

Personal Reflections

Gill Chapter 1

Christopher J. Kinner

10/8/05

Gill begins his work by defining the use of Christian ethical guidelines through utilizing the metaphor of map and travel imagery. As this writer reflected on how the content of this chapter applied to both my life and ministry, it was clear these images fit extremely well with my personal view of life as ‘the journey.’ Often in my personal logs as I journal or as I walk in the mornings and pray, it is with the clear intent to seek God for His direction as I make ‘the journey’ through this life with Jesus as my example, guide and friend. Gill’s travel imagery extols the virtue of emphasizing the dynamic, open and developmental character of the Christian life; in contrast to the static, abstract and dispassionate character of most ethics (20). For this reader this establishes a clear direction that promotes the utilization of Christian ethics not simply as educational but transformational to the individual which puts them into practice.

Gill mentions the Latin meaning for Commandment that is “to commit to one’s charge” (23). This writer was reminded of Hebrews 12:9 which states, “Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live!” This submission to the authority of God was perfectly displayed in the life of Jesus and Gill rightly asserts that “when other guidance is unclear, Jesus is our clarifying center” (31).

Two other observations by Gill that this reader found beneficial were his suggestion that “Jesus granted authority to his church to bind and to loose, a metaphor for moral decision making” (37). This explanation greatly expands the relevancy of this passage beyond religious circles and into the public square of our society. Secondly, the highlighting of God’s use of human language in the writing of the Ten Commandments (39) as it displays God’s ability to utilize human language and culture in contextual revelations.

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Gill Chapter 2

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10/09/05

In this second chapter, Gill begins the task of focusing on the content that constructs and establishes Christian Ethics. His initial four 'rules of the road' are: love God, love your neighbor as yourself, act justly and righteously and liberate and redeem (45). As I read each description for these four 'cover principles,' there were two distinct applications to my life and ministry that became apparent. The first was the distinction of 'Cross-love' and 'Table-love' as we minister to others. As an individual and as a Pastor it is imperative that I both seek and provide opportunities for each of these types of service both in my personal life and in the context of the Church. Opportunities for table fellowship and service should be an authentic part of every Christian's life. Secondly, I was reminded that God's desire for justice is based on liberating and redeeming others and not condemning them. Doing what is right and just in the eyes of God many times means not giving others what we think they deserve (or what they may deserve) but actually providing them grace and support which will gently bring them back into fellowship with God and other believers.

Finally, as Gill discussed the Decalogue in some detail, I was impressed with his observations on the freedom that the Ten Commandments were meant to provide for His people (60-74). As I reflected on this objective, it became clear to me that God was also fulfilling the request of the Israelites through these commands. When in captivity they had asked to be freed from the Egyptians in order to worship God. Now that they had been delivered from slavery, God was fulfilling their request by showing them how to worship Him. Our God is so great that worshipping Him touches every part of our lives and benefits the humble, the weak and the powerless; which are in fact all of us.

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Gill Chapter 3
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10/15/05

Throughout this chapter, David Gill presents the first commandment of the Decalogue. He begins by stating "it takes us straight to the Lord God, the source and center of everything" (79). The focus of our confidence is to be placed in God alone (81), which is an encouragement every Christian must seek to affirm in their faith journey each day. As an individual who serves God in the working of His church, it is with continual humility that I must place my confidence on God as He leads in ways that are counter intuitive and seem to oppose the very nature of the world around us. My attitude of God's leadership in my life must be one that does not tolerate any rivals to occupy His seat in my life; just as God does not allow any other to sit in my seat at His table (82).

