

I. Introduction to the Law of God

The Law of God

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

"The mouth of the righteous utters wisdom, and his tongue speaks justice. The law of his God is in his heart; his steps do not slip." That's Psalm 37:30-31.

"I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart." That's Psalm 40:8.

"Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD!" Psalm 119:1. And there are actually a lot of other places in Psalm 119 that I could add.

"Those who forsake the law praise the wicked, but those who keep the law strive against them." Proverbs 28:4. And there are a few other places in Proverbs 28 that could be added to this.

So are these things still true for us today? Should we still be able to affirm these? And I hope to demonstrate in this series that the answer to that question is yes. How about this one, "The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant." That's Isaiah 24:5. Is that speaking only of Israelites under the Mosaic covenant or is it speaking of people all over the earth? And was it only true back then or is it still true today?

So different Christian traditions have developed a wide variety of schools of thought concerning the laws that we read about in the books of Moses. Some people view them as mere artifacts of the old covenant and where those laws do agree with the moral teachings in the New Testament they act like these are just incidental similarities and that's a logically indefensible position as we'll see as we go on. Others on the opposite end of the spectrum view the entire law of Moses in all of its particulars as the moral standard binding on everyone and every nation at all times throughout the earth. And

indeed, many people both inside and outside the Christian faith believe that these are the only two options we have. There are some passages of scripture that would seem to lend themselves to this idea. For example, in Matthew 5:17-20, Jesus says, "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. 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. 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. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."

So from these words of Jesus, it seems apparent that we have two options, either the law of Moses is still fully enforced or else it's been fulfilled and therefore has nothing to teach us as far as our manner of life is concerned and this creates some difficulty for us as there are many commands in the law of Moses which we don't observe, at least as far as the details about what they command and forbid. So some of you know that one of my favorite foods is pork ribs, also last week as a church we had a crawfish boil. Under the Mosaic law we wouldn't be able to eat these kinds of things and so why do we say that it's okay now? Hopefully our reason for this is not that we don't like what they command or that we desire what they forbid, rather hopefully it's because we recognize that the Mosaic law contained many laws which were given to serve the purposes of that covenant and so they're not applicable outside the boundaries of that specific covenant, and hopefully we recognize this because it's what the Bible teaches both within the law itself but most clearly in the New Testament.

So we see it in the law itself both in that the law explicitly excuses or even prohibits Gentiles from certain commandments and then in some commandments of the law, they are just so bound to the administration of the Mosaic covenant that it would not be possible for those outside that covenantal context to observe them, and we'll look at some of those in a later lesson. In the New Testament, there are many passages in which we are told that we're not to be bound or to bind others to commands in the law. Examples of this we find in Acts 15, Galatians 5, Ephesians 2:15, Colossians 2:14 and 16, and Hebrews 9:8-10. Then in other places we see commands of the law cited by New Testament authors who apply them in ways that don't seem to match up to the plain literal Old Testament applications of them. Examples would be 1 Corinthians 5:13 and 1 Corinthians 9:8-10. At the same time, we need to understand that the moral precepts of right and wrong have always applied to every human being who has ever lived and since these are based on God's own unchanging character and our relationship to him as his creatures and image-bearers, they've always been the same. Since that's the case, we should see that this popular notion that only those laws which are commanded in the New Testament scriptures should be used by us for moral guidance really doesn't make sense, and we see many places in the New Testament where commandments of the law are cited directly as teaching moral principles, statements of right and wrong. Examples are Matthew 4:7 and 10, Matthew 19:18, 19, Matthew 22:37 and 39, Romans 7:7, Romans 13:9, Ephesians 6:2, and 1 Peter 1:16. And besides these, we see many places in the New Testament which while not directly citing Old Testament scripture, do indicate that the

author regarded certain things as right or wrong which the law of Moses also identified as right or wrong respectively. Examples are in Matthew 15:19, Acts 15:20, Romans 1:18-32, 1 Corinthians 5:1 and then 9 through 11, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Colossians 3:5, 1 Timothy 1:9 and 10, and Revelation 21:8.

