

Each week of 2019 we will take a brief look at one or more questions from the Westminster Shorter Catechism. To read previous weeks' briefs go to oakhillpca.com/wsc

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, but does daily break them in thought, word, and deed.

43 of the 107 questions in the Shorter Catechism have focused on the moral law of God (Qs. 39-81). It starts with man's duty to obey God's revealed will, which is summarized in the ten commandments. Before discussing the commandments, the Catechism draws attention to the preface in Exodus 20:1, which highlights God's redeeming work for his people (Qs. 43-44). This sets the stage for learning from the commandments. The Catechism is speaking to people who have been redeemed by God; the commandments help us learn to hate sin and grow in holiness.

The teaching on the ten commandments wrapped up with Question 81. The writers of the Catechism are wise and pastoral. They understand that such an extended time focusing on the commandments can lead people, even redeemed people, to become over-confident in their own abilities to obey. Question 82 is here to slay such foolish pride.

Q. 82 reminds us that we can never obey the commandments perfectly. Sinful disobedience is intermingled in all of our lives. This reflects the plain teaching of Scripture.

Isaiah 64:6 We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.

Isaiah 53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way;

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

The clear implication of this emphasis is that no one can be saved, made right with God, by obeying the commandments. Paul accents this in Galatians 2:16, "we know that a person is not justified by works of the law."

Why, then, spend 40% of the Catechism unpacking a law that cannot save? Theologians have debated for centuries the role of the law in relation to the Gospel. The Catechism has focused on the Law to help believers:

1. Become broken over their sin and, therefore, cast themselves on Christ alone for salvation.
2. Grow in holiness, as the Holy Spirit uses the revealed will of God to transform and sanctify his people.

The law is good and useful for God's people, but we must guard against foolish, self-confident pursuit of righteousness by our own works.