

TEN COMMANDMENTS

by Jong William De

De Jong's exposition of the Ten Commandments, examining each commandment's meaning, scope, and application for Christian life, showing how the moral law continues to guide believers.

11 Chapters

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00. Title and Author

A SUMMARY OF PROF. DOUMA'S THE TEN COMMANDMENTS:

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01. First Commandment

The First Commandment

God spoke all these words, saying: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

1. You shall have no other gods before Me.[Exodus 20:3] Are There Other Gods? Idol gods are 'nothing' (cf. Isaiah 2:8, Isaiah 2:18, Isaiah 2:20). Does the first commandment beat air then? The New Testament also warns against idols (1 John 5:21). There are certain realities and powers in the world which must never be 'idolized.' Baal did not exist, yet the powers he represented, e.g. fertility, growth, rain, etc., were real powers, creative powers that must never be divorced from the Creator. Estranged from the Creator of rain and thunder, people began to worship the creature rather than the Creator. People worship powerful forces within creation as if they were deities. They are not gods therefore, but gods falsely so-called (1 Corinthians 8:4-7). Consider also these creative realities which can be idolized: sexuality, alcohol, love, authority, intellect, money, covetousness, the stomach, tradition, etc. In their right place, these things serve people, in their wrong place they master them. God will surrender fallen men to their desires (Romans 1:24-25). Addiction, says Michael Horton, is simply a euphemism for idolatry.

Choosing God. In the covenant ceremony recorded in Joshua 24:14 ff [Joshua 24:1-33]. , we learn that the choice FOR God is a radical and decisive one. It's a matter of either/or, not both/and. We cannot serve God and mammon (Matthew 6:24). See also Deuteronomy 27:11 ff; Deuteronomy 31:9 ff, Deuteronomy 31:24 ff. Consider the Shema (Deuteronomy 6:4 ff. cf. Matthew 22:37). Choosing God means loving Him. This love is emotional, but not merely so. To love is to stick by your choice. When a marriage gets into trouble, the only path to resolution is the choice of love. The emotional element may then be wholly or partially absent, but faithfulness and commitment must come out. Love is commitment. No third party may interfere. In the New Testament this commandment comes to us in terms of Jesus Christ. 'Whoever loves father or mother, son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me,' Matthew 10:37 ff.). It is important to 'keep' God's words (Luke 8:15; 1 Timothy 6:20; 1 John 3:24; 1 John 5:2-3). One who keeps God's words is equipped to guard against idols. This is how we abide in Christ and he in us (1 John 3:24). With an Undivided Heart. The first commandment must be obeyed with whole-heartedness. When Jesus proposed to the rich young ruler that he sell his possessions in order to be "perfect," he showed half-heartedness. Our love must be undifferentiating: we must love friend and foe alike, as our Father in heaven does (Matthew 5:43 ff.)

Fortune Telling and Witchcraft. Read Deuteronomy 18:10-14 and Leviticus 19:31. The Bible takes mediums, witches and soothsayers seriously. Whoever gives his heart wholly to YAHWEH cannot listen to witches and soothsayers. Their words fall under the category of false prophecy (cf. Jeremiah 29:8; Ezekiel 13:9; Acts 13:6). Consider Deuteronomy 18:10-22. Today this means spiritism, fortune telling, palm reading, and horoscopes. Because witchcraft and unconventional abilities and 'powers' are to be judged by the category of false prophesy, going to Benny Hinn for a

'faith healing' would be a no-no. Going to a chiropractor who will put pins in your back, but has no intention of indoctrinating you or impressing upon you some alternative lifestyle or world view, would not be wrong necessarily. Clairvoyants can be used to solve murders - they have nothing to do with false prophecy. Voetius distinguished between (1) the *magia bona* - the art of knowing hidden properties of natural things. This is not the occult, says Voetius, Geesink and Schilder; (2) the *magia vana* - playful, non-verbal magic. No hidden forces are employed; simply manual dexterity (sleight of hand) and; (3) the *magia superstitiosa* - superstitious sorcery. This must be rejected in line with Deuteronomy 18:1-22 and Leviticus 19:1-37. The One God and our Suffering. The first commandment requires us to accept suffering from God's hand. Ursinus explains patience. Patience is to obey God in submissively enduring the various evils that he sends upon us, from a knowledge of the divine majesty and from an assurance of God's assistance and deliverance. Many deny that suffering comes from God's hand. If the devil isn't real, than Fate is. This denies the one true and all-powerful God. To deny or limit God's sovereignty is to break the first commandment. Though suffering is a consequence of man's sin, it comes from God's hand. Guilt for suffering and death must not be laid at God's feet. The catechism highlights 'humility' - modesty when it comes to evil and suffering, looking first to oneself (1 Peter 5:6) and 'patience' - learning how the Lord blessed Job for his patience (James 5:11). The One God and the Many Religions. What do you think of the Christ (Matthew 22:42)? Christ is the exclusive access to the Father (John 14:6). He shows us the Father (John 1:18). The First Commandment as Liberation. For Babylonians and Philistines, etc., danger lurked on every side - in the lightning, the water, the sun, the storm, the heat and the cold. Certain rituals were necessary for protection - as means of placating the gods. Contrast this with the Creator. Under God, a tree is only a tree. Technology is unthinkable without the first commandment. It made possible the lightning rod and Hoover Dam. If divine power lives in a tree, it would be hazardous to cut it down. Everything in creation is useful, created good and not to be refused, if used with thanksgiving to God (1 Timothy 4:4). It was liberating for the Corinthians to hear that even meat sacrificed to idols was permissible food, since the earth belongs to the Lord (1 Corinthians 10:25 ff; Psalms 24:1). Without the first commandment people become enslaved to money, to intelligence, to work, etc. To be free of idols, you must live with God. Otherwise you remain in slavery. It makes no fundamental difference whether you kneel in terror before images of deities or stand arrogantly on your own two feet. You glorify either creature or Creator (Romans 1:21-32).

02. Second Commandment

The Second Commandment

2. You shall not make for yourself a graven 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; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love Me and keep My commandments. [Exodus 20:4-6]

The Unique Place of the Second Commandment. Roman Catholics and Lutherans wrongly lump the first two commandments together. They deal with different subjects: the first commandment deals with the object of worship - no other gods, the second deals with the form of worship - no images of God. The first opposes other gods; the second opposes self-willed worship. If you stand with your back to the idols, you must still learn to kneel properly before the Lord. The first command points to the true God, the second to true worship. This distinction is warranted on the basis of Scripture. In many places, the people of Israel did not want to worship other gods, but they did want to make an image of Yahweh (see Deuteronomy 4:15-18; the golden calf, Exodus 32:4; 1 Kings 12:28, etc.)

The Significance of an Image. Is this commandment still important today? Do we find images? Not like there were in Bible times, except in museums. But we do know that the sinful heart does not change. Why then did God not want representations of himself? For what sinful inclination did he command this? Well the image in Bible times represented deity. One who has an image meets the deity himself in it. The power of the deity is collected and channeled by means of the image. The comparison with electricity can be made. High voltage is dangerous. So is divine power. An image functions like a transformer - dangerous high voltage is reduced so we can use it with far less risk.

Why no Images? Three reasons:

1. To capture Yahweh in an image is to misunderstand His freedom. You may not make images on account of God's freedom. It is an attempt to make the incomprehensible comprehensible. The craftsman seeks to control God when the reverse is true. Consider 1 Samuel 4:1-22. The Israelites had lost a battle to the Philistines. So they brought the ark into the camp - now they would win. The Philistines were frightened (1 Samuel 4:3-8). Instead, Israel suffered a second defeat and the ark was taken captive. The ark itself became no more than a wooden box as soon as the Lord no longer wished to be associated with it. He sat enthroned on the cherubim of this ark as long as He wanted to. We don't control God. God controls us.

2. To capture Yahweh in an image is to misunderstand His majesty. You cannot make images on account of God's majesty. When the Lord spoke to the Israelites on Mt. Sinai, he spoke while the mountain burned with fire 'to the midst of heaven' (Deuteronomy 4:11-12). Images, by contrast, do not hear, eat nor smell (Deuteronomy 4:28). Image worship evokes ridicule and sarcasm. "To whom will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to him? Do you have to nail him down so he doesn't fall over (Isaiah 40:18 hew:18 hew:18; Isaiah 41:7). The majesty of God is indicated

in Scripture by the metaphor of darkness, by which he is covered (Deuteronomy 4:11; Deuteronomy 5:23) or unapproachable light, in which He dwells (1 Timothy 6:16). Darkness and light are opposites: God is so majestic he cannot be brought within man's reach. Both are impenetrable.

3. To capture Yahweh in an image is to misunderstand His covenant (intimacy). You need not make images on account of God's covenant. God is unapproachable, but for His people He is near. You don't have to go far to see what he is doing (Deuteronomy 30:12-14; cf. Romans 10:6-9). God is not tangible, yet he is closer than any other god.

Self-willed worship arouses the spirit of jealousy in Yahweh, much as jealousy is aroused in the husband who sees his wife loving another man. Instead of receiving life as a gift, they want to secure it. The Spirituality of God and the Prohibition of Images. Many would argue in the past against images based of God's spirituality. God is non-physical. He is Spirit and therefore he cannot be portrayed physically. But images were crafted - consider Aaron and Jeroboam - not always to make God visible, but to make the Incomprehensible one, comprehensible - to manipulate his power. In these older arguments, also, spiritual was exalted over material. Thinking is greater than seeing. But this 'spiritual' interpretation makes the second commandment something of a tautology - self-evident. Why then such a severe blow? But also, what does it mean that God is Spirit. We should not portray God physically, but we do read that God has a form (cf. Numbers 12:8). That God is Spirit certainly includes the message that God is power. In contrast to weak flesh, God has divine power (cf. Isaiah 31:3). The contrast is not with the physical, but with what is weak and fleshly, transient and transitory. Therefore in John 4:24, when Jesus says, 'God is Spirit' he means that God bestows new power because the Messiah will bring an end to temple worship. The worship of God must be done in spirit and truth, in fellowship with the Messiah's life-giving power and in fellowship with the truth that the Messiah proclaims.

God's Own Image. Images of God may not be made, but that does not mean that Israel worshiped without images. Consider the tabernacle, the ark, the ephod, the bronze serpent, etc. The bronze serpent was not to manipulate the power of the deity, but simply a means of healing. When the bronze serpent was used idolatrously, Hezekiah had it destroyed (2 Kings 18:4). No object remains holy if used in a pagan manner. The ephod was a legitimate way of consulting the Lord, but when Gideon and Micah (Judges 8:24-27; Judges 17:5-13) made their own, theirs were both in the service of idolatry. God could not be contained in a temple (1 Kings 8:27-53), yet the glory of the Lord departed from the temple when Judah broke covenant (Ezekiel 1:1-28; Ezekiel 10:1-22).

Man as Image of God. In the image of deity, the deity is represented. This doesn't mean resembled, as in a good likeness, but the image is endowed with the power of the deity. So with Adam and Christ - they do not resemble God (the Father), but in their actions and authority, they show forth God Himself. The temple of God is similar to the image of God. The 'temple of God' is applied to both the congregation (1 Corinthians 3:16) and to us bodily or personally (1 Corinthians 6:19). The image of God, therefore, indicates God's desire to dwell with man and to have His power radiate through man. There are conditions for this image - man must be endowed with understanding and volition, exalted over the animals, thereby in a position to exercise dominion. These conditions are not the image itself. Fallen man does not retain the image. When God's wrath rests upon man, we can hardly say that His Spirit continues to dwell in him. Just as God can

withdraw from his ark, so he can from man - who was created as His temple and image. The image of God can be restored to man. But although fallen man no longer bears the image of God, he was still has the conditions to have that image. No matter how estranged from God and His service man becomes, he remains a temple. The temple may be empty, but it still exists (see Genesis 9:6 and James 3:9). That man functions as the image of God is not decisive for us in ethical deliberations (e.g. abortion, euthanasia, etc.), but that God wants him to function as His image. No Cultic Images, but Visual Arts. Images were not uniformly prohibited; it came down to the purpose behind their use. Samuel erected a monument to the triumph of the Lord (1 Samuel 7:12), Jacob placed a memorial pillar on Rachel's grave (Genesis 35:20), etc. Even the tabernacle and temple enjoyed the benefits of the visual arts - the candlestick, golden bells and pomegranates, etc. Visual arts are in no way condemned by the second commandment.

Sanction and Blessing. To the second commandment are appended a sanction and a blessing. If the head of the family turns away from Yahweh to worship images, his entire family will be swallowed up in his self-willed worship. His sin becomes their stumbling. The opposite is also true. All the way to the most extended generation imaginable, God will show his favor to those who are faithful to Him and keep His commands. David's house continued for generations, even though they were punished for Solomon's sins (1 Kings 11:34, 1 Kings 11:38-39). That this blessing and curse are added to this commandment is significant. Lying and stealing are serious crimes, but turning your back on the Lord to practice self-willed religion is most serious. But these blessings and curses don't hold true automatically. Pious Jehoshaphat had a godless son Jehoram (1 Kings 22:43; 2 Kings 8:16-18). Three godless sons and a godless grandson (2 Kings 22:1-20; 2 Kings 23:1-37) succeeded God-fearing Josiah.

Iconoclastic Campaigns. Historical Information

Images Today. Is this prohibition relevant today? Yes, because behind the image lies a perspective. People suppose that by means of an image they can control and manipulate divine power. People imagine they can fashion gods in images in such a way that they automatically enjoy divine favor on their own plans. So the image gives form to a mental image and you cannot eradicate mental images through an iconoclastic campaign of any kind. There is one small step from ancient image worship to modern self-determined worship, in which God is worshipped in a way different from what he has commanded in His word.

What about books for the laity? On many French cathedrals, you will find important stories from the Old and New Testaments carved in stone. The people were illiterate and would receive limited understandings of the Bible from these murals. But the laity in the sense of illiterate people do not exist anymore. We must advance the reading of Scripture. Illustration and image can stimulate that reading, but can never be a substitute for it. What is decisive is that the preaching of the Word and the congregation's response to that preaching continue to capture the congregation's attention. Living preaching can be contrasted with fixed images. An image fixates something. A sermon is moving. What a minister says wrongly one Sunday, can be corrected the next. Religious art should develop, but outside the walls of the church. And what may be portrayed is whatever Scripture shows. (What about Jesus in the stable or the apple in Paradise?)

Rigid Forms. The image fixates more so than the word that can be corrected. Many things, besides statutes and paintings, in the church can conflict just as much with the second

commandment. Take liturgy: KJV only, only Genevan tunes, a particular style of preaching, etc. The decisive element no longer is the living preaching, but the things that make us safe and secure. But then, fixed forms are not wrong, much less fixed formulations. The Apostles Creed has been around for thousands of years, but because it echoes Scripture, it is good. The confessions are iconoclastic - they remove images, not introduce them. At critical points in her history, the church has thrown out images of God by saying to the heretics: God is not as you portray Him, because He has revealed Himself in His Word differently.

Mental Images. John Calvin stated that human understanding is a perpetual idol-making factory. The mind and spirit of men begets the idolatrous image - regardless if it subsequently takes the shape of wood or stone (1.11.8). We fashion God according to our own understanding. Psalms 50:21 - "We imagined that God was just like them." A person leads his own life, imagining that God bestows His approval automatically. Man creates God in His image, ready to serve Him - evangelism. Consider Psalms 94:1-23 - Yahweh does not see... Then we begin to justify sin - e.g. homosexuality. We imagine God to be a Santa Claus figure, when really it is fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. We can also make him into the image of Scrooge - someone who prefers the death of the godless (cf. Romans 4:5). As long as human understanding serves as the workshop where images of God are crafted according to our own imaginations, we are summoned by the second commandment to return to God's Word - the image that continually destroys our images.

03. Third Commandment

The Third Commandment

3. You shall not take the Name of the LORD your God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His Name in vain. [Exodus 20:7]

Speaking the Name. The prohibition of the third commandment involves, first of all, speaking the Name of God. God's name must not be spoken without meaning or with deceitful intentions. There are basically three errors that lead to a misusing of the name of Yahweh:

1. The name is misused in sorcery. Sorcery attempts to use God's name to summon His assistance, but for selfish ambitions: to drive out sicknesses, to neutralize enemies, to foretell the future. Such sorcerers were not to be tolerated (Deuteronomy 18:10-14; cf. Matthew 7:1-29; Acts 19:13-17). Sorcerers try to control divine forces in order to place life, death and the future within their own power.

2. The name is misused in false prophecy. False prophecy involves predictions which do not come in the name of the Lord, but pretend to (Deuteronomy 18:22; 1 Kings 22:11; Jeremiah 14:15).

3. The name is misused in false oaths. False oaths involve using the name of God to pass off a lie as if it were true (Leviticus 19:12).

Name and Revelation. The third commandment does not say, "you shall not misuse my name," but "the name of Yahweh, your God." Why the third person? The issue is one of misusing that precious name. But this commandment is not exhausted by an improper speaking of that name because the name can be abused without even mentioning it. Included within a person's name is his whole being. Name, in the Bible, often refers not to what they were called, but to what they were (1 Kings 4:31; 1 Samuel 18:30; 2 Samuel 19:21). The opposite of honoring a name is cursing it. To curse, in Hebrew, is to declare someone a nonentity and despicable. The above example of Shimei demonstrates this.

