

Chapter 19: Of the Law of God

Introduction

What is the relationship between the Christian and the Law? Do we have to obey the Law? What is the threefold division of the law? Are we saved by the Law? What are the threefold uses of the Law? What is the moral law and is it binding on all people? What are the Ten Commandments? Were the Ten Commandments known before Sinai? What is the relationship between the believer and the Ten Commandments? What is the doctrine of the Law and the gospel?

There is a lot of work to be done in this chapter and I think that this is a crucial chapter, one that I want to study myself. I do believe what is confessed here, but I do also want to be able to make a *biblical* case for it. The case that I will lay down is obviously convincing to me, I will not be able to address every objection that may come up. What I want to lay down here is the binding authority and nature of the Decalogue on all people, whether saved or unsaved; what the relationship of the Christian is to the Law and such questions.

Defining Our Terms

Natural Law

The Natural Law is the Law of God as revealed in creation and which man knows by virtue of the fact that he's a creature made in the image of God ([see here on the image of God](#)). Natural Law may be discovered by reason and innate knowledge. The Reformed Baptist theologian Richard Barcellos writes the following concerning the substance and form of the Moral Law:

Protestant Scholasticism taught that the Decalogue summarily contains the Moral Law and is the inscripturated form of the natural law, as to its substance. A distinction was made between substance and form. Substance is one; form (and function) may vary. For example, when the Westminster Larger Catechism Q. 98 says, “The moral law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments,” it refers to the fact that the substance (i.e., the underlying essence) of the Moral Law is assumed and articulated in the propositions of the Decalogue as contained in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. The form (and function) fits the redemptive-historical circumstances in which it was given. The substance, or underlying principles, are always relevant and applicable to man because he is created in the image of God. The application may shift based on redemptive-historical changes, such as the inauguration of the New Covenant, but its substance and utility never changes.^[1]

Moral Law

The Moral Law, on the other hand, is the Law which is revealed and summarized by God in the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue, which is the substance of the Natural Law. Richard Muller is quoted in Barcellos on the definition of the Moral Law, saying:

specifically and predominantly, the Decalogus, or Ten Commandments; also called the *lex Mosaica* ..., as distinct from the *lex ceremonialis* ...and the *lex civilis*, or civil law. The *lex moralis*, which is primarily intended to regulate morals, is known to the *synderesis* [the innate habit of understanding basic principles of moral law] and is the basis of the acts of *conscientia* [conscience—the application of the innate habit above]. In substance, the *lex moralis* is identical with the *lex naturalis* ...but, unlike the natural law, it is given by revelation in a form which is clearer and fuller than that otherwise known to the reason.^[2]

And then Dr. Barcellos adds:

As noted above, the Moral Law is summarily comprehended in the Decalogue, not exhausted by it. Though the formal promulgation of the Decalogue had a unique redemptive-historical context and use, it is nothing other than the Natural Law incorporated into the Mosaic Covenant. This is one of its uses in the Bible but not all of its uses.

The Decalogue contains the *summary* and the *essence* of the Moral Law, but it does not contain all the moral laws. For example, there is no “thou shalt respect elders”, but we understand that this is comprehended under the fifth commandment to honor our parents, and derived from it.

Positive Law

Positive Law simply said is a moral law that has no basis in nature nor is it self-evident, but is based upon a commandment of God. Dr. Barcellos defines positive laws as:

Positive laws are those laws added to the Natural or Moral Law. They are dependent upon the will of God. These laws are “good because God commands them.” They become

just because commanded. The first Positive Laws were given to Adam in the Garden (Gen. 1:28; 2:17), as far as we know. Subsequent Positive Laws are spread throughout the Old and New Testaments. Positive laws can be abrogated for various reasons. They are not necessarily universal or perpetual. Some obvious illustrations of Positive Law in the Old Testament are circumcision and animal sacrifices and two New Testament illustrations are baptism and the Lord's Supper under the New Covenant...Neither circumcision, animal sacrifices, baptism, or the Lord's Supper are either universal or perpetual.^[3]

§1 God gave to Adam a law of universal obedience written in his heart

1. God gave to Adam a **law of universal obedience written in his heart**, **1** and a particular precept of not eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; **2 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**. **3**
 1. Gen. 1:27; Eccles. 7:29; Rom. 2:12a, 14-15^[4]
 2. Gen. 2:16-17
 3. Gen. 2:16-17; Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:10,12

Adam was given a **law of universal obedience written in his heart** (Rom. 2:14-15). Even in his innocence, man was never without the law of God (**chapter 4:2**). This law is a law of **universal obedience**, i.e., it concerns everyone. The location of this law was not in stone, but **in his heart**; it was inward. In addition to this law, he was also given a **particular precept of not eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil** (Gen. 2:16-17). By obedience to the law and the precept he was given, he was **bound** along with **all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience**. *Everyone* was to obey *all of* the law, *exactly* as God required and *forever*. This law being given in the context of the Covenant of Works had promises and threats. For a law without a covenant has no rewards or threats. But when it is placed in a covenantal context, it is expanded with rewards and threats. The reward or **promised life** was upon the condition of obedience, which is implied if they did not breach the covenant but would eat of the tree of life (Gen. 2:9; 3:22). But **death** was the punishment for **the breach of** the commandments and the covenant (Gen. 2:17). Furthermore, God **endued Adam with the power and ability to keep** all those things which He commanded and gave him. Therefore, Adam was not placed in a disadvantaged state.

The Law Upon The Hearts Of All Men

We believe that when Adam stood in the Garden, he stood as a representative of all his posterity (**see here on Adam's federal headship**). He did not stand to represent himself alone, but God placed him as the covenant head over the whole human race. His obedience would be our obedience and his disobedience would be our disobedience. Sadly, we know what Adam did. Therefore, we believe that Adam did have the perfect Law of God upon His heart. The moral law, or the natural law, which he knew simply by being a man in God's image, knowing what morality is. Adam certainly knew that he was present in a good creation with a good God. There was a standard before the Fall.

The moral law, we believe was summarized in the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai ([paragraph 2](#)). But how does it make sense then to say that Adam had the moral law upon his heart even when there was no sin and there was no Fall? The objection would be, what does “Thou shalt not steal” and “Thou shalt not commit adultery” mean to a creature who is sinless? It is a valid objection, but obviously, it is not convincing for it assumes that the only way that the moral law can be expressed is in the negatives (thou shalt *not*) and not positives (thou *shalt*). For example, we can state the seventh commandment in the negative just like it is in the text, “You shall not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:14), or we can state it positively as “You shall remain faithful to your spouse.” The same idea is communicated, whether stated negatively or positively, and that idea is that one should be faithful to their spouse. Let’s take for example the third commandment. Negatively, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain” (Ex. 20:7), or we can express it positively as: “You shall honor and glorify the name of the LORD your God.” It is only because of the wicked perversity of man that these commandments had to be stated negatively because disobedience to them is part of our depraved nature.

Adam stood in our place. If he had obeyed God in his time of probation, then we would all have never fallen and received rewards by virtue of his obedience. Not only was the moral law written in his heart, but God gave him one positive precept, namely, “of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat” and threatened death and misery upon the breach of that particular commandment saying, “for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Gen. 2:16). He did eat of it, he died spiritually at that moment and death came through his sin into the world. We all died in Adam (Rom. 5:12-14). For more on Federal Headship and Adam’s disobedience, see [chapter 6](#).

That law, which as the Confession says was written upon Adam’s heart, did not vanish away with his disobedience, but remained. The radical difference now is that Adam had lost the freedom to will the good ([see chapter 9](#)) and therefore, obedience to the Law without grace became impossible. While before the Fall, the creation being “very good” (Gen. 1:31), he did not have to put effort into obedience as that was the “very good” state in which he was. Obedience came naturally to him as a very good creature. While after the Fall, obedience does not come naturally, but rather disobedience comes naturally. The moral law within man is part of what it means to be a rational creature and a human being in the image of God. What separates us from the brute beast is that we act according to choice and not by instinct. We can think through our choices and their consequences. We can know the difference between good and evil. Such knowledge animals don’t have and I believe it is in this sense that man is in the Imago Dei. We reflect (or better said, we were supposed to perfectly reflect) the person of God, His rationality, His goodness, His love and represent Him in the world ([see chapter 4:2](#)).

It is part of the Moral Argument for God to claim that for objective moral standards there must be a Lawgiver. Man, by virtue of him being a creature of God, has in him an innate knowledge of good and evil. We know what is good and what is not good even if we had never heard of the Ten Commandments. But, before some protest, knowing the law of God, or knowing what is good and what is evil, does *not* mean that we are *willing* to follow that lead. Our depraved nature is averse to the law of God and we often go against our conscience (e.g., Rom. 8:7-8). I believe that the conscience and the moral sense that all people have is proof for the assertion that this law, which was written in Adam’s heart, was not destroyed but is written in every person’s heart which enables them to know good and evil.

Romans 2:12-16

All people know that God exists by virtue of them being creatures of Him. They have the moral law upon their hearts. They know good from evil, whether they do that which is pleasing in God’s sight is another story. They have knowledge of God’s Law. The text chiefly cited in support of this is Romans

2. I would like to make a few comments on this passage.

Romans 2:12-16 For all who have **sinned without the law** will also **perish without the law**, and all who have **sinned under the law** will be **judged by the law**. 13 For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. 14 For when Gentiles, who **do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves**, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that **the work of the law is written on their hearts**, while their **conscience also bears witness**, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them 16 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus.

1. Paul has just concluded a section on the fact that God is impartial with regards to Jew or Gentile in His judgment. He will judge both according to the light they had. For “those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life”, but for those who “do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury” (Rom. 2:7-8). God makes no distinction between Jew and Greek in that He will judge the one, but pardon the other. In fact, it is much more severe to the Jew than to the Gentile because of the light and knowledge which the Jew has over the heathen.

2. The word “law” is used in v. 12 four times and it is used in two senses: 1) the natural law and 2) the revealed moral law. In the case of the Gentiles, the apostle says that they sinned without the law and by “law” he means that they sinned without the written revelation of God. They knew by virtue of the moral law written upon their hearts that they should not sin, but they did. They did not have a written and therefore unmistakable revelation of God concerning his will. They sinned without the written law and revelation of God, and therefore they will perish and be judged *not* based upon the written revelation and law of God. This does not mean that they will not be punished on the basis of the moral law, that is certainly the case, but it means that they will be judged according to the measure of light that they had. In contrast to this, the apostle points to those who have sinned under the law, speaking of the Jews here sinned *while* knowing the written revelation and law of God which is unmistakable. Unlike the Gentiles, the Lord had chosen the people of Israel to be His old covenant people and He has revealed Himself to them especially, unlike anything He had done and unlike any light of knowledge that He had shed upon any other nation. Israel knew who God was. They knew that obedience pleased Him and He greatly abhorred sin, it was clear to them from Holy Scripture. They who sinned while living under the written law, will perish and be judged on the basis of that written law. This means that they will be judged on the basis of the greater light that they had received. The knowledge of the Jew concerning the true God here is much greater than the Gentile, although they knew God (Rom. 1:21), obviously, they did not have as much knowledge of His will as the Jew did. Therefore, this Jew here will be punished more severely because of the greater revelation which he lived under. The heathen will receive a “light beating”, while those who know God’s will and still rebel against Him will receive a “severe beating” (Luke 12:47-48).

3. In both cases, the apostle is not assuming that Gentiles will go to heaven because they did not know the written law of God, or that they would not be judged by the law of God. It is a basic biblical assumption that all people will be judged by the law of God because the law of God is not something arbitrary that God thought of someday, but it is a reflection of His pure and glorious character. The moral law reflects the Lawgiver. Things are good because they reflect Him and they are evil because they don’t. It is essential to understand that the moral law is a reflection of God’s holy character. He is the standard. There is nothing above God. We will stand before Him and give an account on the Day of Judgment and the standard to be judged by is His perfection, as expressed in the

Decalogue/moral law. If you are afraid, you should be, because none of us can live such a perfect life, therefore, flee to Christ the Savior!

4. What does Paul mean to say in v. 13? He presents two groups: 1) the hearers of the law which are the Jews, and 2) the doers of the law which are presumably Jews and Gentiles. Is the apostle here teaching that people can be justified by works despite what his conclusion in chapter 3 on chapters 1-2 says? I don't think so. Perhaps he is here speaking about the hypothetical justification by the law, by this I mean, that theoretically, it is possible to be justified by the law, but only if you do all that God commands without any disobedience (Gal. 3:10). Oh, and did I mention, that men are born in and prone to sin from the womb (Ps. 51:4-5; Gen. 6:5; 8:21; [see chapter 6](#))? Therefore, this is an impossible task for anyone, but the Lord Christ. I don't have a firm opinion on this passage and I don't think that its proper understanding is essential to the points I'm trying to make here about the moral law, therefore, I will move on.

5. Now the apostle in v. 14 connects vv. 12-13 together. The Gentiles do not have the written law, but, says the apostle, they actually do what the law requires! How can this be? Here the apostle is referring to moral laws like stealing, murder, adultery, which have not been seen as virtues and from which tons of godless people have abstained. They abstained from these things because they knew the *unwritten* moral law of God. They do that "by nature." The Greek word is here φύσις (*phusis*) and is defined by Mounce as:

essence, Gal. 4:8; native condition, birth, Rom. 2:27; 11:21, 24; Gal. 2:15; Eph. 2:3; native species, kind, Jas. 3:7; nature, natural frame, 2 Pet. 1:4; nature, native instinct, Rom. 2:14; 1 Cor. 11:14; nature, prescribed course of nature, Rom. 1:26^[5]

They do what the law requires by "nature", by virtue of what they are, namely creatures in the image of God. They do that by "native instinct." Albert Barnes observes, "The expression means clearly by the light of conscience and reason, and whatever other helps they may have *without* revelation. It denotes simply, *in that state which is without the revealed will of God*. In that condition they had many helps of tradition, conscience, reason, and the observation of the dealings of Divine Providence, so that to a considerable extent they knew what was right and what was wrong."^[6]

6. When Gentiles follow the law externally, without themselves being conscious of following the true God's will, they become the law to themselves. This does not mean that whatever they think is good, becomes good, but rather, they, or more exactly, their conscience wherein God's law is, becomes the measure of good and evil. The same moral law is revealed to the Jew as well as to the Gentile, what differs is the mode of revelation. The Gentile, as we see in v. 14, becomes the law to himself. But the Jew has the written law already in his hands and knows God's will more clearly and more unmistakably than a Gentile who has no access to Scripture whereby he may know the will of God. The Gentile becomes the law to himself, although he does not possess the written Ten Commandments. The moral law, which was later summarized in the Ten Commandments on Sinai, was already written in the heart of Adam and continued to be part of what it means to be in the *Imago Dei* in every man. But I repeat again, merely having the moral law upon the heart does not mean the willingness to follow that law. We are able to sear and wound our conscience by continual sin whereby it approves of things which are not lawful. Our whole being is affected by sin, the conscience is not exempt from the corruption of sin.

7. By Gentiles doing what the law requires they demonstrate that although they do not have the law in written form upon tablets of stone, they do have the law written upon their hearts. Not only that, but their conscience evaluates their deeds. There is a conflict within their mind about their actions,

some things are commended while others are condemned. Each person has had that feeling when doing something wrong that he remains uneasy with himself. He is troubled within himself, especially the Christian when sinning against God. While at other times we feel good when doing something good. Our conscience is the place where the law is written. We know God's law through our conscience. We have the moral law within us by our creation and by nature of being creatures in God's image. But we must acknowledge that this law, through the Fall, has been marred and continually been disobeyed. People can certainly follow the law outwardly as the things expressed in the Decalogue are "common sense" and "self-evident," but true obedience to the law can happen only by a regenerate person, because the law, first of all, begins with the love and adoration of the true God, from whence all the other commandments about the love of the neighbor flow. John Calvin observed on v. 15:

Who show the work of the law (73) written, etc.; that is, they prove that there is imprinted on their hearts a discrimination and judgment by which they distinguish between what is just and unjust, between what is honest and dishonest. He means not that it was so engraven on their will, that they sought and diligently pursued it, but that they were so mastered by the power of truth, that they could not disapprove of it. For why did they institute religious rites, except that they were convinced that God ought to be worshipped? Why were they ashamed of adultery and theft, except that they deemed them evils?

Without reason then is the power of the will deduced from this passage, as though Paul had said, that the keeping of the law is within our power; for he speaks not of the power to fulfill the law, but of the knowledge of it. Nor is the word *heart* to be taken for the seat of the affections, but only for the understanding, as it is found in Deu 29:4,

"The Lord hath not given thee a heart to understand;"

and in Luk 24:25,

"O foolish men, and slow in heart to believe."

Nor can we conclude from this passage, that there is in men *afull* knowledge of the law, but that there are only some seeds of what is right implanted in their nature, evidenced by such acts as these — All the Gentiles alike instituted religious rites, they made laws to punish adultery, and theft, and murder, they commended good faith in bargains and contracts. They have thus indeed proved, that God ought to be worshipped, that adultery, and theft, and murder are evils, that honesty is commendable. It is not to our purpose to inquire what sort of God they imagined him to be, or how many gods they devised; it is enough to know, that they thought that there is a God, and that honor and worship are due to him. It matters not whether they permitted the coveting of another man's wife, or of his possessions, or of any thing which was his, — whether they connived at wrath and hatred; inasmuch as it was not right for them to covet what they knew to be evil when done.^[7]

John Gill adds that "Though the Gentiles had not the law in form, written on tables, or in a book, yet they had "the work", the matter, the sum and substance of it in their minds; as appears by the practices of many of them, in their external conversation."^[8]

8. Verse 16 concludes by stating that people will be judged and that would be through the

consciences, i.e., the moral law on their conscience will bear witness *against* themselves, and they will be judged according to the gospel. There is a judgment coming upon everyone and there is a moral standard by which everyone will be judged. Either we will be judged in ourselves or a Substitute's perfect righteousness will be imputed to us.

9. In conclusion, this passage teaches that everyone knows the law of God that is on their heart and in their conscience. Those who have the written revelation of God know it more clearly and have a greater knowledge of it, while those who do not possess the written revelation of God, are the law unto themselves. They function as the revelation of the law of God. The same law is there in written revelation (i.e., the Ten Commandments) and in the heart, but the manner and clarity of revelation are different. However wounded and seared our conscience may be, it is enough to testify against us. The conscience may be wounded and through continual sin taught to approve evil, yet the written revelation of God can never be changed to say that evil is good and good is evil. The written revelation has more clarity, and on the basis of that, those who have lived under that written revelation have more light than those who have not known the Scriptures. The former is judged harsher than the latter because of the light of knowledge which they had. Every child of Adam has access to the law of God, first of all, within their hearts and secondly, in the Holy Scriptures.

Did People Sin Before The Law?

The question sounds ridiculous, but we must ask it here. What is sin? 1 John 3:4 says that sin is "lawlessness" or as the KJV has it "sin is the transgression of the law." Transgression of what law? Laws made by man or the law of God? The obvious answer is that sin is the transgression of the moral law of God. This point supports the assertion in this paragraph that all people have the law on their hearts, in that there is a standard against which people sin. The mere existence of sin and of sinning proves that people had the moral law to sin against. The apostle Paul, in the previous passage above, Romans 2:12, does *not* claim that people did not sin when they were not under the written law. No, they certainly did sin and they perished. Sin cannot exist without the moral law of God. Where there is no law of God, there cannot be sin, for sin is the transgression of that law. What does the apostle then mean when he says sin is not counted where there is no law in Romans 5?

Therefore, just as **sin came into the world through one man**, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because **all sinned**—13 for **sin indeed was in the world** before the law was given, but **sin is not counted where there is no law**. 14 **Yet death reigned** from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

1. The first observation is the apostle's claim that death has come through the consequence of sin, which he repeats in Romans 6:23. There was no death when there was no sin. But all the posterity of Adam sinned in him. We did not personally sin with him, but he, being our representative, his disobedience is imputed to all of us. We sinned when our covenant head sinned.

2. What is the "law that was given" in v. 13? I believe the obvious answer is that this is speaking about the written Mosaic Law, for the apostle had already established (in Romans 2:12-14, [see above](#)) that all people have access to the law of God, whether written on tablets of stone or written on the heart. Therefore, Romans 5:13 cannot refer to the moral law absolutely, but rather, the written and therefore, clearer light of the law in stone. If the apostle says that sin was in the world, then this necessarily means the existence of the moral law of which sin is a transgression. If the law did not exist at all, either on stone or on the heart, then there would be no sin, yet the apostle affirms the opposite. Therefore, it seems to me that there are two senses in which this passage may

be taken. **a)** The first sense is to see the law being spoken of here as the clearer light of the written law, which cannot be wounded and seared like our consciences. When we sin without knowing the written moral law continually, we even distort our conscience to approve of that which is unlawful. Even our conscience is tainted by sin and is not exempt from corruption. Therefore, there is a greater knowledge of sins being “counted” or “charged” when there is a written moral law. But, the second sense is much greater and to the point of the passage. **b)** The passage speaks of something in the hypothetical: *if* there was no moral law, then people would not be judged according to their sins. But based on what he established in chapter 2, the apostle teaches that all have access to the moral law of God, therefore this refers to a hypothetical and not the actual situation. Furthermore, the apostle, in the same passage at hand, acknowledges that all in Adam die. But why do they die? They die because we all sinned in Adam and “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Death came from sin. But what is sin? As 1 John 3:4 says, sin is lawlessness or “the transgression of the law” (KJV). To sin is to disobey the law and to break it. But if sin did exist before the giving of the Mosaic Law to Israel, then this necessarily implies the existence of the moral law, which was transgressed before Moses. If the effects of sin were present before Moses, how can sin then *not* be imputed? It certainly was imputed and it was severely punished by God, just think of the Flood, and Sodom and Gomorrah.

3. “Sin is not counted where there is no law” is a truism just like “sin is the transgression of the law.” The apostle does not, in fact, say that there was absolutely no law before Moses, but rather he clearly has in mind the whole law of Moses (moral, ceremonial and civil), which was not given before Moses. He goes on in v. 14 to yet again confirm the effects of sin upon the world before Moses and thereby again establish the moral law.

4. To conclude, we have in this passage and from this idea, namely—that the existence of sin presupposes the existence of the moral law of which sin is the transgression—that the moral law did pre-exist Moses and is known by all men, whether in written form or from their conscience. God did, in fact, punish sin before Moses, therefore this proves that even without the written revelation of God people did sin and violate God’s law and brought God’s judgment upon themselves. Therefore, there is certainly “a law of universal obedience written in [our] heart” which God demands that we obey and every falling short to obey that law is a transgression and sin.

The Threefold Division Of The Law



This is an awkward place to argue for it, but I must, since the Confession goes on in the following three paragraphs to talk about the moral, ceremonial and judicial law. Basically, the threefold division of the law stresses the superiority of the moral law contained in the Ten Commandments above the ceremonial and judicial/civil, which were abrogated and fulfilled by the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord of Glory. I have benefited from:

- Dr. Philip S. Ross - [From the Finger of God: The Biblical and Theological Basis for the Threefold Division of the Law](#)
- David Chanski - [The Law of God II - Threefold Division](#)
- [Tripartite Division of the Law of God: A Patristic and Reformed Orthodox View](#)

- Jonathan F. Bayes - [The Threefold Division of the Law](#)

It has been a classic Christian doctrine to divide the Law of Moses or the law of the Pentateuch into three divisions, which are 1) the moral laws, 2) the ceremonial laws, and 3) the judicial or civil laws. This does not mean that we have neat categories and we know to which category every law belongs, because some laws are difficult to discern or are a combination. But we do believe that the Bible gives us such a division to understand the abiding validity of the moral law and the abrogation of the ceremonial and judicial laws. The question that we need to answer is: Does the Bible make a distinction between the Decalogue (Ten Commandments) and the other laws? If the answer is positive then a division of the law is established. If not, then the threefold division would be proven false.

For those wanting a detailed, exhaustive and interactive treatment of this subject, I recommend Philip S. Ross' [From the Finger of God](#). The book is technical containing a lot of Hebrew and Greek, and interacting with a lot of pro and con literature. It is not a book for the average reader, but it is a very detailed book. What is to follow is not a detailed case for the threefold division, but this is what convinces *me* of the validity of the division.

That the threefold division is not neat and exact is acknowledged by the Confession. In paragraph 3, it is said that "God was pleased to give to the people of Israel ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, **partly** of worship...**partly** holding forth divers instructions of moral duties". This means that just because there are ceremonial laws does not mean that they do not have moral aspects. In fact, the ceremonial laws were moral as long as they were binding on the people of Israel and had not yet been fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. They were positive laws for only a limited time, unlike the Decalogue which is moral law for all time and rooted in the nature of God.

The Division Of The Law In The Old Testament

The Division in the Pentateuch

From the beginning, the Decalogue is distinguished from the other laws which God gave. Most of the Pentateuch contains laws given by God to Moses. Although the Pentateuch is often called the Law of *Moses*, this does not refer to the origination of the laws, but rather the way in which they were communicated to Israel. The Decalogue alone was spoken and delivered directly by God, all the other laws were mediated through Moses. The Ten Commandments were directly **spoken by God** to the people (Ex. 20:1; Deut. 4:33; 5:4-5, 22; 9:10). This already gives us the idea that there is some significance to the Decalogue in contrast to the other laws, for why would God *only* speak these Ten Commandments and not the other ones directly to Israel? This points us to their primacy over the other laws. In fact, Moses tells us the purpose of why God directly came and spoke the words to Israel, namely, "that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin" (Ex. 20:20). Obviously, this does not mean that they would not sin merely because of hearing the Law, they surely did. But it does increase their liability as they heard these words directly from the mouth of God and still rebelled against Him.

That only the Decalogue was **written by the finger of God on tablets of stone** shows their everlasting character (Ex. 24:12; 31:18; 32:15-16; Deut. 4:13; 5:22; 9:10). To be written in stone means that they are meant to survive and remain unchanged, unlike all the other laws which were communicated by God to Moses and written by the hand of Moses. This shows the non-temporary character of the Decalogue, unlike the ceremonial and judicial laws. This is even the case when we use the expression in our daily lives. Furthermore, the Decalogue was to be stored in the Ark of the Covenant showing its centrality to the Old Covenant, unlike all the other laws (Ex. 25:16; 40:20; Deut. 10:1-5; Heb. 9:4). It also formed the core of the Mosaic Covenant (Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13).

The Decalogue has a **timeless character** to it, unlike the other laws which were only for a particular time shadowing the sacrifice of Christ and thereby showing that they were temporary. The laws of the Decalogue are “obvious” and self-evident to man in general. If God exists, we are to worship Him and to obey Him. If we want to live a good life, we must love our neighbor as ourselves. These laws are not things like bringing animal sacrifices or not eating pork, which do not have the *same* moral character as the laws of the Decalogue. The ceremonial laws had moral aspects as long as they were binding on the Old Covenant people of God and their shadowing-function was not fulfilled in Christ. After their fulfillment in Christ, they were abrogated through fulfillment.

In Deuteronomy 5:22, we read of the time when God came upon the mountain and delivered the Ten Commandments in speaking to the people and then it is said that “he added no more.” It is significant that when God spoke these commands, it is explicitly said that He did not add anything to them because they were all He had to say directly to the people concerning the moral law. Calvin observes that

When Moses states that God “added no more,” he signifies that a perfect rule of life is contained in the ten commandments, and that, when their instruction is fully received, the whole body of wisdom is attained to, so that the people need seek to know no more; when God, then, made an end of speaking, he Himself laid down the bounds of legitimate inquiry.^[7]

God said all that He had to say about the moral law in the Ten Commandments and He declared and summarized His mind about the moral law in the Ten Commandments. That was His ultimate and final word about the moral law. That Moses himself distinguished between the moral, ceremonial and judicial laws may be seen in Deuteronomy 4:

That Moses himself distinguished between the moral, ceremonial and judicial laws may be seen in Deuteronomy 4:

Deut. 4:12-14 Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You **heard the sound of words**, but saw no form; there was only a voice. 13 And he declared to you **his covenant**, which he **commanded you to perform**, that is, the **Ten Commandments**, and **he wrote them on two tablets of stone**. 14 And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and rules, that you might do them in the land that you are going over to possess.

Moses here recounts to the people the time when God came upon the mountain and gave the Decalogue to the people and later the rest of the law. We must notice here the distinguishing character that is given to the Ten Commandments. First of all, it is said that the Lord with His voice spoke these Ten Words to the people of Israel. They heard His voice speaking the Decalogue to them and were terrified. Second, the Decalogue is said to be His “covenant”, the Ten Commandments were the substance of the Old Covenant. They were central to it and this is also seen in the fact they were stored in the Ark of the Covenant. Third, and this is an extension of the first point, the Lord Himself through His voice commanded the people to perform the Ten Commandments. Fourth, the Decalogue was written by the finger of God on two tables of stone. This shows the care of God to this law and its importance to Him that He Himself would write it, rather than have Moses do it. And this shows the unchanging character of the Decalogue in that it was written in stone. But now we notice a shift in v. 14 in that all the other laws, the ceremonial and judicial laws which follow after the

giving of the Ten Commandments, the sacrifices, the death penalties, the tabernacle and so on, were communicated through Moses. It was Moses who taught the people to do these statutes and rules and not God, unlike what He did for the Decalogue. Another interesting point is that Moses says that these statutes and rules, or judgments (KJV) or ordinances (NET) are said to be kept “in the land that you are going over to possess.” They have a limited character and a limited place where they are to be observed, namely, in the Promised Land. This does not mean that none of the ceremonial or judicial laws were observed in the wilderness, but rather that they should characterize life in the Promised Land. But no such thing is said about the Ten Commandments, showing that they are timeless and not bound to place. Dr. Ross says on this limitation of “in the land” (Deut. 4:5, 14; 15:31; 6:1; 12:1) that

The qualification ‘in the land’ therefore restricts the binding force of the ‘statutes and ordinances’ to the Promised Land. In so doing, it distinguishes them from the Decalogue, which was always binding, and from the ‘pattern’ laws, which were binding even in the wilderness. The Decalogue as the ‘self-understood’ ‘constitution of the universe’ was the unchanging basis on which God judges all men and nations. The ‘pattern’ laws were exclusively cultic and determined religious practice immediately and in any location. They would only ever be altered at God’s own command (1 Chron. 28:12).^[9]

“Pattern law” refers to laws that were modeled after something not of this creation. For example, the Tabernacle was modeled after heaven itself. In Hebrews, we read that Moses was told, “See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain” (Heb. 8:5; Ex. 25:9, 40; Num. 8:4; Acts. 7:44). The pattern laws were a shadow (Heb. 10:1; Col. 2:16-17) of greater realities that were to come. Dr. Ross says, “The tabernacle was to be a ‘pattern’ or ‘model’ (תבנית) of a greater reality just as an idol was an image (פסל) of a real creature (Deut. 4:16-18) or a god.”^[10]

Thomas Aquinas, who is seen as the one who systemized the threefold division, used some biblical texts to argue his case among other things. He was not the one who invented the threefold division for Dr. Ross shows that even Judaism and early Christianity believed in some form of division of the law, whether it was twofold, threefold or fourfold, they did not think of the law as an indivisible, moral whole. My purpose is not to argue for the division historically, but biblically. Aquinas saw a threefold division in Deuteronomy 4:13-14 and 6:1. The following heavily relies upon Dr. Ross’ discussion since I have no knowledge of Hebrew, but I still find this point an important part of the argument for the classic threefold division.

Deut. 4:13-14 And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, **the Ten Commandments**, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone.
14 And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you **statutes and rules**, that you might do them in the land that you are going over to possess.

Deut. 6:1 “Now this is the commandment—**the statutes and the rules**—that the LORD your God commanded me to teach you, that you may do them in the land to which you are going over, to possess it,

“The three Hebrew words used in Deuteronomy 6:1, the text in which Aquinas found moral, civil, and ceremonial precepts, are תבנית [*mitsvah*, [H4687](#)], פסל [*choq*, [H2706](#)], and מִשְׁפָּט [*mishpat*, [H4941](#)]. They are among the most frequently used words for law and occur together four times in

Deuteronomy (5:31; 6:1; 7:11; 26:17).^[11] He admits that while “no particular expression exclusively describes individual laws”, yet it has been “shown that the individual words do refer to specific categories in certain contexts.”^[11] He cites as examples Deuteronomy 4:10, 13, 36; 5:5, 22; 9:10; 10:2 as examples where the word דְּבָרֵי [*də·bā·rāy*, [H1697](#)], which is translated with “words” does refer specifically to the commandments of the Decalogue. Yet he is careful to add that “This does not prove that דְּבָרֵי [*də·bā·rāy*, [H1697](#)] always means the Decalogue, yet it shows that it is a distinct element of the law which Deuteronomy sometimes recognizes by the use of דְּבָרֵי [*də·bā·rāy*, [H1697](#)].”^[11]

Furthermore, Ross writes, “מִצְוָה [*mitsvah*, [H4687](#)] was used in certain cases to refer to the Ten Words (Deut. 5:10, 29; 6:17; 7:9; 8:2; 13:5) and Aquinas may have been right to understand Deuteronomy 6:1 in that way. Deuteronomy 6:1-3 links the Horeb revelation and the teaching that begins at 6:4 with the *Shema*.” And Dr. Ross concludes this section with:

This investigation shows that the individual Hebrew words for law do not divide the law into cast-iron categories. Even so, the Deuteronomy’s use of the words sometimes makes a distinction between the Decalogue and the rest of the Mosaic code. That distinction does not force the practical-theological conclusion that the Decalogue ‘doth for ever bind all’. It does, however, further challenge the view that the Old Testament law was written, and always viewed, as an indivisible whole.^[12]

Therefore, we, along with Dr. Ross, conclude with “In giving these designations it was not Justin, Aquinas or the Westminster Assembly that first distinguished those laws as the Ten Commandments. Moses is entirely to blame.”^[11]

Mercy And Not Sacrifice

In many places, we read of the preference of obedience to God and mercy to fellow man, rather than rituals and sacrifices (e.g., Hos. 6:6; Ps. 50:7-9; 51:17; Jer. 7:21-23; Mic. 6:8; 1 Sam. 15:22-23; Isa. 1:11-17). To me, this clearly points to a division of the law and rejection of the idea that the law is an indivisible whole and God expects us or expected Israel to obey the law equally in all points. If this observation is right, then we have proven that the Old Testament believers were *conscious* of the division. Let’s take the example of David. He sinned against God and against Bathsheba when he committed adultery with her. In his prayer of repentance in Psalm 51, he declares:

Ps. 51:15-17 O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. 16 For **you will not delight in sacrifice**, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. 17 The **sacrifices of God are a broken spirit**; a broken and **contrite heart**, O God, **you will not despise**.

God would not delight in sacrifice, because that is not a proof of true and godly repentance, rather what God delights in is a broken spirit who knows that he is broken God’s Law and has defied God. One must have a broken and a repentant heart, that is what God delights in and not sacrifice. In this we see clearly, the distinction and division between the moral and ceremonial, and David places the moral law *above* the ceremonial. But what is interesting here is the fact that he thereby does *not* nullify the ceremonial law for he was still under its administration. But what he clearly does is distinguish between the moral and ceremonial law and puts the moral law above the ceremonial laws of sacrifice. In v. 19, David declares:

then will you **delight in right sacrifices**, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

When the sacrifices are offered from a repentant heart, then the Lord will take delight in them because He has ordained them under the Old Covenant as part of the ceremonial law. God *did* desire their proper and faithful observance, as that is what He has commanded, but He and His servants acknowledge that these are subordinate to the moral law.

Another example is Saul. God commanded him to wipe out the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15, yet Saul did not obey the voice of the Lord leaving cattle and Agag the king alive. When Samuel comes to know of this, his reaction is telling:

1 Sam. 15:22-23 And Samuel said, "**Has the LORD as great delight** in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, **to obey is better than sacrifice**, and to listen than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because **you have rejected the word of the LORD**, he has also rejected you from being king."

Saul uses the excuse that he had spared the cattle for sacrifice to the Lord, but Samuel knew better, he was motivated and moved by the people (1 Sam. 15:24). Notice that this passage does not say that the Lord has completely no delight, but rather "as great delight", it compares the delight of the Lord in sacrifices and obedience. The Lord had given Saul a moral command to wipe out the Amalekites and all that belongs to them, but he despised the word of the Lord and did not fulfill it, using the pretense that he would have used the animals for sacrifice. Samuel rebukes Saul for his rebellion declaring that God has greater delight in obedience rather than sacrifice. In fact, "to obey is better than sacrifice", herein we see clearly the division of the law, it may not be a "threefold" division in this passage, but there is certainly a division between the moral and the ceremonial law wherein the moral law has primacy. To me, this alone is a clear testimony to the division of the Mosaic Law even when it was administered, and not only that but that the believers themselves were conscious of this division.

The Division Of The Law In The New Testament

The Lord Jesus

The Summary of the Law

Did the Savior in His lifetime treat the Decalogue as the sum of the moral law and thus above the ceremonial and judicial laws? I believe that the answer is yes and I am indebted to Dr. Ross' discussion on pp. 154-160 on this question. It is generally accepted that the Savior summarized the law in two commandments: 1) the love of God and 2) the love of neighbor. We read

Matt. 22:36-40 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And he said to him, "**You shall love the Lord** your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: **You shall love your neighbor as yourself**. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

The first commandment comes from the *Shema*, which religious Jews to this day recite every day (Deut. 6:4-5). There, we are told that there is but one God and that we should love this one God with everything that we have. This summarizes the first four commandments which are about 1) the exclusivity of that one God, 2) the right worship of that one God, 3) the honoring of that one God and 4) the public worship of that God. The first four commandments are expressions of what it means to love God with everything that we have and are.

The second commandment, given by the Savior, is that of loving our neighbor. The commandment is ancient and given by God to Israel all the way back in Leviticus:

Lev. 19:18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but **you shall love your neighbor as yourself**: I am the LORD.

And there is a similar commandment in v. 34 of the same chapter:

You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and **you shall love him as yourself**, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

It is interesting to see the connection that the LORD makes in v. 34 between what He did for the Israelites, and in turn what the Israelites should do to other people. To “love your neighbor as yourself” summarizes the second table—commandments 5 through 10. 5) We are to obey our parents. 6) We are not to harm our neighbor. 7) We are not to commit adultery against our neighbor. 8) We are not to steal from our neighbor. 9) We are not to bear false witness against our neighbor. 10) We are not to covet anything that is our neighbor’s. The one who does these things loves their neighbor.

The Commandments

The Lord, in Mark 10:19, lists the commandments of God, referring to the second table of the Decalogue:

You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder [6], Do not commit adultery [7], Do not steal [8], Do not bear false witness [9], Do not defraud [10], Honor your father and mother [5].’”

“To defraud” here refers to the tenth commandment about coveting. Ross writes, “it could be as Wessel suggests, ‘a substitute for the commandment against coveting, fraud being a manifestation of coveting.’”^[13] Here we learn that the commandments of God, referred to by the Lord Jesus, *are* the second table of the Decalogue. He did not refer to any laws about sacrifices or feasts, but rather went to the heart of God’s law, namely, the Decalogue. This is significant, as in it we see the essence of God’s moral law being upheld by the Lord Jesus. The second table of the Decalogue is that which He lists as “the commandments”.

Weightier Matters

Matthew 23 is directed at the hypocrisy and evil of the religious establishment of Jerusalem and in it we find this woe:

Matt. 23:23-24 “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have **neglected the weightier matters of the law**: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. 24 You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!

The Lord directs His woe against the scribes and Pharisees for their utter hypocrisy in taking care of the tiniest of matters, yet forgetting what the law is actually all about. Much like His charge against them who see the speck in another’s eye, but not the log in their own eye (Matt. 7:3-5). The Pharisees are all worked up about their agricultural tithes, making sure that they fulfill these commands to the full extent, but they have lost the heart of the law. The Lord declares that they neglected the “weightier” matters of the law. This alone is a blow to the idea that the law is an indivisible whole and that God required obedience in all matters equally. Here the Lord declares that there are “weightier matters.” Notice that He does not say that they should have neglected their tithes, but rather “These you ought to have done, *without neglecting the others.*” What are then “weightier matters of the law”? We need not search because the Lord defines what He means by the weightier matters of the law, namely, justice, mercy, and faithfulness. These are not ceremonial laws, but rather moral laws. To uphold the cause of the widow and the orphans is the cry of the prophets. Showing kindness and love to one another and remaining faithful to God and to one’s neighbor. That is more important, that is “weightier”, rather than the ceremonial laws or the laws about tithing. We have a division here between things that are moral and things that are not moral in the same sense.

The Bread Of Presence And David

Another example is the case where David ate the Bread of Presence. As an answer to the wicked accusation of the Pharisees against the disciples’ plucking heads of grain, the Lord Jesus raises the example of David. He says:

Matt. 12:3-4 He said to them, “Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: 4 how he entered the house of God and **ate the bread of the Presence**, which it was **not lawful for him to eat** nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?

Jesus raises this example without the slightest idea that David was in the wrong, or that he committed a sin in eating what was forbidden in the Law of Moses for any other than the sons of Aaron (Ex. 29:32-33; Lev. 8:31). This is an example where the breaking of a particular law, in this case, ceremonial and one which was pointing to Christ as the Bread from Heaven (John 6:41) Who is always at the presence of God on our behalf, was not sinful. But what if, for example, to get that bread David would first have to kill the priests? Would the Lord Jesus not find blood on David’s hand and exonerate him because he was hungry? Such a suggestion is absurd and would never have come to the Lord’s mind. What we see here is a distinction between the moral and the ceremonial law. To break the ceremonial law was not the same as breaking the moral law. If David had broken the moral law, he would not have been exonerated like he was for breaking the ceremonial law.

Paul the Apostle

I believe that I have so far argued a case (which for me is convincing) of a threefold division of the law. I have tried to show that the law was certainly not understood as an indivisible, moral whole by the biblical authors. My last survey will be with the apostle Paul. We will look at a few things from the apostle which show us that he did not understand the law as an indivisible whole, but rather

distinguished certain things. I will try to be brief.

The Law Of Commandments Expressed In Ordinances

Eph. 2:14-16 For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has **broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility** 15 by **abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances**, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.

Paul claims that Christ is the peace between Jew and Gentile believers, Who through His sacrifice has “broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility”. But how? “by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances” (Eph. 2:14-16). Does the abolition of this “law of commandments” refer to the abolishment of the whole Mosaic Law—moral, civil and ceremonial? I don’t believe that’s the case, rather the apostle specifies what law he is referring to, namely, the one “expressed in ordinances”. But what is this? We can know what he is referring to directly by looking at how the apostle starts his discussion from v. 11. He refers to such an ordinance and Israelite law, namely, circumcision of the male on the eighth day. This is part of the “dividing wall” in v. 14. Circumcision divided those God-fearers and the Jews. It divided pagans and Jews, and the Jews prided themselves in circumcision. You can already hear the Jewish pride and distinctiveness in the way that the apostle writes vv. 11-12. Could it be said that the moral law separated Jew and Gentile? I don’t believe that’s the case. The moral law or natural law of the Decalogue is common to all people in accordance with the apostle’s argument in Romans 1-2 ([see above](#)). The moral law could not have separated Jew and Gentile. Could it have been the civil law? I don’t think that’s the case either, for the Mosaic civil law was not radically different than laws existing already at that time. Dr. Ross notes, “The Code of Hammurabi provides examples: Hands cut off for striking one’s father, a nurse’s breast cut off over contractual disagreements, and different standards for rich and poor.”^[14] What definitely separated the Jews from the Gentiles were laws given specifically to separate them like circumcision (Gen. 17:14) or food laws (Lev. 20:24-26), which we know from the rest of the NT (e.g., Acts 10) were problematic for the infant church. Therefore, we see in this passage that the apostle declares the abolishing and destruction of such ceremonial laws while not speaking a word about the abolishing of the moral law, but rather, elsewhere arguing that it is common for all men (Rom. 1:18-32; 2:12-15). This he could not have done if he had not seen a certain division within the law.

