

## CHAPTER 6

### SURVEY OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

#### First Commandment: No other gods

—WLC 103-06, WSC 45-48

[Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments* (1692), divides consideration of this commandment into two parts: (1) That we must have God for our God, (2) That we must have no other.]

#### *We must have no other god*

#### Everyone has a god or gods

While all people have God as their God in the sense that he created them and rules over them and that they must give account to him, this commandment requires that we acknowledge God as our God.

In a sense everyone has a god of some sort. One of the definitions for “god” in *Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary* is “a person or thing of supreme value.” Everyone has such a person or thing, considered as of supreme value in his or her life, including even atheists and agnostics.

In biblical times atheism or agnosticism was rare. The Bible frequently mentions the gods of the nations that were not the true God.

- “On that same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD.” (Exod 12:12)
- “Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?” (Exod 15:11)

- “Now I know that the LORD is greater than all other gods, for he did this to those who had treated Israel arrogantly.” (Exod 18:11)

### **Idolatry is forbidden**

[Note the extensive discussion of idolatry and its manifestations in worship in Calvin’s day, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.10-12; 4.17.36; 4.18.18).]

The having or recognizing or worshiping of any god other than the true God is considered idolatry, and is condemned in the strongest terms, not only in this commandment, but throughout Scripture. These are typical examples:

- “Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold.” (Exod 20:23)
- “Be careful to do everything I have said to you. Do not invoke the names of other gods; do not let them be heard on your lips. . . . Do not bow down before their gods or worship them or follow their practices. You must demolish them and break their sacred stones to pieces. . . . Do not make a covenant with them or with their gods. Do not let them live in your land, or they will cause you to sin against me, because the worship of their gods will certainly be a snare to you.” (Exod 23:13, 24, 32-33)
- “So Moses went back to the LORD and said, ‘Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold.’” (Exod 32:31)
- “Do not turn to idols or make gods of cast metal for yourselves. I am the LORD your God.” (Lev 19:4)
- “Do not follow other gods, the gods of the peoples around you.” (Deut 6:14)
- “For they will turn your sons away from following me to serve other gods, and the LORD’s anger will burn against you and will quickly destroy you.” (Deut 7:4)
- “For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, won’t he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge.” (1 Cor 8:10)

Especially interesting are the passages that ridicule the stupidity of making and worshiping idols.

- “Of what value is an idol, since a man has carved it? Or an image that teaches lies? For he who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak. Woe to

him who says to wood, ‘Come to life!’ Or to lifeless stone, ‘Wake up!’ Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it.” (Hab 2:18-19)

- (See especially the extended satire of Isa 44:9-20)

### **God sees and is offended by idolatry**

Note that, as our standards point out, the phrase “before me” (עַל-פָּנָי *‘al panay*, literally, “before my face”) means “in front of my face” or “in my sight.” It does not mean that God forbids us to have other gods in greater honor than him; rather it means that we are to have no other gods at all, for he sees all that we do (WLC 106, WSC 48). Idolatry cannot be hidden from God.

“Cursed is the man who carves an image or casts an idol—a thing detestable to the LORD, the work of the craftsman’s hands—and sets it up in secret.’ Then all the people shall say, ‘Amen!’” (Deut 27:15)

### **Manifestations of idolatry**

Thomas Watson notes these ways we can express idolatry:

- To trust in anything more than God
  - Riches
  - Arm of flesh (“We have broken our parliament-crutches, by leaning too hard upon them.”)
  - Wisdom
  - Civility
  - Duties
  - Graces shown in us

- To love anything more than God

Cf. Ezek 14:3-7, idols in the heart

- Our estate
- Our pleasure
- Our belly
- Our children

## ***We must have God for our God***

Every commandment has, along with sins forbidden, the opposite duties required. The first commandment requires the recognition of the true God as our God, and our rendering to him the worship and obedience he requires of us.

Note that the true God is the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Any other God is not the true God.

