

# Why the Law Is Difficult

*The Ten Commandments*

By Don Green

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**Preached on:** Sunday, July 18, 2021

**Truth Community Church**

4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road  
Cincinnati, OH 45255

**Website:** [truthcommunitychurch.org](http://truthcommunitychurch.org)

**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm](http://www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm)

Well, as those of you that are regularly here know, we are embarking on a very serious study of the 10 Commandments in Exodus 20 and I'm really grateful to the Lord for the opportunity to be able to do this and to bring such things before you. As I was doing my preparation over the past many months, I have come across a work on the 10 Commandments by a 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritan named Ezekiel Hopkins, and it's a very insightful lengthy work, and he asked this penetrating question that I think needs to be answered here this morning as well. He says, "Why do we need all this long discourse about the law? Is it not fully abrogated by the coming of Christ? Shall we again be brought under that heavy yoke of bondage which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear? Does not Scripture frequently testify that we are not now under the law but under grace?" Other modern teachers would complain that the 10 Commandments are part of the Mosaic law which was given, as they say, only to Israel and therefore they think it is a mistake to apply the law to Christians.

Well, these are important and serious questions that we need to address and we will address them over the course of the coming weeks, but what I want to address today is a very narrow matter and I had, frankly, planned to preach this on the past Tuesday when family events kept me away from being here, And so somehow in the providence of God, God has worked this out so that this message would have a broader audience than it otherwise would have if I had only preached it on Tuesday. Somehow God has providentially intervened so that each one of you would be here to hear this message on this day at this point in your life, and I think there are serious matters for all of us here. The thing that's striking about it is that these are genuinely difficult matters and it would be foolish to waive them away with a brush of the hand, so to speak. Phil Johnson has said this, he said this issue of the relationship of the law to the gospel is the hardest issue in New Testament theology and so we're dealing with difficult matters and that is why we are taking our time and will be taking our time as we go through this series on the 10 Commandments. I'm very excited about it but this is going to be some matters that we have to apply ourselves to.

And I wanted this morning to address the question why the law is difficult. Why is it that this study is difficult for us to get our minds around it. If this is new to you, if you've not heard teaching, serious teaching on the 10 Commandments, it will stun you at times at how difficult and complex some of the issues are. Well, let me just encourage you at the

outset with the fact that you are in very good company. You are in apostolic company, as a matter of fact, because the Apostle Peter when he was talking about the writings of the Apostle Paul said this: in all his letters there are these things in which are some things hard to understand which the untaught and unstable distort as they do also the rest of the Scriptures to their own destruction, that's 2 Peter 3:15 and 16. The Apostle Peter said these things are hard. Well, no wonder that we 2,000 years after the fact find it to be difficult for us as well. It would be foolish for us to pretend that this is easy and, beloved, it would be even more foolish for us to treat these things in a superficial way. We're not willing to do that and so we're going to take the time to do the work that is necessary to have a good grasp of these things in God's law and it's going to take us a few months to get through it all. We will do that without apology on my part at all.

Now what we're doing here this morning, however, is much more limited. We're not going to try to untangle the knot of everything that makes it a challenge to understand the moral law of God today, I'm simply here to do something very simple. I want to show you this morning why these things are difficult. Why is it difficult for us to get our mind fully around the moral law of God? Why is that so hard? Why did another apostle find it difficult to understand the things that Paul said about these things? Well, and the reason that we're doing this is kind of twofold. One, I want to give you kind of a broad sweep of the issues that are involved, but also to kind of lay it before you as a bit of a challenge to your soul, a little bit of a challenge to your motivation in what it is that you want to be in Bible teaching and in your understanding and in your understanding of your own walk with God. This is an opportunity for us to understand things at a profound level and for me, anyway, I can only speak for myself, that's what I want. I don't want a superficial approach to the word of God. I don't want to simply live on milk. I want some meat in my diet, as the author of Hebrews speaks about in Hebrews 5. We need some meat and when we understand these things, it's going to do a number of things but one thing that it's going to do is it's going to give us a far greater appreciation for the work of Christ on our behalf.

