin: Neglect of Duty

Central to the sins of inferiors against superiors is the very neglect of duties (Matt. 15:4-6). The Pharisees and scribes, in their misplaced zeal, often neglected the weightier responsibilities towards their parents, thereby violating God's law. When one omits the honor, respect, and service owed to superiors, it sets the stage for a host of other transgressions.

Envy, Contempt, and Rebellion: The Trio of Disrespect

Numbers 11 recounts the tale of Joshua's envy towards Eldad and Medad, lamenting their prophesying in the camp. This envy, if left unchecked, can morph into disdain for the God-ordained roles superiors occupy. Contempt, as depicted in the people's demand for a king in 1 Samuel 8:7, essentially rejects God's authority structure, considering it inferior or insufficient. The culmination of this trajectory of disrespect is outright rebellion, as seen in Absalom's insurrection against King David (II Sam. 15:1-12).

Physical Rebellion and Mockery: Actions Speaking Louder Than Words

The gravity of rebellion is intensified when it manifests physically, as indicated by Exodus 21:15, which condemns striking one's parents. Such acts of physical defiance blatantly defy the Fifth Commandment. Complementing these actions is the sin of mockery, a verbal counterpart, demeaning and deriding superiors (Prov. 30:11, 17).

Rejection of Lawful Guidance and Corrections

Beyond overt rebellion, a subtle, yet equally perilous form of transgression lies in dismissing the lawful counsels and corrections of superiors. The young men in 1 Samuel 2:25, who scorned the voice of their priestly superior, illustrate the dire consequences of such dismissal. Moreover, the law in Deuteronomy 21:18-21 prescribes severe penalties for a stubborn and rebellious son, indicating the weight God places on heeding corrections.

The Ramifications: Shame and Dishonor

The culmination of these sins is not merely a personal failing. They invariably lead to scandalous behavior that brings both shame and dishonor upon superiors and their government, as outlined in Proverbs 19:26.

Conclusion: A Pastoral Invitation to Reflect

It is easy to overlook or rationalize these sins, especially in an age that often challenges traditional hierarchies and promotes a spirit of individualism. However, the Scripture invites us to a sober introspection. The call is clear: to recognize these sins, repent of them, and seek to cultivate a spirit of genuine respect and honor towards those whom God has placed over us. In so doing, we not only align ourselves with God's design but also pave the way for blessings and harmonious relationships in our lives.

Q129:

What is required of superiors towards their inferiors?

A129: It is required of superiors, according to that power they receive from God, and that relation wherein they stand, to love,[1] pray for, [2] and bless their inferiors;[3] to instruct,[4] counsel, and admonish them;[5] countenancing,[6] commending,[7] and rewarding such as do well;[8] and discountenancing,[9] reproof, and chastising such as do ill;[10] protecting,[11] and providing for them all things necessary for soul [12] and body:[13] and by grave, wise, holy, and exemplary carriage, to procure glory to God,[14] honor to themselves,[15] and so to preserve that authority which God hath put upon them.[16]

1. Col. 3:19; Titus 2:4
2. I Sam. 12:23; Job 1:5
3. I Kings 8:55-56; Heb. 7:7; Gen. 49:28
4. Deut. 6:6-7
5. Eph. 6:4
6. I Peter 3:7
7. I Peter 2:14; Rom. 13:3
8. Esth. 6:3
9. Rom. 13:3-4
10. Prov. 29:15; I Peter 2:14
11. Job 29:12-17; Isa. 1:10, 17
12. Eph. 6:4
13. I Tim. 5:8
14. I Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:3-5
15. I Kings 3:28
16. Titus 2:15

The Fifth Commandment not only beseeches the honor of inferiors to their superiors but also casts a sacred obligation upon those who stand in positions of authority. As the Westminster Larger Catechism unfolds in Question 129, the moral landscape it sketches for superiors is both profound and demanding, reflecting a robust need to place a great emphasis on God-ordained structures of human society.

The Primacy of Love

The initial call to superiors is to love their inferiors (Col. 3:19; Titus 2:4). This love isn't merely a passive sentiment, but an active disposition which shapes every subsequent duty. It is the fountainhead from which all other responsibilities flow.

Spiritual Responsibilities: Prayer, Blessing, and Guidance

A superior's commitment goes beyond the material; it has a deeply spiritual dimension. Superiors are called to continually intercede in prayer for their inferiors (I Sam. 12:23; Job 1:5). Much like Job, who made it a practice to pray for his children's possible sins, the superiors must adopt an intercessory stance. In blessing their inferiors, they channel the patriarchal spirit evident in Genesis 49, where Jacob blessed his twelve sons, invoking God's favor upon them.

Additionally, in guiding the souls entrusted to them, superiors ought to be pillars of instruction, counsel, and admonition, ensuring they are well-rooted in sound doctrine and righteous living (Deut. 6:6-7; Eph. 6:4).

A Balanced Approach to Rewards and Corrections

In a world where power dynamics can often lead to abuse or negligence, the Catechism, with its roots in the Scripture, champions a balanced stance. Superiors ought to commend those who perform well, giving them their due recognition (Esth. 6:3; I Peter 2:14). However, this positive reinforcement should be coupled with prudent correction for those who err, ensuring they are steered back onto the right path (Prov. 29:15).

Providing Protection and Provision

Echoing the sentiments of Job (Job 29:12-17) and Isaiah (Isa. 1:10, 17), superiors are also custodians of the well-being of their inferiors. This protective and providential role spans both the spiritual nourishment (Eph. 6:4) and physical sustenance (I Tim. 5:8), underscoring a holistic approach to care.

Exemplary Living: The Capstone of Superior's Duty

Perhaps the most potent instruction to superiors is the call to be exemplars – in wisdom, holiness, and gravitas. Their lives must be luminous testimonies, reflecting God's character and thereby bringing Him glory (I Tim. 4:12; Titus 2:3-5). Through such exemplary living, superiors not only earn honor for themselves (I Kings 3:28) but also fortify the God-bestowed authority vested in them (Titus 2:15).

In Closing: A Pastoral Appeal to Superiors

In contemplating the responsibilities outlined in the Catechism, those in positions of authority are beckoned towards a higher calling. It's a journey of selfless love, unwavering commitment, and sanctified living. Superiors, then, are not mere title-holders but

stewards of God's design, and in fulfilling these duties, they mirror the very heart of the Heavenly Father to those under their care.

Q130:

What are the sins of superiors?

A130: The sins of superiors are, besides the neglect of the duties required of them,[1] an inordinate seeking of themselves,[2] their own glory,[3] ease, profit, or pleasure;[4] commanding things unlawful,[5] or not in the power of inferiors to perform;[6] counseling,[7] encouraging,[8] or favoring them in that which is evil; [9] dissuading, discouraging, or discountenancing them in that which is good;[10] correcting them unduly;[11] careless exposing, or leaving them to wrong, temptation, and danger;[12] provoking them to wrath;[13] or any way dishonoring themselves, or lessening their authority, by an unjust, indiscreet, rigorous, or remiss behavior.[14]

1. Ezek. 34:2-4
2. Phil. 2:21
3. John 5:44; 7:18
4. Isa. 56:10-11; Deut. 17:17
5. Dan. 3:4-6; Acts 4:17-18
6. Exod. 5:10-18; Matt. 23:2, 4
7. Matt. 14:8; Mark 6:24
8. II Sam. 13:28
9. I Sam. 3:13
10. John 7:46-49; Col. 3:21; Exod. 5:17

11. I Peter 2:18-20; Heb. 12:10; Deut. 25:3
12. Gen. 38:11, 26; Acts 18:17
13. Eph. 6:4
14. Gen. 9:21; I Kings 1:6; 12:13-16; I Sam. 2:29-31

The biblical framework, as outlined meticulously in the Westminster Larger Catechism, places upon superiors not only duties of care and guidance but also holds them accountable to avoid certain pitfalls intrinsic to positions of power. Q130 is a solemn reminder of the possible aberrations that can creep into the life of a superior, and it's a profound meditation on the intricate balance of power and responsibility.

The Primary Sin: Neglect of Duty

The starting point of the sins of superiors is the neglect of the duties required of them (Ezek. 34:2-4). This scripture paints a vivid image of shepherds who fail to care for the flock, a poignant reminder that omission can be as grievous as commission.

The Lure of Self-Centeredness

Paul, in his epistle to the Philippians (Phil. 2:21), draws attention to those who seek their interests. Superiors, tempted by their position, may fall into the snare of inordinate self-seeking, prioritizing their own glory, ease, profit, or pleasure, thereby undermining the very essence of their role as caregivers and protectors (Isa. 56:10-11; Deut. 17:17).

Commanding the Impossible and the Unlawful

One of the more stark reminders is the sin of commanding things either unlawful (Dan. 3:4-6) or beyond the capacity of their inferiors

(Exod. 5:10-18). This reflects not just insensitivity but a potential abuse of power, reminiscent of Pharaoh increasing the burdens of the Israelites without providing the necessary resources.

Misguidance and Discouragement

Superiors sin when they become agents of misguidance, either by counseling or encouraging their inferiors in evil deeds (Matt. 14:8; II Sam. 13:28) or by actively dissuading them from righteous paths (John 7:46-49). The stern warning against Eli, who failed to restrain his sons from wickedness, serves as a cautionary tale (I Sam. 3:13).

Undue Correction and Exposing to Danger

Correction is a duty, but when meted out excessively or without just cause, it becomes a sin (I Peter 2:18-20). Further, superiors err grievously when they expose or abandon their charges to peril, temptation, or any form of harm (Gen. 38:11, 26).

Provoking and Dishonoring Behavior

Ephesians 6:4 rings a solemn bell against provoking inferiors to wrath, an act that sows discord. Moreover, superiors diminish their divine-given authority when they engage in unjust, indiscreet, or remiss behaviors (Gen. 9:21; I Kings 1:6).

A Solemn Concluding Reflection

The list in Q130 is not merely a catalog of wrongs but a pastoral exhortation, urging superiors to self-examination and repentance. In the Reformed tradition, the emphasis has always been on the transformative power of grace. While the dangers of authority are real, the call is for superiors to lean into God's grace, seek wisdom,

and discharge their duties with a Christlike humility and love, ever mindful of the weighty responsibility they bear.

Q131:

What are the duties of equals?

A131: The duties of equals are, to regard the dignity and worth of each other,[1] in giving honor to go one before another;[2] and to rejoice in each other's gifts and advancement, as their own.[3]

1. I Peter 2:17
2. Rom. 12:10
3. Rom. 12:15-16; Phil. 2:3-4

In our vast web of human relationships, the Westminster Larger Catechism delineates not only the responsibilities that bind superiors to inferiors and vice versa, but it also pays heed to the intricate dance of mutual duty shared amongst equals. Q131 offers a profound reflection on the nature of equality, emphasizing the mutual recognition of worth and the genuine rejoicing in one another's successes and gifts.

Recognizing Dignity and Worth

At the heart of the Reformed tradition lies the doctrine of *Imago Dei*, the belief that every human being is made in the image of God (I Peter 2:17). This foundational concept serves as a cornerstone in

understanding the duties of equals. To recognize the dignity and worth of one another is to acknowledge the divine imprint in each soul. This is not just a passive acknowledgment but an active celebration of our shared humanity and divine heritage.

Prioritizing Others: A Counter-Cultural Call

In a world driven by self-promotion and competition, the call of Romans 12:10 to "give honor to go one before another" is profoundly counter-cultural. This duty requires a humility that places the other at par or even above oneself. Such a stance is not born out of a sense of self-deprecation but out of a profound reverence for the God-given worth in every individual. It is a call to shift from a posture of self-centeredness to other-centeredness, a transformation that is at the heart of the Gospel message.

Rejoicing in Each Other's Fortunes

The duty to "rejoice in each other's gifts and advancement, as their own" (Rom. 12:15-16; Phil. 2:3-4) is a vivid expression of the Christian call to love. In a society often tainted by envy and rivalry, this mandate challenges equals to defy the currents of jealousy and instead embrace a spirit of shared joy. This rejoicing is not merely a superficial happiness but a deep, soulful delight in seeing God's blessings manifest in the life of another.

A Pastoral Conclusion

Q131 is not a mere theological statement but a deeply pastoral exhortation. It invites us to introspection, urging us to examine the state of our hearts towards our peers. In the Reformed tradition, with its rich emphasis on God's grace and the transformative power of the Gospel, believers are called to cultivate hearts that recognize, honor,

and rejoice in the beauty and gifts of their equals. It is an invitation to participate in the divine dance of mutual love and respect, embodying the very essence of Christ's love on earth.

Q132:

What are the sins of equals?

A132: The sins of equals are, besides the neglect of the duties required,[1] the undervaluing of the worth,[2] envying the gifts,[3] grieving at the advancement of prosperity one of another;[4] and usurping preeminence one over another.[5]

1. Rom. 13:8
2. II Tim. 3:3
3. Acts 7:9; Gal. 5:26
4. Num. 12:2; Est. 6:12-13
5. III John 1:9; Luke 22:24

The Subtle Trespasses of Equals: A Reflective Exploration of the Heart's Predispositions

The Westminster Larger Catechism lays bare the nuances of human relationships, ensuring that the relationship among equals is not overlooked. Q132 delves into a realm that is perhaps most prone to overlook—how equals, peers, and companions can sin against one another. While the obligations of superiors and inferiors have their

own complexities, the dynamics amongst equals often hide subtle forms of trespass that demand theological contemplation.

