

Institutes of the Christian Religion by John Calvin
(Translation by Henry Beveridge)
Men's Theology Study – August 4, 2021, 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. 35-59) – Exposition of the Moral Law – The Second Table

1. Fifth Commandment (s. 35-38): *Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.*
 - a. The Meaning: "...since the Lord takes pleasure in the preservation of his own ordinance, the degrees of dignity appointed by him must be held inviolable (s. 35)."
 - b. Sum: "The sum of the commandment, therefore, will be, that we are to look up to those whom the Lord has set over us, yielding them honor, gratitude, and obedience. Hence it follows, that every thing in the way of contempt, ingratitude, or disobedience, is forbidden (s. 35)."

DQ: Why did the Lord give the commandment as "honor your parents" instead of masters, kings, prophets, priests, etc? Does the commandment include others outside of our parents?

- c. Obligation: The fifth commandment obliges us to obedience even if "those on whom the honor is conferred are deserving or not (s. 36)."
 - d. Blessing: For the Israelites, the promise of long life was for them "to enjoy the possession of the land which is to be given thee in testimony of my favor (s. 37)." Christians today may also share in this promise in the sense that "the whole earth is blessed to believers" as we "justly class the present life among the number of divine blessings (s. 37)."
 - e. Limit: This honor has a limit. "Therefore the submission yielded to them should be a step in our ascent to the supreme Parent, and hence, if they instigate us to transgress the law, they deserve not to be regarded as parents, but as strangers attempting to seduce us from obedience to our true Father (s. 38)."
2. Sixth Commandment (s. 39-40): *You shall not murder.*
 - a. The Meaning: "...since the Lord has bound the whole human race by a kind of unity, the safety of all ought to be considered as entrusted to each (s. 39)."
 - b. Sum: "...all violence and injustice, and every kind of harm from which our neighbor's body suffers is prohibited. Accordingly, we are required faithfully to do what in us lies to defend the life of our neighbor; to promote whatever tends to his tranquility, to be vigilant in warding off harm, and, when danger comes, to assist in removing it (s. 39)."

DQ: Does this commandment require Christians to be pacifists?

- c. Reason: "Man is both the image of God and our flesh (s. 40)."

DQ: What are examples of active ways we violate this commandment? What are examples of passive ways we violate this commandment?

3. Seventh Commandment (s. 41-44): *You shall not commit adultery.*
 - a. The Meaning: "...as God loves chastity and purity, we ought to guard against all uncleanness (s. 41)."
 - b. Sum: "...we must not defile ourselves with any impurity or libidinous (i.e., lustfulness) excess (s. 41)." This includes the act of adultery, but also every form of lust and cohabitation.
 - c. Virginity and Singleness (s. 42-43): Virginity is not a virtue to be despised and singleness is a gift for some.
 - i. Matt 19:12, "For there are eunuchs² who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs¹ who have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs³ who have made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. Let the one who is able to receive this receive it."
 - εὐνοῦχος (eunoûchos): [1] a castrated male person, *eunuch*; [2] a human male who, without a physical operation, is by nature incapable of begetting children, *impotent*; [3] a human male who abstains from marriage, without being impotent, *a celibate* (BDAG).
 - ii. Calvin's counsel for those who do not desire virginity or singleness.
 - "The Lord prohibits fornication, therefore he requires purity and chastity. The only method which each has of preserving it is to measure himself by his capacity (s. 43)."
 - "If he has not the power of subduing his passion, let him understand that the Lord has made it obligatory on him to marry (s. 43)."
 - Don't be deceived by marriage; it does not absolve all sinful sexual desires. "And let not a man flatter himself, that because he abstains from the outward act he cannot be accused of unchastity. His mind may in the meantime be inwardly inflamed with lust. For Paul's definition of chastity is purity of mind, combined with purity of body (s. 43)."
 - iii. Calvin's counsel for those who are married.
 - "Wherefore, let spouses consider that all things are not lawful for them. Let there be sobriety in the behavior of the husband toward the wife, and of the wife in her turn toward the husband; each acting as not to do any thing unbecoming the dignity and temperance of married life (s. 44)."
 - Marriage should "exhibit measure and modesty—not run to the extreme of wantonness (s. 44)." Calvin gives the example from Ambrose about a man who did not practice such things towards his wife and committed adultery with her.

DQ: What is wantonness? How might a person violate the 7th Commandment with, not against, their spouse?