We now understand God's name to be His revelation in the works of creation and redemption (Psalms 8:1, Psalms 8:9; Proverbs 17:5). Yahweh made a name for Himself as Creator and as Redeemer of His people Israel. Precisely for that reason, He has made Himself known by the name YHWH. These four letters mean, "I am who I am" (Exodus 3:14) - that is, I exist as Saviour and Liberator, I make real what I say, I do what I have promised. This is demonstrated by the entirety of salvation (Psalms 106:8). On this basis, the Lord may demand that people reverence His name. We are to give it glory, *kabod*, weight. The opposite would be to minimize the name of the Lord, to underestimate, despise and scorn that name. Leviticus 24:10-23 unveils a story in which an Egyptian father blasphemes God's name - not by merely saying it, but by dragging it through the mud. Whoever blasphemes shall be put to death (Leviticus 24:16). God's own people could blaspheme. The Israelites scorned God in the wilderness (Numbers 14:11) and when they enjoyed plenty, they turned to other gods (Deuteronomy 31:20). When this happens, the pagans

have reason to blaspheme the God of Israel (2 Samuel 12:14; Ezekiel 36:20-32). What constitutes the essence of cursing/blasphemy is when someone thinks, speaks & acts disparagingly in regard to God. The Name of Jesus Christ. Christ 'glorifies' the Father. What kabod represents in the Old Testament, doxa represents in the New: the weight, greatness and honor due to the name of God. In Christ, the Father stands before us (John 14:9). We must take into consideration here, therefore, the name of Christ. Glory and honor are also due to Christ (John 1:14; Revelation 5:12-14). In addition to glorifying, we must also deal with blaspheming. A wicked lifestyle on the part of Christians can be the occasion for outsiders to blaspheme the word of God (Titus 2:5). Christ warned against a specific form of blasphemy, blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. When Jesus healed a demon-possessed man, the Pharisees insisted with vehemence that this was the work of the Devil and then introduced the unforgivable sin (Matthew 12:31-32). The blasphemy against the spirit is willfully misunderstanding and branding as devilish what in fact comes from the Holy Spirit. What is clearly from the Holy Spirit, you ascribe to the devil. Hebrews 10:26-31 indicates something similar. Again we see willfulness and self-conscious declaring what is holy to be unclean. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is directed against the work of the Son, both in Matthew 10:1-42 and in Hebrews 10:1-39. We can see how serious it is when the name of Jesus Christ is despised.

Modern Cursing. This is the form of cursing we find in expressions like, "my God," "Jesus," "to hell with you," "damn you," etc. This is generally different from the biblical examples. Modern profanity is not usually intended to be blasphemous. Yet it is still an echo of biblical cursing. People mention God without thinking about him. Cursing is not a self-conscious demonstration of unbelief, but a symptom of unbelief. It is only natural that they use God's name without thinking. We should say, "Isn't this the Creator of your very life whose name you use so lightly?" The vocabulary of the unbeliever exposes his emptiness. Swearing with God's name is also becoming more common among Christians. We must regard it highly. Just as you wear an expensive article of clothing only for special occasions and you take care to keep it in good condition, in the same way we must use the name of God and of Christ.

Abusing God's Name with a Show of Power. God's name can be abused in different ways by different cultures. That was true of cursing. To what degree do the abuses of God's name in sorcery, false prophecy and false oath exist today? Well you can have sorcery without sorcerers. Sorcery appears whenever we say that something is God's will when in fact it is not. We use God's name to lend force to our plans. People now have to follow us because we have God on our side. Sometimes this is accompanied by noble intentions. Crusades were organized under this slogan "It is God's will." You must ask the question, are you communicating what God's will or are you pressing your own will and using God's name to accomplish your goal. Sometimes in prayers, people display a show of power pretending to have God in hand by their incessant use of God's name. Jesus warned against excessive verbiage (Matthew 6:7). Reciting the "Our Father" fifteen times adds no force to your prayer. If you say God's name too often by falling into repetition, you are not treating it reverently. This is different from false prophecy, which says, "Thus says the Lord," when in fact it isn't. The Oath: Meaning and Misuse. The forms of oath swearing have changed, but the substance is the same as in the Bible. The oath is swearing with appeal to the name of God, who serves as witness that a person is speaking the truth or intends to fulfill a vow. There is, therefore, a double application. We can swear an assertory oath in court, to confirm the

truthfulness of our statements (I swear to the tell the truth, the whole truth . . .). And we can swear a promissory oath, a oath of office, obligating us to a careful exercise of our office or calling (e.g. presidents, members of parliament, judges, etc.). This double use of the oath is highlighted by the Heidelberg Catechism (Lord's Day 37 [See below]). There are oaths which confirm 'fidelity and truth' and those of necessity. What is meant by necessity can be determined from Calvin and his distinction between public and private oaths. The public oath is one sworn before officials or superiors. The private oath is sworn by individuals before (an) other individual(s). Calvin provides this example: If a brother accuses you of some breach of faith and will not be persuaded by your arguments because of his thickheadedness, you may appeal to God's judgment. Calvin points to Jacob and Laban (Genesis 31:53), to Boaz, who confirmed his intent to marry Ruth under oath (Ruth 3:13). Today, most oaths and contracts are regulated by legislation - they involve lawyers. Has the oath between private individuals fallen into disuse? Hopefully not. It can serve a positive purpose not only in the world, but also in the church, before the office-bearers (see Calvin's example above).

Oaths serve a double purpose: the honor of God and well being of my neighbor. When we swear an oath by God's name, we appeal to Him in order to end all counter argument (Hebrews 6:16). God knows our hearts and is in position to punish falsehood. Swearing an oath then is an exercise of faith - no one can function as the verifier of our souls. We must take oaths in his name, for He is our God (Deuteronomy 10:20-21). Swearing oaths also serve our neighbor. In a society where the oath is upheld, people recoil from lying and exercise their offices faithfully. Oath-bound physicians are committed to healing, as oath-bound officers are committed to the preservation of order in society. In court, witnesses are restrained from declaring the innocent guilty or vice versa.

We must consider also the consequences of misuses of the oath, i.e. perjury. This is a sacrilege of God's name (Leviticus 19:12). Even among pagans, perjury is a serious misdemeanor. Christians who swear oaths must realize that they always do that before God and that if they perjure they do so risking not only a prison term, but also the displeasure of God. That's what the catechism rightly points out (Lord's Day 37 [See below]). We may not swear unnecessary oaths - those formulated to lend force to our words, "So help me God." The exceptional and serious character of oaths corresponds to the preciousness of God's name.

Misunderstanding the Oath. Numerous sects and groups believe the Scriptures require us to do away with all oaths, among them the Hussites and Anabaptists. In so doing, they appeal both to Matthew 5:33-37 and James 5:12. Consider these four points:

1. Jesus did not nullify the law and the Prophets, meaning he did not nullify the upright use of oaths in the Old Testament;
2. Jesus permitted Himself to be placed under oath before Caiaphas (Matthew 26:63-64) and employed assertions which went beyond simple yes's and no's (e.g. 'Truly, truly...' cf. Matthew 5:18, Matthew 5:26). The apostle Paul also summons God as his witness in a number of places, e.g. Romans 1:9, 2 Corinthians 1:23; 1 Corinthians 11:23. Hebrews 6:13-20 speaks of the oath used among people. Therefore, not every oath is forbidden.
3. Jesus is forbidding Jewish casuistry and superficial swearing in Matthew 5:33-37. People were using oaths in clever ways, not spiritual ones. To escape the tightness of swearing by the name of

Yahweh, people swore 'by heaven' or 'by Jerusalem' or 'by my head.' Jesus and James were forbidding this kind of swearing. Do not swear at all in this way.

4. Anyone wishing to make Jesus' words in Matthew 5:1-48 into a law code for the world will have to institute a different court system. It is interesting to note that the Anabaptists have done precisely this in their own ecclesiastical kingdom. This is surrendering realism for idealism. In paradise, no oaths would be necessary, but in a fallen world, people are confronted with the seriousness of what they are about to say (assertory oath) or of what they are about to do (promissory oath).

Taking Every Oath Seriously. Can you swear an oath by God's name with someone who swears by the name of Allah? In the Scriptures, Isaac entered into covenant with Abimelech, king of the Philistines (Genesis 26:31). In Israel, it was impermissible to swear by anyone other than the true God. But this has become necessary in worldly relationships. We share everything with unbelievers - light, water, land, contracts, cities - these things must be regulated in common. And for that an oath is necessary. If one party swears by a false god, that's his sin, but we may remind him of the declarations he made under oath to his god. In the church we may not tolerate sexually immoral people, but in the world we must live alongside them, even idol-worshippers (1 Corinthians 5:9-11).

Difficulties with the Oath of Office. How can a Christian politician pledge fidelity to a Constitution that presents him with choices that go against his convictions (e.g. Sunday shopping or permission of sexual promiscuity)? Must we become Anabaptist? No, when someone swears an oath to uphold the constitution, he is not thereby declaring agreement at every point. If he were, no one would be able to swear an oath. Any number of laws lack unanimous consent. His oath does obligate him to respect the laws in place. He may employ all his efforts to change bad laws or introduce good ones, but he may not block the implementation of evil laws. A politician must vote against the selling of pornography in the stores, but he may not go into such stores and 'clean them out.' Difficulties in the oath of office become insurmountable only when laws compel participation in godlessness.

Dishonoring God's Reputation. What value does God's name have in our lives and in our relationships with others? Theologians can dishonor and blaspheme God's name by the false doctrines they promote. Reformed theologians have always insisted that heresy is a transgression of the third commandment. But there is more. Orthodox conviction must be clothed with a Christian lifestyle preoccupied in giving glory to God. The degree to which we fall short here is two fold. The Heidelberg Catechism, in question 100 [See below], teaches that God is angry with those who, insofar as in the lies, do not oppose and forbid cursing and swearing. That's obvious - He should expect His followers to defend His name. But often we are more afraid of our neighbor's anger than God's. Secondly, we fall short when we see those Scripture passages which speak of cursing in a holy manner (e.g. 1 Corinthians 16:22; Galatians 1:8). This teaches us that God possesses a unique name and unique honor that must remain exalted, even when it leads to a sharp condemnation of enemies.

Abraham Kuyper once noted that the Scriptures rarely ask us to show our gratitude by doing something for God. Rather, the emphasis is always on being something for the Lord. Religion must not be reduced to morality. Obedience to the third commandment requires earnestness in our

living. Whether we eat or drink or whatever we do, we must do everything to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Speaking is Silver, but Silence is Sometimes Golden. In contrast to blasphemy stands confessing God's name. Nevertheless, there are times when silence is golden. There are inopportune times to defend God's name (Proverbs 19:7; cf. Matthew 7:6). Christ was silent before Pontius Pilate (Matthew 26:63; Matthew 27:14). The question should not be, will I be ridiculed? But, will the Word of God be damaged? Silence, therefore, can be a matter of prudence, but it can also be a matter of laziness. A silent Christian is no Christian. Speaking is silver, but silence is sometimes golden.

Dice and the Third Commandment. Formerly, our Reformed fathers argued against rolling dice in games on the basis of Proverbs 16:33 and the idea that lots were used for prayers and therefore that playing with dice involved 'playing with God' and violating fear and reverence for Him. The outcome in rolling dice proceeds only from God and immediately so (the notion of immediate providence is at work here). Three things can be said in response:

1. The rolling of the dice does not relate to immediate providence. It results from natural laws such that we would be able to predict the result of dice rolling if we were in a position to account for all the variables. Thus we are not 'closer to God' in a way that requires special fear and trembling.

2. The distinction between mediate and immediate providence representing a distinction between distance and nearness to God is dangerous. We should fear and revere God regardless of the manner of his providence.

3. God is involved in everything. Various doses of the incalculable and unpredictable provide the excitement needed for every healthy form of relaxation. But What Then About Proverbs 16:33? 'The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.' We cannot equate casting lots with praying. We can see from Acts 1:24 that casting lots is not automatically a prayer, but through prayer it becomes a sacred act. Casting lots in itself, is not a sacred act. It is a normal occurrence just like thinking about what you are going to say (Proverbs 16:1, Proverbs 16:9), but even in normal occurrences, God is leading. The point is this: we must not disconnect even the very ordinary details of life from God's providence. Not the Third, but the Tenth Commandment. There is such a thing as a wrong use of risk in various games of chance (e.g. many forms of gambling), but that will be discussed in the tenth commandment.

EXTRACTS FROM CONFESSIONS Heidelberg Catechism

Question 100

Q. Is the blaspheming of God's Name by swearing and cursing such a grievous sin that God is angry also with those who do not prevent and forbid it as much as they can?

A. Certainly,[1] for no sin is greater or provokes God's wrath more than the blaspheming of His Name. That is why He commanded it to be punished with death.[2] [1] Leviticus 5:1. [2] Leviticus 24:16.

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Question 101 Q. But may we swear an oath by the Name of God in a godly manner?

A. Yes, when the government demands it of its subjects, or when necessity requires it, in order to maintain and promote fidelity and truth, to God's glory and for our neighbour's good. Such oath-taking is based on God's Word[1] and was therefore rightly used by saints in the Old and the New Testament.[2]

[1] Deuteronomy 6:13; Deuteronomy 10:20; Jeremiah 4:1-2; Hebrews 6:16. [2] Genesis 21:24; Genesis 31:53; Joshua 9:15; 1 Samuel 24:22; 1 Kings 1:29-30; Romans 1:9; 2 Corinthians 1:23.

Question 102 Q. May we also swear by saints or other creatures?

A. No. A lawful oath is a calling upon God, who alone knows the heart, to bear witness to the truth, and to punish me if I swear falsely.[1] No creature is worthy of such honour.[2] [1] Romans 9:1; 2 Corinthians 1:23. [2] Matthew 5:34-37; Matthew 23:16-22; James 5:12.

04. Fourth Commandment

The Fourth Commandment

4. Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labour, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it. [Exodus 20:8-11]

Difficulties. There are four apparent difficulties in understanding the fourth commandment's authority and relevance in society today:

1. The Sabbath's institution. Was the Sabbath non-existent before Exodus 16:1-36 or simply unmentioned?
2. The Sabbath's observance. Was observance of the Sabbath required in Paradise? Seemingly not, because no mention is made in Genesis 2:2-3 to man.
3. The Sabbath's abiding validity. Nowhere do we read that Christ transformed the Sabbath into Sunday.
4. The early church's inattention to the fourth commandment. They often worshiped on Sunday, but they worked too. Constantine proclaimed Sunday a day of rest in AD 321. Sunday was isolated for worship, but apparently not on the basis of the fourth commandment.

Celebrating the Sabbath. The Sabbath was never meant to be oppressive. It was not something from which Christ had to liberate the people, as so many argue. The Israelite was commanded to rest on the Sabbath in order to be refreshed (Exodus 23:12). The Sabbath was a commemoration both of God's creation rest and of Israel's liberation from Egypt. Just as the Sabbath commemorated liberation from Egyptian slavery, so Sunday commemorates Christ's resurrection. The tone of celebration was always there. A song was written for this celebration (Psalms 92:1-15) and it is called, in Scripture, a delight (Isaiah 58:13). The Sabbath was not observed as 'restrictive' by Jesus who performed a variety of works on the Sabbath, including a variety of healings (Mark 3:2-5; Luke 13:11-17, etc.). Such works were in obvious conflict with the Jewish interpretation of the law (Halacha), but in accord with the joy and restoration characterizing the Sabbath day prescribed in the Old Testament. "The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath!" (Mark 2:27). The Sabbath is a gift, to be commemorated without burdensome hindrances. Christ restored the Sabbath to its original beauty and luster.

Filling the Sabbath. Relaxation was not the only purpose for the Sabbath. The Sabbath was made for man, but was identified by Yahweh also as His Sabbath (Exodus 31:13; Leviticus 19:3; Isaiah 56:4) etc. The fourth commandment describes it as a "Sabbath consecrated to Yahweh your God." Israel was to praise Him (Psalms 92:1-15), to exercise fellowship with Him, to bring sacrifices to

Him (Numbers 28:9-10), to honor His sanctuary (Leviticus 19:30; Leviticus 26:2) and to hear His word (2 Kings 4:23). Resting therefore was accompanied by holding sacred assemblies and praising Yahweh. These two activities are combined in some passages (see Leviticus 23:3; Numbers 28:25). During the Exile synagogue worship was introduced - something Jesus customarily attended. Jesus also made use of the opportunity in this worship for extemporaneous sermons. The Sabbath is a joy for man, but man finds His deepest joy in pleasing the Lord.

Distorting the Sabbath - The Gross Distortion. The temptation often arose in Old Testament Israel to work on the Sabbath (see Amos 8:5; Isaiah 58:3; Nehemiah 13:15-22). The Sabbath, therefore, would often be trampled underfoot by profit-driven entrepreneurs. For people looking to please themselves, the law of God became a law of limitations rather than a law of liberty. Transgression of the fourth commandment in this way bore a special character. Why? The Sabbath was a sign of the covenant between Yahweh and His people (Exodus 31:12-17). The Sabbath day showed who Israel was: a chosen and liberated people who could relax for a day in view of the Lord's providential provision. The relationship between the Sabbath and liberty is highlighted in the so-called sabbatical year and the Year of Jubilee: the land was given rest and the slave freed (Leviticus 25:8-9). Observing the Sabbath required faith. Where faith is destroyed, the Sabbath is destroyed. One who violates the Sabbath violates the covenant. Sabbath violation in Israel was often the source of calamity (Nehemiah 13:18; Ezekiel 20:13).

