

Christ In The Commandments — Week 4

THE PREFACE

HOW TO INTERPRET THE COMMANDMENTS

Exodus 20:1-2

Shorter Catechism

Q. 43. What is the preface to the ten commandments?

A. The preface to the ten commandments is in these words, I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Q. 44. What doth the preface to the ten commandments teach us?

A. The preface to the ten commandments teacheth us that because God is the Lord, and our God, and redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all his commandments.

Review

Last week we saw that there are three uses of the Moral Law: The Civil Use—meaning it has a use for every government of every nation on earth; The Evangelical Use—meaning the the law was designed to drive us to Christ in the gospel; and The Directive Use—meaning the the law guides and directs believers as a rule of life, or rather a rule of love. It is a rule of love because love is the fulfilling of the law.

The Moral Law considered in itself is holy, righteous and good (Rom. 7:12). This chart shows how the law relates to the threefold nature of man	Man in the state of innocence	Man in the state of corruption	Man in the state of grace
How is man "under" the law	Innocent man was under the blessing of the law	Fallen man is under the curse of the law	Redeemed man is under the direction of the law (rule of love)
How is man "bound" to the law	Innocent man was bound to the obedience of the law	Fallen man is bound to the obedience and punishment of the law	Redeemed man is bound to the obedience of the law but is freed from the punishment of the law

Today we are going to look at how the people of God, both Israel and the Church are supposed to interpret the Ten commandments. There are rules to interpreting these Commandments. There is a wrong way to interpret the commands as we have already seen. So we will see the rules in two contexts.

☆ The Redemptive Context

☆ The Systematic Context

I. The Redemptive Context

God spoke to them as a covenant people

If we fail to see the redemptive context in which the Ten Commandments were given, we will certainly miss apply them. God gave the Ten Commandments to a redeemed people. That is not to say that all of Israel was saved (Romans 9:6; Jude 5; Hebrew 3:16-19) But as a visible people group— Israel was *the* representation of the church on earth. In other words, God was speaking to them as His covenant people. G.I. Williamson says here, it is wrong to say

“that the people of God in the Old Testament period were required to keep the law of God first, and then were saved by God as a reward for their obedience....When God delivered His people out of slavery in Egypt, it was not because they had kept the ten commandments. No, He first delivered them, and then gave them the ten commandments. So they were not expected to try to keep the law in order to be saved. Rather were they expected to do this because they had already been saved.”¹

In the NT, the apostles were constantly correcting wrong interpretations of the law. When Paul preached at Antioch in Pisidia He demonstrated why Christ was necessary. **Acts 13:38-39** “Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that

¹ G.I. Williamson, *The Shorter Catechism For Study Classes Vol. 2*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing Co., 1970), pg. 7-8

through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which *you could not be freed by the law of Moses.*” The law of Moses cannot set you free. No one is able to redeem their own soul by obedience to it. **Galatians 3:21** “Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For *if* a law had been given that could give life, *then* righteousness would indeed be by the law.” **Romans 8:3** “For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, *could not do*. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,” In other words, God did not give the law, so that Israel or anyone else could redeem themselves through obedience to it.

The preface

However God does expect His people to obey. And He gives three incentives or motives for their obedience in the preface. The preface found in Exodus **20:1-2** says “And God spoke all these words, saying, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” So God says three things: 1) “I am the Lord; 2) “I am...your God”; and 3) “I...brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

1. “I am the Lord”

God identifies who He is. “I am the Living God. The God of all creation. You belong to me simply because I made you.” **Psalms 100:2** says “Know that the LORD, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his.” Therefore we owe him all honor and obedience because He alone has given life and breath and all things.