4. Eighth Commandment (s. 45-46): *You shall not steal.*
 - a. The Meaning: "...injustice being an abomination to God, we must render to every man his due (s. 45)."
 - b. Various Violations:

- i. Longing after other men's goods.
 - ii. Not exerting oneself honestly in preserving one's own goods.
 - iii. The violent stealing, like when a man's property is forcibly plundered and carried off.
 - iv. Malicious imposture, as when someone's property is fraudulently intercepted.
 - v. Taking possession of someone's property with a semblance of justice.
 - vi. Sycophancy: deceiving someone to give under the pretense of donation.
5. Ninth Commandment (s. 47-48): *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*
- a. The Meaning: "...since God, who is truth, abhors falsehood, we must cultivate unfeigned truth toward each other (s. 47)."
 - b. Sum: "...we must not by calumnies (i.e., false statements) and false accusations injure our neighbor's name, or by falsehood impair his fortunes; in fine, that we must not injure any one from petulance, or a love of evil-speaking (s. 47)." Positively, this also includes assisting, by asserting the truth, the maintenance of our neighbor's good name and estate.

DQ: It's obvious how this commandment applies to our tongues, but how does it apply to our minds and ears?

6. Tenth Commandment (s. 49-50): *You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.*
- a. The Meaning: "Since the Lord would have the whole soul pervaded with love, any feeling of an adverse nature must be banished from our minds (s. 49)."
 - b. Sum: "...no thought be permitted to insinuate itself into our minds, and inflame them with a noxious concupiscence tending to our neighbor's loss (s. 49)."
 - c. Is it superfluous to have this 10th Commandment in addition to the 7th Commandment since the 10th appears to be so close in essence? Calvin responds by distinguishing between the design and covetousness.
 - i. The Design: A "deliberate consent of the will, after passion has taken possession of the mind (s. 49)."
 - ii. Covetousness is different because it "may exist without such deliberation and assent, when the mind is only stimulated and ticked by vain and perverse objects (s. 49)."
 - iii. The Point: The 7th includes intent, while the 10th deals not with deliberate intent, but rather with covetousness, which can exist without deliberate intent. Calvin is condemning both sinful inclinations and promptings.

DQ: What is concupiscence? Is it sinful?

7. The End of the Law (s. 51-59)
- a. It is To Love God and Man (s. 51-55)
 - i. How can we learn true piety? From the Law. Why (s. 51)?
 - Obedience to the Law fulfills all righteousness.
 - God reveals his own character in the Law.
 - "...our mind must be completely filled with love to God, and then this love must forthwith flow out toward our neighbor (s. 51)."

- ii. If all 10 of the Commandments are important, then why isn't the first table mentioned more often throughout Scripture, especially in the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles?
 - In the second table of the Law "therein the cultivation of righteousness and integrity is best manifested (s. 52)."
 - Think about the Rich Young Ruler in Matt 19. Jesus mentions only the second table of the Law. Why? "The affection of the heart was not visible, and hypocrites were diligent in the observance of ceremonies; but the works of charity were of such a nature as to be a solid attestation of righteousness (s. 52)."
- iii. Are we to conclude then that living innocently with men is a more complete summary of righteousness than living piously toward God?
 - No. Why not? "...because no man...observes charity in all respects, unless he seriously fear God, such observance is a proof of piety also (s. 53)."
 - Demonstrating love for our fellow man is a testimony to "a pious fear of God, if we truly possess it (s. 53)."
- b. Corruption of the Law by the Schoolmen (i.e., the Catholic Scholastics) (s. 56-59)
 - i. The Schoolmen call the commandments of Christ "counsels (s. 56-57)."
 - They make them binding for monks, but not for ordinary Christians. Why? "The reason they assign for not receiving them as laws is, that they seem too heavy and burdensome, especially to Christians, who are under the law of grace (s. 56)."
 - ii. The Schoolmen distinguish some sins as venial and others as mortal (s. 58-59).
 - Venial Sins: Desire unaccompanied with deliberate assent, and not remaining long in the heart.
 - Mortal Sins: A sin which destroys the grace of God in the heart, separating the person from God.
 - Calvin's Response:
 - The 10 Commandment Condemns so-called venial sins. "Has some undue longing sprung up in our mind? Then we are chargeable with covetousness, and stand convicted as transgressors of the Law (s. 58)."
 - As Augustine states, we weigh our sins against Scripture which states, "the wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23)."
 - We must consider not only what has been commanded, but also the majesty of the one commanding it (s. 59). Therefore, all sin is mortal.