So in light of what we see in these passages I've just mentioned as well as what we read from the words of Jesus previously from Matthew 5, what should we say regarding how the precepts taught in the law of Moses relate to us in the new covenant and to the human race broadly? So my aim in this series is to help us understand from scripture what we as a church that confesses the Second London Baptist Confession believe about how we who are under grace and not under the law are to learn from the law and apply its teaching to our lives. So as a church, we've adopted the Second London Baptist Confession of 1689 as our own statement of faith and most of us probably say that we agree with what it says, at least for the most part, but we need to be able to understand from the Bible why it says what it says and we need to be able to explain it to others from scripture. Remember, our Confession has no authority of its own, its authority is derived from its agreement with what the Bible says and so it's necessary that we understand how the Bible teaches what the Confession teaches, and besides that being able to understand and articulate the biblical basis of our confessional understanding of the law is especially important in gospel witness and apologetics.

So how many of you have seen videos of someone like Ray Comfort talking to unbelievers and seeing how he goes through the 10 Commandments to show them how they fall short of full obedience to God's law in order to convince them of their need for a Savior? Maybe you've done this yourself and this approach reflects an underlying belief that the 10 Commandments do, in fact, present God's law in a way as to define what sin is and to convince a person that he is a sinner. So is this underlying belief true? And I hope in this series to prove that it is.

How many of you have been accused or have heard Christians in general being accused of picking and choosing from among the laws found in the Bible? Many adversaries of the faith assume that we do this arbitrarily and they say that the only honest choice is between being bound to all of it or to none of it, like I mentioned earlier. It's not enough for us to point to our Confession and say that there are different types of laws and that we're only bound to obey certain categories, again, our Confession is a summary statement of what we believe but it's not the actual authority or the source of our knowledge about these things. We need to be able to prove them from scripture.

So let's, then, read chapter 19 of our Confession and consider what it says. You should have gotten it as one of your handouts. I have the original text on one side and a modern version which I got from the Founder's website on the other side. We're going to read the original text but I did include the modern version just in case it might be helpful to you. You should not also that chapter 19 of our Confession is copied with very little change from chapter 19 of the Westminster Confession and so our Confessional Presbyterian friends should be able to agree with everything that we're saying here today as well.

So I'm going to read the original text of the Second London Baptist Confession, chapter 19, of the law of God. It says,

1. God gave to Adam a law of universal obedience written in his heart, and a particular precept of not eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; 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.

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

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; and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties, 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.

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; their general equity only being of moral use.

5. The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, 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; neither doth Christ in the Gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.

6. Although true believers be not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned, 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; 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; 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. The promises of it likewise shew them

God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof, though not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works; 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. 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.

All right, so we see in the first paragraph an affirmation that as well as the positive commandment regarding the tree of knowledge of good and evil, God gave to Adam a law of universal obedience written in his heart. This law of universal obedience is what we call the moral law. The fact that it's not merely spoken to him or even written down on tablets of stone but actually written in his heart and in everyone's heart after him, as it says by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact and perpetual obedience, means that it is not only moral law but also natural law. So the first distinction that we need to make among laws is the twofold distinction between natural and positive laws. So natural laws are those unchangeable laws which are grounded directly in who God is and who we are as God's creatures and image-bearers and which are revealed to us by the natural means which we call the conscience. They define what things are right and wrong for us to do and so they are eternally binding upon us.

Positive laws are laws which are given for specific purposes at the discretion of the lawgiver and they may be repealed by the lawgiver when he feels that they're no longer needed. In our day, the existence of natural moral law or even a universal standard of morality as it's often called, is commonly challenged. A lot of even conservative Christians implicitly relegate the moral law to the category of positive law by teaching that Jesus gave new moral laws to replace the Mosaic law entirely, including its moral judgments, and this is a teaching known as supersessionism. If this is true, it means that all laws established by God can be and have been thrown out and replaced by God at some point, therefore that would mean that there's no natural moral law. Now let's be clear, the Bible does not teach this supersessionist doctrine.

Paragraph 2 goes on to affirm that even though this law had been broken at the fall, it remained a perfect rule of righteousness as well as that it affirms that the 10 Commandments contain in summary form that moral law, and that it is divided into two tables, the first four containing our duty toward God and the other six our duty towards man. Now the Confession gives us its proof for the two tables at Deuteronomy 10:4. Now as a side note, in verse 3 of that chapter, we're told that the commandments were written on two tablets of stone and if you look at most representations of the 10 Commandments, you see the commandments split across the two tablets. If you were here when Hal was preaching his sermon series on the 10 Commandments, you might remember him explaining that the two tables or rather the two tablets probably contained two complete copies of the 10 Commandments, nevertheless, this division of the 10 Commandments

into the two parts, one dealing with our obligation to God and the other dealing with our obligation to man is definitely taught in scripture.