One More Distortion - The Refined Distortion. The Jewish authorities distorted the Sabbath "in garments of piety" by immersing it in countless precepts. This may have been motivated by respect for the law, but eventually the traditions became more authoritative than the Scripture. In the development of this expanded casuistry, freedom was placed in bondage. The Mosaic Law, however, did require careful observance. While the feast days prohibited 'servile labor,' the Sabbath prohibited all work (cf. Leviticus 23:3 with Leviticus 23:7-8). But as a whole, the Sabbath was positive for the life of the Israelites (see Ezekiel 20:18-30). The following two proofs confirm that the Israelites were not in straitjackets on the Sabbath: Joshua led Israel around Jericho seven times on a Sabbath (Joshua 6:15-20) and the Shunammite woman consistently walked 20 miles to see the man of God on the Sabbath (2 Kings 4:23 - the command in Exodus 16:29 forbidding Israelite's from exiting the camp was designed only for their trip to Canaan and was not a perpetual regulation.).

Preliminary Assessment. From the above, we can locate these similarities between Sunday and Sabbath:

1. Both days possess a special character. The Sabbath points back to creation or liberation, Sunday to the resurrection of Christ.
2. Both days are feast days. Sunday celebration, which commemorated Christ's resurrection and deliverance from sin, extends and expands Israel's deliverance from Egypt.
3. Both days have worship in a central place. From 'holy assemblies' to synagogue worship to modern church services.
4. Both days can be violated in similar ways. People become enslaved to their own work and are unable to set aside a day for celebration.

One Day or Every Day? Calvin argues that the Sabbath was given for three reasons: to depict spiritual rest, to preserve ecclesiastical order and to provide relief to workers. Just as Israel was to observe a complete rest externally, so we should rest inwardly, putting to death our own will and allowing God to work in us. Christ, who is the full reality ending all Old Testament shadows, is no longer satisfied with one day, but wants the full span of our lives. Only because of human weakness do we still observe one day instead of seven as our Sabbath. Since the larger society has no time for such widespread worship, we must reserve at least one day. But the begging question is; why is one in seven a sign of weakness, especially if God rested one day in seven?

Calvin's understanding, first of all, over-spiritualizes the Sabbath in emphasizing only our spiritual rest from evil works, thereby neglecting the external features, such as rest from physical work. The spiritual essence of the fourth commandment does exist apart from the physical rest, but within it. The 'ordinary' physical rest, by which we catch our breath and praise God, is in itself a spiritual enjoyment. Calvin's understanding, secondly, eliminates the special character of weekdays to do God-glorifying, though perhaps menial labor. We have six days to do our work - that is Yahweh-serving too!

Ceremonial and/or Moral? Calvin's understanding of the Sabbath is rooted in an earlier theological distinction between the literal and allegorical meanings of biblical expressions. Allegorical interpretation seeks deeper, spiritual meanings for ordinary, earthly events - e.g. Rahab's red cord foreshadows Christ's blood. For the most part, Calvin denounced this tradition with his sober exegesis. But here he capitulates, perhaps under the influence of Augustine, who interpreted external rest simply in terms of signifying the future rest Jesus identified in his gospel offer (Matthew 11:28). But how significant then, is resting from physical labor? Are we left then with but nine commandments? The distinction between literal and allegorical was later accompanied by the distinction between ceremonial and moral, where ceremonial refers to what is no longer binding and moral to what remains binding. The term 'ceremonial' can have at least three different meanings, all of which promotes confusion, rather than clarification. Aquinas argued that the Sabbath is ceremonial (1) in that it fell on Saturday - something has disappeared, (2) in that it adumbrates Christ's rest in the grave - something now fulfilled is foreshadowed and (3) in that it points ahead to our heavenly rest - something unfulfilled is foreshadowed. The term ceremonial, therefore, is confusing. The distinction between permanent and provisional is much more helpful.

Hebrews 4:1-16. Hebrews 4:1-16 is often appealed to, to demonstrate the provisional character of the Old Testament Sabbath. The question of the Sabbath day in this passage is only indirectly present. What are in view are Sabbath places, more so than Sabbath days. Often we could translate the word 'rest' simply by 'resting place.' This activity of resting is not an exclusively Old Testament phenomenon - therein lies the mistake - it is also a New Testament phenomenon since we too rest on the Sabbath in anticipation of the heavenly and definitive rest. The relationship between the Sabbath of old and the Sunday of now is analogous to the Passover of old and the Lord's Supper of now - we are still awaiting something: the eternal rest and the great banquet feast.

Once More: the Difficulties. We wish to affirm that the fourth commandment remains intact for today. To do so, the objections mentioned in the beginning must be dealt with:

1. The institution of the Sabbath. The Sabbath was not given at creation as a universal human institution but was given to Israel (Ezra 20:10-12 [Ezra 10:10-12?]; Ezekiel 20:12; Nehemiah 9:14; Exodus 16:29). The Sabbath was a sign of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel (Exodus 31:12-17; Ezekiel 20:20). Not everything beginning with Israel ended with her. Yet while the Sabbath may not have been present from the beginning, the elements of the Sabbath certainly were (e.g. prayer, Genesis 4:26). The essence of the fourth commandment is permanent; its expression is from Sinai onward. Mankind always had to set aside time to worship (essence), but not always on the Sabbath (expression).

2. The observance of the Sabbath. Since the Sabbath was not instituted at creation, it was not intended to be observed then either. God sanctified the seventh day of the creation week for Himself. He set apart this day to rest. Later, He required the Israelites to do the same. The fourth commandment doesn't say the Sabbath was instituted at creation, but simply grounded in God's creation rest. Again, the question we ask is, why couldn't a gift and a mandate that originated at a later time become so universally significant that it embraces our Sunday?

Texts from Paul's Epistles.

3. The abiding validity of the Sabbath. The fourth commandment is not expressly maintained in the New Testament. In fact, the initial impression we get from some of Paul's epistles is that it has expired with Christ.

A. It is true that nowhere is the fourth commandment explicitly maintained, but even more so, nowhere is it explicitly done away with.

B. Jesus, though resisting the pharisaical understanding of the Sabbath, upheld the Sabbath in His life, even emphasizing its festive character. Would this gift of refreshment and celebration and praise not be fitting for the new dispensation?

C. Paul's remarks must be understood in terms of their context and his audiences. Such an investigation will lead to our conclusion that Paul is not disposing of the fourth commandment.

I. Romans 14:5. The days mentioned here are clearly days of fasting because of the context of eating and not eating. The Sabbath had to do with feasting, not fasting.

II. Galatians 4:10. Paul here, in addressing the Judaizers, is not rendering an isolated judgment about the fourth commandment, but is discussing the Sabbath in the context of matters like circumcision and the entire Jewish festival cycle. This entire cycle was established by the Judaizers as an indispensable condition for sharing in the salvation of Jesus the Messiah. The Jewish Sabbath has ceased to be replaced by Sunday. The fourth commandment has abiding validity.

III. Colossians 2:16-17. Paul here is addressing a legalistic-ascetic religiosity of a Jewish-pagan brand. He explains that the Sabbath was a shadow - a vague outline of what Christ would bestow upon His church. With the coming of Christ, it is no longer possible to travel the old paths of circumcision, feast-days, Passover and Sabbath. Their shadows have disappeared and something more Christ-apparent has appeared in its place - baptism, the Lord's Supper (no shedding of blood) and Sunday. From Sabbath to Sunday.

4. It is apparent that the early church did not view Sunday observance as a requirement of the fourth commandment. Some have argued, in line with this, that Sunday observance is an ecclesiastical ordinance rather than a divine one. With this we must agree, but in a qualified way. Sunday observance is an ecclesiastical ordinance, which inevitably followed on account of the Spirit of Christ who has led the church into all truth. The authority of this ecclesiastical ordinance lay with the Lord of the Sabbath. Sunday observance, therefore, was not merely an ecclesiastical ordinance. That's why, beginning already with the Bible (Revelation 1:10) Sunday became known as 'the Lord's Day.' The Didache, Ignatius, Justin Martyr and Tertullian and Dionysius of Corinth (ca.170), who spoke of the 'holy Lord's Day, repeat this designation. The question remains, why didn't these early writers make the connection between Sunday and the fourth commandment? A number of reasons are possible: (1) the tension between Christians and Jews would have resulted in an aversion to attach a Christian activity to a Jewish precept; (2) the allegorical understanding of those, such as Augustine, who held that the significance of the fourth commandment for us today was purely spiritual - rest from our evil works. The early church may have been weak in this, but she no doubt received Sunday as a day of joy in line with the original intention of the Sabbath. The Provisional and the Permanent. The terms provisional and permanent are much more fitting than ceremonial and moral. The Sabbath was provisional in that Christ has fulfilled it. As a commemoration of liberation from Egypt, the Sabbath was a 'shadow' of what we now possess in Christ, who is its 'substance.' Our commemoration on Sunday focuses on Christ and His resurrection from the grave. Much about the Sabbath remains permanent:

1. Sunday looks back, like the Sabbath, to God's seventh day rest - one day rest in seven;

2. Sunday looks forward, like the Sabbath, to our definitive rest from our evil works (Hebrews 4:10). The following elements were provisional:

1. The Sabbath is no longer observed on Sunday

2. The entire Sabbatical cycle is no longer observed because of its inseparable ties with Israel's existence as a separate theocratic nation (e.g. regulations about working the land, releasing slaves, etc.)

3. Capital punishment for Sabbath desecration has passed away. This sanction too was tied to Israel's separate existence as a special people wholly dedicated to Yahweh, a people for which civil and ecclesiastical discipline was blurred.

4. Many limitations of Sabbath observance have also passed. Such carefully formulated prohibitions were fitting, whereas the New Testament is characterized as a period of freedom (Galatians 4:1-5). Not Overestimating Confessional Differences. The Westminster Catechism focuses on rest from daily work, while the Heidelberg Catechism focuses on resting from our evil works. The former focuses on not working, the other on worshipping. But in order to worship, one can't work so the differences are minimal. Besides, both catechisms operate on the assumption that the fourth commandment is abiding.

Celebrating Sunday. Enjoying Sunday presupposes a few important realities, such as:

1. Denying oneself-relinquishing our ordinary daily concerns. We must not be enslaved to any daily activity, be it our employment or our hobbies or our leisure.

2. Loving neighbor-cherishing other people. In the Old Testament, everyone was equal in that everyone rested - family members, slaves, work animals and the stranger. The celebration of the Sabbath is not an individual activity, but requires the communal celebration of our liberation through Christ Jesus. We must be, and act like, a communion of saints.

3. Serving God-devoting the day to God. Sunday was created for man, but it remains the Lord's Day. We must do things on that day for the Lord that we can't do normally on other days - going to church, but also singing and praying as a family and discussing our obligations as Christians.

Sunday must take on a special character, different even from a Saturday off work. Sunday involves rest, but rest is tied to consecration. Sunday rest therefore differs from holiday rest. We must be selfless on Sundays, rather than selfish.

Filling Our Sunday. On Sunday we celebrate the fact that we are free from ourselves because we are free for God. Excessive casuistry can downplay, even eliminate this celebration. Karl Barth suggested that we must always be in a position to celebrate Sunday as a true day of joy. And Christians cannot defend a uniform celebration of Sunday. Yet there is uniformity to the degree that we all seek to obey the same commandment. We must have uniformity in denying Sunday as a workday, for example, and in upholding Sunday as a 'church-day.' The writer to the Hebrews exhorts us not to forsake assembling together. That alone will give shape to our Sunday observance. School assignments, attending sporting events, long trips, etc. are not fitting exercises for Sunday. Wanting to spend the day in communal celebration will also give shape to our Sunday observance. We won't want to spend it with pagans watching a ball game. We must always be asking the question, what kind of Sunday celebration are we pursuing?

Sunday is a day of consecration and rest. Precisely how we enjoy the Sabbath is a matter of Christian liberty. But Sunday boredom within families is often the result of the inability of families to celebrate Sunday together. Sunday may have a recreational dimension, enjoying things you are not enslaved to which allow for meaningful acknowledgment of the day as the Lord's day.

Working on Sunday. Christians have always recognized that certain works are permitted on Sunday: works of necessity (pulling an ox out of the pit, Luke 14:5), mercy (healing, Mark 2:31 [Mark 1:31?]) and religion (Matthew 12:5). The work of necessity is the most difficult. Wouldn't a farmer's work of baling hay that might otherwise be destroyed by forecasted bad weather be a work of necessity? How about working for utility companies? Two points need to be mentioned: (1) Secularization increases Sunday labor; (2) Many work activities need not be done on Sunday. A nurse's hours, for example, can be restricted. It would be better to speak of those tasks which might be necessary - work in the health care sector, in service and safety sector (police, telephone operators), work in industrial sector (round-the-clock shifts, long-distance trucking, perishable goods). We must be careful, however, that necessity and mercy don't become economic productivity and profit. Some jobs simply must be refused in the confession that one who keeps the commandment keeps his soul (Proverbs 19:16). A refusal to work on Sunday may be scorned, but it may also be admired. A Few More Comments. Four questions:

1. Does the fourth commandment require us to work six days?

No, it simply says that we must perform our work within six days. Laziness comes under the eighth commandment.

2. Can we use the term 'Sunday observance?'

Yes, we serve Christ every day, but on Sunday in a special, prescribed way. It is a holy, set apart day, both because we rest and because we go to church.

3. Is the transgression against the fourth commandment as weighty as the transgression against the sixth?

No, although it may have been in Israel since both were capital offences. Our context and situation, as being significantly different from Israel's, leads us to this conclusion.

4. Must we rest other Christian feast days to preserve Sunday's unique significance?

No, because these days can also be spent meaningfully commemorating their own redemptive significance in history.

EXTRACTS FROM CONFESSIONS Westminster Confession of Faith Question 115: Which is the fourth commandment?

Answer: The fourth commandment is, Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Question 116: What is required in the fourth commandment?

Answer: The fourth commandment requires of all men the sanctifying or keeping holy to God such set times as he has appointed in his Word, expressly one whole day in seven; which was the seventh from the beginning of the world to the resurrection of Christ, and the first day of the week ever since, and so to continue to the end of the world; which is the Christian sabbath, and in the New Testament called the Lord's day.

Question 117: How is the sabbath or the Lord's day to be sanctified?

Answer: The sabbath or Lord's day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God's worship: and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day.

Question 118: Why is the charge of keeping the sabbath more specially directed to governors of families, and other superiors?

Answer: The charge of keeping the sabbath is more specially directed to governors of families, and other superiors, because they are bound not only to keep it themselves, but to see that it be observed by all those that are under their charge; and because they are prone oftentimes to hinder

them by employments of their own.

Question119: What are the sins forbidden in the fourth commandment?

Answer: The sins forbidden in the fourth commandment are, all omissions of the duties required, all careless, negligent, and unprofitable performing of them, and being weary of them; all profaning the day by idleness, and doing that which is in itself sinful; and by all needless works, words, and thoughts, about our worldly employments and recreations.

Question120: What are the reasons annexed to the fourth commandment, the more to enforce it?

Answer: The reasons annexed to the fourth commandment, the more to enforce it, are taken from the equity of it, God allowing us six days of seven for our own affairs, and reserving but one for himself, in these words, Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: from God's challenging a special propriety in that day, The seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: from the example of God, who in six days made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: and from that blessing which God put upon that day, not only in sanctifying it to be a day for his service, but in ordaining it to be a means of blessing to us in our sanctifying it; Wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

Question121: Why is the word "remember" set in the beginning of the fourth commandment?

Answer: The word "remember" is set in the beginning of the fourth commandment, partly, because of the great benefit of remembering it, we being thereby helped in our preparation to keep it, and, in keeping it, better to keep all the rest of the commandments, and to continue a thankful remembrance of the two great benefits of creation and redemption, which contain a short abridgment of religion; and partly, because we are very ready to forget it, for that there is less light of nature for it, and yet it restrains our natural liberty in things at other times lawful; that it comes but once in seven days, and many worldly businesses come between, and too often take off our minds from thinking of it, either to prepare for it, or to sanctify it; and that Satan with his instruments much labor to blot out the glory, and even the memory of it, to bring in all irreligion and impiety.

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Question 103 Q. What does God require in the fourth commandment?