[See also 1 Cor. 7:19 below.](#)

The Commandments Summed up

Rom. 13:8-10 Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. 9 For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

In Romans 13:8-10, the apostle cites four laws from the second table of the Decalogue and then adds “any other commandment” and finally concludes that this is fulfilled in loving one’s neighbor as one’s self. What other commandments could the apostle have in mind other than moral commands like the fifth commandment about honoring our parents, or the ninth commandment not to lie or

bear false witness. It is the commandments of the Decalogue and those derived from them that fulfill the “law”. How is love shown to a neighbor by being circumcised, not eating certain foods or offering sacrifices? Rather, if we love our neighbor, we will not do anything morally wrong to them, but rather will love them and thereby fulfill the moral law.

Conclusion

Putting all the biblical evidence together, especially from the Old Testament itself, we see a certain and a threefold division arise in the Mosaic Law. The law is divided between the moral law, which is unchanging and always binding; the ceremonial law which was typical, shadowy and temporary; and the civil law which was the constitution of Israel and also had a temporary character. But these things will be discussed later in the appropriate paragraphs (ceremonial law in [paragraph 3](#), civil law in [paragraph 4](#), moral law in [paragraph 5](#)).

§2 The Same Law...Delivered by God...in Ten Commandments



2. The **same law** that was first written in the **heart of man continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness** after the Fall, **1** and **was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, 2** and written in two tables, the four first containing our duty towards God, and the other six, our duty to man. **3**

- 1st Commandment: Gen. 35:1-4; Exod. 18:11; Job 31:28; 42:1-2; Josh. 24:2
- 2nd Commandment: Gen. 35:1-4; Lev. 18:21, 27
- 3rd Commandment: Exod. 5:2; Lev. 18:21, 27; Job 2:9
- 4th Commandment: Gen. 2:2-3; Exod. 16; Gen. 7:4; 8:10, 12; Mark 2:27
- 5th Commandment, Gen. 3:17; 9:20-27; 37:10
- 6th Commandment: Gen. 4:3-15; John 8:44; Exod. 1:15-17; Job 24:14
- 7th Commandment: Gen. 12:17; 39:7-9; Lev. 18:20, 27; Job 24:15; 31:1
- 8th Commandment: Gen. 3:11; 30:33; 31:30-32; 40:15; 44:8-9; Job 24:14

- 9th Commandment: Gen. 3:4, 13-14; 12:11-13; 27:12; 29:25; Job 24:25; 27:4; 36:4; John 8:44
 - 10th Commandment: Gen. 3:6; 6:2, 5; 13:10-11; Exod. 15:9-10; Job 31:1, 9-11
2. Rom. 2:12a, 14-15
 3. Exod. 32:15-16; 34:4, 28; Deut. 10:4

The same law, which God gave Adam in his heart (without the “*particular precept*”) was likewise **first written in the heart of man** (Rom. 2:14-15). This is spoken of man generally and not Adam particularly, although he is the covenantal head of humanity. This **same law** remained and **continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness**, meaning, it was the measure of what is good and what God required of us. Notice that the law is the same in substance before and **after the fall**. God did not give a new law now that man was fallen because God’s standards did not change. After that, this **same law...was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments** (Ex. 20). The same law which was written in the heart of man and is in the heart of every man, God was pleased to give verbally and write in stone. The Ten Commandments are the summary of **our duty towards God** and **to man** (Matt. 22:37-40). The first four commandments concern our **duty towards God** and the other six speak of **our duty to** our fellow **man**.

In this paragraph, we will take a look at the moral law of God contained in the Ten Commandments, both at its giving on Mt. Sinai and also the knowledge of these commandments before Moses. The primacy of the Decalogue has been argued [above](#).

Continuity Between The Moral Law and The Decalogue

The moral law, which is binding upon all men and which all men know, was summarized in Ten Commandments. The Confession says that the moral law is “a perfect rule of righteousness”, this is so because the moral law is a reflection of God’s perfection and of His moral excellence. The moral law does not contain arbitrary commands, but ones which are right based on God’s being and character. They reflect His righteousness and holiness, therefore they are the standard. They are a perfect rule of what is right and what is contrary to them, is wrong and sinful. Before the Fall, they were a perfect standard and after the Fall, they remain a perfect standard of righteousness. The Fall did not change the perfection, holiness and moral excellence of God, therefore, the moral law was also not changed. The Decalogue is certainly moral law that reflects God’s perfect character. Nine of the Ten Commandments are self-evident and obvious, there is only one positive precept which is also moral and part ceremonial and that is the Sabbath ([see for more chapter 22](#) on the question of the Christian Sabbath).

The Decalogue was not something new given to Israel, but rather it was the essence of the covenant with Israel (e.g., Ex. 34:28; Deut. 4:13) and it was given so that there would be no misunderstanding through weakened conscience about what God’s moral law was. That this was the case is seen in the general knowledge of the Ten Commandments prior to Sinai in the Pentateuch.

The First and Second Commandments Before Moses

The first commandment declares the exclusivity of Yahweh as the only God to be worshiped and adored (Ex. 20:3) and the second commandment declares how he should be worshiped and also forbids idolatry (Ex. 20:4-6). The first and second commandments are very similar to each other. This was obvious to Adam and Eve as they had perfect knowledge of God prior to the Fall wherein God would walk with them in the Garden. They knew no other God, but the LORD. Cain and Abel both worshiped and knew God, but one was accepted and the other denied. Cain worshiped God, but

he broke the second commandment by not worshipping Him *rightly* ([see here for chapter 22](#) on the Regulative Principle of Worship). He brought that which the Lord had not commanded or that which was not pleasing as a sacrifice to Him and was rejected.

When we read of the patriarchs, we see them also only devoting themselves and worshipping the one true God. When Abraham was called by God, he was an idolater as it was common in his day (Josh. 24:2), but the Lord called and he obeyed. We nowhere read of Abraham having any other god, but rather he held fast to the true God even to the point of offering his own son. He is the One whom Abraham declares to be the judge of all the earth (Gen. 18:25) and who demands from Abraham that he walk blamelessly before Him (Gen. 17:1).

Jacob, when he fled from Laban, unknown to him Rachel, his beloved wife had taken the idols of her father with her (Gen. 31:19). When Laban finds out that Jacob along with his family had fled and the household gods were no more, pursued Jacob and found him. When asked why did Jacob steal Laban's gods, Jacob's response was a clear affirmation of his devotion to the only one God. He said, "Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not live" (Gen. 31:32). Here are two sins coupled together: one is theft and the other idolatry. Jacob was ready to put to death the person who had the idols. It was a grievous sin to him because he knew the true God who demands exclusivity from His people.

When God the LORD called Jacob to go to Bethel and dwell there, Jacob follows the call of God with a call to his people to "Put away the foreign gods that are among [them]" (Gen. 35:2). Jacob knew that God is a God Who is jealous and wants His people to be obedient only to Him and worship only Him. The Almighty will not share His glory with idols. He wants to have the full devotion of His people. When the people gave up their idols, at that time it is said that "a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob" (Gen. 35:5). When they gave up their idols, it was easy to see that they had the one true God on their side.

The ten plagues upon Egypt are said to be "against all the gods of Egypt" (Ex. 12:12) so that even the wicked Pharaoh acknowledges that "the LORD is greater than all gods". These gods against whom the Lord executed judgment were only in the thoughts of people and were not true like Yahweh, the God of the Israelites, Who demonstrates that they're nothing by the plagues which He sent.

Leviticus 18 forbids Israel from all kinds of sexual sins which "the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclean" (Lev. 18:27). But there is one precept concerning idolatry given in the chapter. The Lord declares that the people of the land, which did not have the written revelation of God in the law but had the moral law upon their hearts (e.g., Rom. 2:14-15, [see here](#)), did wicked things and were judged by God for these things. Notice that it is never said that these nations which were judged by God through Israel did not offer sacrifices or ate pork and that's why there were judged. No. They were judged for the moral laws which they broke. But how can God justly judge them by laws they did not know of or possess? This presupposes that they did, *in fact*, have knowledge of these laws by virtue of the fact that they were creatures of the true God. Therefore, one of the things that God says that these people of the land did was that they worshiped and offered children to false gods (Lev. 18:27) and that's one of the reasons that God brought judgment upon them. God brought judgment upon nations that did not know Moses nor the Mosaic Law for things neither ceremonial nor judicial, but moral laws which they did, in fact, know in their heart.

The Third Commandment Before Moses

The third commandment declares that the Lord and His Name should be regarded as holy and not

profaned (Ex. 20:7). We have an example in Genesis 11 with the account of the tower of Babel when people try to glorify *themselves* and make a name for *themselves*. They thereby take the name of the Lord in vain by not giving Him that honor that is due to His name and because of this God brings judgment upon them and spreads them across the earth.

The Pharaoh takes the name of the Lord in vain by disregarding His glory and His power saying, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, and moreover, I will not let Israel go" (Ex. 5:2). Here, the Pharaoh disregards God's word and rejects obedience to His word and thereby incurs more judgment upon himself.

In Leviticus 18, the nations which were driven away by Israel are said to be judged among other things for profaning the name of God (Lev. 18:21, 27). The Lord brought judgment upon them because they were idolatrous and thereby profaned the name of the Lord by rejecting Him and choosing to serve idols rather than the living God. In Leviticus 18:21, profaning the name of the Lord is the result of idolatry. To choose any idol above the LORD is to take His Name in vain and incur His wrath.

The Fourth Commandment Before Moses

The fourth commandment concerns the Sabbath. The institution of the Sabbath took place on the seventh day of creation by God Himself (Gen. 2:3), although it is not explicitly commanded, yet New Testament texts look back to this time and declare that "the Sabbath was made for man" (Mark 2:27) and not the other way around. When was the Sabbath made but on the seventh day? The Sabbath was instituted for man's benefit, not God's. It is true that we do not read of the patriarchs resting on the seventh day, but this is evidence on no side for no text says that they did not rest. In fact, the pattern of seven day weeks was known from even as far back as the Flood (Gen. 7:4). What basis is there for seven days week, but from the creation and the Sabbath at the end of the week?

There is an instance in Exodus 16:22-30 where the Sabbath is celebrated by the people of Israel before Sinai. What is interesting is v. 28 in which the Lord complains saying, "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?" and thereby point toward the idea that the Sabbath was, in fact, commanded by God before Sinai and before this instance. For what's the point of the Lord's complaint if the Sabbath was, in fact, not instituted and commanded before Sinai to say "How long will you refuse..."? The Lord had commanded the people to keep the Sabbath before this instance and from the seventh day of creation, but the people had not kept holy the Sabbath to the Lord. This was probably the case in Egypt too when they were slaves. I don't think that the Egyptians gave them proper rest, but they were abused. That God had to command the Sabbath so often, not only in this case but also after the Sinai is seen from the fact that the Sabbath is the only commandment that is also a positive precept and one that is to be forgotten. That is why the commandment begins with the word "Remember" because we are so often prone to forget it. More will be said below on the commandment and in detail in [chapter 22](#).

The Fifth Commandment Before Moses

The fifth commandment commands the honor of authority above one's self, the closest are the parents (Ex. 20:12). This is seen throughout the lives of the patriarchs and the dishonor of parents is seen as something that is disrespectful. This is an obvious and self-evident thing. Noah was dishonored when Ham saw him naked and brought his father's curse upon himself by his deed (Gen. 9:22, 24-25). But Shem and Japheth were honored and blessed because they covered their father's nakedness (Gen. 9:23, 26-27). Jacob was dishonored by Joseph's dream about his family bowing themselves to Joseph (Gen. 37:10).

The Sixth Commandment Before Moses

The sixth commandment forbids the murder of people (Ex. 20:13). The first instance is Cain's murder of Abel which, clearly is seen as a great evil, so much so that God says that "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground" (Gen. 4:10). The death penalty for the unlawful killing was instituted way before the giving of the Mosaic Judicial law. After the Flood, the Lord tells Noah that "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image" (Gen. 9:6). Murder is forbidden because it is ultimately an attack upon God Himself, in Whose image man is made. The one who sheds innocent blood, his blood must be shed.

Moving in history we see that when the people of God were in Egypt, the midwives refused to heed Pharaoh's command to throw baby boys in the Nile because they "feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live" (Ex. 1:17). They knew that God abhorred murder and so they would not follow the commands of the highest authority in the land, choosing rather to heed the voice of the true Lawgiver and Ruler.

The Seventh Commandment Before Moses

The seventh commandment commands fidelity to one's spouse (Ex. 20:14). Even a wicked Pharaoh knew that it was wrong to sleep with another man's wife and the Lord brought judgment upon his house for his sin (Gen. 12:17-20). A similar case was repeated by Abraham in Genesis 20. Joseph knew that what Potiphar's wife wanted to do was "great wickedness and sin against God" (Gen. 39:9). Both the heathen and believing knew that adultery was wrong. In Leviticus 18, one of the things that the nations which occupied the Promised Land were judged for was adultery (Lev. 18:20, 27) and all kinds of other sexual sins (also mentioned in Lev. 18).

When it was told to Judah that Tamar was "pregnant by immorality" he declared that she should be burned (Gen. 38:24). Unbeknown to him that he was actually the father who had sex with her, thinking that she was a prostitute and declares that he was wrong (Gen. 38:26).

Job, perhaps living at the time of the patriarchs or before them, declares that he had "made a covenant with his eyes" that he would not "gaze at a virgin" and if his heart was "enticed by a woman" he sees that as a negative thing (Job 31:1, 7). Here is not only adultery obviously seen as bad, but even lust!

The Eighth Commandment Before Moses

The eighth commandment forbids theft (Ex. 20:15). Rachael stole the household gods of her father and Jacob declared that the one with whom the gods were found deserves to die (Gen. 31:32). Joseph's brothers were concerned about money found in their sacks after their purchase, no doubt thinking that the Egyptians would accuse them of stealing. Joseph makes it look like Benjamin had stolen his cup and as punishment demanding that he be enslaved (Gen. 44:12, 15-17). Joseph, when he was sold into slavery later, says that he was "stolen" from his land (Gen. 40:15).

The Ninth Commandment Before Moses

The ninth commandment forbids speaking falsehood (Ex. 20:16). The first deception was committed by the serpent when Satan brought doubt about God's word (Gen. 3:1, 4). Abraham lied and told Sarai to lie about her identity (Gen. 12:11-13; 20:2) and Isaac his son repeats the deception of his father (Gen. 26:6-11). Jacob deceives his father (Gen. 27:19-20, he takes the name of the Lord in vain, too, in the process) and flees from Esau's wrath (Gen. 27:35-36, 41-43). Laban deceives Jacob by giving him as wife Leah instead of Rachel and he is angered by Laban's action (Gen. 39:25). Oh,

how the tables were turned!

The Tenth Commandment Before Moses

The tenth commandment forbids all kinds of covetousness (Ex. 20:17). The tree in the Garden was said to be “desired to make one wise” (Gen. 3:6). It was wrong to desire the fruit of this tree when God had forbidden it to man. This was the beginning of their fall. The “sons of God” (whoever they may be) were said to find the “daughters of man” attractive and this is seen as a bad thing (Gen. 6:2). The Lord brings judgment upon the world because He “saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5). He brought judgment upon the world based on their thoughts, intentions, and desires which give birth to their actions. Egypt said that its “desire” or lust “shall have its fill on” Israel (Ex. 15:9), but God instead brought judgment upon Egypt. Job is said to avoid lust, which is covetousness of another’s daughter or wife, lest judgment falls upon him (Job 31:1, 9-11).

Conclusion On The Commandments Before Moses

In these instances, before the giving of the law on Mt. Sinai, we see that people had knowledge of these ten commandments, and some of them were even acknowledged to be so heinous that they were to be punishable even before Moses. Therefore, a continuity is established between the law of nature and the revealed moral law summarized in the Decalogue.

A Brief Exposition of the Decalogue

In this section, I would like to take a look at the moral law of God contained in the Decalogue. I have argued that all people know the moral law of God in paragraph 1. Above, I have tried to show continuity between the law of nature and the revealed moral law in Scripture and thereby show that the natural law was summarized on Sinai in ten commandments. In this section, I will unashamedly quote a lot from various authors from whom I’ve benefited. I have consulted the following works:

- John Calvin - Institutes of the Christian Religion, [chapter 8, sections 13-50](#)
- Thomas Watson - [The Ten Commandments](#)
- Robert L. Dabney - Systematic Theology
 - [Chapter 31: The First Table of the Law—Commandments 1-4](#)
 - [Chapter 32: The Second Table of the Law—Commandments 5-10](#)
- Bill Heir
 - [The First Three Commandments](#)
 - [The Fourth Commandment](#)
- [Westminster Larger Catechism](#), Q&A 91-153. (WLC hereafter)
 - The following catechisms are essentially the same:
 - [Benjamin Keach’s Catechism of 1677](#), Q&A 45-90.
 - [William Collins’ Baptist Catechism of 1693](#), Q&A 45-87.
 - [Hercules Collin’s An Orthodox Catechism of 1680](#) - Q&A 98-134.
 - [Heidelberg Catechism](#), Q&A 92-115.
 - [Westminster Shorter Catechism](#), Q&A 39-85.

I will have things to say myself, but I will likewise let men much wiser than me explain the Decalogue of God to us and to our benefit.

It was a great and very helpful observation that I read in Calvin first and which is expressed in the words of the WLC that “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” (Q. 99, rule 4)^[15]. This is a very helpful observation to see that the Decalogue not only calls us to abstain from sin, but at the same time to do the contrary of sin. Thus the sixth commandment not only commands unlawful killing, but also calls us to protect the lives of people and count life as precious. The ninth commandment not only commands refraining from false witness and lies, but also telling the truth at all times. I believe this is what is meant by the statement that the moral law was “summarized” in the Decalogue. To preserve life, to speak the truth, to be faithful to one’s spouse, to love God, to honor elders are self-evident moral truths, yet they are not explicitly commanded in the Decalogue, but we implicitly acknowledge that they’re included in the moral law.

Preface To The Decalogue

Exod. 20:1-2 And God **spoke all these words**, saying, 2 **“I am the LORD your God**, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

God delivered Israel from bondage by grace. They certainly did not deserve the greatest redemption in the Old Testament and throughout their history, they demonstrated that. But the Lord delivered them according to His promise to the fathers and brought them with a mighty arm from slavery. He freed them by grace and now He gave them His laws so that they would walk in His ways. Israel received the moral, ceremonial and civil laws of God. In Exodus 20, the Lord Himself speaks to them the Ten Words of His covenant.

It was the Lord Himself, not through the ministry of Moses as the other cases, Who spoke the Decalogue to all the people of Israel from Mt. Sinai (Deut. 4:33, 36; 5:4, 22). This demonstrates the special care of God concerning these commandments and displays their primacy that God Himself would declare their words to the people without a mediator. This shows us that God sees them as very important, but this also implies certain things as Thomas Watson observes. If God truly spoke these words then:

1. We must hear all these words;
2. We must attend to them with reverence;
3. We must remember them;
4. We must believe them;
5. We must love them;
6. We must teach them;
7. We must obey them.^[16]

We must pay careful attention to what God is saying so that we would not only be hearers but also doers, seeing that these commandments are for our good and for the good of our neighbor. God has not given us His commandments to burden us, but they display to us the perfect will of God and what is pleasing in His sight. We must see these commandments as true and therefore believe and love them. We must be able to declare with the Psalmist, “Oh how I love your law! It is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119:97). We must be careful to observe God’s commandments whereby we show that we truly love Him in word and in deed (1 John 5:3). Not only that, but we must also be careful to teach God’s commandments to our children and to other people (Deut. 6:4-7), knowing that these commandments were given for our good and obedience to them glorifies God. Watson observes that “The law of God is a hedge to keep us within the bounds of sobriety and piety.”^[16]

The Lord calls His people to obedience by pointing them back to their redemption from Egypt. He deserves their adoration and love simply by virtue of the fact that He’s their Creator. But that

obligation is all the more intensified when it is shown that the Lord redeemed Israel from Egypt. Calvin says:

Let it be understood, then, that mention is made of deliverance, in order to make the Jews submit with greater readiness to that God who justly claims them as his own. We again, instead of supposing that the matter has no reference to us, should reflect that the bondage of Israel in Egypt was a type of that spiritual bondage, in the fetters of which we are all bound, until the heavenly avenger delivers us by the power of his own arm, and transports us into his free kingdom. Therefore, as in old times, when he would gather together the scattered Israelites to the worship of his name, he rescued them from the intolerable tyranny of Pharaoh, so all who profess him now are delivered from the fatal tyranny of the devil, of which that of Egypt was only a type."^[17]

God reminds Israel of their deliverance when He gives them their duty to honor and obey Him, thereby showing that they truly owe Him obedience and love. Nothing has changed in the New Testament, God still requires our obedience. In fact, in the New Testament, we owe God greater love and obedience as our deliverance was from slavery to sin and not from mere human slavery. God has made us His children, has freed us from sin, has justified us and given us His Holy Spirit. Our duty to love God in light of this great salvation is greater than Israel's.

The Lord claims His people as *His own*. He is "the LORD *your* God". This again points to the fact that they owe Him obedience. The Lord delivered Israel from slavery to be His own servants. The Lord declares that "it is to me that the people of Israel are servants" (Lev. 25:55). He, as their Master and Savior, demands from them the obedience that is His due. The same is true under the New Testament. But how may we know that the LORD is our God? Watson observes that:^[16]

1. If God is our God, then though we may feel the stroke of evil—yet not the sting.
2. If God is our God, our soul is safe.
3. If God is our God, then all that is in God is ours.
4. If God is our God, he will entirely love us.
5. If God is our God, he will do more for us than all the world besides can.
6. If God is our God, he will bear with many infirmities.
7. If God is once our God, he is so forever.
8. If God is our God, we shall enjoy all our godly relations with Him in heaven.

God, by being our God, declares His special love to us and requires that we respond properly with love and obedience. Therefore, we must pay careful attention to the commandments of the Lord to keep them and love them. We do not keep them to gain favor with Him; that favor was attained in Christ, but we obey God because we love Him. That is how God Himself asks us to display our love to Him (John 14:15; 15:14; 1 John 5:3). Furthermore, as regenerate children of His, He has given us His Spirit and written His laws in our inward parts so that we would be able to obey (Ezek. 36:25-27; Jer. 31:31-34). God Himself helps us to obey Him so that all the glory is His when we obey (Heb. 13:20-21). If God is truly for us and He desires that we obey His command, let us beg Him to help us to be obedient children of His and delight in His law (Ps. 1:2).

The First Commandment

Exod. 20:3 "You shall have **no other gods** before me.

See also Deut. 5:7.

General Observations On The 1st Commandment

The true God demands to be the sole object of worship and adoration of His people. He cannot tolerate other *wanna-be* gods and substitutes. Watson says that “To go after other gods, is what God cannot bear; it makes the fury rise up in his face.”^[18] When we choose idols above living God we justly incur His wrath. God will not tolerate anything or anyone that tries to take His place in a person’s life. God wants to be the all-in-all in and for us. He is the only God that exists, therefore we should abhor idols and only believe in the true and living God. Watson observes that “The Lord Jehovah (one God in three persons) is the true, living, eternal God; and him we must have for our God.”^[18]

We cannot choose to serve idols and expect that we will have a good end. The apostle Paul, in Romans 1, says that people know the true God and yet reject Him and choose to serve idols. Naturally, we would prefer to devote ourselves to things that are not eternal and futile, than to devote ourselves to the true living God. It is only grace that grants us to choose the LORD as our God. Yahweh, the God of the Bible—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—is the only God that exists (Deut. 6:4; Isa. 43:10; 45:5-7). He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth (Gen. 1:1). He is the sovereign sustainer of all the universe (1 Chron. 29:10-13; Neh. 9:6; Eph. 1:11). He is the One Who made the stars (Gen. 1:16). He is the One Who made the earth (Isa. 45:12, 18). He is the One Who made us (Gen. 1:26-27; Isa. 45:12; Acts 17:26). He is the One Who has granted us life (Gen. 2:7; Job 10:12; 33:4). He is the One Who has given us everything that is good (John 3:27; Jas. 1:17). He is the One before Whom we must give an account (Rom. 14:12; Heb. 4:13). He is the true God and there is no other (Isa. 45:5-6). This commandment calls upon us to worship and serve this one and only God, rather than idols. Calvin observes that:

It is not enough to refrain from other gods. We must, at the same time, devote ourselves wholly to him, not acting like certain impious despisers, who regard it as the shortest method, to hold all religious observance in derision. But here precedence must be given to true religion, which will direct our minds to the living God. When duly imbued with the knowledge of him, the whole aim of our lives will be to revere, fear, and worship his majesty, to enjoy a share in his blessings, to have recourse to him in every difficulty, to acknowledge, laud, and celebrate the magnificence of his works, to make him, as it were, the sole aim of all our actions. Next, we must beware of superstition, by which our minds are turned aside from the true God, and carried to and fro after a multiplicity of gods. Therefore, if we are contented with one God, let us call to mind what was formerly observed, that all fictitious gods are to be driven far away, and that the worship which he claims for himself is not to be mutilated.^[19]

We should not have other gods before the true God. Idolatry is here forbidden. Modern readers should not think that people of old were so stupid to think that the idol itself was a god, but rather the idol represented the god whom they thought existed. The root of the sin of idolatry begins in the heart, which is prone to depart from the true God from birth. An idol is anything that we place above the living and true God and therefore rob God of His due praise and honor. What does it mean to have other gods besides the true God? Watson answers that having other gods besides Yahweh ultimately means 1) to trust anything more than God and 2) to love anything more than God. But what does the opposite then mean? To have Yahweh as our God means that we:

1. acknowledge him to be God (1 Kgs. 18:39; 2 Kgs. 19:15; Jer. 14:22; Ps. 89:6);
2. choose Him as our God (Gen. 28:21; Josh. 24:15; 1 Chron. 28:9);
3. enter into solemn covenant with Him (Isa. 44:5; 55:3; 2 Chron. 15:12);

4. give Him adoration (Ps. 29:2; 89:7; Neh. 8:6);
5. fear Him (Deut. 28:58; Gen. 39:9; Lev. 19:14; Prov. 1:7; 9:10);
6. trust Him (Ps. 9:9-10; 13:5; 20:7; 31:5; 62:8; 141:8; 2 Sam. 22:3)
7. love Him (Deut. 6:5; Mark. 12:30);
8. obey Him (1 John 5:3; John 14:15; 15:14).^[18]

We are to be so in love with God that all our life should revolve around Him and do all things to His glory. We should reject all things that try to take the place of God in our lives. Most people nowadays do not have wooden idols, but they have set up idols in their hearts (Ezek. 14:3). Whether it is sex, money, fame, beauty, "science," self and many other things; when they are number one in someone's life, they become that person's idol and that God will not tolerate that.

The 1st Commandment In The New Testament

The New Testament puts a greater light upon the God Whom we worship. There, it is revealed that "we worship one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance."^[20] Our obligation is even more strengthened by the Son's "exegesis" of the Father (John 1:18). God entered His own creation and demonstrated His love by shedding His blood for us wicked sinners. For this display of love and redemption, God deserves all the more to be our life.

When the Lord Jesus was being tempted by Satan, for all the three recorded temptations, the Lord answered by quoting Scripture. When Satan asked our Lord to worship him, he was rebuked by the Lord:

Matt. 4:10 Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "'**You shall worship the Lord your God** and **him only shall you serve.**'"

The Lord Jesus refers back to Deuteronomy 6:13 and that Yahweh alone is to be worshiped and served religiously and no other. Even our Lord obeyed this first commandment.

In **Matthew 6:24**, the Lord Jesus confirms the exclusivity of worship that is God's due. You cannot serve God and that which is no God religiously. If we worship and serve money, by finding our happiness and hope in that, we reject God and dishonor Him. The true God will not tolerate substitutes. In **1 Corinthians 8:4**, where Paul is discussing idolatry and eating food sacrificed to idols, he mentions some common things known to Christians and Jews, like "an idol has no real existence" and "there is no God but one." Referring back to the exclusivity of Yahweh and rejecting the existence of any other god than Him (1 Cor. 8:6). **Revelation 14:7** calls upon the earth to worship and fear the true God. By referring to Him as being the Creator of all things, the passage calls upon the obligation of man to offer thanks and worship to their Creator. In **1 John 5:20-21**, we are first pointed toward the true God and then drawn away from idols. Jesus Christ is the true God and therefore we are to serve Him. We are to devote our lives to Him Who is true and not to things that do not exist and don't deserve our attention.

Conclusion On The 1st Commandment

We conclude with Dabney who observes that to have Yahweh as our God is the basis on which we will be able to perform the rest of the commandments and it entails certain duties:

The duty of "having Him for our God" may be said to be the summary of almost all the commands of love, reverence and obedience, which so abound in the Scriptures. But we

may say that includes especially, under the general idea of rendering Him all the affection and service which our nature, His character, and our relations to Him require; the following: The duty, (a) of loving Him supremely. (See Matt. 22:37). (b) Of regulating all our moral acts by His revealed will Matt. 28:20. (c) Of owning and acknowledging Him publicly. Josh. 24:22. (d) Of promoting His cause and glory in all suitable ways. 1 Cor. 10:31. (e) Of rendering to Him such acts of religious worship as He may see fit to demand. Ps. 29:2. (f) Of thanking Him for His benefits. Ps. 106:1. (g) Of trusting to His promises. Isa. 26:4. (h) Of submitting to His chastisements. 1 Pet. 5:6. (i) Fearing His anger. Ps. 86:11. (j) Repenting of having sinned against Him, Acts 17:30, and in short, (k) Choosing Him as the portion and eternal inheritance of our souls. Ps. 73:25; 17:15.^[21]

The Second Commandment

Exod. 20:4-6 **“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. 5 **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, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

See also Deut. 5:8-10.

General Observations On The 2nd Commandment

The first and second commandments are in many ways alike. The first commandment declares the exclusivity of Yahweh as God and the second commandment forbids the worship of anything that is not Yahweh. Dabney observes that “As the first commandment fixes the object, so the second fixes the mode of religious worship.”^[22] And Calvin likewise observes that “As in the first commandment the Lord declares that he is one, and that besides him no gods must be either worshipped or imagined, so he here more plainly declares what his nature is, and what the kind of worship with which he is to be honoured, in order that we may not presume to form any carnal idea of him.”^[23]

This commandment forbids all false ways of worshipping the true God and commands the duty to worship God in the way that He Himself desires to be worshiped and not what we feel like it. Keach’s catechism summarizes the second commandment as forbidding “the worshipping of God by images, or any other way not appointed in His Word”^[24] (Q&A 57). We must worship God as He is and therefore not misrepresent Him through idols and images, but we must also worship God as He has willed to be worshiped.

Notice that this commandment does not absolutely forbid the making of any images, but rather forbids the making of images of the Divine and for the purpose of worship. The Reformed position on images of God is that they are, in fact, violations of this very commandment. Therefore, Reformed people are not fond of pictures or statues of what purports to be Jesus. This position is well expressed in the WLC 108, saying, “The sins forbidden in the second commandment are... the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature whatsoever; all worshipping of it, or God in it or by it...”^[15] Israel is warned by Moses not to make images of the God Who spoke to them from Sinai, saying:

Deut. 4:15-18 “Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since **you saw no form** on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, 16 **beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image** for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, 17 the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, 18 the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth.

God is unlike anything that exists and that we know. He has no form. He is spirit, i.e., immaterial (John 5:24). The Israelites did not see the form of God but only heard a voice. Therefore, they are not to think themselves wise as to make anything that resembles God. When we paint a picture of an old man sitting on a throne and declare that to be God the Father we commit idolatry in that we picture God just like ourselves. We are thinking wrongly about Him. God does not want His people to have any representation of Him. They are an abomination to Him because they bear false witness about Him. God is unlike anything we know and since we have not seen His form we are not to try to imagine what His form is. That is not necessary. To depend on images, to me, is a sure sign of weak faith and God calls us to grow in our faith (e.g., 1 Pet. 2:2-3; 2 Pet. 3:18).

God abhors idolatry and His curse is upon the idolaters (Deut. 27:15). Israel was to destroy the idols in the Promised Land (Ex. 23:24) and God even condemned those who had idols in their hearts (Ezek. 14:3). God’s wrath is promised to those who worship idols or worship God through false representations, but His steadfast love to those who worship Him rightly. God is Jealous and He will not give His glory to any other supposed god, neither will He tolerate false representations of Himself. Thomas Watson observes the following by the Roman Catholic claim to images:

But, say the Papists, images are laymen’s books, and they are good to put them in mind of God. One of the Popish Councils affirmed, that we might learn more by an image than by long study of the Scriptures.

‘What profiteth the graven image, the molten image, and a teacher of lies.’ Hab 2:18. Is an image a layman’s book? Then see what lessons this book teaches. It teaches lies; it represents God in a visible shape, who is invisible. For Papists to say they make use of an image to put them in mind of God, is as if a woman should say she keeps company with another man to put her in mind of her husband.^[25]

Images of the Lord Jesus

But now we enter the crucial point about pictures of the Lord Jesus. The Son of God became man, and therefore the argument goes, we can represent Him by a human. But is this the case? I don’t think so! All the images of the Lord Jesus, old and modern, are false because they seek to represent Him Who is God, even though God has forbidden the representation of Himself by anything created. The point that “He became man and therefore, we kind of know how He looked like” is likewise weak. For as Watson observed, this idea divides the person of Christ.

If it be not lawful to make the image of God the Father, yet may we not make an image of Christ, who took upon him the nature of man?

No! Epiphanies, seeing an image of Christ hanging in a church, brake it in pieces. It is Christ’s Godhead, united to his manhood, that makes him to be Christ; therefore to picture his manhood, when we cannot picture his Godhead, is a sin, because we make

him to be but half Christ — we separate what God has joined, we leave out that which is the chief thing which makes him to be Christ.^[25]

God wants to be adored by faith and by the Scriptures. He does not want to be adored by images. Images of Christ are false because they go against the direct commandment of not picturing God. But if some claim that we picture His humanity, they, like Watson observe, divide His singular person, and therefore, what is represented is not Christ, though it claims to be Christ. When that happens, we bear false witness about the true Christ. We ascribe His name to a false image. We take His name in vain (3rd commandment) and we bear false witness about Him (9th commandment).

Dear brothers and sisters, we must understand that we are speaking here of our God, Who is a consuming fire and should not be worshiped by images, but by the heart and by faith. We do not want any pictures of Christ, because we have Him and His Holy Spirit with us at all times. What comfort can an image bring, which actually bears false witness about Him and diminishes His glory? We are speaking about the God of the Universe, the Creator, and the Redeemer, Who demands to be worshiped at all times. He demands that we have no other gods before Him. That is Jesus! He is God. He is Yahweh. Thereby, the idea of picturing Christ for other purposes than worship is also shattered, for we are speaking about a God Who demands our worship at all times. Therefore, if we ascribe His name to an image: 1) we bear false witness about Him because that image does *not* represent Him as He is. 2) But we also directly break the first two commandments by not worshipping Him rightly and creating idols. 3) Furthermore, if we claim that the picture represents God or Christ specifically, and yet not worship it, we take the Lord's name in vain in that we claim that before us is a representation of God and yet we do not worship it. Dear saints, we don't need any representations of God. We worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24), not in pictures. Pictures are a sign of weak faith and a sign of faith in false representations of Him Who is not to be represented.

The answer to the question of why we should not have pictures of Jesus is “because his divine nature cannot be pictured at all; and because his body, as it is now glorified, cannot be pictured as it is; and because, if it do not stir up devotion, it is in vain; if it stir up devotion, it is a worshipping by an image or picture, and so a palpable breach of the second commandment.”^[26]

Don't you know that God loves us? If He truly loves us and if images help us in our faith, why didn't He direct the authors of Scripture to describe how the Lord Jesus looked like? The reason is obvious because God wants to be worshiped as He is—in spirit and in truth, and does not want to be represented falsely. On this point, it is observed by Pastor Joe that:

3. The apostles walked the Earth with Jesus, and even though they wrote extensively about Christ, they did not leave behind any images of the Lord, nor did they even describe His earthly appearance. We can be sure that if these early eyewitnesses had thought it was important for the Christian church to have an accurate image of Jesus in His humiliation, they would have provided it. But they didn't. This means that no one knows what Jesus looks like, and all images of Him are nothing more than figments of human imagination. Thus if a man draws a picture and says, “This is Jesus,” he is telling us that what he has invented in his mind and created with his hands is the Son of God, and that is impious deceit, a gross corruption of His unique glory. There is no essential difference between pointing to an icon or statue of an imaginary person and saying “this is Jesus,” and Aaron referring to the golden calf as “the Lord (Yahweh).” (Exodus 32:5).^[27]

John Murray made a compelling case against pictures of the Lord Jesus and summarizes his brief case in this way:

In summary, what is at stake in this question is the unique place which Jesus Christ as the God-man occupies in our faith and worship and the unique place which the Scripture occupies as the only revelation, the only medium of communication, respecting him whom we worship as Lord and Saviour. The incarnate Word and the written Word are correlative. We dare not use other media of impression or of sentiment but those of his institution and prescription. Every thought and impression of him should evoke worship. We worship him with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God. To use a likeness of Christ as an aid to worship is forbidden by the second commandment as much in his case as in that of the Father and Spirit. ^[28]

See also:

- Paul J. Barth - [Three Reasons Image of God are Idolatrous](#)
- John Murray - [Pictures of Christ and the Second Commandment](#)
- Pastor Joe V - [Why Did John Calvin and the Reformers Forbid All Images of the Divine Persons?](#)

Two Parts of the 2nd Commandment

It is likewise important to observe that this commandment has two parts, namely: 1) making graven images and 2) worshipping God by graven images. The commandment reads:

Exod. 20:4-5 **“You shall not make for yourself a carved image...5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them...”**

Now some critics will say that if we take this passage literally and strictly then we should be like the Amish, who take no pictures or similar groups. But this is proven false even in the Old Testament as God commanded the making of the cherubim and other like objects, which were *not* intended to represent God. Furthermore, the first four commandments clearly speak about our obligation to the *true* God. We are not to make images representing the true God, nor are we to worship Him through those self-made images. This does not mean that we have in the second commandment two different commandments, but merely that the second commandment has two parts: 1) do not make images of God, and 2) neither worship Him by or through images. This observation answers the complaint of those who say that they use or make images of the Divine, but not for the purpose of worship. Since in the second commandment, God not only forbids the worship of Him through images but also the making of those images which purport to represent Him. In his commentary on Exodus 20:4, John Calvin observed:

Now we must remark, that there are two parts in the Commandment — the first forbids the erection of a graven image, or any likeness; the second prohibits the transferring of the worship which God claims for Himself alone, to any of these phantoms or delusive shows. Therefore, to devise any image of God, is in itself impious; because by this corruption His Majesty is adulterated, and He is figured to be other than He is. There is no need of refuting the foolish fancy of some, that all sculptures and pictures are here condemned by Moses, for he had no other object than to rescue God’s glory from all the

imaginations which tend to corrupt it. And assuredly it is a most gross indecency to make God like a stock or a stone. Some expound the words, "Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven image, which thou mayest adore;" as if it were allowable to make a visible image of God, provided it be not adored; but the expositions which will follow will easily refute their error. Meanwhile, I do not deny that these things are to be taken connectedly, since superstitious worship is hardly ever separated from the preceding error; for as soon as any one has permitted himself to devise an image of God, he immediately falls into false worship. And surely whosoever reverently and soberly feels and thinks about God Himself, is far from this absurdity; nor does any desire or presumption to metamorphose God ever creep in, except when coarse and carnal imaginations occupy our minds. Hence it comes to pass, that those, who frame for themselves gods of corruptible materials, superstitiously adore the work of their own hands. I will then readily allow these two things, which are inseparable, to be joined together; only let us recollect that God is insulted, not only when His worship is transferred to idols, but when we try to represent Him by any outward similitude.^[2]

The 2nd Commandment In The New Testament

Again, nothing is changed here in the New Testament. We are again warned against idolatry and idols are mocked. The apostle Paul, when he went through Athens, was troubled by the presence of multitudes of idols and even one having the inscription "To the unknown god" (Acts 17:16, 22-23). Paul sees this as a reference to the true God and calls upon them not to make any representations of Him, saying:

Acts 17:29 Being then God's offspring, **we ought not to think that the divine being is like** gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the **art and imagination of man**.

We ought not to imagine that God is like any created thing, but we must acknowledge Him as He is and accept the fact that we don't know how He "looks" like. God has called us to focus on Him without any images, but through faith in Christ and what is revealed about Him in the Holy Scriptures.

Idolaters are subject to God's wrath (Rom. 1:18-23; 1 Cor. 5:10-11; 6:9; 10:7, 14; Gal. 5:20; Eph. 5:5; Rev. 9:20; 21:8; 22:15) and Christians are to avoid idolatry at all costs (1 Cor. 5:11; 2 Cor. 6:16; Col. 3:5; 1 John 5:20-21). The heathen in Acts 19:26 did rightly understand the message of Paul about the one true God and therefore the rejection of all idolatry, saying that Paul was teaching that "gods made with hands are not gods."

In Ephesians 5:5 and Colossians 3:5, Paul connects covetousness with idolatry. But what does this mean? "Covetousness places one's ultimate allegiance in the acquisition of the possessions of others, which often leads to other grave sins (e.g., 1 Kings 21:1-19). Paul says this is tantamount to idolatry (see also Col. 3:5)."^[29] When we do not accept our lot from God but covet that which God has not given us, we think ourselves wiser than God and thereby commit idolatry. John Gill observes on Colossians 3:5 that:

The covetous man, and the idolater, worship the same for matter and substance, even gold and silver; the covetous man lays up his money, makes no use of it, as if it was something sacred; he looks at it, and adores it, and puts his trust and confidence in it, and his heart is so much set upon it, that he neglects the worship of the true God; and

indeed no man can serve God and mammon.^[8]

Conclusion On The 2nd Commandment

We conclude with Q&A 108 and 109 of the WLC:^[15]

Question 108: What are the duties required in the second commandment?

Answer: The duties required in the second commandment are, the receiving, observing, and keeping pure and entire, all such religious worship and ordinances as God has instituted in his Word; particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ; the reading, preaching, and hearing of the Word; the administration and receiving of the sacraments; church government and discipline; the ministry and maintenance thereof; religious fasting; swearing by the name of God, and vowing unto him: as also the disapproving, detesting, opposing, all false worship; and, according to each one's place and calling, removing it, and all monuments of idolatry.

Question 109: What are the sins forbidden in the second commandment?

Answer: The sins forbidden in the second commandment are, all devising, counseling, commanding, using, and anywise approving, any religious worship not instituted by God himself; tolerating a false religion; the making any representation of God, of all or of any of the three persons, either inwardly in our mind, or outwardly in any kind of image or likeness of any creature: Whatsoever; all worshipping of it, or God in it or by it; the making of any representation of feigned deities, and all worship of them, or service belonging to them; all superstitious devices, corrupting the worship of God, adding to it, or taking from it, whether invented and taken up of ourselves, or received by tradition from others, though under the title of antiquity, custom, devotion, good intent, or any other pretense: Whatsoever; simony; sacrilege; all neglect, contempt, hindering, and opposing the worship and ordinances which God has appointed.

The Third Commandment

Exod. 20:7 “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.

See also Deut. 5:11.