Well, as we understand these things, we are going to grow in our reverence of the fact that he obeyed this great law perfectly and we are going to grow in our understanding of our own sinfulness and how far short we fall of the glory of God, And along with that as we wed those two things together, we will only grow in our love and our appreciation for Christ because we will have a greater understanding of what he did on our behalf. And rather than just playing, you know, sentimental music off FM Christian music stations about Jesus kind of being like our boyfriend or girlfriend, we're going to actually enter into a sober-minded love for him that is rooted in the truth from Scripture, the truth about the law, the truth about Christ, and the truth of our sin and the truth of our salvation. And if we're not going to aim for that in our Christian lives, I don't know what we're doing. I don't know what kind of games we're playing if that's not what we ultimately want.

So this study is going to help us in that direction. Today I simply want to show you why it's a challenging study to embark upon. I'm going to give you four sections of understanding here. First of all, it's difficult to understand the law simply because of the definition of law. That's the point 1. Why is the law difficult? 1. The definition of the law

itself is difficult in Scripture. It is hard to understand the relationship between the law and the gospel because the very term "law" is used in many different ways in the Bible. I'm not going to take the time to turn you to texts for these eight assertions that I'm about to make. If you're interested in them later, you can email the church, email me, and I'll be happy to provide it for you. I just want to give you a sweep just to expose you to the nature of the issues that are involved.

The word "law" is used in at least eight different ways in Scripture. Eight different ways. The word "law" identifies the book of Deuteronomy in Deuteronomy 27. In Luke 24, the term "law" refers to the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch, the writings of Moses, and so it refers to Deuteronomy, it refers to all five books written by Moses. "Law" goes further. In Matthew 22, it distinguishes the writings of Moses from the writings of the prophets. It's used to draw a distinction between different sections of the Old Testament. "Law" in Psalm 19 is used as a summary term for all of God's special revelation. In the book of Romans, "law" refers to the moral law that is the moral code that is written on the hearts of Gentiles, the things that non-Christians and heathen understand implicitly because God wrote it on their hearts. Also in the book of Romans, "law" can refer narrowly to a single statute of the law, one individual law in the midst of the overall revelation found in the Bible. In Galatians 2, we'll look at this term later, "law" identifies works that cannot justify you. The works of the law are not able to justify you. The works that you do in your own strength cannot save you, and "law" is used to express that principle. And in John 1, the word "law" identifies the entire Old Testament era, the whole era before Christ and then grace is realized in the coming of Christ in John 1:17. That's eight different distinct ways that the term "law" is used just in Scripture and if you pick up any kind of detailed English dictionary, you'll find over a dozen meanings for the word "law" just in the English language.

Now look, that makes it difficult, that makes it a challenge, that means that we have to understand how "law" is being used in each individual passage, in each individual text. We can't just assume the way "law" is used in one passage is the same meaning that is intended in another passage. That means it takes some patient study. It takes some thought. It takes some reflection. Each context in which the term "law" is found has its own nuance that must be understood. That makes it difficult. That means that it takes some effort to study these things and to come to grips with their meaning.

And part of the reason that I make that point, thinking of the quote from Ezekiel Hopkins earlier where he quoted from Romans 6:14, we're not now under the law but under grace, for some superficial teaching that one verse is used to justify the entire jettisoning, it's used to justify ignoring the law, ignoring the moral law in particular, because we're not under law but under grace. Well, you should see that something's wrong there, that one single verse can't explain everything in light of the nuance that I just described to you. There is no single verse that explains all we need to know about the law of God in the Christian life and so we realize that we step back from that if we're going to be serious Christians, we step back from that and we say, "Okay, apparently there's some work to be done."