A. First, that the ministry of the gospel and the schools be maintained[1] and that, especially on the day of rest, I diligently attend the church of God[2] to hear God's Word,[3] to use the sacraments,[4] to call publicly upon the LORD,[5] and to give Christian offerings for the poor.[6] Second, that all the days of my life I rest from my evil works, let the LORD work in me through His Holy Spirit, and so begin in this life the eternal sabbath.[7]

[1] Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Deuteronomy 6:20-25; 1 Corinthians 9:13-14; 2 Timothy 2:2; 2 Timothy 3:13-17; Titus 1:5. [2] Deuteronomy 12:5-12; Psalms 40:9-10 w:9-10 w:9-10; Psalms 68:26; Acts 2:42-47; Hebrews 10:23-25. [3] Romans 10:14-17; 1 Corinthians 14:26-33; 1 Timothy 4:13. [4] 1 Corinthians 11:23-24. [5] Colossians 3:16; 1 Timothy 2:1. [6] Psalms 50:14; 1 Corinthians 16:2; 2 Corinthians 8:1-24; 2 Corinthians 9:1-15. [7] Isaiah 66:23; Hebrews 4:9-16; Hebrews 5:1-14; Hebrews 6:1-20; Hebrews 7:1-28; Hebrews 8:1-13; Hebrews 9:1-28; Hebrews 10:1-39; Hebrews

11:1-5. Fifth Commandment The Fifth Commandment

5. Honor your father and your mother. Then you will have a long life in the land Yahweh your God is giving you. (Exodus 20:12).

5. Honor your father and your mother, as Yahweh your God commanded you. Then you will have a long life and it will go well with you in the land Yahweh your God is giving you. (Deuteronomy 5:16).

Both father and mother

Although this commandment includes the matter of honoring all in authority, we must begin by discussing the honor due to father and mother. The OT Hebrew specifically doesn't mention a general phrase "parents", but "father and mother". The more general term "parents" is used in NT Greek, and is not really any different than the more specific phrase "father and mother". Mentioning the mother is no afterthought, for she deserves the same respect as the father. Often children misuse the fact that the mother is physically the weaker parent, yet even so they must honour her. Although the husband must lead the wife, children must show equal honor to both mother and father. The role of parents

Why do we have the fifth commandment? One theory is that children had to respect their parents in order to win in their struggle for survival, especially since children followed the occupational choices of their parents. According to this theory, the need that inexperienced children, who don't know yet what is good for their own future, gave rise to the command that children honor their parents. In this view, since in modern times children depend less on parents for instruction, occupational preparation, etc, it is no wonder that they no longer respect their parents.

However, the fifth commandment wasn't invented by people and the result of a necessary, evolutionary process, but given by God. Yet there is some truth in this theory: Scripture also indicates that parents are called to provide teaching (Deuteronomy 6:6-7).

Thus in Scripture the instruction-provider and instruction-receiver relationship is often described as the father and son relation (eg Proverbs). The NT also indicates that fatherhood involves instruction (eg Paul says to Corinthians he is their father, and calls Timothy et al his children). Christ also said that the genuine family relationship is characterized by listening to God's Word, and so such are His mother, brothers, and sisters. In Israel, then, parenthood functioned properly when parents preserved God's word in their own hearts and handed it on to their children. With this perspective, parents do more than transmit knowledge/skills that render an inexperienced child competent to function in the world. It also involves passing on knowledge that is decisively important for the quality of life, ie living with God.

Instruction was not exclusively the task of the parents - there were also guardians, and other forms of education. Yet even so, it is ultimately the parents who are responsible for their children's instruction. The early years of a child's life are very important, when it is exclusively the parents who nurture their children - by Bible stories, songs, prayers, and deciding which school will be used.

Parenthood and freedom The fifth commandment involves freedom. First parents had to tell the story of Israel's bondage and freedom from Egypt. Then they would say that God commanded

observance of His commands so that He might preserve His people alive. Israel's well-being was thus connected with listening to and obeying God's commandments. Israel retained her freedom in the Promised Land when her sons and daughters obeyed their parent-teachers. The commandment with a promise The promise of a long life in the Promised Land must be seen in this light, and should neither be absolutized nor downplayed.

1. Not absolutized. In some cases an early death can be a blessing by sparing people of misery (Jeroboam's son Abijah), and similarly a long life is not a blessing (Psalms 90:10). Sometimes the godless continue to live, and the oppressed righteous suffer. We are citizens of a commonwealth in heaven, and so the promise does remain valid.

2. Not downplayed. The exception doesn't become the rule. The rule is still valid: anyone who honors his parents will receive benefits from doing so, both in the future as well as now in the present. For example, children are accident-prone, and parents can protect them by warning them about fires, cars, etc. Similarly, wise parents warn against a sinful and dangerous life (Proverbs). Foolishness, laziness etc lead to destruction, whereas righteousness leads to blessing and life. Wisdom thus has physical as well as spiritual benefits.

Parenthood and discipline

Discipline is thus important, not to let off steam, but applied in wisdom as effective medicine. Proverbs indicates that discipline is life-saving! Commands that aren't supported by discipline become empty and ineffective (eg Eli!). Punishment is painful, but brings fruits later.

It is naive to allow children to make important life choices on their own. During childhood years, very significant decisions with lifelong consequences are being made for the children and not by the children (eg by taking the family to church, reading the Bible). We should thus not give plenty of freedom, for one is truly free only when he loves God and keeps His commandments. Parents commit themselves to this kind of child-rearing at baptism.

Even so, things can go differently, that children follow evil in spite of their good upbringing. Faith is a gift of grace, and children must believe for themselves. Further, in our modern world there are limits: a rebellious son can't be stoned as he would be in Israel. Yet the underlying principle remains: He who despises the freedom God gives by disobeying parents is foolish, committing a serious sin, and is playing with his life.

Honoring parents

Someone who must be honored is someone of weight ("honor" = "heavy"). God places parents above children, and so they share some of the glory/honor belonging to God. The opposite of respect is disrespect, where something weighty is treated as if it were light. This is a serious wickedness, since we must always continue to honor our parents, even if they become old and useless.

Honoring parents involves several things:

1. Taking to heart their instruction.
2. Show deference toward them, by language and forms of address.

3. Loving them.

4. Being faithful, also providing for them (financially, spiritually) in their old age.

Honoring parents and choosing a spouse

Older commentaries speak about the parents' task with respect to their children's courtship and choice of marriage partner. Often there is conflict between parents and children regarding dating and marriage. In the past, the influence of parents in this choice was far greater. Although we don't have arranged marriages today, parents do have a say about such a serious decision in their child's life. Children must not see it as strictly private matters beyond parental control. Parents do have a right to be involved in the choice, especially when they see their child take a wrong spiritual turn in dating. Children honor their parents by accepting correction when their parents warn against making wrong choices (eg mixed courtships). Even if the parents are wrong by not accepting a proper partner, one must respect them by discussing openly and honestly with them, and by being as patient as possible. The limits and style of obedience

There are limits to the obedience that children must give. God stands over the parents, and sometimes children must choose for Him and against their parents. For example, when parents don't teach their children about God and His service, children are not obligated to follow the instruction of their parents. We must love Jesus more than father and mother, says Christ. Obviously one should not too quickly deny obedience to one's parents. This can happen when someone from a secular home comes to faith in Christ as an adult. Paul said it was possible for an unbeliever and believer to stay in a marriage (1 Corinthians 7:12-16), and so also a spiritual rift need not entail cutting all natural ties. Wisdom is needed in honestly expressing one's faith convictions while seeking at the same time to maintain family relationships.

Sometimes children are abused. Generally speaking, however, problems between parents and children are rarely of the kind where a choice "for or against Christ" is required. Parents have weaknesses and inadequacies, with which children must be patient. When they get older, children must realize that all parents are sinners, and so within the families children must learn patience and accept the fact that also parents have faults. The limit of obedience thus is that children must obey their parents "in the Lord", ie as long as it is not against the Lord. The style of obedience is also "in the Lord", accepting parents with their weaknesses, just as Christ did. Honouring our parents means we must thus be willing to endure a lot.

Other forms of authority Can we exegetically defend including "all in authority over me" (eg government, elder, teacher)? The Biblical concept of "father" allows this, for the term "father" could apply also to elders, the king, etc. In these relationships of authority, the concept of fatherhood indicates the possession of wisdom and insight. The honor due to father and mother must therefore be given to all those other "fathers" and "mothers". The elderly, the king, etc are all to be shown deference and honour. The honor due to parents, the elderly, judges, princes, and teachers includes the duty to obey. For example, after mentioning this commandment, Paul speaks about the obedience that slaves must give to their masters, wives to husbands, children to parents, etc. Although authority today is less patriarchal, honor and obedience must still be given to those who exercise authority.

Different forms, different words The husband wife relation has now changed, and wives no longer call their husbands "lord" as Sarah did. Although "obey" is no longer in the Dutch form for marriage, the term "follow" contains the notion of a certain rank and authority relationship. Although the fundamental structure remains, cultural changes can necessitate choosing other words.

We see similar changes in the master-servant relationship, and although the texture of the relationship has changed, the concept of authority in the employer-employee relationship remains.

Although authority relationships in the political sphere have changed with democracy, yet a government still rules the people, and an authority relationship remains.

We must take the changes that have taken place into account in our usage. Although we can use terms like "subjection" in the context of parent-child relations, we don't use it anymore in the context of husband-wife relations. Similar remarks can be made about the employer-employee relationship.

Authority and power The concepts of authority and power aren't identical: one can possess authority without having the power needed for carrying out his authority (Dutch queen during war). The reverse is also possible.

Power is in itself not bad, but good and necessary. Although it can be abused, in itself it is not brutal or demonic, eg we speak about the power of the word, of love, of numbers. Power is necessary and wholesome for the proper development of society. Defined, it is "the ability to do something."

Authority, defined, is "the authorization for the (appropriate) use of power."

1. It must be "appropriate", ie have a serving character. Those in authority must use their authority appropriately, that is, it must be functional. Is it still authority if it is not used appropriately? Yes. Authority is thus misused, but the authorization for using power is still there. Parents don't become ex-parents by raising their children inappropriately. Of course, no earthly power is absolute, and can be stripped. There are means in which the authority of parents, office-bearers and governments can have their power taken away.

2. Authority must also be limited by its purpose. eg an employee is only under the authority of his employer during working hours. In this sense, authority is always a limited authority. Even though all authority comes from God, it is not thus untouchable - it has either a wide and narrow scope, of long or short duration. As such, those who possess authority should be respected, even if they are unable to use their power appropriately.

Max Weber (1864-1920) distinguished between authority: a) Charismatic authority characterizes the prophet, hero or leader who speaks to the heart of the people. This authority is easy. b) Traditional authority rests upon "sacred" traditions, such as caste or office. Often this authority is untouchable, though it can also be oppressive. c) Legal authority has no face, and is characterized by laws and bureaucratic institutions.

Although Weber is helpful, he does not take a normative approach. The real basis for respecting authority flows neither from emotions, traditions, or rationality, but from God. People are clothed

with authority by God. Although the forms of authority have changed, we are under other people, and this means they have been appointed by God to be over us, and so we must respect them. Regardless of the form of authority, or whether it functions well or badly, one must submit to legitimate authority.

Crisis of authority and handling suffering The influence of and respect for authority has declined in recent times. There is a cry for change, and for greater freedom. The contemporary emphasis describes authority as functional, to the extent that where the appropriate use of power is absent, the authority is also rejected. The result of this view is that authority depends on the person who exercises power, and the God-given origin is forgotten. Consequently, those under authority are the people who determine whether authority functions, and thus whether it can be legitimated. In the case of a negative judgment, then authority no longer exists. Consistently applied, this would mean that children could dismiss their parents, pupils their teachers, etc. The error here is that one can't conclude from a misuse of authority that the right to exercise authority no longer exists. There may be legitimate means to terminate badly functioning authority. But while in authority, they must be respected, no matter how difficult that might become for us.

How can we explain the drastic lowering of respect for authority?

1. The matter of respect for authority has always been a problem.
2. People often fail to see why defective authority is always better for society than unbridled freedom. In the climate of secularism with its distaste for authority, the entire "capitalist" system with its authority structures is endangered.
3. People are preoccupied with their own individual rights, but forget about their responsibilities. Authority is seen to restrict a person, and hinder individualism.
4. There is less willingness to endure pain. Pain used to be seen as coming from God's hand, but today even smaller amounts of pain and suffering are endured with much protest.

The authority of the state

Scripture clearly teaches that there must be civil government, contra Anabaptists. Yet the government itself doesn't have absolute power, but is subject to divine justice and to the laws of the land. The state also has the power to bear the sword. Although ministers and church members can't defend Christian teaching with physical force, the government may employ force in defending or restoring public order. This understanding accords with Scripture in Romans 13:1-14. Christians in the past have generally operated with a favorable view of government. Politics need not be dirty and ugly, and political power is not a suspicious matter in itself. Although there can be abuses of power, we should not see politics as so thoroughly stained that one can't avoid getting his hands dirty.

Must we read Romans 13:1-14 differently?

Some say that the church has misunderstood Romans 13:1-14, and that a submissive attitude towards the state can't be deduced from this chapter as is traditionally done.

One evangelical writer says that a person must submit (hupotasso, Romans 13:1) to the powers above him, which is different from obeying (hupakouo). Powers that exist have been ordained "under" (not "by") God. The government is thus a human ordinance, which God did not create, install, or appoint, but ordered and put under Himself. Although the state bears the sword, Romans does not say that this is good - Paul is merely observing a fact. This is part of an order that is passing away. The "good" that Christians must do relates not to obedience to the law, but to the "good" actions of Romans 12:1-21. With this contemporary interpretation, one wonders how much loyalty toward the state was actually left. In fact, this view is incorrect. The word "submit" presupposes an attitude of obedience, as is clear from the use of the word elsewhere in the NT. "Submitting" thus includes "being obedient to". This obedience must be rendered because governments are ordained by God. This is clear from the fact that the government exists in the service of God (v4). The theme of Romans 13:1-7 is that since governments are ordained by God, we must live under them. Resisting the government is thus resisting the ordinance of God. Consequently, we can simply continue to say that the government has been instituted by God. Although the state bears characteristics of the provisional and the passing (eg the sword), it is a present characteristic instituted by God, and so the use of the sword and the use of force is legitimate. Moreover, the context makes clear that the "good" refers to showing loyalty towards the state, such as by honoring its tax laws. So where does this new interpretation come from? It has its origin in Anabaptism, in which Christ is excluded from worldly politics. They have a theology of a suffering God, whose power consists in a capacity to tolerate everything. This ends up with a theology of revolution, for although they swear off using the sword, they need it to usher in the new and more just order! In contrast, we maintain Romans 13:1-14, which sees the state as instituted by God in order to reward good and punish evil. Although governments do abuse their power (eg Paul imprisoned), the state must be honored. The right of revolution

Although the 5th commandment requires us to respect political authority, resistance is permissible in emergency situations. Sometimes we must obey God rather than man (eg Egyptian midwives), although such actions don't represent revolution against the government. Religious persecution can be the basis for justifying revolution, but even then freedom of religion is just one of the rights being defended and sought. Other instances can be if a government continually and brutally violates the elementary rights of citizens.

It is necessary that a revolution against the state be conducted by people with political authority. Lesser governments, or leaders recognized by the people, should lead it. In summary, there are three conditions that must be met in order for the right of revolution to exist:

1. Elementary rights belonging to citizens are brutally and continually violated by the government.
2. Persons who may be considered to represent the people are the ones leading the revolution.
3. The probability of success for such a revolution must be high, so that possible bloodshed remains limited.

Civil disobedience

Civil disobedience refers to "publicly visible conduct that consciously violates the law in order to change a law or government regulation by means of what is intended to be nonviolent compulsion." It bears a public character, in the form of sit-ins, blockades, etc.

Objections against civil disobedience:

- In practice, it rarely succeeds in remaining nonviolent.
- It undermines parliamentary democracy.

Christians should avoid civil disobedience. We should use every legal means at our disposal, but not take the law into our own hands by walking outside the fence of the law and try to force our will upon others.

Disobedience to the government can be necessary; but civil disobedience, in terms of both its definition and its well-known practice, looks entirely different from the disobedience commanded for Christians in extreme situations.

06. Sixth Commandment

The Sixth Commandment 6. You shall not kill. [Exodus 20:13]

Respect for Living Things. The commandment here envisions the lives of other people, but it may be worthwhile to consider first its implications for the life of animals and plants. Plants and animals are also creatures of God, but man was given the right to eat them (plants in Genesis 1:29-30, animals in Genesis 9:3). Nevertheless, God cares for such living things (John 4:11): He gives them food and drink (Psalms 104:11-30), accepts them as sacrifices, etc. We cannot use plants and animals simply for our purposes because they exist for God's glory both in this life and in the world to come (Isaiah 11:6-8; Revelation 22:2)! We may abuse neither animals nor plants (see Exodus 23:5), although they may be used to serve our needs. Vegetarianism, therefore, has no biblical basis. Neither does opposition to animal experimentation.

Respect for Human Life. Apart from animals and plants, human beings have been created uniquely in God's image. Human life, especially therefore, must be received with respect (Genesis 9:6; James 3:9). Whether a person functions as the image of God is meaningless in this ethical question; the very fact that he can, and is called to, bear God's image, gives people the right to live.

Freedom, Life and Praise. The sixth commandment, like the others, follows the preamble about deliverance and liberation. King Pharaoh wanted to destroy Israel by killing. God delivered his people from death, thereby making life a sign of grace for His people. To destroy life would be an attack this grace. Life originated from God, through creation and redemption (even from Egypt), and exists for the purpose of God's praise (Psalms 118:17). Every human being is someone, either actually or potentially, who declares God's praise. To kill a human being in this sense is to rob God.

