

1.4 Introduction to the 10 Commandments per WSC, 40-44 & WLC, 98-101

In the way of introduction, the Confession lists many lawful/sanctifying uses of the law that bind believers to walk according to the will of God by self-examination and by consideration of the threats and promises attached to the law. Of the greatest significance here is the *clearer sight* that the law gives concerning *the need we have of Christ* and *the perfection of His obedience* (WFC, XIX, 6). This clear sight is deeply foundational and critically fundamental.

The catechisms add to this introductory information regarding the law. Of the introductory Qs in the catechisms, Q 99 of the WLC is the most important and helpful.

Q: To set the right tone and to preserve balance, what does it mean by “right understanding” (What rules are to be observed for the *right understanding* of the Ten Commandments?)? [***RU = right use, doing, 1 Tim. 1.8, lawful use of the law***]

Q 99 gives 8 rules [1-8]. We can get much from them by grouping some of them together and by clarifying & simplifying some of the language (there are language issues but you can work through them ☺).

3-fold outline on the board

1A. L binds us to perfection [rules 1-3, 5]

2A. L binds us to strive for P by inferring, by making inferences [rules 4, 6]

3A. L binds us to others [7-8]

1A. The law binds us to perfection [1-3, 5]

Being perfect, it binds us to perfection in four ways.

1B. The law binds us to full conformity [1]

We are responsible to the utmost in every duty; it forbids failure to the least degree.

Q: How do James 2.10 and Matthew 5.48 support this claim? ***Break one break all***

2B. The law binds us to perfection comprehensively [2]

It concerns matters of the heart as well as outward matters of our words, works, and gestures (cf. murder in the heart, by angry words, and by actual killing **per Mat. 5**, read it).

1) How do gestures fit here (cf. love is not rude, 1 Co. 13; cf. ***how to answer has a content side and a manners side...that is gracious speech***)?

2) How do we respond to the “that’s impossible objection” that may arise in our hearts? Can we get perspective by making a comparison with striving for...in education or striving for... in tennis (or your favorite sport)? ***This is a key to the best kind of progress; progress is possible.***

3) How do we negotiate “freely and cheerfully” in this arena as prideful sinners? [***need to admit our pride and turn from it; be open, OMH graces; cling to Jesus as our gentle and humble PPK, Mat. 11.28-30 is essential***]

3B. The law binds us per overlaps within it [3]

The 10 may cover the same duty (positive or negative) in different ways (divers respects).

Q: What is an example of this overlap? [***4th and 8th***]

Q: How might this fact serve our goal? [***by emphasis on this or that, giving greater depth to x, different angle or perspective on x; emphasis and angles help us focus***]

4B. The law in its timeliness [5]

Although we cannot never rightly do what God forbids, and though what He commands is always our duty (we can take no vacation from responsibility to God, not for any moment in time on our journey through life), nonetheless, we cannot do everything God commands at every moment (particular duties “plug in” or apply in particular situations and times).

Q: What is an example of this timeliness? [***Sabbath observance applies weekly not daily; we cannot rejoice and mourn at the same time with those who rejoice and mourn***]

Q: How does the principle of timeliness aid our striving for the goal of perfection? [***It shows or applies the principle of reasonableness of what God requires of us; helps us focus cheerfully on our reasonable service***]

2A. We strive toward perfection by inferring opposites [4] and representative clusters [6]

Clearly [4], positive duties imply negative ones (things to avoid) and negative duties imply positive ones (things to do). Within the commandments, promises imply threats and threats imply promises.

Q: For example, what is the opposite implication of “do not murder”? [*Promote life*]

Moreover, each commandment is like a single grape that represents a cluster of grapes [6]; each duty implies similar duties of the same kind.