So we see this in both Matthew 22:34-40 and in Mark 12:28-33. We have the account of Jesus being asked which is the greatest commandment of the law and he replies there that the greatest is, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment and the second is like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets." So it's very important that we realize that both of these commandments that he gave here are actually quoted from the Mosaic law. "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might," is Deuteronomy 6:5. Most of us know that one. Hal read it multiple times during his series on the 10 Commandments and I'm also pretty sure that it's been a Bible drill verse for our children, our youth, in various years. The next one, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," is from Leviticus 19:18 and you might note also that Jesus included this one alongside some of the 10 Commandments when he was talking to the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:19.

So when Jesus is asked which is the greatest commandment of the law, instead of picking one of the 10 Commandments he pulls these other two commandments from elsewhere in the law and says that these are the first and the second greatest commandments. Not only that but he says, "On these two depend all the law and the prophets." Some people take him to mean here that these supersede the 10 Commandments but what we're affirming in our Confession is that those two laws encompass all of the moral precepts found in the 10 Commandments and we see evidence of this in many passages of scripture which we'll look at in greater detail when we get to our lesson on the moral law. So we'll look at one of the more obvious ones right now and that's Romans 13:8-10. In that passage, Paul is talking about how love is the fulfillment of the law and in verse 9 he lists some of the commandments from among the last six of the 10 and says of them that they are summed up in this word, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

So here Paul is identifying these commandments from the latter part of the 10 Commandments with what Jesus called the second greatest commandment of the law and a plain reading of the 10 Commandments tells us that the first four concern duty toward God and the last six concern duty toward one another. So if Paul is identifying the last six with what Jesus called the second great commandment, I think it's a perfectly logical extrapolation to identify the first four commandments then with what Jesus called the first and greatest commandment of the law. Now let me add here that my plan in this series does not include exposition of each of the commandments themselves. If you'd like to better understand each of them and how they apply to us, you can go back and listen to Hal's sermon series from last year and also if you'd like further reading, I can recommend you some books that you can read on this or some series.

Then in paragraph 3 of the Confession, we have the identification of the second category of laws and that's the ceremonial laws and we have a description of the various functions of these ceremonial laws, all of which we do find taught in scripture. It then affirms that

these laws were appointed only to the time of reformation which seemed to me to be a reference to Hebrews 9:10, although the copy of the Confession that we have doesn't include that in the citations. But we'll look at the various functions of the ceremonial laws both for the people of Israel under the old covenant as well as for our own use and what we can learn about them under the new covenant and our proof of our not being bound to the particulars of those commands once we get to that place in the series.

Then in paragraph 4, we have the identification of the third category, the judicial laws which are commonly also called civil laws. Unlike with the moral and ceremonial categories, the Confession doesn't really give any examples of them or describe their function other than to say that they contain some principles of general equity and that they are for moral use. We'll look at what that means. The category includes criminal statutes and the various case laws which while serving the moral law and in the context of the nation of Israel are not necessarily universal applications of moral law, although they do help to clarify the moral law when we study them in their proper context, but they also instruct us in the governance of the church of which Israel was a type. We see this in Paul's quotation in 1 Corinthians 5:13. He cites the commandment or he really just makes the statement, "Purge the evil person from among you." We find that in several places in Deuteronomy. Now in all of those places in Deuteronomy where we see that cited, or where we see that phrase used, it refers to capital punishment by stoning but in 1 Corinthians 5, it refers to excommunication from the church.

The judicial category also includes various laws given to teach moral principles in an indirect way. The passage which is cited in the Confession for this is 1 Corinthians 9:8-10 and that takes the commandment from Deuteronomy 25:4 which says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and it applies it as a command to the churches to provide for their ministers. And we'll look at these and others in more detail when we get to our actual lesson on the civil laws.