General Observations On The 3rd Commandment

The third commandment calls upon us to not dishonor God and the things of God. We understand that by the “name of the LORD” is not simply meant the tetragrammaton (יהוה), but rather more fully—God and the things belonging to Him. Any shallow Bible reader will understand that in the Bible names are important. They are not merely there because they sound nice, but they have meaning. A name is not merely a designation but points to the nature and person himself. For example, in the Great Commission, our Lord says that the disciples should be baptized in “the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 28:19). The singular “name” here of the three persons of the Trinity refers to their unity and common Being. It refers to Their nature,

character, and authority. Likewise in the third commandment, the Name which is not to be blasphemed and not to be used irreverently does not merely refer to words like “God”, “Jesus”, “Holy Spirit”, “Yahweh” or “OMG”, but rather it refers to all things pertaining to God. In Exodus 34:5-7, God came down to Moses and “proclaimed the name of the LORD.” But how did God do that? Verses 6-7 tell us—by proclaiming His excellences and attributes.

The third commandment forbids and says that God abhors “all profaning and abusing of any thing whereby God makes Himself known”^[24] (Keach’s Catechism, Q&A 61). This includes speaking disrespectfully of God and of the things of God, not taking God seriously, failing to worship God, failing to give Him thanks and honor. Thomas Watson observes the following things on what it means to take the name of the Lord in vain. We take the name of the Lord in vain when we:^[30]

- speak slightly and irreverently of His name (Deut. 28:58; and many other places where the name of the Lord is lifted up high);
- profess His name, but do not live consistently according to that profession (Tit. 1:6; Rom. 2:24);
- use God’s name in idle discourse and for no reverent purpose;
- merely worship Him outwardly, but not in our hearts (Matt. 15:8-9; Hos. 4:8; Ezek. 33:31);
- pray to Him, but don’t believe in Him (Prov. 15:8);
- profane and abuse His Word and Truth;
- swear rashly and sinfully by God’s name (Matt. 5:34; Deut. 6:13; Heb. 6:16; [see chapter 23](#));
- prefix God’s name to sinful actions (2 Sam. 15:7, 10);
- speak wrongly about God (Num. 21:5);
- falsify our promises to God and break our oath’s in His Name.

Holy is the Name of our God and therefore we should not use it carelessly, but we must be in awe, adoration, and reverence when we speak His Name. We abhor any and all violations of this commandment. We desire that the Name of the Lord not be taken in vain or profaned, but rather honored and glorified. For this is also what this commandment calls us to do. The WLC 112 teaches that to *not* take the Name of the Lord in vain means:

That the name of God, his titles, attributes, ordinances, the Word, sacraments, prayer, oaths, vows, lots, his works, and: Whatsoever else there is whereby he makes himself known, be holily and reverently used in thought, meditation, word, and writing; by an holy profession, and answerable conversation, to the glory of God, and the good of ourselves, and others.^[15]

To not take the Name of the Lord in vain is to honor and glorify His Name. Aren’t the commands and summons to do that plenty in the Bible? To not take the Lord’s Name in vain is to pray “Hallowed be thy name” (Matt. 6:9). To not take the Lord’s Name in vain is to glorify Him, speak and honor the truth which He has revealed about Himself. The Bible calls on us to praise the name of our God (Ps. 7:17; 69:30; 113:1-3; 148:5; etc.) and to glorify Him (Isa. 24:15; Ps. 86:9, 12; John 12:28; Rev. 15:4).

The purport of this Commandment is, that the majesty of the name of God is to be held sacred. In sum, therefore, it means, that we must not profane it by using it irreverently or contemptuously. This prohibition implies a corresponding precept—viz. that it be our study and care to treat his name with religious veneration. Wherefore it becomes us to regulate our minds and our tongues, so as never to think or speak of God and his mysteries without reverence and great soberness, and never, in estimating his works, to

have any feeling towards him but one of deep veneration.^[30]

Will Not Hold Him Guiltless

Watson observes that:

This prohibition is backed with a strong reason, 'For the Lord will not hold him guiltless;' that is he will not hold him innocent. Men of place and eminence deem it disgraceful to have their names abused and inflict heavy penalties on the offenders. 'The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain;' but looks upon him as a criminal, and will severely punish him. The thing here insisted on is, that great care must be had, that the holy and reverend name of God be not profaned by us, or taken in vain.^[30]

God will not tolerate those who take His Name in vain. They will certainly be punished, He will not leave them without punishment, either in this life and certainly in the next. Under the Old Covenant, blasphemy was punishable by death (Lev. 24:11-16) because it is a serious sin, even if our modern society may not think so, using the holy names and titles of God without reverence. Those who blaspheme the Holy Name of God and take His Name in vain in the senses explained above, will certainly not escape God's wrath. This commandment respects God's glory and honor, and the Lord will not leave them that dishonor Him without punishment. If people are concerned about their reputation and their good name, how much more the Almighty?

The 3rd Commandment In The New Testament

The commandment remains unchanged in the New Testament. The Lord Jesus Himself was accused of committing blasphemy (Matt. 26:65), although He told the truth. There is an interesting case of the Lord Jesus' name being used in vain by unbelievers. To use "in the name of Jesus" at the end of self-centered and unbelieving prayers is likewise taking His name in vain. To use His name as a magic word is to take His Holy Name in vain and use it carelessly. In Acts 19, we read:

Acts 19:13-17 Then some of the **itinerant Jewish exorcists** undertook to **invoke the name of the Lord Jesus** over those who had evil spirits, saying, "**I adjure you by the Jesus** whom Paul proclaims." 14 Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. 15 But the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" 16 And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. 17 And this became known to all the residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks. And fear fell upon them all, and **the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled.**

Here is a case where the precious, glorious, sweet and holy Name of the Lord Jesus was used by unbelievers and used as a magic word. They saw that God worked extraordinarily through Paul (Acts 19:11-12) and they heard Him doing his miracles in the Name of Jesus, therefore they wanted to copy Paul. They wanted the power, without Christ. They were unbelievers and used the Name of the Lord in vain and the Lord let the evil spirit loose on them so that they were overpowered and got a beating. This incident brought fear and reverence upon the people who saw it and heard of it, so instead of the violation of the 3rd commandment by the sons of the Sceva, "the name of the Lord Jesus was extolled" and God glorified. God brought honor upon His holy Name by bringing judgment upon those who took it in vain.

See also Matthew 5:33-34 ([see chapter 23 for more on oaths](#)); Romans 2:24; 1 Timothy 6:1; James 2:7.

Conclusion On The 3rd Commandment

In this commandment, we are prohibited from dishonoring God in any way and are commanded to honor and glorify the Lord of glory. Keach's Catechism (Q&A 60) summarizes the duties as:

The third commandment requires the holy and reverent use of God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, words, and works.^[24]

The Fourth Commandment

Exod. 20:8-11 **“Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.** 9 Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, 10 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. 11 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.

See also Deut. 5:12-15.

General Observations On The 4th Commandment

The fourth commandment commands us to set aside a day of rest apart out of seven as holy to the Lord. From the creation to the resurrection this was the seventh day of the week. From the resurrection, the Lord's Day became the Christian Sabbath, which is the first or eighth day of the week. This is inevitably the most difficult commandment in the Decalogue. Most will agree that all other commandments are valid and are moral, but when it comes to the Sabbath...that's the point of departure. Those who depend upon the (unbiblical) hermeneutic of “unless it is repeated in the NT, it is not valid” say that the Sabbath was abolished at the cross and there is no longer a physical Sabbath rest for the people of God. There are those who celebrate the Sabbath on the seventh day (Saturday) and those who celebrate the Sabbath of the first day (Sunday). The Reformed Confessions teach that the moral law of God was summarized in the Ten Commandments; the moral law is still binding, therefore, we don't agree that the Sabbath was abolished. There is much to be said on the Holy Sabbath, but I will spare my thoughts and leave time for deeper study^[31] until we come to [chapter 22](#), if the Lord wills. Here, I would rather focus more on the text than build a case for the Christian Sabbath. That I will do in chapter 22, Lord willing.

“Remember” because we are prone to forget this commandment. We are to remember and never forget to keep the Sabbath holy to the Lord. We must remember for the Sabbath has a *positive precept* aspect to it. This means that it is a moral command which has some non-moral aspect attached to it. A positive command does not necessarily reflect the Person and character of God as do the normal moral laws, but they are good because God has commanded them. Another example is, the Lord's Supper and Baptism. The principle of one-day-in-seven is a day of rest and worship is moral, but the specific day is not revealed in the natural law, but only in Scripture. God complained earlier about Israel saying, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws?” specifically referring there to the Sabbath, which they were commanded to observe before Sinai (Ex.

16:28). But what this complaint implies is that God had often commanded the observance of the Sabbath and His other commandments, yet Israel chose to disobey. The Sabbath being a positive precept means that people cannot innately know the seventh or first day is to be set apart as holy to the Lord. There is, however, I believe, a common sense in us that if there is a God, then we owe Him worship and reverence and this would include corporate worship which is one of the things done on the Sabbath day. All days are God's, yet He chooses one to make His special and wherein He especially meets with His people.

The basic and moral principle of the Sabbath that we learn here is the **one-in-seven** pattern. God requires one day to be set apart especially for Himself. The Sabbath being on the seventh day or the first day is not an essential part of the moral commandment, but rather what is moral is that we should set one day in seven apart for God. The Lord has merely asked for one day in seven for His public worship and rest, although He is Lord of all our lives and all our days. Yet the Sabbath day is especially His. Sabbath, for example, does not mean "seventh day of the week" and the word was used for many more things than the seventh day of the week under the Old Covenant. The word Sabbath means *rest* or *cessation*, which is what we are commanded to do on that day and it is based on the Creator's rest.

The Sabbath consists simply in two things, "in resting from our own works, and in a conscientious discharge of our religious duty."^[32] Keach (Q&A 66) says that "The Sabbath is to sanctified by a holy resting all that day, even from such worldly employments and recreations as are lawful on other days, and spending the time in the public and private exercises of God's worship, except so much as is to be taken up in the works of necessity and mercy."^[24] The Sabbath does not consist in absolute cessation from work, but cessation from work that is common on other days and could be done on other days. Works of necessity and mercy are encouraged as in the examples of our Lord healing people on the Sabbath. Thomas Watson gives four reasons and arguments for us to keep the Sabbath:

1. From the **rationality** of it. God only requires one day in seven to be set apart for Himself. He could have required 6 out of 7, but instead, He requires 1 out of 7. He has given us space for our works of vocation and reserved only one day for His public worship and rest.
2. From the **justice** of it. The Sabbath is God's Sabbath, it is His due and He requires that we keep it.
3. From God's own **observance** of the Sabbath. The Lord Himself rested on the seventh day from His work of creation and He wants His image-bearers to copy Him in that.
4. From the **benefit** of the Sabbath. God appointed and blessed the seventh day. Our Lord says that the Sabbath was made and instituted for man. It is for our benefit, it is not only a day where we corporately render worship to God, but He also ministers grace to us.

God wants us to copy His pattern of 6 days of work and 1 day of rest in the creation, which brings us to our next point.

The Foundation Of The Commandment

The Sabbath has two foundations as given in the Scriptures: 1) creation and 2) redemption. Exodus 20 places the foundation of the Sabbath on creation, while Deuteronomy 5:15 places the foundation on redemption from slavery. I will only explore the foundation upon creation here. Concerning the first point, we see that v. 11 begins with the word "for", which provides a reason and places a foundation under a prior statement. The rationale given here for Sabbath observance is because God Himself observed the Sabbath! God did all His work of creating the cosmos in six days but rested the seventh day. So, "Israel, you also must copy and repeat the pattern of God's work and rest" is the input of the rationale for the Sabbath. Because the Lord rested and finished His work of creation on

the seventh, He not only blessed and made happy the Sabbath day, but He also made it holy—set it apart and sanctified it. God put the Sabbath above and marked it special than the other six days. Is it necessary to make the observation that God was not tired, but rather His rest consisted of Him enjoying what He created and ceasing from the work of creation. God obviously does not get tired and therefore His rest is not a rest from being tired, rather, His rest consisted in sitting down as Lord and God in His Temple, which the “very good” (Gen. 1:31) creation was. As God did in the creation week, so man should do in the regular week. It is from the account of Genesis that we get the basis for the seven day week in cultures all over the world. There is nothing in the natural world that sets forth a basis for a seven day week, rather than five or ten, unlike the basis for months and years.

Now we go back to Genesis 2.

Gen. 2:1-3 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. 2 And **on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done**, and **he rested on the seventh day** from all his work that he had done. 3 So **God blessed the seventh day and made it holy**, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

On the sixth day, God created man in His own image and when the sixth day was over, the seventh day came wherein God had nothing more to create and therefore rested and enjoyed His very good creation. By resting on that day, God blessed the Sabbath and made it holy as we observed above, why? Because of His rest on it. The Sabbath is blessed and holy **because** it was the day that God rested on. From the beginning we see the basis of the Sabbath here, so that even Calvin, who is not that strong on the Sabbath in his discussion of it in Institutes 2:8:28-34, says in his commentary on Exodus 20:11:

For in six days the Lord made. From this passage it may be probably conjectured that the hallowing of the Sabbath was prior to the Law; and undoubtedly what Moses has before narrated, that they were forbidden to gather the manna on the seventh day, seems to have had its origin from a well-known and received custom; whilst it is not credible that the Observance of the Sabbath was omitted, when God revealed the rite of sacrifice to the holy (Fathers. (334)) But what in the depravity of human nature was altogether extinct among heathen nations, and almost obsolete with the race of Abraham, God renewed in His Law: that the Sabbath should be honored by holy and inviolable observance; and this the impure dogs (335) accounted to be amongst the disgraces of the Jewish nation.^[7]

For whom had God blessed the Sabbath and made it holy, but for man for whose benefit it was made (Mark 2:27)? In fact, I believe that God took six days to create to provide for us a basis for six days of work and one day of rest. God could have created all things which He created in six days in a split second, no doubt. But rather, He chose to create in six days and rest on the seventh to provide a basis for man’s week as Exodus 20:11 teaches. The fact that the Sabbath was made for man is laid down in our Lord’s teaching. In Mark 2, we read:

Mark 2:27-28 And he said to them, “The **Sabbath was made for man**, not man for the Sabbath. 28 So the **Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath.**”

In the midst of the Jewish leaders accusing his disciples of breaking the Sabbath because they were plucking heads of grain (Mark 2:23), the Lord declares His Lordship *over* the Sabbath. The Lord Jesus here does not only claim that He can say what is lawful on the Sabbath and what is not lawful, but He also makes a statement about His deity. For who is the Lord of the Sabbath, but the God of Creation Who made the Sabbath? Therefore, the Lord Jesus here declares His supremacy and lordship over the Sabbath day, which the Jewish leaders had perverted by adding things to it which were not prescribed by God. The Lord Jesus frees the Sabbath from the slavery and burden that the Jews had made it be, so that the people of God would truly be able to say that the Sabbath indeed is “a delight” (Isa 58:13).

Notice what our Lord says concerning the Sabbath. The Jewish leaders were so rigorous concerning Sabbath observances, adding their own man-made commandments and being hypocritical (Luke 13:14-15) so that they practically taught that man was created *for* the Sabbath. But our Lord rejects this false teaching and declares instead, as the Lord of the Sabbath, that the Sabbath was created *for* man. Man was created on the sixth day and the Sabbath on the seventh. Our Lord here goes back to the creation for the basis of the Sabbath, for that is when all things were made. The Sabbath would have been applicable even in the Garden of Eden. In fact, Adam and Eve would have been there when the Lord blessed and made holy the Sabbath. If some object that Adam and Eve, in a “very good” state would not have become tired or weary, that I think is true, but it still doesn’t diminish the observance of the Sabbath prior to the Fall. Why? For the same reason that God was not tired when He observed the Sabbath!

The Christian Sabbath Or The Lord’s Day

Christ, being the Lord of the Sabbath has the right, if He so pleases, to change the day. It is true that the Sabbath day under the Old Testament was the seventh day of the week, although the word “Sabbath” was used for more things than the seventh day of the week (e.g., the Day of Atonement [Lev. 16:29-31]), but this does not refute the idea that there could be a change of day. Because we observe that the principle of the Sabbath is that we should take one day of seven for rest and for the public worship of God. There is no special thing about the seventh day, other than God blessing it after He finished His creation work. Therefore, the same God Who blessed the seventh day has the right to change it if He so desires. The seventh day pointed to the completed creation, but it pointed to the “very good” creation before the Fall. But now, the creation is fallen and is in need of redemption. The word “sabbath” means *rest* and not the “seventh day of the week.” In fact, in the Old Testament, the Sabbath is the only name of a day mentioned. The seventh day of the week was the outward form of the commandment, while the essence is one day in seven is to be a day of rest and worship, which could be changed if God so pleases to do.

By observing the Sabbath before the coming of Christ, the people should have looked back to the rest of God in the creation week. But, after the coming of Christ and He providing redemption, why would the people of God look back to the creation which is doomed to pass away (2 Pet. 3:10)? But rather, as Peter says:

2 Pet. 3:13 But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

We are not awaiting the Genesis 3 world to remain the same, but rather we await a new creation (whether God will renew the present creation or make a new cosmos, is not a point here) where sin and fall will not be there. But how is this new creation accomplished, but through the work of Christ for His people? The basis for the change of day, which many have seen, lies in the fact that Christ

rose on the first rather than the seventh day. Christians are to observe Christ's day, which became to be known as the Lord's Day (Rev 1:10), the first day of the week, the τῆ κυριακῆ ἡμέρα (*te kuriaké hemera*, the Lord's Day) as it is known until this day in Greece. This is the Christian Sabbath, the people of God are not to look *back* to the old creation, but rather they are to look *forward* to the New Heavens and New Earth. The new creation has begun in Christ's resurrection and our regeneration (2 Cor. 5:17). We are to look forward to the eschatological Sabbath and we have the weekly observance of the Lord's day, the first day of the week, as a pledge of that eternal rest. The significance on the first day is seen in:

1. The first day of creation. God began His work of creation on the first day of the week and therefore when we rest and observe the first day of the week as the Christian Sabbath, or more properly named—the Lord's Day, we look forward to a new work of creation or renewal by God.
2. The day of Christ's resurrection. Christ was raised on the first day of the week (Mark 16:2, 7-8; Luke 24:1-6; Matt. 28:1-6; John 20:1-2), which is the basis of our redemption and the redemption of the fallen cosmos (e.g., Rom. 4:25). That is why the Lord's Day is called the *Lord's Day* because on it Christ was raised as the conqueror of all evil powers and through His resurrection, His people too may be conquerors.
3. The day of Pentecost. Pentecost was to be celebrated 50 days after the Jewish Passover, which was to be on the Sabbath day, therefore, Pentecost would have fallen on the day after the Jewish Passover, the first day of the week. It was on this day which the disciples were gathered together in one place praying to God as God poured His Holy Spirit upon them. Therefore, this day adds even more significance to the New Covenant people of God.

Christians from the earliest of times worshiped on the first day of the week, the Lord's Day. It is significant that all the resurrection appearances of our Lord occurred on the first day of the week. We read in the Gospel of John:

John 20:19-20 On the evening of that day, the **first day of the week**, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." 20 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples were **glad when they saw the Lord**.

John 20:26-29 **Eight days later**, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." 27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe." 28 Thomas answered him, "**My Lord and my God!**" 29 Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

The Lord was not only raised on the first day, but He chose to reveal Himself on the first day. "Eight days later" is the next Sunday, counting the present one as the first wherein the Lord revealed Himself again, apparently with no appearances between the first and the second Sundays.

From **Acts 20:7**, we learn that the Christians met on "the first day of the week" to "break bread" and "Paul talked with them". Here we see the basis for celebrating the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week and of preaching and teaching, for what would have Paul talked about them, other than the things of God?

In **1 Corinthians 16:2**, we learn that setting apart money for giving is to be done on the first day of the week. It is in these things that we see reasons for the change of the day. Watson quotes Ignatius saying ““Let every one that loveth Christ keep holy the first day of the week, the Lord’s-day.””^[32]

The designation *Christian Sabbath* was not used from the earliest times, rather the name for the first day of the week for the Christians was the Lord’s Day on the basis of Revelation 1:10. What the name *Christian Sabbath* does is to clearly point to the perpetuity of the fourth commandment and also that it is not the Jewish *seventh* day Sabbath, but rather, the *Christian Sabbath*. This does not mean that the Lord’s Day is not based on the fourth commandment, I believe it is the application of the fourth commandment in the New Covenant with a new day. But the Sabbath was and is commonly seen to be Saturday and connected with the rigorous and legalistic observation of the Jews, therefore, Christians do not often call the first day of the week the Christian Sabbath, so that it would not be connected with the seventh-day Sabbath of the Jews under the Old Testament, but rather choose the more New Testamentish name, the Lord’s Day.

For those who think that Colossians 2:16-17 teaches the abrogation of the Sabbath day, [see below](#).

Conclusion On The 4th Commandment

I have briefly argued for the institution of the Sabbath in the creation and it being strengthened by the Lordship of Christ over it, the change of the day under the New Covenant. There is a lot more to be said on this commandment, but I’m leaving my commentary on this to a future study in [chapter 22](#). Concluding this, let us quote a few authors. Watson observes that:

The grand reason for changing the Jewish Sabbath to the Lord’s-day is that it puts us in mind of the ‘Mystery of our redemption by Christ.’ The reason why God instituted the old Sabbath was to be a memorial of the creation; but he has now brought the first day of the week in its room in memory of a more glorious work than creation, which is redemption. Great was the work of creation, but greater was the work of redemption.^[32]

Concerning the sanctification of the Lord’s day, the WLC 117 says:

Question 117: How is the sabbath or the Lord’s day to be sanctified?

Answer: The sabbath or Lord’s day is to be sanctified by an holy resting all the day, not only from such works as are at all times sinful, but even from such worldly employments and recreations as are on other days lawful; and making it our delight to spend the whole time (except so much of it as is to be taken up in works of necessity and mercy) in the public and private exercises of God’s worship: and, to that end, we are to prepare our hearts, and with such foresight, diligence, and moderation, to dispose and seasonably dispatch our worldly business, that we may be the more free and fit for the duties of that day.^[15]

That we are to rest does not imply that we are to do absolutely nothing even if there is a need. This is expressed beautifully by the WLC 119:

Question 119: What are the sins forbidden in the fourth commandment?

Answer: The sins forbidden in the fourth commandment are, all omissions of the duties required, all careless, negligent, and unprofitable performing of them, and being weary of them; all profaning the day by idleness, and doing that which is in itself sinful; and by all needless works, words, and thoughts, about our worldly employments and recreations.^[15]

We are not to be idle, that is not what it means to sanctify the Sabbath, rather we should be taken up in performing the things of God and the worship of God. It should be our joy to expect eagerly the Lord's Day every week looking forward to meeting the Lord with His people, but all the more to look forward to the eschatological Sabbath in the New Heavens and the New Earth!

The Fifth Commandment

Exod. 20:12 "**Honor your father and your mother**, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

See also Deut. 5:16.

General Observations On The 5th Commandment

The fifth commandment teaches us to honor our parents and those who are over us. We are to honor them and *not* disrespect or dishonor them. We should render honor to whom it is due because it is right and also because it is for our own good too. Now, dealing with the first four commandments on the first table of the Decalogue we come to the second table concerning our duty toward our fellow man. But we should see these tables as dependent upon each other, for the one who loves God will love their neighbor and the one who truly and sacrificially loves their neighbor loves God. "The fifth commandment requires the preserving the honor, and performing the duties, belonging to every one in their several places and relations, as superiors, inferiors, or equals. (Lev. 19:32; 1 Peter 2:17; Rom. 13:1; Eph. 5:21,22; Eph. 6:1,5,9; Col. 3:19-22; Rom. 12:10)"^[24] (Keach, Q&A 70).

Honor is due to our parents because they were the ones who begat us and gave us life and the Lord requires that we honor them. They were the ones who taught us and cared for us and may continue to do so. Although not all parents are good, still, the Lord requires that we honor them as long as they do not require of us the doing of things against the Word of God. That this commandment refers not only to parents but also to authority figures in our lives like superiors, masters (or modern-day employers), the government and church leadership is seen in calling those authorities over us with parent-like words or requiring that they be honored and obeyed:

- father and mother (Prov. 1:8; 6:20; 20:20; 23:22-25; Matt. 15:4-6; 19:19; Col. 3:20; Eph. 6:1-3);
- those in high places render honor to their parents (1 Kgs. 2:19);
- civil magistrate (1 Pet. 2:17; Prov. 24:21; Isa. 49:23; Rom. 13:2, 7);
- older people (Lev. 19:32; Isa. 3:5; Lam. 5:12; 1Tim. 5:1);
- spiritual fathers or teachers (2 Kgs. 2:12; 1 Cor. 4:15; 1 Thess. 5:12-13);
- masters and employers (Gen. 24:12-14; 2 Kgs. 5:13; Matt. 24:45-46; 1 Pet. 2:8; Titus. 2:9; Col. 3:22-24);
- God is our Father (Mal. 1:6; Matt. 6:9).

All our obedience and honor to man must spring forth from our obedience and honoring of our Father in heaven. We must obey the First Table and from there love our neighbor in light of God's revelation. Children are called to honor authority, but authority is likewise called to act in ways that

show that they deserve the honor. Yes, the commandment does not say that we should only honor good parents, but parents—whether good or bad. But good parents would want to be honored by their children and they should make it easy for their children to honor them by behaving in ways consistent with the gospel. We should understand that the reason that we will ultimately honor our parents should be because we love God and honor Him as our heavenly Parent. Our love for them should flow from our love for God. That is when love is true and godly. The parents also have a responsibility to make it easy for their children to honor them in:^[33]

1. Being careful to bring them up in the nurture and fear of the Lord.
2. Keeping parental authority.
3. Providing for their children what is fitting.
4. Putting them to some lawful vocation when they're grown up.
5. Acting lovingly and graciously toward them.
6. Acting prudently—in a careful and wise manner towards them.

When parents act in this way, it makes it easier for children to obey and parents should make it enjoyable for their children to obey them, not requiring of them things they can't do and putting a too high standard. Moreover, parents should imitate what obedience looks like toward their superiors and between the wife and the husband so that children would have a living example. What parents should not do is:^[33]

- Express scorn and criticism of their children by using “opprobrious terms” like Saul (1 Sam. 20:30).
- Striking their children without a cause or when the correction exceeds the fault.
- Deny their children what is needful and necessary.
- Showing more love to one than the other.
- Anything which is sordid and unworthy which brings reproach upon the family.
- Giving them commands which they can't perform without wronging their consciences.

But what parents should instead do is to demonstrate love for their children, pray for them and their salvation, commend the good in them and best of all—set a good example for them to follow. This is the duty of the parents to their children. In this way, they make it easier for their children to obey.

Christ is the greatest example of obedience. Although He is the Creator of Mary and Joseph, yet because of His mission and the Father's purpose, Scripture says that He was “submissive to them” (Luke 2:51). Do we understand what this passage is saying? The Creator Himself, Who became man, followed the fifth commandment in honoring His parents, even though Joseph was not His biological father. He never dishonored or disobeyed His parents, how miserably do we fall short when compared to Christ's perfect obedience! We do fall short, but we should seek to honor our parents as Christ honored His parents. But above all, we should seek to honor our parents because we honor our Father in heaven. In this way, we will be able to truly love and honor our earthly parents and authority.

The 5th Commandment In The New Testament

The commandment is carried into the New Testament with change only in the promise, but not the substance. Obedience and honor are still required to authority. Under the Old Covenant, the promise was for a long life in the Promised Land, but under the New Covenant, it is “the land” or “the earth” since the people of God are no longer limited to a particular geography, but are from the four corners of the earth. The passage I'm alluding to is Ephesians 6:1-3—

Eph. 6:1-3 Children, **obey your parents in the Lord**, for this is right. 2 “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 “that it **may go well with you** and that you may **live long in the land.**”

I’ve been amazed lately by Paul’s reason for obedience in v. 1. He says that obeying parents is simply right. No less, no more. He doesn’t get into a discourse about why it’s right to obey one’s parents, but simply recognizes that it is “common sense.” Next, he follows his command by substantiating it from the Decalogue with God’s own spoken command. The fifth commandment is one where an explicit promise is mentioned, namely, well-being and long life. The difference between the commandment under the Old Covenant and the New Covenant is that the specificity of the Promised Land is removed. It seems that in Ephesians 6:2-3 Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 5 rather than from Exodus 20 as may be seen in this table below:

Deuteronomy 5:16 (direct quotation)	Ephesians 6:2-3 (not direct quotation)
“Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you,	“Honor your father and mother”
that your days may be long,	“that you may live long in the land”
and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.	“that it may go well with you”

The word “land” may also be translated with “earth” as, for example, in the KJV, ISV, NET. First of all, by addressing Gentile children, the apostle Paul assumes that this commandment of the Decalogue is applicable to them and doesn’t get into a discussion of the law, but simply states it without expecting any controversy. Second, as stated above, the aspect of the original promise which was limited to the “land that the LORD your God is giving you”, namely, Canaan, is omitted and applied generally to the place where one lives. Long life and well-being are promised to obedient children wherever they live and not only in the Promised Land under the Old Testament. The obedience of the children to parents and authority, in general, is encouraged by God through the giving of promises, whereby He seeks to move us to obedience. The next thing that the apostle says after finishing the quote from Deuteronomy 5:16 is to address the fathers, or parents saying:

Eph. 6:4 Fathers, **do not provoke your children to anger**, but bring them up in the **discipline and instruction of the Lord.**

He first spoke of the responsibility of children to obey their parents and now speaks about the responsibility of parents not to provoke them to anger and wrath, but rather to bring them up in the fear of the Lord. How can parents do this? Dr. John Gill notes:

And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath,.... Neither by words; by unjust and, unreasonable commands; by contumelious and reproachful language; by frequent and public chidings, and by indiscreet and passionate expressions: nor by deeds; preferring one to another; by denying them the necessaries of life; by not allowing them proper recreation; by severe and cruel blows, and inhuman usage; by not giving them suitable education; by an improper disposal of them in marriage; and by profusely spending their estates, and leaving nothing to them: not but that parents may, and ought to correct and rebuke their children; nor are they accountable to them for their conduct; yet they should take care not to provoke them to wrath, because this alienates their

minds from them, and renders their instructions and corrections useless, and puts them upon sinful practices; wrath lets in Satan, and leads to sin against God; and indeed it is difficult in the best of men to be angry and not sin; see Col 3:21. Fathers are particularly mentioned, they being the heads of families, and are apt to be too severe, as mothers too indulgent.^[8]

And lest we forget, the command to children is to obey their parents “in the Lord” (Eph. 6:1) for that is the obedience which pleases the Lord (Col. 3:20). On this point, Calvin notes:

It ought to be observed by the way, that we are ordered to obey parents only in the Lord. This is clear from the principle already laid down: for the place which they occupy is one to which the Lord has exalted them, by communicating to them a portion of his own honour. Therefore the submission yielded to them should be a step in our ascent to the Supreme Parent, and hence, if they instigate us to transgress the law, they deserve not to be regarded as parents, but as strangers attempting to seduce us from obedience to our true Father. The same holds in the case of rulers, masters, and superiors of every description.^[34]

Albert Barnes expands upon the phrase “in the Lord” with these words:

In the Lord - That is, as far as their commandments agree with those of God, and no further. No parent can have a right to require a child to steal, or lie, or cheat, or assist him in committing murder, or in doing any other wrong thing. No parent has a right to forbid a child to pray, to read the Bible, to worship God, or to make a profession of religion. The duties and rights of children in such cases are similar to those of wives (see the notes on Eph 5:22); and in all cases, God is to be obeyed rather than man. When a parent, however, is opposed to a child; when he expresses an unwillingness that a child should attend a particular church, or make a profession of religion, such opposition should in all cases be a sufficient reason for the child to pause and re-examine the subject. he should pray much, and think much, and inquire much, before, in any case, he acts contrary to the will of a father or mother; and, when he does do it, he should state to them, with great gentleness and kindness, that he believes he ought to love and serve God.^[6]

See Matthew 15:1-8 (parallel in Mark 7:1-13) concerning the Lord Jesus’ accusation of how the Pharisees twist this passage. See also Matthew 19:19; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; Romans 1:30; Colossians 3:20; 2 Timothy 3:2.

Conclusion On The 5th Commandment

In this commandment, we are taught to honor and respect all authority that God has placed above us at the home, government, and church. But how do we honor them? The WLC 127 answers:

The honor which inferiors owe to their superiors is, all due reverence in heart, word, and behavior; prayer and thanksgiving for them; imitation of their virtues and graces; willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels; due submission to their corrections; fidelity to, defense and maintenance of their persons and authority, according to their

several ranks, and the nature of their places; bearing with their infirmities, and covering them in love, that so they may be an honor to them and to their government.^[15]

This commandment also addresses those who are superiors in requiring that they behave in such ways that they make the obedience of others easy and demonstrate that they deserve the respect and honor that God commands that we give them. WLC 129 speaks about the duty of the superiors toward their inferiors:

It is required of superiors, according to that power they receive from God, and that relation wherein they stand, to love, pray for, and bless their inferiors; to instruct, counsel, and admonish them; countenancing, commending, and rewarding such as do well; and discountenancing, reproving, and chastising such as do ill; protecting, and providing for them all things necessary for soul and body: and by grave, wise, holy, and exemplary carriage, to procure glory to God, honor to themselves, and so to preserve that authority which God has put upon them.^[15]

We must understand that all obedience and honor that is given to our superiors must proceed from a heart, which first of all, honors and is obedient to our heavenly Father and the Supreme Being.

The Sixth Commandment

Exod. 20:13 “You shall **not murder**.”

See also Deut. 5:17.

What Does Murder Mean?

The sixth commandment forbids us from all unlawful killing, but at the same time commands us to promote and protect life. That murder is wrong is common sense. Everyone knows it. Obviously, not everyone heeds the voice of their conscience and murderers try to make justifications for their evil actions. An important distinction that we should make from the beginning is the difference between “murdering” and “killing” someone. Noah Webster defines murder as:

The act of unlawfully killing a human being with **premeditated malice, by a person of sound mind**. To constitute murder in law, the person killing another must be of sound mind or in possession of his reason, and the act must be done with malice prepense, aforethought or premeditated; but malice may be implied, as well as express.^[35]

While “kill” is a broader word that speaks about the taking of life, not specifying whether it is lawful or unlawful. Webster writes:

To deprive of life, animal or vegetable, in any manner or by any means.^[36]

The KJV is *incorrect* to say “kill” here and was corrected even by the NKJV. What this commandment forbids is not the taking of life absolutely, but the *unlawful* and *unjust* taking of life where one plans

and does his deed in hate and not, for example, by accident or in self-defense. As J. Warner Wallace, a former homicide detective writes:

“You shall not kill” is actually *not* a command found in the Ten Commandments. The command from scripture in the original language actually says “You shall not murder” (Exodus 20:13). The Hebrew word for “murder” literally means “the intentional, premeditated killing of another person with *malice*.”^[37]

General Observations On The 6th Commandment

The sixth commandment, according to Keach (Q&A 75), forbids:

the taking away our own life, or the life of our neighbor unjustly, or whatsoever tends thereto. (Gen. 4:10,11; 9:6; Matt. 5:21-26)^[24]

The commandment does not only forbid the murder of other people but even suicide because suicide is *self*-murder. We are not to take any human life unlawfully, but rather we should support those in need, promote and protect life. This commandment does not only speak of direct murder by a gun or knife, but also about murder in the case of failing to provide for the preservation of life when it is within one’s power. If I don’t provide food or medicine to a person when it is in my power to do so and my failure to do so would lead to their death, then I have murdered them by failing to persevere their life when it was within my power to do so. Dabney writes:

The sixth commandment is in these terse [abrupt] words. “Thou shalt not kill.” Its obvious scope is the preservation of life. It forbids all that assails our own and others lives, and enjoins all suitable means for the preservation of both. This command is based upon these two great truths: that life is God’s gift, and therefore to be abridged or taken away only at His command; and that life is of supreme value to every man.^[38]

Furthermore, murder is seen to be an attack upon God Himself. God instituted the death penalty for it way before Moses. In Genesis 9:5-6, we read:

And for your lifeblood **I will require a reckoning**: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man. 6 “Whoever sheds the blood of man, **by man shall his blood be shed**, for **God made man in his own image**.

God will require justice for the unlawfully spilled blood because, like Abel, the voice of one’s blood cries out to God for vengeance (Gen 4:10). Therefore, whoever murders man, the same shall be *killed* (not murdered!). The reason given is because man is in the image of God. An attack upon man is an attack upon God because man bears God’s image. To murder is to attack God, and the Lord takes serious offense at this and this is way long before Moses. He commands that murderers be put to death. I’m not that knowledgeable on the topic of government or the death penalty, but I don’t believe Christians can biblically oppose the death penalty. There is certainly emotional baggage with the death penalty which makes it hard, but rationally and biblically, it is simple: A murderer is to be

put to death because they have attacked God by murdering one that is in His image.

Obviously, this commandment does not forbid the death penalty for it says that *murder* is wrong, not the taking of life absolutely. We saw above that long before Moses, the Lord sanctioned the *killing of murderers*. The Law of Moses saw a distinction between murder and killing. To cause the death of someone **accidentally** was not considered to be murder, while in the same passage, the death penalty is given for murderers (Ex. 21:12-13; Num. 35:11, 22-25; Deut. 19:4-6, 11). Why is it not murder? Because it says that the manslayer killed “his neighbor *unintentionally* without having hated him in the past” (Deut. 19:4). He did not have a grudge against his neighbor; wanted to get revenge for some reason or plan for his murder, but rather, it happened by accident, or more properly—“God let him fall into his hand” (Ex. 21:13). Neither is the taking of life in the case of **self-defense** murder (Ex. 22:2-3). If a thief would break into your house and you struck him dead, then God does not hold that against you. Killing in **war** is likewise not murder as was seen by the way that God commanded Israel to wipe out the heathen who possessed the Promised Land. God didn’t disapprove of the killing of Goliath, rather David was angered *because* Goliath was blaspheming God (1 Sam. 17:26, 45-46).

Thomas Watson gives 12 ways that murder is committed summarized here below: ^[39]

1. With the hand (2 Sam. 20:10).
2. With the mind (1 John 3:15).
3. With the tongue, when the Jews handed our Lord over to Pilate and demanded His unjust death (John 18:30).
4. With the pen (2 Sam. 11:15; 12:9).
5. By plotting another’s death (1 Kgs. 21:9-10).
6. By poisoning someone.
7. By witchcraft and sorcery (Deut. 18:10-12).
8. By the intention to kill another (Matt. 2:8, 13).
9. By consenting to another’s death (Acts. 22:20).
10. By not preventing the unlawful death of another.
11. By un-mercifulness (Deut. 24:6).
12. By not executing the law upon capital offenders.

And we can add to the list many other ways practiced nowadays like Euthanasia (which is legal in the Netherlands, where I live) and abortion being the two big ones.

The 6th Commandment In The New Testament

In the New Testament, we read of the Lord Jesus Who connects anger against a brother, insult to a brother and slander to a brother with murder (Matt. 5:21-22). Notice what the Lord is *not* saying. He does not say “it is written,” but rather “You have heard it was said of those old.” He is not quoting Scripture, but the *interpretation* of Scripture by the rabbis. They had taken the commandment against murder to be only the forbidding of the act and not those things which (may) *lead* to the actual act. It is *wrong* to say that the Old Testament was concerned only with the outward act and that here the Lord Jesus teaches us that hatred is also murder. Why? Because Jesus’ teaching is based upon the Old Testament. What He here refutes is the *interpretation* of the Jews, not the text of the Old Testament. For example, we read in Leviticus 19:18—

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but **you shall love your neighbor as yourself**: I am the LORD.

This commandment calls upon people not to take matters into their hand, rather, their duty is to love their neighbor and not hate them. Deuteronomy 19:11 says that murder is committed with hatred and it obviously forbids the act as well as that which leads to the actual act.

The apostle John writes that even hatred is considered to be the murder of the heart when he says:

1 John 3:15 Everyone who **hates his brother is a murderer**, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.

No murder springs from love, rather it springs forth from hatred and malice and these very things God forbids. God hates both the act and those things which lead to the act. Therefore, we should not murder either in deed or in thought.

See also Matthew 19:18; Mark 7:21; 10:19; Luke 18:20; Romans 1:29; 13:9; 1 Timothy 1:9; James 2:11; 1 Peter 4:15; Revelation 9:21; 21:8; 22:15.

Conclusion On The 6th Commandment

In the words of WLC 136, this commandment forbids us from

all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defense; the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life; sinful anger, hatred, envy, desire of revenge; all excessive passions, distracting cares; immoderate use of meat, drink, labor, and recreations; provoking words, oppression, quarreling, striking, wounding, and: Whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any.^[15]

But at the same time commands us to perform (WLC 137)

all careful studies, and lawful endeavors, to preserve the life of ourselves and others by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding all occasions, temptations, and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any; by just defense thereof against violence, patient bearing of the hand of God, quietness of mind, cheerfulness of spirit; a sober use of meat, drink, physic, sleep, labor, and recreations; by charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness; peaceable, mild and courteous speeches and behavior; forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil; comforting and succoring the distressed, and protecting and defending the innocent.^[15]

The Seventh Commandment

Exod. 20:14 "You shall **not commit adultery**.

See also Deut. 5:18.

General Observations On The 7th Commandment

The seventh commandment forbids all sexual intercourse and thoughts outside of the covenant of marriage between one man and one woman. Dabney observes that

Adultery, in strictness of speech, is the sin of illicit cohabitation by a married person. Its eminence in criminality is due to these traits; that in addition to the uncleanness, it involves the breach of the marriage contract, and the treachery contained therein; and that by corrupting the descent of families, it uproots the whole foundation of domestic society. Adultery and divorce without cause are directly antagonistic thereto. They are therefore deadly stabs against all home affections, against all training of children, against every rudiment of social order. Were all to take the license of the adulterer, men would in due time be reduced precisely to the degradation of wild beasts. The sin of the adulterer therefore, is scarcely less enormous than that of the murderer. The latter destroys man's temporal existence; the former destroys all that makes existence a blessing.^[40]

When a married person goes to the bed of another, they break the promise they made to their spouse about staying faithful and pure until the end to each other. They break their word and their relationship is never the same because the trust between them is now broken. What often follows from adultery, or sadly even without adultery, is divorce, which is likewise forbidden here because divorce without the two legitimate reasons, *porneia* (Matt. 5:32; 19:9) and if the unbelieving spouse wants to leave (1 Cor. 7:15), is adultery.

As in all the other commandments, what is commanded and is required here is that we stay faithful in word, thought, and deed. Husband and wife should stay faithful to each other and to the promise that they made to each other before God and the witnesses. Under the Law of Moses, adultery was punishable by death (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22-24)! Adultery and unfaithfulness is a serious crime to God because it is in this language that He describes His relationship to His unfaithful people. In many places in the Old Testament (e.g., Ezek. 16; the book of Hosea; Jer. 3:20), God describes the relationship which He has with His old covenant people as one of a Husband and his unfaithful wife who is an adulterer. Likewise, in the New Testament, idolatry is spoken of in terms of spiritual adultery, for example, in James 4:4-5, where people were trying to love both the world and God. But that should not be. A wife cannot marry two husbands, neither can she stay faithful to two persons at the same time.

Christians are described as those who are “virgins”, not because they are those who have never had lawful sexual intercourse, but because they have remained faithful to their Husband before the consummation of marriage (Rev. 14:4; 2 Cor. 11:2). It means that their devotion is to God and they have no other gods before Him. They only belong to Him. We see that in this commandment, like in the fifth and sixth, the Lord takes offense because the sin that is prohibited concerns something more than human relations. That we should honor our parents is grounded in that we should honor our Father in heaven. That we should not murder is grounded in that murder is an attack upon God. That we should not commit adultery is grounded in that God desires that His people be faithful to Him because He is a Jealous God.

