

WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

SHORTER CATECHISM

LESSON 28 (Q3LES2) - PREFACE TO THE LAWS OF GOD

1. **Prayer**
2. **Bible reading: Exodus 20: 1 - 17**
3. **Review:** In our last lesson, we learned that the duty which God requires of us is obedience to His revealed will. God's revealed will was given to man in His moral law. We learned that God created man with a knowledge of the moral law, and that after the fall, it was still written on his heart. We learned that the moral law is summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments, and that God gave Israel other laws, specifically a ceremonial law, and judicial laws. We discussed the moral law as it relates to salvation. We understand that salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone, but the moral law is still binding in that it reflects the will of God, and that all true believers will endeavor to comply with it.
4. **Introduction:** In this lesson we will go through an introduction to the ten commandments. It is worth noting at this point that different bibles translate the ten commandments in different way; using different words. The WCF and the catechisms use the King James Version. As the Pastor said when we had the ten commandments displayed in the sanctuary prepared, a lot of work went into selecting exactly what words to use. While the words may vary slightly, the meaning remains firm. First we are going to discuss the "sum" of the ten commandments, then we will look at the preface. These are covered in questions 42 through 44 of the SC.

5. **Questions:**

Question 42: What is the sum of the ten commandments?

Answer: The sum of the ten commandments is, To love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind, and our neighbor as ourselves.

Question 43: What is the preface of the ten commandments?

Answer: The preface of the ten commandments is in these words, *I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*

Question 44: What doth the preface to the ten commandments teach us?

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

6. The Larger Catechism and the Shorter Catechism

- a. The same material, which is covered in three questions in the SC, is also covered in three questions in the LC, but in a slightly different manner. SC question 42 (What is the sum of the ten commandments) is covered in two questions in the LC.
- b. LC question 102 asks, *“What is the sum of the four commandments which contain our duty to God?”*. The question is answered, and then the first four commandments are discussed. After completion of the discussion of the first four commandments, LC question 122 asks: *“What is the sum of the six commandments which contain our duty to man?”*. The question is answered, and then the final six commandments are then discussed.
- c. SC questions 43 and 44 are contained in only one question in the LC. LC question 101 asks the same question as SC question 43: *“What is the preface of the ten commandments?”*. The answer however is expanded to include the answer to question 44 of the SC.

7. The sum of the ten commandments.

- a. This question is in two parts, our duty to God, and our duty to man, as presented in the LC. Man’s duty to God is referred to as the “first table of the law”; man’s duty to man is known as the “second table of the law’. TV, in the introduction to his answer of this question, notes this division. Let’s look at these two parts.
- b. What is the sum of the commandments, which contain our duty to God? Both LC and SC are consistent, stating: *“The sum of the ten commandments (in relation to our duty to God) is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind.”* **(Luke 10: 27 “And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself.”)**
- c. What is it to love the Lord with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind?

TV's answer is as good as any: *"To love the Lord with all our heart, and with all our soul, and with all our mind, and with all our strength, doth imply the supremacy, ardency, and activity of our love, whereby we choose the Lord, cleave to him, and delight in him as our chief good, and employ all the faculties and powers of soul and body in obedience, out of love."*

- d. What is the sum of the commandments which contain our duty to man? Both the LC and SC are consistent, requiring us to *"love our neighbor as ourselves"*. **(Matt 22:39 *"And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."*)** The LC contains an additional requirement. LC question 122 also requires us to: *"to do to others what we would have them do to us."* **(Matt 7:12 *"Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets."*)**

- e. Who is our neighbor?

TV says: *"Every man is our neighbor; and therefore we are bound to bear a general affection unto all."*

Does this really mean everyone?

- f. Read **(Mark 12: 28 – 31 ⁽²⁸⁾*And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all? ⁽²⁹⁾And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: ⁽³⁰⁾And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. ⁽³¹⁾And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these.*)**

What is Jesus saying with his answer? He is talking about the sum of the ten commandments. His answer in verse 30 refers to the sum of our duty to God. His answer in verse 31 is the sum of our duty to man. **(Matt 22: 34 – 40)**

- g. TV asks, *"What is the comprehensive duty of the ten commandments?"* His answer is simple, **"love"**.