- “It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me [Jesus].” (John 6:45)
- “Then they asked him, ‘Where is your father?’ ‘You do not know me or my Father,’ Jesus replied. ‘If you knew me, you would know my Father also.’” (John 8:19)
- “Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me.’” (John 8:42)

Watson provides a helpful outline here also:

- We must acknowledge God to be God
- We must choose God to be our God
  - Requires knowledge of God
  - Requires mature deliberation
- We must enter into solemn covenant that he will be our God
- We must give him adoration
  - More than civil respect or veneration; religious adoration
- We must have a holy filial fear for God
- We must trust God
  - This trust at all times
- We must love God
  - “In the godly, fear and love kiss each other.”

- We must obey God
- Two applications:
  - Atheism is condemned.
  - Professing Christians who live as though there were no God are condemned.
    - Christians must believe in God, love God, worship him as God.

## **Second Commandment: No images**

—WLC 107-10, WSC 49-52

This commandment contains three prohibitions:

- 1) Make image of anything (God or creature)
- 2) Bow down to them (in worship)
- 3) Serve them

These three prohibitions must be taken together, not in isolation. The Puritans tended to take the first prohibition by itself, thus forbidding any representation of God or even Jesus Christ, even in the mind (WLC 109). But such an extreme interpretation fails to take into account the full implications of the incarnation, with the apostles and eye-witnesses of Jesus remembering him, and the later appearances to Paul and to John; it also fails to explain the various figures used in the tabernacle and temple. Likewise, the commandment itself forbids images of all creatures, not only the deity; however, the purpose of false worship is evidently in view only.

One general principle which has come from the second commandment is the “exclusive” principle of worship. God has ordained how he wishes us to worship him. For example, he condemned the worship of himself by means of the calf idol by Mt. Sinai. Our worship should follow these lines and should not include items not required by Scripture.

On occasion this exclusive principle also has been pushed to extremes, inconsistently applying the general principles of legitimate human initiative (cf. WCF 1:6). For example, some Puritans, fighting the abuses and superstitions of Roman Catholicism, went so far as to forbid musical instruments in churches (an ironical position, since the Bible nowhere commands church buildings themselves).

Absolutizing this principle can be opposed by referring to the many innovations in Solomon’s temple (10 tables and lamp stands, 2 pillars, 12 bulls, etc.), apparently of human initiation (but see 1 Chr 28:11-13, 19), which God approved and blessed (2 Chr 5:13-14; 7:1). An even stronger argument is Jesus’ attendance at the feast of dedication (John 10:22), a

religious festival begun by Judas Maccabee in 165 B.C. to celebrate the liberation of the temple from the Syrians.

A similar move toward an extreme legalism is evident in Jewish history around the time of Jesus. In earlier periods Jews used pictures and images not only in idolatrous worship, but also in nonreligious decorations (see G. Ernest Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, rev. ed., pp. 90, 124, 161, 180, 206). When the Jews returned from the captivity and renounced idolatry, they also began to exclude all pictures, except geometric designs and pictures of plants, so that by the time of Christ all Jewish art was thus standardized (examples of coins, see *ZPEB* 1/905, and pages after 896; for archaeological remains, see Yagael Yadin, *Masada*, pp. 123-25, 129).

It has been suggested that the “thousands” to whom God shows mercy in this commandment are not just thousands of individuals, but thousands of generations (cf. Deut 5:29; 7:9; 1 Chr 16:15; Ps 105:8; WLC 110).

### **Third Commandment: God’s name**

—WLC 111-14, WSC 53-56

God’s name, as in general Hebrew usage, is the equivalent of his attributes and person (Deut 28:58; Ps 20:1).

Not only are we to reverence his name, but we are not to “take it” in vain, that is, assume it in a hypocritical fashion. We misuse the name of God or Christ when we claim to be “Christian” but live as a non-Christian.

According to our standards, this commandment requires reverence for all the ways by which God makes himself known. This requires respect for his word and work, including his creation. The Christian is not insensitive to nature, as some “ecologists” suppose.

[See John Battle, “The Third Commandment and Godly Environmentalism,” *WRS Journal* 8:1 (Feb 2001): 5-10.]

As with other commandments, Jewish superstition about the name of God, Yahweh, came even to forbid its being used. After a time it was only spoken one time a year, on the Day of Atonement, by the high priest in the Most Holy Place, then later it was not spoken at all. (See Josephus, *Ant.* 2:12:4; cf. the note on p. 60 of the Whiston ed.)

