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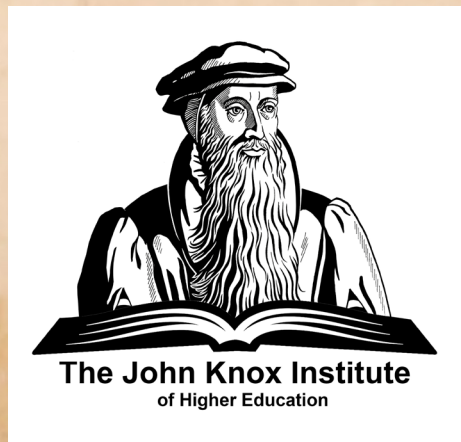
Shorter
CATECHISM

VIDEO LECTURE SERIES

by Rev. Jonathan Mattull

Lecture #40

**The Ten Commandments:
Love for the Lord's Allotment**
Catechism Questions 73 thru 75



John Knox Institute of Higher Education

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Lecture #40

The Ten Commandments: Love for the Lord's Allotment

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 neighbour's wealth or outward estate."*

As we continue our study of the *Shorter Catechism*, we come now to its treatment of the eighth commandment. Once again, we come across guidance from the Lord, as to how we are to love him by loving others.

So Question #73 asks, "Which is the eighth commandment?"—"The eighth commandment is, Thou shalt not steal." To "steal" is to unlawfully take from someone what belongs to them, so it understands that the Lord has given to different people the things that they possess. When we take from them what is theirs without their permission, without purchasing it, etc., that is "to steal."

Notice Question #74, "What is required in the eighth commandment?"—"The eighth commandment requireth the lawful procuring and furthering the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others." To "procure" means that we gain something. To "further" means that we increase something. So the gaining and increasing of not only our own wealth and outward estate—the things that concern us—but even serving others as well. We often think of "wealth" as if it only means "riches," a lot, in abundance. But the word here simply means whatever amount we have. You can think of it as one's outward wellbeing. If someone only has ten dollars, that's the amount of his or her wealth. If someone has one million dollars or more, that's the amount of their wealth. But it isn't just finances or money. It's all the personal property that belongs to that person.

So Question #75, "What is forbidden in the eighth commandment?"—"The eighth commandment forbiddeth whatsoever doth or may unjustly hinder our own, or our neighbour's wealth or outward

estate.” So we see that this commandment addresses how we approach what belongs to us, and what belongs to others. We’ll see that what belongs to us has been given, or allotted to us by the Lord.

So let’s look at three points for our lesson. First, *The Lord’s Allotment to Us*; second, *Obtaining and Preserving the Lord’s Allotment*; and third, *Abusing the Lord’s Allotment*.

So first, understanding *The Lord’s Allotment to Us*. The Lord owns all that is. All is his. This is the starting point for us with reference to our belongings and others’. So think that when Solomon was building the temple for the Lord, God caused his people to bring in an abundance of excellent things. But notice Solomon’s words in 1 Chronicles 29, verses 11 through 14. He says to God, “Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and thou art exalted as head above all. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all. Now therefore, our God, we thank thee, and praise thy glorious name. But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort? for all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee.”

Solomon realized that all the things that the people were bringing were ultimately things that first and foremost belonged, and in fact, still belonged to God. These great offerings given were things that God had given to them. And this is important for us. We need to come to terms with this as the fundamental point. God owns everything. He made everything, he distributes everything, all is by him, and all is for him. If we neglect or ignore this point, we’ll be open to all manner of wrong ideas regarding property and wealth.

Well, notice, while everything belongs to him, he truly does give to men a portion, or an allotment, according to his good will. In her prayer, Hannah acknowledged this very point—1 Samuel 2, verses 7 and 8. She prayed, acknowledging this, “The LORD maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD’s, and he hath set the world upon them.” In other words, the Lord has sovereignly allotted great riches to some, and great poverty to others. This is not to deny hard work and diligence as a means to gain outward wealth. It’s simply to note that all of this is in God’s control. This means then that the property that people have first and foremost is theirs because of God.