As Gill rightly highlights, we do live in society that promotes the exaltation of celebrities and athletes whose selfish aspirations run in opposition to the goals of the saints whose aspirations were focused on humble service to God (85). God does certainly deserve to reside in "the God place" (87) in our lives. One way Gill suggests we do this is through learning to love God by learning to love our neighbor who is made in God's image and likeness (93). This comment reminded me of the theological view articulated by Dr. Tony Compolo who suggests when we serve others we are in fact serving and honoring the person of Jesus Christ Himself. While the fine points of this theological view can be disputed, it has been my experience that seeking to serve others through acts of service does in fact encourage the character of humility and servitude that allows God to reign in a place of authority and power over me as a believer. Thus God is appropriately placed on the throne of my life at the center of my actions and the governing authority that serves as my center.

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Through this Chapter, Gill examines the second command found in the Decalogue. Due in part to other reading and reflection that I am engaged in, it became evident to me that even spiritual and political leaders can become the 'images' that we worship to serve our needs and deliver us from our troubles. This restricts God to one who can only act through specific channels and denies His freedom to work outside of His creation. Binding God to anything in His creation limits His abilities and powers of ownership and becomes an act of idolatry.

As Gill asserts we must not merely capture one aspect of God's character (103), because God is not our creation, but rather we are His creation (102). This realization should serve as an encouragement to us in terms of God's perspective and oversight as being free to examine and pursue options that a limited object that resides inside of the created realm would be limited to. As Gill asserts, "our actions have consequences on those around us" (119). "Stereotypes and images are the foils of personal life and growth" (115). To limit God in any way is to place Him within the confines of an image that has been constructed physically or mentally. To be mindful of this command, I must as a pastor always "wait on God" and seek His leadership for the Church rather than easy pat answers or reliance on impersonal images that many may choose to follow.

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Gill Chapter 5
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10/23/05

For any pastor this chapter should be significant due to the importance this position in ministry places on valuing and properly communicating the word of God. God's chosen mode of revelation (121) is certainly through His spoken word. God created through His spoken word, revealed His name to us through His own voice and sent His Son to us as "the word" that "became flesh." The discussion of how we speak to honor God provided in this chapter deeply encouraged this reader to reflect on his commitment to carefully observe his speech as it pertains to the ministry context in which he presides. To utilize a discussion of God to merely 'flatter' God or impress listeners with empty or vain facts concerning Him is wholly inappropriate as rightly pointed out by this author; when the Christian minister fully embraces the reality that "it is not possible to pronounce the name without anything happening" (124).

The name of God and the word of God are not to be utilized as tools for vain hypocrisy or empty rites and meaningless religious rituals (126, 131). For those that are called to speak for God, proper reverence and a meaningful relationship with Him are a prerequisite to calling on His name. Gill is correct in this reader's view to cite that "the modern world has lost awareness of the value of words" (138). As one who has heeded the call to speak God's word in this world, the task of appropriately honoring the name of our Lord should logically be the starting point as we honor His word and responsibly communicate the heart of our Father to those we are called to minister to.

Personal Reflections

Gill Chapter 6
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10/23/05

“Good food, table songs and joy are a part of the authentic Sabbath experience” (147).

As I read this chapter of Gill, I found myself working to form a vision for what the Sabbath could be and mean in my home, for my family and for God’s people. This is a vision I have worked on forming and preserving throughout my life and one that compels me each week through ministry and in my personal time with the Lord.

For all of us it is important to note how the Sabbath erases discriminatory barriers (148) and should benefit all of God’s creation. Further, I greatly enjoyed Gill’s insight that the Sabbath is not merely a rest for us to enable us to continue our work (149). “Human work is as essential as human rest” (150) and what should good rest look like for each of us, for our families, for our world? Appropriately in this chapter we are encouraged to “rest with Him and work for Him” (151). God does have a right to our full attention on the Sabbath and this should not make such a day dry or boring, but rather a day of inviting God to the party and celebrating with Him and in Him.

In Gill’s closing sentences he observes how technology can invade our Sabbath experience. I was reminded here of my sister once suggesting that my brother-in-law and I turn off the computer on a Sunday afternoon because “it was tired.” At the time I thought my sister silly, as technology does not ‘get tired.’ After this reading I am humbled to admit how right she was. While the other things of life become tired, vibrant relationships with God and His family should always be celebrated. We must trust God each week and seek to join the party that He has invited us to attend!