2. “I am...your God”

God adds that word “your” showing a deeper relationship than just mere Creator/creature. Although God was Lord of the Egyptians, He was in a special, unique way the God of Israel. This is covenantal language. **Deuteronomy 26:18** “And the Lord has declared today that you are a people for

his treasured possession, as he has promised you, and that you are to keep all his commandments,” As the church we likewise are in covenant with God and He expects on that basis us to order our lives after His Word. **1 Peter 1:17** “And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile,”

3. “I...brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”

Israel was delivered from the most powerful nation on earth. They were slaves, and God dramatically rescued them through ten plagues bringing Egypt to their knees and gave birth to the nation of Israel. After centuries of oppression, God ransomed them from their slavery. And the church's salvation is likened to Israel's captivity. **1 Corinthians 10:1-4** “For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.” Jesus Christ has delivered us from greater enemies than Egypt. He delivered us from death, the devil, and the damnation of a holy God. And therefore as our Redeemer, we obey His voice.

II. The Systematic Context

Rules?

As strange as it may sound, there are *rules* that must be followed when interpreting the ten commandments.² How do we know? Because the Ten Commandments themselves don't tell us what these rules are. But remember how Jesus interpreted them in the Sermon on the Mount? His repeated language of “You have heard that it was said...but I say to you” (**Matthew 5:21-22**) demonstrate that the Jews had wrongly interpreted the Ten Commandments. Therefore if we are going to understand the Ten

² See Larger Catechism Q.99

Commandments correctly, we have to understand the rules that attend to them. And all these rules come from Scripture themselves. In each of these rules there is an affirmation and denial.

Rule 1: The law in both its essence and end is *love*

Denial: No “obedience” is true obedience if love is not the author and aim

Romans 13:8 “Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.”

In Matthew 22:40 Jesus says “On these two commandments (loving God and neighbor) depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

In 1 Timothy 1:5, Paul says “The aim of our charge is love”

Love is the distinguishing mark of those who belong to Christ (John 13:35). “Nothing can be pleasing to God unless it is done out of love for Him. The reason why the greatest and the second greatest commandment are put together is because neither one of them can be fulfilled with out the other (Gal. 5:14). As Turretin says “God cannot be loved without a love for our neighbor made after his image, so neither can our neighbor be loved without the love of God who created him”³ (1 John 4:20) Yet love of neighbor is always subordinate to love of God. Where ever there is a conflict, whether real or perceived between love towards Christ and love towards man, Christ must reign supreme. Jesus says “Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me” (Matthew 10:37). The first table of the law always takes hierarchy over the first. That’s why it’s the first table. That’s why loving God is greatest commandment. That’s

³ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology, Vol. 2*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 1994), pg. 36

rule one: the law in both its essence and end is love. No “obedience” is true obedience if love is not its aim.

Rule 2: The law is *spiritual* encompassing both body and soul

Denial: The law is not interpreted rightly if it doesn’t include all duties of the body and soul.

Romans 7:14 “For we know that the law is spiritual” Remember that we said the last two week that if the Scripture speaks of the law, we should ask “which law”? In Romans 7, the immediate context is the ten commandments. Just a few verses earlier in v.7 Paul says “For I would not have known what it is to covet if *the law* had not said, “You shall not covet.” That’s the tenth commandment. Paul is saying that the ten commandments are spiritual. Meaning, the ten commandments include more than the mere letter that each one represents. This is why Jesus said over and over again in the Sermon on the Mount “You have heard that it was said...but I say to you” They reduced the commandments to the letter, Jesus interpreted them to include the spirit. God does not and cannot accept any other type of obedience. Jesus said “God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” John 4:24 They include all the duties of the soul as well. There is no part of man that the ten commandments don’t speak to. As the Larger Catechism says “[it] reaches the understanding, will affections, and all other powers of the soul; as well as words, works, and gestures.”⁴ “Christ plainly teaches this when he extends homicide [a physical act] to hatred of a brother [an act of the soul] and adultery [a physical act] to lust and looks [an act of the soul] (Matthew 5:22, 28).”⁵ That’s rule two: The law is *spiritual* encompassing both body and soul. The Ten Commandments are not interpreted rightly if they don’t include all duties of body and soul.

