

LECTURE 7: THE FIFTH, SIXTH, AND SEVENTH COMMANDMENTS

Fifth Commandment: Honor parents

—WLC 123-33, WSC 63-66

This principle of honoring one's parents is by our standards applied to all relationships, as appropriate, as to superiors, inferiors, or equals. Scriptures which support this commandment being applied to others than parents include the following:

- Parents: cf. sin of disobedience, Rom 1:30
- Rulers: Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-17
- Masters (employers): Eph 6:5-8; Col 3:22-25; 1 Pet 2:18; Phlm
- Church officers: Heb 13:17; 1 Pet 5:5

This commandment applies to children in the home, even as they grow older. Note the commendation of the Rechabites (Jer 35) and the warnings of Jesus and Paul (Mark 7:9-13; 1 Tim 5:8)

It should be noted that the Westminster standards point out that authorities and equals, as well as subordinates ("inferiors"), are included in this commandment. Each person needs to fulfill his or her obligations with regard to others in a manner befitting the relationship between them. The duties of superiors and of equals are spelled out in the WLC #129-132.

This is the first commandment with a specific promise of reward. For the nation it was a promise; for individuals, a general rule (cf. Eph 6:2-3).

Sixth Commandment: No murder

—WLC 134-36, WSC 67-69

Meaning of the commandment

In order to understand the prohibition in this command clearly, it is necessary to note the words used in the Hebrew and Greek:

רָצַח *ratsach*, "to murder, kill"

φονεύω *phoneuo*, "to murder"

These biblical words never are used with the following meanings:

- (1) God's killing of a person
- (2) Killing of animals

(3) Public killing in war

Note principle of self defense applied to individuals (Exod 22:2-3) and to nations (Neh 4:14).

(4) Public killing in criminal justice

That the sixth commandment cannot be used against capital punishment is clear from such passages as Gen 9:6; Num 35; Deut 19:10-19; Rom 13:1-4; Acts 25:11, where capital punishment is specifically required and committed to the state.

Rather, these words consistently refer to killing by private individuals in one of these contexts:

(1) Premeditated killing for hatred

Num 35:20-21 (to be killed by the “blood avenger,” גֹּאֵל הַדָּם *gôel hādām*)

(2) Premeditated killing for greed

Case of Ahab, 1 Kgs 21:19

Case of David, 2 Sam 12:9 (uses different word, הָרָג *hārag*; cf. 1 Kgs 15:5)

Both of these, (1) & (2), are clearly murder, and the Bible demands the death penalty for them.

(3) Premeditated killing for revenge

This was approved in the primitive justice system, before kings reigned in Israel. But it was limited by various legal requirements (Deut 19:15-19; after kings were in place, they were to enforce this law, 1 Sam 12:13-15; in the NT as well, Rom 13:4, “avenger”).

(4) Accidental killing

This also was forbidden, but the sin was not as grave as murder, and the civil penalty was less severe (Num 35:22-28).

Related issues

Several public issues relate to this commandment. They will be dealt with under special topics in readings and class discussion.

1) War and pacifism

2) Capital punishment (for a good article supporting capital punishment, see J. Daryl Charles, “Crime, The Criminal and Capital Justice,” *JETS* 38:3 [Sept. 1995] 429-441)

3) Various issues in medical ethics

[see Franklin E. Payne, Jr., M.D., *Biblical/Medical Ethics: The Christian and the Practice of Medicine* (Mott Media, 1985)—an excellent help; also see the *WRS Journal* 5:2 (Aug 1998), devoted to these issues]

- Abortion, infanticide
- Some methods of birth control
- Alternate conception methods (*in vitro* fertilization; literally, “in the glass”)
- Tissue engineering; embryonic stem cell research (use aborted fetuses to get tissue to help others with diseases, as Parkinson’s disease or Alzheimer’s disease)

- Cloning

[for cloning, see Glen G. Scorgie and Claire F. Evans Jones, “Human Life Is Not Sheep: An Ethical Perspective on Cloning,” *JETS* 40/4 (Dec., 1997), 663-79]

- Euthanasia, active and passive

4) Suicide

Cf. Acts 16:28; Eph 5:28-29; see WLC #135-136

5) Alcohol, tobacco, drugs, etc.

