

## **Catechism Sec. 13: The Preservation Of Society**

by B. S. Poh

**Q58. What is the eighth commandment?**

**A58. The eighth commandment is, “You shall not steal.”<sup>1</sup>**

*1. Exodus 20:15*

**Q59. What is required in the eighth commandment?**

**A59. The eighth commandment requires lawful endeavours to further the wealth and well-being of ourselves and others<sup>1, 2</sup>, while forbidding whatever that tends towards taking away the wealth or well-being of ourselves or others unjustly<sup>3, 4</sup>.**

**Notes:** We have couched the last part of the answer according to that of the sixth commandment, leaving out “all” in “all lawful endeavours” since we are here dealing with property, not life. The emphasis is on the lawfulness of the endeavours and not on the endeavours *per se*. Also, “well-being” replaces “outward state”.

- 1. 1 Tim. 5:8, But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*
- 2. Prov. 28:19, He who tills his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows frivolity will have poverty enough!*
- 3. Eph. 4:28, Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.*
- 4. Prov. 21:17, He who loves pleasure will be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil will not be rich.*

### **Comments:**

1. The eighth, ninth and tenth commandments may be considered as those that guard the interactions between man and man, so that society may be preserved and not descend into chaos. The eighth commandment is concerned with *the sanctity of private property*. The right to private property is ordained by God (Gen. 1:29; Acts 5:4), who is the ultimate owner of all things (Psalm 50:10-11). God has given different abilities and opportunities to men to gain wealth and to improve their lot (Prov. 6:6-8; Matt. 25:19-46). One’s wealth may have been given, as a gift or an inheritance (Num. 36:7-9; 2 Cor. 12:14; Eph. 4:28; Phil. 4:18), or it may have been earned (Prov. 27:23, 27; Eph. 4:28; 2 Thess. 3:10; 1 Tim. 5:8). Stealing is unjustly taking away what belongs to others. This may happen secretly or openly, obviously or subtly. A burglar may secretly, but obviously, take away what is yours. A bad government may openly and subtly take away the hard-earned wealth of some to give to others in the name of “the equal distribution of wealth”.

Being lazy and sleeping on the job is stealing the employer's time and getting paid for inadequate work done. Being wasteful at a job costs the employer money and is a form of stealing from him.

2. Christians may work hard, and use their ingenuity to gain wealth honestly and justly. Money is needed to support those dependent on us, e.g. our children and aged parents (2 Cor. 12:14; 1 Tim. 5:8, 16). Money is needed to support gospel work (1 Cor. 16:1-2; Phil. 4:18; 1 Tim 5:17). It is legitimate to live comfortably - within our means, and within reason. The danger lies in "the love for money", which is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:10). Being rich is not a sin, although riches can become a snare (Matt. 19:24). A poor person may be guilty of greed, while a rich person may be truly godly (1 Tim. 6:17-19).

**Q60. What is the ninth commandment?**

**A60. The ninth commandment is, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour."<sup>1</sup>**

*1. Exodus 20:16*

**Q61. What is required in the ninth commandment?**

**A61. The ninth commandment requires the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man<sup>1</sup>, and of our own<sup>2,3</sup>, and our neighbour's good name<sup>4</sup>, especially in witness-bearing<sup>5</sup>, while forbidding whatever is prejudicial to truth, or injurious to our own or our neighbour's good name<sup>6,7</sup>.**

- 1. Zech. 8:16, These are the things you shall do: speak each man the truth to his neighbor; give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace.*
- 2. 1 Pet. 3:16, Having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed.*
- 3. Acts 25:10, So Paul said, "I stand at Caesar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged. To the Jews I have done no wrong, as you very well know."*
- 4. 3 John 1:12, Demetrius has a good testimony from all, and from the truth itself. And we also bear witness, and you know that our testimony is true.*
- 5. Prov. 14:5, 25, A faithful witness does not lie, but a false witness will utter lies. A true witness delivers souls, but a deceitful witness speaks lies.*
- 6. Eph. 4:25, Therefore, putting away lying, " Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another.*
- 7. Psalm 15:3, He who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend.*