The Neglect of Mutual Duties

The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans, makes a poignant statement: "Owe no one anything, except to love each other" (Rom. 13:8). Love, in its truest essence, is not just an emotion but is expressed in duty and action. Equals often err, not through overt acts of hostility, but through neglect—overlooking the spiritual, emotional, and even tangible needs of each other. Such neglect, subtle as it may seem, is an affront to the divine call to love as Christ loved us.

Diminishing the Divine Image

The Christian tradition holds steadfast to the belief in the *Imago Dei*, the divine image in every human. When equals undervalue each other's worth (II Tim. 3:3), they dismiss this sacred image, treating the divine imprint as something commonplace or inconsequential.

The Sin of Envy and Grief at Another's Success

Perhaps one of the most insidious sins among equals is envy. To envy the gifts of another (Acts 7:9; Gal. 5:26) is not merely a personal failing; it is a rejection of God's sovereign distribution of gifts. Moreover, grieving at another's advancement (Num. 12:2; Est. 6:12-13) is an affront to the biblical call to rejoice with those who rejoice. Such a disposition reveals a heart that is not aligned with God's kingdom values, where the success of one is a cause for communal celebration.

Usurping Preeminence: The Struggle for Supremacy

The desire to dominate, even in the company of peers, has been an age-old struggle, as reflected in the disputes among the disciples about who would be the greatest (Luke 22:24). This desire to usurp preeminence (III John 1:9) is more than mere ambition—it is a challenge to the divine order, where each is to consider others better than themselves.

A Pastoral Meditation

The sins of equals are not always overt, but they reside deep within the crevices of the heart. The contemplative believer must heed the Reformed call to daily self-examination, discerning those subtle inclinations that might lead one astray. In recognizing these, one not only seeks personal repentance but endeavors to build a community that reflects Christ's love, free from envy, pride, and neglect.

Q133:

What is the reason annexed to the fifth commandment, the more to enforce it?

A133: 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]

1. Exod. 20:12
2. Deut. 5:16; I Kings 8:25; Eph. 6:2-3

Within the compendium of Christian doctrine we find an imperative call to honor our father and mother—an age-old command, but one ever relevant and profoundly rooted in the essence of the divine-human relationship. Yet, it is the rationale annexed to this commandment—the promise of longevity and prosperity—that beckons for profound contemplation.

The Theological Depth of Earthly Honor

The fifth commandment, nestled within the Decalogue, holds a unique position as the bridge between commands that pertain to our reverence toward God and those that concern our relationships with fellow humans. This nexus is not by mere chance. By instilling reverence for those who have been instruments of our earthly existence, we indirectly cultivate an atmosphere of reverence toward the God of life Himself.

The Promise: A Testament of Divine Consistency

The phrase "That thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Exod. 20:12) isn't a mere afterthought or an arbitrary reward. It is an affirmation of the Creator's commitment to life. God, in His infinite benevolence, assures His people that in the act of honoring, there lies a blessing—a tangible extension of His protective and sustaining grace. In essence, God is not just setting a rule, but revealing a fundamental principle of His kingdom.

The Conditionality of the Promise

The Reformed tradition, in its emphasis on the sovereignty and wisdom of God, reminds us that the promises of God are always in alignment with His divine purposes. While longevity and prosperity are assured, they are dispensed "as far as it shall serve for God's glory and their own good" (Deut. 5:16; I Kings 8:25; Eph. 6:2-3). God, the all-knowing architect of our lives, knows precisely how blessings should be meted out for our ultimate benefit and His glory.

A Pastoral Reflection

The fifth commandment, when viewed through the prism of Reformed theology, isn't a mere directive from a distant Deity. It is an invitation to participate in the rhythm of divine grace. To honor one's parents becomes an act of aligning oneself with God's will—a will that seeks our welfare, growth, and longevity. The promise annexed to the commandment serves as a gentle pastoral reminder: In God's economy, obedience is never in vain. Every act of honoring, every gesture of respect, is a step toward abundant life—both in quality and quantity. The believer is thus called to introspect: Do I view the fifth commandment merely as an obligation or as a gateway to experiencing God's benevolence in profound ways?

Q134:

Which is the sixth commandment?

A134: The sixth commandment is, Thou shalt not kill.[1]

1. Exod. 20:13

Q135: What are the duties required in the sixth commandment?

A135: The duties required in the sixth commandment are, all careful studies, and lawful endeavors, to preserve the life of ourselves [1] and others [2] by resisting all thoughts and purposes,[3] subduing all passions,[4] and avoiding all occasions,[5] temptations,[6] and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any;[7] by just defense thereof against violence,[8] patient bearing of the hand of God,[9] quietness of mind,[10] cheerfulness of spirit;[11] a sober use of meat,[12] drink,[13] physic,[14] sleep,[15] labor,[16] and recreations;[17] by charitable thoughts,[18] love,[19] compassion, [20] meekness, gentleness, kindness;[21] peaceable,[22] mild and courteous speeches and behavior;[23] forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil;[24] comforting and succoring the distressed, and protecting and defending the innocent.[25]

1. Eph. 5:28-29

2. I Kings 18:4

3. Jer. 26:15-16; Acts 23:12, 16-17, 21, 27

4. Eph. 4:26-27

5. II Sam. 2:22; Deut. 22:8

6. Matt. 4:6-7; Prov. 1:10-11, 15-16

7. I Sam. 24:2; 26:9-11; Gen. 37:21-22

8. Psa. 82:4; Prov. 24:11-12; I Sam. 14:45

9. James 5:7-11; Heb. 12:9

10. I Thess. 4:11; I Peter 3:3-4; Psa. 37:8-11

11. Prov. 17:22

12. Prov. 25:16, 27

13. I Tim. 5:23

14. Isa. 38:21

15. Psa. 127:2
16. Eccl. 5:12; II Thess. 3:10, 12; Prov. 16:26
17. Eccl. 3:4, 11
18. I Sam. 19:4-5; 22:13-14
19. Rom. 13:10
20. Luke 10:33-34
21. Col. 3:12-13
22. James 3:17
23. I Peter 3:8-11; Prov. 15:1; Judg. 8:1-3
24. Matt. 5:24; Eph. 4:2, 32; Rom. 12:17, 20-21
25. I Thess. 5:14; Job 31:19-20; Matt. 25:35-36; Prov. 31:8-9

Embedded in the heart of the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments' moral compass, the sixth commandment stands as a sentinel, affirming the inestimable worth and sanctity of human life: "Thou shalt not kill" (Exod. 20:13). This seemingly concise commandment unfolds into the profound truths of moral duties and spiritual imperatives that the Reformed Christian tradition has meticulously unraveled.

Life's Divine Origination and Esteem

From the onset, it is paramount to understand why human life holds such inherent value. Drawn from the wellsprings of the Holy Scripture, humanity's worth is not just an accident of biology but is derived from being image-bearers of the Almighty. This *imago Dei*, the image of God in man, provides the foundation upon which the sixth commandment rests.

The Expansive Nature of "Thou Shalt Not Kill"

While the immediate implication of the commandment is the prohibition of murder, its ramifications delve deeper, enjoining a

holistic commitment to uphold life. This includes not only refraining from inflicting harm but actively promoting the well-being and flourishing of oneself and others (Eph. 5:28-29; I Kings 18:4). The sin of omission, neglecting to protect or support life, is just as grievous as the sin of commission, actively seeking to harm or end life.

The Inner Battle: Heart, Mind, and Soul

The Bible, echoed by the teachings of figures like Calvin and Luther, underscores the necessity of heart transformation. The duty to preserve life begins in the inner sanctum of one's thoughts and desires (Jer. 26:15-16). Sinful passions, when unchecked, become the fertile ground where seeds of violence and harm are sown (Eph. 4:26-27). Hence, the commandment not only speaks to external actions but beckons for an internal renewal and vigilance.

The Role of Prudence and Temperance

A true understanding of the sixth commandment nudges us towards a balanced life. Overindulgence or neglect in areas like food, drink, and even recreation can be detrimental to life (Prov. 25:16, 27; Eccl. 3:4, 11). In the Christian tradition, every facet of life—physical, emotional, and spiritual—interlocks in a delicate balance, each affecting the other.

The Gentle Force of Love and Forgiveness

The commandment's true spirit revolves around love—not a fleeting, emotional kind of love, but a deep, sacrificial, Christ-like love (Rom. 13:10). Such love inevitably leads to peaceable behavior, gentle speech, and an earnest desire for reconciliation (James 3:17; I Peter 3:8-11). To uphold life is to imitate Christ, the Prince of Peace.

Pastoral Reflection

To the believer navigating the tumultuous waters of life, the sixth commandment emerges not as a burdensome legalistic rule, but as a life-giving fountain—a call to cherish, uphold, and enhance the gift of life. The invitation, then, is to introspect: Do I view life—mine and others’—through the sanctified lens of the sixth commandment? And if so, does it move me to act, think, and live in a way that not only avoids harm but actively seeks the flourishing of all?

Q135:

What are the duties required in the sixth commandment?

A135: The duties required in the sixth commandment are, all careful studies, and lawful endeavors, to preserve the life of ourselves [1] and others [2] by resisting all thoughts and purposes,[3] subduing all passions,[4] and avoiding all occasions,[5] temptations,[6] and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any;[7] by just defense thereof against violence,[8] patient bearing of the hand of God,[9] quietness of mind,[10] cheerfulness of spirit;[11] a sober use of meat,[12] drink,[13] physic,[14] sleep,[15] labor,[16] and recreations;[17] by charitable thoughts,[18] love,[19] compassion, [20] meekness, gentleness, kindness;[21] peaceable,[22] mild and courteous speeches and behavior;[23] forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting

good for evil;[24] comforting and succoring the distressed, and protecting and defending the innocent.[25]

1. Eph. 5:28-29
2. I Kings 18:4
3. Jer. 26:15-16; Acts 23:12, 16-17, 21, 27
4. Eph. 4:26-27
5. II Sam. 2:22; Deut. 22:8
6. Matt. 4:6-7; Prov. 1:10-11, 15-16
7. I Sam. 24:2; 26:9-11; Gen. 37:21-22
8. Psa. 82:4; Prov. 24:11-12; I Sam. 14:45
9. James 5:7-11; Heb. 12:9
10. I Thess. 4:11; I Peter 3:3-4; Psa. 37:8-11
11. Prov. 17:22
12. Prov. 25:16, 27
13. I Tim. 5:23
14. Isa. 38:21
15. Psa. 127:2
16. Eccl. 5:12; II Thess. 3:10, 12; Prov. 16:26
17. Eccl. 3:4, 11
18. I Sam. 19:4-5; 22:13-14
19. Rom. 13:10
20. Luke 10:33-34
21. Col. 3:12-13
22. James 3:17
23. I Peter 3:8-11; Prov. 15:1; Judg. 8:1-3
24. Matt. 5:24; Eph. 4:2, 32; Rom. 12:17, 20-21
25. I Thess. 5:14; Job 31:19-20; Matt. 25:35-36; Prov. 31:8-9

Among the moral directives that constitute the moral compass of Christian orthodoxy, the Sixth Commandment stands as a sentinel, guarding not just the sanctity of life, but also the sanctity of

interpersonal relationships and the internal universe of human emotions. The Westminster Larger Catechism, in its quest for thoroughness, explores the profound implications of this commandment in Question 135, underscoring a philosophy of life that transcends mere existence.

To "not kill" is more than an interdiction against physical harm; it's a summons to an intentional life of holistic preservation. The commandment demands a vigilant guardianship of our own life [Eph. 5:28-29] as well as an altruistic commitment to uphold the dignity and sanctity of the lives of others [I Kings 18:4]. This responsibility stretches beyond the evident physical dimension to encompass the cognitive realm, asking believers to gird their minds against destructive thoughts [Jer. 26:15-16] and to cultivate emotional landscapes characterized by quietness [I Thess. 4:11], cheerfulness [Prov. 17:22], and restraint [Eph. 4:26-27].

The canvas of this commandment is expansive, and its hues are numerous. It encompasses the judicious use of sustenance and sleep [Prov. 25:16; Psa. 127:2], the embrace of labor and recreation [Eccl. 5:12; 3:4], and the nurturing of a compassionate heart [Luke 10:33-34]. Speech and behavior, too, come under its purview, emphasizing harmony [James 3:17], kindness [Col. 3:12-13], and reconciliation [Matt. 5:24]. And at the pinnacle of its moral edifice is the call to be a balm to the wounded and a shield to the vulnerable [I Thess. 5:14; Prov. 31:8-9].