### ***Excursus: Teaching of WCF, Ch. 22, “Of Lawful Oaths and Vows”***

## 1-4. Oaths

As opposed to vows, which are solemn promises to God, oaths are taken to prove the truthfulness of what someone is saying, whether or not it contains a promise. Although not frequent, the taking of both oaths and vows is an important part of life. It was also important in Bible times (cf. Matt 23:16-22). The *Westminster Confession of Faith* first discusses oaths, then it discusses vows.

1. Definition of oaths: “A lawful oath is a part of religious worship, wherein, upon just occasion, the person swearing, solemnly calleth God to witness what he asserteth or promiseth; and to judge him according to the truth or falsehood of what he sweareth.”

Notice that these oaths involve the name of God, and thereby are acts of worship. They recognize him as able to judge the truthfulness of what is said, and to enforce it at the last day.

2. Form and occasion of oaths: “The name of God only is that by which men ought to swear, and therein it is to be used with all holy fear and reverence; therefore to swear vainly or rashly by that glorious and dreadful name, or to swear at all by any other thing, is sinful and to be abhorred. Yet as, in matters of weight and moment, an oath is warranted by the Word of God, under the New Testament, as well as under the Old; so a lawful oath, being imposed by lawful authority, in such matters, ought to be taken.”

God has commanded that all such oaths be taken in his own name (Deut 6:13). Therefore, to swear by anything else or by anyone else is wrong, since God alone is in a position to judge our oath. Oaths are permitted in both the Old Testament and the New Testament (Heb 6:16; 2 Cor. 1:23). But they are to be taken only in the most serious circumstances (cf. Jas 5:12). They should not be refused when required by the civil authority, as the Quakers and some other groups do (Ezra 10:5). This is especially the case when called upon to give testimony under oath (for example, Exod 22:7-11).

3. Truthfulness of oaths: “Whosoever taketh an oath ought duly to consider the weightiness of so solemn an act, and therein to avouch nothing but what he is fully persuaded is the truth. Neither may any man bind himself by oath to anything but what is good and just, and what he believeth so to be, and what he is able and resolved to perform.”

Of course, to lie, even without an oath, is a sin, included under the ninth commandment. But to lie under oath is a much graver one, since it specifically invokes the name of God. When under oath, we must tell the full truth. Likewise, binding oneself with an oath is much more significant than a simple statement, as the following sections explain.

4. Content of oaths: “An oath is to be taken in the plain and common sense of the words, without equivocation or mental reservation. It cannot oblige to sin; but in any thing not sinful, being taken, it binds to performance, although to a man’s own hurt; nor is it to be violated, although made to heretics or infidels.”

Oaths are to be spoken and understood in their plain meaning (Ps 24:4). We are to fulfill our promises made under oath, even if it means we must sacrifice to do it (Ps 15:4). And we should honor oaths made even to unbelievers (Josh 9:18-19; cf. 2 Sam 21:1). This last point is important, for the Roman Catholic Church believes that oaths made to heretics do not have to be kept; they broke their oath to John Huss, and tried to do so to Martin Luther.

### **5-7. Vows**

As mentioned earlier, vows are a particular type of oath, in which God is called to witness to guarantee that a particular person will fulfill a promise he or she is making.

5. Definition of vows: “A vow is of the like nature with a promissory oath, and ought to be made with the like religious care, and to be performed with the like faithfulness.”

We note here that a vow is a promise to do something, couched in the form of an oath, calling God to our witness. Common vows we take today are for baptism, marriage, and ordination. In a more indirect way, the Lord’s Supper includes elements of a vow as well.

6. Purpose of vows: “It is not to be made to any creature, but to God alone: and, that it may be accepted, it is to be made voluntarily; out of faith and conscience of duty; in way of thankfulness for mercy received; or for obtaining of what we want: whereby we more strictly bind ourselves to necessary duties; or to other things, so far and so long as they may fitly conduce thereunto.”

As with oaths in general, so vows are to be made only to God (Ps 76:11). In order to be acceptable, vows must be voluntary, springing from the heart. Normally, vows are made to God in order to emphasize thanksgiving (as in Ps 50:14), or to obtain a special request (as in Gen 28:20-22 and in 1 Sam 1:11). The vows taken are to either bind ourselves to already existing duties, or to activities consistent with them.

