

Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin

(Translation by Henry Beveridge)

Men's Theology Study – July 21, 2021– 6:30 pm

Book 2 – Of the knowledge of God the Redeemer, in Christ, as first manifested to the fathers, under the law, and thereafter to us under the gospel.

Chapter 8 (s. 13-34) – Exposition of the Moral Law – The First Table

1. First Commandment (s. 13-16): *I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.*

- a. To avoid contemptuous obedience to the Moral Law, God provides a triple sanction in the preamble.

DQ: How do people contemptuously obey God?

- i. First, God “claims to himself power and authority to command, that he may impress the chosen people with the necessity of obedience...”
 - As the name LORD, God has all power and lawful dominion and authority to require obedience to his law. To withdraw from his law would be to withdraw from the one in whom we have our being (s. 13).
- ii. Second, God “holds forth a promise of favor, as a means of alluring them to the study of holiness...”
 - After showing a right to demand obedience as LORD, he has allures us to obedience as “your God.” How? By showing that he had chosen to himself a people, to do good to them in this life, and in the life to come (s. 14).
- iii. Third, God “reminds them of his kindness, that he may convict them of ingratitude, if they fail to make a suitable return.”
 - As one who “brought you out of the land of Egypt,” God fixes our thoughts on his delivering us from spiritual bondage (s. 15).

b. Four Categories of Obedience

Quote: “...nothing which belongs to (God) is to be transferred to any other (s. 16).”

- i. Adoration: Veneration and worship and bringing our consciences into subjection with his Law
- ii. Trust: Securely resting in God under all his attributes and consider ourselves happy to be in subjection and communion with him.
- iii. Invocation: Continually retaking ourselves to his promised aid as the only resource in every case of need.
- iv. Thanksgiving: Gratitude which ascribes to him the praise of all our blessings.

DQ: Calvin wrote, “Not a particle of his glory is to be withheld: everything belonging to him must be reserved to him entire (s. 16).” What do the words “before me” indicate and increase?

2. Second Commandment (s. 17-21): *You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them...*

- a. "The purport of the commandment, therefore, is, that he will not have his legitimate worship profaned by superstitious rites (s. 17)."

DQ: What is the regulative principle and how does it guard us from breaking the 2nd Commandment?

- b. Two parts to the 2nd Commandment: (1) Subjecting God to our senses. (2) Representing him under any visible shape (s. 17).
- c. The 2nd Commandment comes with a warning that God is jealous and will visit the iniquity of the fathers to the 3rd and 4th generation, but showing mercy to thousands. What does this mean?
 - i. Temporal punishments where sons bear the sins of their parents by being inflicted for their own safety (s. 19).
 - ii. A curse from the Lord righteously falls not only on the head of the guilty, but also on his lineage. How? The father is deprived of the Spirit and acts wickedly, and so the son becomes forsaken by God follows the father's wicked example (s. 19).
 - iii. Positively, not only in Christian education, but by consequence of the blessing promised in the covenant (s. 21).

DQ: What about children of wicked parents who are converted, and children of godly parents who go wayward?

3. Third Commandment (s. 22-27): *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.*

- a. "...the majesty of the name of God is to be held sacred. In sum, therefore, it means, that we must not profane it by using it irreverently or contemptuously (s. 22)." Calvin mentions observing three things to sanctify the name of God:
 - i. First: Our thoughts and words must bespeak of God's excellence, reverence of his name, and extol his greatness.
 - ii. Second: We must not pervert his sacred word and mysteries.
 - iii. Third: We must not defame his works.
- b. Oaths: Calling God to witness that what we say is true (s. 23).
 - i. Oaths are of a "species of divine worship" because by "appealing to the name of the Lord, and calling him to witness, we are justly said to declare our own religious veneration of him (s. 23)."
 - ii. When we call God to witness the truthfulness of what we say is true, we imprecate (i.e. utter or invoke curses) God's vengeance for perjury if it is false (s. 24).
 - iii. We also violate this commandment when we use it for oaths that are superfluous (s. 25).

DQ: What are some examples of lawful oaths in which it is proper to invoke God's name?

4. Fourth Commandment (s. 28-34): *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, etc.*

- a. Purpose: "...being dead to our own affections and works, we meditate on the kingdom of God, and in order to such meditation, have recourse to the means which he has appointed (s. 28)."

DQ: Has the 4th Commandment been abrogated through Christ?

- b. Foreshadowing Christ, the 4th Commandment required the following (s. 28):
 - i. It gave Israel a type of spiritual rest by which they were to cease from their own works, and allow God to work in them.
 - ii. A stated day in which Israel was to assemble to hear the Law and perform religious rites.
 - iii. A day of rest for servants.
- c. External Sign and Thing Signified (s. 29-31)
 - i. The external rest signified the internal work of God. "We must resign our own will, yield up our heart, and abandon all lusts of the flesh. In short, we must desist from all acts of our own mind, that God working in us, we may rest in him, as the apostle also teaches (Heb 3:13; 4:3, 9) (s. 29)."
 - ii. Why Seven (s. 30)?
 - Israel was following the example of God to spur on their zeal.
 - Seven being the number of perfection in the Bible, Sabbath was the seventh day to show the perpetuity of the commandment.
 - Caused Israel to anticipate the coming perfection of the last day, aspiring to perfection.
 - iii. External Sign Realized in Christ (s. 31)
 - "...on the advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, the ceremonial part of the commandment was abolished. He is the truth, at whose presence all the emblems vanish; the body, at the sight of which the shadows disappear. He, I say, is the true completion of the Sabbath."
 - As a result, we should devote our whole lives to Christ, not just one day, and should have nothing to do any longer with superstitious observance of days.
- d. Sabbath still important (s. 32)
 - i. We are still called to gather for peaching, sacraments, and public prayer.
 - ii. We are still called to give our servants and laborers rest from labor.
 - iii. We don't assemble daily because of human weakness to assemble too often and we should adopt the rule which God has imposed on the Church throughout the ages.
- e. Physical and Spiritual Observance on Sunday (s. 33-34)
 - i. We still maintain a weekly gathering in order to "retain decency, order, and peace in the church (s. 33)."
 - ii. The day was shifted from Saturday to Sunday because of Christ's resurrection and to symbolize the end of superstitious rites (s. 34).
 - iii. How can we observe the 4th Commandment?
 - First, "...that during our whole lives we may aim at a constant rest from our own works, in order that the Lord may work in us by his Spirit."
 - Second, "...that every individual, as he has opportunity, may diligently exercise himself in private, in pious meditation on the works of God, and, at the same time, that all may observe the legitimate order appointed by the church, for the hearing of the word, the administration of the sacraments, and public prayer."
 - Third, "...that we may avoid oppressing those who are subject to us."

DQ: Does Calvin's view of the Christian Sabbath differ from the Westminster Confession of Faith 21.7?