Reverence for Human Life. Life exists for a purpose - that implies a limitation. Human life is not a goal in and of itself, but it is designed for service to God and neighbor. Plants and animal life do not have absolute value - they may be killed for human purposes; but neither does human life. Killing is justified at times. Immortality is innate in humans - it is in God, but it is bestowed on humans (1 Corinthians 15:53-54). The expression 'reverence for life' gives the impression that life was sacred. This was Albert Schweitzer's view - to pluck a leaf or kill a flower was sinful. We must have reverence for God over reverence for life. God gave us animals to eat and God entrusts the state with the sword. The maxim, 'reverence for life' is too broad, too high and thus too dangerous.

No Unlawful Killing. The commandment is concerned with unlawful killing, the kind of killing that violated justice. But it includes far more than "murder." Murder involves premeditation and intention. If someone kills intentionally, but without premeditation, it is voluntary manslaughter. When someone kills out of recklessness (e.g. reckless driving), it is called involuntary manslaughter or reckless homicide). A nurse who administers the wrong medicine to a patient who dies because of it is also guilty of involuntary manslaughter. A death for which there is no culpability is one in which, for example, an axe head flies off the handle and kills someone (see

Deuteronomy 19:5). The fifth commandment applies to all of these suggesting to us that what is forbidden is more than mere 'murder.' Accidental deaths in the Bible required special provisions, either involving a flight to the altar of Yahweh (Exodus 21:3) or to a city of refuge (Numbers 35:1-34). Even when there was no culpability, special provisions were in order.

Abortion. Until quite recently, both Catholic and Protestant believers were convinced that abortion was morally wrong. The need to defend human life and personhood from conception (Psalms 129:1-8; Job 10:8-12) is becoming great, even within Christendom. Several arguments have been advanced in support of abortion, the first of which we accept: (1) the medical argument - when the mother's life is threatened; (2) the psychological argument - the woman's psychological health is threatened by continuing pregnancy; (3) eugenic argument - the likelihood of disabled children; (4) ethical argument - pregnancies resulting from criminal acts such as rape or incest. Shouldn't that unborn child receive the right to live? (5) social argument - woman's social standing is threatened by continuing pregnancy (e.g. studies, income, etc.). We must always maintain the possibility of adoption.

Euthanasia. We must distinguish between different forms of euthanasia. Within what is often called active euthanasia, there exists, first of all, involuntary euthanasia by which a person's life is terminated without his or her consent. Such euthanasia is often administered to newborns with severe handicaps or to older folk who suffer from senility. This form of euthanasia is outright wrong. We are to value life, not from our own measly estimations, but in terms of God and the glory he receives, even from seemingly meaningless life. Christ provided a place in his kingdom for lunatics and paralytics, the blind and the deaf.

Also within active euthanasia we can speak of voluntary euthanasia by which a person requests the termination of his or her life. Although such death is self-determined, the self does not always know best. Besides, we do not have self-determination over our lives! God commands us not to kill - and that includes ourselves. People will argue that in view of all the medications and treatments life no longer ends naturally. But here a distinction between culture and nature is warranted. Humanly planted trees, we say, are grown naturally. So we recognize that life, even plant life, is not a human product but has an existence quite apart from humanity. It matters greatly, therefore, whether someone dies from euthanasia or cancer - the first being a fatal human act, the latter being a fatal illness. The first is an unnatural death; the second is natural, even if medications were involved. But since we do not believe in the absolute reverence for life because 'absolutes' belong properly and only to God, we will concede that life can be prolonged, but need not be stretched. To postpone life by a day or a week seems unnecessary. The second category is passive euthanasia. Such terminology carries a number of problems so we prefer termination of treatment. There is a grand distinction between termination of life and termination of treatment. Death may follow a termination of treatment, but not necessarily so. A person no longer receiving medical treatment will still be fed and loved and cared for. Hence the term 'passive euthanasia' is unfitting.

Suicide. Suicide involves a person taking his own life without the help of others (e.g. euthanasia). The Bible records a number of suicides (e.g. Samson and Saul), but nowhere gives a moral commentary. Our starting point, therefore, must be the sixth commandment. Because we have been created in God's image, killing ourselves, like killing others, is wrong. We must also be careful in our religious judgment of people who have taken their own lives - suicide often results

from pathological, rather than reasoned behavior. But suicide can never be justified ethically. In Jesus Christ there is refuge and hope for the desperate. He is sovereign, not we. He makes of our lives what He wants; we do not decide that.

Negligent Homicide. Israel was to protect the life and safety of her neighbors by building railings around her roofs. This principle extends also to us, at both small (slippery sidewalks) and great (Chernobyl) levels. The sphere of sports and entertainment is also relevant here. If certain sports put human lives at risk, than they cannot be considered healthy sports. The same applies to addictions to drugs and excessive uses of alcohol or tobacco. Much good can be said about alcohol - it makes the heart glad (Psalms 104:15) and the fruit of the vine will be enjoyed in the kingdom of God (Matthew 26:29). But alcohol abuse is a reality - something the Scripture also warns against. Wine can bite like a snake and sting like a viper (Proverbs 23:32). Christians must take preventive measures to ensuring healthy lives (diets, etc.).

Getting to the Heart of the Matter. To get at the root of the matter dealt with in this commandment involves turning to envy, hatred, anger and vindictiveness. Yet the heart of the matter involves loving God and neighbor and acting in a way that is patient, peace loving, gentle, merciful and friendly. Hatred for others put one "danger of hell fire" (Matthew 5:22). Dishonor need not include only physical pummeling. Mere words and language can serve as deadly venom (1 Samuel 25:10; 2 Samuel 16:7-8; Proverbs 12:18, NIV). Anger is more of a momentary explosion of rage involving a more direct display of disgust. Words kill and so do looks. Envy involves a desire to steal a good piece of fortune that we do not have. It attacks another and destroys oneself (Proverbs 14:30). A vindictive person wants to enforce a punishment against another without the right to do so. We must let God be judge (Romans 12:19). Yet these four 'emotions' can be expressed legitimately. "Do I not hate them that hate you," we read in Psalms 139:1-24. Marital infidelity often invokes righteous jealousy. Saying "no" to death also means saying "yes" to life. We must be willing to go the extra mile with our neighbor (Matthew 5:41). The Commandment's Long Reach: "Your Neighbor." If we are to love our enemies, then no one is excluded from that love. But not everyone is our neighbor in the same sense. We are not called first to love those farthest away, but those nearest to us, those who cross our path. The priest and the Levite saw the half-dead man, but the Samaritan saw and did something.

Self-Defense. Killing in self-defense is biblically permissible, but not always so. We discover in Exodus 22:2-3, that if an intruder was killed in the dark there was no culpability on the part of the killer; there was culpability, however, if the intruder was killed in the daytime.

Capital Punishment. We must defend capital punishment as a consequence of our respect for life and God's law (Genesis 9:6). A person may not be killed with impunity. The government has the right to bear the sword for the protection of life. The catechism [See below] confesses that the sword is used to prevent murder. The sword functions in the service of life, not death. But notice how the sword is entrusted to the government and no to individual persons. Romans 12:1-21 says, "Take no revenge, but let God be judge." In Romans 13:1-14, we read that the government may exercise vengeance on God's behalf. Karl Barth has argued that the death of Christ has satisfied the judicial basis for the death penalty. But then what about other criminal punishments - wouldn't they be satisfied too? Capital punishment for murder is different than other OT punishments - e.g. homosexuality, adultery. With murder, the context is avenging wrongdoing: life for life, eye for eye

(Exodus 21:23-25).

War. The government may also use the sword for outside invaders. This refers to 'just war.' Generally state, a just war must be waged (1) by a legitimate government, (2) for a legitimate cause, (3) with a legitimate purpose, (4) with consideration of benefits and costs, (5) with means proportionate to the offense and (6) recognizing the difference between civilians and soldiers. War and bloodshed in the Bible was never accepted as normal phenomena (Joshua 1:13; Isaiah 2:2-4). Nuclear weapons should not be banned because there will always be one side storing them up. Thus such weapons can function as a deterrent.

EXTRACTS FROM CONFESSIONS Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day xx

Question 105 Q. What does God require in the sixth commandment?

A. I am not to dishonour, hate, injure, or kill my neighbour by thoughts, words, or gestures, and much less by deeds, whether personally or through another;[1] rather, I am to put away all desire of revenge.[2] Moreover, I am not to harm or recklessly endanger myself.[3] Therefore, also, the government bears the sword to prevent murder.[4]

[1] Genesis 9:6; Leviticus 19:17-18; Matthew 5:21-22; Matthew 26:52. [2] Proverbs 25:21-22; Matthew 18:35; Romans 12:19; Ephesians 4:26. [3] Matthew 4:7; Matthew 26:52; Romans 13:11-14. [4] Genesis 9:6; Exodus 21:14; Romans 13:4.

Question 106 Q. But does this commandment speak only of killing?

A. By forbidding murder God teaches us that He hates the root of murder, such as envy, hatred, anger, and desire of revenge,[1] and that He regards all these as murder.[2] [1] Proverbs 14:30; Romans 1:29; Romans 12:19; Galatians 5:19-21; James 1:20; 1 John 2:9-11. [2] 1 John 3:15.

Question 107 Q. Is it enough, then, that we do not kill our neighbour in any such way?

A. No. When God condemns envy, hatred, and anger, He commands us to love our neighbour as ourselves,[1] to show patience, peace, gentleness, mercy, and friendliness toward him,[2] to protect him from harm as much as we can, and to do good even to our enemies.[3]

[1] Matthew 7:12; Matthew 22:39; Romans 12:10. [2] Matthew 5:5; Luke 6:36; Romans 12:10; Romans 12:18; Galatians 6:1-2; Ephesians 4:2; Colossians 3:12; 1 Peter 3:8. [3] Exodus 23:4-5; Matthew 5:44-45; Romans 12:20.

07. Seventh Commandment

The Seventh Commandment 7. You shall not commit adultery. [Exodus 20:14]

A Crime Against Property? The Hebrew word for "to commit adultery" indicates that a man, either married or unmarried, has sexual intercourse with a married (or betrothed) woman. He takes into possession what does not belong to him (Deuteronomy 22:24). Having sex with an unmarried woman, at least in Israel, would not constitute adultery. The decisive factor was the woman's status: was she or wasn't she married? In the case of Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38:1-30) Tamar was charged with adultery and not Judah because Judah though she was unmarried.

We might conclude therefore that adultery was a crime against property, but wrongly so. A man's wife was worth more than a piece of property. Having sex with a slave girl was a violation of property, but not adultery, and a special fine was assessed (Leviticus 19:20-21). In the case of adultery, the death penalty was required, either by means of fire (Genesis 38:24) or stoning (Deuteronomy 22:23-24). If this was purely a matter of property, it could have been treated under the eighth commandment (You shall not steal). This commandment involves not merely a violation of property, but a violation of honor. The honor of a husband, illustrated by the Lord's jealousy, can hardly be restored (Proverbs 6:34-35; Jeremiah 3:8-9; Jeremiah 5:7; Hosea 2:1-23; Hosea 3:1-5). Adultery is a violation of a unique relationship - marriage. A Still Wider Field of Vision. Yet the seventh commandment cannot be restricted to the act of adultery. Jesus teaches us that in Matthew 5:17, Matthew 5:28. Not property, but sexuality is the subject of this commandment - principles for sexual relationships. The boundaries of these relationships are given in part in Leviticus 18:1-30; Leviticus 20:1-27. Prostitution is involved in this discussion for adultery and prostitution are often closely linked in the Bible. But that's because of the distinction between a married or unmarried woman. Visiting the latter constituted adultery and was punishable by death. But all other forms of prostitution are condemned by the Bible (Leviticus 19:29; Deuteronomy 23:17-18). For a woman to lose her virginity outside of marriage was a shameful thing (Deuteronomy 22:13-21). The body is not for prostitution, but for the Lord Jesus Christ. It is a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:13-14).

Man and Woman. Marriage is an institution of God. The participants of marriage are man and woman. Some, such as Plato, have argued that humanity originated with an androgen and that we should understand the duality of man and woman as brokenness. Modern feminists want to 'restore' the brokenness by downplaying differences - hence homosexuality and bisexuality are encouraged. Male or female is a result of nurture, not nature. God is also a He/She. Yet, we must submit to Scripture and to God who said "It is good" about Adam and Eve. The harmonious relationship between man and woman was broken because of the fall. Men and women were to rule the world together but with an order of rank: the man functions as head. The Goal of Marriage. The goal of marriage is twofold: to propagate and to assist one another. Both are clear in Genesis 2:24: A man shall leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife and become one flesh. Cleaving refers to a loving relationship or friendship. Become one flesh refers to sexual relations,

but not exclusively so. In Ephesians 5:1-33, flesh refers to the entire person (see Ephesians 5:29, Ephesians 5:31). Polygamy, therefore, is illegitimate. It does not conform to the marriage instituted at creation. Though God tolerated it, it did bring many problems (Genesis 16:4-6; Genesis 29:16-24).

Responsible Family Planning. Having children is a purpose of marriage, but being childless does not necessarily indicate a failed marriage. Yet we must not disconnect the goal of marriage from having children. Arguments for remaining childless on the basis of Genesis 1:1-31 are not valid. New generations will always be needed as the world turns. Yet children appear in the world not automatically, but as a matter of reflection. This distinguishes human reproduction from animal reproduction. Restricting children may at times be necessary, either by natural or artificial birth control.

Artificial Insemination. What about artificially intervening to enable conception and birth? When it comes to artificial insemination we must distinguish between sperm donated by a husband (AIH where H = Husband) and that by a non-husband (AID - where D = Donor). In cases of AID, contraception occurs beyond the limits of marriage and a third party is introduced in the marriage. This transgresses the exclusive marriage relationship. This is a case of artificial adultery. This cannot be compared to adoption, where both parents stand in the same relationship to the child. The biological aspect is immense, both for the child and his parents. Artificial insemination by a husband need not be rejected. In Vitro Fertilization. This form of conception occurs in the laboratory where a sperm cell fertilizes an egg in a 'test-tube.' The conceived embryo is then transferred into the uterus. Fertilization therefore occurs outside the woman's body. This has opened the possibility of surrogate motherhood. This is an option for women whose uteruses are not functioning, but who can produce healthy eggs. Here, using IVF an embryo is transferred to the uterus of another woman. Four conditions must be met for this to be approved: 1. The embryo must originate from the woman and her husband; 2. The embryo must be implanted in its own mother (we reject surrogate motherhood). The womb is not a guestroom for a child, but a place where mothers care for their children. 3. All embryos must be implanted. Embryos are human life and we cannot go about selecting the best ones. 4. The embryos must be implanted as soon as possible. Freezing them increases the chance they will be used for other purposes.

Because of Sexual Immorality. The third purpose for marriage is sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 7:1). Paul speaks soberly about marriage in this passage in 1 Corinthians. This must be read in light of what he writes in Ephesians 5:1-33 about the beauty of marriage. Unmarried status deserves preference in Corinth because of the existing crisis (1 Corinthians 7:26, 1 Corinthians 7:32-40). This is not a regulation for all time. Paul recognizes the strength of sexual urges and so as to prevent immorality, marriage is recommended.

Sexual Pleasure. The above argument can lead to a mistaken conclusion. Those who marry are weak and less spiritual, less devote Christians. People of high spiritual position, like the office-bearers, should not get married. Celibacy is more exalted than marriage. Yet marriage is a holy institution, a divinely ordained institution which originated before man's fall into sin. There are other reasons, than sexual immorality. Besides when God called his creative work, "very good," he was also speaking of marriage. Sexual enjoyment, also, is exalted in the Scriptures (Proverbs 5:18-19 and the Song of Songs). Voluntary singleness can be good, but we should not impose

celibacy. The priests were married, as were the apostles of the New covenant (1 Corinthians 9:5). While sexual enjoyment is exalted, it should not become gluttonous. Not every form of sexual expression is permitted.

En Route to Adulthood. Grapes ripen only in autumn. A child must mature before he is introduced to the world of sexuality. For that reason pedophilia is extremely harmful. Even worse is incest. Regulations against incest were codified in the Mosaic Law (Leviticus 18:1-30; Leviticus 20:1-27). Masturbation should also be discussed here. The Bible says very little about masturbation. The sin of Onan (Genesis 38:9-10) has nothing to do with Onanism. Onan engaged not in self-pleasure, but in pregnancy prevention to fulfill his levirate duty. We do learn from Leviticus 15:16-17 and Deuteronomy 13:10-11 that nocturnal emissions render a man ceremonially unclean, as do female menstruations. And nocturnal emissions, although effected 'subconsciously' do include impure desires. Prayers for forgiveness should include the sins of sleep. We must desire to present our bodies as holy and acceptable sacrifices to God (Romans 12:1).

Choosing a Partner and Preparing for Marriage. The decision to marry has become a personal choice rather than a business one. This is an improvement. In Bible times, many marriages were entered out of love (Michal loved David - 1 Samuel 18:18, 1 Samuel 18:20), but many were also arranged apart from love (Isaac's wife whom he received with love - Genesis 24:67). The basis of a good marriage is the faithfulness that husband and wife pledge to one another. A mutual fondness can grow out of faithfulness. Arranged marriages, therefore, can be successful. And parents should give their input and advice, although they should not compel their children to follow their advice.