7. Content of vows: “No man may vow to do any thing forbidden in the Word of God, or what would hinder any duty therein commanded, or which is not in his own power, and for the performance whereof he hath no promise or ability from God. In which respects, popish monastical vows of perpetual single life, professed poverty, and regular obedience, are so far

from being degrees of higher perfection, that they are superstitious and sinful snares, in which no Christian may entangle himself.”

Vows should be reasonable and just, not sinful, as those of Jezebel in 1 Kgs 19:2, Herod Antipas in Mark 6:23-26, and the Jewish fanatics in Acts 23:12-14. Vows should take into account the ability of the person to fulfill them. Therefore, it is wrong to encourage people to take the superstitious monastic vows, which require things most people should not or even cannot give (Matt 19:11-12; 1 Cor 7:2, 9, 23; Eph 4:28). In the Old Testament God protected women and children from their own rash vows by allowing the husband or father to negate the vow (Num 30).

This section leads us to consider the vow of Jephthah. Some believe that he actually sacrificed his daughter; others that he dedicated her to tabernacle service and perpetual virginity (Judg 11:30-39). In any case, Jephthah is not praised for that as much as for being a man of faith in general (Heb 11:32).

## **Fourth Commandment: Sabbath day**

—WCF 21:7-8, WLC 115-21, WSC 57-62

### ***Requirements of the fourth commandment***

This commandment includes two basic ideas: (1) no work on the Sabbath day, and (2) the whole day hallowed to the Lord. Some add a third concept: (3) work expected for the other six days.

The history of Israel in Scripture provides a similar pattern concerning this commandment as we have seen for other commandments: at first lax, and then later superstitiously precise.

Initial laxity:

- (Isa 56:2, 4; 58:13-14)
- Jer 17:21-23
- Ezek 20:12-13, 16, 24; 22:8, 26; 23:38
- Neh 13:15-22

Later superstitious precision:

- Christ healing invalid by pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15)
- Disciples picking grain (Matt 12:1-8 = Mark 2:23-28 = Luke 6:1-5)
- Christ healing man with withered hand (Matt 12:9-14 = Mark 3:1-6 = Luke 6:6-11)
- Christ healing crippled woman (Luke 13:10-17)
- Christ healing man born blind (John 9)
- Christ healing man with dropsy (Luke 14:1-6)
- By these events and teachings, the Lord showed his approval of works of necessity and mercy on the Sabbath day (WSC 60).

### ***Identity of Sabbath day***

According to our standards the Sabbath day command continues in effect, only the day is now changed from the last day of the week to the first day of the week.

Nearly all Christian denominations recognize this change, with two major exceptions:

- (1) Some believe that the day has not been changed to the first day of the week, and remains at the seventh day of the week (Seventh Day Adventists, Seventh Day Baptists, Messianic believers, etc.).
- (2) Some believe that the Sabbath commandment itself has been abolished with the Mosaic law, and that the Christian day of worship is an entirely new institution (groups more influenced by dispensationalism, also some Calvinists).

Since the beginning of the Christian church various Christian writers have stated the reason for changing the day of worship to the first day of the week. Here are most of the biblical reasons that have been advanced by them:

- 1) Light created on the first day of the week
- 2) Jesus' resurrection on the first day of the week
- 3) Jesus met disciples on the first day of the week (John 20:19, 26)
- 4) Pentecost was on Sunday in AD 30

- 5) Christians broke bread on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7)
- 6) Collections were taken on the first day of the week (1 Cor 16:1-2)
- 7) “Lord’s day” in Rev 1:10 probably refers to the first day of the week, as it does in all early Christian literature

That Sunday worship was the practice of the earliest church is evident from all available patristic evidence:

- Ignatius, *To the Magnesians* 9:1-3 (ANF 1:62)

If, therefore, those who were brought up in the ancient order of things have come to the possession of a new hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but living in the observance of the Lord’s Day, on which also our life has sprung up again by Him and by His death—whom some deny, by which mystery we have obtained faith, and therefore endure, that we may be found the disciples of Jesus Christ, our only Master.