Such a rich tapestry of moral guidance in the Sixth Commandment provides a comprehensive framework for Christian living. Far from being a simple directive, it emerges as a robust ethos that encourages believers to cherish, protect, and uplift life in all its myriad forms. Through this commandment, the Westminster Larger Catechism

paints a vision of a faith that is deeply pastoral, constantly introspective, and fervently aspirational—a faith that sees the imago Dei, the image of God, in every soul and seeks to honor it in thought, word, and deed.

Q136:

What are the sins forbidden in the sixth commandment?

A136: The sins forbidden in the sixth commandment are, all taking away the life of ourselves,[1] or of others,[2] except in case of public justice,[3] lawful war,[4] or necessary defense;[5] the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life; [6] sinful anger,[7] hatred,[8] envy,[9] desire of revenge;[10] all excessive passions,[11] distracting cares;[12] immoderate use of meat, drink,[13] labor,[14] and recreations;[15] provoking words,[16] oppression,[17] quarreling,[18] striking, wounding,[19] and: Whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any.[20]

1. Acts 16:28

2. Gen. 9:6

3. Num. 35:31, 33

4. Jer. 48:10; Deut. ch. 20

5. Exod. 22:2-3

6. Matt. 25:42-43; James 2:15-16; Eccl. 6:1-2

7. Matt. 5:22
8. I John 3:15; Lev. 19:17
9. Prov. 14:30
10. Rom. 12:19
11. Eph. 4:31
12. Matt. 6:31, 34
13. Luke 21:34; Rom. 13:13
14. Eccl. 2:22-23; 12:12
15. Isa. 5:12
16. Prov. 12:18; 15:1
17. Ezek. 18:18; Exod. 1:14
18. Gal. 5:15; Prov. 23:29
19. Num. 35:16-18, 21
20. Exod. 21:18-36

The sixth commandment, etched within the Decalogue, stands as a beacon illuminating the sanctity and value of human life: "Thou shalt not kill." Yet, as with many of God's precepts, the implications of this commandment transcend its immediate surface. One must delve deep into the expanses of its prohibitions to truly grasp its breadth.

Life's Divine Endowment and Prohibition against Its Termination

Central to the biblical understanding is the recognition of life as a divine endowment. To terminate it, whether our own or another's, is to arrogate to oneself a prerogative reserved solely for the Divine (Acts 16:28; Gen. 9:6). Nonetheless, exceptions, tethered closely to scriptural warrant, include the execution of justice, just war, and personal defense (Num. 35:31, 33; Jer. 48:10; Exod. 22:2-3).

Negligence and Indifference: Silent Transgressors

Beyond overt acts, the commandment also condemns negligence or indifference towards preserving life. To withdraw from aiding life, even passively, is a grievous affront (Matt. 25:42-43; James 2:15-16). The theological underpinnings of this perspective are rooted in the Christocentric worldview: every individual, bearing the imago Dei, demands our utmost care and consideration.

Emotions, Passions, and Their Potent Force

Central to Bible's commandment is the discernment that often, transgressions spring forth from unchecked emotions. Sinful anger, excessive passions, envy, and the dark longing for revenge—all are seedbeds that might sprout actions violating life's sanctity (Matt. 5:22; Eph. 4:31; Rom. 12:19). It is, therefore, a call not merely for external restraint but profound heart transformation.

Daily Habits: Seemingly Benign, Potentially Deadly

The expansive view of the sixth commandment encompasses our daily routines. Immoderate indulgence, be it in food, drink, labor, or leisure, is deemed a violation (Luke 21:34; Rom. 13:13; Isa. 5:12). These daily transgressions, often trivialized, in fact subtly erode life's quality and quantity.

The Potency of Words and Actions

Provoking words, capable of inciting violence, are underscored as transgressions of this commandment (Prov. 12:18). Oppression, which might silently suffocate life, and outright physical confrontations, both, stand condemned (Ezek. 18:18; Num. 35:16-18, 21).

Pastoral Reflection

To the earnest believer, navigating this life, the sixth commandment emerges not just as a rule against homicide but a comprehensive framework for valuing life in all its facets. The introspective query then becomes: Do our actions, words, emotions, and even daily habits align with this profound call to reverence life? How might we more fully embrace and embody this divine call, cherishing life in all its manifestations?

Q137:

Which is the seventh commandment?

A137: The seventh commandment is, Thou shalt not commit adultery.[1]

1. Exod. 20:14

The Seventh Commandment: The Sanctity of Marital Bonds Explored

Within the sacred Decalogue, given by the Divine to guide humanity towards righteousness and moral fortitude, stands the seventh commandment, proclaiming unequivocally: "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exod. 20:14). This precept, however, is not merely a prohibition against a singular act; it is a profound affirmation of the sanctity of the marital bond, and by extension, human relationships and our very understanding of faithfulness.

Marriage: A Divine Reflection

Reformed theology, with its profound reverence for Scripture, discerns in marriage a reflection of the covenantal relationship between Christ and His Church. Just as the Messiah is unwaveringly faithful to His bride, so too are individuals called to uphold this fidelity within their marital unions. Adultery, thus, is not merely a betrayal of one's spouse but a fracturing of this sacred reflection and an affront to God Himself.

Beyond Physical Acts: A Matter of the Heart

While the immediate implication of the commandment seems to point to physical acts of unfaithfulness, the biblical and Reformed understanding is far more encompassing. Christ, in His Sermon on the Mount, explores the horizon of this commandment, teaching that even lustful thoughts are tantamount to adultery (Matt. 5:28). Thus, the seventh commandment calls for purity not only in deeds but in the very recesses of the human heart.

Pastoral Implications: The Call to Faithfulness in All Relationships

From a pastoral perspective, this commandment extends its tendrils into all spheres of human relationships. Are we, as believers, maintaining spiritual fidelity to our Lord? Are our hearts divided in their loyalties, committing 'adultery' by idolizing worldly pleasures over divine devotion? Such introspective inquiries are imperative for the devout heart seeking alignment with this commandment.

Reflection

In contemplation of the seventh commandment, believers are invited to recognize the profound depths of its implications. It serves not merely as a rule governing marital conduct but as a beacon illuminating the path to true fidelity—in marriage, in relationships, and in our covenant with the Divine. How, then, might we strive daily to embody this fidelity, preserving the sanctity of our commitments and reflecting the unwavering faithfulness of our Savior?

Q138:

What are the duties required in the seventh commandment?

A138: The duties required in the seventh commandment are, chastity in body, mind, affections,[1] words,[2] and behavior,[3] and the preservation of it in ourselves and others,[4] watchfulness over the eyes and all the senses,[5] temperance,[6] keeping of chaste company,[7] modesty in apparel,[8] marriage by those that have not the gift of continency,[9] conjugal love,[10] and cohabitation,[11] diligent labor in our callings,[12] shunning all occasions of uncleanness, and resisting temptations thereunto.[13]

1. I Thess. 4:4; Job 31:1; I Cor. 7:34
2. Col. 4:6
3. I Peter 2:3
4. I Cor. 7:2, 35-36

5. Job 31:1
6. Acts 24:24
7. Prov. 2:16-20
8. I Tim. 2:9
9. I Cor. 7:2, 9
10. Prov. 5:19-20
11. I Peter 3:7
12. Prov. 31:11, 27-28
13. Prov. 5:8; Gen. 39:8-10

The seventh commandment, while succinct in its phrasing, unfolds the duties essential for a godly life, as understood within the Bible. "Thou shalt not commit adultery" is not merely a prohibition against marital infidelity; it extends an invitation for the believers to pursue purity in every facet of life, casting a vision of holiness that permeates our very being.

Chastity: A Holistic Pursuit

The call to chastity is not limited to physical acts. It engages the entirety of the human being – body, mind, and affections. The Apostle Paul, emphasizing this holistic sanctity, urges the Thessalonians toward possessing their bodies in sanctification and honor (1 Thess. 4:4). The venerable Job, exemplifying this principle, made a covenant with his eyes to guard them from impurity (Job 31:1). It is this all-encompassing chastity that the our Lord urges us towards, recognizing that our sanctification is a work that spans the depths of our thoughts to the breadth of our actions.

Words and Behavior: External Expressions of an Inner Reality

Purity is more than internal piety; it is demonstrably lived out. Our words, imbued with grace, should always edify (Col. 4:6). Our behavior should be a radiant testimony of the transformation Christ has wrought within us (1 Peter 2:3). The believer is, therefore, not just a passive recipient of grace but an active embodiment of it.

The Sacredness of Marriage and the Honor of Singleness

Marriage is esteemed as a gift and a guard. Those without the gift of continence are encouraged toward this holy union, not as a mere concession but as a joyful embodiment of God's creative intent (I Cor. 7:2, 9). Yet, the seventh commandment is not merely prescriptive in directing to marriage but also paints the beauty of conjugal love, mutual respect, and harmonious cohabitation (Prov. 5:19-20; I Peter 3:7).

Vigilance: The Guardian of Chastity

The bible underscores vigilance as indispensable for maintaining purity. Such vigilance requires prudent choices in company, a cautious guard over our senses, and an intentional avoidance of all that might entice us toward impurity (Prov. 2:16-20; Job 31:1; Prov. 5:8).

A Contemplative Reflection

As we explore the vast expanse of the seventh commandment, we discern a call not merely to avoid specific sins but to cultivate a lifestyle of purity. It beckons us towards a wholeness of life, wherein every thought, word, and action resonates with the heart of God. In an age where the lines of morality are frequently blurred, may we, fortified by the truths of our Reformed heritage, ardently pursue a life of unwavering integrity and radiant holiness.

Q139:

What are the sins forbidden in the seventh commandment?

A139: The sins forbidden in the seventh commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required,[1] are, adultery, fornication,[2] rape, incest,[3] sodomy, and all unnatural lusts;[4] all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections;[5] all corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto;[6] wanton looks,[7] impudent or light behavior, immodest apparel;[8] prohibiting of lawful,[9] and dispensing with unlawful marriages;[10] allowing, tolerating, keeping of stews, and resorting to them;[11] entangling vows of single life,[12] undue delay of marriage;[13] having more wives or husbands than one at the same time;[14] unjust divorce,[15] or desertion;[16] idleness, gluttony, drunkenness,[17] unchaste company;[18] lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays;[19] and all other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves or others.[20]

1. Prov. 5:7
2. Heb. 13:4; Gal. 5:19
3. II Sam. 13:14; I Cor. 5:1
4. Rom. 1:24, 26-27; Lev. 20:15-16
5. Matt. 5:28; 15:19; Col. 3:5
6. Eph. 5:3-4; Prov. 7:5, 21-22
7. Isa. 3:16; II Peter 2:14

8. Prov. 7:10, 13
9. I Tim. 4:3
10. Lev. 18:1-21; Mark 6:18; Mal. 2:11-12
11. I Kings 15:12; II Kings 23:7; Deut. 23:17-18; Lev. 19:29; Jer. 5:7; Prov. 7:24-27
12. Matt. 19:10-11
13. I Cor. 7:7-9; Gen. 38:26
14. Mal. 2:14-15; Matt. 19:5
15. Mal. 2:16; Matt. 5:32
16. I Cor. 7:12-13
17. Ezek. 16:49; Prov. 23:30-33
18. Gen. 39:10; Prov. 5:8
19. Eph. 5:4; Ezek. 23:14-16; Isa. 3:16; 23:15-17; Mark 6:22; Rom. 13:13; I Peter 4:3
20. II Kings 9:30; Jer. 4:30; Ezek. 23:40

In an age where moral boundaries are constantly shifting and redefined, the seventh commandment emerges as an anchor, steadfastly holding believers to the timeless standard of God's holiness. While it is tempting to reduce the commandment to mere physical acts of infidelity, a closer examination reveals a profound call to purity that encompasses our very essence, both internally and externally.

Adultery and Its Kin: An Affront to the Divine Design

The sins expressly stated, such as adultery, fornication, rape, and incest, are direct affronts to the divine design of human relationships, revealing a tragic deviation from God's intent for intimacy and procreation (Heb. 13:4; II Sam. 13:14). Moreover, the enumeration of sodomy and unnatural lusts underscores the breadth

of God's standard, emphasizing that our sexuality must align with His design and purpose (Rom. 1:24, 26-27).

The Inner Battleground: The Heart and Mind

Beyond overt actions, the seventh commandment probes into the sanctum of our hearts and minds. Unclean imaginations, purposes, and affections are not mere passive transgressions; they fundamentally disrupt our communion with God and distort our view of His image-bearers (Matt. 5:28; Col. 3:5). Our very thoughts become a battleground, with the stakes being our very relationship with our Creator.

Society's Subtleties and Their Spiritual Ramifications

The catechism further elaborates on societal infractions that we may often overlook, yet have profound spiritual ramifications. Lascivious literature, media, and even casual conversations that entertain impurity (Eph. 5:3-4; Prov. 7:5, 21-22) subtly erode our moral fabric, distancing us from the holiness to which we are called.

Prohibiting lawful marriages or endorsing illicit ones not only disrupts societal order but also distorts the beautiful archetype of Christ and the Church (I Tim. 4:3; Lev. 18:1-21). Similarly, the condemnation of stews and resorting to them reveals the depth of societal decay when God's standards are abandoned (I Kings 15:12; Jer. 5:7).