Q: What is an example duty “of the same kind” with “do not murder”? [*Salt your icy steps to protect your mail person from a fatal fall or even from a life damaging fall as in a broken hip*]

Part of our work is to draw lines and arrows from things explicit to things implicit. This is part of our duty in the study of Scripture in general. This is some of the inner working of meditation on the law and abiding in the word (cf. the principle of “good and necessary consequence” WCF, I.6)

To illustrate, how is this principle of mediation confirmed by Paul’s one statement argument in Romans 8.31b? He has only premise (or support part of the argument) and arguments typically have three statements. The argument is the question, **If God is for us, who can be against us?** There is complexity to Paul’s thoughts here because he does three things: 1) he makes an argument with a single statement, 2) that statement is a question, and 3) the single statement has the form of an “if...then” expression. It demands reflection or meditation to get his point. Logicians call these arguments enthymemes (arguments with missing parts, suppressed, and implicit parts). All the parts are present in the context and available to careful thought. Here the question drives us to the full argument as we intuitively search for an answer:

Premise 1: **If God is for us, who can be against us?** [Idea: if God is for us who can oppose us and decisively harm us? This converts to “if God is for us then no one can decisively harm us”]

Premise 2 (Suppressed): God is for us [per the context of working love and saving all He calls]

Conclusion (Suppressed): No one can be against us or oppose us and decisively harm us! As we read the text, we may have this answer to 31b before we finish reading 32. Thus, implicit arguments have both perspicuity (inherent clarity) and efficacy (heart penetrating power). If we do not see the answer immediately, logical reflection (inference making) will lead us to it.

Q: What danger must we be aware of when we work from the explicit to the implicit (as some do for example by opposing capital punishment from the 6th or opposing honoring the national flag per the 2nd)? [*cf. Vos, 251; failures to make important distinctions as between civil allegiance and religious worship in the flag case, or failure to read the command in context of the entire Bible as in the capital punishment case; also, it is a mistake of context to argue vegetarianism from the 6th*]

3A. The law binds us to responsibility for the moral well being of others [7-8]

1) How does the catechism support this “others” orientation of the commandments? [*cf. the citation of Ex. 20.10 (note the extrapolation from the 4th to all 10) and love, Lev. 19.17, as fulfilling the last six at least. Do partake in the sins of others, 1 Tim 5.22. Take no part in the unfruitful acts of darkness, Eph. 5.11.*]

2) What does “according to our places and callings” mean in this “others” orientation? [*cf. Vos, 253; nature and degree of responsibility goes with our position and relationships; cf parent to child and child to parent; both have responsibility to promote uprightness in the other, but greater weight rests on the parent; likewise, pastor-member; greater for pastor, but there for both*]

3) Is it wrong to do or to arrange for someone else (Christian or not) to do something that is wrong? What example might clarify the truth here? [*Vos, 253, a Christian in business having employees sell porn; the demands of God’s law are the standard for all people*]

4) How can we promote righteous practice in others...per our stations in life? [*stations brings up the exercise of authority God gives in the family, state, and church; we promote by example and word of testimony and persuasion in general; per stations, by exercise of appropriate authority; cf. a loving (by law) parent may encourage, invite a neighbor and his child to church, but he takes his child to church inculcating attendance and learning from infancy. An official of the state ought to promote honesty by example and word; but he must also exercise his authority to prosecute thieves.*]

5) How can we be helpful in promoting righteous practice in others? [*Vos, 254, empathize, avoid critical spirit (undue, excessive, bitter, destructive criticism vs. gentle, kind, tactful, up building, firm but loving, cf. OMH; not harsh or self-righteous, cf. 2 Tim 2.24f. Encourage those in hard battles with sin, do not rejoice in iniquity, but in the truth; avoid gossip; speak to x in private if about to y, have x present*]

6) What is an example of partaking with others in what is forbidden them and why is it wrong? [*Vos, 254, a child is not to leave home, another child knows this but goes with him to the store; it is not disobeying the 5th for the one child, not directly, but he does violate the command too because he encourages disobedience to it. Again, why does this work like this? It works because love is a grid over the law; love fulfills the law; the law show how to love and love show who to love by giving the others orientation. I love others by keeping the commands and I love them in how I keep them and I love them in how I help them keep them-that is for their good and love seeks their good]*