

LORD'S DAY 44

113. Q. What does the tenth commandment require of us?

A. That not even the slightest thought or desire contrary to any of God's commandments should ever arise in our heart. Rather, we should always hate all sin with all our heart, and delight in all righteousness.¹

1. **Psalm 19:7-14** The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; ⁸ The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; ⁹ The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward. ¹² Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults. ¹³ Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great

transgression. ¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; ²⁴ and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Romans 7:7-8 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." ⁸ But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire. For apart from the law sin was dead.

114. Q. But can those converted to God keep these commandments perfectly?

A. No. In this life even the holiest have only a small beginning of this obedience. ¹ Nevertheless, with earnest purpose they do begin to live not only according to some but to all the commandments of God.²

1. **Ecclesiastes 7:20** For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin.

Romans 7:14-15 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.

1 Corinthians 13:9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part.

1 John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

2. **Psalm 1:1-2** Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful: ² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night.

Romans 7:22-25 For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of

my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ I thank God; through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

Philippians 3:12-16 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you. ¹⁶ Nevertheless, to the degree that we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us be of the same mind.

112. Q. If in this life no one can keep the ten commandments perfectly, why does God have them preached so strictly?

A. First,
 so that throughout our life we may more and more become aware of our sinful nature, and therefore seek more eagerly the forgiveness of sins and righteousness in Christ.¹
 Second,
 so that, while praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, we may never stop striving to be renewed more and more after God's image, until after this life we reach the goal of perfection.²

1. **Psalm 32:5** I acknowledged my sin to You, and my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah

Romans 3:19-26 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin. ²¹ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Romans 7:7 What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet."

Romans 7:24-25 O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ I thank God; through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

2. **1 Corinthians 9:24** Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it.

Philippians 3:12-14 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

1 John 3:1-3 Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. ² Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.



The principle idea of the tenth commandment is the forbidding of **covetousness**. A dictionary would define covetousness as “**greatly desirous of something that belongs to another.**” The English word *covet* comes from the Latin *cupere* which means *to wish for, to desire*. The idea of *greatly* desiring something is not necessarily a part of this word. Neither is it a part of either of the two Hebrew words used in the two versions of the tenth commandment (cf. Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5). The one word means *to wish for, to desire* and the other word means *to delight in, to regard as precious*. Along this same line, the Catechism does not restrict *covetousness* to only *great* desires, but includes in this term “*even the slightest thought or desire.*”

The idea of coveting is not necessarily negative, though it is often regarded as such. It is often said, “*You may not covet*”. But that is not correct. Both of the Hebrew words for *covet* are used of God when He desired Mt. Zion for His dwelling (cf. Psalm 132:13,14). We could say that God *coveted* Zion for His dwelling.

It is not necessarily wrong for man to covet. God created man with this *desire*. For example, God made male and female in such a way that they were *desirable* to one another (cf. Genesis 3:16).

God does not forbid all covetousness. God only forbids us to covet things that are evil, things that He has forbidden. We must not take delight in sin.

God wants us to covet. God wants us to have desires. But these desires must be for what is good and holy. We are to covet obedience to God’s law, or as the Catechism says, we are to delight in all righteousness. Psalm 119 is a good example of the right covetousness which God demands, especially as expressed in vs. 20: “*My soul is consumed with longing for thy ordinances at all times.*”

Notice how strongly the Catechism expresses this radical nature of this commandment. Concerning what is forbidden, the Catechism teaches us that not even the **slightest** thought contrary to

any of God’s commandments should **ever** arise in our hearts. Concerning what is required in this commandment, we must **always** hate **all** sin with **all** our heart, and delight in **all** righteousness.

God is not pleased with half-hearted obedience. We must not have a lackadaisical (take it or leave it) attitude towards the service of God. We must not be lukewarm Christians (cf. Revelation 3:16). On the contrary, we must be radical in our service. The fire of enthusiasm and zeal for the service of God should burn brightly in us.

The question arises, however, “*Can those who are converted keep these commandments perfectly?*” Early in the Catechism (cf. LD 2) we learned that the natural, unconverted man cannot even begin to show God the perfect love and render the perfect obedience which God requires, for he is dead in sin. Compare the radical demand in this commandment with the radical depravity of man as described in Genesis 6:5, “*Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*”

Considering the extent of man’s depravity, we might wonder whether the question asked above is even remotely correct. Since man is so corrupt, how can the Catechism ask whether we can keep this **perfectly**? But the Catechism is not asking this question about the natural man. It is asking this question about the man who has been regenerated by the Spirit of God. Although by nature the natural man can do no good, those who are regenerated can do good (cf. LD 3). Thus the question is legitimate: “*Can those who are converted keep all these commandments?*”

Sadly enough, we must confess that we who have been converted have only a small beginning of this obedience. We cannot keep these commandments perfectly, for our conversion or our regeneration is not yet complete. Paul says, “*Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected...*” (Philippians 3:12). John said, “*If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us*” (1 John 1:8).