Reflections for the Reverent Heart

Contemplating the vast expanse of the sins forbidden in the seventh commandment compels us to introspection. We are reminded that our call to purity is not mere moralism but a heartfelt response to a

holy God who desires a people set apart for Himself. This is not merely about a list of do's and don'ts but about cultivating a heart that beats in rhythm with God's own.

May we, informed by the depth of our Reformed heritage and empowered by the Holy Spirit, strive not just to avoid the explicit sins, but to passionately pursue a life radiating the purity and holiness reflective of our God. Such a life is not just about avoiding pitfalls but about dancing in harmony with the very heart of God.

Q140: Which is the eighth commandment?

A140: The eighth commandment is, Thou shalt not steal.[1]

1. Exod. 20:15

The eighth commandment, when uttered, rings clear with authority: "Thou shalt not steal." At a cursory glance, it may seem simple, but it becomes a profound exploration of human relationships, divine ownership, and the nature of stewardship.

Origins of Ownership

To fully understand this commandment, one must first grapple with the concept of ownership. Who truly owns anything? The bible teaches that all of creation belongs to God, as expounded in Psalms: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it" (Ps. 24:1). If God is the

ultimate possessor of all things, theft, then, is not merely a violation against man, but an affront to God, the Divine Owner.

The Heart of the Matter

According to Scripture, there lies an understanding that God's commandments are not mere external regulations but probes into the human heart. Jeremiah 17:9 reminds us, "The heart is deceitful above all things." The act of stealing, then, is a manifestation of deeper internal corruptions: covetousness, discontent, and ultimately a distrust in God's provision.

A Broader Horizon

While the explicit wording of the commandment forbids the act of taking what is not rightfully ours, its implications are vast. It not only addresses the unlawful acquisition but extends to how we perceive and handle what we already possess. Are we, in essence, stealing when we withhold good from those to whom it is due? Are we robbing God when we fail to steward His blessings generously and judiciously?

A Pastoral Perspective

For the believer, the eighth commandment is not merely a restriction but an invitation. An invitation to trust in the providence of a generous God, to find contentment in His design, and to live in a manner that reflects His benevolence. The pastor's role is to guide the flock into a deep introspection, not to induce guilt but to illuminate areas of life where God's grace can transform. Every act of integrity, every decision to give rather than hoard, becomes a testament to a heart being shaped by the Spirit.

Conclusion: Stewards, Not Owners

In contrast with carnal wisdom, the eighth commandment offers a paradigm shift. We move from seeing ourselves as owners to recognizing our roles as stewards of God's creation. "Thou shalt not steal" becomes more than a directive against unlawful taking; it becomes a clarion call to honor God with all we have and all we are. It beckons us to live with open hands, reflecting the generosity of a God who gave His all for us.

Q141:

What are the duties required in the eighth commandment?

A141: The duties required in the eighth commandment are, truth, faithfulness, and justice in contracts and commerce between man and man;^[1] rendering to everyone his due;^[2] restitution of goods unlawfully detained from the right owners thereof;^[3] giving and lending freely, according to our abilities, and the necessities of others;^[4] moderation of our judgments, wills, and affections concerning worldly goods;^[5] a provident care and study to get,^[6] keep, use, and dispose these things which are necessary and convenient for the sustentation of our nature, and suitable to our condition;^[7] a lawful calling,^[8] and diligence in it;^[9] frugality;^[10] avoiding unnecessary lawsuits ^[11] and suretyship, or other like engagements;^[12] and an endeavor, by all just and lawful means, to

procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others, as well as our own.[13]

1. Psa. 15:2, 4; Zech. 7:4, 10; 8:16-17
2. Rom. 13:7
3. Lev. 6:2-5; Luke 19:8
4. Luke 6:30, 38; I John 3:17; Eph. 4:28; Gal. 6:10
5. I Tim. 6:6-9; Gal. 6:14
6. I Tim. 5:8
7. Prov. 27:23-27; Eccl. 2:24; 3:12-13; I Tim. 6:17-18; Isa. 38:1; Matt. 11:8
8. I Cor. 7:20; Gen. 2:15, 3:19
9. Eph. 4:28; Prov. 10:4
10. John 6:12; Prov. 21:20
11. I Cor. 6:1-9
12. Prov. 6:1-6; 11:15
13. Lev. 25:35; Deut. 22:1-4; Exod. 23:4-5; Gen. 47:14, 20; Phil. 2:4, Matt. 22:39

The eighth commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," while succinct in its phrasing, unveils profound layers of theological and ethical depth. This commandment is more than a mere prohibition against thievery; it beckons the believer into a thoughtful engagement with the broader concepts of ownership, stewardship, and our responsibilities towards our fellow man.

Divine Ownership and Human Stewardship

Firstly, to grapple with the prohibition against stealing, we must recognize that everything under heaven belongs to the Lord (Psa. 15:2, 4). We are but stewards of what has been entrusted to us. When we steal, we not only wrong our fellow man but also rebel against the

divine Owner of all things. Theft is thus not merely a crime against man but an affront to God.

Justice, Truth, and Integrity in Transactions

In a world marred by greed and corruption, the duties elucidated by the commandment call believers to an elevated standard in all their dealings. Justice, truth, and faithfulness must govern all contracts and commerce (Zech. 7:4, 10). This commitment to integrity is more than just honest transactions; it's about recognizing the Image of God in the other, treating them with the dignity they deserve, and rendering to every person their due (Rom. 13:7).

Restitution and Generosity

The commandment's call to restitution showcases God's heart for reconciliation and restoration (Lev. 6:2-5). A stolen item is not just a material loss but represents a breach in relationships and trust. Beyond this, believers are urged towards generosity, resonating with the selfless love of Christ who gave Himself for us (Luke 6:30, 38).

Moderation and Provident Care

In a society where materialism and excessive consumption are rampant, the call to moderation and provident care stands in stark contrast (I Tim. 6:6-9). The believer is called to strike a balance – diligently working in their calling (Eph. 4:28; Prov. 10:4) while not becoming enslaved to the trappings of wealth. Frugality and prudence (John 6:12; Prov. 21:20) are virtues that free the believer from the shackles of greed, enabling them to live in contentment and joy.

Promotion of the Well-being of Others

In closing, the duties underlined in this commandment culminate in a profound call: to use just and lawful means to promote the wealth and estate of others as we would our own (Lev. 25:35; Matt. 22:39). This isn't just about avoiding harm, but actively seeking the good of our neighbor.

To reflect deeply on the eighth commandment is to be ushered into a transformative journey from selfishness to selflessness, from mere ownership to purposeful stewardship, and from individualism to true brotherhood. May we, as believers rooted in the Reformed tradition, rise to embody this divine call, radiating the love and integrity of Christ in all our interactions.

Q142:

What are the sins forbidden in the eighth commandment?

A142: The sins forbidden in the eighth commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required,[1] are, theft,[2] robbery,[3] man-stealing,[4] and receiving anything that is stolen;[5] fraudulent dealing,[6] false weights and measures,[7] removing land marks,[8] injustice and unfaithfulness in contracts between man and man,[9] or in matters of trust;[10] oppression,[11] extortion,[12] usury,[13] bribery,[14] vexatious lawsuits,[15] unjust enclosures and depopulations;[16] engrossing commodities to enhance the price;[17]

unlawful callings,[18] and all other unjust or sinful ways of taking or withholding from our neighbor what belongs to him, or of enriching ourselves;[19] covetousness;[20] inordinate prizing and affecting worldly goods;[21] distrustful and distracting cares and studies in getting, keeping, and using them;[22] envying at the prosperity of others;[23] as likewise idleness,[24] prodigality, wasteful gaming; and all other ways whereby we do unduly prejudice our own outward estate,[25] and defrauding ourselves of the due use and comfort of that estate which God hath given us.[26]

1. James 2:15-16; I John 3:17
2. Eph. 4:28; Psa. 42:10
3. Psa. 62:10
4. I Tim. 1:10
5. Prov. 29:24; Psa. 50:18
6. I Thess. 4:6
7. Prov. 11:1; 20:10
8. Deut. 19:14; Prov. 23:10
9. Amos 8:5; Psa. 37:21
10. Luke 16:10-12
11. Ezek. 22:29; Lev. 25:17
12. Matt. 23:25; Ezek. 22:12
13. Psa. 15:5
14. Job 15:34
15. I Cor. 6:6-8; Prov. 3:29-30
16. Isa. 5:8; Micah 2:2
17. Prov. 11:26
18. Acts 19:19, 24-25
19. Job. 20:19; James 5:4; Prov. 21:6
20. Luke 12:15
21. I Tim. 6:5; Col. 3:2; Prov. 23:5; Psa. 42:10
22. Matt. 6:25, 31, 34, Eccl. 5:12

- 23. Psa. 37:1, 7; 73:3
- 24. II Thess. 3:11; Prov. 18:9
- 25. Prov. 21:17; 23:20-21; 28:19
- 26. Eccl. 4:8; 6:2; I Tim. 5:8

The eighth commandment, "Thou shalt not steal," at its surface level might be considered merely as an interdiction against pilfering, but upon profound reflection it unfurls into a vast panorama of human temptations, weaknesses, and ethical blind spots.

More than Mere Theft

The commandment's essence penetrates much deeper than merely the act of theft (Eph. 4:28). It delves into realms of robbery (Psa. 62:10), the odious sin of man-stealing (I Tim. 1:10) which tarnished human history and enslaved countless in misery, and even the seemingly passive act of receiving stolen goods (Prov. 29:24). These reflect not only on the external actions but provide a mirror into the covetousness of the human heart.

Deceit in Dealings

One of the profound breaches of this commandment lies in fraudulent dealings (I Thess. 4:6). This is not limited to deception in commerce, but stretches to the utilization of false weights and measures (Prov. 11:1), a vivid illustration of the human propensity to tilt scales for self-gain. Beyond personal transactions, the removal of landmarks (Deut. 19:14) points to our quest for dominion, often at the cost of justice and equity.

The Trap of Oppression and Extortion

The commandment also highlights how power dynamics can be misused. Oppression (Ezek. 22:29) and extortion (Matt. 23:25) serve as painful reminders that the love of wealth can make one blind to the image of God in their fellow beings. Furthermore, the inclusion of usury (Psa. 15:5) underscores how systems can be skewed to benefit the rich at the expense of the vulnerable.

The Subtle Lure of Covetousness

The commandment pulls back the veil on subtler forms of transgressions – not just overt actions, but internal dispositions. Covetousness (Luke 12:15), inordinate affection for worldly goods (I Tim. 6:5), and the ensuing distrustful cares (Matt. 6:25) expose the idolatry of the heart that places material wealth above the Creator.

The Poison of Envy and the Waste of Idleness

Envy at the prosperity of others (Psa. 37:1, 7) reflects a heart discontented with God's sovereign distribution of gifts. The commandment also confronts the slothfulness of idleness (II Thess. 3:11) and the frivolity of prodigality (Prov. 21:17), calling for a balanced, diligent stewardship of the resources entrusted to us.

In Closing: A Call to Heart Examination

The breadth of sins forbidden in the eighth commandment, stretching from overt theft to internal discontent, calls the believer to deep introspection. This reflection serves not to overwhelm with guilt, but to paint a clear picture of human frailty and the desperate need for grace. In understanding the vast implications of this commandment, believers are pointed to Christ, the only true remedy for covetous hearts and the embodiment of selfless generosity.

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1. Psa. 15:2, 4; Zech. 7:4, 10; 8:16-17
2. Rom. 13:7
3. Lev. 6:2-5; Luke 19:8
4. Luke 6:30, 38; I John 3:17; Eph. 4:28; Gal. 6:10
5. I Tim. 6:6-9; Gal. 6:14
6. I Tim. 5:8
7. Prov. 27:23-27; Eccl. 2:24; 3:12-13; I Tim. 6:17-18; Isa. 38:1; Matt.

11:8

8. I Cor. 7:20; Gen. 2:15, 3:19

9. Eph. 4:28; Prov. 10:4

10. John 6:12; Prov. 21:20

11. I Cor. 6:1-9

12. Prov. 6:1-6; 11:15

13. Lev. 25:35; Deut. 22:1-4; Exod. 23:4-5; Gen. 47:14, 20; Phil. 2:4, Matt. 22:39

The eighth commandment's explicit directive, "Thou shalt not steal," is not merely prohibitive but is an invitation to a broader, richer moral and spiritual life. The Westminster Larger Catechism's Question 141 delves deep into the positive obligations borne from this commandment, painting a portrait of a life rooted in respect for God's sovereignty over creation and love for our neighbors. These duties acquire deeper dimensions, offering profound insights into the heart of Christian ethics.

1. The Cornerstones: Truth, Faithfulness, and Justice

These foundational virtues of truth, faithfulness, and justice serve as guiding lights in all interpersonal transactions, ensuring our actions mirror the character of God Himself. As the psalmist declares, those who walk blamelessly and do justice, speaking truth from their hearts, shall dwell in God's holy hill (Psa. 15:2, 4).