Some restrictions must apply to whom we may marry. We may not marry unbelievers because marriage is designed to reflect the relationship between Christ and His church. How then can a believer be yoked to an unbeliever (2 Corinthians 6:14-16)? We are called to marry in the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:13-20). Marriages require a shared religious foundation so that spiritual unity may be experienced in marriage too.

Cohabiting Without Marrying? Society today does not see the need to marry. Marriage brings with it lifelong commitments which tend to complicate breaking up. This cannot be defended on the basis of Scripture where man and woman are to share life in body and soul with one another. Here are the arguments against it:

(1) In the Mosaic legislation, sexual intercourse was proper only within the context of marriage. If it became evident on her wedding night that a woman was not a virgin, she was stoned to death (Deuteronomy 22:13-21). If a man had sex with an unbetrothed girl, he could be compelled to marry her (Exodus 22:16-17). Sex may not occur outside of marriage (1 Corinthians 6:12-20 and 1 Corinthians 7:9);

(2) Living together as man and woman affected the broader community. The village community witnessed the marriage of Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 4:7-13). The community can be summoned to serve as witness when promises and obligations are not fulfilled;

(3) The Bible teaches us that living together as husband and wife is a lifelong bond. Just as living together does not require a marriage license, so leaving each other does not require a divorce. By their very nature, the components of love and total life communion between a man and woman

require a promise of lifelong faithfulness. Just as government officials are required to make public pledges that hold them accountable, so should husbands and wives.

Homosexuality. Scripture condemns homosexuality in Leviticus 18:22-23 and Leviticus 20:13 along with Romans 1:26-27. The argument that Leviticus is forbidding cultic homosexuality holds no water. Why is there no forbidding of cultic heterosexuality? Secondly, it is the homosexual act, which is forbidden, quite apart from its context. Romans 1:1-32 teaches us that it is 'against nature.' What nature means here, as opposed to 1 Corinthians 11:14, is determined by the context - creation. The punishments for homosexual behavior have changed, but the moral culpability has not. A person with homosexual desires is not by definition a homosexual. So long as he or she fights against them, they are with all others fighting the good fight of faith.

Adultery and Divorce. A marriage is not a contract which may be dissolved, but a covenant witnessed by God and other people (Proverbs 2:17; Malachi 2:14). Adultery and divorce do not mean the same thing. Destroying a marriage by adultery was punishable by death. Divorce was permitted in cases where the husband discovered "something indecent" in his wife (Deuteronomy 24:1). These words likely refer to the shameful behavior of a serious nature. But divorce was never to be routine - Jesus reminds us of that (Matthew 5:31-32). Jesus permitted divorce permissible in cases of sexual immorality since capital punishment was no longer administered for adultery. The Jews had turned the permission of divorce into a virtue. Divorcing for the most obscure reasons prevented them from committing adultery. Jesus blew the dust of that by saying that divorce and adultery are cut from the same cloth. In fact, divorce opens the door for adultery. Two things are necessary for adultery: a marriage is dissolved which shouldn't have been and one of the divorced partners marries someone else. When a third party enters the picture and has sex with one of the partners, then adultery occurs. One translation has of Matthew 5:32, "If a man divorces his wife and she has not been unfaithful, then he is guilty of making her commit adultery if she marries again." Compare with 1 Corinthians 7:10-11. Divorce turns into adultery if a divorced party marries another. Two possibilities exist: either the divorced parties remain unmarried or they become reconciled.

Permissible Divorces. Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 argue that divorce certificates were not forbidden on the grounds of sexual immorality. There's an exceptive clause like this: Anyone who assaults another person, except in a situation of war, and kills him, commits murder. Adultery does constitute grounds for a divorce, but does not necessitate a divorce. A second ground for divorce is willful desertion, based on 1 Corinthians 7:15-16. If the unbeliever chooses to leave the believer, the latter is not obligated to remain with the unbeliever at all costs. If the unbeliever is willing to remain married, the couple should remain married. The faith of one has a powerful and sanctifying influence, such that the child is considered holy (1 Corinthians 7:14).

It is disputed what is meant by saying the believer is no longer 'bound' to remain married to the unbeliever. Is he or she free to marry a second time? If the first marriage is dissolved, a second marriage should be permissible. Paul says to believers who have divorced: Don't marry again or else be reconciled to your spouse (1 Corinthians 7:10-11). He does not say this for this situation.

How do you reconcile Jesus with Paul? They were dealing with different situations. The difference is formulated clearly by William Ames: There's a ground for effecting divorce (Matthew) and there's a ground for acquiescing in divorce (1 Corinthians). Willful desertion, as introduced in 1

Corinthians 7:1-40 may have broader applications by analogy. Each case must be evaluated individually. The question of culpability is especially difficult to establish. The lovelessness of one can drive the other into the arms of a third. The first is the innocent one, yet the source of the trouble.

Divorce Without Subsequent Marriage. If there are legitimate grounds for divorce, these can also be legitimate reasons for marrying again. A divorce is a break in the marriage, but before God husband and wife are not separated. They are not free to enter a new marriage.

Abstaining in Freedom. In this whole area of being unable to remarry, a Christian can be severely tested in his or her obedience to the seventh commandment. For many, a subsequent marriage or sexual intercourse must be given up. The remedy can only be the gospel which shows us that we are on the way to a place where people neither marry nor are given in marriage (Matthew 22:30). Freedom consists in crucifying the flesh with its passions and desires (Galatians 5:24).

08. Eighth Commandment

The Eighth Commandment 8. You shall not steal. [Exodus 20:15]

Kidnapping. In certain New Testament lists of sins which parallel the 10 commandments in some respect we discover 'kidnapping' as a violation of the eighth commandment (See 1 Timothy 1:10). A better translation of this reads, "man stealers." We read about this kind of stealing in Exodus 21:16 and Deuteronomy 24:7. This has led some to argue that the eighth commandment is about stealing people, not property. This is incorrect. And yet stealing people is part and parcel of what is forbidden. But who steals people today? Voetius spoke of children taken by the Roman church and brought to a monastery, for example. But Voetius also condemned slavery under stealing. This robs them of legitimate freedom. Yahweh guaranteed freedom by liberating his people from Egyptian bondage. No Israelite was to rob his brother by degrading him to the status of slave. There were slaves in Israel, with God's permission, but they were included in the spoils of war. Such slaves were entitled to a respectable life however (see Exodus 21:16 and Deuteronomy 23:15-16). Modern commentaries speak of terrorism as a form of 'man-stealing.' In some ways, discrimination and manipulation are forms of slavery - robbing people of their dignity, etc.

Stealing the Heart. Manipulation is known in the Bible as 'stealing another's heart.' Jacob stole Laban's heart by not telling him he wanted to flee (Genesis 31:20) and then fleeing (Genesis 31:26). Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel, just like political candidates dupe their audiences. The same can be said of Adolf Hitler. We could consider advertising here. But we must remember that occasionally people let their freedom be taken from them. A society sometimes wants to be fooled - it then is partly to blame.

Social Injustice. Older commentaries often spoke of land thievery. In these commentaries, those in power were reminded of this commandment. Those stealing private property are criminals; those who steal public property are kings (Bullinger). Both are wrong and both Luther and Calvin lamented it (cf. Isaiah 5:8; Jeremiah 22:13-17; Amos 8:4-6). These attitudes conflict with the Bible's teaching about our obligations to the poor. They were to share in the harvest (Exodus 23:11; Leviticus 19:10; Leviticus 23:22). In a land blessed by Yahweh, where all His commands are carefully observed, there did not need to be nor should there have been any poor (Deuteronomy 15:4-5).

Weights, Measures, Merchandise and Money. The catechism [See below] mentions stealing by force, but also secret theft (see Proverbs 9:17 NIV). This secrecy often has the appearance of righteousness and includes false weights, measures, merchandizing and money (Leviticus 19:35-36; Deuteronomy 25:23-26; Proverbs 11:1). You could mix flour with sugar or water with wine, etc. Today such deception is more difficult. Yet we can still make our product to seem better than it is.

What about usury? Initially the church objected to loaning money at interest (see Exodus 22:25 and Leviticus 25:35-38 and Deuteronomy 23:19-20). Yet, as Calvin argued, it is incorrect to

identify every form of interest with usury. Usury is exorbitant profit taking. But if certain goods are loaned which themselves yield a profit, then interest is not usury. But in any case, interest was forbidden in Scripture because it always envisioned loaning money to a poor brother. Aside from all this we must recognize that Israel was a unique theocracy in which every poor citizen who feared Yahweh would be cared for. By rejecting usury, the catechism means all means used to obtain another's possessions wrongly. Here we could deal with monopolies and the borrowing and squandering of large sums of money, etc. The catechism mentions lastly greed and the abuse of our possessions. For the greedy person, money becomes a goal rather than a means. Saving must have a goal, like a collection for the needy (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). But laying up treasures on earth, so that money becomes god Mammon (Matthew 6:19-24) is a form of stealing. What about squandering? Doesn't this rob another person? Yes, because man is a steward before God. Being a Steward. People cannot be made slaves or they become dependent on us and their freedom is lost. But something else is at stake here. Nobody is an owner in an absolute sense, with absolute sovereignty. Only God is. God is the Creator and the earth and its fullness belong to him (Exodus 19:5; Psalms 24:1; Psalms 50:10). This has been given to men (Psalms 115:16). The Lord gives and takes away (Job 1:21). The land Israel took as an inheritance was the Lord's (Hosea 9:3) - they were but pilgrims and sojourners. In Israel, a impoverished man could have to surrender his land to his creditor. But in reality, he was surrendering not his land, but the harvests off his land - until the Year of Jubilee, when his land was returned (Leviticus 25:11-16). One could never amass huge areas of land under Yahweh. Moreover, because of the right of redemption, a next of kin could buy back what someone was forced to sell (Leviticus 25:25). When Ahab wanted to buy Naboth's vineyard, he was not permitted because the land was the property of Yahweh and was loaned to a particular family and to nobody else (1 Kings 21:3).

Some have argued that the penalty for stealing, as opposed to adultery, was lenient in Israel. Yes, but adequate restitution had to be made and the Israelites' right to property was relative. He did not have absolute right to his property. In terms of his relationship to God, man does not own property, but simply has things in his possession. Ownership involves legal right. Having something in one's possession gives a person actual control, as if it belonged to him. Man is a steward. He manages goods that belong to Another. Every person will have to give an account of what we have done with the possession entrusted to us (see Luke 16:1-31; Matthew 12:36; Romans 14:12). This is underscored in the catechism, which states that we may not be wasteful. We are not free to use our things as we please. As a steward, I manage my possessions as God's property.

Private Property. We are stewards before God and yet in some sense we do own property. Abraham bought a burial plot (Genesis 23:3-18), Naboth refused to sell his land to Ahab, etc. There was private property in the New Testament as well. There are many indications that Christians owned their own homes, including Mary, mother of John, Lydia, the seller of purple and Philip the evangelist (Acts 12:12; Acts 16:24-15; Acts 21:8). The communal sharing in Acts 2:1-47; Acts 4:1-37 describes the style in which church members managed their possessions. This management (by individuals) kept in view the benefit of neighbor in such a way that togetherness and the well being of the group governed their attitudes.

Private property need not be condemned as long as it is managed within the parameters of Christian stewardship. Nor is it proper to consider poverty to be better than wealth (Proverbs 30:8). It is also true that we need not become 'inwardly detached' from our possessions (Mark 10:29-30).

But we must be ready to lose our property for the sake of Christ's kingdom (Matthew 19:16-29). We must also not be preoccupied with storing up treasures on earth (Matthew 6:19-20). We have brought nothing into the world; we shall take nothing out (1 Timothy 6:7).

Work. The Scripture connects laziness and stealing. The sluggard comes to poverty (Proverbs 6:6-11) and poverty tempts a person to steal (Proverbs 30:9; cf. Ephesians 4:28). The one who refuses to work shall not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10). From another perspective Scripture views work as hard and troublesome, the result of our fall into sin (Genesis 3:17-19; Psalms 90:10). But we must not forget that work was first mandated in Paradise, before the fall into sin (Genesis 1:28; Genesis 2:15). Even the wealthy, who don't need to work, must work. They too are stewards and should not leave their talents buried in the ground (Matthew 25:24-30). The Hebrew word for 'work' means 'to serve.' We are not slaves to work, but servants both to God and to neighbor.

Stewardship and Generosity. Older commentaries spoke of sacrilegium (sacrilege) - church robbery or church thievery. Here we could consider Achan, who stole devoted things and those who withheld the tithe. Money or possessions intended for God or the poor of the church may not be stolen. The church should never become wealthy while the poor remain poor. When church buildings were golden, charity became wooden. A German confession in 1562 listed among the sins of church robbery, those preachers who failed to preach rightly and piously and walked off with a salary they did not deserve.

It is difficult to determine whether the tithe is still in place. It was tied, on the one hand, to the Levitical priesthood, which has passed away. It came, secondly, in a completely different context - where there were no other taxes. Thirdly, Jesus and the apostles nowhere indicate what percentage we should be giving. Yet we must give generously, not only to those in the household of faith, but to all (Galatians 6:10).

Enjoying Without an Aftertaste. Is it possible to be too generous with our money so that we always refuse a glass of wine or a nice vacation. Yes, we may enjoy God's wealth without a bitter aftertaste. Israel was commanded to feast with the tithes that were brought before the Lord (Deuteronomy 12:6-7, Deuteronomy 12:17-19; Deuteronomy 14:22-23). Job was very generous, but took no offense at his children enjoying feasts (Job 1:1-22). Jesus knew of the poor, but enjoyed a wedding feast (John 2:1-25). He did not scold a woman for pouring expensive perfume on his feet (Mark 14:7). There is a time to be shocked by pictures of starving children and to re-examine the budget. But there is also a time to go on vacation. But there is also an economic argument. If everyone stopped purchasing luxuries and stopped going on vacation, thousands would lose their jobs here! Therefore a portion of prosperity must be for us to enjoy.

Forced to Steal. Is there ever a time, when we are forced to steal? When Israel left Egypt, the Israelite women took things from the Egyptians, but they had asked for these things (Exodus 3:22; Exodus 12:35-36). We can be sympathetic to one who steals while hungry (Proverbs 6:30-31), but that does not remove culpability. Yet, where life is at stake, the scales of justice were tipped in favor of communal use of vital necessities. But if someone steals from you, you may not steal from them - the Lord is the avenger. If taxes are too high, we may not withhold. The blessing of the Lord makes one rich and toil adds nothing to it (Proverbs 10:22 RSV note). Can a Christian be a businessman? The profit motive is not the same as greed. Evil does not lie in our occupations, but in our hearts. Being as businessman is an honest calling, as long as the merchant ship has a

"spiritual" rudder.

EXTRACTS FROM CONFESSIONS Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day xx

Question 110 Q. What does God forbid in the eighth commandment?

A. God forbids not only outright theft and robbery[1] but also such wicked schemes and devices as false weights and measures, deceptive merchandising, counterfeit money, and usury;[2] we must not defraud our neighbour in any way, whether by force or by show of right.[3] In addition God forbids all greed[4] and all abuse or squandering of His gifts.[5]

[1] Exodus 22:1; 1 Corinthians 5:9-10; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. [2] Deuteronomy 25:13-16; Psalms 15:5; Proverbs 11:1; Proverbs 12:22; Ezekiel 45:9-12; Luke 6:35. [3] Micah 6:9-11; Luke 3:14; James 5:1-6. [4] Luke 12:15; Ephesians 5:5. [5] Proverbs 21:20; Proverbs 23:20-21; Luke 16:10-13.

Question 111 Q. What does God require of you in this commandment?

A. I must promote my neighbour's good wherever I can and may, deal with him as I would like others to deal with me, and work faithfully so that I may be able to give to those in need.[1] [1] Isaiah 58:5-10; Matthew 7:12; Galatians 6:9-10; Ephesians 4:28.

09. Ninth Commandment

The Ninth Commandment 9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. [Exodus 20:16]

In a Court of Law. The ninth commandment involves, first of all, judicial or courtroom matters. That is not its only sphere, but it is its primary one. The elders of a particular locale exercised jurisprudence in Israel. And the system was uncomplicated - there were no lawyers or fingerprints. What established truth was the testimony of witnesses (see, e.g., 1 Kings 21:13). Witnesses, therefore, could be responsible for life or death (Deuteronomy 17:6; Deuteronomy 19:15; cf. Proverbs 25:18). In view of the seriousness of this matter, we see how the Lord seeks to safeguard the exercise of justice. One testimony is not enough, and the witnesses must throw the first stone (Deuteronomy 17:7). To stone someone with your own hands requires more courage than a few lying words! Someone unmasked for false witnessing had to receive to punishment the accused would have received (Deuteronomy 19:16-19).

All of these regulations serve to protect two things: (1) the accused from false witnesses and (2) the administration of 'just' justice.

God ordained the justice system for human welfare. To safeguard life (6th), marriage (7th) and property (8th) you need legal institutions. The ninth commandment involves a crucial issue - the safeguarding of honor, life, marriage and property. Freedom vanishes and fear reigns with faulty justice systems. Where justice reigns, peace also reigns (Psalms 72:1-3).