- *Didache* 14:1 (ANF 7:381)

But every Lord’s day do ye gather yourselves together, and break bread, and give thanksgiving after having confessed your transgressions, that your sacrifice may be pure.

(The same expression, “the Lord’s Day,” is used in Rev 1:10, and elsewhere in the Fathers for the first day of the week; see ANF 7:381, n. 12: “If the early date is allowed, this verse confirms the view that from the first the Lord’s day was observed, and that, too, by a Eucharistic celebration.”)

- *Epistle of Barnabas* 15:9 (ANF 1:147)

Then we shall be able to sanctify it, having been first sanctified ourselves. Further, He says to them, “Your new moons and your Sabbath I cannot endure.” Ye perceive how He speaks: Your present Sabbaths are not acceptable to Me, but that is which I have made, [namely this,] when, giving rest to all things, I shall make a beginning of the eighth day, that is, a beginning of another world. Wherefore, also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, the day also on which Jesus rose again from the dead. And when He had manifested Himself, He ascended into the heavens.

- Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 67 (ANF 1:186)

And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; . . . But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration.

- Irenaeus in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5:24 (NPNF/2 1:243)

[Concerning the controversy over the date of Easter] Among them was Irenaeus, who, sending letters in the name of the brethren in Gaul over whom he presided, maintained that the mystery of the resurrection of the Lord should be observed only on the Lord's day.

For a defense of the seventh-day position, see Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday* (1977); he argues that the Roman pontiff led the Christian church in the second century to change the day of worship (esp. in ch. 6, "Rome and the Origin of Sunday"). This book, by the way, was his doctoral thesis at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome; he was the first non-Catholic to be admitted to this institution. He has popularized this position in "How It Came About: From Saturday to Sunday," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 4:3 (Oct. 1978), 32-40.

More recently, evangelical Protestants have contributed to this topic. See D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day* (1982); note R. J. Bauckham's reply to Bacchiocchi (pp. 222-45, esp. 236-38). Some of these writers take the position that the Christian Lord's Day is not the same institution as the sabbath, similar to position (2) above. For a reply from a Reformed perspective, see Richard B. Gaffin, Jr., in *Pressing Toward the Mark*, ch. 3, "A Sabbath Rest Still Awaits the People of God."

It should be noted that Paul in Col 2:16-17 seems to be talking about the old Jewish Sabbath celebrated on Saturday (cf. the other holy days mentioned). It was optional whether believers continued to observe Saturday; however, the Lord's Day (Sunday) now took the place of the weekly day of worship.

## **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:

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:



## **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
- 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 נָאָפֶׁן *nā'ap* (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 נָאָזָח *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.

[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]

### ***Divorce and remarriage***

See esp. John Murray, *Divorce*; also Jay Adams, *Divorce and Remarriage*; also Joe M. Sprinkle, "Old Testament Perspectives on Divorce and Remarriage," *JETS* 40/4 (Dec., 1997), 529-50

In the OT divorce was an option allowed the Israelites, for the cause of עֲרֻבָה *'erwāh*, indecorous, indecent, obscene, disgraceful conduct (Deut 24:1-4). In those cases the divorced persons could not remarry each other after one of them had married another person.

Jesus taught that this allowance of divorce was not ideal (Matt 19:8). He taught that unbiblical divorce put the divorced spouse in the position of becoming an adulterer (along with that person's new spouse), and that it was adultery for the person divorcing his spouse unbiblically to remarry.

Divorce passages in the Gospels:

- Galilean ministry, Matt 5:32
- Peraean ministry, Luke 16:18
- Final Judean ministry, Matt 19:9 = Mark 10:11-12

Other passages:

- Paul on desertion, 1 Cor 7:10-15
- Marriage dissolved by death, Rom 7:1-3

Jesus used an exclusion clause ("except for marital unfaithfulness") in Matt 5:32 and 19:9. That clause is not recorded in Mark or Luke. The term (πορνεία *porneia*) refers to all kinds of sexual sin or perversion.

Paul allows that, in the case of a person being deserted by his spouse, the person may seek a divorce and may remarry, "only in the Lord" (1 Cor 7:15, 39).