So let me make something clear right now because people tend to get confused when we talk about the three-fold division of the Mosaic law. What we're not affirming is that the Mosaic law has only partially been fulfilled or partially abolished. That would contradict Jesus' words from Matthew 5 that I quoted earlier. The whole Mosaic law as it functioned in the Mosaic covenant has been fulfilled by Christ and no one is under it any longer. Now those who are still in Adam and not in Christ are still under the law as a covenant of works but it's only the moral law, not the Mosaic law as a whole, but no one is under the Mosaic law anymore. What we are affirming is that God has an eternal moral law revealed both in nature and in scripture and that the moral precepts expressed in the Mosaic law and which are summarized in the 10 Commandments as well as further taught in the general equity of the case laws, reveal that eternal moral law and so we can still look to them for moral instruction.

Now then in paragraphs 5 through 7, our Confession describes various uses of the law. It doesn't give actual names to these uses but theologians, at least as far back as Luther, have identified three uses which are commonly called the civil use, the pedagogical use, and the didactic use. Sometimes you'll find them in a different order, pedagogical, civil

and then didactic, but I think civil, pedagogical, didactic kind of makes the most logical sense. Now even though these three uses of the law are not identified in successive paragraphs in the Confession the way that the three divisions of the Mosaic law are, we can see that they are all affirmed in paragraphs 5 through 7 of the Confession and these uses of the law describe the ways by which the moral law is to be used by both non-believers and by believers and so I want to spend some time looking at those three uses. Just in brief, the civil uses and, by the way, we'll have actual lessons on these later but just to cover them briefly, the civil use which is not to be confused with the civil laws refers to the benefit of people's obedience to the moral law for civil society. So for example, society is better off when people acknowledge and worship the true God and when they don't murder or steal or purger, etc., and society suffers when they break these laws. So this use, obviously, is for unbelievers as well as for believers. The pedagogical use refers to the laws giving people a knowledge of their sinfulness and of their need for salvation. So this is useful to unbelievers to bring them to conversion or to just leave them without excuse on the day of judgment. It's also of use to us to further our conviction in humility before God because it reminds us of what Jesus did for us on the cross, knowing that he actually paid this penalty. The didactic use is for believers only and it refers to the way by which the law teaches us how to live as obedient children to God.

So the uses of the law, especially of the didactic use, are also affirmed very clearly in the 16th chapter of our Confession which is titled "Of Good Works," and that was, if you were here, the topic of this year's Deep South Founders Conference. So I do want to actually do at least one lesson on chapter 16 looking at that because, yeah, the subject of good works can be a bit challenging when we're affirming that on one hand we are saved entirely by the grace of God and not by our works, but also when we see that the scriptures are full of commands to do good work as well as threats of judgment for evil works. And even among conservative Protestant Christians, there is a lot of confusion around this and so I think we need to flesh these things out.

So then once we've looked at all of these, there's one more thing that I want to spend some time on at the end and that is the contrary views of Jesus and the Pharisees regarding the law. A lot of times the Pharisees are seen as people with a high view of the law and a lot of people take Jesus' confrontations with the Pharisees as sort of Jesus telling them to back away from their devotion to the law, and so the people who understand these things in this way will accuse those of us who insist on obedience to the moral law of being Pharisees or legalists but an honest reading of the gospels makes it clear that the Pharisees had falsely reinterpreted the law and adapted it to their own traditions as well as making up a lot of new laws, and that Jesus' teachings actually were perfectly in line with how the law was always meant to be understood and used. So my plan is to spend some time toward the end of this series discussing the way that they interacted on the subject of law.

So then to outline the lesson plan for this series, if you look at the back of your outline, here are the points that I'd like to cover. So part 1: introduction, that's what we're doing now. Next, looking at the distinction between natural law and positive law. And then

looking at the moral law as it's taught in both the Old and New Testaments. After that, I want to do a bit of a primer on covenant theology and the reason for that is because, as I mentioned earlier, the positive laws throughout the Bible are given in the context of the various covenants that God has made and so those positive laws govern those various covenants and are not applicable outside of those covenants that they were given to apply to. So kind of understanding how all those covenants fit together in redemptive history will help us to understand the positive laws in the Bible.

