

LESSON THIRTY-FOUR.

FROM THE SEVENTH TO THE END OF THE TENTH COMMANDMENT.

373 Q. What is the seventh Commandment?

A. The seventh Commandment is: **Thou shalt not steal.**

STEALING is one of those vices of which you have to be most careful. Children should learn to have honest hearts, and never to take unjustly even the smallest thing; for some begin a life of dishonesty by stealing little things from their own house or from stores to which they are sent for goods. A nut, a cake, an apple, a cent, etc., do not seem much, but nevertheless to take any of them dishonestly is stealing. Children who indulge in this trifling thievery seldom correct the habit in after life and grow up to be dishonest men and women. How do you suppose all the thieves now spending their miserable lives in prison began? Do you believe they were very honest—never having stolen even the slightest thing—up to a certain day, and at once became thieves by committing a highway robbery? No; they began by stealing little things, then greater, and kept on till they made stealing their business and thus became professional thieves. Again, the little you steal each day does not seem much at the time, but if you put all the “littles” together you may soon have something big, and almost before you know it—if you intend to continue stealing—you may have taken enough to make you guilty of mortal sin. If you intended to steal, for instance, only a few cents every day for the whole year, you would at the end have stolen many dollars and committed a mortal sin. There are many ways of violating the seventh commandment. Workmen who do **not** do a just day’s work, or employers who

cheat their workmen out of wages earned ; merchants who charge unjust prices and seek unjust profits ; dealers who give light weight or short measure or who misrepresent goods ; those who speculate rashly or gamble with the money of others, and those who borrow with no intention or only slight hope of being able to pay back, all violate this commandment. You violate it also by not paying your just debts or by purchasing goods that you know you will never be able to pay for. Moreover, besides the injustice, it is base ingratitude not to pay your debts when in your power to do so. The one who trusted or lent you helped you in your need and did you a great favor, and yet when you can you will not pay, and what is worse, frequently abuse and insult him for asking his own. Though such dishonest and ungrateful persons may escape in this world, they will not escape in the next, for Almighty God will make them suffer for the smallest debt they owe.

Again, others often suffer for the dishonesty of those I have mentioned, for when some good person who really intends to pay is in great need and wishes to borrow or be trusted, he is refused because others have been dishonest. Every one should pay his debts, and even keep from buying things that are not really necessary till he is thus enabled to pay what he owes. You must pay your just debts even before you can give anything in charity.

374 Q. What are we commanded by the seventh Commandment ?

A. By the seventh Commandment we are commanded to give to all men what belongs to them and to respect their property.

“Respect their property”—that is, acknowledge and respect their rights to their property and do nothing to violate these rights.

375 Q. What is forbidden by the seventh Commandment ?

A. The seventh Commandment forbids all unjust taking or keeping what belongs to another.

“**Taking,**” either with your own hands or from the hands of another; for the one who willingly and knowingly receives from a thief the whole or part of anything stolen becomes as bad as the thief. Even if you only help another to steal, and receive none of the stolen goods, you are guilty. There are several ways of sharing in the sin of another; namely, by ordering or advising him to do wrong; by praising him for doing wrong and thus encouraging him; by consenting to wrong when you should oppose it—for instance, a member of a society allowing an evil act to be done by the society when his vote would prevent it; again, by affording wrong-doers protection and means of escape from punishment for their evil deeds. This does not mean that we should not defend the guilty. We should defend them, but should not encourage them to do wrong by offering them a means of escape from just punishment. We share in another’s sin also by neglecting to prevent his bad action when it is our duty to do so. For example, if a police-officer paid for guarding your property should see a thief stealing it and not prevent him, he would be as guilty as the thief. Your neighbor indeed might warn you that the thief was stealing your goods, but he would not be bound in justice to do so, as the officer is, but only in charity, because it is not his duty to guard your property. Parents who know that their children steal and do not prevent them or compel them to bring back what they stole, but rather encourage them by being indifferent, are guilty of dishonesty as well as the children, and share in their sins of theft. But suppose you did not know the thing was stolen when you received it, but learned afterward that it was, must you then return it to the proper owner? Yes; just as soon as you know to whom it belongs you begin to sin by keeping it. But suppose you bought it not knowing that it was stolen, would you still have to restore it? Yes, when the owner asks for it, because it belongs to him till he sells it or gives it away. If you have bought from a thief you have been