In both the above cases, the guilty party has effectively destroyed the marriage already, just as though he had died. For this reason, the Westminster Confession (24:5-6) recognizes these as the only two justifiable reasons for obtaining a divorce, with the consequent right to remarry:

“Adultery or fornication, committed after a contract, being detected before marriage, giveth just occasion to the innocent party to dissolve that contract. In the case of adultery after marriage, it is lawful for the innocent party to sue out a divorce, and after the divorce to marry another, as if the offending party were dead.

“Although the corruption of man be such as is apt to study arguments, unduly to put asunder those whom God hath joined together in marriage; yet nothing but adultery, or such willful desertion as can no way be remedied by the Church or civil magistrate, is cause sufficient of dissolving the bond of marriage: wherein a public and orderly course of proceeding is to be observed; and the persons concerned in it not left to their own wills and discretion in their own case.”

## **Polygamy**

[Good article by R. K. Harrison, “Polygamy,” *New ISBE* 3:901-902]

Polygamy means “many marriages” (πολλοί *polloi*, “many” + γαμέω *gameo*, “to marry”); *polygyny* means many wives, and *polyandry* means many husbands.

God created monogamy with Adam and Eve (Gen 2:20-24). The importance of this beginning is stated by Jesus (Matt 19:8). Since then the birth rate is about 19 boys per 18 girls, confirming the intent of creation. Polygamy, as usually practiced, denies the rights of other men, and requires the unnatural life of eunuchs for many.

In the OT many practiced polygamy: Lamech of the line of Cain (Gen 4:19; there is no evidence of polygamy in the line of Seth, Gen 5); polygamy was indicated in the wicked pre-flood world (Gen 6:2), while Noah and his sons were monogamous (Gen 6:18; cf. 8 people in 1 Pet. 3:20). After the flood polygamy developed again, along with tribal wars, surplus of women, slavery, and concubinage. It was practiced by Abraham (Gen 16:3, but not apparently by Isaac), Esau (Gen 26:34; 28:8-9), Jacob (Gen 29-30, but not apparently by Joseph or Judah). Moses and Joshua were monogamous. Polygamy was practiced by many judges: Gideon (Jud. 8:30), Jair (Judg 10:4), Ibzan (Judg 12:9), Abdon (Judg 12:14), Elkanah father of Samuel (1 Sam 1:2); but Jephthah, Samson, and Samuel were monogamous. Besides various individuals mentioned in the genealogies (the sons of Izrahiah of the tribe of Issachar, and Shaharaim of the tribe of Benjamin; 1 Chr 7:4; 8:8), many kings in Judah were polygamous: Saul (2 Sam 12:8), David (2 Sam 2:2; 3:13-15; 5:13; God “gave” these wives to him, 2 Sam 12:8), Solomon (1 Kgs 11:3; cf. Song 6:8),

Rehoboam (2 Chr 11:21), Abijah (2 Chr 13:21), Joash (2 Chr 24:3), probably Josiah (2 Kgs 23:31, 36; 24:18—brother [2 Chr 36:4]). Esther was a part of the large harem of Artaxerxes (Esth 2:13-14). Herod the Great, King of the Jews in the time of Jesus' birth, was polygamous (Josephus, *Ant.* 17:1:3).

The Mosaic law permitted and regulated some aspects of polygamy:

- Exod 21:10 – Jewish female slave – to be married
- Lev 18:18 – not to marry a wife and her sister
- Deut 21:15-17 – if one wife loved more than another
- Deut 25:5-10 – Levirate marriage; *levir* = “husband’s brother”

However, most Israelites had only one wife (Prov 12:4; 19:14; 31:10-29). And in general the OT showed its approval of monogamy (Ps 128:3; Prov 5:18; 18:22 [19:14; 31:10-29]; Eccl 9:9).

