

# WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

## SHORTER CATECHISM

### LESSON # 36 (Q3LES11) - THOU SHALT NOT STEAL.

1. **Prayer**
2. **Bible reading: Leviticus 6: 1 - 7**
3. **Review:** In our last lesson, we covered the seventh commandment, which is ***Thou shalt not commit adultery***. It is covered in SC questions 73 through 75. We learned that the seventh commandment deals with the relationship of a man and a woman. The commandment deals not only with adultery, but also with sexual morality in general. It includes the proper relationship of a man and a woman before marriage, and perversions of sex. It includes the proper actions and attitudes, including thought, dress and behavior.
3. **Introduction:** This week we will look at the eighth commandment. The eighth commandment is covered in questions 73 through 75 of the SC. Like the preceding commandments, this commandment deals with relations with others. This commandment deals with our relationship with others in the area of property.
4. **Questions & Answers:**
  - Question 73: Which is the eighth commandment?**  
**Answer: The eighth commandment is, *thou shalt not steal*.**
  - Question 74: What is required in the eighth commandment?**  
**Answer: The eighth commandment requireth the lawful procuring and furthering the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others.**
  - Question 75: What is forbidden in the eighth commandment?**  
**Answer: The eighth commandment forbiddeth whatsoever doth or may unjustly hinder our own or our neighbor's wealth or outward estate.**
5. **The SC, LC and WCF?**

- a. The SC and the LC both cover this commandment in three questions, the SC in questions 73, 74, & 75, the LC in questions 140, 141, & 142. As usual, the SC is a summary of the answer provided for the LC, and both are in agreement with each other. The LC expands greatly on the duties required and the sins forbidden by this commandment. The WCF does not provide specific guidance on this matter.

## 6. General

- a. Thou shalt not steal. This is pretty straight forward, and not difficult to understand. You don't even need my Webster's New 20<sup>th</sup> Century Dictionary to look up the meaning of "steal". But the meaning of "steal" here is very broad, and includes all direction on how we handle our own and others property. I like the scripture passage (**Luke 6:38 "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."**). If everyone went by this rule, we wouldn't have the problems with this commandment that we do.

## 7. Approach to this commandment.

- a. We're going to try a different approach this question. Since the sins forbidden are generally the mirror of the duties required, we will try and address both at the same time, and see how it works. In this particular case, the duties required are described in a more general manner. The sins forbidden are more specific in nature.
- b. Again, we will base our discussion of this commandment on the LC, as the SC is a condensation of it. LC Q141 asks: "*What are the duties required in the eighth commandment?*". It answers: "*The duties required in the eighth commandment are, truth, faithfulness, and justice in contracts and commerce between man and man; rendering to every one his due; restitution of goods unlawfully detained from the right owners thereof; giving and lending freely according to our abilities, and the necessities of others; moderation of our judgements, wills and affections concerning worldly goods; a provident care and study to get, keep, use and dispose these things which are necessary and convenient for the sustentation of our nature, and suitable to our condition; a lawful calling, and diligence in it; frugality; avoiding unnecessary law-suits, and suretiship, or other like engagements; 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.*"
- c. Q142 of the LC asks: "*What are the sins forbidden in the eighth commandment?*" It answers: "*The sins forbidden in the eighth commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are, theft, robbery, man-stealing, and receiving anything*

*that is stolen; fraudulent dealing, false weights and measures, removing land-marks, injustice and unfaithfulness in contracts between man and man, or in matters of trust; oppression, extortion, usury, bribery, vexatious law-suits, unjust inclosures and depopulations; ingrossing commodities to enhance the price; unlawful callings, and all other unjust or sinful ways of taking or withholding from our neighbor what belongs to him, or of enriching ourselves; covetousness; inordinate prizing and affecting worldly goods; distrustful and distracting cares and studies in getting, keeping, and using them; envying at the prosperity of others; as likewise idleness, prodigality, wasteful gaming; and all other ways whereby we do unduly prejudice our own outward estate, and defrauding ourselves of the due use and comfort of that estate which God hath given us.”*

## 8. Duties required and sins forbidden.

- a. We will start our discussion of the specifics of this commandment with the first of the “sins forbidden”. This is very specific, and cuts to the chase, as they say. The first of the sins forbidden (after neglect of the duties required) is: *“theft, robbery, man-stealing, and receiving any thing that is stolen.* There are scripture proofs for each of these points. The scripture proof I’ve selected is **(1 Tim 1:10 *“For whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for purjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine;”*)**

I chose this proof, first, because the other points are easy to understand, and second because there may be some confusion over “manstealing”.

Anyone like to take a shot at “manstealing”? I initially took this to mean selling someone into slavery, but checking other references, it is translated as kidnapping.

- b. The first point in LC Q141, the “duties required”, is *“truth, faithfulness, and justice in contracts and commerce between man and man.”* The “sins forbidden” counterpart is: *“Fraudulent dealing, false weights and measures, removing land-marks, injustice and unfaithfulness in contracts between man and man, or in matters of trust.”* Also, the fourth “sins forbidden” point: Ingrossing commodities to enhance the price. Again, there are scripture proofs for each of these points. **(1 Thes 4:6 *“That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.”*)** Our duties are truth and faithfulness in our commerce with others.