The 7th Commandment In The New Testament

Just like the sixth commandment about murder, our Savior stresses the fact that both the act as well as that which leads to the act are sinful and forbidden. In Matthew 5:27-28, we read:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ 28 But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already **committed adultery with her in his heart.**

Now some have said that this is entirely new teaching from the Lord Jesus not found in the Old Testament, but this is dead wrong. So long before the Lord Jesus and Moses, Job said that he would guard his eyes against lust (Job 31:1, 7-11). Furthermore, the tenth commandment says, “you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife,” what do you think that means? Jesus is not adding to the Decalogue, rather He is *bringing out* that which was already in the Old Testament to a greater light, which was obscured by the Jewish leaders. Notice again what our Lord says, “You have heard that it was said” and thereby He is referring to their Jewish traditions and interpretations of the Law, rather than “it is written.” The words are exactly like in the seventh commandment, yet the interpretation is different. Christ the Lord is the Lawgiver. He gave Israel the Decalogue and He spoke it to them as He is Yahweh the LORD. He teaches His people the proper and right interpretation of the commandment, which does not only forbid the act, but also that which leads to the act—lust, which He calls adultery of the heart. In this commandment, He forbids all lust and pornography. The fanciful imaginations are already adultery of the heart. He does not say that it is the same as actual adultery, but it is nonetheless, adultery of the heart. On the basis of all the above and more, the WLC 139 writes:

The sins forbidden in the seventh commandment, besides the neglect of the duties required, are, adultery, fornication, rape, incest, sodomy, and all unnatural lusts; all unclean imaginations, thoughts, purposes, and affections; all corrupt or filthy communications, or listening thereunto; wanton looks, impudent or light behavior, immodest apparel; prohibiting of lawful, and dispensing with unlawful marriages; allowing, tolerating, keeping of stews, and resorting to them; entangling vows of single life, undue delay of marriage; having more wives or husbands than one at the same time; unjust divorce, or desertion; idleness, gluttony, drunkenness, unchaste company; lascivious songs, books, pictures, dancings, stage plays; and all other provocations to, or acts of uncleanness, either in ourselves or others.^[15]

God wants His people to be sexually pure and clean before Him and before man (1 Thess. 4:3; Heb. 13:4). See also Matthew 19:18; Mark 7:21; 10:11-12, 19; Luke 16:18; 18:20; Acts 21:25; Romans 1:29; 2:22; 7:3; 13:9; 1 Corinthians 5:11; 6:9, 18; 10:8; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3; James 2:11; 2 Peter 2:14; Jude 1:7; Revelation 2:14; 2:21-22; 9:21.

In the New Testament, the word used for forbidding sexual immorality is the Greek πορνεία (*porneia*, G4202), which is used for:

- adultery (Matt. 5:32; 19:9);
- fornication (Matt. 15:19; Mark 7:21; 1 Cor. 6:18; 7:2; cf. Gen. 38:24 LXX);
- incest (1 Cor. 5:1);
- not discernable which specific act (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; 1 Cor. 6:13; 2 Cor. 12:2; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5; 1 Thess. 4:3; Rev. 9:21);
- spiritual adultery (Rev. 2:21; 14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3; 19:2).

It is best to see the passages listed under the category “not discernable which specific act” to be general warnings against all forms of unlawful sexual intercourse. Thayer’s Greek Definitions defines *porneia* as:

1. illicit sexual intercourse
 - a. adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals etc.
 - b. sexual intercourse with close relatives; Lev. 18
 - c. sexual intercourse with a divorced man or woman; Mk. 10:11,

1. metaph. the worship of idols
 - a. of the defilement of idolatry, as incurred by eating the sacrifices offered to idols^[41]

Both the Old and New Testament prohibitions are against all kinds of sexual intercourse outside of covenant marriage.

Conclusion On The 7th Commandment

Because God loves and wants His people to be faithful to Himself, He likewise requires faithfulness and purity between husband and wife in a covenant of marriage. We are to abstain from both the act of actual adultery, sexual intercourse outside of marriage and the thought thereof—lust.

The Eighth Commandment

Exod. 20:15 “You shall **not steal**.

See also Deut. 5:19.

General Observations On The 8th Commandment

The eighth commandment calls us not to covet what is not ours and not to steal that which is not ours. That stealing is wrong is acknowledged by everyone inherently. They may say that it is not wrong, but when the sin of stealing is committed against them, they are not indifferent. As R.C. Sproul liked to say, if a person doesn’t believe in sin, steal their wallet. That will surely bring an inconsistent reaction. Keach (Q&A 81) says that

The eighth commandment forbids whatsoever does or may unjustly hinder our own or our neighbor’s wealth or outward state.^[24]

To steal is to be discontent with God’s providential care. It is God who allots us whatever we have. When we steal, we say to God that what He has given us is not enough and we resort to taking that which is not ours. Stealing, first of all, begins in the heart when one is discontent with what they have, coveting what is not theirs and then going out to unlawfully get it. Calvin writes:

In substance, then, the commandment forbids us to long after other men’s goods, and, accordingly, requires every man to exert himself honestly in preserving his own. For we must consider, that what each individual possesses has not fallen to him by chance, but by the distribution of the sovereign Lord of all, that no one can pervert his means to bad purposes without committing a fraud on a divine dispensation.^[42]

Thomas Watson identifies two internal causes of theft: 1) unbelief and 2) covetousness. Concerning the first he writes:

Unbelief. A man has a high distrust of God's providence. "Can God furnish a table in the wilderness?" Psalm 78:19. "Can God spread a table for me?" says the unbeliever. "No, he cannot." Therefore he is resolved he will spread a table for himself—but it shall be at other men's cost, and both first and second course shall be served in with stolen goods. ^[43]

When a man understands that whatever they have is from God, they should then be content with what God has allotted and pray for His blessing, but not take matters into their hand by sinning. That is never God's command. The second cause is:

Covetousness. The Greek word for covetousness signifies "an immoderate desire of getting;" which is the root of theft. A man covets more than his own, and this itch of covetousness makes him scratch what he can from another. Achan's covetous heart made him steal the wedge of gold—a wedge which cleaved asunder his soul from God! Joshua 7:21. ^[43]

To avoid stealing, the apostle says that the ex-thief should now work and make his own money (Eph. 4:28).

The 8th Commandment In The New Testament

The commandment is carried over unchanged therefore further comments will not be needed. See Matthew 19:18; Mark 7:22; 10:19; Luke 18:20; Romans 2:21; 13:9; 1 Corinthians 5:10-11; 6:10; Ephesians 4:28; 1 Peter 4:15; Revelation 9:21.

Conclusion On The 8th Commandment

We should be content with what God has allotted to us and not covet and take things that do not belong to us, rather we should pray to God and maybe He will give us these things.

The Ninth Commandment

Exod. 20:16 "You shall **not bear false witness** against your neighbor.

See also Deut. 5:20.

General Observations On The 9th Commandment

The general truth of the ninth commandment is that we should not lie and bear false witness about someone is acknowledged universally. It is a given truth. Calvin writes:

The purport of the commandment is, since God, who is truth, abhors falsehood, we must cultivate unfeigned truth towards each other. The sum, therefore, will be, that we must not by calumnies and false accusations injure our neighbour's name, or by falsehood

impair his fortunes; in fine, that we must not injure any one from petulance, or a love of evil-speaking.^[44]

How do we bear false witness about our neighbor? By slander and by outright lying against and about them. We should seek to protect the good name of people and not to misrepresent and slander their reputation. Slander is a “false and malicious statement or report about someone.”^[45] We slander someone when we speak lies about them behind their back. Slander is a sin and it is wrong (Lev. 19:16; Ps. 101:5; 140:11; Prov. 20:19; 30:10; Matt. 15:19; Rom. 1:30; 3:8; Eph. 4:31; 2Tim. 3:3). To raise a slander about our neighbor is to speak evil about them. The Lord hates those who bear false witness (Prov. 6:19; 12:17; 19:5, 9; 25:18; Ps. 5:5-6; Ex. 23:1; Matt. 26:59; Acts. 6:13), because He is a God of truth, therefore He hates all falsehood!

By lying, we misrepresent God Who is Himself the truth and we, being made in His image, should reflect His truthfulness. Watson notes the sad fact that “The tongue which at first was made to be an organ of God’s praise—has now become an instrument of unrighteousness.”^[46] We should speak the truth at all times, although there are times when for a greater cause we are lead to *not* speak the truth, but rather lie. The cases of Christians hiding Jews in their homes come to mind. When the Nazi soldiers come to the door to ask if there are Jews inside and they answer with “no.” Yes, they have lied, but they have done so to prevent a greater evil, namely, the murder of the innocent. Or the biblical case of Rahab hiding the Israelite spies (Josh. 2:1-5). This does not justify lying, nor does it say that lying is not a sin, but rather demonstrates the moral difficulty that we may face sometimes. In Deuteronomy 19:16-21, the *Lex Talionis* is to be applied upon the one who has borne false witness against their neighbor and Israel is called to “purge the evil from [their] midst.” This is a serious crime in the eyes of God.

The 9th Commandment In The New Testament

The commandment is carried into the New Testament without anything special added to or said about it, therefore no further comments are needed. See Matthew 15:19; 19:18; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; John 8:44; Acts 5:3-4; Romans 1:29; 13:9; Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9; 1 Timothy 4:2; 2 Timothy 3:3; Revelation 21:8; 22:15.

Conclusion On The 9th Commandment

We conclude with the words of Calvin:

Wherefore, if the true fear and love of God dwell in us, we must endeavour, as far as is lawful and expedient, and as far as charity admits, neither to listen nor give utterance to bitter and acrimonious charges, nor rashly entertain sinister suspicions. As just interpreters of the words and the actions of other men, let us candidly maintain the honour due to them by our judgment, our ear, and our tongue.^[47]

The Tenth Commandment

Exod. 20:17 “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.”

See also Deut. 5:21.

General Observations On The Tenth Commandment

The tenth commandment forbids all kinds of covetousness. Covetousness is the wrong and sinful desire to have something that is not ours. The commandment lists all kinds of things which were important to the Old Testament world, but does not restrict the commandment to ox and donkey or wife and servant, rather “anything that is your neighbor’s.” Covetousness is closely related to stealing, for there is no stealing without first coveting whatever one is trying to steal. We are not to covet—we are not to have a sinful desire to possess something that is not ours. Calvin writes:

The purport is: Since the Lord would have the whole soul pervaded with love, any feeling of an adverse nature must be banished from our minds. The sum, therefore, will be, that no thought be permitted to insinuate itself into our minds, and inhale them with a noxious concupiscence tending to our neighbour’s loss. To this corresponds the contrary precept, that every thing which we conceive, deliberate, will, or design, be conjoined with the good and advantage of our neighbour.^[48]

This commandment forbids lust in saying that we should not covet our neighbor’s wife and implicitly, daughter. We are not to look with lust at her, neither should we commit adultery with her (as explicitly per the 7th commandment). I have heard that some people think that the Decalogue is merely concerned with the outward, well...I think they forgot to read the tenth commandment. This commandment explicitly concerns itself with the inward thoughts and affections of man, condemning that which is wrong. The WLC 148 says:

The sins forbidden in the tenth commandment are, discontentment with our own estate; envying and grieving at the good of our neighbor, together with all inordinate motions and affections to anything that is his.^[45]

When we are discontent with what God has allotted to us through His providence, we often wish that our life would have been just as good as that person’s, or that our house would have been just as big or comfortable as that man’s house, or that we would have just as many books as that person at church, or that we would have a phone like that guy at school and the list goes on and on demonstrating that we’re not content with what we have, but want the possessions of others, or want to be like them. This is why covetousness is identified with idolatry by Paul, but more on that, below.

Thomas Watson says that a man may be said to be given to covetousness:^[49]

1. when his thoughts are wholly taken up with the world (Phil. 3:19);
2. when he takes more pains for getting earth than for getting heaven;
3. when all his discourse is about the world (John 3:31);
4. when he is so in love with the world, that he doesn’t care about heaven (2Tim. 4:10);
5. when he overloads himself with worldly business;
6. when he is so in love with the world, that to get whatever he wants, cares not what unlawful means he uses.

Covetousness is a wicked sin which is the breach of all the Ten Commandments according to Watson. Here are his words at large:

It breaks the first commandment; “You shall have no other gods but one.” The covetous man has more gods than one; Mammon is his God. He has a god of gold, therefore he is called an idolater. Col 3:5.

Covetousness breaks the second commandment: “You shall not make any graven image, you shall not bow yourself to them.” A covetous man bows down, though not to the graven image in the church—yet to the graven image on his coin.

Covetousness is a breach of the third commandment; “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” Absalom’s design was to get his father’s crown, which was covetousness; but he talked of paying his “vow to God,” which was to take God’s name in vain.

Covetousness is a breach of the fourth commandment; “Remember the Sabbath-day to keep it holy.” A covetous man does not keep the Sabbath holy; he will do his business on a Sabbath; instead of reading in the Bible, he will cast up his accounts.

Covetousness is a breach of the fifth commandment; “Honor your father and your mother.” A covetous person does not honor his father, if he does not help him in his necessities. Nay; he will get his father to make over his estate to him in his lifetime, so that the father may be at his son’s command.

Covetousness is a breach of the sixth commandment; “You shall not kill.” Covetous Ahab killed Naboth to get his vineyard. 1 Kings 21:13. How many have swum to the crown—in blood?

Covetousness is a breach of the seventh commandment, “You shall not commit adultery.” It causes immorality; you read of the “hire of a whore.” Deut 23:18. An adulteress for money, sets both conscience and chastity to sale.

Covetousness is a breach of the eighth commandment “You shall not steal.” It is the root of theft: covetous Achan stole the wedge of gold. Thieves and covetous are put together. 1 Cor 6:10.

Covetousness is a breach of the ninth commandment; “You shall not bear false witness.” What makes the perjurer take a false oath but covetousness? He hopes for a reward.

It is plainly a breach of the tenth commandment; “You shall not covet.” The mammonist covets his neighbor’s house and goods, and endeavors to get them into his own hands. Thus you see how vile a sin covetousness is! It is a mother sin! It is a plain breach of every one of the ten commandments. ^[49]

Thus, covetousness is actually the root of the breach of the Decalogue.

The 10th Commandment In The New Testament

The New Testament doesn’t add much to the commandment other than *directly* identifying covetousness with idolatry. In Ephesians 5:5 and Colossians 3:5, Paul connects idolatry with covetousness. Why? Because covetousness is a sin that seeks to have more than God has allotted. It displays discontentment with His providence and seeks to make that which He has not lawfully given us, our own. Pastor MacArthur notes that “When people engage in either greed or the sexual sins Paul has cataloged, they follow their desires rather than God’s, in essence worshipping

themselves—which is idolatry (Num. 25:1-3; Eph. 5:3-5).^[50] And “The greedy person wants things more than he wants God, and puts things in the place of God, thereby committing idolatry.”^[51] The cure for covetousness is given in Hebrews:

Heb. 13:5 Keep your life free from love of money, and **be content with what you have**, for he has said, “**I will never leave you nor forsake you.**”

The cure is that we learn to be content with whatever God has allotted and if we want more, we should seek God in prayer in this matter, and not covet what is not ours. Rather, we should understand that God will never hold back anything that is needful and necessary for us and realize that we have all things necessary for godliness in Christ already!

See also Mark 7:22; Luke 12:15; Acts 20:33; Romans 1:29; 7:7; 13:9; 1 Corinthians 5:10-11; 6:10; Galatians 5:19; Ephesians 5:3, 5; Colossians 3:5; 1 Timothy 6:10; 2 Timothy 3:2; 2 Peter 2:14; Hebrews 13:5.

Conclusion On The 10th Commandment

Rather than being discontent with whatever God has allotted us, we should be thankful and content. The WLC 147 says:

The duties required in the tenth commandment are, such a full contentment with our own condition, and such a charitable frame of the whole soul toward our neighbor, as that all our inward motions and affections touching him, tend unto, and further all that good which is his.^[15]

We conclude with Watson:

The best remedy is contentment. If we are content with our own, we shall not covet that which is another's. Paul could say, “I have coveted no man's gold or silver.” Whence was this? It was from contentment. “I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content.” Phil 4:11. Contentment says, as Jacob did, “I have enough.” Gen 33:11. I have a promise of heaven, and have sufficient to bear my charges there; I have enough. He who has enough, will not covet that which is another's. Be content! “In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being content—whether well-fed or hungry, whether in abundance or in need.” Philippians 4:12^[49]

The Summary Of The Law

When asked what was the greatest or most important commandment of the Law, our Savior replied:

Mark 12:29-31 Jesus answered, “The **most important** is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ 31 The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is **no other commandment greater than these.**”

Matt. 22:37-40 And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the **great and first commandment**. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 **On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.**”

The Lord Jesus sees the commandment to love God and to love one’s neighbor to be the main point of God’s Law. Not only that but also of the whole Old Testament, because that is what “Law and the Prophets” refers to (Matt. 5:17; 7:12; 11:3; Luke 24:44). But more specifically, these two commandments are the summary of God’s moral law, the Decalogue, which had primacy over the ceremonial and civil law, as I tried to argue above in paragraph 1 ([see here](#)). What’s the reason to see them as a summary of the Ten Commandments? Because the Ten Commandments are divided as the first four concerning our duty *directly* toward God, calling us to acknowledge Him as the only God, worshiping Him, honoring Him and honoring His day. The Lord cites Deuteronomy 6:4-5 to this effect. All our duties toward God should spring forth from a heart which loves Him and desires to do the things that He commands.

Then our Lord partially (there were no verse divisions back then) cites Leviticus 19:18, and by this, we understand that He is summarizing the second table—commandments five through ten. We demonstrate our love to our neighbor

1. when we honor them;
2. when we protect their life;
3. when we do not lust after their spouse or commit adultery with their spouse, but rather display respect and friendly love;
4. when we do not steal from them, but rather further the wealth and outward state of them;
5. when we speak what is right and honorable about them;
6. when we do not seek to have what is theirs.

The duties of commandments 5-10 when performed, will be done because of love first of all to God, and to their fellow man who is in the image of the God they love. Calvin says, “First, our mind must be completely filled with love to God, and then this love must forthwith flow out toward our neighbour.”^[52]

Some contend that the doing away with the Mosaic Covenant, did likewise away with the Decalogue because they reject the tripartite division of the law, which we argued for above ([see above](#)), where the Decalogue, which is the moral law, has primacy and the existence of the commandments summarized in the Decalogue way before Moses ([see above](#)). The Decalogue was something that was brought in the Mosaic Covenant in stone but was not limited to it. As I tried to show, the laws of the Decalogue were in effect way before Moses. In fact, from day 6 when man was created, the moral law in the conscience being part of what constitutes the *Imago Dei* ([see above](#)). That the Mosaic is done away with as a covenant and in whole, does not mean that God did away with the Decalogue, as it is the law of nature which is embedded in every human conscience. But more importantly, the moral law summarized in the Decalogue reflects His morally perfect character and person. They say that the Decalogue as moral law was done away with and what we have now are these two greatest commandments. We are not under the Decalogue as moral law, but under these two commandments which they believe is the Law of Christ. But I’m puzzled by this and ask the same question which Joseph Pipa asked, “Should we not reason that if the summary is morally binding, that which it summarizes is morally binding as well?”^[53]

The brother of the Lord in James 2:8-11 calls the second greatest commandment “the royal law according to the Scripture”:

Jas. 2:8-11 If you really fulfill the **royal law according to the Scripture**, **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself,”** you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are **convicted by the law as transgressors**. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. 11 For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law.

Here James sees the unity of God’s Law that when one is broken, all are broken. That he is referring to the moral law is seen by his two citations from the Decalogue, commandments six and seven. If we show partiality to our neighbor we are not honoring or loving them and thereby breaking God’s law. We become “transgressor[s] of the law” and by the commandments he cites, the law which he speaks of is the moral law summarized in the Decalogue. See more on this passage, [below](#).

Likewise, the apostle Paul gives a summary of the second table in Romans 13. We read—

Rom. 13:8-10 Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the **one who loves another has fulfilled the law**. 9 For the commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore **love is the fulfilling of the law**.

To show love to God and to man is the purpose of the Decalogue and that is what it calls us to do. But we may also ask, “How should I love God and my neighbor?” At that time, we look to God’s law to learn *how* we are supposed to love. See more on this passage, [below](#).

In this passage, Paul cites commandments seven, six, eight and ten and claims that they’re summed up in “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”, which is the royal law according to James (Jas. 2:8) and the second greatest commandment according to the Lord Jesus. Paul doesn’t limit himself to these four commandments from the Decalogue, but adds, “any other commandment”. I think that this should be understood in a qualified sense, that is, any other commandment concerning man, not any commandment absolutely. He is here referring to the moral duty toward our fellow man as summarized in the second table of the Decalogue. This is the fulfilling of the law, meaning, in this is the law realized in a person’s life.

Lastly, our Lord, in Matthew 19, summarizes the second table in the same way:

Matt. 19:16-22 And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” 17 And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, **keep the commandments**.” 18 He said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, 19 Honor your father and mother, and, **You shall love your neighbor as yourself**.” 20 The young man said to him, “All these I have kept. What do I still lack?” 21 Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.” 22 When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for **he had great possessions**.

Notice, first of all, that our Lord told the man to keep the commandments and then goes on to enlist

the commandments, which are from the Decalogue. He enlists the moral commandments and not things like not failing to bring an offering or abstaining from certain foods. Our Lord cites the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth and fifth commandments. He ends his listing of the commandments with a last commandment, that is, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" which all these things prohibited or commanded as duties before were an expression of that. But where is the tenth commandment? I believe it is implicitly there and will be revealed by his response to the Lord Jesus: "he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions" (Matt. 19:22). He was covetous and would not give away his possessions even for heaven! That does not only prove that he broke the tenth commandment, but also the first table in that he was an idolater (Eph. 5:5; Col. 3:5). Mammon was his god, not Yahweh. He placed "great possessions" before God and thereby broke the first table.

A question may be asked as to why we don't have the first table summarized in this way also? It is thus summarized as we understand Jesus' answer to the question about the greatest commandment, but not in enlisting the commandments individually. If we truly love our neighbor we are fulfilling the law, but what about the first table? For one to truly love their neighbor, they must *first* love God above all from which flows their love toward their fellow man. Therefore, to know if a person loves God, we must look to see their fruit and their love for their fellow man. The apostle John argued in this way in 1 John 4:20-21. If a person says that they love God (and thus follow the first table), but hate their brother (disobeying the second table), they are a liar. They cannot love God without loving their neighbor.

Calvin notes on Matthew 22:37—

What follows is an abridgment of the Law, (73) which is also found in the writings of Moses, (Deu 6:5.) For, though it is divided into two tables, the first of which relates to the worship of God, and the second to charity, Moses properly and wisely draws up this summary, (74) that the Jews may perceive what is the will of God in each of the commandments.^[7]

Therefore, I conclude, that indeed to love God fulfills the first four commandments and to love our neighbor fulfills the commandments of the second table. These summarize the Decalogue to us and they are the most important. When asked "what is the purpose of the Decalogue or what is it trying to get us to do" the answer is "love to God and neighbor." When asked "how do we love" we send people to the Decalogue, which summarizes our duty toward God and man.

The Praises Of God's People About God's Law

The law of God is praised throughout the Psalms. As Israel was under the threefold law of God: moral, ceremonial and civil laws, they were bound to obey them. But we also saw that there was a distinction between the different laws, the moral law summarized in the Decalogue having the primacy. Even in the Psalms to obey (moral) is better than sacrifice (ceremonial) (e.g., Ps. 40:6-8; 50:8-9; 51:16-17).

One of the reasons that I can't think about God's law in legalistic terms is because of how His law is praised in the Psalms. How David delights himself in God's law and expresses his love for God and his law. I cannot think of David being a legalist and thinking that he will gain favor with God if he obeys. But rather, He had the Spirit of God within him and he knew God truly, therefore, he could not but delight in God's law.

Psalm 1

The book of God's people's songs begins with the blessing upon the person who delights in God's law. The godly man has no delight in that which is contrary to God and His law. He has no delight in "the council of the wicked", nor does he associate with those living in sin, neither does he take part in their sins. In contrast, His delight and pleasure are in God and His law and on God's law is his mind all day. He reads the Scriptures, he finds pleasure in God's Word and he tries to obey God's law. He has no pleasure in wickedness and all that is contrary to God's law.

He is likened to a tree that is planted in a place where it has all that it needs to be nourished and brings fruit because it feeds on that which is God and which is delightful. In contrast, the wicked—those who despise and disobey God's law—are like chaff which is driven away to every side and has no foundation to stand on. Therefore, the wicked will not stand with God's people, the righteous—those whose delight is in God and His law. Those who delight themselves in the law will be vindicated and will remain standing, while those who despise His law will perish!

God's blessing rests upon those who love His law *because* they love Him. For there is no true love for God without loving the things that belong to Him and the things that He delights in. This first Psalm sets the tone to the whole book, which is devoted to songs about and prayers to God. Those who delight in God also delight in His law, His ways and His people. Throughout the Psalms, these themes of God's law and love for God are repeated.

Psalm 19

In this Psalm, David uses all kinds of different words to refer to the law of God and to Scripture in general and to show how excellent it is!

Ps. 19:7-11 The law of the LORD is **perfect**, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is **sure**, making wise the simple; 8 the precepts of the LORD are **right**, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is **pure**, enlightening the eyes; 9 the fear of the LORD is **clean**, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are **true**, and righteous altogether. 10 More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. 11 Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

1. God's Law is perfect and it is blameless, it revives the soul. It renews us in that it shows us how to live godly lives and how to live in a way pleasing to God.
2. God's Law is steadfast, sure and is to be believed and cherished. It makes foolish men wise because it is given by Him Whose wisdom is unfathomable.
3. God's Law and precepts are upright. They are not wrong, they are just and they are correct in what they command. And therefore, there is joy when one follows God's precept in doing the right things. God's precepts are right and therefore lead the man of God in the right way.
4. God's Law and commandments are pure and radiant. They light our path before us because they are pure and therefore blameless and those who try to follow them will know that God's Word is a lamp to our feet (Ps. 119:105). Through God's law, we know what is good and what is evil, and therefore we know that we should strive to reject the evil and do the good.
5. The fear of God is, first of all, acknowledging who God is (Prov. 1:7) and hating sin (Prov. 8:13; 16:6). True fear of the Lord in reverence is clean and healthy. It is good and not something to be afraid of. It is not fear from judgment, but the fear of offending and displeasing Him. It is giving Him the reverence that He deserves as our Maker and Redeemer.

6. God's Law, commandments and rules are all true because they stem from Him who is the Truth, therefore, they cannot but be true. They are not only true but righteous in all ways and are "absolutely just" (NET). God's law is to be trusted and acknowledged to be the rule of all righteousness and moral good.
7. God's servant has more delight in God's law than in worldly riches because he knows that these will perish, but they who delight in His law will remain forever (Ps. 1:5-6).
8. Moreover, God's law both gives warnings for disobedience, showing us what is the correct way (therefore all that is contrary is to be rejected) and what is the evil way (therefore what is contrary is to be followed), and promises for obedience. Psalm 119:163-165 says, "I hate and abhor falsehood, but I love your law. Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous rules. Great peace have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble." And "Therefore I consider all your precepts to be right; I hate every false way" (Ps. 119:128).

Psalm 119

I will not be doing any exposition of Psalm 119, that will be too long, rather, I advise you to go read Psalm 119 and see the believers' delight in God's law and God's Word. This Psalm is responsible for the fact that I cannot think of someone who carefully wants to follow God's law to be a legalist. The saint who has written this Psalm loves God's law and God's Word *because* he loves God and wants to delight in the things that God Himself delights in.

Inability To Keep And The Purpose Of The Law

It is amazing to me that the catechisms, right after finishing their questions about the Decalogue, follow with this question:

Q. 88. Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God? (Keach)^[24]

Is man able to follow the law of God perfectly? Is man able to please God through obedience to the law? Many people see the Reformed understanding and high view of the law to be some form of legalism. That may be the case for some, but the Reformed teaching on the law is not meant to lead people to legalism, rather to the cross. We declare, as we believe the Bible teaches, that the Decalogue is the moral law of God, a reflection of His moral excellence and is binding upon all men everywhere and God by right as Creator requires that we all perfectly obey the law. But we cannot. Our first parents transgressed the law of God and we, in Adam, likewise transgressed the law and became sinners. Therefore, it is impossible for any sinner to perfectly keep the law of God. To put it simply, the requirement is that we at all times, in every second and with every deed show perfect love with all our being to God and also love our neighbor. Any Christian would admit that this is an impossible task. To bring salvation is *not* the purpose of the law. We do not obey God's law to gain favor with Him or to be saved. Not at all. But we obey the law because that is how we demonstrate our love to Him and that is how we walk in His ways. The answer to the catechism question is:

A. No mere man, since the fall, is able in this life, perfectly to keep the commandments of God, but daily breaks them in thought, word, and deed. (Eccles. 7:20; Gen. 6:5; Gen. 8:21; 1 John 1:8; James 3:8; James 3:2; Rom. 3:23)^[24]

We are not able to perfectly love God and our neighbor, but we break these commandments daily. No man is able to perfectly keep the law of God. No man, but the God-Man Who did, in fact, perfectly keep the law of God because He was sinless, unstained by Adam's sin and obeyed the law

on our behalf and His perfect law-keeping is imputed to us ([see Christ's Active Obedience](#)). If the law does not justify, what then is its purpose? Keach (89) answers:

A. The purpose of the law, since the fall, is to reveal the perfect righteousness of God, that His people may know his will for their lives and the ungodly, being convicted of their sin, may be restrained therein and brought to Christ for salvation. (Ps. 19:7-11; Rom. 3:20,31; 7:7; 12:2; Titus 2:12-14; Gal. 3:22,24; 1 Tim. 1:8)

It is by the law that we know what sin truly is. There is no sin without the law ([see above](#)). It shows us our sin and therefore what judgment awaits us. Without the law, there is no true understanding of salvation for we must understand that we have broken God's law and have come under His condemnation. What Jesus does is to take the curse of the law upon Himself on our behalf and obey the law perfectly also on our behalf. What God does is He imputes that perfect righteousness of Christ to His elect and therefore God sees wretched sinners through the perfect righteousness of Christ. Amazing grace!

After the Q&A on the Decalogue, the Reformed catechisms follow with the fact that we are unable to keep God's law, the punishment for sin and then provide the remedy to our sins. Keach's Catechism Q&A 92 says:

Q. 92. What does God require of us, that we may escape His wrath and curse, due to us for sin?

A. To escape the wrath and curse of God due to us for sin, God requires of us faith in Jesus Christ, repentance unto life, with the diligent use of all the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption. (Acts 20:21; Acts 16:30,31; 17:30)^[24]

Only faith in Jesus Christ saves. Law-keeping does not save, but true and loving law-keeping *demonstrates* that one is saved and loves God (1 John 5:3). The law shows us our sin and therefore drives us to the cross again and again. When we are at the foot of the cross we receive forgiveness and then the cross points us to our duty in the law towards God and man. Law and gospel are not contrary when used rightly, but more on that in [paragraph 7](#).

§3 The Ceremonial Laws



Ceremonial Law

3. Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of **Israel ceremonial laws**, containing several **typical ordinances**, partly of worship, **prefiguring Christ**, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; **1** and **partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties**, **2** all which ceremonial laws being appointed only to the time of reformation, are, by Jesus Christ the true Messiah and only law-giver, who was furnished with power from the Father **for that end abrogated and taken away.** **3**
1. 1 Cor. 5:7; 2 Cor. 6:17; Jude 23
 2. Col. 2:14, 16-17; Eph. 2:14-16
 3. Heb. 10:1; Col. 2:16-17

This law of the Ten Commandments is called **moral law**. **Besides this law** and in addition to it, God gave **Israel ceremonial laws**. Notice that the ceremonial laws are not said to be universal or concern all humanity, but specifically **the people of Israel**. What did this law contain or consist of? It consisted of **typical ordinances**, i.e., things which pointed beyond themselves to Christ, His people, and the New Covenant. These were **partly of worship**. This is important to note as the threefold division of the law is not so rigid that we can separate each commandment and give them only one category. Under the Mosaic, many things were both moral and had a ceremonial or judicial application, hence the careful wording of **partly of worship**. The ceremonial laws were **prefiguring Christ** and His work (e.g., Col. 2:16-17). Then we come to another “**partly**” aspect of the ceremonial laws, namely that they **partly held forth divers** (i.e., various) **instructions of moral duties**. The ceremonial law had moral aspects to it and was dependent upon the moral law. But all of these ceremonial laws were put in place **to the time of reformation**, i.e., the coming of Christ and the fulfillment of His work. They were **abrogated and taken away** (Col. 2:17; Eph. 2:14-16) by the **only law-giver, Jesus Christ the true Messiah**. It was He who gave these commandments to Moses and it is He Who has fulfilled and abrogated them.

Typical Ordinances Fulfilled In Christ

The ceremonial law is described by the Confession as those laws which are “typical ordinances”,

meaning that they were types of Christ and His work. They were *partly* of worship. Meaning, the ceremonial laws were not only concerned with worship, nor that the worship laws were merely ceremonial with no moral aspect. God actually expected His Old Covenant people to obey all the three divisions of the law. He required obedience to all and they were all in a sense moral, namely, in that God had by positive command instituted them. When we say that there is a division within the Law of Moses, we don't mean that, for example, moral has nothing to do with the ceremonial and civil, or that the ceremonial has nothing to do with the moral. Rather, we believe that laws of the Decalogue are the moral law written on the heart of man and the laws which have primacy and are everlasting, unlike the ceremonial and judicial laws, which were limited to and particularly given to Israel. This is expressed in "*partly* holding forth divers instructions of moral duties".

What is classed under ceremonial laws includes the sacrificial system (e.g., Lev. 1-7), the Aaronic priesthood (e.g., Lev. 8-10), food laws (e.g., Lev. 11), purity laws (e.g., Lev. 12-15), feasts and holy times (e.g., Lev. 23), the tabernacle and the temple (Heb. 8:5). There is not always a clear line between moral and ceremonial as may be seen from Leviticus 18, but remember, the claim is never that there is a *clear* and directly discernable line, rather as the Confession says, "*partly*". The laws were mixed, but there was certainly a distinction as I tried to show in [paragraph 1](#).

The ceremonial laws are not inherently moral, but they receive a moral character only when God commands these things. They are *positive* precepts, unlike the Decalogue, which is the eternal and moral law of God. The things required and commanded in the Decalogue are right and good because they are a reflection of God's moral perfection. Therefore, ceremonial laws and positive precepts may be abrogated or changed without an effect upon the moral law of God. It is an undisputed point generally among Christians that Christ the Lord fulfilled and abrogated the ceremonial law. There is no longer a need for sacrifices because Christ is our sacrifice (1 Cor. 5:7). There is no longer need for an earthly priesthood because Christ is our High Priest and we are all priests (e.g., Heb. 2:17; Rev. 1:6). There are no longer clean and unclean animals because Christ declared all foods clean (Mark. 7:19). There is no longer a need for purity laws because we are made clean by the blood of Christ (Heb. 10:22; Rev. 7:14). All these laws pointed to Christ. Believers under the Old Covenant knew that sacrifices were not the way to God, but rather obedience and faith (e.g., Abraham in Gen. 15:6 and Gen. 22:14; or David in Ps. 51:16-17 and Ps. 32:1-2). They who truly knew God under the Old Testament knew that there was no atonement in the offerings, rather, these merely covered but did not do away with sin. They looked through these sacrifices to the ultimate sacrifice, to the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29).

The tabernacle and the temple pointed to Christ. He Himself claimed to be the temple (John 2:19-22) and His people have become the true Temple wherein His Spirit dwells (e.g., 2 Cor. 6:16). There is no longer a need to look toward Jerusalem or go to Jerusalem, for our Lord said that "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:24). A spirit is not limited to space and matter but is everywhere. No longer will God manifest His presence in a special way at a particular place on the earth, because His people are spread throughout the face of the earth. The writer of Hebrews claims that "They serve[d] a copy and shadow of the heavenly things" (Heb. 8:5). The feasts which the people of Israel celebrated are no longer need because they were shadows and are fulfilled in Christ (Col 2:16-17), Who is the true and real substance and the fulfillment which they shadowed.

The Abrogation Of The Ceremonial Law

I refer you to the brief discussion about Ephesians 2:14-16 and the abrogation of that which set Israel apart—the ceremonial law, [above](#).

In **Hebrews 10:1**, we read:

For since the law has but a **shadow of the good things to come** instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

The term “law” here specifically refers to the ceremonial law concerning the priesthood and sacrifices, for that is what the author is speaking about. The previous mention of “law” is in Hebrews 9:22 and it speaks about the need for purifying everything by blood. That is ceremonial and not moral. In Hebrews 10:8, the Author quotes Psalm 40:7 and speaks about offerings which “are offered according to the law”. All these things make it clear that Christ does away with the ceremonial law because it is weak and it is now fulfilled in Him. What shadow does “thou shalt not murder” or “thou shalt have no other gods before me” have? None. Now that the reality has come, there is no longer need for shadows.

In **Hebrews 10:5-9**, Christ does and establishes the will of God, *by* doing away with the ceremonial law. He does away with “Sacrifices and offerings”, and establishes God’s moral will for Him, that He become a sacrifice for His people and therefore the fulfillment of all those things which He did away with to establish this will of God concerning Him.

Colossians 2:14, 16-17

Colossians 2 is also a major text to this effect, although it is often used to claim that the Sabbath day is here abrogated. We beg to differ.

Col. 2:14-17 by canceling **the record of debt that stood against us** with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. 16 Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of **food and drink**, or with regard to a **festival** or a **new moon** or a **Sabbath**. 17 These are a **shadow of the things to come**, but the substance belongs to Christ.

What is the record of debt? A more literal translation may be more helpful, “having blotted out **the handwriting in the ordinances** that is against us” (YLT). What does this handwriting signify? And what are the ordinances? Calvin notes on v. 14:

Now Paul contends that ceremonies have been abolished, and to prove this he compares them to a hand-writing, by which God holds us as it were bound, that we may not be able to deny our guilt. He now says, that we have been freed from condemnation, in such a manner, that even the hand-writing is blotted out, that no remembrance of it might remain. For we know that as to debts the obligation is still in force, so long as the hand-writing remains; and that, on the other hand, by the erasing, or tearing of the handwriting, the debtor is set free. Hence it follows, that all those who still urge the observance of ceremonies, detract from the grace of Christ, as though absolution were not procured for us through him; for they restore to the hand-writing its freshness, so as to hold us still under obligation.^[7]

The HCSB Study Bible notes:

The **certificate of debt** may refer to a handwritten document or to the Mosaic law. Paul typically viewed the law's purpose as revealing the guilt of sinners (Dt 27:26; Rm 7:13; 1Co 15:56; Gal 3:10). Some Jewish writings, likewise, speak of God keeping records of people's sins as debts against them. God, however, has abolished those records through Christ's substitutionary atonement that was accomplished when He died on the cross.^[54]

This passage does not refer to the abrogation of the whole law, rather to the abrogation of condemnation brought by the law and that which was not inherently moral. This is seen in the close connection that one should have in interpreting this text and Ephesians 2:15. Why? Because these are the only two places where Paul uses the word δόγμα (*dogma*, G1378) which is defined as "a decree, statue, ordinance"^[55] and is used in Luke 2:1; Acts 16:4; 17:7; Ephesians 2:15 and Colossians 2:14. *Dogma* is only used twice by Paul and therefore the meaning should be gleaned from the context of its uses. I believe that it is clear from Ephesians 2 that what the apostle is speaking about when he says "abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances" is the ceremonial law which had set Israel apart from the Gentile nations and not the moral law which is on the heart of every man. Therefore, in Colossians 2:14, the reference is not to the moral, but ceremonial law, as Calvin notes and Paul's further discussion will lead to. Therefore, these things which had set Israel apart and were against us were nailed to the cross and done away with. It is on this basis that the apostle concludes (v. 16, "Therefore") that no one is to judge Christians about foods or festivals. Because they were nailed to the cross and were abolished (Eph. 2:15), there is no longer a moral obligation to observe them. The same God Who by positive precept commanded them has abolished and abrogated them *because* they were fulfilled in Christ.

Albert Barnes observes on the first part of v. 14:

Blotting out the handwriting - The word rendered handwriting means something written by the hand, a manuscript; and here, probably, the writings of the Mosaic law, or the law appointing many ordinances or observances in religion. The allusion is probably to a written contract, in which we bind ourselves to do any work, or to make a payment, and which remains in force against us until the bond is cancelled. That might be done, either by blotting out the names, or by drawing lines through it, or, as appears to have been practiced in the East, by driving a nail through it. The Jewish ceremonial law is here represented as such a contract, binding those under it to its observance, until it was nailed to the cross. The meaning here is, that the burdensome requirements of the Mosaic law are abolished, and that its necessity is superseded by the death of Christ. His death had the same effect, in reference to those ordinances, as if they had been blotted from the statute-book. This it did by fulfilling them, by introducing a more perfect system, and by rendering their observance no longer necessary, since all that they were designed to typify had been now accomplished in a better way; compare the notes at Eph 2:15.^[6]

What we have under discussion here, therefore, are ceremonial laws and not moral commandments.

Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of **food and drink**, or with regard to a **festival** or a **new moon** or a **Sabbath**. 17 These are a **shadow of the things to come**, but the **substance belongs to Christ**.

Paul in v. 16 declares that food (Lev. 11) and drink (Lev. 11:34; drink offerings also) laws are all

shadows and were nailed to the cross. In this expression, the apostle is generally saying that all things which were peculiar to the Old Covenant concerning eating and drinking are done away with. The next section, “festival or a new moon or a Sabbath” refers to all offerings and feasts. We believe that it refers to ceremonial Sabbaths and not to the creation ordinance Sabbath.

First of all, the word in the original is in the plural, therefore it should more properly be rendered as “Sabbaths” and thereby not referring to the singular Sabbath day, but rather the different kinds of Sabbath days in the Old Testament. Albert Barnes observes that “The word Sabbath in the Old Testament is applied not only to the seventh day, but to all the days of holy rest that were observed by the Hebrews, and particularly to the beginning and close of their great festivals.”^[6]

Second, these three designations are used in the OT to designate festivals and offerings on these festivals. Joseph Pipa writes concerning the interpretation which from Colossians 2:16 gets the abrogation of the Sabbath:

Such an interpretation, however, fails to take into account the context of these passages. Paul was dealing with Jewish practices about food and religious observances, not requirements of the moral law. He made this distinction by the terms he used in Col 2:16—“a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day.” These three terms are often used together to describe the special holy days of Jewish worship (2 Chron 8:13; 31:3; Lev 23:1-25).^[56]

To claim that the Sabbath of the creation ordinance is here being abrogated is not easily seen. It may be so on a surface reading, but comparing Scripture with Scripture reveals that the Sabbath was never abrogated. I hope to say more about Hebrews 4 in [chapter 22](#), which declares that “there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9). These terms which Paul picked refer to ceremonial feasts and offerings. It is these offerings and feasts which find their fulfillment in Christ. But the seventh day Sabbath pointed to the believer’s rest in Christ, while the first day Sabbath, or the Lord’s Day, points to the eschatological rest that we will have in the hereafter.