Now there are in the room many of you are happy to do hard work in other areas. You're happy to do hard work in your garden. You're happy to do hard work in your career. You're happy to do hard work at home, happy to do hard work in the shop, happy to do hard things for other people. Well, if that's true, then isn't it obvious that for the sake of the glory of God, for the sake of understanding his precious word, isn't it obvious that we should be willing to do some hard work in order to understand it, to apply ourselves? To not resent it but to embrace it?

Look at 2 Timothy 2 in verse 15, in verse 15 it says, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth." It takes diligence to understand the word of God. We're not willing to take a superficial approach. We're not willing to accept a lazy spirit as we come to the word of God. How could we be lazy in light of what Christ has done for us, in light of the work that he has done coming from heaven, going to the cross, going to the grave, coming out alive, ascending into heaven to intercede for us until we're with him in glory? That was hard work on his part. Well, the least we can do, it seems to me, is to devote the work to understand the word that he's left behind.

Turn back a book to 1 Timothy 5. 1 Timothy 5:17. My point here is not about the office of elder but the work. Verse 17, "The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." It's hard work. It's hard work for us to understand these things and that's why the law is difficult to understand. It takes labor. It takes effort. We have to apply ourselves to this.

So, you know, I'm actually, you know, I'm excited, I'm interested, I'm interested to see how this congregation responds to the work that's necessary to understand the law of God. I'm interested to see what the response is. I think this is going to be a good test for where our church is really at, to find out how people respond to this. I'm looking forward to that and I'm expecting the best but I realize that this is going to have a winnowing effect on some but it's worth it. God's word is worth it. Our Christ is worth it. It is worth it to understand what he requires from us in detail so that we can live a life that's pleasing to him in the time that we have left here on the earth. We want this even though it's difficult. Is there anything worthwhile that has ever been gained without difficulty in attaining it? Has any athlete at the Olympics ever won a gold medal without doing the hard work of training? Has any champion ever held up the trophy without hard work that led him there? Has anyone ever mastered a musical instrument and brought artistic beauty to our ears without the hard work that was necessary to do it? No. No. We understand that and we embrace it in other things in life, what I'm laboring to emphasize here, let's not treat Christ cheaply. Let's not treat his word cheaply by pretending that this is easier than what it actually is.

So the law is difficult to understand, first of all, by the very definition of the term itself. Now secondly, secondly the types of law. The types of law make it difficult to understand the moral law of God. Part of what makes this difficult to understand the relationship between the law and the gospel is this: God gave three kinds of law to Moses. When we're speaking of law, there are different aspects to the law. There's the ceremonial law,

as I'm going to explain here in a moment. The ceremonial law, the judicial law, and the moral law.

Now some Bible teachers, again, object to those categories. They say that distinction is not laid out verbally in Scripture but neither is the word "Trinity" which is a linchpin of Christian orthodoxy. That's a false objection. It's a superficial objection. We believe that our 1689 Confession gets it right and so following that, following what Scripture teaches, we recognize three different types or kinds of law that God gave to Moses. First of all, there is the ceremonial law. The ceremonial law. That refers to the manner of Old Testament worship. God gave to his people in his revelation to Moses, God required different kinds of sacrifices and priests and rituals and tabernacles, a tabernacle, not plural. He gave his people different sacrifices and rituals to follow in the tabernacle and temple so that they could approach him before the coming of Christ, and that outward form of worship was what they practiced. It was a shadow that was pointing to Christ.

Look at the book of Hebrews 10, going to the right in your Bibles if you're still in 1 Timothy. Hebrews 10:1 it says, "For the Law, since it has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the very form of things, can never, by the same sacrifices which they offer continually year by year, make perfect those who draw near." The law was a shadow that was pointing to a future final sacrifice by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look at verses 11 and 12, "Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but Christ, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, sat down at the right hand of God." In the Old Testament, the worship was different. Christ had not yet come and so God ordained these animal sacrifices and different rituals as an avenue of worship to him before the fulfillment that Christ would bring. The Old Testament worship has been replaced in Christ and so that ceremonial aspect has been fulfilled by what Christ has done and is no longer practiced, but it's one aspect of the law and that makes understanding the law difficult.