Likewise, the OT gives several laws or examples which discourage polygamy:

- Not a “suitable helper” if part of a harem
- No castrated men (necessary for eunuchs) allowed in the congregation (Deut 23:1)
- Favoring one wife forbidden (Exod 21:15-18)
- Examples of jealousy of wives (Jacob’s wives, Gen 29-30; Elkanah and Hannah, 1 Sam 1:2ff; Rehoboam and Maacha, 2 Chr 11:21)
- Kings not to multiply wives to themselves (Deut 17:17)

After the captivity in Babylon and into NT times monogamy was the rule (cf. Mal 2:15; Ezra 9:2; 10:3; Matt 18:25; 19:3-9; see also Tob 1:11; 2:19; 8:4, 13; Susan 29, 63; Sir 26:1-27). There is no regulation of polygamy in the NT, with the assumption that monogamy was practiced and approved; one wife was assumed (Eph 5:23, cf. 4:4; also 2 Cor 11:2; cf. 1 Cor 7:2; 9:5). Monogamy was explicitly required for church officers (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:6).

In the time of Paul, while polygamy was prevalent in Greek culture, it was illegal for Jews and for Romans; and since NT times was not tolerated in the churches. There is no extant case of a baptized polygamist for 1500 years. A prominent case was Philip Landgrave of Hesse, who took another wife on the advice of Martin Luther—the most notorious case in Protestant history.

Statement of conference of missionaries in Calcutta, 1834 (unanimous vote of Baptist, London and Church Missionary Societies, Church of Scotland, American Presbyterian Board):

“If a convert before becoming a Christian has married more wives than one, in accordance with the practice of the Jewish and early Christian churches, he shall be permitted to keep them all: but such a person is not eligible to any office in the Church. In no other case is polygamy to be tolerated among Christians.” (quoted from Brown, *History of Missions* 3/365-366, in J. H. Worman, “Polygamy,” McClintock and Strong *Cyclopaedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* 8/366)

### **Sexual perversion**

See J. J. Davis, *Evangelical Ethics*, ch. 5, “Homosexuality”; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an OT Ethics*, pp. 114-19, 195-97.

Biblical and Christian doctrine regarding the purpose of sex as created by God are very clear. Sexual union is to take place between man and woman within the bonds of marriage.

Homosexual activity is consistently regarded with loathing in Scripture. Examples of its practice in the OT are in Genesis 19 and Judges 19. It is condemned in the law (Lev 18:22; 20:13) and in the NT (Rom 1:26-27; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10). Nowhere in the Bible does any passage approve of homosexuality or regulate its behavior or relations, including those passages which deal with marriage, family, celibacy, slavery, or civil relations. There is absolutely no Scriptural warrant for this activity, but rather universal condemnation. Yet, in spite of the odiousness of this sin, it can be forgiven and cleansed by God (1 Cor 6:9-11).

It follows from the biblical standards for sexual behavior stated above, that any other forms of sexual perversion are entirely against Scripture and against nature. They display the irony of sin: the true and legitimate pleasure which God has intended is lost, and replaced with behavior that is miserable and degrading, and results in estrangement and death.

### **Eighth Commandment: No stealing**

—WLC 140-42, WSC 73-75

[See E. Calvin Beisner, *Prosperity and Poverty: The Compassionate Use of Resources in a World of Scarcity* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1988)—excellent; another excellent source is Joseph M. Stowell, *A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1990); see also John W. Robbins, *Ecclesiastical Megalomania: The Economic and Political Thought of the Roman Catholic Church* (Trinity Foundation, 1999)]

## **Definition of stealing**

Stealing (גָּנַב *gānab*; κλέπτω *klepto*) is defined as taking what belongs to another without his agreement or permission. The only exceptions to this commandment would be in cases of war or of punishment for crime.

Scriptural law forbids all kinds of stealing, including real property, animals, slaves, or other movable property. Thieves were to make full restitution, with additional amounts added depending on the nature of the theft. The Bible also commands honest weights and measures, prompt payment of obligations, and all reasonable efforts to protect the property of others. Scripture commends hard work, earning money, saving and investing, and generosity. At the same time, it condemns the love of money (Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13-14 [same statement on a different occasion]; 1 Tim 3:3; 6:10; 2 Tim 3:2; Heb 13:5; 1 Pet 5:2).