⁴ Larger Catechism Q.99

⁵ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology, Vol. 2*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 1994), pg. 36

Rule 3: The law *includes* a positive command and negative prohibition in *every part*⁶

Denial: No good can be truly performed without its opposite evil being avoided nor can evil be truly avoided without its opposite good being performed.⁷

The first commandment is stated negatively “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3) But it is stated positively when Jesus answers Satan in Matthew 4:9-10 “And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” [10] Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, “*You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.*” Jesus is quoting Deut 6:13 which is what the first commandment (although stated negatively) positively requires.

Likewise, the eighth commandment “You shall not steal” (Exodus 20:8) is not obeyed if you merely abstain from taking property that does not belong to you. Paul restates the commandment in Ephesians 4:28 and states what is positively required. “Let the thief no longer steal, *but* rather let him *labor*, doing *honest work* with his own hands, *so that* he may have something to *share* with anyone in need.” You see if love is truly the essence and end of the law (rule 1) than *merely* not stealing does not meet that end if you see someone in need. Private property was not given to us ultimately for our own private enjoyment. It was given so that we could be generous like Christ. 2 Cor. 8:9 “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.” Brakel on this point here says

⁶ The Larger Catechism additionally states “so, where a promise is annexed, the contrary threatening is included; and, where a threatening is annexed, the contrary promise is included.” (Q.99)

⁷ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology, Vol. 2*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 1994), pg. 36 pg. 34-35

“He who does not kill has not observed the sixth commandment; instead, as much as he is able, he must preserve the life of his neighbor and live in love and peace with him...He also has not observed the ninth commandment who merely does not bear false witness; rather, it implies the promotion of the honor of his neighbor”⁸

That’s rule three: The law *includes* a positive command and negative prohibition in *every part*. No good can be truly performed without its opposite evil being avoided nor can evil be truly avoided without its opposite good being performed.

Rule 4: The law includes both the genus and species; the effect and the cause; the related and the correlative in each prohibition and command

Denial: No “obedience” is true obedience unless all related virtues are embraced and all related vices are avoided.

We’ll take these one at a time.

1) The law includes both genus and species.

The seventh commandment “You shall not commit adultery” is a sub-set or a species of the larger set or genus of sexual immorality. It’s not as if God only prohibited the specific sexual sin of adultery but allowed every other form of sexual immorality. No the genus is included when a specific species is mentioned. Jesus prohibits every kind of sexual immorality in Matthew 5:28. And this extends to every commandment—the genus and species is included in all.

2) The law includes both the effect and the cause.

The sixth commandment “You shall not murder” is a very specific effect. All the causes that would lead up to murder are equally forbidden: hatred, envy, wrath, bitterness, a vengeful spirit. Murder flows from these causes. And all these causes are equally forbidden under the commandment as Jesus rightly

⁸ Wilhemus Å Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service, Vol. 3: The Law, Christian Graces and the Lord’s Prayer*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 1994), pg. 86

interprets the law in Matthew 5:21ff. In that same place Jesus also teaches rule three—that the prohibition to murder, also includes the positive command to love and be reconciled to one another—Matthew 5:24

3) The law includes both the related and the correlative.

The fifth commandment “Honor your father and your mother,” also includes the related command to honor all those in authority. As Francis Turretin says “Under the word “parents” are understood all superiors—magistrates, masters, teachers, pastors.”⁹ We can see Paul make this clear in the Romans 13, and the author of Hebrews in 13:17. But there is also a correlative or corresponding command. Yes children are to honor their parents, but parents are commanded to treat their children love and cherish their children. Paul connects the fifth commandment to the corresponding duty of parents in Ephesians 6:2-4 “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”

That’s rule four: The law includes both the genus and species; the effect and the cause; the related and the correlative in each prohibition and command. No “obedience” is true obedience unless all related virtues are embraced and all related vices are avoided.

Rule 5: The law is always binding; yet some commands cannot be obeyed at all times.