Personal Reflections Gill Chapter 7

Christopher J Kinner 10/30/05

In this seventh chapter Gill deals with the fifth commandment. This commandment has always been one that has caused me much personal discomfort. Though my parents are Christians, my home was one that contained little authority (166) and my personal identity was simply a caricature of others they knew or presumptuous of whom I was and am. Through my parents' lack of honor to their parents and regard for others in our family, I have repeatedly been frustrated and angered in these relationships. Consequently I have found little comfort at times within the community of believers as I myself have developed trust and security issues that I bring as baggage into the family of believers. As I have reflected on the value of the fifth commandment throughout my life and again in the reading of this chapter, it has become imperative to expand my understanding of others and value the family ties of both my genetic family and the community of believers for me to positively impact a negative dynamic that has been a continual presence within our family for several generations.

As a Pastor I have often dealt with many issues that others bring into the church from the basis and understanding of how their personal families relate. For those that have not been able to trust in their father to be faithful in a marriage or interested in their well-being, the ability to trust the leadership or care of a pastor can be very difficult. There have been several times in ministry when I have had to realize the family of God needs to be a safe, faithful and caring place where individuals are allowed to test the faithfulness and care of those who have been placed in leadership positions. Through allowing others to test me without becoming defensive or distant from them, God can begin to heal deep wounds and bring His family together.

When Gill states, "The implication for parents clearly, is to strive to become good agents and representatives of God -- To be worthy of honor" (170), this reader could only think of the 'hall of faith' found in Hebrews 11 where the Mothers and Fathers of our faith are lifted up by the early church and through the word of God. It has become increasingly important for me as a Christian to keep a fresh knowledge of both the history of the Christian faith as well as those ministers in the Baptist tradition that I follow. Certainly God's family of faith contains parents who "provide unconditional love, sacrificial care, wise counsel, discipline and mentoring" (170). Most notably of those is our truest Brother of all, Jesus the Christ.

Personal Reflections Gill Chapter 8

Christopher J Kinner 10/30/05

Gill's eighth chapter involves a full discussion of the many aspects that can be attached to the sixth commandment. As I read this chapter there were several phrases that stood out to me and I found it helpful to write them down and reflect further on them. "If you are dead, nothing else on the list has any importance" (180). Although this seemed a humorous phrase at first, it is very much appropriate as one considers the very nature of the 'living God' and His 'living word.' For God to teach us to value life seems both appropriate to His place as creator and also judge over His creation.

As a pastor to singles it is often that I speak with those who feel they have been wronged, hurt, humiliated and embarrassed by a former spouse following an affair, divorce or painful breakup. When I read the phrase, "The Rabbis believed the sixth commandment had broad implications...we should not publicly embarrass a fellow human being...or cause someone to lose his livelihood" (185), I was reminded of this dynamic. While I have often counseled those faced with such situations to avoid revenge or the public humiliation of the spouse in an attempt to bring justice or equilibrium to the wronged or hurt in a relationship, I have never considered the sixth commandment as a basis for this discussion. Just as God declares "it is mine to avenge; I will repay" (Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19; Hebrews 10:30), I was also reminded through this reading that this commandment reminds us only God can bring justice.

As Gill rightfully points out, "anger, in turn, comes out of hurt" (189) but it is a horrible thing to consider that "murder represents the ultimate form of slavery to one's passions, emotions and folly" (188). With these phrases considered, I could see clearly that "self control is best founded on hope" (190) and "God does not seem in a hurry to kill those who offend" (195). Therefore as Christians "we work toward reconciliation and overcoming of evil with good" (191). Each of these comments served to invigorate Gill's discussion of the sixth commandment and provide this reader with much to consider.