The same threefold terminology in Colossians 2:16 is used in various places in the OT to refer to ceremonial feasts and sacrifices, not to the one-in-seven Sabbath day (Neh. 10:33; 1 Chron. 23:31; 2 Chron. 2:4; 8:13; 31:3; Ezek. 45:17; Hos. 2:11). In fact, there was not only the moral fourth commandment Sabbath day but many ceremonial Sabbath days. For example, there is a Sabbath for the land which is one year long (Ex. 23:10-11). The great Day of Atonement is called a Sabbath (Lev. 16:29-31). Every time in Leviticus 23 when there is a holy convocation, the people may not do ordinary work (v. 7 for the Passover; v. 21 for Pentecost; vv. 24-25 for the Feast of Trumpets; v. 28 for the Day of Atonement where all work is forbidden; v. 35 for the Feast of Booths) and there the people are called to a “solemn rest,” that is, keeping a Sabbath (although not explicitly named “Sabbath”). The threefold terminology used by Paul in Colossians 2:16 is always related to sacrifice in the Old Testament (Neh. 10:33; 1 Chron. 23:31; 2 Chron. 2:4; 8:13; 31:3; Ezek. 45:17; Hos. 2:11), therefore, what reason do we have that Paul means anything else? It is these sacrifices which pointed to Christ the High Priest Who offered one final sacrifice to end all sacrifice and to bring in everlasting righteousness. Dr. Ross, after showing that there are more Sabbaths than only the fourth commandment Sabbath day, writes:

A simplistic equation between ‘sabbath’ and the fourth commandment is therefore inadequate, but what is most significant for the interpretation of Colossians 2:16 is that on six other occasions where feasts, new moons, and sabbaths are grouped together in

the Old Testament they are always bound up with offerings (1 Chron. 23:31; 2 Chron. 2:4; 8:13; 31:3; Neh. 10:33; Ezek. 45:17), suggesting that the term is concerned more with the sacrificial activity of these occasions than with the days themselves...It is therefore most likely that just as the reference to food and drink designated an activity and served as shorthand for all dietary laws, so feasts, new moons, and sabbaths serve as shorthand for the offerings and rituals common on those occasions. ^[57]

Therefore, on the basis of these things, it is just too simplistic to understand “Sabbath days” in Colossians 2:16 to be referring to the creation ordinance Sabbath, while ignoring the ceremonial Sabbaths all over the Old Testament and the use of the threefold terminology in the Old Testament. What Colossians 2:14, 16 teaches is the abrogation of all dietary laws, sacrificial laws and feast days under the Old Covenant because they are shadows and have the fulfillment in Christ, Who is the true sacrifice and the High Priest from a superior order—the order of Melchizedek, the King of Righteousness Who at the same time is the High Priest of God’s people. Finally, v. 17 declares that they are shadows which were pointing beyond themselves, but the “body” belongs to Christ. Meaning, these things pointed to the reality of Christ. Why should we observe things which pointed beyond themselves to something else, when that something has already come? These shadows lose their purpose and therefore are abrogated.

Conclusion

God was pleased to give Israel ceremonial laws to set them apart from the nations around them and through the ceremonial system to point them to the future Messiah. When that Messiah came, He did away with the ceremonial system because He was its fulfillment and therefore, the ceremonial law lost its function and passed away. As long as they were under the Old Covenant and the Messiah had not yet come, these laws were moral and binding. But when the substance of which they were the shadow had come, they were by divine will abrogated and fulfilled.

§4 The Judicial Laws



4. To them also he gave sundry **judicial laws**, which **expired together with the state of that people**, not obliging any now by virtue of that institution; **1 their general equity only being of moral use. 2**

1. Luke 21:20-24; Acts 6:13-14; Heb. 9:18-19 with 8:7, 13; 9:10; 10:1
2. 1 Cor. 5:1; 9:8-10

To them, i.e., to the “people of Israel” (paragraph 3), He also gave **sundry** (various) **judicial laws** in addition to the moral and ceremonial laws. These **judicial laws** had to do with governing Israel. But they also were given for a particular time since they **expired together with the state of that people**. They were given to Israel as a nation as long as it existed as a nation and was in covenant with God. No one is obliged to obedience **by virtue of that institution**. Nonetheless, **their general equity** (1 Cor. 9:8-10) is still **of moral use** even though the state of that people is expired. The moral ground on which these commandments were given is still of use and should still be obeyed.

What Were The Judicial Laws?

Now we turn to the third division of the law, what is called the judicial or civil law. These laws could be seen as the constitution of Israel as a political body, containing things like penalties, property rights, land inheritance and possession, duties to protect the poor, orphan and widow among other things. The Judicial Law has more to do with morality than the ceremonial and that is why the Confession does not say that it was abrogated, but rather “expired”, which is a softer term. My comments on this section will be brief, as the subject of Theonomy, which is nowadays hot, is a subject that I have not studied in any serious depth, nor do I have the interest to do so at this present time. I understand though that both confessional Presbyterians and especially Reformed Baptists reject Theonomy on the basis that it goes against the Threefold Division of the Law and against this paragraph in both confessions.

Although the judicial laws expired, yet there remains a general use of them. Punishing murderers

and thieves has more morality to it than, for example, offering a sacrifice. The judicial laws contain penalties for the breaches of the moral law, or they enforce and establish morality in the land. The purpose of the judicial law specifically and the whole law of Moses generally was to display Israel's righteous system of government:

Deut. 4:8 And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

Their rules are righteous and holy, why? Because God gave them. It is not something that Moses thought up, but he merely was the mediator who communicated to the people the words of the ceremonial and judicial laws, while God Himself spoke the words of the Decalogue to the people. I know that it is difficult for the modern and natural mind to accept the righteousness of God's judicial law. The civil law of Israel required the death penalty for various moral wrongs including murder, theft, Sabbath-breaking, adultery, homosexuality, and blasphemy among other things. The death penalty was only applied to moral cases and never to ceremonial things like sacrifices or circumcision. See Matt Slick's list over at [CARM](#).

Penalties For The Breaches Of The Decalogue

The only commandment which does not have penalties prescribed to it is the tenth because that is a thing in the mind and has to do with thoughts, which the government cannot see. But when these thoughts give birth to works (e.g., idolatry, adultery, theft), then to these actions penalties were prescribed. Below is a table with each commandment and the punishment for breaking it.

The first and second commandments are very similar in nature, the first pointing that there is no other God and the second teaching us how this God is to be worshiped, therefore, the penalties are the same for both breaches and the texts for them may be used for both.

#	Commandment	Punishment
1	You shall have no other gods before Me.	Death: Ex. 22:21; Deut. 13:6-10.
2	You shall not make for yourself a carved image.	Death: the conquest of Canaan, for example. Deut. 17:2-5; Lev. 20:2, 27 [sorcerers].
3	You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.	Death: Lev. 24:14, 16, 23.
4	Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.	Death: Ex. 31:14-15; 35:2, Num. 15:32-36.
5	Honor your father and your mother	Death: Ex. 21:15, 17; Lev. 20:9; Deut. 21:18-21.
6	You shall not murder.	Death: Gen. 9:6; Ex. 21:12-14; Lev. 24:17, 21; Num. 35:16-18, 30-31; Deut. 19:13.
7	You shall not commit adultery.	Death: Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22.
8	You shall not steal.	Death or Restitution: Ex. 21:16; 22:1-3.
9	You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.	Death: Deut. 19:16-21; 13:5 [false prophets].
10	You shall not covet.	None found.

These punishments were to be meted out on the basis of the consistent and truthful testimony of two or three people:

Deut. 17:6 On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness.

Under the theocracy of Israel, where God ruled the land through the king whom He anointed and through the priesthood, or more properly, that is how it *should* have been, these sins were punishable by death because they were serious crimes in God's eyes. In fact, all sins and every sin ultimately deserves the death penalty (Rom. 6:23). However much these laws and these death penalties make us Christians uncomfortable, we should *never* think of them as unrighteous because they were actually given by God! Therefore I agree that:

First, we must remember that God has instituted capital punishment in His Word; therefore, it would be presumptuous of us to think that we could institute a higher standard. God has the highest standard of any being; He is perfect. This standard applies not only to us but to Himself. Therefore, He loves to an infinite degree, and He has mercy to an infinite degree. We also see that He has wrath to an infinite degree, and it is all maintained in a perfect balance.^[58]

It is a very improper and godless reaction to say that the death penalties prescribed by God were unrighteous. That is, in fact, to react like an unbeliever to God's laws and righteousness. It is not to fear the Lord at all when we think and speak in this way. Whatever we may think of the relevance of the judicial law today, we must never think it was unjust, otherwise, we wrong God and dishonor His name.

Expired

The reason that they expired is because of the abrogation of the Old Covenant as a whole and the destruction of the theocracy to which it was given. It is an interesting question whether the judicial law was always executed or not in the history of Israel. Even in the golden times of Solomon and with the Temple standing, idolaters were among his wives but were not executed (e.g., Deut. 13:6-11). There were times of reformation throughout Israel's history as recorded in the Old Testament, but there was never a time of perfect justice. The first big blow to the theocratic system came with the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon and the exile of the Jews around 586 B.C. After their return from exile, they began rebuilding the Temple and the old city, but their form of government was never again autonomous from man, but they were subject to Persia and later under Roman rule. Under Roman rule, the power of Israel's judicial system was even more limited since they themselves admit that they have no right of putting someone to death (John 18:31). The power of death had been taken away from them by Rome, but Gill observes on John 18:31, "as for the stoning of Stephen, and the putting of some to death against whom Saul gave his voice, these were the outrages of the zealots, and were not according to a formal process in any court of judicature."^[8]

These civil laws were given to be practiced specifically by the Israelites, although the surrounding nations did have similar laws, therefore, when the theocracy expired under which and for which these laws were given to function as a kind of constitution in the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., God put a public end to all the Old Covenant, including the ceremonial and judicial laws. Since the first covenant has passed away, all that is peculiar to the first covenant like the ceremonial and judicial law have likewise passed away.

General Equity

That the civil laws have passed away and are expired does not mean that they're irrelevant and useless. Rather, we should learn to get the moral principles from them which did not expire with the state of that people. God still abhors breaches of His commandments and I don't believe that He is displeased with those governments who carry the death penalty for murder in a just way. The New Testament nowhere calls us to seek to establish God's civil law in the land we are living in. We are told to submit to authority and obey the laws of the land (1 Pet. 2:13, 17; Rom. 13:1-7; Titus 3:1), which in many cases, would not have been the same as God's. There is one exception about this call to submission: When the laws of the land force us to do things contrary to the law of God, we must disobey the laws of the land (e.g., Acts 5:29). Otherwise, we are called to obey the laws already in place and not seek to implement the civil law given to Israel. God has given the civil government the authority of the sword (Rom. 13:4) and as Thomas Watson observes:

A magistrate ought not to let the sword of justice rust in the scabbard. As he should not let the sword be too sharp by severity, so neither should the edge of it be blunted by too much leniency [mercy].^[39]

The New Testament does not say that the death penalty is done away with nor does it say that we should implement the civil laws of God wherever we are. Rather, we are called to obey the rules of the land we're living in as far as they are in accord with God's law. Dr. Philip Ross observes:

...it is an unavoidable conclusion that rather than campaigning for Moses-inspired judicial reform, the epistles called upon Christians to submit themselves to nation laws that were not patterned on the judicial laws of Israel.^[59]

Something Greater Than The Death Penalty

Rather than soften the penalty for sin, in the New Testament, the *clearer* revelation is given of punishment after death. For example, in Hebrews 10:28-29, an argument is made by the Author from the lesser to the greater. He says, under the Old Covenant, which has passed away, the person who has set aside the law of Moses or disregards Moses' law is put to death. The sentence of death is brought upon the transgressor. He is put to death physically. But now the Author, after giving the example of the *lesser* moves to the greater:

29 **How much worse punishment** do you think one will deserve who has trampled on the Son of God, regarded as profane the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

What is worse than physical death? The second death—eternal ruin and misery. The earthly and physical penalties are no longer binding, but that does not mean that God changed His morality. It only means that God will wait a little longer for the execution of His perfect justice. In these examples, which we see in Hebrews (e.g., Heb. 2:1-4; 10:28-29), we are warned on the basis of earthly penalties of the former covenant, of the greater penalties of the one who despises Christ and His covenant.

1 Corinthians 9:7-10 And General Equity

1 Cor. 9:7-10 Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? 8 Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.” **Is it for oxen that God is concerned?** 10 **Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake,** because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop.

Paul here cites a civil law (Deut. 25:4) concerning animals and gets the principle behind the law and that is, a person should be paid his due. Not many of us have oxen, but we understand the *principle* and basic idea of this passage. Even in the time of the New Testament, the apostle applies this passage, not to animals, but man. In fact, he says that God had ultimately man in mind when He gave this commandment. Paul uses Deuteronomy 25:4 in 1 Timothy 5:18 in the same way and applies it to wages, citing Luke 10:7 with it!

1 Corinthians 5:13 And General Equity

The last example comes from Brandon Adam’s article [1 Cor. 5:13 is the general equity of Deut. 22:21](#).

Deut. 22:20-22 But if the thing is true, that evidence of virginity was not found in the young woman, 21 then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father’s house, and the men of her city shall **stone her to death with stones**, because she has done an outrageous thing in Israel by whoring in her father’s house. So you shall **purge the evil from your midst**. 22 “If a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman. **So you shall purge the evil from Israel.**

1 Cor. 5:9-13 I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with **sexually immoral people**— 10 not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who **bears the name of brother** if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 12 For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those **inside the church whom you are to judge?** 13 **God judges those outside.** **“Purge the evil person from among you.”**

Brandon Adams writes:

Rather than civil enforcement being carried over to the New Testament, what we see is civil enforcement (typological) being replaced with church enforcement (antitype). To state the title of this post more accurately: 1 Cor 5:13 is the New Covenant application of the general equity of Deut 22:21.

This is very simple. Instead of Paul calling the death penalty upon the adulterer or directing his

words to the government, he gets at the heart and points to the command in Deuteronomy. When Paul says, "Purge the evil person from among you" he does not mean the same thing as Moses did. Moses meant the death penalty, while the New Covenant application of that Old Covenant command/principle outside of the theocracy of Israel is excommunication. The church is given charge over those who bear the name of brother or sister. The church is to discipline those in her charge. The church is to punish those who are unrepentant, not by death, but by excommunication. They would choose to no longer associate with anyone who lives in sin. "Those outside" are the world of the ungodly. God will deal with them. The church is to do nothing to them. The church is not to persecute or kill them, but rather, God will deal with them. They are not under the authority of the church, so the church cannot excommunicate them.

From this passage, we learn that generally, many laws which required the death penalty under the civil law of theocratic Israel, are interpreted under the New Covenant in terms of excommunication. The phraseology of purging the evil is used concerning:

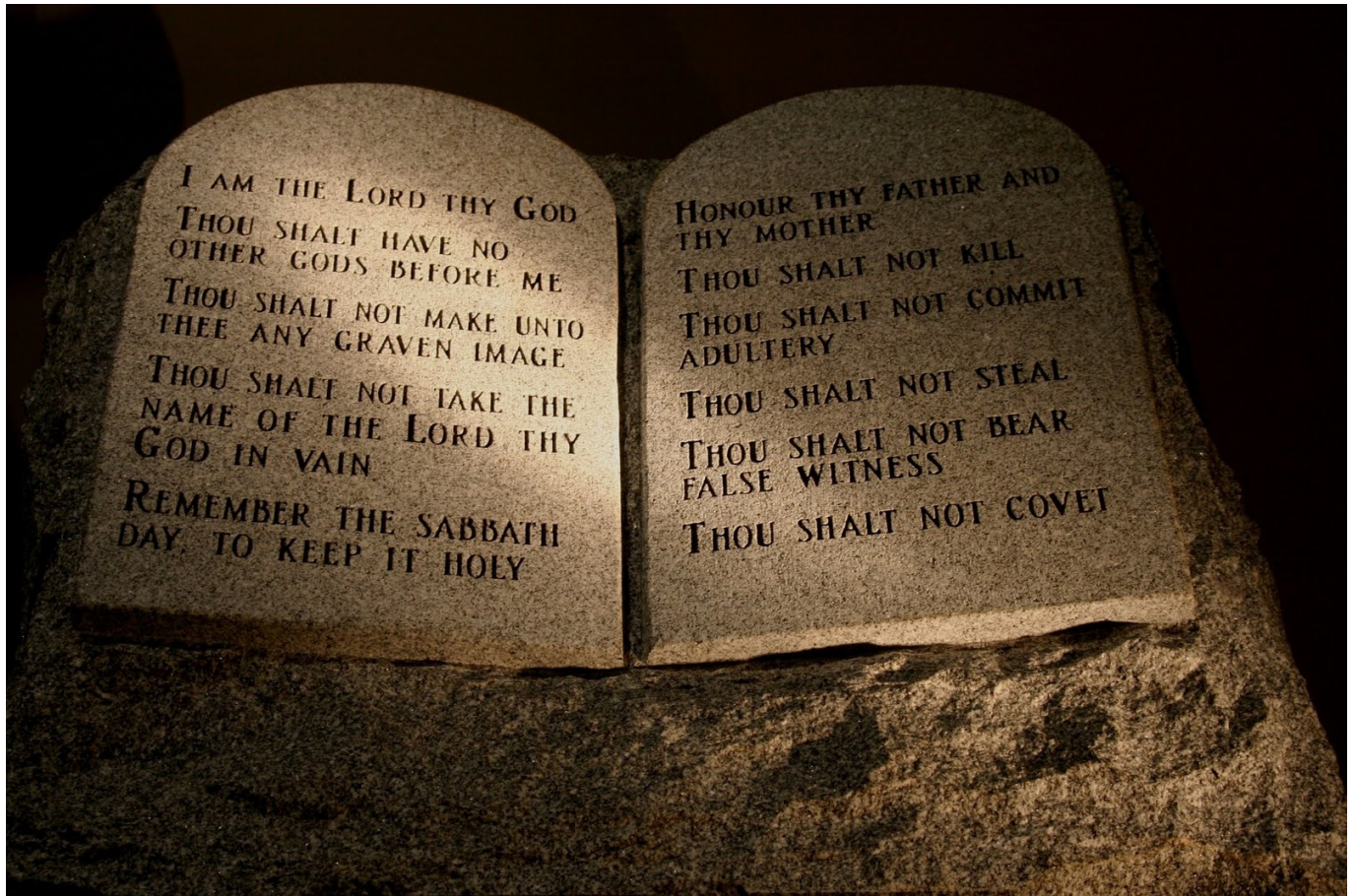
- false prophets (Deut. 13:5);
- idolaters (Deut. 17:2-7);
- the one disobedient to the priest or the judge (Deut. 17:12);
- a false witness (Deut. 19:19);
- a stubborn and rebellious son (Deut. 21:18-21);
- a girl who is not a virgin (Deut. 22:20-21);
- a man and a woman committing adultery (Deut. 22:22);
- a betrothed virgin and a man who had sexual intercourse (Deut. 22:23-24);
- a man who steals and sells one of his people (Deut. 24:7).

The power given to the church by God is not to execute people, but to excommunicate those unwilling to repent and to be disciplined. We can easily see excommunication being a disciplinary measure regarding those things listed above.

Conclusion On The Judicial Laws

Though the judicial law, as part of the Mosaic Covenant, has passed away, yet the general truth and moral use of the civil law was not abrogated. Christians are not called to establish theocracies on this earth, but rather they are called to obey the laws of the land and not to rebel unless forced to do things contrary to God's law. The greatest power given to the church is not the death penalty, but excommunication and discipline. Concerning those that are outside, Scripture says that God will deal with them and therefore, the church has no authority over them. Rather, the church has only authority over its members.

§5 The Moral Law Doth For Ever Bind All



5. The **moral law doth for ever bind all**, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, **1** and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of **the authority of God the Creator**, who gave it; **2 neither doth Christ in the Gospel any way dissolve**, but much strengthen this obligation. **3**

1. Matt. 19:16-22; Rom. 2:14-15; 3:19-20; 6:14; 7:6; 8:3; 1 Tim. 1:8-11; Rom. 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 7:19 with Gal. 5:6; 6:15; Eph. 4:25-6:4; James 2:11-12
2. James 2:10-11
3. Matt. 5:17-19; Rom. 3:31; 1 Cor. 9:21; James 2:8

The moral law which was given and written in the heart of man **doth for ever bind all** (Rom. 2:14-15). God does not require **obedience** only from **justified persons** (Rom. 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 7:19; Eph. 4:25-6:4), but also of **others** (1 Tim. 1:8-11). The obedience to the law is not meant to be so that people only obey them because they are good and right, but more importantly **in respect of the authority of God the Creator**. They are to be obeyed because they were given by the Creator and obedience to these commandments is obedience to **God the Creator**. This same **moral law**, which was written in the heart and later given in the Ten Commandments. **Christ in the Gospel** does not in **any way dissolve**, rather, He **strengthens** (Matt. 5:17-19; Rom. 3:31) this obligation by clarifying what the law means and what it requires.

The Moral Law Doth For Ever Bind The Unbeliever

It is clear from Romans 2:14-16 ([see above](#)) that the law of God is written even upon the heart of the unbelieving man and he will be judged according to it on the day when "God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus" (Rom. 2:16). It is obvious that God commands and demands that even unbelievers believe in Him and obey Him. Most of all, His command to them is: repent and believe,

otherwise you will perish (Acts 17:30-31; Luke 13:3, 5). He is their Creator and can demand from them their obedience and love. They owe it to Him as creatures in covenant with Him through Adam (Rom. 1:21-23). They will all be judged by Him, which implies that they were under His law and they had knowledge of this law. Romans 1:32 teaches us that not only unbelievers know the moral law of God, but they also know its righteous punishment.

The Moral Law Doth For Ever Bind The Believer

More than the Creator, Christians know God as their Father and Redeemer, therefore, their obligation of obedience to Him is even greater than the unbelievers'. Not only that, but the Bible also calls God's people to obey God! The simple question here is: Does God require and desire the obedience of His people? The answer is obvious. Over and over again we are called to obey God, although in many instances the Ten Commandments are not named, yet we understand that all moral laws are dependent upon the Decalogue, which is the summary of the moral law.

The Lord gave His law to Israel: moral, ceremonial and civil after by grace redeeming them from Egypt. The Lord gave His Ten Commandments to Israel by first reminding them of His work of redemption among them. He did not give it to them so that they would be redeemed, but He gave the Decalogue to Israel because they were redeemed. He gave it as a rule of life (see e.g., Deut. 7:6-11) and a way to obtain and remain under His blessing under the Mosaic economy of works (which is different in *substance* from the New Covenant, see [chapter 7](#) on the New Covenant and its nature). He gave it so that His people would learn to live as redeemed people, in obedience to God. The same is true for the Christian and the New Covenant. The moral law is not written on the heart for the purpose so that we would be saved, but that we live as people who *have* been saved. The moral law teaches us about what God requires of us and how He desires that we live in a God-fearing and honoring way. The moral law is not a covenant of works for the believer to earn God's favor, but it shows us what God requires of us now that we belong to Him and how we can display our love to Him. By the *Moral Law*, I refer here to the commandments to obey God not in things ceremonial or civil, but things pertaining to the Ten Commandments, which are summarized by our Lord as 1) loving God and 2) loving our neighbor. That our Lord summarizes the Ten Commandments in two love commandments, does not mean that He gave a new law, but it means that the purpose of the Decalogue is to show love to God and man. His summarizing the ten in two in no way abrogates or removes the Ten Commandments. As Joseph Pipa observes, "Should we not reason that if the summary is morally binding, that which it summarizes is morally binding as well?"^[60] The two commandments summarize the purpose of the law for believers and tells them what obedience to the law should display, namely—love for God and our neighbor. As to the question of "how", we are sent to the Ten Commandments to learn the summary of our duty to God and man. [See here](#) for my comments on the summary passage of the law.

I want to conduct a brief survey concerning the perpetual validity of the law for the believer in the New Covenant. I will start with a couple of Old Testament prophecies concerning the New Covenant and then move on to some passages from the New Testament.

The Moral Law in Old Testament Prophecy

What do the Old Testament prophecies of the New Covenant say concerning the believer's relationship to the law? We will look to Jeremiah and Ezekiel where the great promises of the New Covenant are given in the Old Testament.

Jeremiah 31:33

Jer. 31:33 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: **I will put my law within them**, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

This is a passage that I've discussed in various chapters, but here I will limit my discussion to the identification of the "law" which will be written on the hearts of New Covenant believers. What is this law? Is it the whole Mosaic moral, ceremonial and civil law, or the moral law specifically? I believe the latter to be the case. To prove that this is the case we need to examine Jeremiah's use of the phrase "my law." The phrase occurs in Jeremiah 6:19; 9:13; 16:11; 24:6; 44:10 and in each the context implies that something other than the ceremonial or civil law is in view.

In **Jeremiah 6:19**, judgment is announced against the faithless covenant people, because they have rejected God's law ("my law"), although God says in v. 20 that He does not desire their offerings and sacrifices. Therefore, "my law" which they have rejected must be the moral law and not the ceremonial law which contains the commandments about offerings and sacrifices. In **Jeremiah 9:13**, the Lord complains that His people have forsaken His law ("my law") which He had set before them and neither have they obeyed His voice or walked according to His law. What law is He talking about? It is the Decalogue which He is talking about and specifically the first commandment, for v. 14 goes on to say that the people "have gone after the Baals". This idolatry was the basis of their judgment and exile, not breaking some ceremonial law, rather the breaking and rejecting of the moral law. In **Jeremiah 16:11**, we are given the reason why the people will go into exile and receive the judgment of God. They have evil pronounced against them because they "have not kept my law". What law might God be talking about here? The Lord says that Israel has "gone after other gods and have served and worshiped them" which is the breaking of the first and second commandments. Again, as in Jeremiah 9:13, Israel is judged because of their disobedience to the moral law. In **Jeremiah 26**, the prophet brings a word of warning and of repentance to the rebellious people. The Lord warns them "If you will not listen to me, to walk in my law that I have set before you" (Jer. 26:4) then it will go bad for the people. What law might the Lord be talking about here? When people are in idolatry, what they are breaking is the first table of the Decalogue. It is useless to call them to observe the civil or ceremonial law if they are constantly breaking the moral. They are producing evil deeds and are called by God to repentance. The people are to mend their ways and their deeds and "obey the voice of the LORD" (Jer. 26:13), which is the basic summary of the Decalogue where we learn how we are to obey God. The last reference comes in **Jeremiah 44:10**. The chapter begins by reminding the people who have escaped to Egypt why God brought judgment upon Jerusalem. The reason given is not because they failed to make the sacrifices at the temple, or ate food which was unclean, or were themselves ritually unclean, but "because of the evil that they committed, provoking me to anger, in that they went to make offerings and serve other gods that they knew not" (Jer. 44:3). In the next verse, the ministries of the prophets are summarized in calling the Old Covenant people of God away from idolatry because it is an abomination that the Lord hates. It is because of the idolatry of the people that God's wrath and anger were poured out on the people (Jer. 44:5-6). After reminding those who escaped to Egypt of His judgment against Jerusalem, now the Lord warns the people in Egypt who have strayed after other gods and the true God calls on them to remember what He did to the idolatrous people of Judah (Jer. 44:8-9). It is after this that the Lord declares, "They have not humbled themselves even to this day, nor have they feared, nor walked in my law and my statutes that I set before you and before your fathers" (Jer. 44:10). What laws might God be talking about here but the Decalogue, specifically, the first table which they have broken! Therefore, God's judgment will even come upon the idolatrous people of Israel in Egypt (Jer. 44:11-14)!

Dr. Richard Barcellos summarizes the six uses of the phrase "my law" in Jeremiah:

In these contexts, it is described as something that can be heard, something that was set before the Old Covenant people of God, something that is equated with God's voice, something that can be broken, something that when broken is considered as forsaking God and committing idolatry, something that can be listened to, something that can be transgressed, something that will be written on the heart, and something that was set before the fathers. It is very clear that Jeremiah is referring to an objective standard of known and expected conduct when he uses the phrase "My law."^[61]

Consistent all throughout Jeremiah the phrase "my law" never refers to anything other than the moral law, which is summarized in the Decalogue. But that is not the only reason why we believe that the Decalogue is being spoken of here. The second reason is even stronger, namely, the passage speaks of a law *written* by God. Hmm...What law did God ever write? The obvious answer is: the Decalogue, which He first spoke to all the people of Israel from Mt. Sinai and secondly He gave them the two tablets of stone on which He with His own finger wrote the Ten Commandments (Ex. 24:12; 31:18; Deut. 5:22; etc.). In contrast, the ceremonial and civil laws were undoubtedly given by God, but not to the people directly, but through the agency of Moses. Only the Ten Commandments were uttered by God's own voice and subsequently written in tablets of stone by His own finger to signify their utter importance to God.

The promise of Jeremiah 31:33 is that God will write His law, namely, the Ten Commandments (which are the only commandments that He wrote) not upon tablets of stone, but upon "tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor. 3:3). The law is not different, but only the location is different. It is no longer upon tablets of stone which are far away, but upon our very hearts, near and dear to us. The Ten Commandments are upon the hearts of all true believers because God has written them upon our hearts through His Spirit so that we would walk in His ways.

The careful student will now notice that Romans 2:14-15 claims that all have the law written on their hearts, which I understand to refer to the moral law ([see above](#)), but then how is this promise any different? It is different because this is given as a part and promise of the New Covenant. It is different because the law is written anew in our hearts and not left stained and corrupted by sin as it was prior to regeneration. It is written on our hearts and the ability to truly obey is given, which is not present with those who do not have the Spirit of God (Rom. 8:7-9). Those who have the law upon their hearts in the manner of Jeremiah 31 have God as their personal God and they are His treasured possession, while this is not the case with those who have the work of the law on their conscience or in their heart in the manner of Romans 2:15. The promise of the New Covenant not only gives the law upon the heart but also the promise that God Himself will cause us to obey His holy law.

I believe that this is sufficient proof that the Decalogue under the New Covenant will not pass away. In fact, it is reinforced and nothing in the New Testament would lead us to doubt that the whole Decalogue is, in fact, written on the hearts of all true believers and they are by God's grace made able to obey the Ten Commandments from the heart. This passage is taken up in Hebrews in two places (Heb. 8:10; 10:16) and nothing in either place would lead us to the idea that the law, which is clearly the Decalogue, is not written on the hearts of God's people, or that only nine commandments are written on our hearts (excluding the fourth commandment concerning God's Sabbath). Although the book of Hebrews clearly says that the New Covenant and Old Covenant cannot mix, yet the author shows no concern when he cites this passage. The law of the Decalogue is written upon the hearts of God's New Covenant people. This law is the summary of the moral law which is part of what it means to be in the *Imago Dei*.

In 2 Corinthians 3, the apostle Paul alludes to this passage, saying that Christians are a letter from Christ, who are not written with ink, but by the Spirit, "not on tablets of stone but on tablets of

human hearts” (2 Cor. 3:3). Here, the apostle is undoubtedly thinking of the New Covenant promise in Jeremiah 31:31-34. He contrasts the “letter” written with ink on tablets of stone, which refers to the Decalogue on tablets of stone, with the “letter” written by the Spirit of the living God on tablets of human hearts. The law is written in such a way on our hearts that it becomes part of our identity. The way we live—loving God and loving our neighbor, shows to others, as if we were a letter, that we seek to please God in obedience to His law. Paul does not need “letters of recommendation” because the Corinthians are his letters of commendation, whose spiritual father he is (1 Cor. 4:15), by the fruit they produce and by the way they live.

Therefore, this passage teaches the abiding validity of the Decalogue for the Christians, which is written not on stone, but on the hearts of God’s people as part of the New Covenant promise.

Ezekiel 36:25-27

Ezek. 36:25-27 I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. 26 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 And I will put my Spirit within you, and **cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.**

This is a promise which is dear to my heart because of my sinfulness. Here, I find comfort that God, through His Spirit, will lead me on His path to walk in His statutes and rules. This passage should be read together with Jeremiah 31:31-34 as a complementary promise of the New Covenant. The imagery of stone and heart are likewise here present as they were in 2 Corinthians 3, which alludes to the promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34. God will give us a new heart. Not only does He write His law on our heart, but He actually gives us a new heart in regeneration on *which* He writes His holy moral law. He renews and recreates us spiritually. He not only gives a new heart and a new spirit but gives us *His* Spirit. The Holy Spirit within us is Who causes us to obey God, not we ourselves. It is the giving of the Spirit which is connected with obedience to God’s statutes and rules which He has, according to Jeremiah, written on our hearts and minds. God has not only written His law upon our hearts, but it is He Himself Who supplies us with His Spirit, through Whom He has written the law upon our hearts so that we would walk in His law and be able to obey from the heart! Thank You, Lord!

John Gill sweetly explains v. 27:

And I will put my Spirit within you,.... My Holy Spirit, as the Targum; the Spirit of holiness; the author of internal sanctification, of the new heart and spirit, and of the fleshy one before mentioned; and through whose grace and strength the saints do what is after said they shall do:

and cause you to walk in my statutes: men are first made alive by the Spirit of God, and have spiritual strength put into them, who of themselves can do nothing; by means of which they are enabled to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, and to continue in the observation of them; which walking in them supposes:

and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them; being constrained by the love of God; influenced by the grace of Christ; and strengthened by the blessed Spirit: and such persons observe and do them willingly and cheerfully; from a principle of love; in faith, and to the glory of God; without any mercenary and selfish views; without trusting to,

and depending upon, what is done for salvation.^[8]

Christ Does Not Dissolve, But Strengthens Our Obligation To Obey

The Confession claims that Sola Fide and Sola Gratia are, in fact, compatible with law-keeping. Contrary to the claim of some, Christ did not free us from obedience to the moral law but rather strengthened our obligation to render obedience. How exactly did Christ do that? Central to this discussion is Matthew 5:17-19, to which we turn our attention now.

Matthew 5:17-19

Matt. 5:15-17 “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; **I have not come to abolish** them **but to fulfill** them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until **all is accomplished**. 19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

What Are The Law Or The Prophets?

Either anticipating what He will teach or on the basis of what He had taught before delivering the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord Christ warns His listeners not to think that He has come to nullify the Old Testament Scriptures, but rather to fulfill them. Crucial to this text is the understanding of the word “fulfill”, which we will turn our attention to in a few moments. But first, let us identify what is meant by “the Law and the Prophets.”

I believe that the phrase refers to the Old Testament as a whole and not to the Decalogue or the Law of Moses particularly. The phrase occurs in Matt 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; 23:2; Luke 16:16; John 1:45; Acts 13:15; 24:14; 28:23; Rom 3:21. The clearest proof that this refers to the Old Testament is I believe in Luke 16:16 where Abraham says to the man in Hades that his family has “[T]he Law and the Prophets”, meaning that they have the Word of God in their hands. Or, what Paul testifies before Felix that he believes “everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets” (Luke 24:14), by which he means that he believes the whole Bible (as he knew it, before the completion of the NT).

What is meant then by “the Law” in v. 18? I believe that the Old Testament is still in view, for the word or category “Law” is used in the New Testament for more than only the Pentateuch. For example, the Lord referring to Psalm 82:2 says, “Is it not written in your Law” (John 10:34). The Lord again quotes from the Psalms (35:19) by prefacing it with “the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled” (John 15:25). And 1 Corinthians 14:21 quotes Isaiah 28:11-12 says, “In the Law it is written”. In these instances, we see the word or category “Law” being used as a reference to all the holy writings which we know as the Old Testament and not merely to the Pentateuch. Seeing therefore that the word “Law” in v. 18 and the phrase “the Law or the Prophets” in v. 17 refer to the same thing, i.e., the Old Testament Scriptures, I see no reason to think that the subject of fulfillment changes from v. 17 to v. 18. What Christ will fulfill and what must be accomplished are the Old Testament Scriptures.

Jesus came not to destroy or do away with the authority, prophecies or requirement of the Old Testament, but to fulfill it. Now we turn our attention to what it means to *fulfill* the Old Testament Scriptures.

What Does The Word Destroy And Fulfill Mean?

Whatever the word *fulfill* means, it cannot mean *abolish* or make useless, for that is directly contradictory to what Christ expresses He will *not* do! To understand what *fulfill* means we must understand what the word *abolish* means. The Greek word καταλύω (*kataluo*, G2647) means “to nullify, abrogate, Mt. 5:17; Acts 5:38, 39”^[62] and “to loosen down”, “to demolish”.^[63] Christ our Lord did not come to destroy, annul or nullify what came before Him, but rather to fulfill it. Therefore, whatever the word “fulfill” means in v. 17, it cannot mean what *kataluo* means.

The word for fulfill, πληρόω (*pleroo*, G4137), in its various forms is used 90 times in the New Testament and has multiple meanings. The word in its various forms is used 16 times by the apostle Matthew, and in **twelve** instances it clearly refers to Old Testament prophecy being fulfilled (Matt. 1:22; 2:15, 17, 23; 4:14; 8:17; 12:17; 13:35; 21:4; 26:54, 56; 27:9), in **two** instances (Matt. 13:48; 23:32) it does not refer to anything prophetic and the last **two** instances (Matt. 3:15; 5:17) are debatable where the identical form is used, πληρῶσαι (*plerosai*; aorist tense, active voice and infinitive mood).

In Matthew 3:15, Jesus fulfilled “all righteousness” by submitting to the ordinance of God given to John, not because He was a sinner, but by identifying with the sinful people He came to save and to initiate His ministry. He fulfilled all righteousness by obeying God in all of His ordinances and commands. An interesting point that I’ve learned from Dr. Philip Ross’ book, *the Finger of God*, is that perhaps the often thought background of the Father’s declaration (v. 17), comes not from Psalm 2:7, but elsewhere. He writes concerning Jeffery Gibbs argument:

He [Jeffery Gibbs] argues instead that, along with Isaiah 42:1, Jeremiah 38:20 (LXX) is the background: ‘Ephraim is a beloved son to me’, so that Matthew is not portraying Jesus as Servant and King, but as Servant and Israel. After chapters 1-2, Matthew’s narrative ‘emphasizes other Christological themes, most notably that the infant Jesus is the antitype or recapitulation of Israel as a whole (Matt 2:15)’, and Psalm 2 does not include the ‘beloved’ found in Matthew’s expression or speak in the third person. Furthermore, in Jeremiah 38:20 (LXX), the verbal agreement with υἱός ἀγαπητός (beloved son) is ‘precise’...Thus ‘Matthew presents Jesus at his baptism as God’s son, the “embodiment” of Israel, God’s son.’^[64]

Christ fulfills all righteousness by obeying everything that God commanded His people through John concerning baptism. Not that He needed repentance, but because He was representing His people, He likewise had to do the things that they were commanded to do. Therefore, I believe that this passage, along with the other non-disputable uses of *pleroo* refer to fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Now we turn our attention to Matthew 5:17.

Joseph Thayer understands the use of *pleroo* in this passage to mean:

universally and absolutely, **to fulfil**, i. e. “to cause God’s will (as made known in the law) to be obeyed as it should be, and God’s promises (given through the prophets) to receive fulfillment”: Matthew 5:17;^[65]

The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament says the following on the use of *pleroo* in Matt 5:17:

In Mt. 5:17 (b) the idea is not simply that of validating the law as distinct from abolishing it. The goal of Jesus' mission is fulfilment. He does not simply affirm the law and the prophets but actualizes the will of God that is declared in them from the standpoint of both promise and demand. An example of such fulfilment may be seen already in Mt. 3:15.^[66]

The key to understanding how Christ fulfills the Law and the Prophets is to understand His fulfillment in light of Old Testament prophecy and demands. The Lord Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets:

1. In His person and teaching;
2. By His obedience; and
3. In all that he does to actualize these in His followers.

First) The Lord, as prophesied in Isaiah 42:21, was pleased "to magnify his law and make it glorious." This is exactly what Christ does in the rest of the Sermon on the Mount. He does not *add* to the moral law of the Old Testament, for all things that He discusses are moral, and not ceremonial issues (e.g., murder, adultery, divorce, oaths, doing good, loving one's enemies, etc...), but He gives an exposition of the moral law. He, as *the* Lawgiver, gives the right and proper interpretation of His moral law as summarized in the Decalogue. Throughout His discussion, the Lord does not refer to some quotation from the Old Testament in the usual formula of "it is written", but by "you have heard it was said..." and that, I believe for the purpose to distinguish from what the Word of God *actually said* and what was the *interpretation* of the Rabbis of that law. [See above our brief exposition of the Decalogue](#) and especially the sixth and seventh commandments in the New Testament where I discuss Christ's words in the Sermon on the Mount. Christ does not say anything negative about the Law of God and neither does He say anything against the Sabbath commandment. He actually strengthens the Law as our Confession states by teaching and in Himself setting an example of a law-keeping Servant of God. Ernest Reisinger observes concerning Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount:

If Jesus is not opposing the law itself in this sermon, then what problem is He addressing? A very crucial recurring phrase in Matthew 5:21-44 is the words, 'You have heard that it was said' or "it has been said," to which Jesus responds, 'But I say...' (see vv. 21-22; 27-28; 31-32; 33-34; 38-39; 43-44). Notice, the passage does not first say "the commandments say." It does not contrast what the law says with what Jesus says. It contrasts what "you have heard" with what "I say."

Jesus is contrasting the prevalent, erroneous teaching on the law with His true, full understanding of it. Where have the people heard what they have been wrongly taught? They have heard it from religious leaders who are preoccupied with minute details and outward actions, at the expense of central principles, inner motives, and true spirituality.^[67]

Second) Christ obeys the Law and the Prophets by being the subject to its curses and demands for His people. Christ became the curse of the law for us (Gal 3:13). He received what we should have received. He was the fulfillment of all the sacrificial types. He was the Lamb of God *par excellence*. He was what all the sacrifices and the Temple types pointed to and in His person, they find their fulfillment.

Third) Lastly, He accomplishes and fulfills God's Law and what is written in the Old Testament in His disciples. As Thayer said, He causes "God's will (as made known in the law) to be obeyed as it should be, and God's promises (given through the prophets) to receive fulfillment".^[65] Through His life, death, and resurrection, Christ the Risen Lord brings to pass and will bring to pass all that is written in the Old Testament concerning Him and His people. Crucial to this aspect of Christ's fulfillment is He is what New Covenant believers ought to be. It is important in this aspect to see the New Covenant promise of Jeremiah 31:31-34 as central. He brings this promise of the New Covenant in His people by His life, death, and resurrection, but also by the fact that He, in fact, is what this promise points to. Christ is the true Israel, Christ is the One Who has the Law of God written on His heart and obeyed it perfectly to every jot and tittle and Christ is the One Who has perfect knowledge of His Father. It has pleased God to make wretched sinners like His one and only Son by working in them all that is necessary to make them like Him. For further discussion on this point see Dr. Ross, *the Finger of God*, pp. 203-215.

A.W. Pink summarizes these three meanings:

If we take "fulfil" here in its widest scope, then we gladly avail ourselves of the compound definition of W. Perkins. First, Christ fulfilled the Law by His *doctrine*: both by restoring to it its proper meaning and true use, and by revealing the right way in which the Law may be fulfilled. Second, in His *person*: both by performing perfect and perpetual obedience unto its precepts, and by suffering its penalty, enduring death upon the Cross for His people. Third, in *men*: in the elect by imparting faith to their hearts, so that they lay hold of Christ who fulfilled it for them, and by giving them His own Spirit which imparts to them a love for the Law and sets them on endeavoring to obey it; in the reprobate when He executes the curse of the Law upon them.^[68]

Therefore, to conclude on the meaning of this fulfillment, Dr. Ross says:

"His fulfillment is eschatological, soteriological, and moral—he brings salvation to Israel that will culminate in a new world (Matt. 19:28); he is Jesus, who will 'save his people from their sins' (Matt. 1:21); unlike Israel, this son will not fall in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-17; cf. Ps. 78:17, 40) and he demands moral integrity from his followers (Matt. 5:20).^[69]

Therefore, Everything In The Old Testament Is Binding?

Matt. 5:18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, **not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law** until all is accomplished.