2. Rendering to All Their Due

Romans 13:7 aptly reminds us of the duty to give respect and honor where they are due. This is not merely an external duty but an inward recognition of the inherent dignity and worth of every individual as bearers of God's image.

3. Restitution: Healing Broken Bonds

Restitution is not just about material restoration but seeks to mend the broken bonds of trust and community. Zacchaeus's encounter with Christ exemplifies this, where salvation manifests in acts of restitution (Luke 19:8).

4. Generosity: Reflecting God's Abundance

Our calling is to mirror the generous heart of God. Giving and lending become sacred acts, testifying to our trust in God's providence and our solidarity with our fellow humans.

5. Moderation: The Golden Mean

The call to moderate our affections concerning worldly goods is a reminder of the transient nature of earthly wealth. It encourages the believer to find lasting treasure in God and His promises, rather than the fleeting pleasures of materialism.

6. Provident Care: Stewardship in Action

Recognizing God as the true owner of all things, we are called to be diligent stewards, using resources wisely and preparing for future needs, thus reflecting God's wisdom and care in our daily lives.

7. The Sanctity of Work

Deriving their ethic from the Bible, the Protestant Reformers has always held a high view of work. A lawful calling is seen not just as a means of sustenance but as a venue through which God's creative and redemptive purposes are worked out in the world.

8. Frugality and Avoidance of Strife

Frugality is not mere thriftiness but a lifestyle choice that respects the resources God provides. Additionally, avoiding unnecessary legal conflicts underscores the premium the Scriptures place on community, peace, and reconciliation.

9. Advocating for Others

The duty to further the wealth and estate of others encapsulates the essence of the commandment. It's not just about refraining from harm but actively seeking the welfare of our neighbors, thus fulfilling the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2).

Conclusion: Living Beyond the Letter

The duties detailed in Q141 challenge believers to live beyond the mere letter of the law, steering them towards the heart of Christian discipleship. They paint a vision of a community where mutual respect, generosity, and love reign supreme, giving a foretaste of the Kingdom of God on earth. The eighth commandment emerges not just as a rule but as a roadmap for a life well-lived, glorifying God in every transaction, choice, and relationship.

Q142:

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1. James 2:15-16; I John 3:17
2. Eph. 4:28; Psa. 42:10
3. Psa. 62:10
4. I Tim. 1:10
5. Prov. 29:24; Psa. 50:18
6. I Thess. 4:6
7. Prov. 11:1; 20:10
8. Deut. 19:14; Prov. 23:10
9. Amos 8:5; Psa. 37:21
10. Luke 16:10-12
11. Ezek. 22:29; Lev. 25:17
12. Matt. 23:25; Ezek. 22:12
13. Psa. 15:5
14. Job 15:34

15. I Cor. 6:6-8; Prov. 3:29-30
16. Isa. 5:8; Micah 2:2
17. Prov. 11:26
18. Acts 19:19, 24-25
19. Job. 20:19; James 5:4; Prov. 21:6
20. Luke 12:15
21. I Tim. 6:5; Col. 3:2; Prov. 23:5; Psa. 42:10
22. Matt. 6:25, 31, 34, Eccl. 5:12
23. Psa. 37:1, 7; 73:3
24. II Thess. 3:11; Prov. 18:9
25. Prov. 21:17; 23:20-21; 28:19
26. Eccl. 4:8; 6:2; I Tim. 5:8

The eighth commandment, a reflection of God's righteous character, illuminates the breadth and depth of ethical living within the Christian worldview. This commandment, though deceptively simple in its injunction, "Thou shalt not steal," holds within it a vast expanse of moral imperatives. The Westminster Larger Catechism's Question 142 serves as a mirror, revealing to us the manifold ways we can transgress against this divine mandate.

1. Beyond Mere Neglect: Actively Forbidden Sins

The beauty of the Scriptures are found in its profound understanding of sin's depths. Sin isn't merely the neglect of duty but often an active rebellion against the Divine. Theft, robbery, and man-stealing are not just violations of human trust but transgressions against God's divine order.

2. Deception and Injustice: Violations of Godly Integrity

Fraudulent dealings and the use of false weights and measures erode the foundational trust that holds societies together. The removal of

landmarks and unfaithfulness in contracts isn't just an affront to our neighbors but mocks the God of truth.

3. Oppression, Extortion, and Usury: Exploiting the Vulnerable

These sins highlight a grotesque distortion of power and privilege. They scream of humanity's incessant thirst for dominance, sidelining the image of God in the oppressed. They stand in stark contrast to the biblical narrative of liberation, justice, and compassion.

4. Covetousness: The Root of All Evil

This is not a mere whimsical desire but a deep-seated longing that places worldly goods above the Creator. The Apostle Paul, in Colossians, warns against such earthly desires, urging believers to set their minds on things above.

5. Distrust and Anxiety: Lacking Faith in Divine Providence

While prudent planning is virtuous, an excessive preoccupation with worldly goods often stems from a lack of trust in God's providence. Such anxieties, as Christ proclaimed in His Sermon on the Mount, are needless for those who are in the Father's care.

6. Envy and Idleness: Spiritual Decay

Envy, a resentful longing invoked by someone else's possessions or qualities, corrodes the soul, making it unable to rejoice in the blessings of others. Idleness, on the other hand, is a refusal to partake in God's call to stewardship and creativity.

7. Prodigality and Gaming: Misusing God's Gifts

These represent a reckless waste of resources entrusted by God to individuals, denying oneself and others the blessings these resources can offer.

Conclusion: The True Wealth of the Eighth Commandment

The prohibitions listed in Q142 are not merely a list of "don'ts" but a profound call to holistic, ethical living. The Bible recognizes that the eighth commandment is not just about protecting property but preserving the sanctity of relationships, fostering trust, and mirroring God's righteousness in our dealings.

This contemplation, pastoral in its concern, urges the believer to recognize the value of intangible wealth: the wealth of integrity, trust, and godly relationships. In refraining from these sins, we don't just avoid harm but actively contribute to the weaving of a societal fabric that reflects the Kingdom of God on earth.

Q143:

Which is the ninth commandment?

A143: The ninth commandment is, Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.[1]

1. Exod. 20:16

The ninth commandment stands as a sentinel against the erosion of truth in society, guarding the sacred bond of trust between

individuals. Rooted deeply in God's unchanging nature as Truth, it casts a compelling vision of integrity for God's people. "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor" is not merely a dictate of human ethics but a profound reflection of divine character.

1. The Divine Nature: God as Truth

To begin understanding this commandment, one must first comprehend the nature of God. The Scripture constantly emphasizes that God is truth. Every promise He makes, every word He speaks, is rooted in the very essence of truth. Hence, when His people, made in His image, bear false witness, it is nothing short of tarnishing this divine image within.

2. The Sacrament of Speech

Speech, a gift unique to humankind, carries with it enormous power. The ability to communicate, to bear witness, is sacred. When one bears false witness, it's not just an offense against man but a perversion of this sacred gift. The didactic wisdom of the Proverbs frequently warns against such misuse, highlighting the destructive power of untruthful lips.

3. The Pastoral Heart: The Damage Beyond Words

While the surface violation of this commandment seems to concern speech, its pastoral implications run much deeper. False testimony can lead to profound injustices, ruining reputations, fracturing communities, and even condemning the innocent. The reverberations of untruth ripple out, causing untold pain and suffering. Such actions are antithetical to the heart of Christ, who is Himself the Truth and who constantly sought to uplift, restore, and heal.

4. Community and Trust: The Social Fabric

The introspective believer will recognize that bearing truthful witness is foundational to a community's health. Trust, once broken, is hard to mend. When members of a community can no longer trust one another's word, the very fabric of society starts to fray. The ninth commandment, in its wisdom, seeks to uphold this delicate fabric by enshrining truthfulness as a cardinal virtue.

5. A Mirror to the Soul

In a deeply contemplative sense, our words reflect the state of our souls. To speak the truth is to have a soul in harmony with God's nature. To bear false witness is to reveal a dissonance, a spiritual malaise. As the Apostle James pondered, how can both fresh and saltwater flow from the same spring?

Conclusion: A Call to Authentic Living

The ninth commandment is a clarion call for authentic living. To bear true witness is to align oneself with the divine, to partake in God's restorative work in the world. It is not just about avoiding falsehood but actively championing truth in all its forms. This, the Reformed tradition asserts, is the high calling of every believer: to reflect God's truth, both in word and in deed, heralding the Kingdom where Truth Himself reigns supreme.

Q144:

What are the duties required in the ninth commandment?

A144: The duties required in the ninth commandment are, the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man,[1] and the good name of our neighbor, as well as our own;[12] appearing and standing for the truth;[3] and from the heart,[4] sincerely,[5] freely, [6] clearly,[7] and fully,[8] speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice,[9] and in all other things whatsoever;[10] a charitable esteem of our neighbors;[11] loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name;[12] sorrowing for,[13] and covering of their infirmities;[14] freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces,[15] defending their innocency;[16] a ready receiving of a good report,[17] and unwillingness to admit of an evil report,[18] concerning them; discouraging talebearers,[19] flatterers,[20] and slanderers;[21] love and care of our own good name, and defending it when need requireth;[22] keeping of lawful promises;[23] studying and practicing of whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely, and of good report.[24]

1. Zech. 8:16
2. III John 1:12
3. Prov. 31:8-9
4. Psa. 15:2
5. II Chr. 19:9
6. I Sam. 19:4-5
7. Josh. 7:19
8. II Sam. 14:18-20
9. Lev. 19:15; Prov. 14:5, 25
10. II Cor. 1:17-18; Eph. 4:25
11. Heb. 6:9; I Cor. 13:7

12. Rom. 1:8; II John 1:4; III John 1:3-4
13. II Cor. 2:4; 12:21
14. Prov. 17:9; I Peter 4:8
15. I Cor. 1:4-5, 7; II Tim. 1:4-5
16. I Sam. 22:14
17. I Cor. 13:6-7
18. Psa. 15:3
19. Prov. 25:23
20. Prov. 26:24-25
21. Psa. 101:5
22. Prov. 22:1; John 8:49
23. Psa. 15:4
24. Phil. 4:8

The ninth commandment, as succinctly declared in the Westminster Larger Catechism, underscores the sanctity of truth. We find that this commandment is far from a mere injunction against lying. Instead, it paints a vivid portrait of a life shaped by truth in its manifold expressions.

1. The Sanctity of Truth

At the very heart of the Bible is the understanding of God as the very embodiment of Truth. To speak truthfully, then, is to participate in God's nature and to further His design for creation.[1] The duty is not merely to avoid falsehood but to actively safeguard and champion truth in all spheres of life.

2. Truth and Human Dignity

Truth is interwoven with human dignity. By promoting the good name of our neighbor and our own, we affirm the image of God in

each person.[2] This is more than a matter of reputation; it is a deep acknowledgment of the worth of every individual in God's eyes.

3. An Active Defense of Truth

The commandment also calls for a proactive defense of the truth. It is insufficient to remain passive in the face of falsehood or injustice.[3] One must stand, from the heart, for the truth, even when it comes at personal cost.

4. A Charitable Esteem: The Pastoral Core

Beyond mere speech, the ninth commandment cultivates a certain disposition of the heart.[11] It beckons believers to love, to hope for the best, to mourn the shortcomings of others, and to cover these shortcomings with the mantle of grace. This pastoral core offers a corrective to a world that is often quick to judge and slow to understand.

5. The Danger of Talebearing and Flattery

Truth is often endangered not by outright lies but by half-truths, distortions, and flattery.[19-21] The believer must discern and reject such subtle untruths, understanding the damage they wreak on individual souls and the communal fabric.

6. A Personal Duty: Guarding One's Name

The commandment also recognizes the personal dimension of truth. [22] Just as one must guard the name of another, so too must one guard and preserve one's integrity. This is not born out of vanity but out of a holy desire to live as a testament to God's truth.

7. A Life Shaped by What is Lovely and True

Finally, this commandment is an invitation to immerse oneself in all that is true, noble, and praiseworthy.[24] It reminds the believer that to live by the truth is to be drawn into the beauty and goodness of God's creation. The contemplative heart, then, sees this commandment not as a mere duty but as a path to a richer, deeper communion with the Divine.

Conclusion

The ninth commandment is a holistic call to truthfulness. It reaches into every corner of one's life, shaping not just one's words but one's heart, relationships, and very way of being in the world. In adhering to this commandment, one is not merely following a rule but embracing a vision of life that reflects the heart of God Himself.

Q145:

What are the sins forbidden in the ninth commandment?