Personal Reflections Gill Chapter 9

Christopher J Kinner 11/08/05

Gill's ninth chapter involves a full discussion of the many aspects that can be attached to the seventh commandment. As I read this chapter there were many things that I as a pastor to singles noted. Often I speak with those who feel they have been wronged, hurt, humiliated and embarrassed by a former spouse following an affair, divorce or painful breakup. As Gill rightfully points out in his previous chapter, it is a horrible thing to consider that "murder represents the ultimate form of slavery to one's passions, emotions and folly" (188). However, in this chapter there is a differing type of death that can be brought about by the passions and emotions that people become enslaved to; the death of a covenant relationship, the death of a marriage. I was touched in this chapter by Gill's desire to grieve over the death of a marriage. He could not be more correct in sighting the need for this process of acknowledging and grieving the loss of the life of a sacred union.

Also, Gill rightly points out that the union between a Man and a Woman is grounded in creation (222) and God establishes this relationship. So often in our society we wrongly assume we are responsible for choosing a mate or capable of 'fixing a marriage,' however, when we can begin to acknowledge God's rightful place above His creation, I believe we can find the guidance necessary to move forward, grow and heal.

I found distasteful Gill's desire to allow legislation that would extend the benefits of civil unions (248). As a Pastor it is increasingly difficult in our culture to encourage the important covenant and work of God that marriage represents and then allow loopholes for others to fool themselves into thinking they can experience some of the benefits of marriage at their convenience and not others. As a Singles Pastor I view this as an act of caring and seek to promote the benefits of singleness and of marriage as distinct and not to be coveted by those who are called to the other side of the grass.

Personal Reflections Gill Chapter 10

Christopher J Kinner 11/08/05

Gill's tenth chapter involves a full discussion of the many aspects that can be attached to the eighth commandment. I found myself quickly wondering if I have ever "left the edges unharvested" and spent time actively caring for the alien, widow and orphan in my community (253). In our current culture I suppose I could assure myself that I have placed 'money in the offering plate.' However, I found myself wondering how I could directly invite those in need to enter the boundaries of my life (my field) and in this way give more directly to them.

The next issue for contemplation I found myself drawn to in this chapter was a way that pastoral ministry and the frailty of human arrogance can bring about theft; "failing to respond when someone greets you, representing someone else's ideas as your own and misleading someone to be grateful to us when we do not deserve it" (255). A passion for loving others and the realm of creative ideas are places where pastors spend much of their time. This combined with a culture that has little regard for the work of the Pastor, it can become even more desirous for the Pastor to fail to respond to critics, to show one's worth by having all the ideas or even to take credit for the work of God. I have felt this pressure and have often found this type of theft steals the honor that is due to God and others in the body of Christ. Certainly the Pastor is to be a conduit of God's love and healing; the one who focuses the creativity of others and whose role is to place the needs of others ahead of their own. A Pastor who does all of the visitation, counseling, teaching and praying for the people steals the blessings of God from others who would grow through involvement in ministry.

Insecurity in position, personal safety and physical resources can cause even the most upright citizen to break the tenth commandment. As a Christian, this reading reminded me it is important to daily see God as my security and confidence and to fully trust Him so I will not be encouraged to steal.

Personal Reflections Gill Chapter 11

Christopher J Kinner 11/14/05

Gill's eleventh chapter involves a full discussion of the many aspects that can be attached to the ninth commandment. This commandment is most often acknowledged in legal disputes or trials in our culture. However, Gill begins this chapter not by highlighting the legal sense for which this commandment is most noted by our society, but rather through making a direct correlation to the potential for bringing public disgrace or contempt to others in our community (282). Many of Gill's other chapters noticeably conclude with the importance of the commandment being tied into community life. For this reader the initial emergence of this discussion in the opening paragraphs of this chapter create a dynamic that demonstrates the importance of this commandment's role in community life. Back-biting, slander, tale-bearing, innuendo, failing to speak up, false witness and even flattery (283) are all ways a neighbor may be harmed and his/her reputation can be harmed in community life. This harmful act may even prevent others from making needed purchases or retaining their rights to move freely throughout the community.