8. The preface to the ten commandments

- a. Once again, I learned a lot from the answers provided to this question. It should be noted that the preface is frequently included in the text of the first commandment, as in our tablets in the sanctuary. The text of Exodus 20 does not indicate that it should not be a part of the first commandment. The preparers of WCF possibly separated it from the first commandment because of its importance, and the requirement to discuss it in detail. Also, it is more of an introductory statement, not a commandment.
- b. What is the preface to the ten commandments? Both LC (q101) and SC (q43) again agree: *The preface to the ten commandments is “I am the Lord thy God, which hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”* This is a direct quote from **Exodus 20:2**.
- c. What is meant by the first phrase of the preface: *“I am the Lord thy God,”*?
- The SC question 44 says, in part *“Because God is the Lord, and our God...”*
 - The answer to LC question 101 expands greatly, giving many scripture proofs: *“Wherein God manifesteth his sovereignty, as being JEHOVAH, the eternal, immutable, and almighty God; having his being in and of himself, and giving being to all his words and works: and that he is a God, in covenant...”* (**Exodus 3: 14 “And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.”**) and (**Isaiah 44:6 Thus saith the Lord the King of Israel, and his redeemer the Lord of hosts; I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there is no God.”**)
 - God seems to be telling us that **He is the boss**.
- d. What is God saying with the rest of the preface? (*“which hath brought thee out of the land or Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”*)
- SC question 44 adds: *“and our redeemer”*
 - LC question 101 adds more understanding: *“in covenant, as with Israel of old, so with all his people; who, as he brought them out of their bondage in Egypt, so he delivereth us from our spiritual thraldom;”*
 - Does anyone know what a thraldom is? Again to my Webster’s New 20th Century Dictionary: thraldom – the state of being a thrall; bondage; servitude... And of course a thrall is: “enslaved”
 - So, more than just stating that God had freed his people out of the hands of the Egyptians, there is a promise of freedom from “spiritual thraldom”. Anyone like to take a shot at what “spiritual thalldom” enslavement by sin. (**Luke 1: 73**

– 74 ⁽⁷³⁾*The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,* ⁽⁷⁴⁾*That he would grant unto us, that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear.”)*

e. What does God require of us for his promise of freedom from sin?

- Both the LC and the SC agree that we are required to keep all God’s commandments.
- The LC specifically states, and the SC includes by inference, “that we are bound to take him for our God alone.” (Lev 18:30 **“Therefore shall ye keep mine ordinance, that ye commit not any one of these abominable customs, which were committed before you, and that ye defile not yourselves therein: I am the Lord your God.”**)

9. Understanding the ten commandments.

a. Before starting on the ten commandments, I think a look at question 99 of the LC is important. Question 99 asks: **“What rules are to be observed for the right understanding of the ten commandments?”** It then lists 8 rules required. Let’s look at them.

RULE:

1. ***That the law is perfect, and bindeth every one to full conformity in the whole man unto the righteousness thereof, and unto entire obedience for ever; so as to require the utmost perfection of every duty, and to forbid the least degree of sin (James 2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all) The law is perfect.***
2. ***That it is spiritual, and so reacheth the understanding, will, affections, and all other powers of the soul; as well as words, works and gestures. (Rom 7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin).*** Other scripture proofs see LC, pp182, para p. The ten commandments are spiritual, and so work within us. This is a tough one.
3. ***That one and the same thing, in divers respects, is required or forbidden in several commandments. (Col 3: 5 Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence (strong or abnormal desire or appetite), and covetousness, which is idolatry.)*** That all transgressions of the law are sin, and by breaking one, you automatically break others.
4. ***That as, where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden; and, where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded: so where a promise is annexed, the contrary threatening is included; and, where a threatening is annexed, the contrary promise is included. (compare Ex 20:12 with Prov 30:17)***

5. *That what God forbids, is at no time to be done; what he commands, is always our duty; **and yet every particular duty is not to be done at all times.*** Don't do what God says not to do, do what God says to do. The scripture proof for the last part of this is (**Matt 12:7 But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless**), I'm not sure I understand this last part. Possibly there are things we do not know, therefore we cannot always react properly?
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. (**Matt 15:4 For God commandeth, saying, Honor thy father and mother: and, He that curseth father or mother, let him die the death.**)* Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not abort thy child.
7. *That what is forbidden or commanded to ourselves, we are bound, according to our places, to endeavour that it may be avoided or performed by others, according to the duty of their places. (**Ex 20:10 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**)* What is forbidden by God, we should attempt to help others keep from doing.
8. *That in what is commanded to others, we are bound according to our places and callings, to be helpful to them (**2 Cor 1:24 Not for that we have dominion over your faith but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand**) ; and to take heed of partaking with others in what is forbidden them. (**1 Tim 5:22 Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partakers of other men's sins: keep thyself pure**)*

10. SUMMARY

- a. The sum of the ten commandments is presented clearly in (**Luke 10: 27 "And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself."**) The preface to the ten commandments not only notes that God delivered his people out of physical bondage, but also out of spiritual bondage. For this, we must obey all his commandments.