A145: The sins forbidden in the ninth commandment are, all prejudicing the truth, and the good name of our neighbors, as well as our own,[1] especially in public judicature;[2] giving false evidence, [3] suborning false witnesses,[4] wittingly appearing and pleading for an evil cause, outfacing and overbearing the truth;[5] passing unjust sentence,[6] calling evil good, and good evil; rewarding the wicked according to the work of the righteous, and the righteous according to the work of the wicked;[7] forgery,[8] concealing the

truth, undue silence in a just cause,[9] and holding our peace when iniquity calleth for either a reproof from ourselves,[10] or complaint to others;[11] speaking the truth unseasonably,[12] or maliciously to a wrong end,[13] or perverting it to a wrong meaning,[14] or in doubtful and equivocal expressions, to the prejudice of truth or justice;[15] speaking untruth,[16] lying,[17] slandering,[18] backbiting,[19] detracting,[20] tale bearing,[21] whispering,[22] scoffing,[23] reviling,[24] rash,[25] harsh,[26] and partial censuring; [27] misconstructing intentions, words, and actions;[28] flattering, [29] vainglorious boasting,[30] thinking or speaking too highly or too meanly of ourselves or others;[31] denying the gifts and graces of God;[32] aggravating smaller faults;[33] hiding, excusing, or extenuating of sins, when called to a free confession;[34] unnecessary discovering of infirmities;[35] raising false rumors,[36] receiving and countenancing evil reports,[37] and stopping our ears against just defense;[38] evil suspicion;[39] envying or grieving at the deserved credit of any,[40] endeavoring or desiring to impair it, [41] rejoicing in their disgrace and infamy;[42] scornful contempt, [43] fond admiration;[44] breach of lawful promises;[45] neglecting such things as are of good report,[46] and practicing, or not avoiding ourselves, or not hindering: What we can in others, such things as procure an ill name.[47]

1. I Sam. 17:28; II Sam. 1:9-10, 15-16; 16:3
2. Lev. 19:15; Hab. 1:4
3. Prov. 6:16, 19; 19:5
4. Acts 6:13
5. Jer. 9:3, 5; Acts 24:2, 5; Psa. 3:1-4; 12:3-4
6. Prov. 17:15; I Kings 21:9-14
7. Isa. 5:23
8. Psa. 119:69; Luke 16:5-7; 19:8
9. Lev. 5:1; Acts 5:3, 8-9; II Tim. 4:6

10. I Kings 1:6; Lev. 19:17
11. Isa. 59:4
12. Prov. 29:11
13. I Sam. 22:9-10; Psa. 52:1
14. Psa. 56:5; John 2:19; Matt. 26:60-61
15. Gen. 3:5, 26:7, 9
16. Isa. 59:13
17. Lev. 19:11; Col. 3:9
18. Psa. 50:20
19. Psa. 15:3
20. James 4:11; Jer. 38:4
21. Lev. 19:16
22. Rom. 1:29-30
23. Gen. 21:9; Gal. 4:29
24. I Cor. 6:10
25. Mattt. 7:1
26. Acts 28:4
27. Gen. 38:24; Rom. 2:1
28. Neh. 6:6-8; Rom. 3:8; Psa. 69:10; I Sam. 1:13-15; II Sam. 10:3
29. Psa. 12:2-3
30. II Tim. 3:2
31. Luke 18:9, 11; Rom. 12:16; I Cor. 4:6; Acts 12:22; Exod. 4:10-14
32. Job 4:6, 27:5-6
33. Matt. 7:3-5
34. Prov. 28:13; 30:20; Gen. 3:12-13; 4:9; Jer. 2:35; II Kings 5:25
35. Gen. 9:22; Prov. 25:9-10
36. Exod. 23:1
37. Prov. 29:12
38. Acts 7:56-57; Job 31:13-14
39. I Cor. 13:5; I Tim. 6:4
40. Num. 11:29; Matt. 21:15
41. Ezra 4:12-13

- 42. Jer. 48:27
- 43. Psa. 35:15-16, 21; Matt. 27:28-29
- 44. Jude 1:16; Acts 12:22
- 45. Rom. 1:31; II Tim. 3:3
- 46. I Sam. 2:24
- 47. II Sam. 13:12-13; Prov. 5:8-9; 6:33

The Ninth Commandment, with its succinct exhortation against bearing false witness, holds within its compass a depth of instruction for the soul, reflecting the vastness of God's wisdom and His profound concern for the inner sanctum of our integrity. The Westminster Larger Catechism, in its exploration of this commandment, peels back layer upon layer to expose not only the gross violations of lying and deceit but also the subtler, yet deeply corrosive, sins of the tongue and heart.

1. The Primacy of Truth

At the foundation of this commandment lies the divine value of truth, and any deviation from it – be it direct falsehood, forgery, or even undue silence in the face of injustice[8-9] – is an affront to the nature of God Himself. It is not enough to refrain from uttering untruth; one must actively champion truth and stand against the suppression of it.

2. Truth in Public Justice

Public judicature holds a special place in the purview of this commandment.[2] The Scriptures sternly warn against any compromise in matters of justice, emphasizing the gravity of false testimony and unjust judgment.[3-6] These are not just transgressions against individuals but against the societal structures that God has ordained.

3. The Subtleties of Untruth

The commandment brings to light the nuanced shades of untruth, including speech that is technically accurate yet spoken maliciously, or truths spoken out of season, or words twisted to a wrongful meaning.[12-15] This calls for a discerning spirit, able to weigh not just the content but the intent of words.

4. The Pastoral Heartbeat: Addressing Relational Trespasses

Much of the commandment's exposition in the catechism pertains to how we view and speak of others: slander, backbiting, and rash judgments all poison relationships and wound the Body of Christ.[17-27] Yet, it also cautions against flattery and vainglorious boasting, for these too are departures from truth, driven by pride and self-interest. [29-30]

5. The Inner Realm: Heart Postures and Dispositions

The catechism invites deep introspection by shedding light on inner dispositions like scornful contempt, envy, and undue admiration. [39-44] These, though they may never find overt expression, are nonetheless breaches of this commandment. The heart is the wellspring of our actions, and it is here, in its hidden chambers, that truth must be most jealously guarded.

6. The Weight of Our Words and Reputations

Truth's guardianship extends to our reputations and those of others. The catechism underscores the gravity of unnecessarily revealing others' weaknesses or rejoicing in their disgrace.[35, 42] But it also

draws attention to our own reputations, imploring believers to avoid behaviors that tarnish their witness.[46-47]

Conclusion

The Ninth Commandment emerges as a call to profound personal and communal integrity. It is not merely about refraining from lies but involves cultivating a love for truth that permeates every facet of life, from our deepest heart postures to our public declarations. Such a holistic embrace of truth, as the Reformed tradition underscores, is not merely adherence to a moral code but a reflection of the very nature of God and an outpouring of our love for Him.

Q146:

Which is the tenth commandment?

A146: The tenth commandment is, Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbor's.[1]

1. Exod. 20:17

The Decalogue, in its divine wisdom, culminates in a commandment that touches the innermost chambers of the human heart. The tenth commandment, "Thou shalt not covet," as expounded in the Westminster Larger Catechism, speaks not to overt actions but to the

subtle inclinations and desires that give birth to those actions. In doing so, it pierces through the external veneer of religiosity, drawing the believer into a profound examination of the heart's labyrinthine recesses.

1. The Nature of Covetousness

At the core of this commandment lies the concept of covetousness, a deep-seated longing for that which belongs to another. It is a complex emotion, intertwined with discontent, envy, and the insatiable cravings of our fallen nature. Unlike the preceding commandments which regulate tangible transgressions – theft, adultery, murder – this one governs the ethereal realm of desires, signifying that true piety is not merely external compliance but internal conformity to God's righteous standard (Rom. 7:7).

2. The Spectrum of Desire

The commandment's detailed enumeration – coveting a neighbor's house, wife, servants, livestock, or anything that belongs to him – underscores the vastness of human desire. In the Reformed tradition, it is understood that this list is not exhaustive but illustrative, serving as a mirror to expose the multifaceted nature of our covetous inclinations (Heb. 4:12).

3. The Heart's Idol Factory

John Calvin, a luminary of the Reformed faith, famously described the human heart as an "idol factory." Covetousness, in essence, is the manufacturing of idols – placing created things, however good or benign, in the sacred space reserved for God alone (Col. 3:5). When we covet, we not only desire our neighbor's possessions but subtly question God's wisdom and goodness in His providential allotments.

4. The Pastoral Concern: Discontentment and Spiritual Unrest

From a pastoral perspective, the tenth commandment addresses the spiritual unrest that covetousness breeds. For in longing for another's portion, we discount our own blessings, undermining the contentment and peace that accompany a grateful heart (Phil. 4:11-12). The commandment, therefore, is not merely a prohibition but an invitation to find our satisfaction in God, recognizing that in Him we have all things (1 Tim. 6:6-8).

Conclusion

The tenth commandment, in its profound simplicity, beckons the believer to a life of heart-purity, where desires are sanctified and aligned with the will of God. It reminds us that true godliness is not skin-deep. It challenges the believer to ascend higher, to cultivate a spirit that rejoices in the blessings of others, and rests, with serene trust, in the sufficiency of God's providence. In this, it encapsulates the essence of the Christian journey: a pilgrimage of the heart towards the celestial city, where desires are perfectly attuned to the Divine.

Q147:

What are the duties required in the tenth commandment?

A147: The duties required in the tenth commandment are, such a full contentment with our own condition,[1] and such a charitable frame of the whole soul toward our neighbor, as that all our inward motions and affections touching him, tend unto, and further all that good which is his.[2]

1. Heb. 13:5; I Tim. 6:6

2. Job 31:29; Psa. 122:7-9; I Tim. 1:5; Est. 10:3; I Cor. 13:4-7

In this journey through the Decalogue, the tenth commandment occupies a unique and transcendent place. Whereas the preceding commandments focus largely on the external actions that emerge from the wellspring of human volition, the tenth casts its gaze inwards, scrutinizing the subtle currents of desire and disposition that flow beneath the surface of observable conduct. Through the lens of Catechism, the duties encompassed in this commandment unfurl into two deeply interwoven strands: contentment with our providential lot and an unfeigned, soul-deep benevolence towards our neighbor.

1. The Theology of Contentment

Contentment is not a passive resignation to our circumstances but a joyful embrace of our divinely-appointed condition[1]. The Apostle Paul, writing to Timothy, underscores contentment as an integral facet of godliness, implying that to be content is to reflect the very nature of God (1 Tim. 6:6). Within the Christian tradition, this divine attribute is seen as an antidote to the insidious poison of covetousness, offering a serenity that is firmly anchored in the immutable character of God rather than the shifting sands of circumstance.

2. The Heart's Benevolence Towards Our Neighbor

But the duties of the tenth commandment extend beyond the horizon of personal tranquility. A soul attuned to the heartbeat of God is invariably directed outward, nurturing an authentic and comprehensive goodwill towards the neighbor[2]. This "charitable frame of the whole soul," to borrow the phraseology of the catechism, is not confined to mere feelings but encompasses the entire spectrum of "inward motions and affections." It is a holistic, all-encompassing love, one that seeks the holistic well-being of our fellow sojourner, echoing the divine love that continually wills our good (1 Tim. 1:5).

Such an orientation towards the other is reminiscent of the Psalms, where the prosperity and peace of Jerusalem are earnestly sought (Psa. 122:7-9), and the Book of Job, which speaks of not rejoicing at the misfortune of one's enemy (Job 31:29). It finds its fullest expression in the Pauline hymn of love, where love's multifaceted virtues are extolled, pointing towards a selfless, other-regarding disposition that finds joy in the good of the other (I Cor. 13:4-7).

Conclusion

In the panorama of God's law, the duties enshrined in the tenth commandment stand as a poignant testament to the heart of true religion. It is a religion that is not content with mere externals but explores the profound depths of the human soul, beckoning it to mirror the divine image. It calls the believer to a life of deep-seated contentment and radical love, twin virtues that serve as luminous beacons in a world often darkened by discontent and self-centeredness. For the contemplative soul, these duties are not burdensome impositions but liberating pathways that lead to the heart of God and the flourishing of human community.

Q148:

What are the sins forbidden in the tenth commandment?

A148: The sins forbidden in the tenth commandment are, discontentment with our own estate;[1] envying [2] and grieving at the good of our neighbor,[3] together with all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his.[4]

1. I Kings 21:4; Est. 5:13; I Cor. 10:10
2. Gal. 5:26; James 3:14, 16
3. Psa. 112:9-10; Neh. 2:10
4. Rom. 7:7-8; Rom. 13:9; Col. 3:5; Deut. 5:21

The theological richness of the Decalogue culminates in the tenth commandment, a commandment that pierces the veil of external deeds and plunges into the cavernous depths of the human heart. It tackles the often-subtle sin of covetousness, exposing the hidden chambers where discontent and envy ferment. We are beckoned to confront these affections with sobriety and to discern their far-reaching implications.

1. The Malady of Discontentment

The foundational sin flagged in this commandment is "discontentment with our own estate"[1]. Such a disposition runs contrary to the theological ethos of God's providence and sovereignty. It is not merely a benign dissatisfaction; it is a tacit accusation against God's wisdom and goodness in our allotment. We

see the devastating narrative of Ahab's sulking over Naboth's vineyard, illustrative of how corrosive discontent can become when unchecked (I Kings 21:4). In a similar vein, the account of Haman in Esther presents us with the absurdity of how the lack of one man's honor could render all other privileges tasteless (Est. 5:13). The Apostle Paul, too, admonishes the Corinthians against murmuring, a symptom of a discontented spirit, that once plagued the Israelites in the wilderness (I Cor. 10:10).