Secondly, another aspect to the law is the judicial law. The judicial law. That refers to the precepts that were given to the Jews in Exodus 21-23 to govern their civil state. They were a nation, they were an independent nation under God and God gave them precepts and regulations and ordinances to govern how civil life and the civil state would be done. These laws governed Israel's daily life in matters of property rights and criminal punishment. Most Christians believe that those laws were set aside when biblical Israel ceased to exist there in the first century after the destruction of Rome and earlier. But you have the ceremonial law, the laws regulating worship, the judicial law regulating the matter of civil state.

Then thirdly, thirdly we come upon the moral law. The moral law which is the subject matter of the 10 Commandments. Generally speaking, moral law refers to the rule of righteousness which God gave in the 10 Commandments. The rule of righteousness that God gave in the 10 Commandments, and as we're going to see in the coming weeks and months, the 10 Commandments summarize, they bring in one concise place the rule of obedience that God has given to man to govern his relations to God and to other men. The first four are vertical, the last six are horizontal. It's a summary of what God requires

from men in their moral accountability to him. That is distinct from the sacrifices. That is distinct from the civil ordinances. And what you find as we study the moral law and we're going to look at this more closely next week, the moral law expressed in the 10 Commandments is based on the unchanging moral nature of God. They are a revelation of his holiness. They show us what God requires. They are a manifestation of his righteousness. It is an absolute standard of righteousness that applies to all men everywhere at all times. This is like a universal umbrella that is over all of humanity from the beginning of time until the end that we are studying and dealing with. The moral law sets a binding moral obligation for all men for all time, and that is not set aside by salvation in Christ, as I'm going to explain in a moment. The law still instructs us. The law still teaches us. So in this age, you and I, we must understand the role of the moral law in the Christian life and that's why we're undertaking this entire study. That's why we're undertaking this entire study is it's so important to understand how the moral law applies to us today.

So why is the law difficult? Well, there are a lot of definitions, there are a lot of different uses of the term that make it difficult. Secondly, there are different kinds of law in the Old Testament: the ceremonial, the judicial, the moral law. And by the way, in case any of you that haven't been with us, you bristle against that idea that the moral law has relevance to the Christian today, we've done a couple of messages on this already but just reading the New Testament you find that the New Testament writers are repeatedly appealing to the words of the 10 Commandments, the themes of the new commandment, in order to enforce the moral obligations of Christian life upon the readers. If the law had been set aside and had no relevance, they would not appeal to it. But they do again and again. Christ did. Paul did. And so, of course we need to understand these things, of course we need to know the implications. How are we going to live lives to the glory of God if we're not aware of what he actually requires?

And friends, if I can just go on a bit of a tangent here and make this observation. Part of the challenge in our age is that we live in a sentimental age just so wrapped up in emotion and not clear thinking. We're wrapped up in an age that denies any standard of absolute truth as well, when actually there is absolute truth revealed in God's word. So between the combination of an emotional approach to life and a culture that denies the standards of absolute truth, we're in a very vulnerable position by our environment to diminish the importance of the things that we're about to study. This whole study is a frontal assault on that sentimental approach to life and that standard of life and that approach to life that thinks truth is relative, you have your truth, I have mine, and let's not worry about it too much. All of those factors undermine an earnest approach to studying the moral law because we're conditioned to think that it doesn't matter. It does matter and we'll see that more clearly next week.

Well, there's a third thing that makes it difficult to study the moral law of God, we're kind of going from broad and narrowing things down as we go along here, and that's the use of moral law. The use of moral law. It's difficult to understand the law because it has different purposes, it has different effects. And today I'm just going to summarize the things that we need to understand about it and clarify what it is that we're talking about

when we talk about the moral law in the Christian life, okay? This is really really serious. We'll start with some negatives and end up with a positive here statement.