James wrote, *“For we all stumble in many things. (James 3:2)*

Does this mean that there is no difference between the converted and the unconverted? Far from it! There is a great deal of difference. But the difference lies more in the heart than in the deed. We want to do right, but we cannot attain the goal of perfection that we want (cf. Romans 7:19). Of course, we do not wish to make it sound as if those who are converted do not produce any good fruits. That is not true. They do begin to live, not according to some, but according to all the commandments of God. But that beginning is very small. The converted do produce fruits of gratitude, but even the best of these fruits are defiled. In this sense, our works merit us nothing more than the works of the unconverted.

The greatest difference between the converted and the unconverted lies in their attitude towards God’s law and sin. The unconverted have no desire to keep God’s law, and feel no remorse over their sin. The converted, however, have a strong desire to keep God’s law, and they are filled with remorse when each evening again they must confess that their deeds were imperfect.

But if we cannot keep these commandments, why does God continue to have them preached so strictly? Why doesn’t God lower His demands?

We should realise that the law of God is a direct reflection of Himself. When man fulfils the law he bears the image of God. The first commandment *“You shall have no other gods before Me”* arose from the fact that there are no other gods besides Yahweh. The second commandment *“You shall not make for yourself a graven image ...”* arose from the fact that God cannot be visibly represented. The third commandment *“You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain”* arose from the great glory and majesty of God. So it is with all the commandments. God’s law is a reflection of God Himself. God imposed His law upon man so that man might reflect His glory by keeping the law. Now God does not change, therefore the law which reflects

Him cannot change. Neither could God not lower the demands without denying Himself the rightful glory and honour that comes to Him when man reflects Him by fulfilling the law.

Rather than lower the demand, God has sent His Son to fulfil the law for us. Christ has rendered the perfect obedience which we could not render. We receive this obedience of Christ as our own if we accept it with a believing heart.

But if Christ has rendered obedience to the law, why do we still hear the law week after week? There are three reasons.

The preaching of the law incites us to pray for that which the gospel promises
What the law TEACHES us:	What the gospel PROMISES us:
1. that we have done so many things contrary to God’s law.	1. that Christ made atonement for sins which believers have committed against God’s law - (forgiveness of sins).
2. that we have never rendered obedience to even one of God’s laws.	2. that Christ imputes His perfect obedience to God’s law (righteousness) to believers.
3. that remnants of the old nature cling to us against our will and defile our thoughts and actions.	3. that the Holy Spirit puts to death the old nature and makes the new nature come more and more alive (sanctification).

1. Through the preaching of the law God teaches us that we cannot perform what is required of us for eternal life. Thereby **we are taught to seek the source of our life outside of ourselves in Jesus Christ.** God desires to have us remove all trust in our own ability and rely solely upon God’s grace in Christ Jesus. Unless we realise that we are incapable of obeying God’s law perfectly, we will never turn to Christ for His obedience.
2. Even though Christ has obeyed the law for us and thereby fulfilled all righteousness, **we are still required to keep the law out of thankfulness.**

Christ said, "*If you love Me, keep My commandments*" (John 14:15). Since we by nature do not know the perfect will of God, it pleases God to have His law proclaimed.

3. We said that the law reveals to us our shortcomings and sin. Because we love God and want to show Him our gratitude, we earnestly want to keep His commandments. The greater the knowledge of our shortcoming and sins, the more we will pray for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may be renewed

more and more after God's image, so that we might put off sin and live in all holiness.

From this we learn that the strict preaching of the law incites us to pray for what the gospel promises us in the gospel. Consider the chart below.



Questions

1. What is the principle idea contained in the tenth commandment? Define what this means.
2. Does the Catechism restrict covetousness to only great desires? What does the Catechism include?
3. Is coveting necessarily evil? How can you prove this?
4. What does God forbid us to covet? What does God require us to covet? What does Psalm 119:20 say?
5. With what terms does the Catechism show the radical nature of the tenth commandment a) as far as what is forbidden? b) as far as what is required? What does this teach us concerning our attitude towards the service of God?
6. Can those who are converted to God do good? Can they show God the perfect love and render the perfect obedience that He requires? If so, how? If not, why not?
7. Is there any difference between the unconverted and the converted as far as the good fruits which each bears? Wherein lies the greatest difference between the converted and the unconverted?
8. Since we cannot keep God's commandments, why doesn't God lower His demands?
9. What has God done rather than lower the demands of the law?
10. If Christ has rendered the law for us, why must we still hear the law proclaimed each week?
11. Since Christ has fulfilled the law for us, are we still required to obey the law? Why (not)?
12. What three things does the law reveal concerning ourselves? What does this revelation induce us to do? What three things does the gospel promise?