

Class 11a: The purpose of this class is to understand some introductory principles, which we will use to understand the *Decalogue* in the following two studies. We will observe some features of the *Decalogue* as a whole and 8 rules for understanding each word or commandment of the *Decalogue*.

Introductory Principles of the *Decalogue*

- **Prologue:** The Prologue to the *Decalogue* establishes the context for the law. Ex 20:2 establishes the primary context of the *Decalogue* as the perfect rule of holiness for God's redeemed people. In other words, the *Decalogue* was given to the Church to keep because they had already been saved by grace. The Law or the *Decalogue* contains two other uses. The second use is to drive people to seek salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The third use is to restrain the evil pursuits of men. All three of these uses are employed for Israel, the OT Church, but we must understand that God did not give Israel (or the NT Church) the *Decalogue* as a means to earn salvation.
- **Grammar:** The Hebrew language has a mild and a strong way to communicate a negative command. Proverbs 1:15-15 is an example of the weak command, but the 8 negative commands in the *Decalogue* use a form, which expresses an absolute prohibition. The 6th Commandment looks like this: לֹא תִרְצַח. It literally means *NOT murder*. The verb is in the form *imperfect* form that we would use to express a present, and future action. In other words, a command in this form is valid for the present and the future. The Lord gave the *Decalogue* to the Church as the rule of holiness for all time.
- **Subject:** When considering the subject of the *Decalogue*, the King James Version is more helpful than any other English translation. Why? It distinguishes between *thou* (singular) and *you* (plural). Each of the *Ten Commandments* was written to the second person singular, *thou*. The *Decalogue* was not given to Israel collectively. Rather, it was given to everyone in Israel (The Church) personally. It is easy for us to read the *Decalogue* without recognizing the significance of this little detail of the Law. Thomas Watson explained it well. "Because the commandment concerns every one, and God would have each one take it as spoken to him by name. Though we are forward to take privileges to ourselves, yet we are apt to shift off duties from ourselves to others; therefore the commandment is in the second person, *Thou and Thou*, that every one may know that it is spoken to him, as it were, by name."

Interpretative Principles of the *Decalogue*

- When we examine the *Decalogue*, we will look at Ex 20:22-23:33 and other passages in the last half of Exodus for a fuller exposition of the meaning of each command. These passages in Exodus and Deuteronomy 5:22ff give a commentary on the *Decalogue*, which reveals to us how each commandment is to be applied. The context of the giving of the law seems to indicate that the judicial laws, which were given to Israel, were summarized in the Ten Commandments. (Ex 31:18, 34:28)
- One note of caution needs to be given. WCF 19.4 says, *To [Israel] also, as a body politic, [God] 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.* (Exod. 21; Exod. 22:1-29; Gen. 49:10; 1 Pet. 2:13,14; Matt. 5:17,38,39; 1 Cor. 9:8-10) – Exodus 21-23 gives us principles, which teach us how to apply the *Decalogue* to our present time. These judicial laws ended in form with the end of Israel as a physical kingdom.
 - Ex 22:21-24 and 23:9 gives the context of the laws in Ex 21-23. They are the laws for the nation of Israel. The law itself recognizes sojourners; therefore, we must conclude that Ex 21-23 applies to Israel, the nation.
 - 1 Peter 2:13,14 shows how the **principle** of the judicial law is applied to the NT Church.
 - Matt 4:17, 38-39 demonstrates that civil punishment given to Israel in Ex 21:23-25 no longer applies as we receive the law through Jesus Christ.

WLC 99 Q. 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:*

1. That the law is perfect, and bindeth everyone to full conformity in the whole man unto the righteousness thereof, and unto entire obedience for ever, so as to require the utmost perfection of every duty, and to forbid the least degree of every sin(Ps. 19:7; James 2:10; Matt. 5:21,22)

2. That it is spiritual, and so reacheth the understanding, will, affections, and all other powers of the soul; as well as words, works, and gestures.(Rom. 7:14; Deut. 6:5 compared with Matt. 22:37,38,39; Matt. 5:21,22,27,28,33,34,37,38,39,43,44)

3. That one and the same thing, in divers respects, is required or forbidden in several commandments. (Col. 3:5; Amos 8:5; Prov. 1:19; 1 Tim. 6:10)

4. That as, where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden; (Isa. 58:13; Deut. 6:13 compared with Matt. 4:9,10; Matt. 15:4,5,6) and, where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded;(Matt. 5:21-25; Eph. 4:28) so, where a promise is annexed, the contrary threatening is included;(Exod. 20:12 compared with Prov. 30:17) and where a threatening is annexed, the contrary promise is included.(Jer. 18:7,8; Exod. 20:7; Ps. 15:1,4,5; Ps. 24:4,5)

5. That what God forbids, is at no time to be done; (Job 13:7,8; Rom. 3:8; Job 36:21; Heb. 11:25) what he commands, is always our duty;(Deut. 4:8,9) and yet every particular duty is not to be done at all times.(Matt. 12:7)

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. (Matt. 5:21,22,27,28; Matt. 15:4-6; Heb. 10:24,25; 1 Thess. 5:22; Jude 23; Gal. 5:26; Col. 3:21)

7. That what is forbidden or commanded to ourselves, we are bound, according to our places, to endeavour that it may be avoided or performed by others, according to the duty of their places. (Exod. 20:10; Lev. 19:17; Gen. 18:19; Josh. 24:15; Deut. 6:6,7)

8. That in what is commanded to others, we are bound, according to our places and callings, to be helpful to them;(2 Cor. 1:24) and to take heed of partaking with others in what is forbidden them. (1 Tim. 5:22; Eph. 5:11)