Forms of Untruthfulness. Obviously, the ninth commandment has in mind a much wider sphere than simply the judicial system. It forbids all forms of untruthfulness, all forms of lying (Ephesians 4:25). As such the ninth commandment aims at preserving the reputation, the good name, of the Israelite. That reputation is at risk both within and outside of the courtroom. A good name can be destroyed through:

(1) backbiting and gossip. Gossip need not include lying, but it does involve being untruthful. To say things that are true, but in the context of slander is deceitful. Here someone's faults are described in minute detail, painting a false picture. It is a universal phenomena that we would rather here something bad, than good about our neighbor. Gossip can even come under the disguise of piety, either by giving the appearance of reluctance or by starting/ending the story with a trumpet of praise for the person. There is a big difference, Luther said, between knowing about sin and talking about sin;

(2) judging rashly. The disciples passed a blind man and asked Jesus who had sinned - the blind man or his parents (John 9:2). The media is great at making rash judgments - tearing apart a politician before the full story is known. Therefore Jesus said, 'Judge not, that you be not judged.' Now judgments are necessary in various situations. Judges, church leaders and all of us must evaluate matters as part of our God-given task. But too often we judge rashly. Who made you judge over us? We are not called to render a judgment in every situation.

(3) libel. Libel is lying openly and intentionally, lying when we know better. The Jews committed libel when they accused Jesus of saying something he didn't really say. They changed the words he had said to the them: "I (Jesus said, 'You') will destroy this temple and I will raise it up." Libel often occurs by twisting someone's ones words. Truth is in precision. This is a challenge in scientific research - the portrait is so easily tinted according to our tastes. Who Is My Neighbor? The previous commandments involved neighbor, but here for the first time is he expressly mentioned. Is everyone our neighbor? In Israel, it was especially one's fellow Israelite. In the New Testament, the neighbor is to be found first of all within the new people of God, the church (Romans 15:2; James 4:12; Ephesians 4:25). But we must include others. Recall the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37; cf. Romans 13:8-9; Titus 3:4). Our promises and pledges for protection must be kept for heretics and terrorists. "It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it (Ecclesiastes 5:5, NIV). Official who promise terrorists that they can leave unharmed, must keep their word. Joshua was supposed to kill the Gibeonites, residents of the pagan land of Canaan, but their envoys tricked him into believing they had come from a distant country to make a treaty with Israel. So Joshua made a treaty of friendship with them. When later Joshua discovered their deceit, he let them live otherwise God would have punished Israel for not keeping their sworn oath (Joshua 9:1-27).

Lying Lives Deep. Lying comes very easily to us. As a result the verbal inflation rate is high: everything needs to be documented with invoices and receipts. We are not inherently trustworthy. One theologian (W. Aalders) thinks we do not take life seriously enough and make it into a game or a stage performance. Abraham Kuyper said that the world of fantasy is bigger and more interesting than the real world. Everyday life bores us. Gossip and deceit spices it up.

Why do we all fall for this game? We all stumble because of a little organ - the tongue. A bit in the horse's mouth steers its whole body. A rudder directs a huge vessel. We can tame animals, but we cannot tame the tongue. Out of the same mouth proceeds blessing and cursing (James 3:2-10). The tongue is set afire by hell itself, James says, by the father of lies (John 8:44). Jesus said this to the Jews who were boasting that Abraham was their father. Through the fall into sin, man has not simply been defiled with the lie, but dominated by the lie. The truth of God is exchanged for the lie (Romans 1:25). The lie grips pagan nations. In one such nation, a girl was not to be told that she had pretty eyes or else the spirits would become jealous and hurt her. We try to preserve ourselves through lying. No cure exists but radical conversion. That requires off to put off the old nature, under which the apostle Paul includes lying (Ephesians 4:22-25). For this we need the grace of God's liberation from the bondage to lying - Christ is the way, the truth and life (John 14:6). Life with Christ removes the need to lie, the bondage to lying. Self-denial replaces self-preservation. But difficulties remain. Changes in behaviour are one thing. Changes in attitude are much different. You can speak the truth and still walk the lie.

Knowing how the lie lives deep in the human heart, the Bible understandably fulminates against false prophets. These prophets lead people back into idolatry and slavery, seducing them to surrender their freedom (Deuteronomy 13:1-18). There is always a constant struggle in the church to preserve truth.

Three Kinds of Lies. There are three classes of lies - the malicious, the jocular and the necessary.

(1) The malicious lie is the lie that has been discussed above - it is always a violation of the command.

(2) The jocular lie is the untruths we spout to amuse one another. This is not necessary lying because there is no intention to deceive. But sometimes elements of truth are mixed with untruth so that these elements cannot be distinguished (Proverbs 26:18-19). Here an intention to deceive and deride neighbor is disguised as humor. Then the joke becomes the lie.

(3) The lie of necessity. The Latin phrase is: lying (not against, but) for my neighbor's benefit. Hiding the Jew in World War II is the classic example. Should We Reject the Lie of Necessity? The church has throughout her history rejected the lie of necessity almost universally. Augustine argued that you may die bodily, but at least you won't die in the soul. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. This is not achieved when we sacrifice our own eternal salvation to save the temporal life of our neighbor. But the Bible contains some surprising examples of the lie of necessity. The midwives Shiphrah and Puah let the baby boys of Israel live after birth, contrary to Pharaoh's command. And yet they are spoken of as fearing God and as being blessed by God because of their attitude (see Exodus 1:15-21). Rahab spoke falsehood in saying to the king of Jericho that she did not know where the spies were (Joshua 2:4-6) and she is praised for her faith (Hebrews 11:31). Her faith was made complete by these works (James 2:25). These women performed a service to their neighbors by means of the lie of necessity. But this lie must be distinguished from all lies for personal survival. Abraham and Isaac pretended their wives were their sisters in Egypt - this could have resulted in other men committing adultery with their wives (Genesis 12:11-20; Genesis 20:2-18; Genesis 26:7-11). How about military deception? The Lord recommended such tactics in Joshua's battle against Ai and in David's fight against the Philistines (Joshua 8:1-26; 2 Samuel 5:22-25). Some argue that this is not lying, merely deception. We must speak the truth, they say, even if we deceive. Athanasius was asked by his pursuers, "Where is Athanasius?" He answered, "Athanasius is not far away; with a little effort you can find him." But one form of misleading is not better than the other. What is decisive is whether in particular circumstances we are permitted to mislead.

Dire Circumstances. But agreeing that the lying is sometimes permissible is dangerous. But it can also be dangerous to be silent when the Germans knock on the door looking for Jews. So the argument that we should remain silent rather than lie is weak. We must not condemn the lie of necessity - it's a borderline situation, something we find in other commandments. Children are to obey their parents, except when their parents compel disobedience to the Lord. We are not to kill, except in self-defense. A lie of necessity, like these, is permitted, but only in dire circumstances - when life is at stake, either our neighbor's or ours.

What is Courtesy, What is Pretense? There is also a fourth class of lies: the polite lie. This refers to signing off a letter, 'sincerely yours' or saying 'Thank you' to the question, "Have you had enough to eat" when really you would like more. But here we are not dealing with lying, but with customs of politeness. A lie intends to deceive, but we are not deceiving when we show respect to whom it is due or follow rules of etiquette. Politeness is something other than refined insincerity. But even etiquette can be corrupted. Politeness can become a lie. Pretense occurs in a common form when a Christian's talk clashes with his walk, like the Pharisees who resemble whitewashed tombs (Matthew 23:4, Matthew 23:27).

Secrecy and Concealment. The ninth commandment forbids lying and thus requires us to love the truth and to speak and confess the truth uprightly. Sometimes this requires silence. Many jobs have a professional code of conduct, which require concealing truths: physicians, ministers, social workers, etc. A doctor may be confidential with certain diseases, but with others must divulge the information. In 1605, a plot was discovered in which some men were going to assassinate James I. Two Jesuit priests who had known of the plot because of their work in the confessional were executed for remaining silent. There's a limit to the obligation of confidentiality. Tattle telling is necessary sometimes. Keeping silent is different from concealing the truth. We are true witnesses when we help our neighbor with our words, even when we have to oppose him.

10. Tenth Commandment

The Tenth Commandment

10. You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his ox, or his ass, or anything that is your neighbour's. [Exodus 20:17]

Not Two Commandments. We mentioned before that there are different ways of numbering the commandments. The Jews, Greek Orthodox and Reformed have one commandment where the Romans and Lutherans have two. The argument for dividing the commandment rests on the repetition of "You shall not..." but is faulty because the content is the same and the New Testament quotes the command not to covet as one (see Romans 7:7, Romans 13:9).

Only Our Inward Desire? The tenth commandment obviously has to do with desires - desiring the property or wife of one's neighbor. But haven't the previous commandments on adultery, stealing and killing, etc. also focused on wrong desires?

Calvin and others distinguished between plan and desire. It one thing to have desires, quite another thing to consolidate them into a plan. In cases of adultery or murder, the will concurs self consciously with the desire. The desire evolves into plan to possess. Some desires however never come to outward expression. A man can desire another woman without making any moves to acquire her. Desire does not always lead to plan. There are stages of desire: a desire is nursed, the will is surrendered to the desire; a plan is developed to satisfy the desire and the plan translates the desire into a deed. According to Calvin, the commandment focuses on the first two stages of desire. We would argue instead, however, that the tenth commandment has to do, just as with the other commandments, with outward behaviour also. And outward behaviour always evolves from inward thinking.

You Shall Not Set Your Desire On...The verb 'to covet' can better be translated: "You shall not set your desire on..." If we set our desire on something, we are out to get it. Desire, therefore, already includes a plan (contra Calvin) which simply awaits the occasion. Achan coveted - set his desire on - a magnificent Babylonian robe, on pieces of gold and silver and he took all of it (Joshua 7:21). Here 'covet' means that he could not keep his hands off all that stuff. The primary meaning of the tenth commandment is this: Anyone who sets his desire on his neighbor's house wife, employees or animals will not be able to keep his hands off. With premeditation, he intends to strike. Coveting, therefore, lies somewhere between the disposition and the deed. The deed is condemned by the previous commandments, but the tenth looks behind those deeds to the passionate heart and to the steps people take to implement the plans.

Desire as a Spreading Flame. Some have said that the church cannot punish sins against the tenth commandment because those sins belong to an inner disposition, which cannot be seen. The heart can be compared to the boardroom. All kinds of decisions are made in the boardroom behind closed doors. But these decisions leak out so eventually outsiders get a pretty good idea of

what went on inside. The same is true of the heart. We often judge superficially by outward appearance, but God judges the heart (1 Samuel 16:7). In many cases, we can judge what is in the inside - because desire does not just burn internally - the fire spreads. What's in your heart never stays hidden.

You are not to covet your neighbor's wife. Coveting, although not necessarily resulting in adultery, can wreck marriages. The wife may not know everything brooding in the boardroom of his heart, but she knows enough to realize that there is another woman. The same holds true for coveting 'land.' Wars for land begin with desire and plans before attack. Coveting land often results in murders.

Passions may rage somewhere between inclination and deed without ever reaching their goal. A conspiracy to overthrow a government is hatched, but never carried out. There is a severe sentence if the conspirators are collared. Even though they did not kill (sixth commandment), they had wrongly coveted (tenth commandment). What lies in the heart becomes manifest. A person's entire body reflects what is living in him. Love of money radiates from the eyes. The eyes have been called the mirror of the heart - you can read someone's heart by looking at their eyes - bright, downcast, etc. ? A Sprawling Territory. Both king and commoner fall prey to covetousness. When a pirate had to confess his piracy to Alexander the Great and why he made the seas unsafe, the prisoner responded: I was merely doing the same as you, when you make the world unsafe. But since I work with a small ship, I am called a pirate; you are called a king, because you work with a whole fleet. The history of the human race has been a history of coveting what belonged to another. Think of envy - the first sin, how Cain's envy led to the death of Abel. God told Cain to master that desire (Genesis 4:7), but desire masters us. Envy blinds a person to everything he has and allows him to see the one thing he does not have. The territory covered by the tenth commandment is sprawling - a desire for other things. Not possessing, but craving to possess is what is wrong. Not wealth, but wanting to be wealthy (1 Timothy 6:9). Covetousness easily becomes idolatry. Do Not Forfeit Your Freedom. Do not chase after your desires, or you become enslaved to them. It is not wrong to strive for a better position, but there is an unchristian chasing after affluence. The starting point of the tenth commandment is this: Your own house is the best one for you - your wife is the most pretty one for you - your job is the most fruitful development of your abilities. Your house may be smaller than others, your wife may be less attractive than other women and your job may rank lower on the scale of values than those of your friends.

Advertising and Gambling. Advertisements reflect what lives within man. The questionable side of advertising reflects the kind of people we are. When it comes to advertising, the customer is king and the advertiser is but his court jester. The court jester lives only by leave of the king himself. A Christian lifestyle repels against questionable forms of advertising - YOU shall not covet. Life is more than buying and consuming. Gambling is entirely questionable, however. Because gambling appeals only to greed. Even those promoted as 'contests' are forms of gambling because the accomplishment bears no relationship to the prize. Possessing is not condemned - but desiring to possess is. The Good Desire and Autarchy. Yet, God does not condemn every possible desire. That's Buddhism - freedom from everything earthly and the complete suppression of all desires. The state of nirvana is where there is complete oblivion to external stimuli and internal passions. If worrying about food and drink - proper desires - makes seeking the kingdom second, then there is coveting. But natural desires are good. Jesus was hungry, thirsty, sleepy, etc. Some things we

should desire - God (Psalms 42:1-2), to be with Christ (Php 2:23). Good desire lies embedded in living with Christ and is satisfied with what He gives - this is autarchy from the Greek, autarkeia, "sufficiency." God is able to give us sufficiency in all things (2 Corinthians 9:8). Christian autarchy or sufficiency has nothing to do with self-sufficiency, where someone saves himself. In 2 Corinthians 9:8 autarchy means that a believer has received enough. This sufficiency must be experienced as contentment. Godliness brings great profit if accompanied by contentment. Paul knew poverty and wealth and he learned to be "autarch" in every situation (Php 4:11).

Penetrating More Deeply. The tenth commandment is concerned with those desires that set a person in motion, leading him to reach for the things of his neighbor. This is a discernable desire. But some desires do not set a person in motion - they are called, by the court of human opinion, innocent thoughts or daydreams. But, "cleanse me from secret faults" (Psalms 19:12). Sin arouses all kinds of desires within us. Are we responsible for all desires or only the ones we nurture. Roman Catholic ethicists distinguish between spontaneous desires, nurtured desires and fulfilled desires and argue that we are responsible only for the latter two. Reformed ethicists say no - all three, evil desires arise out of an evil heart. Our love for God must be radical - with heart, soul, strength and mind. All evil desires at any given stage must be enlisted in the service of Christ. We must put evil desires to death and replace them with good desires. Love's radical claim is satisfied with nothing less - Lord's Day 44. In the light of love's radical demand, we discover our radical depravity. O wretched man that I am - I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 7:24-25). We must always go back to the house of slavery known as sin and to the deliverer - the God of Israel who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ.

11. Appendix

Appendix: THE USE OF SCRIPTURE IN ETHICS

The Possibility of Using Scripture in Ethics

1. The use of Scripture within Scripture itself. Can we appeal to Scripture to find proper solutions to moral problems? Jesus and Paul both appeal to the OT in the NT, and the 10 commandments are cited several times. An appeal to texts of Scripture was obviously authoritative for the NT church.

2. The use of Scripture throughout church history. Similarly Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin et al regarded an appeal to Scripture's authority as decisive in reflecting upon human behaviour. Until our modern era, the appeal to Scripture in moral matters was considered self-evident and decisive. The way in which theologians appealed to Scripture varies: Aquinas' Scriptural references were sparse and used much reason; Augustine was more broad and meaningful in his use of Scripture. Catechisms' appeals to the 10 commandments also show that Scripture was regarded as authoritative in ethical matters.

3. A significant transition. Several developments changed the traditional perspective:

1. With Scripture criticism, the Bible was regarded as a collection of human rather than divine manuscripts. Consequences: a) The Bible was regarded as a collection of various theologies, and similarly various ethics, one of Jesus, of Paul, of the NT church, etc. b) The Bible was seen to offer little more than that found in the surrounding environment of Israel and the early church.

2. With existentialist philosophy, fixed truths and moral directives were no longer accepted. We find this influence in Barth, whose situation ethics excludes all universal moral truths, and says that God's command comes only in the form of historically unique and temporally concrete commands.

4. From text to paradigm. Even after this transition, Christians tried to appeal to Scripture, but this appeal had to pass through a sieve of what people regarded as central/thematic to Scripture. Themes and paradigms ruled the day, and a direct appeal to Bible texts became impossible. But there is no legitimate criterion for selecting a particular paradigm!

J. Blank says that Scripture's precepts are historically and sociologically antiquated, and thus we need "ethical paradigms" beyond the circumstances.

H.M. Kuitert agreed, seeing commands as just "examples of earlier faith-obedience".

Examples of paradigms include the Exodus paradigm and the Sermon on the Mount paradigm. The Exodus paradigm is used by liberation theology "let my people go" - but ignores the fact that the aim of liberation was that God's people serve Him. Similarly the love paradigm fails when it results in a direct conflict with the Biblical commandments.

Karl Barth also goes from text to paradigm, yet he continually appeals to Scripture. He justifies this by saying that although there is a vertical line of an encounter between God and man, there is also a horizontal line of continuity and constancy of the divine commanding and human acting. Scripture thus gives us a "lead", a "direction", but not the answer itself. Thus Barth avoids speaking about a general commandment applicable for everybody in all times.