Matthew 5:18 enforces what was said in v. 17, "any notion of fulfillment that involves abolition becomes doubly untenable."^[70] Our Lord declares that it will be easier for the Universe to pass away than even the smallest detail of the Old Testament to pass away *before* it is accomplished. There will be indeed a time when all the Old Testament will be accomplished, but it is not now. I understand the word "accomplish" to have the same meaning as "fulfill" in v. 17, and the same goes for the word "Law" to be a reference to all the Old Testament and not particularly the Pentateuch. In fact, the Greek word for accomplish, γίνομαι (*ginomai*, G1096), which basically means "to cause to be"^[71] is used four times with *pleroo* in Matthew (Matt 1:22; 21:4; 26:54; 26:56).

If v. 17 teaches the abiding validity of all the Old Testament and the non-abrogation of the Old Testament as a whole, then how does the Confession state in paragraph 3 that the ceremonial laws were abrogated and in paragraph 4 that the judicial laws were expired? Does this not go against Matthew 5:17-18? That would only be the case if both the ceremonial and judicial laws of the Old Testament were of an eternal and ever-binding nature. But this is not the case. I have already tried to show how the ceremonial laws were seen to be types of the Messiah and had their fulfillment in Him and therefore, they were abrogated ([paragraph 3](#)). Concerning the civil law of Israel, that law was given only to Israel to be a kind of constitution and a law of justice for it and it was binding as long as Israel was a theocracy ([paragraph 4](#)). When Israel was destroyed first by Babylon and later by Rome, the civil law expired, though not in the same way as the ceremonial, because man should still obey “general equity” of the judicial law.

The ceremonial laws were by nature temporary as they were shadows and types, therefore, a contradiction would be seen only on the supposition that they were meant to be ever-lasting and ever-binding, but, in fact, they were not. Likewise the judicial law. It was meant to be practiced by Israel in the land as long as they were a theocracy, but since the nation of Israel was destroyed by Rome and judged by God it is no longer binding. Add to that, the whole Mosaic Covenant of which the ceremonial and civil laws were a part. The moral law being ever-binding and the rule of righteousness even before Sinai. On Sinai, it was merely revealed in *words*, but it was not something new. The manner of revelation was different. Prior to Sinai it was written on the heart of every human being ([see Romans 2 above](#)).

Not only on the basis of the nature of the ceremonial and civil law, but we have direct statements in the New Testament that the ceremonial law was done away with (Col 2:16-17; Mark 7:19; Heb 8:5; [see paragraph 3](#)). See also [paragraph 4](#) about how the civil law is applied in the New Covenant.

On the contrary, Christ the Lord never and nowhere teaches the abrogation of the moral law in the Decalogue, but rather, even in Matthew 5, strengthens the moral law. How? By giving the proper interpretation of *His* law. It is He Who gave Israel the Ten Commandments. He is God. He is Yahweh. The Decalogue is Christ’s Law. It is He alone, Who is the Lawgiver, Who can give the proper interpretation of His Decalogue.

An example of a law that was temporary in jurisdiction is the law concerning manna-gathering in Exodus 16. Dr. Ross writes:

Although embedded in the Mosaic Law, the manna laws are of temporary jurisdiction. Exodus 16:35 records Moses as saying, “This is what the LORD has commanded: “Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generation, so that may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.”...The command to preserve an omer revealed that the manna would not be a perpetual provision (as Exodus 16:35 records) and the specific gathering laws were therefore limited in their validity by the law itself.^[72]

Although this is all true, yet this does not mean that the law concerning manna-gathering became as nothing to Israel, but rather it taught them the lesson that “that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD” (Deut. 8:3).

Such laws, ceremonial and civil, remain in the corpus of the Old Testament and their ongoing relevance is by way of memorial and foretold. When we look, for example, at the Old Testament laws concerning sacrifice, we look at them by the realization that Christ was the goal of all these

laws. These laws pointed to and shadowed Christ's work. They are not binding because they were fulfilled in and abrogated by Christ. Their continuing relevance is in pointing us to Christ and showing how Christ actually fulfilled them in the New Testament. Observe what Calvin says on v. 17:

With respect to ceremonies, there is some appearance of a change having taken place; but it was only the use of them that was abolished, for their meaning was more fully confirmed. The coming of Christ has taken nothing away even from ceremonies, but, on the contrary, confirms them by exhibiting the truth of shadows: for, when we see their full effect, we acknowledge that they are not vain or useless.^[7]

Therefore, Dr. Ross concludes:

There is no incompatibility between Matthew 5:18 and the confessional language of abrogation, so long as abrogation is defined by the 'built-in obsolescence' and temporal jurisdiction written into parts of the Mosaic Law.^[73]

Abrogation becomes part of what it means for the non-moral laws to be fulfilled and accomplished. They are no longer binding, though they serve a memorial function and in them we see Christ shadowed.

The Least And The Greatest

Matt. 5:19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the **least of these commandments** and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Whoever "relaxes" (ESV), "breaks" (HCSB) or "sets aside" (ISV) any of the *least* commandments shall be called least. This is probably a reference to the Pharisaic distinction between the weightier and lesser matters of the Law (Matt 23:23). Jesus' disciples are to be law-keepers and law-teachers. Teaching the whole counsel of God without neglecting certain things, but teaching the whole Word of God authoritatively. Yet His disciples must follow and teach the law in the way it was intended to be taught and followed. As we discussed above, the ceremonial and civil laws were *meant* and *designed* to be temporary and therefore, these have passed away and their application under the New Covenant is different. While the moral law, which the Lord will go on to teach in the following verses is the ever-binding rule of righteousness. In this connection, the teaching and righteousness of Jesus' disciples will exceed the Pharisees because the emphasis will be on the moral aspect of the law over against the cultic aspects.

Concerning v. 20, a commentary notes:

The superiority to the Pharisaic righteousness here required is plainly in *kind*, not *degree*; for all Scripture teaches that entrance into God's kingdom, whether in its present or future stage, depends, not on the degree of our excellence in anything, but solely on our having the character itself which God demands. Our righteousness, then—if it is to contrast with the *outward* and *formal* righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees—must be *inward*, *vital*, *spiritual*. Some, indeed, of the scribes and Pharisees

themselves might have the very righteousness here demanded; but our Lord is speaking, not of persons, but of the *system* they represented and taught.^[74]

Conclusion

In this passage, our Lord teaches the abiding validity of all the Old Testament. He will fulfill its demands and promises in His own person, by His obedience and work those benefits in His people.

There is no contradiction between the language of abrogation and expiration of the ceremonial and civil laws and what Christ says concerning the Law (v. 18) because these laws were by design to be temporary, unlike the moral law of the Decalogue which is written on the hearts of all men and especially and anew in hearts of the elect ([see Jeremiah 31:33 above](#)).

This passage teaches the abiding validity of the moral law by teaching that Christ is the fulfillment and not the abrogation of the Old Testament. The moral law is ever-binding and is not abrogated, in fact, our Lord goes on to explain it more fully in what follows in Matthew 5.

The Moral Law in John

Commandments and obedience is a central theme in John's writings. We read a lot of keeping God's commandments in his gospel and epistles. Let's take a look at a few examples.

John 13:34 - A New Commandment

John 13:34-35 **A new commandment** I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, **you also are to love one another**. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Love is the summary, point, and fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:8; Gal 5:14). But what does our Lord mean by "a new commandment"? Does He mean that the Old Testament did not command people to love each other? What does this "newness" consist of?

I believe the newness of this commandment consist in that believers should love *as* Jesus has loved them. That they should have loved their neighbor was known (e.g., Lev 19:18) and old (1 John 2:7; 2 John 1:5). But the newness of this commandment is that they should follow Christ's pattern. That they should love as He loved, even to the point of death. Christ declares:

John 15:12-14 "This is my commandment, that you **love one another as I have loved you**. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that **someone lay down his life for his friends**. 14 You are my friends **if you do what I command you**.

The commandment is not to merely to love one another as the family of God but to love as Jesus loved, even to the point of laying down our lives. It is only when we obey His commandments that we are His friends. There is no true friendship with Jesus without obedience to His commandments. Love to our neighbor is the summary of the second table of the Decalogue (Matt 2:36-40). Christ here strengthens our obligation to love and obedience by the fact that He Himself has displayed obedience to that commandment in that He considers us as His friends and lays down His life for us. He loved us to the point that He gave His sinless life for our sake.

Here we have the summary of the second table, namely, the duty to our neighbor strengthened by the example of our Lord and His love. There is no true love for neighbor without love for God. In fact, true and godly love for neighbor springs forth *from*, first of all, love for God. John writes:

1 John 4:20-21 If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for **he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God** whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever **loves God** must also **love his brother**.

Love for God is the duty of the first table of the Decalogue and love for neighbor, the second table. But, true love for God works itself out in love for our neighbor. The argument that the apostle makes here is that it is impossible for someone to claim that they love God while at the same time they hate their brother. Love for God is an unseen claim. Anyone can claim that they love God, but how can they prove that claim? This is similar to what James says concerning the one who claims to have faith, while they do not have works, which are the evidence and fruit of true faith. Likewise here, to merely say that one loves God is not enough. That love for God must work itself out in a way that it will be known to others. In what way? In love for our neighbor.

It is impossible ("cannot"), says the apostle, that one can truly love God without loving their brothers and sisters, or more frequently expressed—their neighbor. In v. 21, the apostle confirms the idea that love for neighbor must come forth from love for God. The commandment that God gave us is that the one who, first of all, loves God, must *also* love his brother. This, I believe, is the summary of the Decalogue. Love for God and love for neighbor are inseparable. Love for God summarizes the duty of the first table, while love for our neighbor summarizes the duty of the second table. There is no reason to think that here we are given two new commandments and that the Ten Commandments are no longer binding. These two commandments are the summary of the Ten. If the summary is binding, it follows then that which it summarizes is likewise binding. These commandments show us the basic point of the Decalogue, namely, love. But the Decalogue shows us *how* we are to love God and our neighbor.

Keeping His Commandments

Especially in John's epistles, an emphasis is laid upon obedience to God's commandments which he, as we saw above, summarizes in the duty to love God and likewise our neighbor. John does not name all the Ten Commandments but uses the summary that the Lord gave on which "depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt 22:40). If the summary is binding, that which it summarizes is likewise binding.

A point which is made repeatedly by John is that we show our love to God by obedience to His commandments. In 1 John 2, the apostle writes:

1 John 2:3-6 And by this we know that we have come to know him, **if we keep his commandments**. 4 Whoever says "I know him" but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him, 5 but **whoever keeps his word**, in him truly the **love of God is perfected**. By this we may know that we are in him: 6 whoever says he abides in him **ought to walk in the same way in which he walked**.

Here he gives a way, a test to us of how we can know if we truly have been saved or not. The test is to see whether we keep His commandments. If we keep His commandments, then we know Him. But

if we do *not* keep His commandments then we are liars and the truth is not in us. In other words, the one who does not keep nor has a desire to keep God's commandments is a false convert.

God's word and commandment are connected to each other, and the "word" refers to God's commandments (1 John 2:7). We are to keep His word and commandments. The verb basically means "to keep, guard, obey, observe".^[75] But whoever observes, obeys and keeps God's commandment, it is in that person that God's love becomes to maturation, is completed and is perfected. This does not refer to God's love for the child of God, but the child's love for the Father. As we more and more seek to walk in His ways, we will see that our love for God will grow.

There is an obligation ("ought") upon the believer to walk in the same path and way as the Savior did. How did Christ walk and live? In loving obedience to His Father in every commandment and point, never disobeying, but always obeying. So likewise, His people are called to walk in the same manner. Although it is impossible, in this fallen world, to live like Jesus, yet we are nonetheless called to strive and seek to be like Him and by the grace of the Holy Spirit, we may have some tastes of what it means to walk like Jesus.

Again, in 1 John 5:3, the love for God is defined in terms of keeping His commandments. If we love God we will keep His commandments. If we keep His commandments it is because we love Him. These two things go hand in hand. There is no true obedience without first love for God, neither is there true love for God which does not work itself out in obedience to His commandments.

This all is no different than Jesus' declaration that the one who truly loves Him will indeed keep His commandments (John 14:15). He says:

John 14:21-24 Whoever **has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me**. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." 22 Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" 23 Jesus answered him, "**if anyone loves me, he will keep my word**, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. 24 Whoever **does not love me does not keep my words**. And the **word that you hear is not mine but the Father's** who sent me.

Here again, as in 1 John 2:2-3, 7, we have the "word" and "commandment" equated with each other. Whoever obeys Jesus by keeping His commandments, it is that person who truly loves Him and that is also the person who will be loved by God. Those who love Jesus, love to obey Jesus' commandments. These two go hand-in-hand. In v. 24, Christ declares that there is no keeping of His words and commandments without first loving Him. Of course, people can be legalists and not truly know the Lord and claim that they love Him, but their love is not true. The "word" is not Jesus' ultimately, but the Father's. These are God's commandments which Jesus is expounding and commanding His people to follow. This "word" refers to the Decalogue and the summary of the Decalogue which Jesus constantly uses in John. The commandment to love one another and to love God, are old and were given by God since Sinai. What is new is the motivation to love and the model of how we should love.

The Moral Law in Paul

The apostle Paul often speaks of the law, although some have supposed that he actually teaches the abrogation of the whole Mosaic law including the Decalogue. That the whole Mosaic Law was done away with is true, but that the Decalogue is likewise done away with is not. For the Decalogue is

merely the summary of what is on man's heart, namely, the moral law. It is *not* unique to the Mosaic Covenant. Its revelation in stone is what was unique, not its knowledge or existence.

I would like to take some time to look at some passages concerning the law and obedience from the apostle of Sola Fide.

Romans 3:27-31 - We Uphold The Law

Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a **law of works**? No, but by **the law of faith**. 28 For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from **works of the law**. 29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. 31 Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, **we uphold the law**.

After the greatest explanation of justification by faith alone and by Christ being the substitute Who bore our sins, the apostle now expects an objection. If we say that we are justified apart from the law, then we surely destroy the law. Is that the case? The apostle answers, rather than overthrowing the law, we actually uphold it by Sola Fide! How? Let us see how.

Boasting is excluded when one realizes that they were saved not because of anything in them or things they've done, but merely because of sovereign grace. The ideas of boasting and grace cannot mix. The one excludes the other. You cannot boast about yourself that you are saved while at the same time, believe that your salvation had nothing to do with you. But, if we are saved by works, then boasting is natural a reaction to salvation. We are saved by grace and not works, therefore, all boasting in ourselves is excluded. The law which nullifies boasting is that of faith. What is meant by *law* here is doctrine, rule, arrangement, principle, and economy. It is the rule and principle of faith which overthrows the rule and principle of works. It is because we are saved by the law, principle, and doctrine of faith that all boasting is excluded. If we were saved by the law, doctrine, and principle of works then boasting would be natural. Then the apostle goes on in v. 28 to repeat his statement about justification by faith alone. God will justify both the Jew and the Gentile on the basis of faith alone.

Then comes our main text, v. 31. Does the fact that we believe the law is useless for justification means that the is useful for nothing? The word "overthrow" here is the Greek verb καταργέω (*katargeo*, G2673), which means "to render idle, unemployed, inactivate, inoperative" and "to cause to cease, put an end to, do away with, annul, abolish".^[76] The answer to this objection is an absolute no. The doctrine of justification by faith alone does not "overthrow" (ESV), "make void" (KJV), "cancel" (HCSB), "abolish" (ISV), "nullify" (NET) or "make useless" (YTL) the law of God. In fact, Paul's prior claim is that "the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it" (Rom. 3:21). Barnes expresses this objection in these words:

Do we render it vain and useless; do we destroy its moral obligation; and do we prevent obedience to it, by the doctrine of justification by faith ? This was an objection which would naturally be made; and which has thousands of times been since made, that the doctrine of justification by faith tends to licentiousness.^[6]

Salvation by grace and substitution in Christ came *not* by or through the law, but it was nonetheless

testified and witnessed by the law in the types and shadows, for example. The Law itself does not claim that one can be justified before God through its works, rather it shows us our need for justification. Justification will never come through the works of the law, rather it is by faith alone.

Rather than cancel the law, the doctrine of justification upholds the law. What does it mean that we uphold the law? BDAG says that ἱστημι (*histemi*, G2476) means “to validate something that is in force or in practice, reinforce validity of, uphold, maintain, validate”^[77] in Romans 3:31. Just like in Matthew 5:17, we have here two antithetical words, overthrow and uphold. “Uphold” means whatever is contrary to “overthrow” and vice versa. Therefore, by Sola Fide we do not make void, cancel or abolish the law, but rather, we use the law lawfully and as it was designed to be. That is, to reveal our sin (Rom. 3:20) and through that, the need for redemption. It is the moral law of God that unveils our sin and it is the gospel that declares that Christ perfectly obeyed the moral law for us. Therefore, by obedience to the moral law, we do not try to gain justification or acceptance with God, but rather we display our love for Him. We are already accepted and therefore, we obey. Not vice versa.

This objection which the apostle expects is wrong because it assumes that the law has only one function, that is, to justify. That is clearly not the case as the apostle showed before (v. 20) that knowledge of sin comes from the law. Moreover, through the law, we know our duty as redeemed believers of what God expects from us ([see above The Moral Law In John](#) especially). Matthew Henry notes on this passage:

He [Paul] obviates an objection (Rom 3:31), as if this doctrine did nullify the law, which they knew came from God: “No,” says he, “though we do say that the law will not justify us, yet we do not therefore say that it was given in vain, or is of no use to us; no, we establish the right use of the law, and secure its standing, by fixing it on the right basis. The law is still of use to convince us of what is past, and to direct us for the future; though we cannot be saved by it as a covenant, yet we own it, and submit to it, as a rule in the hand of the Mediator, subordinate to the law of grace; and so are so far from overthrowing that we establish the law.” Let those consider this who deny the obligation of the moral law on believers.^[78]

As justified believers, we do not seek justification by the law, but we seek God’s will which is found in His law. We strive to obey God’s commandments as a way of expressing our gratitude and love for Him, not to gain acceptance. The moral law moreover, sends us back to the cross where we should always be. When we sin, the moral law shows us our sin and as believers, we know Who dealt once for all with sin. The Law sends us to the cross and the cross sends us to the Law by pointing to the gratitude and love that we owe God which is expressed by keeping His commandments (e.g., 1 John 5:3). The Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible writes:

The glory of God’s law, in its eternal and immutable obligations, is then only fully apprehended by the sinner, and then only felt in the depths of his soul, when, believing that “He was made sin for him who knew no sin,” he sees himself “made the righteousness of God in Him.” [2 Cor. 5:21] Thus we do not make void the law through faith; yea, we establish the law.^[74]

The law that we are under is not the law of works, but of faith. It is based on the principle and doctrine of justification by faith alone, and not by the law in any way. It is a law of grace, to lead us

in the paths that God desires us to be and to conform us to His will. As a summary of what was discussed above, the Reformation Study Bible writes:

Paul is rejecting the law as the way of salvation. But since the law as moral demand was not given to sinners in order to justify them (vv. 19, 20), the principle of salvation by grace through faith cannot be a contradiction of the law. As he later demonstrates, the gospel upholds and furthers the law's ultimate goal (8:3, 4; 13:8-10).^[79]

Romans 7

Romans chapter 7 is an excellent discussion on the law, the Christian and sin. I will not be able to give a whole exegesis on the passage, but I would like to take a look at some verses from here.

Died To The Law

Rom 7:4 Likewise, my brothers, you also have **died to the law through the body of Christ**, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.

Here the apostle sees the law is being antithetical to the work of Christ. We cannot, at the same time, in the same sense as Rom 7:4, belong to Christ and to the law. But in what sense is law being used here. Is it being used as a rule of righteousness that shows us what God desires, or is it being used as something else?

We have died to the law because we have died with Christ. We have died to the curse of the law in our Substitute. Those who were under the law were "held...captive" and served merely "in the old way of the written code" (Rom 7:6). We are dead to the law, not absolutely as a rule of righteousness, but in the way which the apostle in these passages describes the law and contrasts that with Christ. Barnes notes:

Ye also are become dead to the law. Rom 6:3, Rom 6:4, Rom 6:8. The connexion between us and the law is dissolved, so far as the scope of the apostle's argument is concerned. He does not say that we are dead to it, or released from it as a rule of duty, or as a matter of obligation to obey it; for there neither is, nor can be, any such release; but we are dead to it as a way of justification and sanctification. In the great matter of acceptance with God, we have ceased to rely on the law, having become dead to it, and having embraced another plan.^[6]

Read in this way, this passage is similar to an earlier passage, Romans 3:27-31. We are released from the law as a covenant binding us, demanding perfect obedience and cursing us when we disobey (e.g., Gal 3:10-13). We are not free to follow our own will or to disregard the moral law in direct contradiction to what the apostle said in Romans 3:31. Rather, we are freed from the curses of the law and from the law as a covenant of works because the demands of the law were fulfilled in our Substitute. Moreover, v. 5 adds more information about the way that Paul is speaking here. He speaks of the time before Christ when we, having the law either on the heart or in stone, were aroused by the law to sin. But how was that possible? Is the fault with the law? Such an idea Paul refutes in the following verses, saying that sin used even that which is good to work more sin in us.

But, this was specifically the time before we came to know Christ. This was the time we were married to the law, bound to it as a covenant of works, held captive by it and were subject to its curses.

As a last observation, notice the end of v. 4 and the purpose why we have died to the law. We are to bear fruit. We did not die to the law to be lawless, but to bring fruit that is pleasing to God in freedom and through the Spirit. This passage does not destroy our obligation but teaches us that we are free from the curses and binding of the law as a covenant of works. John MacArthur notes on v. 6:

released from the law. Not freedom to do what God's law forbids (6:1, 15; 8:4; cf. 3:31), but freedom from the spiritual liabilities and penalties of God's law (*see note on 7:4*; cf. Gal. 3:13). Because we died when he died (*see note on Rom. 6:2*), the law with its condemnation and penalties no longer has jurisdiction over us (7:1-3).^[80]

Finally, Calvin likewise notes on v. 6:

But now we have been loosed from the law, etc. He pursues the argument derived from the opposite effect of things, — “If the restraint of the law availed so little to bridle the flesh, that it became rather the exciter of sin; then, that we may cease from sin, we must necessarily be freed from the law.” Again, “If we are freed from the bondage of the law for this end, that we may serve God; then, perversely do they act who hence take the liberty to indulge in sin; and falsely do they speak who teach, that by this means loose reins are given to lusts.” Observe, then, that we are then freed from the law, when God emancipates us from its rigid exactions and curse, and endues us with his Spirit, through whom we walk in his ways.^[7]

The Commandment Is Holy And Righteous And Good

The next section that I will look at is vv. 7-13. *First* of all, the law that Paul is here speaking about is the moral law summarized in the Decalogue, for that is the law which all men know (Rom. 2:12-16). Moreover, that is the law which reveals our sin (Rom. 3:20) and which the apostle himself cites as an example. He cites the tenth commandment as an example of a law or commandment which showed him what sin was (Rom. 7:7). Even though the commandment said “You shall not covet”, yet, because he was still unregenerate, sin used the law to work more corruption in Paul. Instead of being kept away from sin, the law, used by sin, worked more sin in him. *Secondly*, Paul repeats what he in Romans 4:15; 5:13 said, namely, “apart from the law, sin lies dead” (Rom. 7:8). [See above for more on the connection between sin and law.](#) Sin is an offense because it is a transgression of the moral standard of God (1 John 3:4). *Thirdly*, the commandments which promised life upon obedience (e.g., Lev. 18:5; Deut. 4:1) actually produced death in Paul. Why? Because he was still a man devoid of God's Spirit and in his unregenerate state in which he “cannot please God” neither submit to “God's law” (Rom. 8:7-8). He was helpless against the curse of the law. He had to take it himself. He had no substitute. *Fourthly*, Paul is careful not to say that it was the law of God that worked death in him. But rather, “sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment” (Rom. 7:11). Sin used that which is “holy and righteous and good” to work in Paul that which is unholy, unrighteous and evil. The purpose of this is laid out in v. 13. This happened “so that sin through the commandment might become exceedingly sinful” (NKJV). MacArthur notes, “Confronted by God's law, the sinner's rebellious nature finds the forbidden thing more attractive, not because it is

inherently attractive, but because it furnishes an opportunity to assert one's self-will."^[81] Finally, after exonerating the law from the charge of being the author of sin, Paul says on the contrary, "So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good." Here, he is borrowing language from **Psalm 19:7-9** (see above). There is nothing wrong with the law. What is wrong is in man and in his misuse of the law for purposes it was not meant for. The law is **holy** and pure. The law and the commandment are **righteous**. It declares what is right and what is wrong; it is just. It reflects God's standard of righteousness. It is **good** because it reflects the goodness of God's morality. It is not something arbitrary, neither it is good because God commands it, but rather, it is good because it reflects God. To conclude, let us read what Gill wrote concerning the description of the law and commandment in v. 12:

holy, because of its author, the holy God, from whom nothing can come but what is holy; and because of the matter of it, it is a transcript of the holy nature of God, a declaration of his holy will; it requires holiness both of heart and life; it forbids whatever is unholy, and commands nothing but what is holy; it teaches men to live holy, sober, righteous, and godly lives. It may be truly called

just, or righteous, as it demands perfect obedience to all its precepts, or it will not admit of it as a righteousness; as it pronounces guilty, curses and condemns for every disobedience of it; as it deals impartially with persons the transgressors of it; and as it acquits believers upon the foot of the righteousness of Christ, the fulfilling end of it. It is rightly called

good, from the author of it, God, from whom every good thing comes, and nothing else; from the matter of it, and from the use of it both to saints and sinners.^[8]

The Law Is Spiritual

Rom. 7:14 For we know that **the law is spiritual**, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.

There is a conflict between the law, which throughout Romans 7 is the moral law specifically, and the unspiritual person. But what is meant by "spiritual" here? The word πνευματικός (*pneumatikos*, G4152) is an adjective which basically means "spiritual". But what does that mean? I believe the use of this word in 1 Corinthians 2:15 can perhaps shed some light on its meaning.

1 Cor. 2:14-15 The **natural person** does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. 15 The **spiritual person** judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

Paul here contrasts the unregenerate person calling them *natural* and the regenerate person calling them *spiritual*. To be "spiritual" does not mean here to be mystic or non-physical, but rather to be *of* the Holy Spirit, to be led *by* the Holy Spirit (see the whole chapter for clarity). Now coming back to Romans 7, we see that the law was actually *meant* for the regenerate, for those who have the Spirit of God and are therefore *spiritual*. Far from the law having nothing to do with the believer, it is, in fact, meant for God's redeemed people who have His Spirit! This law is written in our hearts and on our minds (Jer. 31:33, see above), it becomes part of our identity and the way we live. We are

subject to its promises, but the curses the Lord Christ once for all took upon Himself on the cross (Gal. 3:10-13). By the law, we learn what God's will is. God's law keeps us away from sin by the help of His Spirit. God has not given believers the law to curse them, He did that in Christ. But He has given us the law that we may delight in doing His will and obeying Him and thereby receive its promised rewards. The Reformation Study Bible notes:

7:14 the law is spiritual. A further description of the law, in addition to v. 12. Far from repudiating the law (3:31), Paul declares that it sets forth the standard to which life governed by the Spirit should conform. By contrast, he calls himself "of the flesh" because he cannot fully reach this standard. As a moral ruin, now under reconstruction, he displays the marks of what he has been as a result of Adam as well as of what he will be as a result of Christ.^[82]

Barnes notes:

That the law is spiritual. This does not mean that the law is designed to control the spirit, in contradistinction from the body, but it is a declaration showing that the evils of which he was speaking were not the fault of the law. That was not, in its nature, sensual, corrupt, earthly, carnal; but was pure and spiritual. The *effect* described was not the fault of the law, but of the man, who was sold under sin. The word spiritual is often thus used to denote that which is pure and holy, in opposition to that which is fleshly or carnal, Rom 8:5; Rom 8:6; Gal 5:16-23. The *flesh* is described as the source of evil passions and desires; the spirit as the source of purity, or as that which is agreeable to the proper influences of the Holy Spirit.^[6]

Finally, Jamieson, Fausset, Brown note:

Just as a "spiritual man" is a man transformed-animated and led by the Holy Spirit, so the law-which is "holy, just, and good" (Rom 7:12), embodying the demands of Him who is a Spirit-cannot but breathe spirituality in its nature and intent.^[74]

Far from the law being useless to the believer, it was, in fact, given and has a purpose for the believer.

I Delight In The Law Of God

Rom. 7:22-25 For **I delight in the law of God**, in my inner being, 23 but I see in my members another law waging war against the **law of my mind** and making me captive to **the law of sin** that dwells in my members. 24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? 25 Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself **serve the law of God with my mind**, but with my flesh I serve **the law of sin**.

Paul sees a conflict, during his *regenerate* state, between what he *should* do and what he *actually* does. These things wage war within him (Gal. 5:17) and the law of sin tries to captivate him and take

him back. In his inner being—in his new self, in his regenerate self, in his new heart and spirit—he loves the law of God. His “delight is in the law of the LORD” (Ps. 1:2) and he is a man who greatly delights in God’s commandments (Ps. 119:35). The expression “inner being”, or more literally “inner man”, is explained by Albert Barnes thus:

Here it is used evidently in opposition to a carnal and corrupt nature; to the evil passions and desires of the soul in an unrenewed state; to what is called elsewhere “the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts,” Eph 4:22. The “inward man” is elsewhere called “the *new man*,” (Eph 4:24) and denotes not the mere intellect, or conscience, but is a personification of the principles of action by which a Christian is governed; the new nature; the holy disposition; the inclination of the heart that is renewed.^[6]

In his pure and inner-self, without the corrupt nature, the believer loves and delights in God’s law. But obedience to it in a fallen world and in the flesh is far more difficult than it appears to be. There is a war in his members between “the law of my mind” and “the law of sin.” The former refers to the law of God, which is in his inner being and the latter to the law of sin, which fights against God’s law. God’s law is trying to set Him free, while the law of sin is trying to keep him captive (cf. Rom. 7:6). His body is still unredeemed and awaits future redemption (Rom. 8:22-23), add to that he is living in a fallen and sinful world. Therefore, sin would be impossible to escape for a mere man. This body we live in produces death in us and we need to be delivered from it. Finally, the apostle comes to a conclusion: he will do his best in the struggle between the law of God and the law of sin. He will serve and delight in God’s law in his inner being, in his mind. While in his body he will be made to serve the law of sin, although he does not desire it actually (Rom. 7:15). What Paul does not want to do here is to serve the law of sin with his mind and with his flesh. If he is made to serve the law of sin, he will try his best to serve God with his mind and in his inner man. He will not let sin win this war in any way.

This is sad in many ways and it describes the lives of all Christians, but let us seek the Lord in prayer and look forward to His Parousia when our bodies will be delivered from this corruption of sin! Thanks to Jesus Christ, we *know* that we will be delivered completely from all the power of sin. It is just a matter of time. We conclude with the words of Matthew Henry on v. 25:

At length he finds an all-sufficient friend, even Jesus Christ. When we are under the sense of the remaining power of sin and corruption, we shall see reason to bless God through Christ (for, as he is the mediator of all our prayers, so he is of all our praises)—to bless God for Christ; it is he that stands between us and the wrath due to us for this sin. If it were not for Christ, this iniquity that dwells in us would certainly be our ruin. He is our advocate with the Father, and through him God pities, and spares, and pardons, and lays not our iniquities to our charge. It is Christ that has purchased deliverance for us in due time. Through Christ death will put an end to all these complaints, and waft us to an eternity which we shall spend without sin or sigh. *Blessed be God that giveth us this victory through our Lord Jesus Christ!*^[78]

Romans 8:1-4 - The Righteous Requirement Of The Law Might Be Fulfilled In Us

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2 For the **law of the Spirit of life** has set you free in Christ Jesus from the **law of sin and death**. 3

For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that **the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us**, who **walk** not according to the flesh but **according to the Spirit**.

Paul continues where he left off in chapter 7. We should remember that the original "Bible" did not have chapter or verse divisions, therefore, this letter was one continuous whole from the beginning to the end. The chapter and verse divisions came later (around the 13th century). Therefore, we should not merely think because it is another chapter, therefore, Paul is speaking about a different subject. Nay, the subject still has to do with the Christian and the law.

There is no condemnation for those found in Christ because Christ Himself has taken their condemnation upon Himself in His person as the Substitute of His elect. He is the propitiation of our sins and we have received the application of His propitiation through faith (Rom. 3:25). The apostle here is giving a conclusion on what he has been discussing from the beginning concerning sin and salvation. Basically, Paul is saying: "Because of all these things which I discussed in the previous discourse [chapters], there is no condemnation for the believer." In v. 2, the apostle grounds the assertion that he made in v. 1. The reason why there is no condemnation is that believers have been set free. They have been set free from "the law of sin and death". How? By "the law of the Spirit of life...in Christ Jesus". They have been set free from one *law* by another *law*. The word "law" in v. 2 refers to a controlling power or a principle. Notice the contrast that is made between these two laws. One is a law of sin, the other is of the Holy Spirit. One is a law of death, the other is of life. One is outside of Christ, the other is in Christ. There is a clear antithesis between these two laws. These two cannot mix.

In v. 3, we see something that the Law could not do, namely, condemn sin. This does not mean that the moral law did not have the power to show us that we are sinful, it, in fact, served such a function by the admission of the apostle (Rom. 3:20; 7:7). But what is meant here, is that the law is powerless to do away and deal with the problem of sin. The law is powerless to condemn sin so as to remove it. The law reveals sin, but it cannot deal with the problem of sin; that is where Christ's work comes in! Notice that the apostle is careful not to make a negative charge toward the law. He identifies the weakness not in the law, but in the "flesh." The problem is with sinful man, not with God's righteous law. Moreover, to justify sinners was never the purpose of the law. That is what Christ did. He, by His life and death, gave us life and justification (Rom. 5:18-19). The law cannot provide justification and life for sinners.

In v. 4, Paul gives us the purpose and the goal of God's action in sending His Son to "condemn sin in the flesh." The reason was so that "the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us", or literally, "that the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in us" (YLT). What is then the requirement or righteousness of the law? I believe that we find this in the summary of the Law by our Lord in the two greatest commandments, to love God and to love our neighbor. The righteous requirement of the law is love. Christ the Lord died and condemned "sin in the flesh", so that love would be fulfilled or "accomplished" (HCSB) in us. Not only did Christ summarize the Law in this way, but the apostle Paul in Romans 13:8-10 ([see below](#)) likewise summarized the law in terms of love. The next question we must ask is, "does this refer to justification or sanctification?" In other words, is Romans 8:4 speaking about the work of Christ *on behalf* of believers, or the believers themselves fulfilling the "righteous requirement of the law" thanks to Christ's work? I believe the latter to be the case for the following reasons:^[83]

1. The great discussion of justification is already in the previous chapters. The apostle already discussed the imputation of Christ's righteousness to believers and His work on behalf of

believers in Romans 5:18-19, for example.

2. Chapter 8 is concerned with sanctification and perseverance. It has to do with living the Christian life. It begins with the position that one is already justified and concerns itself about how a justified believer should endure and fight sin.
3. Paul's wording is likewise interesting. Instead of saying that "righteous requirement of the law" is fulfilled *on our behalf*, he says that it is fulfilled *in us*. It is something that is done in our persons, not something done on our behalf by another. This obviously does not deny the work of the Spirit in working in our lives to produce the "righteous requirement of the law", namely, love. Philip Schaff notes, "**In us**; not, 'among us,' nor, 'through us,' nor yet, 'on us,' but, 'in us.' This points to actual holiness;" ^[84]
4. Right after writing concerning "the righteous requirement of the law", the apostle speaks of a "walk...according to the Spirit." This does not refer to a specific moment in life (i.e., justification), but a continued walk/way of life (i.e., sanctification). Love is fulfilled in us by the work of the Spirit throughout our lives. The Spirit works on us to conform us to Christ's image, so that the Law of God may ever more be fulfilled in us and obeyed by us. "The saints "fulfill" the law's "claim" not in the sense of sinless perfection, (for see last chapter, and cp. 1Jn 1:8-10,) but in that of a true, living, and working consent to its principles; the consent of full conviction, and of a heart whose affections are won to God.' ^[85]

For these reasons, I believe that this passage is about sanctification and not justification. We see here conformity to the law of God by the work of the Spirit is a crucial aspect of our sanctification. Therefore, this passage refers to the continuing validity of the Law of God, worked by the Spirit of God in the people of God. The "righteous requirement" is love, but what is love is defined by God's commandments as summarized in the Decalogue. The Law of God is used by the Spirit of God to conform the people of God to the image of Christ.

Romans 13:8-10 - Love Is The Fulfilling Of The Law

Rom. 13:8-10 Owe no one anything, except to **love each other**, for the one who loves another has **fulfilled the law**. 9 For the **commandments**, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "**You shall love your neighbor as yourself.**" 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the **fulfilling of the law**.

To work love in us is the purpose of the Decalogue. It was so summarized by our Lord (Matt. 22:36-40; Mark. 12:28-31; cf. 1 John 4:21). What does the word *fulfill* here mean? Let us first start with some preliminary observations.

It is certainly interesting, if those who contend that the moral law of the Decalogue was abrogated, why the apostle quotes four commandments from the second table. He quotes them, expecting no opposition whatsoever that some will say, "Oh, that doesn't apply for us, Paul!" He uses them assuming that they're *still* valid and binding. In fact, it is only with the moral law that we can show love to our neighbor, for what do sacrifices have to do with showing love to our neighbor? We show our love to our neighbor when we obey the duties of the second table of the Decalogue. This passage is built upon the second greatest commandment, Leviticus 19:18. Paul lists only four of the six commandments of the second table and adds that basically "any other commandment" (which has to do with our neighbor) is fulfilled in the second greatest commandment. For brevity's sake, Paul mentions only four of the six commandments concerning our duty to our neighbor, yet he thereby does not exclude other moral commandments concerning our duty to our neighbor. The second table

is here summarized as our Lord did ([see above](#)), in loving our neighbor. We have said it and we will say it again: If the summary is binding, that which is summarized is likewise binding, i.e., the Decalogue. Richard Barcellos expresses it in these words:

In Romans 13:9, love is a comprehensive command which implicitly contains others. In other words, that which sums up necessarily contains that which is summed up. “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” necessarily contains the commands of the Decalogue mentioned previous by Paul. The individual commands toward our fellow man are summarized, and therefore implicitly contained in the one commandment to love your neighbor.^[86]

The Decalogue tells us *how* we are to love our neighbor and the summary of the Decalogue tells us that the Decalogue’s purpose is love. But what does this *fulfillment* of the law by love mean? The verb used v. 8 is the same as in Matthew 5:17, πληρόω (*pleroo*, G4137) and TDNT gives it the following meaning in Romans 13:8 and Galatians 5:14—

A second nonliteral meaning in the NT is “to fulfil a divine demand or claim.” Thus (a) in Rom. 13:8; Gal. 5:14 believers fulfil the demand of the law in virtue of their new life in the Spirit (Rom. 8:4, 9-10). The idea is not that love fills up the law as though it were a vessel, but that it meets its norms.^[66]

Love is the norm of the Decalogue. Likewise, Thayer says that *pleroo* here means “**to carry into effect, bring to realization, realize; α. of matters of duty, to perform, execute:** τόν νόμον, Romans 13:8; Galatians 5:14;”^[65] Dr. Barcellos explains this fulfillment: “Love expresses itself by keeping the law of God. Love obeys God’s law.”^[87] In v. 10, the noun form of the verb is used, πλήρωμα (*pleroma*, G4138). Love is the fulfillment, realization, and performance of the Decalogue. It should produce love and it is given to us for that purpose. Albert Barnes notes on this “fulfillment”:

Is the *completion*, or meets the requirements of the law. The law of God on this *head*, or in regard to our duty to our neighbour, requires us to do justice towards him, to observe truth, etc. *All* this will be met by *love*; and if men truly *loved* others, all the demands of the law would be satisfied.^[6]

In v. 8, the verb “fulfilled” means fulfilling the demands of the law and in v. 12, the noun “fulfilling” or “fulfillment” means that love meets the requirements of the law and is its goal. There is little difference between the two. As for those who would ask why nothing of the first table is contained, we first point them to our discussion above concerning 1 John 4:20-21 ([see above](#)) and then the words of Augustine:

Since in fact love is only made perfect through the two commands of love of God and neighbour, why is it that in both letters the Apostle mentions only the love of neighbour, unless it is because people can lie about their love of God, since it is put to the test less often, but they are more easily found guilty of not loving their neighbour when they behave wickedly towards others...in a question of works of righteousness it is usually enough to mention just one of them, but it is more appropriate to mention the one on the

basis of which a person is more easily found guilty.^[88]

This passage is in many ways similar to **Galatians 5:14**, therefore, there is no need to treat the Galatian passage separately. Love is the duty and goal of the Decalogue and on this point Matthew Henry observes:

If the love be sincere, it is accepted as the *fulfilling of the law*. Surely we serve a good master, that has summed up all our duty in one word, and that a short word and a sweet word—*love*, the beauty and harmony of the universe. Loving and being loved is all the pleasure, joy, and happiness, of an intelligent being.^[78]

Finally, Arthur W. Pink connects this passage with Romans 3:31—

Love is the fulfilling of the Law because love is what the Law demands. The prohibitions of the Law are not unreasonable restraints on Christian liberty, but the just and wise requirements of love. We may add that the above is another passage which serves to explain Rom. 3:31, for it supplies a practical exemplification of the way in which the Gospel establishes the Law as the expression of the Divine will, which love alone can fulfill.^[89]

1 Corinthians 7:19 - Keeping The Commandments Of God

For neither circumcision counts for anything nor uncircumcision, but **keeping the commandments of God**.

What are “the commandments of God” that are being referred to here? I believe that the moral law is being referred to here. It is interesting to note that whenever the word “commandments” (plural) is used and a list is given, it is always the Decalogue (Matt. 19:17-19; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20), the summary of the Decalogue (Matt. 22:37-40; Mark 12:29-31) or Jesus’ commandment to love each other (John 14:15, 21; 15:10). Moreover, even if the singular “commandment” is used and a list is given, it concerns the commandments of the Decalogue (e.g., Rom. 13:9). My point is that “the commandments of God” here refer to the moral law of God as summarized in the Decalogue and strengthened by Christ (Paul would later speak of the Law of Christ, [see below](#)). What is important is that we keep God’s commandments. What is here encouraged and contrasted are the *moral* commandments of God and the *ceremonial* commandments of God.

Circumcision, which was the initiation sign of the Old Covenant, is here regarded as unimportant and not binding, over against “keeping the commandments of God.” Circumcision is the prime example of a commandment that is ceremonial. It was an essential part of the Old Covenant, but now it is a sign that has been fulfilled by the circumcision of the *heart*. Circumcision was, in fact, a *commandment* of God since the Abrahamic Covenant (e.g., Gen. 17:10-14) and its disobedience was the breaking of God’s covenant (Gen. 17:14). But, how is Paul then pitting one commandment of God against other commandments? It is essential, I believe, for the proper understanding of this passage to believe in the threefold division of the law. Paul is disregarding one set of commandments, the ceremonial which now have had their fulfillment in Christ, over against the moral, which are ever-binding and which Paul here declares their importance and perpetuity. Circumcision is nothing (KJV)

and has had its fulfillment in the New Covenant promise, but “keeping the commandments of God” remains and is not “nothing.” Rather, we are encouraged to keep and obey His commandments.

1 Corinthians 9:19-21; Galatians 6:2 - The Law Of Christ

1 Cor. 9:19-21 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those **under the law** I became as one **under the law** (though **not being myself under the law**) that I might win those under the law. 21 To those **outside the law** I became as one outside the law (**not being outside the law of God** but **under the law of Christ**) that I might win those outside the law.

