

GENERAL RULES FOR THE RIGHT UNDERSTANDING AND EXPOUNDING OF THE COMMANDMENTS

(from A Practical Exposition of the Ten Commandments, by Ezekiel Hopkins, 1701)

1. All those precepts which are dispersed in the holy Scriptures, and which concern the regulating of our lives and actions, although not found expressly mentioned in the Decalogue, may yet very aptly be reduced under one of these ten commands.

2. The affirmative commands include the prohibition of the contrary sin; and the negative commands include the injunction of the contrary duty.

3. Every negative command binds always, and to every moment of time; but the affirmative precepts, though they bind always, yet they do not bind to every moment; that is, as to the habit of obedience, they do; but not as to the acts.

4. The same precept which forbids the external and outward acts of sin, forbids likewise the inward desires and motions of sin in the heart; and the same precept which requires the external acts of duty, requires likewise those holy affections of the soul that are suitable thereunto.

5. The command not only forbids the sin that is expressly mentioned, but all occasions and inducements leading to that sin.

6. The commands of the first table are not to be kept for the sake of the second; but the commands of the second are to be kept for the sake of the first.

7. The commands of the first table, so far forth as they are purely moral, supercede our obedience to the commands of the second table, when they are not both consistent.

8. Again, whereas, in the first table, there is one command partly moral and natural, partly positive and instituted, and that is our observation of the Sabbath, we may observe that our obligation to the duties of the second table often supercedes our obedience to that command of the first table.

9. Whatsoever is forbidden in any command, both all the signs and symptoms of it, and likewise all the effects and consequences of it, are forbidden in the same.

10. The connection between the commands is so close and intimate, and they are so linked together, that whoever breaks one of them is guilty of all.

Now that bond which runs through them and knits them thus together, is the authority and sovereignty of God enjoining their observance: so that whoever fails in his due obedience to any one, virtually and interpretatively does transgress them all.

Thus we find it expressly affirmed, "Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10). Not as though the violation of one precept were actually the violation of another; for many may steal, and yet not actually murder; many again may murder, and yet not actually commit adultery: but this place of the apostle must be understood of violating that authority which passes through them all, and by which all the commandments have their sanction. For since the authority of the great God is one and the same in all these laws, he that shall so far disrespect this authority as wilfully to break one of them, evidently declares that he owns it not in any. And although other considerations may restrain such an one from those crimes which are forbidden by some commandments, yet his observance of them is no part of obedience, nor can it be interpreted to be performed out of conscience and respect towards God; for were it so, the same authority which withheld him from murder, or theft, or adultery, would likewise restrain him from lying, or taking the name of God in vain; . . .