cheated and must suffer the loss. Your mistake will make you more careful on the next occasion. Suppose you find a thing, what must you do? Try to find its owner, and if you find him give him what is his, and that without any reward for restoring it, unless he pleases to give you something, or unless you have been put to an expense by keeping it. If you cannot find the owner after sincerely seeking for him, then you may keep the thing found. But suppose you kept the article so long before looking for the owner that it became impossible for you to restore it to him, either because he had died or removed to parts unknown during your delay—what then? Then you must give the article or its value to his children or others who have a right to his goods; and if no one who has such a right can be found, you must give it to the poor, for you have it unjustly—since you did not look for the owner when it was possible to find him—and therefore cannot keep it.

376 Q. Are we bound to restore ill-gotten goods?

A. We are bound to restore ill-gotten goods, or the value of them, as far as we are able; otherwise we cannot be forgiven.

“Ill-gotten”—that is, unjustly gotten. “Value.” It sometimes happens that persons lose or destroy the article stolen, and therefore cannot return it. What must be done in such cases? They must give the owner the value of it. However, when you have stolen anything and have to restore it, you need not go to the owner and say, “Here is what I stole from you.” It is only necessary that he gets what is his own or its value. He need not even know that it is being restored to him, unless he knows you stole it; and then it would be better for your own good name to let him know that you are making amends for the injustice done. Therefore, no one need have any excuse for not restoring what he has unjustly, because he has only to see that it is returned in some way to its owner, or to those who have the next right to

it, or to the poor. But you must remember you cannot make restitution by giving to the poor if you can restore to the proper owner. You must restore by giving to the poor only when the owner cannot be found or reached. Some persons do not like the duty of restoring to the proper owner, and think they satisfy their obligation by giving the ill-gotten goods to the poor; but they do not. You cannot give even in charity the goods of another without being guilty of dishonesty. If you wish to be charitable, give from your own goods. It is a sin to delay making restitution after you are able to restore. You must restore just as soon as you can, because the longer you keep the owner out of his property and its benefits, the greater the injury you do him and the greater the sin. One who, after being told by his confessor to make restitution, and promising to do so, still delays or keeps putting off, runs the risk of being guilty of sacrilege by receiving the sacraments without proper dispositions. But suppose a person cannot restore; suppose he lost the thing stolen and has not the value of it. What must he do? He must have the firm resolution of restoring as soon as he possibly can; and without this good resolution he could not be absolved from his sins—even if he had not the real means of restoring. The good intention and resolution will suffice till he has really the means; but this intention must be serious, otherwise there will be no forgiveness.

377 Q. Are we obliged to repair the damage we have unjustly caused?

A. We are bound to repair the damage we have unjustly caused.

378 Q. What is the eighth Commandment?

A. The eighth Commandment is: Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

Either in a court, while we are acting as witnesses, or by telling lies about him at any other time.

379 Q. What are we commanded by the eighth Commandment?

A. We are commanded by the eighth Commandment to speak the truth in all things, and to be careful of the honor and reputation of every one.