In this passage, we learn of Paul’s evangelistic strategy. He wanted to change and adapt to the environment as long as that did not interfere with the moral law of God. Although he is not obligated to do the things which he goes on to describe, yet for the sake of the gospel, he will follow or do certain things which are not binding upon him. He has learned from his Master that “whoever would be great among you must be your servant” (Matt. 20:26). As long as he is not binding himself to things which go contrary to the gospel, he is willing to do them for evangelistic purposes, so that he would not be a stumbling block.

When Paul was around Jews he would, for the sake of the weak brother or those whom he’s trying to win over to Christ, keep the ceremonial laws which, as a Christian, are no longer binding upon him. For example, he would circumcise Timothy “because of the Jews who were in those places” (Acts 16:3) and because Timothy’s mother was a Jew and thus he had to be circumcised. He knew and taught that circumcision doesn’t matter (e.g., 1 Cor. 7:19), yet here, so as not to give the Jews a cause of stumbling or an excuse, he takes Timothy and circumcises him. Likewise in Acts 21:20-26, he observes a vow and a purification ceremony, even offering a sacrifice. He did this so that he would not cause a reason for the Jews to see an *unnecessary* problem in Paul. He would not have done this if the matter was concerning justification by faith or Gentile and Jewish Christian fellowship, for example (e.g., Acts 15; Gal. 2:11ff). He knows that he has the freedom to eat anything he wants, yet, if a Jewish person or brother is weak and is offended by him eating *non-kosher* food, then he would refrain from that (e.g., Rom. 14:1-4).

How should the phrase **under the law** be understood? I believe that it should be understood in the same way as a Jew would understand it, namely, under the whole Mosaic law—moral, ceremonial and judicial. That this is the case is shown both from the common knowledge of the moral law by all people and they following it *generally*. Both Jews and Gentiles, for example, did not think murder or stealing was good. This moral law is common to both Jews and Gentiles, saved and lost ([see paragraph 1](#)). But that the whole threefold Mosaic Law is being spoken of here is also confirmed by the contrast which he makes in the following verse concerning the Law of God/Christ. Paul purposefully does not identify the “law” in v. 20 with the law of God, rather, the sense seems to be more, “under the law of the Jews” or “under the Jewish law.” As long as the shadows were not fulfilled and Christ was not crucified and raised, the whole threefold Mosaic law was binding. But when Christ suffered and rose, the whole Mosaic Covenant, including the ceremonial law, was done away with. Therefore, it would be natural to see that Paul here does not equate the Jewish law with the law of God in the next verse, as that law which the Jews were still observing has had its fulfillment in Christ. Moreover, he places himself *outside* the Jewish law (“though not being myself under the law”). He is not bound by it, rather, he is bound by another law. Yet, as long as this Jewish law does not go against any gospel truth, he is willing to adjust himself. That the ceremonial law is in view here is also seen in Paul’s identification of the “the law of commandments expressed in

ordinances” as being the “dividing wall of hostility” between Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14-15, [see above](#)). This is what separated Jews and Gentiles and from this ceremonial law are Christians set free. Paul did not observe the ceremonial laws among the Gentiles, and thus, some were accusing him of totally abandoning the law of God (Acts 20:20-21). This is the law that set the Jews apart from all other nations as Ephesians 2:14-15 says.

But to those **outside the law**, that is, outside the Mosaic Law of the Jews which he had just talked about, he would act as one free from the Mosaic Law. He would not require circumcision; he would eat what the ceremonial law considers “unclean;” he would eat with Gentiles, which Jewish teaching forbade and so on. Since these laws are no longer binding and have found their fulfillment in Christ, Paul has all the freedom not to observe them and not to bring any of the typical Jewish pride or outward holiness, which the Gentiles perhaps experienced from the Pharisees. He would not be a stumbling block to the Gentiles by observing the dietary laws or not eating with them because of Jewish tradition. Because he knows that such a teaching is not in accordance with the gospel and that “nothing is unclean in itself” (Rom. 14:14), he is at liberty to eat that which was considered unclean under the Mosaic Covenant. But, now that Paul has declared himself outside the Jewish law, as a reminder to his readers, he adds the following parenthetical note:

(not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ)

Although he is outside *Jewish* law, he is, in fact, *not* outside the Law of *God*. He is bound by and he is under the Law of God as a Christian in accordance with the promise of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:33). He is bound and under the law of the Decalogue which is written upon his heart in the New Covenant. Would Paul, for evangelistic purposes, do some of the abominations which the Gentiles do, so as to win them over? Would Paul have sacrificed to idols to try to reach idolaters in this way? Would he have participated in orgies? What about drunkenness? (see Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 4:17-19). The answer is obviously a resounding no. Paul would not want to violate the abiding moral commands of God for the sake of evangelistic strategy. He would, on the other hand, eat food which was *commanded* by God, under the Old Covenant, not to be eaten. Or, he would say that we don’t need to be circumcised (1 Cor. 7:19), although that was a command of God in the Old Testament (Gen. 17:14). We see here that Paul makes a distinction between the laws which are abiding and those which are gone, yet may be kept for the sake of evangelistic strategy and for the avoidance of being a stumbling block.

So, what is the **Law of Christ**? Notice first of all that Paul equates the “law of God” with “the law of Christ.” He says first that he is outside the Jewish law, but not outside the law of God. He is *inside* the law of God and under the law of Christ. He gives the law of God, which he distinguishes from the Jewish law in v. 20 by explicitly identifying it as God’s and giving it a special Christ-centered character. It seems to me that the use of “of God” and “of Christ” is here more for stylistic purposes than to give any suggestion that these two designations are actually referring to two different laws. These are not two laws, but rather one law with two designations. The Jews gloried in possessing the law of God and despising those who did not follow the whole threefold Mosaic Law. But now that the civil law is expired ([see paragraph 4](#)) and the ceremonial law abrogated because of fulfillment ([see paragraph 3](#)), the moral law of God is all that remains binding and by Christ’s exposition of it throughout the Gospels, the law receives a special Christ-centered character. Christ strengthens the law by bringing to light what was obscured through the teaching of the Jewish leaders and by summarizing the law in terms of love (e.g., Mark 12:28-31; John 15:12-14).

Some people contend that this law of Christ is the commandment to love each other (e.g., John 13:34; 15:12) and/or His summary of “all the Law and Prophets” (Matt. 22:36-40; Mark. 12:28-31).

We would not strongly disagree at this point, but when the claim is made that “love” is the only commandment that we are given and that the Decalogue is done away with, then we strongly disagree! That by the Law of Christ is meant the commandment to love each other, is perhaps true. The other use of “law of Christ” is in Galatians 6:2 and the idea of loving each other is closely connected—

Gal. 6:1-2 Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted. 2 Bear one another’s burdens, and so **fulfill the law of Christ.**

But surely, as we observed with Romans 13:8-10 ([see above](#)), love, being the requirement and what meets the norm of the law, it must then be defined by the law. The law defines what love is. We don’t get to decide what love is. God has already decided what love is and how love is to be shown and He has *summarized* our duty in the Decalogue. To “Bear one another’s burdens” is the commandment to love our neighbor (Lev. 19:18) and each other (John 13:34). Furthermore, we should not disconnect Paul’s statement here concerning the Law of Christ from his statement in the previous chapter, ‘For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”’ (Gal 5:14). If the fulfillment, point or summary of the whole moral law is in the love of neighbor ([see our comments on Romans 13:8-10](#) which in many ways is similar to Gal. 5:14) and “Bear[ing] one another’s burdens” is to “fulfill the law of Christ”, should we then not conclude that these two are basically the same? This is indeed my understanding of the law of Christ. It is not a different law, but it is the same moral law of God summarized in the Decalogue *with* the force which the Savior gave it both when He expounded it and when He summarized it in the two duties of loving our God and loving our neighbor. At the same time, in the context of the Galatian controversy, the significance of referring to “the law of Christ” should be seen in that it is directed against the deadly legalism of the Judaizers. These people wanted to make others captive, while God’s law sets us free (Ps. 119:45 KJV). They were trying to bind the consciences of men by things which were either added to the law of God by tradition or which after the resurrection were abrogated. Calvin writes concerning Paul’s answer to the Judaizing law-keepers:

“If you are very desirous to keep a law, Christ enjoins on you a law which you are bound to prefer to all others, and that is, to cherish kindness towards each other. He who has not this has nothing.[”] On the other hand, he tells us, that, when every one compassionately assists his neighbor, the law of Christ is fulfilled; by which he intimates that every thing which does not proceed from love is superfluous; for the composition of the Greek word ἀναπληρώσατε, conveys the idea of what is absolutely perfect. But as no man performs in every respect what Paul requires, we are still at a distance from perfection. He who comes the nearest to it with regard to others, is yet far distant with respect to God.^[7]

Paul’s answer to the legalistic Judaizers is to point especially to Jesus’ summary and fulfillment of the law in loving God and our neighbor. It seems to me a bit too difficult to construct a whole theology of “we’re not to obey the Ten Commandments, but the Law of Christ—the commandment to love each other” based on these two texts (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2). Rather, we should see a *radical* and *complete* continuity between the law of the Decalogue and what is called the Law of Christ (not only from these passages, but a lot more), which is the moral law summarized in the Decalogue and also strengthened by Christ. If some still will contend that the law of Christ only contains the summary commandments, that is, the commandment to love God and our neighbor, we would point out that

these two commandments point to the goal and fulfillment of the law, but they do not show *how* we should love. The Decalogue gives us a summary of how we should love God and our neighbor, while Christ tells us what the fulfillment of the law is—he tells us of the fruit which obedience to the Decalogue should bring, namely, love.

If still, some would say that only the commandment of loving each other is contained in the law of Christ, we would respond that this still necessarily implies, first of all, obedience to the first table of the Decalogue as we have discussed above ([see above](#)). There is no true and godly love for neighbor without first of all love for God. All true love springs from love for God. We should remember that Paul equates the Law of God with the Law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21) and we should not put these two in opposition, but see them as different designations of the same thing with the emphasis of love in the Law of Christ. In conclusion, A.W. Pink writes:

Therefore, to be under the Law to Christ, is to be under the Law of God, for the Law was not abrogated but reinforced by Christ. This text, then, gives a plain and decisive answer to the question, *How* the believer is under the Law of God, namely, as he is “under the Law to Christ”, belonging to Christ, as he does, by redemption.^[89]

Ephesians 4:25-6:9 - Paul Teaching From The Decalogue

Much of Paul’s moral instruction to the Ephesians is based upon the Decalogue and it appears to be that he has the Decalogue in the back of his mind. The only commandment that is not touched upon is the Sabbath commandment. This does not mean he did not believe it was binding, for the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence. It simply means that he did not find it necessary to address it to this particular congregation.

Notice that what Paul does is to allude and depend upon the teaching of the Decalogue and not directly quote, though he does that toward the end of his moral instruction (Eph. 6:2-3). But for most of his instruction, he is alluding to it. Neither have I limited myself here only to what is explicitly stated in the commandment, but I understand it wholly, as I have tried to explain in our [brief exposition of the Decalogue](#). Thus, anger and hatred are placed under the sixth commandment. Sexual immorality and impurity under the seventh and so on.

#	Commandment	Paul’s Allusion
1	You shall have no other gods before Me.	Eph. 5:5; cf. Eph. 4:6
2	You shall not make for yourself a carved image.	Eph. 5:5
3	You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.	Eph. 4:29-30
4	Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.	-
5	Honor your father and your mother	Eph. 6:1-3, 4-9
6	You shall not murder.	Eph. 4:26, 31
7	You shall not commit adultery.	Eph. 5:3, 5
8	You shall not steal.	Eph. 4:28
9	You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.	Eph. 4:25, 31
10	You shall not covet.	Eph. 5:3, 5

I will treat Paul’s instruction concerning the fifth commandment separately.

Ephesians 6:1-3 - Obey Your Parents

Children, **obey your parents in the Lord**, for this is right. 2 **“Honor your father and mother”** (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.”

Paul could go ahead and quote the fifth commandment without any slight hesitation that the Decalogue is not binding upon the believer. Here, the apostle quotes the fifth commandment as found in Deuteronomy 5:12-16 and assumes not only that the commandment is valid and should be obeyed, but that the promise attached to its obedience is likewise valid! Not only the commandment is binding, but the promise still holds true. To establish his instruction to children, he bases it upon God’s Law. He shows them that what he is commanding is in accordance with the will of God as revealed in the Ten Commandments. All he has to do is to cite it. It is self-explanatory. Yet, it is quite interesting, if Christ truly did away with the Decalogue and the Christian is no longer obligated to obey them, why Paul would quote the fifth commandment here. The apostle, in fact, takes it for granted that there would be no objection that the commandment is still valid and binding. Not only that, but the promise of long life and prosperity still holds true, even if the Mosaic Covenant had been done away with by the death and resurrection of Christ.

The promise of the commandment is slightly different. The original promise referred to a long and prosperous life in the Promised Land, while the apostle speaks of “land” generally, wherever you live. We see that although the promise is slightly different, yet that does not make it so that the commandment is different. It is still, in essence, the same commandment, though the limitation of the promise as found in Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16 to the Promised Land, is lifted up. [See for more here.](#)

1 Timothy 1:8-11 - The Law Is Good, If Used Lawfully

Now we know that **the law is good**, if one uses it lawfully, 9 understanding this, that **the law is not laid down for the just** but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, 10 the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and **whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine**, 11 **in accordance with the gospel** of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

Paul begins by a common confession, “we know.” It is a given and it is true that the Law of God, of which he is speaking, is indeed good. This is in accord with what he elsewhere says, for example, in Romans 7:12, “So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.” The Law is good and it is good because it reflects the goodness of the Lawgiver. But it is only good if one uses it *lawfully*. To use it *lawfully* means to use the law according to the law. To not use it contrary to its purposes. The Greek word καλός (*kalos*, G2570) means “beautiful, handsome, excellent, eminent, choice, surpassing, precious, useful, suitable, commendable, admirable”.^[90] God’s law is useful, precious and good. Both Paul and the false teachers, who “desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions” (1Tim. 1:7), confessed that. Both admitted and believed the goodness of God’s Law. But, there is a use of the law which is good and legitimate, and there is a use which is not good because it is not in accord with its design. These Jewish teachers were most probably trying to teach the

Ephesians that they need to keep the law to be justified. They were most likely Judaizers, like those who were in the Galatian church. Since the infancy of the church, some Jews were insisting upon the Gentiles to keep the Law of Moses to be saved (e.g., Acts 15:1, 5). To use the Law as a means of justification is an *unlawful* use of the Law. The Law, as given to sinful man was not meant to justify him, but instead to reveal sin and the need for the Savior. Therefore, any use of the Law as a means of justification is an unlawful use of the Law.

Who Is The “Righteous Person?”

Now then the apostle goes on to describe the lawful use of the Law. He begins by declaring for whom it was *not* intended, “the law is not laid down for the just” (1Tim. 1:9). Who or what is “the just” or “a righteous person” here? Does it refer to the Christian justified believer? I believe that it does *not* refer to the believer for that will contradict all that was laid down in other passages both in Paul and elsewhere about the validity and use of the Law for the believer (e.g., Rom. 3:31; 7:14; 8:3-4; 13:8-10; Eph. 6:1-3). Barnes writes:

It cannot be supposed, moreover, that the apostle meant, to say that the law was not binding on a *righteous man*, or that he was under no obligation to obey it—for he everywhere teaches that the moral law is obligatory on all mankind. To suppose also that a *righteous man* is released from the obligation to obey the law, that is, to do *right*, is an absurdity. ^[6]

“The just” or the “righteous person” here is contrasted with those who break the Ten Commandments, therefore, the “righteous person” here is the one who always keeps the Law of God. This clearly does not refer to the Christian. The Christian is certainly righteous in that the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed to him, yet he is not righteous (blameless, guiltless, sinless) in the sense of perfectly keeping the Law of God. No mere man is righteous on this ground. We daily break the commandments of God. The apostle Paul thinks of himself in the *present time* (“I am”) as “the foremost” or “the chief” of sinners (1Tim. 1:15). Paul, even after justification considers himself the chief of sinners, not because Christ’s righteousness was not imputed to him, but because he still hasn’t been conformed to the perfect rule of righteousness (cf. Rom. 7:25).

A lot of commentators believe that the Christian is being referred to as “a righteous person”, but still don’t think that this rules out the use of the law for the believer. Paul here is laying down a certain function of the law for the unbeliever. He is combating those who were trying to be justified by the law, telling them that the law brings condemnation, rather than justification. Paul is *not* trying to give a whole treatise on the use of the law for if this was the only use of the law which Paul believed is valid, he would have contradicted himself as we saw that he most certainly believed that Christians are obliged to follow the moral Law of God in the above passages which we discussed. Moreover, as Albert Barnes notes:

The meaning seems to be, that the purpose of the law was not to fetter and perplex those who were righteous, and who aimed to do their duty and to please God, It was not intended to produce a spirit of servitude and bondage. As the Jews interpreted it, it did this, and this interpretation appears to have been adopted by the teachers at Ephesus, to whom Paul refers. The whole tendency of their teaching was to bring the soul into a state of bondage, and to make religion a condition of servitude. Paul teaches, on the other hand, that religion was a condition of freedom, and that the main purpose of the law was not to fetter the minds of the righteous by numberless observances and minute

regulations, but that it was to restrain the wicked from sin. This is the case with all law. No *good* man feels himself fettered and manacled by wholesome laws, nor does he feel that the purpose of law is to reduce him to a state of servitude. It is only the wicked who have this feeling—and in this sense the law is made for a man who intends to do wrong.^[6]

For the believer, the Law leads us to the way of freedom to live according to God's will (Ps. 119:45 HCSB). But for the unbeliever, the Law condemns him and damns him. It cannot bring freedom to those who are devoid of God's Spirit for the Law *is* spiritual (Rom. 7:14, [see above](#)). These false teachers were trying to use the Law and no doubt not only the moral law, but the ceremonial law likewise to bring Christians into slavery under the law. The purpose of the law for the "righteous man" is not to condemn him. Whom it condemns and damns is the unbeliever who is outside of Christ and therefore is under God's condemnation *already* (John 3:18, 36).

The Law is not laid down to condemn the believer but rather points to his duty toward God and man. The Law is used by God to sanctify us and to conform us to Christ's image, Who perfectly obeyed God's Law in word, thought and deed. The Law is written upon the hearts of God's people. It is not something external to them, but something internal. God teaches and leads His people to walk in His Law. But for those who are outside of Christ, they need the Law to restrain them from sin and to be punished. Following the Law is not part of the depraved nature, rather doing all that the Law forbids is part of the depraved nature. "This freedom of the righteous from the Law is what St. Paul everywhere asserts (Rom 6:14; Rom 8:2; Gal 2:19; Gal 3:25; Gal 5:18, etc.), the Law being viewed, not as a holy rule of life, but as a system of penalties—"a Law of sin and death."^[9] As a system which brings condemnation and death, the Law of God is not meant for the Christian, but rather the unbeliever who is an *antinomian*. But as a guide and as a rule of life, it is written in the heart and on the mind of the Christian to govern and direct his conduct. John Calvin notes on the word "righteous":

...in this passage Paul gives the appellation "righteous" to those who are not absolutely perfect, (for no such person will be found,) but who, with the strongest desire of their heart, aim at what is good; so that godly desire is to them a kind of voluntary law, without any motive or restraint from another quarter. He therefore wished to repress the impudence of adversaries, who armed themselves with the name of "the law" against godly men, whose whole life exhibits the actual role of the law, since they had very great need of the law, and yet did not care much about it; which is more clearly expressed by the opposite clause.^[7]

In conclusion, whether the "righteous person" refers (1) to someone who is morally perfect or (2) to the Christian, it could not be proven from either that the Law has nothing to do with the Christian. Paul here is specifically dealing with the misuse of the Law by the false teachers and pointing out the use of the Law for unbelievers. He is not giving a treatise on all the possible uses of the Law. We as Christians still should look into the mirror of the Law and seek to conform more to it, because the Law reflects God's holiness and shows us our sin. Though we can no longer be condemned by the Law because Christ was condemned on our behalf and has satisfied and canceled that function of the Law for the believer.

Breakers Of God's Law

It is my belief that the list that Paul gives in vv. 9-10 corresponds to the first through the ninth commandments of the Decalogue. If it could be proven that this is actually the case then we see in

Paul a strong case for the abiding validity and use of the moral law of the Decalogue. Just a cursory reading of this passage will at least call to mind commandments five through nine, therefore, there is no question that the Law which Paul has in mind is the Law of the Decalogue. The moral law is summarized in the Ten Commandments. That is the law that is binding and still valid.

It is clear that the list in vv. 9-10 from those who strike their parents until “perjurers” follows the normal order of the fifth to the ninth commandments. Therefore, is it not likewise reasonable to see the list given at the beginning following the order of the First Table of the Decalogue? Single Greek words are used for the violators of the Second Table, therefore, is it not likewise likely that Paul uses single words for those who violate the First Table? Dr. Richard Barcellos observes:

If the sins in 9b and 10 reflect both the content and order of the Decalogue, should we expect the sins in 9a to do so as well? In other words, since verses 9b and 10 reflect the content and order of the second part of the Decalogue, does verse 9a reflect the content and order of the first part?^[92]

Breakers Of The First Table

Paul begins by saying that the Law was laid down for the “lawless and disobedient”. It was laid down for the condemnation of those who put themselves outside the Law, are not in conformity to the Law and are against the Law. Not only are they such, but they are **disobedient** to the Law, but more importantly, they are disobedient to their Creator. The Greek word for disobedient, ἀνυπότακτος (*anupotaktos*, G506), refers to someone who is “not made subject”^[93] and “insubordinate”^[94] to God’s Law (cf. Rom. 8:7-8). These two phrases describe all those who break the Ten Commandments. They function as the summary of all that is to come in vv. 9-10.

Next, Paul lists the “ungodly and sinners.” This refers to those who violate the first and second commandments. The **ungodly** is the one who does not have the LORD as their God. They’ll rather choose anything, but the Lord God. The **sinners** here refers to those who have not been freed from sin and who live in sin. This will no doubt include the sin of idolatry. In fact, the essence of sin is idolatry. When we do not love and fear God, we choose to sin. These two terms refer to violations of the first two commandments.

The next two vices are the “unholy and profane” and these refer to violations of the third and fourth commandments. The **unholy** refers to those who do not honor and glorify the Name of God. It refers to those who do not pray, “Hallowed be thy name” (Matt. 6:9 KJV). Their not honoring and considering God’s Name as holy reflects their own character as unholy. This is a violation of the third commandment. Then we come to the word **profane**. I believe that this term refers to those who profane the Lord’s Day Sabbath. The *Cambridge Bible For Schools and Colleges* notes:

the N. T. use of the word describes disregard of God’s day, Mat 12:5; of God’s house, Act 24:6; of God’s law and truth, 1Ti 4:7; 1Ti 6:20; 2Ti 2:16; of God’s name and birthright blessing, Heb 12:16.^[85]

It seems to be a violation of both the third and fourth commandments. The verb form of the word is defined in TDNT as:

bebeloo. “To desecrate,” used in the LXX of God (Ezek. 13:19), his name (Lev. 18:21), his

day (Neh. 13:17-18), his land (Jer. 16:18), his covenant (Ps. 55:20), and the name of the priest (Lev. 21:9; used also here of a virgin). The only NT instances are in Mt. 12:5 for desecration of the sabbath and in Acts 24:6 for that of the temple, both involving the OT concept of holiness.^[95]

It is indeed interesting that in the NT the verb form is only used of the Sabbath and God's Temple. Those who have defiled and profaned God's Name and God's Day will be judged and the Law is laid down for their condemnation. Therefore, Dr. Barcellos quotes George Knight saying, "Since the keynote of the sabbath is to keep it holy (Exodus 20:8) and since Paul's list is in negative terms, the single term [profane], might well characterize those who profane that day, putting the command negatively in terms of its violation".^[92]

The words "the unholy and profane" refer to those who break the third and fourth commandments of the Decalogue. In conclusion, we have in the words "for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane" a summary of the violators of the First Table. These are the ones who disobey their duty toward God and therefore, likewise disregard and disobey their duty toward man.

Breakers Of The Second Table

Now we move to the Second Table and here we have single Greek words giving us examples of those who break the commandments concerning their duty toward their fellow man.

for those who strike their fathers and mothers. Here Paul gives the worst violations of the fifth commandment. The word strike here refers to murder and not merely to a "slap." The Greek words in the form as they appear are πατρολῳαίς (*patroloais*, G3964) and μητρολῳαίς (*metraloais*, G3389) and are translated by Young's Literal Translation as "parricides and matricides". What is the worst way that one can dishonor their parents? By taking their lives. This clause concerns itself with the violations of the fifth commandment, but it also touches upon the sixth commandment concerning murder. This sin was punishable by death in the Law of Moses (Ex. 21:15).

for murderers. This is a violation of the sixth commandment (Ex. 20:13). Murder was punishable by death since at least the time of Noah (Gen. 9:5-6), if not earlier.

the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality. Homosexuality, which is included under sexual immorality, is a violation of the seventh commandment (Ex. 20:14). The Lord Jesus taught us that this did not merely concern itself with the act, but likewise with our desires (Matt. 5:27-28). Homosexuality is a sin and it was punishable by death under the Old Covenant (Lev. 20:13).

enslavers. This is a reference to the eighth commandment (Ex. 20:15). What is worse than stealing a person himself? This term refers to the worst violations of the eighth commandment. Enslavers would steal people and cause them to work or sell them. This sin was punishable by death in the Law of Moses (Ex. 21:16).

liars, perjurers. This is a violation of the ninth commandment (Ex. 20:16). Perjury is "The crime of willfully and knowingly making a false statement about a material fact while under oath."^[96] This likewise was a sin punishable by death in the Law of Moses (Deut. 19:16-21).

and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine. Paul could have listed those who are covetous, those who hate God and their neighbor, those who are loveless and so on, but he prefers rather to say that the Law condemns those who are against healthy and sound gospel doctrine. The Law is laid down to condemn everyone who is against sound doctrine. But what is interesting here is that Paul

includes the Ten Commandments under “sound doctrine” for those things which he listed were violations of the Decalogue. Barnes notes that “The meaning is, if there is anything else that is opposed to the instruction which the law of God gives.”^[6] Calvin notes:

If there is anything else that is contrary to sound doctrine In this clause he maintains that his gospel is so far from being opposed to the law, that it is a powerful confirmation of it. He declares that by his preaching, he supports that very sentence which the Lord pronounced in his law, against “everything that is contrary to sound doctrine.” Hence it follows, that they who depart from the gospel, do not adhere to the spirit of the law, but merely pursue its shadow.^[7]

Moreover, this sound doctrine is connected and is “in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God” (v. 11). The Law, when used lawfully, is consistent and not against the gospel. It is sound teaching and sound doctrine. It is good and it is holy. John Stott, as quoted by Barcellos, notes:

It is particularly noteworthy that sins which contravene the law (as breaches of the Ten Commandments) are also contrary to the sound doctrine of the gospel. So the moral standards of the gospel do not differ from the moral standards of the law. We must not therefore imagine that, because we have embraced the gospel, we may now repudiate the law!^[92]

Living contrary to the vices of vv. 9-10 is to live according to the Law and to live according to sound doctrine. Living in accordance with the vices is to living contrary to sound doctrine and contrary to the law. Albert Barnes notes on v. 11—

The gospel is a system of Divine revelation. It makes known the will of God. It states what is duty, and accords in its great principles with the law, or is in harmony with it. The law, in principle, forbids all which the gospel forbids, and in publishing the requirements of the gospel, therefore, Paul says that the law really forbade all which was prohibited in the gospel, and was designed to restrain all who would act contrary to that gospel. There is no contradiction between the law and the gospel. They forbid the same things, and in regard to morals and true piety, the clearer revelations of the gospel are but carrying out the principles stated in the law.^[6]

Here we see the Law to be part of the gospel and consistent with it. The Law is not the enemy of the gospel. It becomes antithetical and at enmity with the gospel *only* if used *unlawfully*.

Conclusion

The Law is an instrument that brings condemnation laid for the wicked and not the righteous. For the depraved nature is contrary to the Law, but the Law is part of the redeemed, new nature and we seek to conform our lives more to the Law of God. Paul discusses here the use of the Decalogue for unbelievers and how it condemns them. He goes on to list, using single Greek words, violations of commandments one through nine of the Decalogue. The Law has no condemning power upon the believer, but it is God’s gift to the believer. It shows us the way that God desires that we live, but it likewise shows us our sin (Rom. 3:20). When we see our sin, we should remember that the Savior

died for sin and be driven to the cross.

The Moral Law in James

The apostle James, the brother of the Lord, talks about the law of God calling it “the perfect law, the law of liberty” (Jas. 1:25; 2:12), “the royal law” (Jas. 2:8), moreover we should be “a doer of the law” (Jas. 4:11). Let’s see what those passages mean and to what law are they referring.

The only two commandments cited by James are the sixth, seventh (Jas. 2:11) and the summary of the Second Table (Jas. 2:8). The examples that he gives of the “royal law” and the “law of liberty” are commandments from the Decalogue or a summary of them. Therefore, it is reasonable to think that when James speaks of the law he has in mind the Decalogue and the summary thereof, not the ceremonial and civil laws, for there is not a single word in this Epistle about those.

James’ emphasis that true faith will be accompanied by works is strengthened by the fact that he refers Christians back to the Decalogue. It is there that we learn of our duty and of what is pleasing in God’s sight. It is following God’s moral law as summarized in the Ten Commandments that produces works to vindicate and display our faith. Our works do not produce faith, but true faith will produce works consistent with God’s Law because His Law is written on the hearts and in the minds of His people. Gospel and Law are not antithetical when used lawfully.

James 1:25 - The Perfect Law Of Liberty

But the one who looks into **the perfect law, the law of liberty**, and **perseveres**, being no hearer who forgets but **a doer who acts**, he will be **blessed in his doing**.

James stresses the fact all throughout his letter that our faith should be accompanied by works and so also in v. 22, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.” We should not only hear the Word of God and His Law, but we should also do what it commands. If we do not desire to obey Him, then we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. We should be people who do not forget the Word and commandments of God, but rather who do them and are therefore blessed by God. God blesses those who keep His commandments (e.g., Ps. 112:1). Doers and not merely hearers is what James calls us to be.

The passage before us begins with the word “But” and therefore gives us the idea that there is a contrast being made here. If we look back, we will see that James wrote of someone who was merely a hearer and he compared them to someone who looks at themselves in the mirror, but then directly forgets how they looked like (Jas. 1:23-24). This demonstrates the folly of those who look in the mirror of God’s Law, but do nothing about their sin. They do not seek the Savior, nor do they seek to conform themselves to God’s Law and forsake sin. The mirrors in the ancient world were made of polished metal and did not give a perfect reflection of the person. They saw themselves “in a mirror dimly” (1 Cor. 13:12), but this mirror is contrasted with the *perfect* law of liberty. Here a “stress is laid on the fact that the mirror does supply, in some measure, the self-knowledge which the man could not attain without it.”^[85] The Law reveals our sin, but sadly some people do nothing about their sin problem and simply ignore it. But now we return to v. 25 and see the contrast made with another person. The Law or mirror is not different, but what it produces is different dependent upon man’s reaction to the Law. For those who look at the Law and do nothing about their condition, the Law will bring more sin and will bring condemnation. But for those, Christians, who look at the Law of God to examine themselves in its light and to live according to it, the law becomes a law of liberty. It brings freedom rather than bondage. The crucial difference between the person in vv. 23-24 is that

he is merely a *hearer*, while the person in v. 25 is a *doer* who perseveres in the Law and commandments of God.

Moreover, this *looking* into the law is not merely a glance, but *ἡ παρακύψας*. This word means, to stoop down near by anything; to bend forward near, so as to look at anything more closely. 1Pet 1:12. The idea here is that of a close and attentive observation. The object is not to contrast the manner of looking in the glass, and in the law of liberty, implying that the former was a “careless beholding,” and the latter an attentive and careful looking’.^[6] It is to examine ourselves in light of God’s Law and not merely “take a look” or “take a glance” at the Law, but to study it, seek and strive by the Spirit and God’s grace to conform to its commandments, for that is pleasing to God.

The phrase “the perfect law, the law of liberty” as translated in the ESV is literally in Greek “the perfect law—that of liberty” (YLT). It is translated as “the perfect law of freedom” in the HCSB and ISV; and “the perfect law of liberty” by the KJV and NET. It is a complete, perfect and good law which brings forth liberty. It seems that James is here combining Psalm 19:7 and Psalm 119:45 KJV. His Law is perfect, and we will walk in liberty and freedom because we seek God’s precepts and commandments. It is *perfect* because it reflects God’s character, it is not arbitrary but springs forth from His being and nature. Rather than bringing bondage, it actually sets Christians *free* to walk in the way of the Lord and according to His Law which He has written on our hearts. Barnes says, “It is called the law of liberty, or freedom, because it is a law producing freedom from the servitude of sinful passions and lusts.”^[6] It shows us the right path and forbids us to go to the path of sin. It is not able to cause us to do that which is right, but by the Spirit of the Lord, we are by grace made able to obey God’s commandments. Calvin observes:

Moreover, since it is a blessing of the Old Testament that the law of God should reform us, as it appears from Jer 31:33, and other passages, it follows that it cannot be obtained until we come to Christ. And, doubtless, he alone is the end and perfection of the law; and James adds liberty, as an inseparable associate, because the Spirit of Christ never regenerates but that he becomes also a witness and an earnest of our divine adoption, so as to free our hearts from fear and trembling.

And continueth. This is firmly to persevere in the knowledge of God; and when he adds, this man shall be blessed in his deed, or work, he means that blessedness is to be found in doing, not in cold hearing.^[7]

We should look into the perfect Law of God which brings liberty and be doers of it. The Decalogue should never be separated from Christ’s teaching, but Christ’s teaching should be seen as a clearer exposition of the Law and a strengthening of it, by revealing its true meaning and exposing the false interpretation of the Jewish leaders as He does in the Sermon On The Mount.

James 2:8-12 - The Royal Law

If you really **fulfill the royal law** according to the Scripture, **“You shall love your neighbor as yourself,”** you are doing well. 9 But if you show partiality, you are **committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.** 10 For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become **accountable for all of it.** 11 For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, **you have become a transgressor of the law.** 12 So speak and so act as those who are to be **judged under the law of liberty.**

Instead of showing partiality (Jas. 2:1-7), Christians are called to love their neighbor and show *no* partiality. If they truly think that they're following the Law, then they should not forget the summary of the Second Table, which is: "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). To show partiality is to disobey this commandment, and this is not "doing well." The commandment in Leviticus 19:18 is called "the royal law" because "it is the supreme law that is the source of all other laws governing human relationships. It is the summation of all such laws (Matt 22:36-40; Rom 13:8-10)."^[97] It summarizes our duty toward man and it likewise reveals if we follow our duty toward God ([see 1 John 4:20-21 above](#)). This law

is king of all laws, as He is King of kings: the sum of the Ten Commandments. The great King is love: His law is the royal law of love. He 'is no respecter of persons;' to respect persons is at variance with Him and His law. The law is the "whole;" the particular "scripture" (Lev 19:18) quoted is a part. To break a part is to break the whole (Jas 2:10).^[74]

That James is here summarizing our duty toward our neighbor in the same way that our Lord did does not mean that now there is no other commandment than "love." Rather, the summary shows us what is the *fulfillment* and *goal* of the commandments. The Decalogue merely summarizes *how* we may show love to our neighbor. In the New Testament, the Decalogue should never be divorced from Jesus' teaching and strengthening of its commandments by His right exposition of it. It is Jesus who gave the Law on Sinai for there is but one Lawgiver (Jas. 4:12) and it is the Son Who revealed God upon the Mountain (John 1:18), no man has seen the Father but some had seen the pre-incarnate Christ.

To show partiality is to break the summary of the Law in that we are not loving our neighbor. In fact, to show partiality is not only *improper*, but it is also a sin. What is sin but a transgression of the Law (1 John 3:4 KJV; [see for more on the law and sin above](#))? Therefore, if anyone keeps "the whole law", which I understand to refer to the Decalogue as he seeks to demonstrate by quoting the seventh and sixth commandments, but fails in any commandment, he has broken the *whole* law. Here we see the Decalogue as an indivisible and one whole. Its commandments are consistent with one another and dependent upon one another. It is not a set of arbitrary and random commandments, but a consistent whole and summary of the moral duty of man toward God and man. Jamieson, Fausset, Brown note:

The law is one seamless garment, which is torn if you but tear a part; or a musical harmony, spoiled if there be one discordant note (Tirinus); or a golden chain, whose completeness is broken if you break one link (Gataker). You break the whole law, though not the whole of the law, because you offend against love, the fulfilling of the law. If any part of a man is leprous, the whole man is judged to be a leper. God requires perfect, not partial obedience. We are not to choose parts of the law to keep, which suit our whim, while we neglect others. Any sin brings death: not that all sins are equal as acts but all alike betray a state of natural alienation from God.^[74]

No one can perfectly keep the Law of God, neither does James say that such a thing is possible. But that does not dissolve us of our obligation to obey and strive to obey, so as to demonstrate our thankfulness and our love for God (1 John 5:3). We should not only be hearers but doers of the law. When we break a single commandment of the Decalogue, we become accountable for all, "Not in the sense of having violated every command, but in the sense of having violated the law's unity. One transgression makes fulfilling the law's most basic commands—to love God perfectly and to love one's neighbor as oneself—impossible."^[98]

Then in v. 11, the apostle James goes on to give an example by citing two commandments: the seventh and the sixth. The commandments concerning adultery and murder seem disconnected, but James views them as a part of the whole unity of the Law, therefore, to break one is to break the whole law. Murder and adultery are the worse violations of our duty toward our fellow man. For to commit adultery with our neighbor's wife is to disgrace him and to put his wife to shame. In other words, that is not showing love to one's neighbor and therefore breaking the supreme and royal law. To murder one's neighbor is likewise clearly not to show love. Whether you murder, steal, commit adultery, dishonor your parents, covet or lie, "you have become a transgressor of the law", not because you have committed each one of those sins, but because you have transgressed the commandment which unites and summarizes the whole law, which is: "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). This teaching is consistent with what the Torah itself says and what the apostle Paul says:

Gal. 3:10 For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "**Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things** written in the Book of the Law, and do them."

The curse of the law is upon everyone who does not abide by *ALL* things. God requires perfect obedience, but thanks to Christ, Paul goes on to explain that this curse of the law was laid upon Him and therefore we are not cursed neither will we ever be subject to the curse of the law. The Law has no longer power to condemn the regenerated believer. The Law becomes our friend and our guide to show us the way of righteousness. It cannot condemn us because the Law condemned Christ on our behalf. Therefore, in vv. 12-13, James gives the conclusion on this matter: we are to act and be doers who will be judged by the law of freedom and liberty. By the Law which brings freedom, not bondage and condemnation. Christians will be judged by the law of liberty not to determine their eternal destiny (for they are saved by grace alone, Jas. 1:18; [see the exposition of James 2:14-26 here](#)), but their rewards from God (Ps. 19:11; [see here for more on works at the Final Judgment](#)). The one who shows mercy demonstrates that he has received mercy from God, that's why the Scriptures call us to show forgiveness and love as our Lord did (e.g., Eph. 4:32). On the other hand, the one who shows no mercy demonstrates that he has received no mercy from God and is still in his sins.

In conclusion, the royal law here is the supreme law on which our duty toward our fellow man is based. It is the summary of the Decalogue, particularly the Second Table. If one violates any commandment of the Decalogue, he breaks the whole Decalogue, for the Law of God is one unity and indivisible whole. This unity should be expressed in love for our neighbor which flows first of all from love for God.

James 4:11-12 - Doers Of The Law

Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, **speaks evil against the law and judges the law**. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. 12 There is only **one lawgiver and judge**, he who is able to save and to destroy. But who are you to judge your neighbor?

The "law" which James refers to here is the same Law of God which he spoke about in James 2:8-11, which was summarized in "the royal law" which says "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18). "By the law here is meant the moral law, that law the summary of which is, "Thou shalt love

thy neighbour as thyself;’ and which St. James designates ‘the royal law’ (Jas 2:8). He who in a censorious spirit judges his brother, sets at nought this law of love, and thus speaks evil of it, or undervalues it.”^[84] The one who speaks evil of their brother or sister, that is, their neighbor, speaks evil about the law. Why is that? Because “he judges the law” and to speak evil about and judge the law is to do the same about the Lawgiver. By speaking evil of another and by slandering we break the ninth commandment (Ex. 20:16) and we do *not* show love to our neighbor, thereby breaking the whole law (Jas. 2:10). James calls us not to be judges, but *doers* of the Law. The Law is not something that is antithetical to the Christian life, rather, we should be *doers* of it; we should follow the commandments of God and keep them, for they are given for our own good to lead us into the liberty of living as God desires. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, but if we break the Law, we thereby judge the Law and place ourselves in the place of God! When we break the Law we put ourselves in the place of God and defy His authority over our lives. By despising and disobeying His Law, we despise and disobey *Him*. “To speak against a brother is to scorn the law of love.”^[99] Albert Barnes notes on v. 11:

But if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge. It is implied here that it is the simple duty of every Christian to *obey* the law. He is not to assume the office of a judge about its propriety or fitness; but he is to do what he supposes the law to require of him, and is to allow others to do the same. Our business in religion is not to make laws, or to declare what they should have been, or to amend those that are made; it is simply to *obey* those which are appointed, and to allow others to do the same, as they understand them. It would be well for all individual Christians. and Christian denominations, to learn this, and to imbibe the spirit of charity to which it would prompt.^[6]

Christians are *doers* and not *rejecters* of the Law. Christians should be people who regulate their lives by the perfect law of liberty, love, and delight in God’s Law, and not despise it.

Vice Lists And The Decalogue

Here I will merely give a list of sinners and sins listed in the vice-lists given by the apostle Paul and John. These lists show how most of the vice lists are composed of violations of the Decalogue. This does not only show the abiding validity of the Decalogue but also that *it is, in fact*, the standard on the Day of Judgment. The vices and sinners listed in the third column do not always correspond to the explicit text of the commandment because I understand the commandments more fully, **[as I have tried to explain them above.](#)** I understand most sins against the First Table to be interconnected. For example, the idolater breaks not only the second commandment but the first, second and third commandment. Idolatry and false worship are connected with profaning the Name of the Lord in Leviticus 18:21. Moreover, there is no one who breaks the first commandment without breaking the second, and vice versa. Furthermore, I understand drunkenness to be a violation of the fifth commandment in accordance with its close connection in Deuteronomy 21:20. To lead a lifestyle of drunkenness is to dishonor one’s parents. What follows is not an exegesis of each text, but merely, tables of the Commandments and the sins of sinners that are condemned in them.

Romans 1:28-31

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. 29 They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness.

They are gossips, 30 slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, 31 foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.

#	The Ten Commandments	Vices
1	You shall have no other gods before Me.	Haters of God (v. 30), did not acknowledge God (v. 28)
2	You shall not make for yourself a carved image.	Haters of God (v. 30), did not acknowledge God (v. 28)
3	You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.	Haters of God (v. 30), did not acknowledge God (v. 28)
4	Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.	-
5	Honor your father and your mother	Insolent (v. 30), disobedient to parents (v. 30)
6	You shall not murder.	Malice (v. 29), murder (v. 29), ruthless (v. 31)
7	You shall not commit adultery.	Homosexuality, lesbianism (vv. 24-27)
8	You shall not steal.	-
9	You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.	Deceit (v. 29), gossips (v. 29), slanderers (v. 30)
10	You shall not covet.	Covetousness (v. 28), envy (v. 28)

1 Corinthians 5:10-11

not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. 11 But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.