[See Herbert Fingarette, *Heavy Drinking: The Myth of Alcoholism as a Disease* (Univ. of Calif., 1988)—secular, but good on responsibility]

Scope of the sixth commandment

According to the biblical method of interpreting the commandments, this command reaches the heart, and it requires the opposite duty, love to one’s neighbor.

Jesus taught that this commandment reaches the heart, and requires one not to hate or belittle his neighbor (Matt 5:21-26). Political or economic systems, such as Communism or Nazism, which do not recognize the individual as a creature of God will often break this commandment horribly, inspiring in the people the idea that individuals are to be hated or disregarded because of their class or opinions.

Since God created man in his own image, and since man still bears that image, man’s life is regarded as sacred. Each of us is obligated to maintain and preserve our own life, and the lives of others.

Seventh Commandment: No adultery

Scope of the commandment

—WLC 137-39, WSC 70-72, WCF 24 (on marriage and divorce)

The terms used in this commandment are נָאֵץ *nā’āp* (in the Qal and Piel) in the OT and μοιχεύω *moicheuo* in the NT. These terms in the Bible usually describe adultery with married persons. This type of sin is doubly heinous, in that not only do the offending parties sin against God and themselves, but also against the covenant they made before God, and against the innocent party or parties. Cf. Prov 5; 6:20-35.

However, this prohibition does not exhaust the meaning of this commandment. According to WLC 99, rule #6, similar sins are included in this prohibition. And, in fact, the Bible often condemns all sins of a sexual nature with the more general terms נָאֵץ *nāzāh* and πορνεύω *porneuo*, and their related words. These words describe all kinds of sexual sins —fornication, adultery, harlotry, homosexual activity, and other perversions.

As Jesus pointed out, this commandment includes not only outward actions, but the inward thoughts and desires of the heart.

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matt 5:27-28)

Ethics of marriage

Marriage was instituted by God before the fall into sin (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4-6). God did this because man in the image of God is both male and female, and marriage is good for man (Gen 1:27; 2:18). A faithful marriage is a good thing (Heb 13:4). It should never be forbidden (1 Tim 4:3).

The Westminster Confession (24:2) lists the purposes of marriage as follows:

- Mutual help of husband and wife (Gen 2:18)
- Increase of mankind with a legitimate seed (Gen 1:28; 9:1; Mal 2:15)
- Increase of the church with a holy seed (Gen 18:18-19; 1 Cor 7:14)
- Preventing of uncleanness (1 Cor 7:2, 9; 1 Thess 4:3-7)

The Roman Catholic Church and some other groups have taken Paul’s instruction in 1 Cor 7 to favor celibacy, and even to require celibacy for its ministers. The passages above show that marriage does not make a Christian more carnal, and less qualified to lead in the church (1 Cor 9:5).

For an excellent discussion of the responsibility of fidelity in marriage versus the modern idea of “intimacy,” see Tim Stafford, “Intimacy: Our Latest Sexual Fantasy,” *Christianity Today* (Jan. 26, 1987), 21-27.

Marriage and children

See J. J. Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, ch. 2 “Contraception,” ch. 3, “Reproductive Technologies.”

The Roman Catholic teaching that the begetting of children is the primary purpose of marriage, is wrong. This false idea is what leads that church to deny the use of all forms of birth control (excepting abstinence from sexual intercourse). They maintain that the primary purpose of sexual intercourse, and even of marriage itself, is procreation. Hence, birth control is sinful, as it seeks to contravene God’s purpose. Protestants have opposed this position, asserting that sexual union in marriage is in itself a good and desirable thing. We would oppose only those forms of birth control which destroy a newly formed person who has been already conceived, or would endanger the health of the mother or father.

Recently there have been medical techniques developed which enable childless couples to have biological children. Some of these methods involve steps which either destroy fertilized ova, thus breaking the sixth commandment, or introducing a third person into the procreative process, thus disrupting the family unit and breaking the seventh commandment. It is important for couples to recognize God’s sovereignty in the giving of children (Ps 127), and not to absolutize their natural desire for children from their own bodies, and thereby destroy what is even more precious, the sanctity of their marriage.