**Comments**

1. This commandment is concerned with *the sanctity of speech*. Two basic matters are involved: speaking the truth, and keeping a good name. Putting it another way, we must refrain from lying and slander. God is called "LORD God of truth" (Psalm 31:5). Jesus Christ is "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6). Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). All those who are saved, through faith in Christ, come to know God, and the truth. It is our duty to be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:48). When we fail to tell the truth, we harm our own name, and possibly the name of others, especially when called upon to be a witness. It is essential that, in

everyday life, Christians “speak the truth in love”, with the view of edifying others (Eph. 4:15, 25). In witness-bearing, the rule is to “speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” (Prov. 12:22). Sanctified speech also includes abstaining from gossip (1 Tim. 5:13), boasting (James 3:5) and uttering unwholesome words (Eph. 4:29, 31; 1 Pet. 2:1). There are times when we must speak up for the truth and not commit the “sin of silence” (Ezek. 3:18; Esther 4:14).

2. Excuses are often used to cover up the breaking of this commandment, under the guise of “white lies” and “lies of necessity”. “White lies” are supposedly harmless, told to avoid hurting others, or to flatter them. But this is contrary to biblical teaching (Eph. 4:25; 1 John 2:21). “Lies of necessity” are supposedly unavoidable in certain circumstances. It is claimed that Abraham lied to save his life (Gen. 12:13, 19; 20:2, 5, 12), and the midwives lied to Pharaoh to save lives (Ex. 1:19-21). Two points must be noted: (i) there is no indication in Scripture that God approved of Abraham’s lie; (ii) the rules of war are different from the rules of peace, which applied to the situation faced by the midwives. Camouflage, deception, and outwitting the enemies are legitimate and accepted strategies of warfare. Another point to note is that withholding information from those who have no right, or need, to know is different from telling outright lies. For example, you need not reveal to a robber that your husband is away, or where your jewellery is kept.

**Q62. What is the tenth commandment?**

**A62. The tenth commandment is, “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, nor his male or female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbour’s.”<sup>1</sup>**

*1. Exodus 20:17*

**Q63. What is required in the tenth commandment?**

**A63. The tenth commandment requires full contentment with our own condition<sup>1, 2</sup>, with a right and charitable frame of spirit towards our neighbour, and all that is his<sup>3, 4</sup>, while forbidding all unworthy emotions and desires toward anything that belongs to him<sup>5</sup>.**

**Notes:** In the last part of this answer, we have used a considerably shortened version of the answer of the next question in the original Catechism.

- 1. Heb. 13:5, Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”*
- 2. 1 Tim. 6:6, Now godliness with contentment is great gain.*
- 3. Gal. 5:26, Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.*
- 4. James 3:14, 16, But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.*
- 5. Col. 3:5, Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.*

**Comments:**

1. This commandment is concerned with *the sanctity of the heart*. Unlike all the other commandments, this one speaks only of the inward state of the heart. Out of the heart flows all

kinds of evil (Mark 7: 20-23). The believer must guard against any stirring of discontent with his own situation, which will lead to envy, then covetousness, and finally entanglement in sinful desires, if not committing physical acts of sin (James 1:14-15; 3:14-16). Covetousness is idolatry (Eph. 5:5 cf. Matt. 5:21-22; 27-28). Paul, who was perfect with regard to external righteousness (Phil. 2:6), was convicted of his inner corruption by this law (Rom. 7:7). The believer has no choice, but to be perfect (i.e. striving for perfection), as the Father in heaven is perfect (Matt. 5:48).

2. God gives different abilities and opportunities to all, to be used to the utmost for His glory (1 Cor. 3:11-13; 10:31; 12:4-7). He does not demand from His children more than they are able to give (Matt. 25:14ff). We are to have a charitable frame of spirit toward those who are more able, and have done better, than us. The key to guarding the heart is to find full contentment in God (Gen. 15:1; Phil. 4:11-12). This will guard us not only from discontent, but also from the opposite sins of fatalism and sloth (Matt. 25:29).

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