#	The Ten Commandments	Vices
1	You shall have no other gods before Me.	Idolaters (v. 11)
2	You shall not make for yourself a carved image.	Idolaters (v. 11)
3	You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.	Idolaters (v. 11)
4	Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.	-
5	Honor your father and your mother	Drunkard (v. 11; cf. Deut. 21:20)
6	You shall not murder.	-
7	You shall not commit adultery.	Sexual immorality (v. 10, 11)
8	You shall not steal.	Swindlers (v. 10, 11)
9	You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.	Swindlers (v. 10, 11), reviler (v. 11)
10	You shall not covet.	Greedy (v. 11), swindlers (v. 10, 11)

1 Corinthians 6:9-10

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

#	The Ten Commandments	Vices
1	You shall have no other gods before Me.	Idolaters (v. 9)
2	You shall not make for yourself a carved image.	Idolaters (v. 9)
3	You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.	Idolaters (v. 9)
4	Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.	-
5	Honor your father and your mother	Drunkards (v. 10; cf. Deut. 21:20)
6	You shall not murder.	-
7	You shall not commit adultery.	Sexually immoral (v. 9), adulterers (v. 9), homosexuals (v. 9)
8	You shall not steal.	Thieves (v. 10), greedy (v. 10), swindlers (v. 10)
9	You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.	Revilers (v. 10), swindlers (v. 10)
10	You shall not covet.	Greedy (v. 10), swindlers (v. 10)

Galatians 5:19-21

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, 21 envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.

#	The Ten Commandments	Vices
1	You shall have no other gods before Me.	Idolatry (v. 20)
2	You shall not make for yourself a carved image.	Idolatry (v. 20), sorcery (v. 20)
3	You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.	Idolatry (v. 20)
4	Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.	-
5	Honor your father and your mother	Drunkenness (v. 21; cf. Deut. 21:20)
6	You shall not murder.	Enmity (v. 20), strife (v. 20), fits of anger (v. 20), rivalries (v. 20)
7	You shall not commit adultery.	Sexual immorality (v. 19), impurity (v. 19), sensuality (v. 19), orgies (v. 21)
8	You shall not steal.	-
9	You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.	-
10	You shall not covet.	Jealousy (v. 20), envy (v. 21)

1 Timothy 1:8-11

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, 9 understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, 10 the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, 11 in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

[See above for our discussion on this passage.](#)

#	The Ten Commandments	Vices
1	You shall have no other gods before Me.	Ungodly (v. 9), sinner (v. 9)
2	You shall not make for yourself a carved image.	Ungodly (v. 9), sinner (v. 9)
3	You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.	Unholy (v. 9), profane (v. 9)
4	Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.	Unholy (v. 9), profane (v. 9)
5	Honor your father and your mother	Those who strike their fathers and mothers (v. 9)
6	You shall not murder.	Murderers (v. 9)
7	You shall not commit adultery.	Sexually immoral (v. 10), homosexual (v. 10)
8	You shall not steal.	Enslavers (v. 10)
9	You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.	Liars, perjurers (v. 10)
10	You shall not covet.	-

Revelation 21:8

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

#	The Ten Commandments	Vices
1	You shall have no other gods before Me.	Faithless, sorcerers, idolaters
2	You shall not make for yourself a carved image.	Faithless, sorcerers, idolaters
3	You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.	Faithless, idolaters
4	Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.	-
5	Honor your father and your mother	-
6	You shall not murder.	Murderers
7	You shall not commit adultery.	Sexually immoral
8	You shall not steal.	-
9	You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.	Liars

10	You shall not covet.	-
----	----------------------	---

Revelation 22:15

Outside are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

#	The Ten Commandments	Vices
1	You shall have no other gods before Me.	Sorcerers, idolaters
2	You shall not make for yourself a carved image.	Sorcerers, idolaters
3	You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.	Idolaters
4	Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.	-
5	Honor your father and your mother	-
6	You shall not murder.	Murderers
7	You shall not commit adultery.	Sexually immoral
8	You shall not steal.	-
9	You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.	One who loves and practices falsehood
10	You shall not covet.	-

§6 Believers Are Not Under the Law as a Covenant of Works

6. Although **true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works**, to be thereby justified or condemned, **1** yet **it is of great use to them** as well as to others, in that as **a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty**, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly; **2 discovering also the sinful pollutions** of their natures, hearts, and lives, so as examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against, sin; together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ and the perfection of his obedience; **3** it is likewise of use to the regenerate to **restrain their corruptions**, in that it forbids sin; and the threatenings of it serve to shew what even their sins deserve, and what afflictions in this life they may expect for them, although freed from the curse and unallayed rigour thereof. **4** The promises of it likewise shew them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof, **5** though **not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works**; **6** so as man's doing good and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one and deterreth from the other, **is no evidence of his being under the law and not under grace.** **7**

1. Acts 13:39; Rom. 6:14; 8:1; 10:4; Gal. 2:16; 4:4, 5
2. Rom. 7:12, 22, 25; Ps. 119:4-6; 1 Cor. 7:19
3. Rom. 3:20; 7:7, 9,14, 24; 8:3; James 1:23-25
4. James 2:11; Ps. 119:101, 104, 128
5. Eph 6:2-3; Ps. 37:11; Matt. 5:6; Ps. 19:11
6. Luke 17:10
7. Matt. 3:7; Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 2:40; Heb. 11:26; 1 Peter 3:8-13.

The law does not function **as a covenant of works** for **true believers...to be thereby justified or**

condemned (Acts 13:39; Rom. 6:14; 8:1; Gal. 2:16; 4:4-5). This is not the function of the law in the New Covenant. Rather, the law is given as a **rule of life**. It reveals to us **the will of God and our duty** and it **directs us to walk accordingly**. It still reveals to us our **sinful pollutions** (Rom. 3:20) and it shows the sinfulness of sin so that we may have more **hatred** for it. When it reveals to us our sinfulness, we may **with a clearer sight** see our need **of Christ and the perfection of His obedience**. These things the law is given to work for the regenerate as well as the unregenerate. The law is often used by God to awaken people to their sinfulness and the need for Christ. But for the **regenerate** the law is also **of great use to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin; and the threatenings** of it show us how serious God is about sin and how harmful it is. God often disciplines us for our sins as a father disciplines His children; not to condemn us but to bring us back to righteousness. Therefore, we should fear the discipline of the Lord. God will discipline us for sin even though we are **freed from the curse and unallayed rigour** of the law. The law will never condemn a justified person, nor are we rewarded according to the **rigour** or strictness of the law. God is always gracious in His dealings with us and it is all thanks to the Lord Jesus Christ and His work. The **promises** which God gives for obedience are blessings because of Christ and **not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works** (Rom. 6:14). As these promises are also found in the Covenant of Grace, they are freely bestowed on us because of Jesus Christ. This aspect of the law giving promises as well as threatening **is no evidence of us being under the law and not under grace**. We are under grace because even the law is given to serve us and bring us closer to God. Furthermore, the law will never condemn us like it should under a covenant of works. Therefore, we are not under the law as a covenant of works, but under grace. Grace is our only leg to stand on.

In this paragraph, we deal with the Law as *not* being a covenant of works for the believer and about the uses of the law.

Not As A Covenant Of Works

We have already touched upon this subject in the preceding paragraphs, especially paragraph 5, but here I would especially like to discuss the subject of how the law is not a way of salvation nor is it a system of condemnation for the justified believer. Notice that the Confession does not teach that the believer can attain justification or condemnation by the Law. The Law can neither justify the *ungodly*, nor can it condemn the *godly*. Rather, the Law of God, which is the moral law as summarized in the Decalogue, is to function as a *rule of life* and not a system of *justification*. We have touched upon this many times above in our exposition of passages about the relationship of the Christian and the moral law ([see paragraph 5](#)).

Romans 6:14 - Not Under Law But Under Grace

For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are **not under law but under grace**.

This is the favorite text of antinomians and those who reject the Reformed understanding about the Law of God as expressed here. The usual cry is “you are not under law but under grace” and therefore we do not need the Ten Commandments and we are not under any law. But is this really what Paul is teaching? Is Paul teaching that the Christian does not have to obey the Law? That will be contradictory to what he will say in Romans 7:25 and many other places ([see above, The Moral Law In Paul](#)).

A little bit of context is mandatory for us to understand the true meaning of this passage. In Romans 6:1, after dealing with the doctrine of justification by faith alone, he expects an objection, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound?" If salvation is free and has nothing to do with anything that we've done, why not continue with sinning? The reason is that we have died to sin with Christ, which is symbolized in baptism. The reason that a Christian *cannot* live a lifestyle of sin after regeneration is because, he, in Christ, has died to sin. Therefore, from the outset, we see that not being under the law does not mean that we can freely sin. In fact, *because* we are under grace we should not sin! We have died with Him to be set free from sin (Rom. 6:7). What is sin but the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4)? Therefore, to not sin is to live in accordance with God's moral law. Since we died with Him, we will likewise live with Him (Rom. 6:8). Therefore, we should not let sin reign in our bodies as a hard task master, making us to obey its passions (Rom. 6:12). This was the case before we died to sin with Christ, but now that we have died to sin, we should not let it rule over us. Before Christ, we were willing slaves to sin, but now we should be willing slaves to Christ and righteousness (Rom. 6:13). We should delight ourselves in righteousness, rather than sin. It is at this point that our present passage comes:

Rom. 6:13-14 Do not present your members to sin as **instruments for unrighteousness**, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to **God as instruments for righteousness**.¹⁴ For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

We are not under the law because we have died to that which gives power to the law, i.e., sin. Moreover, to be under the law is to seek justification through the law. This is the major point that Paul was battling against in Romans 2-5. There is no peace and justification by the law, rather it brings condemnation. He is here not speaking of the law as he elsewhere does as a rule of life (e.g., Rom. 3:31; 7:25; 8:3-4; 13:8-10). Rather he speaks here about the law as a system to be governed by and to be under the dominion of. In other words, we are either slaves to the law or slaves to grace; we are either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness. Here, Paul views law and grace as antithetical because he is speaking about them as systems of justification. To be "under" something here, is to be dominated and ruled by it; to be the slave of that which you are under. This is, I believe, the sense that Paul is using this terminology here. If we were "under the law" then sin *will* indeed have dominion over us. But since we are under grace and have been saved by grace apart from the works of the law, we are not under the dominion of sin and the law. The law can no longer bring condemnation upon us. Jamieson, Fausset, Brown write:

To be "UNDER THE LAW," then, is first, to be 'under its claim to entire obedience on pain of death;' and so, secondly, to underlie the curse of the law as having violated its righteous demands (Gal 3:10)... On the other hand, to be "UNDER GRACE," is to be under the glorious canopy and saving effects of that "Grace which bringeth salvation" and reigns 'through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord' (see the notes at Rom 5:20-21).^[74]

And Calvin likewise notes:

Hence, *not to be under the law* means, not only that we are not under the letter which prescribes what involves us in guilt, as we are not able to perform it, but also that we are no longer subject to the law, as requiring perfect righteousness, and pronouncing death

on all who deviate from it in any part. In like manner, by the word *grace*, we are to understand both parts of redemption — the remission of sins, by which God imputes righteousness to us, — and the sanctification of the Spirit, by whom he forms us anew unto good works.^[7]

Paul is not an antinomian, for he expects that some will misunderstand his statement, therefore, he goes on to say:

Rom. 6:15-16 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! 16 Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?

Sin, which is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4), is not the answer to us being under grace. Rather, *since* we are under grace we should all the more refrain from sin. To not sin and live in righteousness is to live in accordance with God's Law. Therefore, this verse does not teach that the Christian is free from obedience to God's Law, rather, here is a contrast made between the law as a system of justification and a rule of righteousness for a justified believer. We are freed from the curse and rigor of the Law, but not from obedience to it. In fact, we have been set free from sin to live to righteousness! In this, the statement of the Confession is justified:

...so as man's doing good and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law and not under grace.

Romans 10:4 - Christ Is The End Of The Law For Righteousness

For **Christ is the end of the law for righteousness** to everyone who believes.

How often is this verse quoted as "Christ is the end of the law" and by which people imply that Christ abrogated the whole Old Testament law! It's quite amazing that people so misuse this passage. It is true that Christ is the end of the law, but for a particular purpose, not wholly! There is not a period after "end of the law", but the apostle then goes on to explain for what is Christ the end. Christ is the end of the law for *righteousness*. What does this mean?

The law being referred to here is the whole Mosaic Law which the Jews, by their obedience to it, tried to gain a right standing with God. By their obedience to the Law of Moses and their works, they thought they would be justified. This, the apostle has totally refuted, especially in chapters 3-4 of this epistle. What he argues here is that "Christ ends using the law for the purpose of obtaining a right standing with God."^[100] The law was not given for the purpose of producing righteousness and salvation; it cannot accomplish that for sinful man. Rather, it was given to reveal sin and show its sinfulness (Rom. 3:20; 7:5, 13). But what does Christ being the "end" here mean? The word τέλος (*telos*, G5056) can mean *end* as in "termination" and "goal" among other things depending on the context, of course. The translation "end" by most English Bibles does not necessarily mean "end" as termination, but can also mean *goal*. The word in itself is ambiguous. I believe a combination of these two meanings fits the passage.

Here, Paul is using the word “law” to denote the Mosaic Law as a system of justification and not a rule of life. People were trying to use it to gain righteousness and justification (Rom. 10:3), but this was not the end for which it was given (e.g., Rom. 3:19-20). A sense of termination is certainly there. Christ’s work fulfilled and therefore, abrogated the Old Covenant, and so the Mosaic covenant of works/national covenant was abrogated, terminated, and ended. That system and the misuse for justification of it has come to an end. Theoretically, I believe one could have received justification by it, if perfectly obeyed and began so, without sin. But given the nature of fallen man and of original sin, justification and righteousness by it was there an impossibility for mere men. See chapter 7 on my thoughts on the question of eternal life and the Mosaic Covenant [here](#).

Christ is also the fulfillment and goal of the law, meaning, the law was pointing forward to Him and it is in Him that the law finds its fulfillment and goal. He came to fulfill the Law (Matt. 5:17-19; [see above for our discussion of this passage](#)) and the law through the types and shadows pointed to Him. Moreover, Paul said earlier that “the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it” (Rom. 3:21). This means that justification by faith alone was attested and taught by the Old Testament. It did not come through the Law, but nonetheless, it was attested and witnessed to *by* the Law. I believe this to have been done through the sacrificial types and shadows among other things, which pointed toward Christ’s sacrifice. The meaning of *telos* here, therefore, is that Christ is both the *goal* and *termination*, which is expressed by the English “end.” Most importantly, this verse should not be read as a blank statement, “Christ is the end of the law”, but rather be read as a whole and in its context. Christ is the *goal* and *end* of the law as a system of righteousness and a covenant of works for the believer, because He, through His sacrifice which the law pointed to, brings everlasting righteousness to all who believe and thereby abrogates that old and ineffective system, for no sinful man could obtain righteousness by it. For a sinful and unredeemed man, all it can do is bring condemnation. But for the one who has been justified it *cannot* bring condemnation for it has been abrogated as a covenant of works (cf. Rom. 8:1; Gal. 3:10-13). Its function for the believer is as a rule of life, which shows us what God’s will is and what true righteousness looks like. Richard Winston writes:

...Christ does not end the law in any universal sense. He ends the individual pursuit of the law in order to obtain right standing with God. When a sinful human trusts Christ for salvation, Christ ends the law unto righteousness for them. ^[101]

The law, as viewed to be in the Mosaic Covenant, is abrogated. But we have argued that the moral law, as summarized in the Decalogue, is an expression and a reflection of God’s moral character and moreover, its commandments predate Sinai ([see above](#)). The moral law of God, which is summarized in the Ten Commandments, is above and independent from the Mosaic Covenant. It was given in written form under the Mosaic Covenant, but as a moral code, it is eternal because it reflects the nature of God and was put on the heart of the first man. In the New Covenant, it is no longer written upon tablets of stone, but upon tablets of flesh ([see the discussion on Jeremiah 31:33 above](#)). In support of the view “that Christ ends the individual’s use of the law for the purpose of obtaining righteousness”, Richard Winston gives the following points:

First, the lexical data and the context support the meaning of τέλος as “end” in the sense of termination. Christ is putting an end to something.⁹⁰ Second, the phrase εἰς δικαιοσύνην [for righteousness] directly modifies τέλος νόμου [end of the law], not the entire equative clause.⁹¹ Christ ends the law with reference to righteousness (and the pursuit of righteousness). Third, the flow of thought in 10:1-3 leads naturally to a statement in 10:4 about Christ ending the pursuit of righteousness by works for those

who believe.^[102]

In conclusion, Christ the Lord terminates the Law of Moses as a system of righteousness, because He, by His passive and active obedience, establishes everlasting righteousness for all who put their faith in Him. In the words of Winston, “Paul identifies Christ as the end of the law because Christ is the ultimate manifestation of the message that humans must trust God alone for their salvation.”^[103] Therefore, we have been set free from the law as a system of righteousness and a covenant of works which demands perfect obedience, or which otherwise pronounces its curse. In the words of Paul in Acts 13:39, “by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.” Why? Because He fulfilled and obeyed the law on our behalf. Not only that, but it was also He who took upon Himself the curse of the law on our behalf! Oh, what amazing grace!

Threefold Uses Of The Law

Since we have argued that the Law of God is still valid and binding on the believer, we now explore the classic threefold uses of the Law. The first and second uses are valid for both believer and unbeliever, while the third use is exclusively for the born again believer.

1. The Pedagogical Use

First of all, the Law functions as a mirror and a schoolmaster, showing us our sin and the perfect righteousness of God. The apostle says that “through the law comes knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:13; 7:7-11). This means that without the Law there would not have been knowledge of sin ([see above for more on the connection between Law and Sin](#)). The Law shows us our sin and the gospel shows us the solution for sin. Although in our time, people want to minimize sin, yet I believe that it is crucial for salvation and proper representation of the gospel to expose the sinfulness of sin and then give the gospel solution. People should know that they’re sinners, falling short of God’s standard and glory, and *then* be presented with the gospel of grace which declares that Jesus has kept the Law for us and took the curse of the Law upon Himself which we should have taken. The Law, says the apostle, leads us to Christ (Gal. 3:19-24). Calvin writes:

Thus the Law is a kind of mirror. As in a mirror we discover any stains upon our face, so in the Law we behold, first, our impotence; then, in consequence of it, our iniquity; and, finally, the curse, as the consequence of both. He who has no power of following righteousness is necessarily plunged in the mire of iniquity, and this iniquity is immediately followed by the curse. Accordingly, the greater the transgression of which the Law convicts us, the severer the judgement to which we are exposed. To this effect is the apostle’s declaration, that “by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom 3:20). By these words, he only points out the first office of the Law as experienced by sinners not yet regenerated.^[104]

Concerning the first use (which he classifies as the second), Berkhof writes:

A usus elencticus or pedagogicus. In this capacity the law serves the purpose of bringing man under conviction of sin, and of making him conscious of his inability to meet the demands of the law. In that way the law becomes his tutor to lead him unto Christ, and thus becomes subservient to God’s gracious purpose of redemption.^[105]

2. The Civil Use

Secondly, the Law restrains evil. It is acknowledged by us that the Law is *not* the gospel, but the Law is not contrary to the gospel when used lawfully. The civil use of “the law restrains our sin, it holds a wicked man back from being as sinful as he would otherwise would be.”^[106] Though the Law cannot change the heart, what it *can* do is restrain evil on the threat of *punishment*. The Law commands not to murder and steal, but it does not change the heart of man to want what is right. Nevertheless, it threatens man with punishment if these commandments are violated and therefore, the Law restrains evil and sin. Even those who are wolves in sheep’s clothing in the Church will be affected and changed in a certain way when they hear the Law of God explained clearly. They may not become believers and thus obey the Law from the heart, but they will fear the punishment and thereby restrain themselves from certain sins and evils (see 2 Pet. 2:20; cf. Rom. 13:3-4). The first use shows us our sin and the second use shows us the punishment for our sin and seeks to restrain us from sin by the threat of punishment or discipline.

This use of the Law helps the Christian to all the more seek to obey God and thereby manifest his love and thankfulness toward God, not willing to fall under His fatherly displeasure and discipline but to always walk pleasing to Him. David says that by the Law he is warned and by keeping them God rewards him (Ps. 19:11). Concerning the second use of the Law, Calvin writes:

The second office of the Law is, by means of its fearful denunciations and the consequent dread of punishment, to curb those who, unless forced, have no regard for rectitude and justice. Such persons are curbed not because their mind is inwardly moved and affected, but because, as if a bridle were laid upon them, they refrain their hands from external acts, and internally check the depravity which would otherwise petulantly burst forth. It is true, they are not on this account either better or more righteous in the sight of God. For although restrained by terror or shame, they dare not proceed to what their mind has conceived, nor give full license to their raging lust, their heart is by no means trained to fear and obedience. Nay, the more they restrain themselves, the more they are inflamed, the more they rage and boil, prepared for any act or outbreak whatsoever were it not for the terror of the law...they are not led by voluntary submission, but dragged by the force of fear.^[107]

But the Law has also the use to bring the unbeliever to Christ. Of this, Calvin writes:

...“The law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (Gal 3:24); since there are two classes of persons, whom by its training it leads to Christ. Some (of whom we spoke in the first place), from excessive confidence in their own virtue or righteousness, are unfit to receive the grace of Christ, until they are completely humbled. This the law does by making them sensible of their misery, and so disposing them to long for what they previously imagined they did not want. Others have need of a bridle to restrain them from giving full scope to their passions, and thereby utterly losing all desire after righteousness. For where the Spirit of God rules not, the lusts sometimes so burst forth, as to threaten to drown the soul subjected to them in forgetfulness and contempt of God; and so they would, did not God interpose with this remedy... For all who have remained for some time in ignorance of God will confess, as the result of their own experience, that the law had the effect of keeping them in some degree in the fear and reverence of God, till, being regenerated by his Spirit, they began to love him from the heart.^[108]

Berkhof writes:

A usus politicus or civilis. The law serves the purpose of restraining in and promoting righteousness. Considered from this point of view, the law presupposes sin and is necessary on account of sin. It serves the purpose of God's common grace in the world at large.^[105]

3. The Normative Use

Lastly, the Law should be a normative standard for the believer. The Law is the perfect rule of righteousness. The *normative* or *didactic* use of the Law refers to the Law as used by believers so as to learn the will of God from it. In the Law of God, we learn what God loves and what God hates. We learn what God desires of us. The revealed will of God is in conformity with His perfect and abiding Moral Law. The Law followed in this way and used by the Spirit functions as a means to our sanctification. The Law does not sanctify for it is the *Spirit of the Almighty* Who uses the Law to sanctify us. The Spirit sanctifies, the Law merely shows the perfect standard of God and the Spirit works to conform us to that standard. We follow the Law not to gain approval from God or earn justification. We have the approval of God and we follow the Law because of His great love which He poured upon us in Christ our Lord, and not merely because of duty. We seek to follow the Law because that is the nature of the regenerate man on whose heart the Law is written (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:25-27). We cannot follow the Law with the idea that we will gain the approval of God and receive salvation; that is impossible (Gal. 2:16; Rom. 6:14). But we are under the Law as a rule of life and not a system of salvation (Rom. 7:22, 25; 13:8-10; 1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 5:13-14; 6:2; Heb. 8:10; Jas. 1:25; 2:8-13; 4:11; 1 John 2:3-7). The Law does not function as a covenant of works for the believer, but it is part of the New Covenant as promised in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Bob Schilling writes:

The reason the law is now our aid and not our enemy is because the gospel has transformed our relationship to it. Our transgressions are forgiven; we're no longer under its condemnation (Rom. 8:1) nor bondage. Its precepts are now our delight and joy (Ps. 1:2; 19:7-10; 119:97). And most importantly, having been born again (1 Pet. 1:3-5), God's Spirit is now within us (Rom. 8:9-14) empowering our new hearts to keep and obey His law (1 John 2:3) in a manner that genuinely pleases Him (Eph. 5:8-10; 1 John 3:22; 1 Chron. 29:17; Luke 1:6; Josh, 11:15, 14:5).^[106]

Calvin writes:

The third use of the Law (being also the principal use, and more closely connected with its proper end) has respect to believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already flourishes and reigns. For although the Law is written and engraven on their hearts by the finger of God, that is, although they are so influenced and actuated by the Spirit, that they desire to obey God, there are two ways in which they still profit in the Law. For it is the best instrument for enabling them daily to learn with greater truth and certainty what that will of the Lord is which they aspire to follow, and to confirm them in this knowledge; just as a servant who desires with all his soul to approve himself to his master, must still observe, and be careful to ascertain his master's dispositions, that he may comport himself in accommodation to them.^[109]

And he also says that the Law, in regards to believers

has the force of exhortation, not to bind their consciences with a curse, but by urging them, from time to time, to shake off sluggishness and chastise imperfection, many, when they would express this exemption [freedom] from the curse, say, that in regard to believers the Law (I still mean the Moral Law) is abrogated: not that the things which it enjoins are no longer right to be observed, but only that it is not to believers what it formerly was; in other words, that it does not, by terrifying and confounding their consciences, condemn and destroy.^[110]

Berkhof briefly explains:

A usus didacticus or normativus. This is the so-called *tertius usus legis*, the third use of the law. The law is a rule of life for believers, reminding them of their duties and leading them in the way of life and salvation. This third use of the law is denied by the Antinomians.^[111]

Salvation

Hercules Collins' 1680 Orthodox Catechism, which is a Baptist version of the Heidelberg Catechism, asks the question (Q&A 2) "What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort?" and the following answer is given:

Three things: first, how great my sin and misery are;(a) second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery;(b) third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.(c)

(a) Romans 3:9-10 1 John 1:10

(b) John 17:3 Acts 4:12

(c) Matthew 5:16 Romans 6:13 Ephesians 5:8-10 2 Timothy 2:15 1 Peter 2:9-10

First is the revelation of our sin and the righteousness of God. This corresponds to the first use of the law, which is the law as a mirror. *Second* is the revelation of what our sins deserve if God had judged us already according to His perfect Law. *Third* and last is the normative use of the Law whereby we follow God's Law in thanksgiving and obedience for and because of what He has done for us. In our salvation and sanctification, we see the threefold uses of the law: (1) conviction of sin, (2) deliverance from the curse and (3) thankful obedience. It is necessary to make use of the Law in this way so that we would always have the cross of Christ at the center. When we sin, the Law reveals our sin, but as born again children of God, we know that we can find forgiveness by our Father (1 John 1:8-10; Heb. 4:14-16). Therefore, the Law becomes our friend and points us to Christ. When we are forgiven, then God points us to His Law which contains a summary of what He requires of us as His children as thankful obedience.

The Six-fold Uses Of The Law?

The Confession seems to give us six uses here instead of three. The reason is that the Confession distinguishes between the first and second uses of the Law for the believer and the unbeliever. The

statement on itself is pretty clear and I do not want to add anything, but give a summary of the uses it lists.

- a. For Regenerate & Unregenerate
 - i. "as a rule of life, informing them of the will of God and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly"
 - ii. "discovering also the sinful pollutions of their natures, hearts, and lives..."
 - iii. "a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ and the perfection of his obedience"
- b. For The Regenerate Alone
 - i. "to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin"
 - ii. "the threatenings of it serve to shew what even their sins deserve"
 - iii. "The promises of it likewise shew them God's approbation of obedience"

Blessings Not A Due For Obedience

David says, "Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward" (Ps. 19:11). Not only does God warn us from error and shows us the right path in His Law, but He also rewards us with blessings because we seek to obey Him. We do not earn His favor nor His blessings, but because He is a gracious and loving Father, it pleases Him to bless us. Calvin notes here, "In requiring from us whatever is contained in the law, he demands nothing but what he has a right to; yet such is his free and undeserved liberality, that he promises to his servants a reward, which, in point of justice, he does not owe them."^[7] Christ our Lord taught us:

Luke 17:10 So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, '**We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.**'"

We can never do *all* that we are commanded to do, but even if that were possible, still we should proclaim, "we are unworthy slaves, worthy of no glory and no honor. All that we did was our duty." There is no way that any man can "supererogate, and to do more than God requires" ([chapter 16:4](#)). [See here for more on Luke 17:10](#). Spurgeon notes on Psalm 19:11:

Though we should not serve God for a reward, yet we shall have a reward for our service. The time is coming when ungodliness shall be as much prosecuted by justice, as in times past godliness had been persecuted by injustice. Though our reward be not for our good works, yet we shall have our good works rewarded, and have a good reward for our works.^[112]

God blesses us not because a blessing is a due for (imperfect) obedience, but because He loves to love us and display His kindness toward His children. Here are some such blessings which God gives to His children.

Ps. 119:2 **Blessed** are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart, (Prov. 29:18)

Ps. 119:165 Great **peace** have those who love your law; nothing can make them stumble.

John 14:21 Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be **loved by my Father**, and **I will love him** and **manifest myself**

to him.”

Eph. 5:2-3 “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), 3 “that it may **go well with you** and that you may **live long in the land.**”

1 John 3:22 and whatever we ask **we receive from him**, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.

1 John 3:24 Whoever keeps his commandments **abides in God**, and **God in him**. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us.

§7 Uses of the Law Are Not Contrary To the Gospel



7. Neither are the aforementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the Gospel, but do sweetly comply with it, the **Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely and cheerfully which the will of God**, revealed in the law, requireth to be done. **1**

1. Gal. 3:21; Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 36:27; Rom. 8:4; Titus 2:14

The classical threefold uses of the law are not **contrary to the grace of the Gospel** (Gal. 3:21), since the law, in this scheme, does not function as a covenant of works. But they **sweetly comply** together. This is because obedience to God is the work of **the Spirit of Christ** (Ezek. 36:27; Rom. 8:4; Heb. 13:20-21) in us so that we would **do that freely and cheerfully which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done** (Titus 2:14). Obedience to the law of God

does not come from our strength, but through the graces and workings of the Spirit in us. Furthermore, the law is not given as a covenant of works whereby we may be condemned. But the law is given as a rule of life so that we would know our duty toward God and man and obey by the power of the Spirit.

This is a point that we've touched upon a lot above, especially in the previous paragraph concerning the uses of the Law. This paragraph basically restates what it means to be under grace, and yet still have the obligation to obey. It says that the obligation to obey is not contrary to the gospel which says "believe, and live." The Law and the gospel are friends *if* used properly! The Law and the gospel are absolutely antithetical when viewed as two covenants and as two ways of justification. The Moral Law is not a covenant of works for the believer by which he can be justified or condemned, rather it is a rule of life. It shows us the right path and reveals our sin. If we are thinking of the Law as a system of justification through which we can gain right-standing with God, then the Law and the gospel are absolutely antithetical and sworn enemies. There can be no harmony between them. But the Law can also be viewed as all of God's commandments, which should function as a rule of life and righteousness for us. Through the Law comes the knowledge of sin, but it is also true that through the Law we come to know God and His righteousness. The Law reveals our need for the Savior and the gospel presents to us this amazing Savior. This is the same for the unbeliever as well as the believer. We all need the Law and gospel preached to us constantly. When we think of the Law as a "rule of life", we're not thinking of the Law as a covenant of works or as a system of justification. Therefore, this use of the Law is *not* contrary nor antithetical to the gospel, rather "it sweetly complies with it", as the Confession says. We preach the Law to expose our sin, declare the perfect righteousness of God and what we deserve. But we preach the gospel to proclaim that our sins have been forgiven, Christ has lived His perfect life in perfect obedience to God's Law on our behalf and has received the curse of the Law on our behalf. We preach the Law to show the problem and then proclaim the gospel to show the solution. As Francis Turretin said:

It is one thing to be under the law to acquire life by it (as Adam was) or as a schoolmaster and prison to guard men until the advent of Christ; another to be under the law as a rule of life, to regulate our morals piously and holily. It is one thing to be under the law inasmuch as it is opposed to the gospel as to rigid and perfect exaction of obedience and the terrible curse with which it threatens sinners; another to be under the law inasmuch as it is subordinated to the gospel, as to sweet direction.^[113]

When used in this way, i.e., the Threefold Uses of the Law, the Law and the gospel are friends which complement each other, and not enemies. The Law shows us our sinfulness, and the gospel proclaims God's work in sending His Son to forgive us. Then, after knowing God, we look to the Law to learn of our duty and what God requires of us as His children. We, by following His Law, know that we are doing that which pleases Him, but also that which He has commanded *for our own good*. We should know God is a loving Father Who commands that which is good and forbids that which is sinful. We should not see Him as a "fun-killer," but a loving Father Who wants to maximize the joy of His children in Himself and in His ways. He warns us in the Law of things which disturb our well-being, our relationship with Him and with others. Moreover, in commanding that which is good, He commands that which is agreeable to His own nature. God's Moral Law as summarized in the Decalogue is not a set of random ten commandments, but a reflection of the moral excellence of God Himself! Therefore, when we seek and strive to obey God, for we cannot perfectly obey Him in this life, we are properly reflecting His image in the world. Even when we obey His commandments out of love for God and our own duty, we should recognize that it is actually God Who gives us the ability

and willingness to obey. It does not come from our flesh. It is the Lord Who works in us to do His pleasure. See for more particular sections of [chapter 7](#), [chapter 9](#), [chapter 10](#), [chapter 13](#), [chapter 16](#). For more see Richard C. Barcellos, [How the “uses of the law . . . sweetly comply with . . . the grace of the Gospel” \(2LCF 19.7\)](#).

In conclusion on the whole chapter—

The end of the matter; all has been heard.

Fear God and keep his
commandments, for this is the
whole duty of man.

(Ecclesiastes 12:13)

Footnotes

1. [^](#) Richard Barcellos. *Definition of Key Terms and Phrases*. pp. 1-2. http://www.1689federalism.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Barcellos_LawWritings.pdf
2. [^](#) *Ibid.* p. 2.
3. [^](#) *Ibid.* pp. 2-3.
4. [^](#) Many Scriptural references have been supplied by Samuel Waldron’s [Modern Exposition of 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith](#) which was apparently supplied by the [Westminster Confession of Faith 1646](#).
5. [^](#) William D. Mounce. [Physis](#).
6. [a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p](#) Albert Barnes. [Barnes’ New Testament Notes](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). In loc.
7. [a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n](#) John Calvin. [Commentaries](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). In loc.
8. [a, b, c, d, e, f](#) John Gill. [Exposition of the Entire Bible](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). In loc.
9. [^](#) Philip S. Ross. *From the Finger of God: The Biblical and Theological Basis for the Threefold Division of the Law*. (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2010). pp. 114-115.
10. [^](#) *Ibid.*, p. 111.
11. [a, b, c, d](#) *bid.*, p. 108
12. [^](#) *Ibid.* pp. 109-110.
13. [^](#) *Ibid.* p. 159.
14. [^](#) *Ibid.* p. 282, note 65.
15. [a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m](#) [The Westminster Larger Catechism](#).
16. [a, b, c](#) Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments*. [Chapter 1.3](#).
17. [^](#) Calvin, *Institutes*, [2.8.15](#)
18. [a, b, c](#) Watson, *Ten Commandments*. [Chapter 2.1](#).

19. [^ Calvin, Institutes. 2.8.16.](#)
20. [^ The Athanasian Creed.](#)
21. [^ Robert L. Dabney. Systematic Theology. \(Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1985, originally 1871\). p. 358. Scripture references have been modernized in all citations.](#)
22. [^ Ibid., p. 361.](#)
23. [^ Calvin, Institutes, 2.8.17](#)
24. [a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j Benjamin Keach. The Baptist Catechism.](#)
25. [a, b Watson, Ten Commandments. Chapter 2.2.](#)
26. [^ Thomas Vincent. A Family Instructional Guide.](#)
27. [^ Pastor Joe V. Why Did John Calvin and the Reformers Forbid All Images of the Divine Persons?](#)
28. [^ John Murray. Pictures of Christ and the Second Commandment](#)
29. [^ The Holy Bible: English Standard Version: The ESV Study Bible. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles \(2008\). Taken from the Online Version at \[www.esvbible.org\]\(http://www.esvbible.org\). in loc.](#)
30. [a, b, c Watson, Ten Commandments. Chapter 2.3.](#)
31. [^ I will at least be reading the 4 perspectives book on the Sabbath, Robert Paul Martin's new book on the Christian Sabbath, Joseph A. Pipa's The Lord Day, various writings from Dabney on the Sabbath, Jonathan Edwards and I hope also to read some from A.W. Pink and Owen.](#)
32. [a, b, c Watson, Ten Commandments. Chapter 2.4.](#)
33. [a, b Chapter 2.5.](#)
34. [^ Calvin, Institutes. 2.8.38](#)
35. [^ Noah Webster. Webster's Dictionary 1828. Murder.](#)
36. [^ Noah Webster. Webster's 1913 Dictionary. Kill.](#)
37. [^ J. Warner Wallace. The Difference Between Killing and Murdering.](#)
38. [^ Dabney, Systematic Theology. p. 400.](#)
39. [a, b Watson, Ten Commandments. Chapter 2.6.](#)
40. [^ Dabney, Systematic Theology. p. 407.](#)
41. [^ Joseph Henry Thayer's Greek Definitions. Taken from the TheWord Bible Software. G4202](#)
42. [^ Calvin, Institutes 2.8.45.](#)
43. [a, b Watson, Ten Commandments. Chapter 2.8.](#)
44. [^ Calvin, Institutes 2.8.47.](#)
45. [^ The Free Dictionary. Slander.](#)
46. [^ Watson, Ten Commandments. Chapter 2.9.](#)
47. [^ Calvin, Institutes 2.8.48.](#)
48. [^ Ibid., 2:8:49.](#)
49. [a, b, c Watson, Ten Commandments. Chapter 2.10.](#)
50. [^ John MacArthur. The MacArthur Study Bible: English Standard Version. \(Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2010\). p. 1789, note on Colossians 3:5.](#)
51. [^ Kenneth L. Barker, Donald W. Burdick, & Kenneth Boa. Zondervan NASB Study Bible. \(Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House., 1999\). p. 1724, note on Ephesians 5:5.](#)
52. [^ Calvin, Institutes. 2.8.51.](#)
53. [^ C. P. Arand, C. L. Blomberg, S. MacCarty, & J. A. Pipa. Perspectives on the Sabbath. Ed. C. J. Donato. \(Nashville: B & H Pub. Group, 2011\). p. 125.](#)
54. [^ HCSB Study Bible, Holman Christian Standard Bible. \(Nashville, Tenn. 2010\). p. 2058.](#)
55. [^ William D. Mounce. <https://billmounce.com/greek-dictionary/dogma>](#)
56. [^ Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views. p. 146.](#)
57. [^ Ross, From The Finger Of God. pp. 277-278.](#)
58. [^ GotQuestions.org. What does the Bible say about the death penalty / capital punishment?](#)
59. [^ Ross, From The Finger Of God. p. 298.](#)
60. [^ Perspectives on the Sabbath: Four Views. p. 125.](#)

61. [^](#) R. Barcellos, S. Waldron, E. Blackburn, & P. R. Martin. *Going Beyond The Five Points*. Ed. by Rob Ventura. (San Bernardino, CA: [CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform], 2015). p. 31.
62. [^](#) William D. Mounce, [καταλύω](#).
63. [^](#) [Mickelson's Enhanced Strong's Greek and Hebrew Dictionaries](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). G2647.
64. [^](#) Ross, *From The Finger of God*. p. 200.
65. [a](#), [b](#), [c](#) Thayer's Greek Lexicon. [G4137](#).
66. [a](#), [b](#) TDNT Dictionary. Taken from Bible Works. Number 639, p. 870.
67. [^](#) Ernest C. Reisinger. *Law and Gospel*. [Chapter 11: The Law and the Savior](#).
68. [^](#) Arthur W. Pink. *An Exposition on the Sermon on the Mount*. [Chapter 6: Christ and the Law](#).
69. [^](#) Ross, *From The Finger of God*. p. 202.
70. [^](#) *Ibid.*, p. 215.
71. [^](#) [Mickelson's Enhanced Strong's Greek and Hebrew Dictionaries](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). G1096.
72. [^](#) Ross, *From The Finger of God*. pp. 218-219.
73. [^](#) *Ibid.* 219.
74. [a](#), [b](#), [c](#), [d](#), [e](#), [f](#) Jamieson, Fausset, Brown. [Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible \(Full\)](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). *In loc.*
75. [^](#) William D. Mounce. [τηρέω](#).
76. [^](#) [Joseph Henry Thayer's Greek Definitions](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). G2673.
77. [^](#) BDAG Lexicon. Taken from Bible Works. Number 3754.
78. [a](#), [b](#), [c](#) Matthew Henry. *Commentary On The Whole Bible (Full)*. By default in The Word. Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). *In loc.*
79. [^](#) *The Reformation Study Bible ESV*. Ed. R.C. Sproul. Ligonier Ministries (2015). p. 1984, note on Romans 3:31.
80. [^](#) John MacArthur. *The MacArthur Study Bible: English Standard Version*. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2010). p. 1660.
81. [^](#) *Ibid.* p. 1661.
82. [^](#) *Reformation Study Bible ESV*. p. 1991, note on Romans 7:14.
83. [^](#) See Joy Community Fellowship. [How is the Righteous Requirement of the Law Fulfilled in us?](#)
84. [a](#), [b](#) Philip Schaff. [A Popular Commentary on the New Testament](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). *In loc.*
85. [a](#), [b](#), [c](#) [The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). *In loc.*
86. [^](#) Barcellos in *Going Beyond The Five Points*. p. 38.
87. [^](#) *Ibid.* p. 39.
88. [^](#) As quoted in Ross, *From The Finger of God*. p. 340.
89. [a](#), [b](#) Arthur W. Pink. [The Law And The Saint](#).
90. [^](#) [Joseph Henry Thayer's Greek Definitions](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). G2570.
91. [^](#) Joseph S. Exell, H.D.M Spence. [The Pulpit Commentary](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). *In loc.*
92. [a](#), [b](#), [c](#) Richard Barcellos. [An Ethical Manifesto: 1 Timothy 1:8-11 and the Decalogue](#). *Founders Journal*.
93. [^](#) [Joseph Henry Thayer's Greek Definitions](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). G506.
94. [^](#) [Mickelson's Enhanced Strong's Greek and Hebrew Dictionaries](#). Taken from the [TheWord Bible Software](#). G506.
95. [^](#) TDNT Dictionary. Taken from BibleWorks. Page 105, number 133.
96. [^](#) *The Free Dictionary*. [Perjury](#).
97. [^](#) *The NASB Study Bible*. p. 1806, note on James 2:8.

98. [^](#) *The MacArthur Study Bible: ESV*. p. 1879, note on James 2:10.
99. [^](#) *The NASB Study Bible*. p. 1808, note on James 4:11.
100. [^](#) Richard Winston. *Christ the End of the Law: The Interpretation of Romans 10:4*. (*Puritan Reformed Journal*. June 2015, volume 7, number 2). p. 22.
101. [^](#) *Ibid.*, p. 40, footnote 89.
102. [^](#) *Ibid.*, p. 40. The content in the square brackets is mine.
103. [^](#) *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41.
104. [^](#) Calvin, *Institutes* [2.7.7](#).
105. [a](#), [b](#) Louis Berkhof. *Systematic Theology*. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Banner of Truth Trust. 1963). p. 614.
106. [a](#), [b](#) Bob Schilling. [The Three-Fold Use of Moral Law](#). [Grace & Truth Community Church](#).
107. [^](#) Calvin, *Institutes*. [2.7.10](#).
108. [^](#) *Ibid.*, [2.7.11](#).
109. [^](#) *Ibid.*, [2.7.12](#).
110. [^](#) *Ibid.*, [2.7.14](#).
111. [^](#) Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*. p. 615.
112. [^](#) Charles H. Spurgeon. *The Treasury of David*. [Psalm 19](#). Note on verse 11.
113. [^](#) Francis Turretin. *Elenctic Theology*, 2.11.23 (II:143). As quoted in Richard C. Barcellos, [How the "uses of the law . . . sweetly comply with . . . the grace of the Gospel" \(2LCF 19.7\)](#). p. 9.