2. The Snare of Envy

Discontentment, if allowed to fester, often metamorphoses into envy – a resentful longing for another's blessings[2]. This is not a passive sin but an active malignancy. Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, identifies envy as an impediment to walking by the Spirit, classifying it amongst the "works of the flesh" (Gal. 5:26). The epistle of James further elaborates on the discord and disorder that ensue when envy reigns in the heart (James 3:14, 16).

3. Grieving at our Neighbor's Good

A particularly grievous manifestation of envy is the act of grieving at our neighbor's good fortune[3]. The Psalms hint at the wicked's vexation upon witnessing the charitable deeds of the righteous (Psa. 112:9-10), while Nehemiah's account offers a poignant portrait of how Sanballat the Horonite and Tobiah the Ammonite official were deeply distressed because someone sought the welfare of the Israelites (Neh. 2:10). Such an attitude stands in stark antithesis to the love-centric ethos of the kingdom of God.

4. Inordinate Affections

Beyond the explicit sins of discontentment and envy, the tenth commandment also forbids all "inordinate motions and affections" towards our neighbor's belongings[4]. Paul, drawing on the Sinai commandments in his epistle to the Romans, highlights how the law arouses covetous desires within man (Rom. 7:7-8), while also emphasizing that love negates covetousness (Rom. 13:9). The Colossian epistle exhorts believers to mortify covetousness, equating it to idolatry (Col. 3:5), and Deuteronomy underscores the vast scope of this commandment, spanning from our neighbor's spouse to his ox or donkey (Deut. 5:21).

Conclusion

The tenth commandment, in its forbidding of particular sins, beckons the believer to a profound introspection. It exposes the shadows where sin flourishes and prompts a heartfelt pursuit of heart-purity. For the reflective soul, it is a poignant reminder of the inward holiness God seeks and a call to cultivate a spirit of contentment and selfless love. Embracing this commandment is not merely about avoiding prohibitions but embodying a posture of heart that resonates with the divine heartbeat – one that desires God above all and loves the neighbor with a Christ-like affection.

Q149:

Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God?

A149: No man is able, either of himself,[1] or by any grace received in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God;[2] but doth daily break them in thought,[3] word, and deed.[4]

1. James 3:2; John 15:5; Rom. 8:3
2. Eccl. 7:20; I John 1:8, 10; Gal. 5:17; Rom. 7:18-19
3. Gen. 6:5, 8:21
4. Rom. 3:9-19; James 3:2-13

At the very heart of Christianity lies the profound recognition of human frailty in juxtaposition with the majestic holiness of God. The Westminster Larger Catechism, a beacon of theological precision, casts its illuminating light on this juxtaposition in Question 149. Here, we are ushered into a contemplative meditation on the stark reality of our fallen condition and the consequent inability to perfectly adhere to God's divine mandates.

1. The Futility of Human Endeavor

The scripture is abundantly clear that no person, by their own strength, can achieve the righteousness demanded by God's law[1]. James, with piercing clarity, points out that we all stumble in many ways (James 3:2). Jesus Himself, in John 15:5, avers the utter dependency of humanity on Him, cautioning that apart from Him, we can do nothing. The Apostle Paul, too, in his epistle to the Romans, expounds on the limitations of the law due to the frailty of the flesh (Rom. 8:3).

2. The Limits of Grace in This Life

While grace is a transformative and empowering force, even this divinely-bestowed favor does not lead to a state of perfection in this present life[2]. The Preacher in Ecclesiastes reminds us that there is

no righteous person on earth who does good and never sins (Eccl. 7:20). The apostle John, in his first epistle, addresses the self-deceptive nature of any claim to sinlessness (1 John 1:8, 10). Paul, in his raw and vulnerable discourse in Romans 7, captures the daily tension between the inward desire to do good and the prevailing power of sin (Rom. 7:18-19). Furthermore, Galatians highlights the unceasing conflict between the flesh and the Spirit (Gal. 5:17).

3. The Pervasiveness of Sin

Sin's insidious nature permeates not only our overt actions but also the very core of our innermost being[3]. The Genesis narrative, recounting the sorry state of humanity, observes the continual evil imaginations of the human heart (Gen. 6:5, 8:21).

4. Daily Transgressions in Thought, Word, and Deed

Sin, in its multifaceted manifestations, affects every dimension of our existence – thought, speech, and action[4]. Paul's exposition in Romans 3 paints a somber portrait of humanity's universal guilt (Rom. 3:9-19). The epistle of James further underscores the unruly nature of the tongue, which no human can tame (James 3:2-13).

Conclusion

The introspective soul, when confronted with the weighty truths of Question 149, is brought to a humble recognition of its dire need. Yet, there's profound pastoral comfort in acknowledging our shortcomings. This recognition not only elevates the grace of God but also anchors our hope not in our own righteousness but in the perfect righteousness of Christ. Thus, while the quest for holiness remains our noble pursuit, our confidence rests not in our imperfect obedience but in the finished work of our Savior. The Catechism, in

this instance, not only educates but also leads the heart to a deeper reliance on God's mercy and grace.

Q150:

Are all transgressions of the law of God equally heinous in themselves, and in the sight of God?

A150: All transgressions of the law of God are not equally heinous; but some sins in themselves, and by reason of several aggravations, are more heinous in the sight of God than others.[1]

1. John 19:11; Ezek. 8:6, 13, 15; I John 5:16; Psa. 78:17, 32, 56

The Westminster Larger Catechism stands as a detailed map of the Bible, guiding believers through the complexities of faith and practice. Question 150 delves into the intricate nature of sin, asking whether all transgressions hold equal weight in their offensiveness both intrinsically and in the divine perspective.

1. The Inherent Disparity of Sin's Weight

It is essential to delineate that while all sin transgresses God's holy law and consequently separates humanity from its Creator, not all sins carry the same degree of guilt or consequence in themselves[1]. The Gospel of John captures a moment where Jesus Himself intimates this reality. Speaking to Pilate, Jesus alludes to the greater

guilt borne by those who handed Him over (John 19:11). This not only reveals the gradation of sin but also underscores the truth that circumstances and the heart's intention can exacerbate the heinousness of an act.

2. The Exacerbating Factors of Sin

The prophet Ezekiel, in his visionary experiences, is led progressively through detestable practices that God's people had committed[1]. Each subsequent revelation is termed "greater" than the previous (Ezek. 8:6, 13, 15). This amplifying sequence demonstrates that certain sins, due to their context, implications, or the disposition from which they arise, carry a heavier weight of offense in the eyes of God.

3. The Sin Unto Death

John, in his first epistle, ventures into the profound differentiation between sins leading to death and those that do not (I John 5:16). This cryptic delineation alludes to sins with dire spiritual ramifications, possibly referring to persistent unrepentance or outright apostasy.

4. The Repeated Insolence against Divine Mercy

The Psalms recount the historical insolence of Israel. Despite witnessing the mighty acts of God, they sinned even more against Him (Psa. 78:17, 32, 56). The repeated rebelliousness, especially in the face of known mercy and grace, serves as an aggravating factor, making the sin even more grievous in the divine perspective.

Conclusion

The contemplative heart, when meditating upon the variegated heinousness of sin, is led to a sobering self-examination. Recognizing that not all sins are alike in their gravity prompts a more nuanced introspection and spurs the believer to be ever vigilant, especially against those transgressions that carry greater weight in the eyes of God. Yet, as pastoral as this understanding is, it simultaneously shines a light on the vastness of God's mercy. For if God, in His justice, recognizes degrees of sin, how much more does He, in His mercy, tailor His grace to meet the depth of our need? The Catechism, in its wisdom, not only educates but also tenderly shepherds the heart towards a deeper gratitude for the redeeming work of Christ, who bore the weight of all our sins – whether great or small.

Q151:

What are those aggravations that make some sins more heinous than others?

A151: Sins receive their aggravations,

1. From the persons offending:[1] if they be of riper age,[2] greater experience or grace,[3] eminent for profession,[4] gifts,[5] place,[6] office,[7] guides to others,[8] and whose example is likely to be followed by others.[9]
2. From the parties offended:[10] if immediately against God,[11] his attributes,[12] and worship;[13] against Christ, and his grace;[14] the

Holy Spirit,[15] his witness,[16] and workings;[17] against superiors, men of eminency,[18] and such as we stand especially related and engaged unto;[19] against any of the saints,[20] particularly weak brethren,[21] the souls of them, or any other,[22] and the common good of all or many.[23]

3. From the nature and quality of the offense:[24] if it be against the express letter of the law,[25] break many commandments, contain in it many sins:[26] if not only conceived in the heart, but breaks forth in words and actions,[27] scandalize others,[28] and admit of no reparation:[29] if against means,[30] mercies,[31] judgments,[32] light of nature,[33] conviction of conscience,[34] public or private admonition,[35] censures of the church,[36] civil punishments;[37] and our prayers, purposes, promises,[38] vows,[39] covenants,[40] and engagements to God or men:[41] if done deliberately,[42] wilfully,[43] presumptuously,[44] impudently,[45] boastingly,[46] maliciously,[47] frequently,[48] obstinately,[49] with delight,[50] continuance,[51] or relapsing after repentance.[52]

4. From circumstances of time [53] and place:[54] if on the Lord's day,[55] or other times of divine worship;[56] or immediately before [57] or after these,[58] or other helps to prevent or remedy such miscarriages:[59] if in public, or in the presence of others, who are thereby likely to be provoked or defiled.[60]

1. Jer. 2:8

2. Job 32:7, 9; Eccl. 4:13

3. I Kings 11:4, 9

4. II Sam. 12:14; I Cor. 5:1

5. James 4:17; Luke 12:47-48

6. Jer. 5:4-5

7. II Sam. 12:7-9; Ezek. 8:11-12

8. Rom. 2:17-24
9. Gal. 2:11-14
10. Matt. 21:38-39
11. I Sam. 2:25; Acts 5:4; Psa. 51:4
12. Rom. 2:4
13. Mal. 1:8, 14
14. Heb. 2:2-3; 12:25
15. Heb. 10:29; Matt. 12:31-32
16. Eph. 4:30
17. Heb. 6:4-6
18. Jude 1:8; Num. 12:8-9; Isa. 3:5
19. Prov. 30:17; II Cor. 12:15; Psa. 55:12-15
20. Zeph. 2:8, 10-11; Matt. 18:6; I Cor. 6:8; Rev. 17:6
21. I Cor. 8:11-12; Rom. 14:13, 15, 21
22. Ezek. 13:19; I Cor. 8:12; Rev. 18:12-13; Matt. 23:15
23. I Thess. 2:15-16; Josh. 22:20
24. Prov. 6:30-35
25. Ezra 9:10-12; I Kings 11:9-10
26. Col. 3:5; I Tim. 6:10; Prov. 5:8-12; 6:32-33; Josh. 7:21
27. James 1:14-15; Matt. 5:22; Micah 2:1
28. Matt. 18:7; Rom. 2:23-24
29. Deut 22:22, 28-29; Prov. 6:32-35
30. Matt. 11:21-24; John 15:22
31. Isa. 1:3; Deut. 32:6
32. Amos 4:8-11; Jer. 5:8
33. Rom. 1:26-27
34. Rom. 1:32; Dan. 5:22; Titus 3:10-11
35. Prov. 29:1
36. Titus 3:10; Matt. 18:17
37. Prov. 23:35, 27:22
38. Psa. 78:34-37; Jer. 2:20, 13:5-6, 20-21
39. Eccl. 5:4-6; Prov. 20:25

40. Lev. 26:25
41. Prov. 2:17; Ezek. 17:18-19
42. Psa. 36:4
43. Jer. 6:16
44. Num. 15:30; Exod. 21:14
45. Jer. 3:3; Prov. 7:13
46. Psa. 52:1
47. III John 1:10
48. Num. 14:22
49. Zech. 7:11-12
50. Prov. 2:14
51. Isa. 57:17
52. Jer. 34:8-11; II Peter 2:20-22
53. II Kings 5:26
54. Jer. 7:10; Isa. 26:10
55. Ezek. 23:37-39
56. Isa. 58:3-5; Num. 25:6-7
57. I Cor. 11:20-21
58. Jer. 7:8-10, 14-15; John 13:27, 30
59. Ezra 9:13-14
60. II Sam. 16:22; I Sam. 2:22-24

When navigating the treacherous waters of sin, the Westminster Larger Catechism, rooted firmly in the Bible, offers profound insights. Question 151 expands on the multifaceted nature of sin, seeking to understand the various factors that amplify the grievousness of a transgression. This contemplative exploration into sin's heinousness bears significant implications for our understanding of God's holiness, the human condition, and the need for redemption.

1. Offenders and Their Stature

Sins magnify in severity based on the offender's status[1]. The elderly[2], given their life experience, are expected to display greater wisdom. Those bestowed with divine grace[3] or placed in positions of leadership and authority are held to a higher standard, for they are the luminaries whose actions cast light or shadow upon many[4-9]. A lapse from one in such a position reverberates more widely than from another, making their transgression notably grievous.

