

Instruction In The Westminster Standards

The Historic Standards of Presbyterian Denominations.

STUDIES IN THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 61. What is forbidden in the fourth commandment?

A. The fourth commandment forbiddeth the omission, or careless performance, of the duties required, and the profaning the day by idleness, or doing that which is in itself sinful, or by unnecessary thoughts, words, or works, about our worldly employments or recreations.

Scripture References: Ezek. 22:26. Mal. 1:13. Amos 8:5. Isa. 58:13. Jer. 17:24, 27.

QUESTIONS:

1. What are the two types of sins forbidden in this fourth commandment?

The two types of sins forbidden are the sin of omission and the sin of commission.

2. What are the sins of omission mentioned in this question?

The sins of omission mentioned are: (1) The omission of the duties of the Sabbath. These duties would be such things as the neglect of private or public worship, and the neglect of duties of love and mercy that should be performed on the Sabbath.

3. Would it be possible for us to sin even in the performance of duties of love and mercy on the Sabbath?

Yes, it would be possible for us to sin in the performance of these duties if we performed them in the wrong manner. We could go about them in a weary way, wishing that we did not have to perform them, failing to realize that in the performance of these duties we may also be serving our Lord. (Matt. 25:31-46)

4. How could we best defend ourselves against such attitudes?

We can best defend ourselves by fixing our hearts on God (Ps. 57:7), by claiming by faith our place "in the heavnlies" at the start of the day, asking God to keep us faithful in all things.

5. What are the sins of commission mentioned in this question?

The sins of commission mentioned are the following: (1) Profaning the Sabbath Day by idleness. (2) Profaning the day by doing things which are sinful in the eyes of God on His day. (3) Profaning the day by unnecessary thoughts and words and acts regarding worldly matters, by pleasures and recreations that are contrary to all the Word teaches for the lawful performance on the Sabbath.

6. Why is it so important to keep this day as unto the Lord?

It is important because God has commanded us to do so and it is important because it is impossible to be holy without the keeping of His commandments.

THE SABBATH AND THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

The question is asked by many believers today: "Why has it become such a common thing to break the Sabbath?" That it is a common thing can't be denied. It is a rare church today where any attempt is made to keep the Sabbath Day holy in the Lord. Did you ever ask a minister, who says nothing about this in his church, why he does not? Did you ever pin him down to giving a reason for it? You might be surprised at his answer.

Many of them will answer with words like these: "Well, I fail to see why this has too much importance to the church of today. After all, this was a ceremonial law and ceremonial laws are no longer binding on the Christian. Besides, you can't expect too much of the people. We should be thankful if they attend church on the Lord's Day."

There are two glaring errors in such an answer. The first error is that the keeping of the Sabbath was a ceremonial law. The observing of the Sabbath was instituted a long time before God gave His people the ceremonial laws through His servant Moses. The keeping of the Sabbath is one of the moral laws handed down by God and is just as binding as the other nine commandments. Did you ever notice that in our Shorter Catechism there are more questions devoted to the keeping of the Sabbath than in any other of the commandments?

The second error in the hypothetical answer by the minister is that of not expecting too much of the people. This is a common error today of ministers and one that is practiced by many ministers in their work. In the area of Sabbath keeping the average minister of today has simply given up. He keeps quiet; but he is commissioned by God to preach the whole counsel of God and the keeping of the Sabbath must be submitted to the Lordship of Christ just as much as anything else. He should remember that Christ did not eliminate the keeping of the Sabbath. Christ simply placed it where it belonged. He secured it. He placed it under His Lordship. (Matt. 12:7, 8)

As a born-again believer, what are you doing about the Sabbath? Do you recognize the Lordship of Christ in this area of your Christian life? Would you be willing to submit every part of your life to this commandment? May God help all of us to do so, all to His glory.

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