Notice then, that to steal from someone, be it a private person or a global business or company, is fundamentally to steal from God, and to deny his goodness and wisdom. Additionally, we should note that private property is ultimately a God-given truth. God has given to each individual something that belongs to them. There could be no stealing, were it not for the fact that things belong to others. Stealing is the unlawful taking from someone what belongs to them.

“Is it the case that people own things?” some ask, “Is it the case that there’s such a thing as personal property?” others ask. Well, some appeal to the early church, and say that the church practiced a form of communism. And there’s an idea that says, people don’t actually own property, everything really belongs to everyone else together. For instance, in Acts 4, verse 32, we read, “And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.”

However, we find that this is not denying personal property. Rather, it’s a clear expression of the great liberality and love that the believers had to use their personal property for the good of those

in need. In fact, in Acts chapter 5, the very next chapter, we find an example of this. As Christians were giving of their personal property in support of the church, we find two early disciples, Ananias and Sapphira, deceiving the church in what they gave. So they sold their personal property for a certain price. And then in order to gain the approval of the church, and to show themselves as if they were quite charitable, they gave a certain amount of the money, but kept other of it back, and they acted as if they were giving the full price. Well, notice, in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 5, we read this very case: “A certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”

Well this is a great sin. It was not a great sin because they kept back part of the price. It was because they lied and acted like they were giving them all that they had, by way of the purchase price. In other words, they were lying and acting like they were more generous than they really were. So notice Peter’s reproof, in verses 3 and 4: “Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back, part of the price of the land? Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou has not lied unto men, but unto God.” You see, what was the sin? It wasn’t in holding onto private property. When it was sold, Peter said, it was still under your power, it was still your own to do with as you desired. Instead, the sin was lying and deceiving. The point is that the Bible acknowledges private property. What God has given to men is theirs. Now, it’s theirs to use to his glory. It’s theirs to use for their needs and the support of others, but it is theirs.

Well, second, let’s look at *Obtaining and Preserving the Lord’s Allotment*. How is it then that men obtain and preserve what the Lord has allotted to them? As we search the Scriptures, we see that there are primarily two ways to gain and preserve wealth, and to increase our outward estate. It is either by the way of receiving something as a free gift, or it comes by consequence of lawful and diligent work. Work, of course, is then rewarded with payment, or wages, or outward provision.

A free gift is the free transferring of what someone owns to someone else. So perhaps you have a birthday, and a family member or a friend buys something with their own money. It’s theirs, but then they give it freely to you. That’s a gift. On other occasions, perhaps a parent dies, and they appointed that their children receive the remaining finances and outward belongings. This is the form of an outward gift. We see this even in what was taking place in Acts 4 and Acts 5. Various believers owned things, they sold things, they took the money and they gave gifts. A gift is the giving of something that one owns to someone else.

Now, we must be careful. Sometimes gifts are given, but they’re given in order to bribe someone. So though it’s not seeking, as it were, payment back in an outward way. It’s seeking influence over someone, and the Bible warns us very clearly about those sinful gifts. But lawful gifts, right gifts, are freely given, and they ought to be received with gratitude, both to the person giving, but also, as we’ve seen, to God, who is the one overseeing it all.

The other and ordinary way of obtaining and preserving the Lord’s allotment is by diligent work. The Lord has established work to be the fundamental and primary way for us to obtain outward provisions for ourselves and families, and in order to give to others. Notice Paul’s words, in 2 Thessalonians 3, verses 8 through 12. He says of his own example: “Neither did we eat any man’s bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us. For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly,

working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.”

Well, we’ll look at some of this in a moment, but for now, simply notice, Paul says he himself worked. And the others who were workers with him worked. They didn’t just eat others’ food freely, though they had authority to, as the minister is laboring in word and in prayer, and is to be supported by those to whom he ministers. But he was particularly giving an example to encourage others to work with their own hands, and thus procure that which was needed for them. This is the point. Men are to work. That’s the ordinary way. They work their jobs. They labor, whether as a farmer, or as a mechanic, or as an office worker. Whatever their work is, they’re doing that work in order then to receive the payment that is due to them, so then they can meet their own needs, and the needs of others. This is the main point. It’s through daily work that we gain either the finances to buy what we and our families need, or that we perform certain work in exchange for what we and our families need.

