

## The Theology of the Westminster Standards WLC 99 – The Ten Commandments

*“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.” – John 14:21*

*“There is no greater mistake than to suppose that a Christian has nothing to do with the law and the Ten Commandments, because he cannot be justified by keeping them. The same Holy Ghost who convinces the believer of sin by the law, and leads him to Christ for justification, will always lead him to a spiritual use of the law, as a friendly guide, in the pursuit of sanctification.” – J. C. Ryle, Holiness, 26*

### I. Review

#### A. The Law was Given to Adam in the Covenant of Works (WCF 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. (WCF 19.1)*

#### B. The Moral Law Remained from the Fall to Moses (and Beyond!) (WCF 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: the first four commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six, our duty to man. (WCF 19.2)*

### II. The Ten Commandments

#### A. The Redemptive (Covenant of Grace!) Context of the Ten Commandments

1. **Ex 34:27–28** – *“And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.’”<sup>28</sup> ... And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.”*
2. **Ex 20:2** – *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”*

- B. **Ex 20:2–17** – *“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. [1]<sup>3</sup> “You shall have no other gods before me. [2]<sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself a carved 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. <sup>5</sup>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 on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, <sup>6</sup>but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. [3]<sup>7</sup> “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. [4]<sup>8</sup> “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. <sup>9</sup>Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, <sup>10</sup>but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. <sup>11</sup>For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. [5]<sup>12</sup> “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may*

*be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. [6]<sup>13</sup> “You shall not murder. [7]<sup>14</sup> “You shall not commit adultery. [8]<sup>15</sup> “You shall not steal. [9]<sup>16</sup> “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. [10]<sup>17</sup> “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”*

### III. How to Interpret the Ten Commandments (WLC 99)

*WLC Q. 99. What rules are to be observed for the right understanding of the Ten Commandments?  
A. For the right understanding of the Ten Commandments, these rules are to be observed ...*

#### A. The “Biblical” Rule

1. Defined: Every commandment must be understood in the context of the whole Bible as God speaks to our whole person, throughout our lives.

*1. That the law is perfect, and bindeth every one to full conformity in the whole man unto the righteousness thereof, and unto entire obedience forever; so as to require the utmost perfection of every duty, and to forbid the least degree of every sin.*

...

*3. That one and the same thing, in divers respects, is required or forbidden in several commandments.*

...

*5. That what God forbids, is at no time to be done; what he commands, is always our duty; and yet every particular duty is not to be done at all times.*

1. E.g., **Ex 20:14** – “You shall not commit adultery”
  - a. **Deut 21:15** – “If a man has two wives, the one loved and the other unloved, and both the loved and the unloved have borne him children ...”
  - b. **Mark 10:5–6** – “And Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment [i.e., about certificates of divorce in Deut 24].<sup>6</sup> But from the beginning of creation, “God made them male and female”’ ... ”

#### B. The “Inside/Outside” Rule

1. Defined: Each commandment carries internal, heart dimensions, as well as external dimensions.

*2. That [the law] is spiritual, and so reacheth the understanding, will, affections, and all other powers of the soul; as well as words, works, and gestures. (WLC 99)*

2. E.g., **Matt 5:27–28** – “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’<sup>28</sup> But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

### C. The “Two-Sided” Rule

1. Defined: Every commandment is both positive and negative.

*4. That as, where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden; and, where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded: so, where a promise is annexed, the contrary threatening is included; and, where a threatening is annexed, the contrary promise is included. (WLC 99)*

2. E.g., **Ex 20:8** – “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy ...”

- a. **Is 56:2** – “Blessed is the man ... who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it ...”

### D. The Rule of “Categories”

1. Defined: Each commandment stands for a whole category of sins. It governs not only the specific sin mentioned, but all the sins organically related to that sin, including all the lesser sins of the same kind.

*6. That under one sin or duty, all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded; together with all the causes, means, occasions, and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto. (WLC 99)*

2. E.g., **Ex 20:13** – “You shall not murder.”

### E. The “Brother’s Keeper” Rule

1. Defined: We must not encourage someone else to do what God has told us not to do. We must do all in our power to help other people keep God's law.

*7. That what is forbidden or commanded to ourselves, we are bound, according to our places, to endeavor that it may be avoided or performed by others, according to the duty of their places.*

*8. That in what is commanded to others, we are bound, according to our places and callings, to be helpful to them; and to take heed of partaking with others in what is forbidden them. (WLC 99)*

## IV. Application – Grasping the comprehensive demands of the law ...

- A. ... guards us from becoming deluded into thinking we can keep it!
- B. ... guards us from thinking that the law doesn’t matter now that we are Christians!
- C. ... reveals the stark portrait of sin and the all-sufficient perfection of Christ’s obedience for us!
- D. ... presses home what life in Christ should be, and what it will be!

Remember, God’s GRACE in CHRIST is the atmosphere in which obedience to God’s good law is *valued and pursued and enjoyed!!*