

## THE LARGER AND SHORTER CATECHISMS.

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

QUESTIONS # 149 & 82.

*(Larger Catechism)*

Q #149. *Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God?*

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

*(Shorter Catechism)*

Q #82. *Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God?*

A. No mere man since the fall is able in this life perfectly to keep the commandments of God,<sup>5</sup> but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed.<sup>6</sup>

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Question 1—*What does it mean to keep the commandments perfectly?*

*Answer*—The perfect keeping of the law of God requires the keeping of *all* the commandments of God at *all* times, without the least breach of them in regard of disposition, inclination, thought, affection, word or conduct, Deut. 10:12. This, in turn, requires a perfect conformity of heart and life to the commands of God, all of which implies: 1.) A perfection in the principle of action, because there can be nothing sinless and pure that proceeds from a polluted nature, Matt. 22:37-39. 2.) A perfection in all the parts of obedience, because there can be no keeping of the commandment when any point of the keeping is found wanting, Jas. 2:10. 3.) A perfection of degrees of every part, because there is no perfection without the most precise and circumspect keeping of the law, Mark 12:30, 33. 4.) A perfection of duration and continuance in that keeping, because one defect, whether in thought, word or deed, destroys all perfection of keeping, Gal. 3:10.

Question 2—*Who can keep this law perfectly?*

*Answer*—This law, which was created for man, Mark 2:27; has admitted of keeping:

*First*, by Adam before the Fall, who kept this law for a time, Gen. 1:27; as that rule of covenant obedience proposed to him, until iniquity was found in him, Eccl. 7:29.

*Second*, by the man Jesus Christ, who was no *mere* man, but the God-man, who was not only able to keep this law, but actually did keep it, Heb. 4:15. His obedience was such that it fulfilled all the perfection of righteousness required by the law: 1.) In its principle of action, Heb. 7:26. 2.) In its parts of obedience, Matt. 3:15. 3.) In all its degrees, John 15:13. 4.) In its duration and continuance, Phil. 2:8.

*Third*, by the saints in heaven, who are able to keep, and actually do keep that perfection of obedience unto the will of God, Heb. 12:23.

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<sup>1</sup> Jas. 3:2; John 15:5; Rom. 8:3.

<sup>2</sup> Eccl. 7:20; 1 John 1:8, 10; Gal. 5:17; Rom. 7:18, 19.

<sup>3</sup> Gen. 6:5; 8:21.

<sup>4</sup> Rom. 3:9-19; Jas. 3:2-13.

<sup>5</sup> Eccles. 7:20; 1 John 1:8, 10; Gal. 5:17.

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 6:5; 8:21; Rom. 3:9-21; Jas. 3:2-13.

Yet, since the Fall, no *mere* man, (*i.e.*, none descended from Adam by ordinary generation, Acts 17:26), while in this life, has been able to keep these commandments perfectly, Eccl. 7:20. Man is not able to do this either of himself because: 1.) There exists in each man that propensity to will to sin, Jas. 3:2. 2.) It lies outside the power of fallen mankind to attain anything remotely akin to this perfection, John 15:5. 3.) Due to sin, the flesh now stands unable to keeping of the law, Rom. 8:3.

This inability cleaves to everyone who remains in this mortal state of being, Rom. 7:23, 24. Nor does any grace received in this life enable to the perfect keeping of this law, 1 John 1:8, 10. Grace places in those so renewed a principle which opposes the striving of the flesh, Gal. 5:17. Nonetheless, grace, while renewing godly desires, does not automatically bring forth a perfection of obedience unto the law of God, Rom. 7:18, 19. Rather, spiritual growth, like natural growth, is gradual and attained by parts, until the saints arrive at their full stature in glory, 1 Thess. 3:13. The effect of this remaining inability is: 1.) To humble us and drive us off self-exaltation to which we are too prone, Job 42:6. 2.) To work in us an ever increasing sense of dependency upon Christ, for pardon of sin and perfecting of even our best good works, Ps. 130:3; 2 Cor. 1:12.

Question 3—*In what ways do we sin against the law of God?*

*Answer*—This law of commandment is broken by all men, 1 Kings 8:46. Indeed, it is broken daily, Matt. 6:12.

Men violate this commandment in three ways: 1.) In thought, when we transgress the spirit and intent of the law restraint, Matt. 5:28. Our thoughts are always open before God, who is omniscient, so that they are as open as any words or deeds, Heb. 4:13. God's law goes beyond men's laws and touches those things which are hidden from the observation of man, Gen. 8:21. It was the thoughts of man, as much as his words or deeds, which brought about the flood, Gen. 6:5. 2.) In word, whenever we speak what we ought not, or do not speak what we ought or whenever we speak what we ought but not in that manner demanded by God in his law, Jas. 3:2-13. Therefore, it comes to pass men commit many tongue-sins, Prov. 10:19. God's commands are to rule our tongues, telling us what to speak, what not to speak and even how we ought to speak when we do, Matt. 12:37. 3.) In deed, which when done contrary to the command of God, or left undone when commanded, violates that rule of men's outward life and conversation, Ps. 14:2, 3. In this, men demonstrate the breadth and depth of their depravity of nature, Rom. 3:9-21.

This law is broken even by those who might be accounted amongst the best of men, Matt. 26:41. These breaches are wrought through many inadvertencies, Gal. 6:1. So many are these offenses that we can hardly tell the degree of sin into which we find ourselves, Ps. 19:12. Therefore, we should have daily recourse to Christ by faith and repentance, 1 John 2:1.

This is not to say that the saints of God should fall into gross sins daily, against the letter of the law, in thought, word or deed, for God will disown such from being numbered amongst his people who do so, Gal. 5:19-21. Rather, like Paul the saints should groan under the weight of their unhappy sinful inclinations, Rom. 7:24.

Finally, we ought to be convinced by this inability to keep the law perfectly that we are wholly indebted to the free grace of God for salvation and eternal life, Tit. 3:5; and not to anything in ourselves, who are, at best, but unprofitable servants, Luke 17:10.