Denial: No “obedience” is true that fails in one part of the law, neither is “obedience” true if lesser laws are obeyed and greater ones ignored

The Larger Catechism says here “The law is perfect, and binds everyone to full conformity in the whole man unto the righteousness thereof, and unto entire

⁹ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Vol. 2, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 1994), pg. 36 pg. 35

obedience forever; so as to require the utmost perfection of every duty, and to forbid the least degree of every sin.” The Law doesn’t grade on a sliding scale. Partial obedience is not obedience. James says “For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it” (James 2:10). The law is always binding.¹⁰

Yet there are times when some commands cannot be obeyed. Our “parents are not always alive or near us, so that we can [give] them their due [honor].”¹¹ A more clear time when we cannot obey a command, particularly of authority is when man’s laws contradict God’s law. When Peter and John were commanded to disobey Jesus’ command to be His witnesses by the governing authorities, they responded in Acts 4:19-20 “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.”

Likewise God rebuked the Jesus for observing the ceremonial law while disobeying the moral law. Hosea 6:6 “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” The ceremonial law is always second to the moral. Baptism is also second to the gospel. Sacrifice is always second to showing mercy. That’s rule five: The law is always binding; yet some commands cannot be obeyed at all times. No “obedience” is true that fails in one part of the law, neither is “obedience” true if lesser laws are obeyed and greater ones ignored.

Rule 6: The law binds us according to our station to help others according to their station honor God with the commandments.

Denial: No “obedience” is true obedience if you have no regard for your neighbor’s relationship with God.

¹⁰ Remember what this means, because the unbeliever is bound to the law in a different way. The unbeliever is bound to both obedience and punishment. The believer is free from the punishment of the law through Christ (Romans 8:1), but He is bound to the obedience of the law (Romans 3:31) and to transgress the law is sin (1 John 3:4).

¹¹ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology, Vol. 2*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 1994), pg. 36 pg. 36

That language “according our our station” is important. It just means that depending on where God has appointed us determines how we are to help our neighbor honor God’s commands. Parents are not just to look after their own souls, they are to especially care for the souls of their children—instructing them to obey God. Deuteronomy 6:6-7 “And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”¹² In a different station, Paul recognized it was his appointment to help the church obey God. He said in 2 Corinthians 1:24 “Not that we lord it over your faith, but we work with you for your joy, for you stand firm in your faith.”

Conversely, we are to not to encourage our neighbor in anyway in their disobedience towards God. Paul extends this to pastors by warning them in 1 Timothy 5:22 not to lay hands on anyone to quickly because it can be a means to taking part of their sins. In Ephesians 5:11 he tells the whole church “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.” That’s rule six: The law binds us according to our station to help others according to their station honor God with the commandments. No “obedience” is true obedience if you have no regard for your neighbor’s relationship with God.

The takeaway

As I was going over these rules and thinking about them carefully, I realized in a deeper way that I am failing in all of these commandments. The takeaway from these rules is to remind us that the law is impossible to obey perfectly. Isaiah 64:6 “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our

¹² This is one of the explicit reasons that God gives regarding His purposes for Abraham. Genesis 18:19 “For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.”

iniquities, like the wind, take us away.” All our best attempts at obedience are corrupt. That’s why we need a Redeemer. The law increases our knowledge of sin, so that our knowledge of grace increases. “The purpose of God in showing believers the evil of their own hearts is to make them prize more highly the grace and all sufficiency of Jesus.”¹³

Q.115 Since no one in this life can obey the Ten Commandments perfectly, why does God want them preached so pointedly?

A. First, so that the longer we live the more we may come to know our sinfulness and the more eagerly look to Christ for forgiveness of sins and righteousness...¹⁴

¹³ *The Letters of John Newton*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2015), pg. xii-xiii

¹⁴ Ps. 32:5; Rom. 3:19-26; 7:7, 24-25; 1 John 1:9

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Second, so that we may never stop striving, and never stop praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, to be renewed more and more after God’s image, until after this life we reach our goal: perfection.

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1 Cor. 9:24; Phil. 3:12-14; 1 John 3:1-3