Moreover, notice how our work is the way that we procure enough for ourselves *and* enough to support others who can’t work. Ephesians 4:28 addresses those who used to steal: “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.” How is it that we are to procure wealth for ourselves, and to support others? Well, the primary way is by work.

Well, third, *Abusing the Lord’s Allotment*. We abuse the Lord’s way of giving to us when we do one of several things: stealing, which is able to be done by cheating, and lying, and taking; or engaging in sloth, where we don’t work, or we don’t work as hard as we should; or when we gamble, that is, when we seek to obtain wealth in a way that is not in accordance to God’s order. To steal is to take something unlawfully from someone else what is theirs. Well, what should be done instead of stealing? Well, as we’ve seen, work. We read and quoted earlier from Ephesians 4, “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.”

The work is not only that the worker would have enough for himself, but that he may also support others who stand in need. It’s interesting, isn’t it—stealing is always interested in taking for ourselves. But when we work, we’re not only working in order to provide for ourselves and our families, but also so that we then can have provision to give to someone else. So our work is both for ourselves, and for the benefit of those who stand in need.

But explicit stealing is not the only way of violating this commandment. Another way is sloth. A slothful person is a person who could work. They have the physical or mental ability to work, but they don’t work. There are two forms of this. The primary form is when a person is physically and mentally able to work a job, but for a variety of reasons, they don’t work at all. The other form is when one should be working diligently, but they fail to give themselves diligently to their work. So let’s look at these two ways.

First, the primary way—increasingly, men and women, and now children, think that they are owed outward care. While it’s most certainly true that we must lovingly assist and care for those who are unwell and cannot work. But it’s not the case that we simply stand by right, demanding that people give to us what we think we need. Earlier, we referred to 2 Thessalonians 3. Notice verse 10. Paul said, “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.” Now, it is clear, some cannot work. There are some people who are physically disabled, and legitimately cannot engage in physical labor to earn wages. These people need charitable support, and care, and assistance. And this is a part of loving our neighbor

and supporting them. However, it's increasingly the case that people don't work, not because they cannot, but because they will not. They actually think a certain job is beneath them, that they deserve a better job.

Well, the Bible which treats of this calls such people "slothful." We see this again and again in the Proverbs. Notice particularly Proverbs 26, verses 13 through 16: "The slothful man saith, There is a lion in the way; a lion is in the streets. As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed. The slothful hideth his hand in his bosom; it grieveth him to bring it again to his mouth. The sluggard is wiser in his own conceit than seven men that can render a reason." It's not that there aren't arguments in their mouths as to why they aren't working, the point is, the arguments are groundless. It's often the case that those who are slothful have many reasons why they cannot work. However, when it comes down to it, if their bodies are able, and their minds are able, all of these are simply excuses. And if they will not work, they shouldn't be receiving support.

Let's look at the other form of sloth, namely, when one is getting paid to do work, but they fail to perform that work in the way that they should. This is often the case when a worker is paid by the hour. Instead of working diligently for that time, they purposely find ways to be lazy. Instead of doing all that they could in that hour, they take it easy, and they avoid the various things that they're supposed to be doing, all the while, still expecting to get paid. So there's some forms of work where people have to be in cars and deliver things, or they have to go and visit certain places, and they're paid for the hours that they're driving around. Well, they might pull over, and go into a building and waste time, and rack up the hours while they're not working. That's sloth, and it's a form of stealing. There are many ways of doing this.

Those who are slothful, we should be clear, steal. They either do so in clear and obvious ways, as directly taking. When they have no money, they have to gain it by stealing. But they may also do it indirectly. So think for a moment about government assistance, or charitable agencies that are privately run. When someone who could work does not work, and they still receive financial support, they're guilty of stealing from others. We don't deny that the church should provide and care for individuals and families who are truly suffering financial hardships, or are unable to work. This is part of the loving care that is to be given. We do not even deny that civil governments should assist citizens who are similarly afflicted. However, when this is done for people who could otherwise work, it's a sinful arrangement.