The forbidden sins include “false weights and measure”. What does this apply to today? What do you think “removing land-marks” refers to, and what is its application today?

ingrossing commodities to enhance the price. What does this mean? (**Prov 11:26** *He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him: but blessing shall be upon the head of him that selleth it.*) Doing anything to unjustly raise the price of something beyond its value.

- c. Rendering to every one his due. The “sins forbidden” opposite appears to be “Oppression, extortion, usury, bribery, vexatious lawsuits, unjust enclosures and depopulation’s”. Paul says in (**Romans 13:7** *“Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.”*)

What is Paul saying here? Do not fail to pay your debts.

On the “sins” side, what is meant by “unjust enclosures and depopulation’s” They seem to be talking about unjust seizure of land, and forcing people off their land. (**Isaiah 5:8** *“Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth.”*)

- d. Restitution of goods unlawfully detained from the right owners thereof. On the “sins” side: Unlawful callings, and all other unjust or sinful ways of taking or withholding from our neighbor what belongs to him, or of enriching ourselves. This one seems pretty straight fourth. (**Lev 6: 2 - 5** *“<sup>2</sup>If a soul sin, and commit a trespass against the Lord, and lie unto his neighbor in that which was delivered him to keep, or in fellowship, or in a thing taken away by violence, or hath deceived his neighbor; <sup>3</sup>Or have found that which was lost, and lieth concerning it, and sweareth falsely; in any of all these that a man doeth, sinning therein: <sup>4</sup>Then it shall be, because he hath sinned and is guilty, that he shall restore that which he took violently away, or the thing which he hath deceitfully gotten, or that which was delivered him to keep, or the lost thing which he found, <sup>5</sup>Or all that about which he hath sworn falsely; he shall even restore it in the principal, and shall add the fifth part more thereto, and give it unto him to whom it appertaineth, in the day of his trespass offering.”* If you unlawfully keep something that belongs to another, it is a sin, and must be repaid.
- e. Giving and lending freely, according to our abilities, and the necessities of others. (**1 John 3:17** *“But whoso hath this world’s good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of the Lord in him?”*)

The “sins” counterpart is “Covetousness” to the point where you will not help others in need. This will be discussed in detail in our discussion of the tenth commandment.

- f. Moderation of our judgements, wills and affections concerning worldly goods, ( 1 Tim 6: 6 – 9 ***“<sup>6</sup>But godliness with contentment is great gain.<sup>7</sup>For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.<sup>8</sup>And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content.<sup>9</sup>But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.”***)

The “sins” counterpart is a little difficult to associate with this. “Inordinate prizing and affecting worldly goods:” (Col 3:2 ***“Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.”***).

Do not become obsessed with wealth and other worldly gains, so that you forget who is in charge. Do not become so obsessed with gain that you resort to any means to obtain it. If you have excess, share it with those who do not. This discussion could be developed into a long discussion. Particularly from Proverbs, this does not mean everyone who says they are in need. Those who will not work and are deceitful do not warrant our consideration.

- g. A provident care and study to get, keep, use and dispose these things which are necessary and convenient for the sustentation of our nature, and suitable to our condition: On the “sins” side: “Distrustful and distracting cares and studies in getting, keeping, and using them (worldly goods). (Proverbs 27: 23 – 27 ***“<sup>23</sup>Be thou diligent to know the state of thy flocks, and look well to thy herds:<sup>24</sup>For riches are not for ever: and doth the crown endure to every generation?<sup>25</sup>The hay appeareth, and the tender grass showeth itself, and herbs of the mountains are gathered.<sup>26</sup>The lambs are for thy clothing, and the goats the price of the field.<sup>27</sup>And thou shalt have goat’s milk enough for thy food, for the food of thy household, and for the maintenance for thy maidens.***.) Use what God has given you to support yourself and your family.
- h. A lawful calling, and diligence in it. On the “sins forbidden” side: unlawful calling. (1 Cor 7:20 ***“Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.”***) Use God’s given calling to obtain what He will give to you. Do not resort to unlawful means to acquire gains.
- i. Frugality. Anyone want to define “frugality”? From guess where!! “prudent economy, prudent or sparing use, thrift” (Prov 21:20 ***“There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man spendeth it up.”***) Waste not, want not.

On the “sins” side: As likewise idleness, prodigality, wasteful gaming. Anyone like to take a shot at “prodigality”? “Reckless wastefulness, lavishness, one who wastes his money.” (Prov 21:17 ***“He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man: he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich.”***) Nothing else to say.

- j. Avoiding unnecessary lawsuits, and suretiship, or other like engagements. (**Prov 6: 1 – 3** *“**1My son, if thou be surety for thy friend, if thou hast stricken thy hand with a stranger. 2Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth, thou art taken with the words of thy mouth. 3Do this now, my son, and deliver thy self, when thou art come into the hand of thy friend; go, humble thyself, and make sure thy friend.**”*)

On the other side: vexatious (irritating, disquieting, harassing, in law, instituted without real grounds) lawsuits. (**1 Cor 6:1** *“**Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?**”*) Do not institute spurious lawsuits. Be careful covering the debt of others.

We could spend significant time discussing lawsuits.

## 9. Summary

- a. The last item “required” by LC q141 is *“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.”* Likewise, LC q142 forbids, *“all other ways whereby we do unduly prejudice our own outward estate, and defrauding ourselves of the due use and comfort of that estate which God hath given us.”* Although most people do not think of it, God’s Word provides specific direction as to how we are to deal with others in business matters. Like all the commandments dealing with our duty to man, the sum of this commandment is “love”.