After that, we'll look at the ceremonial and civil laws of the Mosaic covenant and then the civil and pedagogical uses of the moral law, and then the didactic use of the moral law. The reason why I've combined on point 5 and point 6 is I haven't actually written those, I haven't gotten quite that far in writing my manuscripts out but I don't expect that I'll need two whole weeks for each of, or one week each for the ceremonial laws and the civil laws and the civil use and pedagogical use. I think I can combine some of those. But for the didactic use of the moral law, I definitely think that I will need a full lesson on that and then we'll look at chapter 16 of the Confession on good works, and then we'll look at Jesus versus the Pharisees on the law, and finally just some general discussion of the subject of the law and the gospel and how they relate to each other. And I know that that's only 10 points and that I do have 12 weeks, I wanted to leave some space in case I need additional time to cover any topics or if any other topics come up over the course of this series that I feel like I need to add.

So in the end, what's the purpose of this study? For one thing, it's important for our apologetics and witness, like I mentioned earlier, we have a duty to proclaim the gospel of salvation from sin but believing the gospel starts with knowing what sin is and acknowledging that you are a sinner, and so we need to be able to define and identify sin but we also need to be able to avoid legalism. For those of us who are already converted, we need to be able to recognize your own sin and be reminded of our inability to save ourselves and consequently of our constant need for Christ in continual repentance, and we need to strive to know what God commands of us so that we can be doing those good works that God has created us for in this new birth. And finally, we need to be able to read the Bible with an understanding of how the various commandments that God has given throughout the ages fit into the broad story of redemption, that is the Bible, and how all of his commandments, even those which are not morally binding upon us, have things to teach us about who God is and what this work is that he has done in order to bring us out of our sinful condition and made us his children.

So with that, I'll close for today. Does anyone have any questions or comments? You do, yeah?

["I do but I have to wait until week 9."]

Okay. Perfect.

["What does the Bible say about the law and you went to week 9 on these and messed me all up."]

All right.

["I'm not sure I'm going to be here but..."]

Okay, well, you can always, you know, you can email ahead of time so I can make sure to address it that week.

["A visitor, you truly whetted my appetite...for the next 12 weeks."]

Well, I appreciate that. I am recording these. I did start the recording like two paragraphs into it this morning because I was not paying attention. But they'll be on our website. So I appreciate that. Anyone else?

[unintelligible]

Absolutely.

["Looking at our culture today and seeing things economical that are taking place, even viewing the kind of rescue package that is arriving and then the official double down on even more social action and debt spending, I look at this and there are many Christians who say the sixth commandment, the sanctity of life, we should be urgent about abortion. The sanctity of sexuality, we should be urgent about being against transgenderism and fornication. But when it comes to the eighth commandment, you shall not steal or even the 10th commandment, you shall not covet, people say, well, that's just all personal preference when in reality the moral law of God is binding on our economics as well or am I being too much in the [unintelligible]..."]

No, and you know, that's actually a really good point because...

["You're speaking to a Libertarian here."]

You see, so actually one thing that I'm going to cover in the covenant theology lesson is two kingdom theology but how both the common kingdom and the kingdom of Christ are subject to the moral law. And you know, I wasn't planning on going into a lot of detail like that but that is interesting. I remember talking to somebody, he was a theonomist but I do actually agree with him on this point about our monetary system and how what, you know, the Federal Reserve does with our monetary system is definitely out of line with what's taught about, for example, unequal weights and measures, the way that they manipulate the value of our money is certainly immoral.

Yes, sir.

["I was reading an interesting [unintelligible] by Gary Morris, [unintelligible] basically talking about economics in one lesson."}]

Yes, great book.

["Different perspective and he was saying I wish we had more students that, 'Thou shalt not steal.' He said, 'I've been working on that.'"]}

Yeah, well, you know, I mean, Ron Paul had that sticker on his desk that said don't steal the government hates competition. All right, since we don't have the time, I can't say it with the recording going.

Anyone else real quick before we close? Richard, will you close us, please?

O Lord, we thank you for John's preparation on this subject where we can spend some more time just learning of your precepts and our, especially as Christians, our moral obligations to you and how they transcend the supposed some unjust laws that man [unintelligible] should be respected. Lord, with that, I pray that that would come to bear on the consciences and hearts this week to prepare [unintelligible] and that we're struck by the sword of your word in order to comprehend the message that [unintelligible]. Lord, we thank you that for the gathering of the saints today, Lord. It is your day therefore we understand as John does allude to that even with this [unintelligible] codified in the 10 Commandments, that the fourth commandment, we should keep your day holy and sanctified still stands. God, we thank you that we're in a situation in a church that does [unintelligible]. Amen.