5. Biblicism. Biblicism is "that appeal to Scripture which uses Bible texts in an atomistic (isolated) way by lifting them out of their immediate contexts or out of the whole context of Scripture." It is characterized by neglecting to note the differences in circumstances between then and now. eg Nationalizing land has been rejected by an appeal to Ahab's stealing of Naboth's vineyard. Generally speaking, Biblicism results in conservatism.

6. Inherent biblicism. Not every appeal to Scripture is Biblicistic. H.M. Kuitert et al thinks that a pure appeal to Scripture in ethics is impossible, since your cultural POV decides which texts are applicable and which are not. In his view, using any Bible texts to support an ethical argument implies Biblicism. In 1970, Kuitert thus criticized Calvin's seemingly arbitrary use of Scripture. Kuitert did not yet reject every appeal to Scripture in ethics. In 1981 he went further, and insisted that the Bible can't be used for moral instruction. He believed that it was our cultural starting point that ended up determining our ethics, and hence RC ethics (based on natural law) was essentially no different from Protestant ethics (based on Scripture).

Pim Pronk agrees with Kuitert that we don't deduce our standpoint from Scripture, but rather read it back into the Bible.

7. Our own position (1). Our starting point is to affirm the unity/reliability of Scripture. This presupposition doesn't solve all problems in the use of Scripture, but it is different from a "cultural starting point". The Word, by the Spirit, converts people, and demonstrates how God's people should live. Can we use proof-texts in ethics? The fact that the RC (natural law) ethics is similar to ours is because much is presupposed before it is proved. In a more strongly secularized society, the differences would be much greater, simply because those who appeal to Scripture can't accept the cultural starting point of the other side!

8. Our own position (2). The danger of Biblicism is always there. But ultimately the question is: do we give the last word to our "cultural starting point" or to Scripture? In using Scripture, of course we must also consider the "cultural starting point", but Scripture is always decisive. As an example, those who see differences between husband and wife as "outdated", reinterpret certain Scripture passages (eg 1 Timothy 2:9-15), overshadowing them by other texts like Galatians 3:28 - this is arbitrary selectivity. Here we must resist the "cultural starting point", and maintain Scripture as valid. The Method of Using Scripture in Ethics

1. Varieties of Scripture usage. Our use of Scripture shows some variety. We use Scripture as a guide (when appealing very directly to the Bible), as a guard (when it warns), as a compass (when it points out the general direction we must walk), and as an example (which show a more general Christian ethos).

2. Scripture as guide. Here a simple reference to Scripture suffices. In many cases, a simple appeal to Scripture tells us exactly what God's Word is for us or for others, eg do not live in anger with a brother (Matthew 5:22). As a guide, Scripture thus tells us specifically what good and evil lie

in our path.

3. Scripture as guard (1). Often we can't directly appeal to Scripture, because of the great difference in situation between the biblical time and now. Developments to a better juridical system, better forms of government aren't commanded by Scripture, yet obviously they are correct, and the Bible does play some role. Scripture is a guard that warns against corrupt developments, eg the Bible doesn't stipulate democracy, but warns against certain abuses. As a guard, Scripture warns us against despising God and oppressing people.

We know God not only from special revelation in Scripture, but also as He reveals Himself in the creation and in the history of the world - we must also know this in forming our moral judgment. This does not mean that the majority opinion rules, for the fact that something impresses many people as being good is not the last word (eg homosexuality). But sometimes there are things that impress human consciousness as being good, and we can connect this with God's leading of history aimed at the restraint of evil and the development of the good.

4. Scripture as guard (2). In "reading" history, we can mistakes (eg German Christians saw Hitler's rise to power as God's will). Yet here Scripture functions as a guard, for although it doesn't always declare what is good in a particular situation, it can still show us what is evil in that situation.

5. Scripture as compass (1). For example, although the Bible doesn't address questions posed by DNA research, there are Biblical themes (eg creation, place of man in creation) that can be applied to these issues. There are constant principles that remain valid, and are relevant for our judgment of the most advanced scientific developments. For instance, with in-vitro-fertilization, Scripture as guard says what we must not do (thou shalt not kill), whereas Scripture as compass indicates those themes which help us discover what we must do.

Appealing to specific verses and to general themes is not contradictory - it is a false dilemma to say "we must work Scripturally rather than textually". Themes apart from verses leads to speculation, whereas isolated verses leads to Biblicism. Thus we need to consider the constant principles which remain valid amid every change (eg man is a creature). Heyns lists ten biblical coordinates, but they are so diverse that they can't be used efficiently in practice.

6. Scripture as compass (2). Scripture gives the general direction we must go, and within that general orientation we must use our own understanding of the issue and our own insight. What is the relation between using our understanding and using Scripture? Calvin distinguishes between:

1. the ratio ingenita (positive, which everyone has by nature) 2. the ratio vitiosa (destructive, results from human depravity) 3. the tertia ratio (led by the Word and Spirit) This is different than the use of paradigms. The paradigms of higher criticism are to be rejected, but there are elementary biblical givens which we must accept. A. Troost goes to an extreme when he says that in Scripture one is directed to Christ, and the Bible tells us nothing else than to look upon Christ. In his view, science, not the Bible, tells us what we must do in a particular situation, by reading God's revelation in creation. The problem is that Troost allows himself to appeal to Genesis 1:1-31, but not to other passage in Scripture to discover norms for a specific structure such as marriage. Scripture not only provides a lens to give a clear view of creational structures, but also provides a content necessary for a correct view of specific structures.

7. Scripture provides examples (1). Scripture itself urges us to follow the lives of others. It is concerned with the history of God's redemption of man through Christ, and within the resulting fellowship in following Christ, a Christian ethos is born. The apostles, in pointing to our life "in Christ", do more than what "is written". eg Paul in Ephesians 6:2 ff points to the 5th commandment, but begins by saying that children must obey their parents in the Lord. Thus a proper use of Scripture must always include wanting to abide in a living relationship with Christ and His church. The Bible is thus given for both story and moral, example and command.

8. Scripture provides examples (2). In the fellowship with Christ and His church, we may search for God's will. Taking into account the example of the previous generation testifies to respect for the fellowship of the church. Yet even so, there can be differences of insight and conduct. Some differences can't be allowed to continue beside each other, but we must be careful, considering that there are "weak" and "strong", and we must accept others in spite of these differences. Each person must be fully convinced in his own mind, because not everyone draws the same conclusions from the same (scriptural) data. Even where there are differing opinions, each must accept the other in love.

9. Fulfillment in Christ (1). Christ is the fulfiller of the OT law and prophets. We thus no longer use the Mosaic legal/penal code. Scripture itself indicates that these prescriptions are no longer binding. Christ came to fulfil the law and the prophets (Matthew 5:17), in the sense that they are not full without Christ, and that He makes them full, fills them out, which involves a significant alteration (eg ceremonial impurity abandoned, eating unclean food permitted). "Fulfil" means that Christ brings the finishing revelation, showing how far-reaching the OT commandments are, and their true intention and significance (eg Sermon on the Mount: not just adultery is forbidden, but also lust).

10. Fulfillment in Christ (2). The fulfilling has consequences also for the "civil" ordinances, as well as the "ceremonial". Israel no longer has an exclusive place as a holy nation, and thus there is freedom in making laws which correspond better to the circumstances of our time, place, and people. Even in Israel itself, God's law applied only to Israel, and differently to foreigners or sojourners. Some Mosaic regulations still needed to be followed, as the Jerusalem council reaffirmed. Aquinas' distinction between moral, ceremonial and civil laws can be maintained, but only as a guideline - for Israel, there was only one law. Aquinas' based it on the distinctions in Deuteronomy 6:1, and was followed by Melancthon, Calvin, and the WCF [See below]. Ceremonial laws have always been understood as obsolete. Civil laws were also not considered fully binding for NT Christians. Moral laws retain their direct validity.

11. Is Moses still binding after all? The Christian Reconstruction movement (Rushdoony, Bahnsen, North) believes that the entire Mosaic legal code is still valid. These opinions function in the context of postmillennialism, and the reinstatement of the Mosaic legal code (except the ceremonial laws) is seen as the dawn of a new age. In this view, "plero-o" (Matthew 5:17) means "confirm, restore, re-establish", but this theonomic view is not tenable: a. It fails to explain why Scripture exalts the new covenant so far above the old. Christ is the mediator of a better covenant, and the apostles were to teach what He commanded. b. If "plero-o" means that the Law and the Prophets are still binding, how can the ceremonial laws be excluded? c. What follows in Matthew 5:1-48 shows that Christ isn't establishing the Mosaic legal code for civil life, but is focusing on the

internal spiritual and moral meaning of the law. For example, Christ shows the true intention of the permitting of divorce in Deuteronomy 24:1-22, saying it was because of "hardness of heart", and He Himself goes back to Genesis 2:1-25 where divorce is excluded. d. Christian Reconstruction pays much attention to the reformation of the world, but little to the reformation of the church. In fact, Paul speaks of excommunication as conformity to the Mosaic legal code "Put away the wicked man from among you!" e. It is impossible to apply the Mosaic legal code consistently in modern society. How would we determine what is a detail and what is a principle?

12. Using the Old Testament. How do we use the ceremonial & civil aspects of the OT for contemporary moral reflection? Both Jesus and the apostles regularly appealed to Moses, showing that it was possible to appeal to specific texts in order to know God's will. For us, the fulfillment in Christ means we must read the OT spiritually, focussing on the truth and substance that remain in Christ (BCF 25 [See below]). To that substance belongs the revelation of a holy & merciful God who summons man to live in holiness and mercy. The form of the cult has changed, but not the substance: eg, God's people must live as holy, different. "Fulfil" thus means we must neither denigrate Mosaic legislation to irrelevance, nor make it valid in the same way as for Israel. Thus we honor the character of Scripture as the revelation of the history of redemption. There is historical progression, for the old covenant had a temporal character. Precisely what the moral element is remains difficult to say, and the NT helps us here showing the continuing validity of the 10 commandments. NB: To use a "redemptive historical paradigm", as W.H. Velema does, does not in itself provide enough to make moral judgments: more is needed.

13. Using the entire canon. Scripture has its unity in Christ, and thus doesn't function as a mere collection of laws and rules. Both the OT and NT have canonical authority, shedding light on one another. On controversial subjects, we must ensure that we let the whole of Scripture speak, not just the parts that supposedly support our view. Not only must we read the OT in light of the NT, but also the NT in light of the OT, eg the Pauline discussion of the role of sex and marriage must be seen in light of what Proverbs and Song of Solomon speak about it.

14. The testimony of the Holy Spirit (1). Sometimes answers to ethical questions can't be drawn simply and directly from Scripture, and we must search for God's will. The OT itself speaks of the implicit search for the as-yet unknown commandment (Psalms 25:4 "Show me your ways..."). The NT indicates that the Spirit leads us in the truth. Through experience and exercise, our senses become sharpened to distinguish good from evil, and to discern what pleases the Lord. Does the Spirit give knowledge beside the knowledge of Scripture? If we say yes, we fall into spiritualism. Every appeal to the Spirit must be evaluated according to Scripture. If we say no, we forget that we need to make concrete decisions without Scripture telling us precisely what those decisions ought to be. In this sense, we can say that the Spirit works not only *per verbum* (through the Word), but also *cum verbo* (alongside the Word).

H. Bavinck says that Lutherans say that the Spirit works through the Word (*per verbum*), whereas Reformed theologians prefer to say that the Spirit ties Himself to the Word (*cum verbo*). This supposed difference between the two schools, however, is not so clear as Bavinck suggests. K. Bockmuhl also makes a distinction between the power of the testimony of the Spirit, and the content of the testimony of the Spirit. Calvin limited the Spirit's role to just a power, but Bockmuhl says that the testimony of the Spirit also can have its own content.

15. The testimony of the Holy Spirit (2). We can speak of the testimony of the Spirit as more than just a power, for the Spirit also does open our eyes to the path of life along which we must walk. This applies, for example, to the question of determining God's will for our personal lives (occupation, marriage partner etc). It is possible to be mistaken about the Spirit's leading, and so we must be cautious in appealing to the testimony of the Holy Spirit. What we need is the harmony of two voices, Spirit and Scripture, thus testing everything with Scripture. The Spirit's leading will always be in harmony with, and never contradict, the revealed Word of God. For example, at weddings we often speak about God bringing bride and groom together. We also believe that prayers are answered, although not with words.

16. Exercising care in our use of Scripture. Appealing to Scripture is not always simple, and we can also ask too much from Scripture - by expecting detailed blueprints for all areas of life. Examples of this:

1. Gary North argues that only one economic system is possible, "revelational economics". In practice, North falls into Biblicism.
2. John Frame's Medical Ethics often tries to prove too much with the Bible.

17. Summary. We use Scripture in our moral reflection in more than one way: as a guide, a guard, a compass, and by examples. Christ is not just the great example, but also fulfils Scripture. We must take this into account, as well as the fact that Scripture is a unity, and so its entirety must be considered. The testimony of the Spirit guides us, but must always be tested by Scripture. In so doing, we must not ask too much of Scripture.

Others, such as James Gustafson, have also pointed out variety in the use of Scripture. But we need not limit ourselves by choosing one method, but combine the different uses. In using Scripture, however, we must reject two extremes:

1. Scripture is irrelevant..... No: Scripture is authoritative.
2. Scripture is sufficient for making judgments..... No: there are more sources for ethics than Scripture alone.

EXTRACTS FROM CONFESSIONS Belgic Confession of Faith Article 25- Christ, the Fulfilment of the Law

We believe that the ceremonies and symbols of the law have ceased with the coming of Christ, and that all shadows have been fulfilled, so that the use of them ought to be abolished among Christians. Yet their truth and substance remain for us in Jesus Christ, in whom they have been fulfilled. In the meantime we still use the testimonies taken from the law and the prophets, both to confirm us in the doctrine of the gospel and to order our life in all honour, according to God's will and to His glory.

Wesminster Confession of Faith Chapter 19:

Of the Law of God

19:1 God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which He bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and

threatened death upon the breach of it: and endued him with power and ability to keep it (Genesis 1:26, Genesis 1:27 with Genesis 2:17; Job 28:28; Ecclesiastes 7:29; Romans 2:14, Romans 2:15; Romans 5:5, Romans 5:12, Romans 5:19; Galatians 3:10, Galatians 3:12).

19:2 This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness, and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables (Exodus 34:1; Deuteronomy 5:32; Deuteronomy 10:4; Romans 13:8, Romans 13:9; James 1:25; James 2:8, James 2:10-12): the four first commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six our duty to man (Matthew 22:37-40).

19:3 Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, His graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits (Galatians 4:1-3; Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 9:1-28; Hebrews 10:1); and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties (1 Corinthians 5:7; 2 Corinthians 6:17; Jude 1:23. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated, under the new testament (Daniel 9:27; Ephesians 2:15, Ephesians 2:16; Colossians 2:14, Colossians 2:16, Colossians 2:17).

19:4 To them also, as a body politic, He gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the State of that people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require (Genesis 49:10, with 1 Peter 2:13, 1 Peter 2:14; Exodus 21:1-36; Exodus 22:1-29; Matthew 5:17, with Matthew 5:38, Matthew 5:39; 1 Corinthians 9:8-10).

19:5 The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof (Romans 13:8-10; Ephesians 6:2; 1 John 2:3, 1 John 2:4, 1 John 2:7, 1 John 2:8); and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it (James 2:10, James 2:11); neither doth Christ, in the Gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation (Matthew 5:17-19; Romans 3:31; James 2:8).

19:6 Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned (Acts 13:39; Romans 6:14; Romans 8:1; Galatians 2:16; Galatians 3:13; Galatians 4:4, Galatians 4:5); yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs, and binds them to walk accordingly (Psalms 119:4-6; Romans 7:12, Romans 7:22, Romans 7:25; 1 Corinthians 7:19; Galatians 5:14, Galatians 5:16, Galatians 5:18-23); discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts, and lives (Romans 3:20; Romans 7:7); so as, examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin (Romans 7:9, Romans 7:14, Romans 7:24; James 1:23-25); together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of His obedience (Romans 7:24, Romans 7:25; Romans 8:3, Romans 8:4; Galatians 3:24). It is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin (Psalms 119:101, Psalms 119:104, Psalms 119:128; James 2:11): and the threatenings of it serve to show what even their sins deserve; and what afflictions, in this life, they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law (Psalms 89:30-34; Ezra 9:13, Ezra 9:14). The promises of it, in like manner, show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof (Leviticus 26:1, Leviticus 26:10, Leviticus 26:14 with 2 Corinthians 6:16; Psalms 19:11; Psalms 37:11 with Matthew 5:5; Ephesians 6:2, Ephesians 6:3); although not as due to them by the law, as a covenant of works (Luke 17:10;

Galatians 2:16). So as, a man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law; and not under grace (Romans 6:12, Romans 6:14; Hebrews 12:28, Hebrews 12:29; 1 Peter 3:8-12 with Psalms 34:12-16).

19:7 Neither are the forementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the Gospel, but do sweetly comply with it (Galatians 3:21); the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done (Ezekiel 36:27; Hebrews 8:10 with Jeremiah 31:33).

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