“**Reputation.**” If it be a sin to steal a man’s money, which we can restore to him, it is certainly a much greater sin to steal his good name, which we can never restore, and especially as we have nothing to gain from injuring his character. It is a sin to tell evil things about another—his sins, vices, etc.—even when they are true. The only thing that will excuse us from telling another’s fault is the necessity to do so in which we are placed, or the good we can do to the person himself or others by exposing his faults. How shall you know when you have injured the character of another? You have injured another’s character if you made others think less of him than they did before. If you have exposed some crime that he really committed, your sin is called *detraction*; if you accuse him of one he did not commit, your sin is *calumny*; and if you maliciously circulate these reports to injure his character, your sin is *slander*. But how shall you make reparation for injuring the character of another? If you have told lies about him, you must acknowledge to those with whom you have talked that you have told what was untrue about him, and you must even compensate him for whatever loss he has suffered by your lies: for example, the loss of his situation by your accusing him of dishonesty. But if what you said of him was true, how are you to act? At every opportunity say whatever good you can of him in the presence of those before whom you have spoken the evil.

380 Q. What is forbidden by the eighth Commandment?

A. The eighth Commandment forbids all rash judgments, backbiting, slanders, and lies.

“**Rash judgment**”—that is, having in your mind and really believing that a person is guilty of a certain sin when

you have no reason for thinking so, and no evidence that he is guilty. “**Backbiting**”—that is, talking evil of persons behind their backs. You would not like your neighbor to backbite you, and you have no right to do to him what you would not wish him to do to you. Besides, every one hates and fears a backbiter; because as he brings to you a bad story about another, he will in the same manner bring to some one else a bad story about you. It is certainly an honor to be able to say of a person; “He never has a bad word of any one;” while, on the other hand, he must be a despicable creature who never speaks of others except to censure or revile them. Never listen to a backbiter, detractor, or slanderer—it is sinful. Another way of injuring your neighbor is, revealing the secrets he has confided to you. You will tell one friend perhaps and caution him not to repeat it to another; but if you cannot keep the secret yourself, how can you expect others to keep it? Again you may injure your neighbor by reading his letters without his consent when you have no authority to do so. This is considered a crime in the eyes even of the civil law, and any one who opens and reads the letters of another can be punished by imprisonment. It is a kind of theft, for it is stealing secrets and information that you have no right to know. It is dishonorable to read another’s letter without his consent, even when you find it open. To carry to persons the evil things said about them by others so as to bring about disputes between them is very sinful. The Holy Scripture (Rom. i. 29) calls this class of sinners whisperers, and says that they will not enter into heaven—that is, as long as they continue in the habit. If ever, then, you hear one person saying anything bad about another, never go and tell it to the person of whom it was said. If you do, you will be the cause of all the sin that follows from it—of the anger, hatred, revenge, and probably murder itself, as sometimes happens.

* 381 Q. What must they do who have lied about their neighbor and seriously injured his character?

A. They who have lied about their neighbor and

seriously injured his character must repair the injury done as far as they are able, otherwise they will not be forgiven.

382 Q. What is the ninth Commandment?

A. The ninth Commandment is: Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife.

383 Q. What are we commanded by the ninth Commandment?

A. We are commanded by the ninth Commandment to keep ourselves pure in thought and desire.

384 Q. What is forbidden by the ninth Commandment?

A. The ninth Commandment forbids unchaste thoughts, desires of another's wife or husband, and all other unlawful impure thoughts and desires.

* 385 Q. Are impure thoughts and desires always sins?

A. Impure thoughts and desires are always sins, unless they displease us and we try to banish them.

386 Q. What is the tenth Commandment?

A. The tenth Commandment is: Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's goods.

"Covet" means to long for or desire inordinately or unlawfully. If I should desire, for example, my friend to be killed by an accident, in order that I might become the owner of his gold watch, I would be coveting it. But if I desired to have it justly—that is, to be able to purchase it, or another similar to it, that would not be covetousness.

387 Q. What are we commanded by the tenth Commandment?

A. By the tenth Commandment we are commanded to be content with what we have, and to rejoice in our neighbor's welfare.

388 Q. What is forbidden by the tenth Commandment?

A. The tenth Commandment forbids all desires to take or keep wrongfully what belongs to another.