## **Property ownership**

WSC 74 states that this commandment requires “the lawful procuring and furthering the wealth and outward estate of ourselves and others.” This requirement assumes an economic system in which individuals own their own property. Such indeed is the biblical norm. Property ownership is assumed and encouraged in both the OT and the NT. The book of Proverbs is an example of the Bible’s attitude toward private enterprise and what is called the capitalistic system (e.g., Prov. 27:23-27). (See John Battle, “Property Rights and Responsibilities in the OT,” *Reformation Review* 26:1 [Jan., 1981], 6-20).

The example of the early Christians in Acts 2:44-45 and 4:32 - 5:11 is not one of so-called “Christian socialism.” First, note that all the giving on the part of those who had property was voluntary, not required for Christian communion. Second, the imperfect tense of the Greek verbs shows that the giving was a continuous process, taking place as various needs arose; they did not simply turn over all their property at one time. Third, the text itself in 5:4 asserts the private ownership of the property involved; Ananias and Sapphira were killed not for keeping their property, but for lying to the Holy Spirit (5:4, 9).

Collectivism is condemned by WCF 26:3, “Nor doth their (the saints’) communion one with another, as saints, take away, or infringe the title or property which each man hath in his goods and possessions.”

Recently, some evangelical writers have sought to make Christians in prosperous countries feel guilty for their abundance (e.g., Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, 1977). While prosperous Christians are commanded to give to the poor, and not to exploit them, they are not expected to destroy the free economic system which enabled them to

obtain their wealth. Nor are they guilty and responsible for evils in the world which they did not cause. Man must be free economically if he is to be free religiously and politically, and if he is to fulfill his place as made in God's image.

The eighth commandment is a strong argument against Marxism; in its application it encourages labor, thrift, profit, and generosity (Eph 4:28).

## ***Gambling***

This command prohibits, among other things, "idleness, prodigality, wasteful gaming, and all other ways whereby we do unduly prejudice our own outward estate; and defrauding ourselves of the due use and comfort of that estate which God hath given us" (WLC 142).

Unlike investing, which seeks to use money to make a profit by performing some useful service, gambling seeks to profit from others' losses. And the odds of "beating the house" make it a foolish use of money, harming the estate of those practicing it.

## **Ninth Commandment: No false witness**

—WLC 143-45, WSC 76-78

This commandment shows God's love for truth. While the terms of this commandment especially relate to witness bearing in court, the scope of the commandment is broader, including all sins and related duties of a similar nature (cf. Col 3:9, "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices").

Sins of the tongue are often mentioned in the Bible, and their serious nature is emphasized (Prov 6:16-19; Jas 3). The Smaller Catechism of Martin Luther is helpful in the area of our attitude toward our neighbor: "What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not deceitfully belie, betray, backbite, nor slander our neighbor, but apologize for him, speak well of him, and put the most charitable construction on all that he does."

Christians should not only be scrupulously honest, but should avoid even the appearance of dishonesty. Note Paul's careful attention to his reputation in this regard (2 Cor 8:20-21).

It should be noted that this commandment assumes that we are in a position in which people have a right to the truth. Many Bible passages especially mention in this regard to testimony in court. We also are to support the truth by proclaiming it wherever appropriate. There are some situations in which Christians are not obligated to tell certain truths to unworthy hearers, especially situations involving war or self-defense. While examples of these situations

in the Bible have puzzled many believers, they are explained by the intent of the commandment. This same principle limits the sixth and eighth commandments not to include similar situations.

## **Tenth Commandment: No coveting**

—WLC 146-48, WSC 79-81

The word in Exod 20 is חָמַד *hāmad*, “covet, appropriate”; it may refer to either inward coveting or to outward taking by force. However, the word in Deut 5 is different, אָוַח *āwāh* in the hithpael, “covet, desire,” and clearly refers to inward desire. Thus this commandment is the only one to deal primarily and explicitly with one’s mental attitude. This commandment especially convicted Paul before his conversion (Rom 7:7-11).

This commandment requires the spirit of contentment with one’s outward estate, and a charitable frame of mind toward others (Prov 30:8-9; Eccl 5:10-12; Luke 3:14). Much of the drive in modern times for socialistic programs comes from plain selfishness and greed of those who think they would benefit at others’ expense.

Christians are not only to refrain from coveting the blessings of others, but are to seek what is best for them and to rejoice with them—the essence of the Golden Rule.