2. Those Offended: From the Divine to the Fraternal

The weight of sin grows heavier based on whom the offense targets[10]. Sins against the Divine – God the Father[11], His attributes[12], and worship[13]; Christ and His grace[14]; and the Holy Spirit with His witness and workings[15-17] – are gravest, for they challenge the very essence of the Divine. Furthermore, sins against those in elevated positions or those to whom we owe special duties of care carry a unique heinousness[18-23]. Offenses against the brethren, especially the weaker ones, are of particular concern as they wound the very body of Christ.

3. The Nature and Quality of Sin

The intrinsic qualities of the offense itself can accentuate its seriousness[24]. Transgressions that flout the direct commands of God's law[25], amalgamate numerous sins[26], manifest outwardly from heart-conceived wickedness[27], lead others astray[28], and are irreparable in their damage[29] are especially grievous. Sins committed against God's gracious interventions – means, mercies, judgments[30-32], and even one's convictions[33-41] – bear an added weight. These transgressions, if executed with premeditation, relish, or persistence[42-52], are magnified in their guilt.

4. The Amplifying Circumstances of Time and Place

The context in which a sin is committed can intensify its gravity[53]. A transgression on the Lord's Day[55], during divine worship[56], or juxtaposed against holy acts[57-59], profanes what is sacred, making the offense more heinous. Similarly, sins committed publicly or in settings where they harm or defile others carry added weight[60].

Conclusion

As we contemplate the factors that amplify sin's heinousness, a profound reverence for God's holiness and a profound sorrow for humanity's fallenness should envelop our hearts. Understanding these aggravations serves not only as a warning but also as a pastoral reminder of the depths from which Christ's redemption lifts us. Every facet of sin explored here magnifies the extent of God's grace, as, despite these aggravations, we are extended mercy. The Catechism's insights into the Bible not only instruct but shepherd the heart towards a deeper reliance on Christ, the only remedy for our multifaceted transgressions.

Q152:

What doth every sin deserve at the hands of God?

A152: Every sin, even the least, being against the sovereignty,[1] goodness,[2] and holiness of God,[3] and against his righteous law, [4] deserveth his wrath and curse,[5] both in this life,[6] and that

which is to come;[7] and cannot be expiated but by the blood of Christ.[8]

1. James 2:10-11
2. Exod. 20:1-2
3. Hab. 1:13; Lev. 10:3; 11:44-45
4. I John 3:4; Rom. 7:12
5. Eph. 5:6; Gal. 3:10
6. Lam. 3:39; Deut. 28:15-68
7. Matt. 25:41
8. Heb. 9:22; I Peter 1:18-19

The Weight of Sin and Divine Justice: A Theological Reflection on Sin's Deservedness

Few truths penetrate the soul as deeply as our understanding of sin and its due consequences. Westminster Larger Catechism's Question 152 directs our gaze upon this very issue, posing a somber query: "What doth every sin deserve at the hands of God?" It is a question that not only challenges our understanding of God and His nature but also beckons us to introspect our own standing before Him.

Every sin, irrespective of its perceived magnitude, is a direct affront to the sovereignty of God[1]. Our Lord, the Creator, set forth His decrees and the order of the universe[2]. To sin is to rebel against His established rule and challenge His supreme authority. This is not a trivial matter. The gravity is further compounded when we consider that every transgression stands against God's innate goodness, the very essence of His benevolent nature[2].

Moreover, God, in His immaculate holiness, cannot tolerate even the slightest shade of iniquity[3]. His holiness stands in stark contrast to our fallenness. The purity of His essence is such that even angels

approach Him with veiled faces, signifying the profound reverence His holiness demands. Thus, to sin, even in the minutest measure, is to tarnish the pristine nature of the Holy One.

Sin is also a violation of God's righteous law[4], the divine moral compass He graciously provided to guide humanity. The law is not a mere set of rules; it is an extension of God's character. In disobeying the law, we are, in essence, denying the very nature of God.

Given this profound gravity, it is no surprise that every sin, regardless of its scale, rightfully attracts God's wrath and curse[5]. It is not an overreaction on God's part but a just response to injustice. We witness the outworking of this wrath in the trials and tribulations that plague our earthly existence[6], and Scripture solemnly warns of even graver consequences in the life to come[7].

Yet, even in the face of such dire contemplations, hope shines forth. No human endeavor can assuage the weight of sin. But the profundity of the Gospel message is that the very wrath we deserved was bore by Christ, and it is only His precious blood that holds the power to expiate our transgressions[8].

In the light of this contemplation, the pastoral heart cannot help but be moved. It is a call to recognize the depths of our depravity and the towering magnitude of God's grace. As we fathom the gravity of what every sin deserves, may our hearts be drawn ever closer to Christ, the only One who took upon Himself the punishment we deserved, offering redemption and hope.

Q153:

What doth God require of us, that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us by reason of the transgression of the law?

A153: That we may escape the wrath and curse of God due to us by reason of the transgression of the law, he requireth of us repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ,[1] and the diligent use of the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of his mediation.[2]

1. Acts 16:30-31; 20:21; Matt. 3:7-8; Luke 13:3, 5; John 3:16, 18
2. Prov. 2:1-5; 8:33-36

The Solemn Necessity of Repentance and Faith: Reflections on our Great Need and Greater Savior

A journey through the Bible is a profound exploration of God's grace amidst human frailty. At its heart lies the tension of divine justice and mercy, which are reconciled perfectly in Christ. Question 153 of the Westminster Larger Catechism ushers us into this profound theological intersection, compelling us to ask: "What doth God require of us, that we may escape his wrath and curse due to us by reason of the transgression of the law?"

At the backdrop of every sin stands the looming reality of God's righteous wrath and curse. Every violation of His law, every deviation from His holy character, exacts a cost. The weight of such divine displeasure, grounded in His perfection, is no light matter. Yet, within this somber reflection emerges a glimmer of divine hope.

First and foremost, God calls for "repentance toward God." It is not a mere feeling of remorse or regret but a genuine turning away from sin and turning toward God. In Acts 16:30-31, the Philippian jailer, sensing the weight of his own sin, asked Paul and Silas what he must do to be saved. The response was clear: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ." The harmony of repentance and faith is further evident in the ministry of John the Baptist, who called for a baptism of repentance, urging all to produce fruits in keeping with repentance (Matt. 3:7-8). This turning, this profound change of heart and direction, is vital. Without it, one remains ensnared in the impending doom of divine wrath.

Yet, repentance alone is insufficient and impossible in our own strength. The gravity of sin requires a remedy that exceeds human ability. This is where "faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" enters[1]. John 3:16, the Gospel in a nutshell, captures this essence perfectly. Those who believe in Him, who entrust themselves wholly to Him, shall not perish but have everlasting life. Such faith is not a mere intellectual assent but a deep, abiding trust that recognizes Christ's sufficiency and embraces Him as the sole remedy for our sin-induced ailment: to free us from both the guilt and bondage to sin.

Finally, the catechism urges the "diligent use of the outward means" [2] — those ordained pathways through which Christ communicates His redemptive benefits. These include the reading and preaching of the Word, sacraments, and prayer. They are the channels God has instituted, and it is through them that believers are nurtured, edified, and drawn closer to Christ.

The pastoral heart finds here a profound call to action. It beckons believers to a life marked by deep introspection, ongoing repentance, steadfast faith, and diligent engagement with God's means of grace.

In the Bible, this question and answer serve as a solemn reminder of our desperate need and God's lavish provision in Christ. It is a call to escape the due wrath, not by our merit, but by the merit of our Great Savior, Jesus Christ.

Q154:

What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of his mediation?

A154: The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to his church the benefits of his mediation, are all his ordinances; especially the word, sacraments, and prayer; all which are made effectual to the elect for their salvation.[1]

1. Matt. 28:19-20; Acts 2:42, 46-47

In the heart of the Bible lies an awe-inspiring truth: the living Christ, our Mediator, continues to engage His people, bestowing upon them the rich benefits of His redemptive work. This divine reality brings us to an essential question posed by the Westminster Larger Catechism, Question 154: "What are the outward means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of his mediation?"

The answer is elegantly simple yet deeply profound: "The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to his church the benefits of his mediation, are all his ordinances; especially the word,

sacraments, and prayer." [1] Let us, with introspective reverence, explore these divinely appointed channels of grace.

Firstly, "the word" is the understanding of the Scriptures as God's inerrant and infallible revelation. Through the proclamation and study of God's Word, believers are edified, convicted, comforted, and directed. It is this very Word that Christ commissioned His disciples to teach in the Great Commission, emphasizing its centrality in the life of the Church (Matt. 28:19-20). When the Word is preached and heard in faith, it becomes a powerful instrument in the hands of the Spirit, bringing life, transformation, and sanctification.

Secondly, "the sacraments." These are visible signs and seals of God's covenant grace — baptism and the Lord's Supper. They signify and seal the benefits of Christ's mediation to true believers. Through them, the reality of Christ's redemptive work is vividly portrayed, offering a tangible link between the believer and the promises of the Gospel. They are not mere symbolic rituals but efficacious means of grace, wherein, by faith, believers partake of Christ and all His benefits.

Lastly, "prayer." In the sacred act of prayer, the soul reaches out to God, finding communion, intercession, thanksgiving, and supplication. The early church, as recorded in Acts 2:42, devoted themselves to prayer, emphasizing its significance. Through prayer, the believer engages with God, experiencing His presence, grace, and guidance. It's the channel through which the heart pours out its desires, sorrows, and joys, finding solace in the embrace of the divine.

These outward means, though ordinary in appearance, become extraordinary channels of grace when accompanied by the Spirit's

work. To the elect, they are made "effectual... for their salvation," acting as conduits of divine life and blessing.

For the introspective soul and the pastoral heart, this truth is both a comfort and a call. A comfort, knowing that Christ has provided tangible ways for His benefits to flow to us. A call, to diligently engage with these means, drawing nearer to our Savior. This stands as a lighthouse, guiding believers to the rich shores of Christ's mediation.

Q155:

How is the word made effectual to salvation?

A155: The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of enlightening,[1] convincing, and humbling sinners;[2] of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ;[3] of conforming them to his image,[4] and subduing them to his will;[5] of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions;[6] of building them up in grace,[7] and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.[8]

1. Neh. 8:8; Acts 26:18; Psa. 19:8
2. I Cor. 14:24-25; II Chr. 34:18-19, 26-28
3. Acts 2:37, 41; 8:27-39
4. II Cor. 3:18
5. II Cor. 10:4-6; Rom. 6:17

6. Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; Eph. 6:16-17; Psa. 19:11; I Cor. 10:11

7. Acts 20:32; II Tim. 3:15-17

8. Rom. 1:16; 10:13-17; 15:4; 16:25; I Thess. 3:2, 10-11, 13

The Bible presents the Word of God not as mere letters on a page but as the living and active means of grace in the believer's life. This brings us to the reflection upon Question 155 of the Westminster Larger Catechism, which inquires: "How is the word made effectual to salvation?"

The answer proffers a profound insight: "The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means...". Here, we are reminded of the mysterious union between the Word of God and the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit who breathes life into the Word, transforming it from mere audible sound or visible script into the living force that accomplishes the divine purposes.

Let us reverently unpack these intricately woven theological truths.

Firstly, the Word serves as a beacon of "enlightening"[1]. As recorded in Acts 26:18, Paul's mission was to open the eyes of the Gentiles, turning them from darkness to light. This light, according to Psalm 19:8, illuminates the soul, making the simple wise.

Furthermore, the Word possesses the potency of "convincing, and humbling sinners"[2]. As the heart is laid bare, like King Josiah upon hearing the Book of the Law (II Chr. 34:18-19, 26-28), there is a profound realization of one's spiritual bankruptcy, driving them to genuine repentance.

In this posture of humility, the Word operates as the means "of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ"[3].

The accounts of the early church in Acts reveal how Peter's sermon on Pentecost pierced the hearts of his listeners (Acts 2:37), leading to a massive turning to Christ. Likewise, the Ethiopian eunuch, upon understanding Isaiah's prophecy, was drawn to the Savior (Acts 8:27-39).

Moreover, the Word functions as the mirror, "conforming them to his image"[4]. Through it, believers, like in a glass, behold the glory of the Lord and are changed into the same image from glory to glory (II Cor. 3:18).

It doesn't end there. The Word is a powerful weapon, "subduing them to his will"[5] and "strengthening them against temptations and corruptions"[6]. As Christ exemplified during His temptation in the wilderness, the Word serves as our sword in spiritual warfare (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10; Eph. 6:16-17).

Pastorally, one cannot overlook its nurturing role. The Word is the sustenance "of building them up in grace"[7] and the anchor "establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation"[8]. Paul, in his epistle to the Romans, emphasized the intrinsic power of the gospel, encapsulating the essence of the Word's effectual nature (Rom. 1:16; 10:13-17).

To the contemplative soul, this understanding beckons a deeper immersion in the Scriptures, ensuring that one doesn't merely read but also heeds. To the shepherd of God's flock, it is a call to preach with conviction, knowing that it is not just words but the very instrument of God's transformative power. In this grand symphony of salvation, the Word and the Spirit dance together, leading the believer into the fullness of Christ's redemptive embrace.

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