So take the example of government programs. These programs are funded by taxes from citizens. These citizens are working to provide for themselves and families. The tax then takes a portion of their earned income, and the government takes that portion, and of that portion, gives some of it to those who aren't working but could be working. And so those who are working are having their wages taken from them and given to others who aren't working but could be working. That's stealing.

Another prominent way of stealing is by gambling. Gambling is when someone makes a bet or wager, and puts forth a little money in an effort to get a lot more back. It's an attempt to get wealth without work. It's not a free gift. There's this appearance of investment. But it's not really investment. It's casting, as it were, a lot before the Lord without seriously seeking him. If they were seeking him, they would work. Moreover, it's often motivated by selfish desire for more, and it's pursued without earnest spiritual dependence upon the Lord, in prayer, work, and diligence.

Well much more could be said, but these are the three main ways of stealing. Well, we should also notice that it doesn't take a poor person to steal. Because we're to be interested in caring for

others. So rich businessmen could be unjustly hindering the wealth of another by not paying them what is a just wage. And that is in violation of this commandment as well.

Well, let's close by looking at applications. First, one practical thing that this commandment reminds us, is that we're to work. We're to give ourselves to labor. Now not everyone has the same gifts and calling, and not everyone will gain the same amount in return for their work. However, whatever our gifts and calling might be, we are to devote ourselves to loving the Lord by working, and looking to the Lord to provide for us by that work, that we then can provide for our families and to others. And so, if we're going to avoid stealing, one thing we should be diligent in is working. Remember that even the ability to work is God's gift.

So when we pray, for instance, "Give us this day our daily bread," and we go out and work hard, we make money, we buy the food or the other things we need, and we say, "Thank you, Lord, for giving us this day our daily bread." Why do we do that? We worked. Well, we do it because God not only gave us the ability to work, but the opportunity to work, and then to earn money to buy the food or the other things that we need, and to enjoy it. All is coming from God. And so, though we are employing this means of work and procuring finances or other provisions, we see that all of this is from God. So with Solomon, we can say, "Thank you, God, for this kind provision to us."

Well, this leads us to another application. We should thank God for the ability to work. The world lives in this idea, this fantasy of thinking, "I want to be rich and wealthy so that I don't have to work." But we should remember, work is not a consequence of the fall. Even before the fall, Adam and Eve were to work. Adam was to care for the vineyard. It was the consequence of the fall that it would be through this toilsome labor. But work itself is good. And when God gives us the ability to work, we should do so to his glory. And it's not only for our own selfish gain. It's for our necessities, but also for others. And so we thank God that he's using us and our work, not only to meet our needs, but to support and care for others who are in need. What a great thing that God gives us the privilege to enjoy.

And finally, remember that you and I have a responsibility, lovingly to care for and support others who cannot work. It's not that we have a responsibility to give to everyone who asks. But when there are legitimate people who have real needs, it's our responsibility to help and assist them, to care for them. Well, we do this by praying and asking the Lord. We also do this by giving and supporting them. And this comes by our work, that we might gain and give.

How will we do all this rightly? It's not just in the mechanics of having it happen. It all starts by knowing God's love to us, his giving to us. Think of how full the Scriptures are in this testimony that God gave—he gave his only begotten Son; the gift of God is eternal life. All of these notions of God giving, he takes of what he has, and he gives for our good. You see, this can help us, that if we work and gain, we don't just think, "Now, it's mine." But we lovingly give, even as God has given to us. Think of Jesus Christ. He owns all things. He's done all things, but he gives freely, having lovingly labored for our everlasting good. He gives everlasting life.

If you and I are going to avoid stealing but also support not only ourselves and others, it will start as we both know the love of God, and as our love to him increases, and then multiplies to others. May God bless us that we would grow in this display of love.