

5. If external obedience is of value and is preferable, do believers have a responsibility to attempt to influence the moral conduct of the non-Christian members of their society for good? If so, on what basis does this responsibility rest?

A. A. Hodge, in his book, The Confession of Faith (a commentary on the Westminster Confession of Faith, which commentary was published in 1869), suggests the following rules of interpretation of the Ten Commandments:

The great rule for interpreting the Decalogue is to keep constantly in mind that it is the law of God, and not the law of man -- that it respects and requires the conformity of the governing affections and dispositions of the heart as well as of the outward actions. Every commandment involves a general moral principle, applicable to a wide variety of particular conditions, respecting the motives and ends of action, as well as action itself. The rules of interpretation . . . are in substance as follows:--

(1) The law is perfect, requiring perfect obedience, and condemning the least shortcoming as sin.

(2) It is spiritual, respecting thoughts, feelings, motives, and inward states of hearts, as well as actions.

(3) That every command implies a corresponding prohibition, and every prohibition a corresponding command; and every promise a corresponding threatening, and every threatening a corresponding promise.

(4) That under one sin or duty all of the same kind are forbidden or commanded, together with all that, directly or indirectly, are the causes or occasions of them.

(5) That we are not only bound to fulfil the law ourselves, but also to help others to do so as far as we can.

Are we really bound to help others to fulfill the Law of God as far as we can? Can this principle be established?

In Matthew 22:35-40 a professional interpreter of the Law of Moses asked Jesus, "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

In Romans 13:8-10 Paul writes, "Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbor; love therefore is the fulfillment of the law."

And in Galatians 5:13-14 Paul says, "For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

From these three passages it is clear that we are bound to obey God's commands that pertain to our duties to Him out of love to Him. And we are bound to obey God's commands that pertain to our duties to our neighbor out of love to Him and to them.