Gill also mentions the swearing of oaths but utilizes the words of Jesus (Matt. 5:33-37) to limit this type of truth telling (285). As I reflected on this reading during the past week, I found myself intrigued by this apparent contradiction. The resolution that has begun to form in my mind was that we should never rush to tell "the truth" but rather be careful and diligent watchers of our tongues. As James 1:19 states, "My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires." For myself I continually need to be diligent in finding what is "pure, noble and holy" (Phil. 4:8) and to consider these things. When one rushes to open his/her mouth, such as I do at times, this commandment is sure to be broken.

Personal Reflections Gill Chapter 12

Christopher J Kinner 11/14/05

Gill's twelfth chapter involves a full discussion of the many aspects that can be attached to the tenth commandment. This final commandment brings a fitting climax to this reader. When Gill states "Much of the Apostolic teaching is about replacing malice, anger, lust, greed, jealousy, envy and other bad attitudes with humility, forgiveness, compassion, kindness, tenderheartedness and joy" (302) he is hitting this Pastor right where he lives. Much of the work of the Pastor is in bringing the true Gospel message that does not allow the converted to remain the same as they were formerly. The transformation must go to our core as "our attitudes can lead to actions" (310). The interior life must be changed because "our attitudes have an effect on others" (311).

As I read this chapter, I found myself considering how much of our society's advertising is based on covetousness. The dynamic of showing us what others possess and what we simply should not have to live without. When Gill states that covetousness shows our "dissatisfaction with God's provision for us" (312), all I could do was nod with approval. So often I hear the words "why me?" and see people not just admiring the possessions of others, but also their status, relationships, intelligence, talents or health. As I read this chapter I found myself pondering the question, "when will I be happy, just being me?" For some, there are never enough blessings in life. Certainly for Adam and Eve, they coveted what Satan told them they were lacking and rather than being content as God had made them they took what was not theirs and attempted to make it their provision. Certainly I do not know more than God and I must continually ask Him to show me what my provision is and help me to be truly thankful for it. As I hear the Lord's Prayer, "give us each day, our daily bread" (Luke 11:3) and "lead us not into temptation," I am reminded of our need to seek to live lives without covetousness and concern over amassing wealth to fulfill our selfish and empty desires.

Personal Reflections Gill Postscript

Christopher J Kinner 11/30/05

Gills' postscript contained several items that appealed to this reader. One such item was his investigation of the patterns that can be observed in the Decalogue. As he discussed the Hebrew tradition of the ten fingers and described how they correspond to the Ten Commandments I was reminded of how closely observant Jews and Rabbi's study the law. One of the dynamics that Gill himself seems to address throughout this book is the need for us to see how these laws should be kept at our fingertips due to their constant need for use in our daily lives. For the commandments of God to be so ingrained in our hearts and minds that they guide the use of our hands and are always shown in our actions can truly guide us as "pilgrims in an ethical wilderness" (333).

Gill also highlights the Decalogue as "Ten Ways of Love" (327) and a ten part code of justice and rights. I particularly enjoyed his discussion of God's rights. I was encouraged to consider what rights God has and what He can rightfully claim from us. When we utilize the perspective of how the Ten Commandments are an expression of God's rightful expectations for his people it promotes the consideration of these commandments in all that we do.

Finally the interior architecture that Gill discusses made me take note of how thoroughly these Ten Commandments fill our every interaction, in all relationships, our observance of life, all communication, every economic interaction and God's call (agent) within our lives to specific relationships. The final push by Gill seems fueled by a desire that we in some way comprehend the Ten Commandments and find ways to utilize them in organizing and guiding our lives. Ethics certainly is a "team sport" and honoring God through being the kind of community that He desires should be an important part of every Christian's life.