First of all, so important to understand, so easy to go to fall off the beam on this very point. If you're taking notes, be sure to write this down. The moral law is not for justification. The moral law is not for justification. What I mean by that is this: you cannot obey the 10 Commandments and gain salvation by them. The law was not given for that purpose. You cannot obey God enough in order to earn his favor. You cannot obey God enough to get forgiveness of one sin, let alone the thousands and tens of thousands of others that you've committed. We cannot earn our standing with God through obedience to the moral law. Scripture is abundantly clear on this.

Turn to the book of Galatians 2. I alluded to it earlier. Galatians 2:16. It requires a perfect righteousness to be in the presence of God and you and I cannot do that. We've already failed. If you lived perfectly from now until the time of your death, it wouldn't be enough. And you can't do that and you won't do it. The law condemns us. The law breaks us. The law exposes our sin rather than giving us a standard that we obey in order to earn salvation. Galatians 2:16, "nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified."

Do you know how you can identify if you have that spirit of self-righteousness in your heart? Do you know how you can realize that you have misunderstood the purpose of the moral law? It's that if your approach, if your thought about yourself in the presence of God is, "I'm basically a pretty good person." A person who thinks like that, a person who talks like that is a person who does not understand what the moral law is for. The moral law convicts you of sin, it does not congratulate you on your righteousness. You have broken God's law therefore it could not possibly be the means by which you earn righteousness.

Look over at the familiar passage in Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." You see, God's means of salvation, God's plan of salvation by definition excludes people from boasting about it. By definition salvation is a gift of grace, undeserved favor from God to man. And because it is undeserved, therefore we have nothing to boast about if we have been saved. We can't boast in our righteousness because we had none that contributed to our justification. We boast instead in Christ. We boast in what he has done on our behalf. We understand that his righteousness is the basis of our standing before God and we receive that not through anything that we have done but simply by receiving him by faith, by believing in him, by trusting in him. That's not a meritorious work, that's a gift from God.

And one more in Romans 3:19-20. We're making the point that the moral law is not what we use to earn salvation, it's not how we get our justification in the presence of God. Romans 3:19-20, "Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become

accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin." For those of you that think you're good enough, for those of you that have a proud estimation of your moral excellence, this passage and the teaching of Scripture comes to you and puts its finger on your lips and says, "Shh, don't talk that way." The law is designed to quiet you in your boasting about your moral goodness. It's meant to take that away from you because it exposes your sin. It convicts you of guilt. It shows you that you are not worthy of the presence of God in your own righteousness, and as a result of that, it brings a holy hush on us all so that we're not boasting about our goodness in the presence of God.

And because that is the case, we understand that the moral law is not used to earn our justification. We do not obey it in order to earn forgiveness. We don't obey it – watch this – we don't earn to keep God's favor. Christ has obtained the favor of God for us through his person and work. God is favorably disposed to his people because he is favorably disposed to his Son, and if we are in Christ, God is favorably disposed to us on the basis of Christ, not on the basis of our own righteousness. And this is so important because it teaches us, and I belabor the point, I know, and I don't apologize for it. I'm not in an apologetic mood today, okay? These are things that we don't apologize for. The law comes to show you your unworthiness. Christ comes to deliver you from your unworthiness and clothe you in his robes of righteousness, and on that basis, on the basis of Christ, we boast in him and not in ourselves so that we do not claim goodness in our own being. We realize that if there is anything good about us, if there is anything righteous about us, it is something external to us that we have been given as a gift and so the moral law is not for justification.

Now secondly, this is a wonderful aspect of it. Secondly, you need to understand this about the moral law: the moral law does not threaten to punish true Christians. The moral law does not threaten to punish true Christians. This is really important to understand and for those of you that have grown up in legalistic homes, you know, you've always been threatened by the law of God if you disobey your parents or whatever and you've just had that weight laid upon you. I understand that's really hard to get your mind around and to be relieved from the terrible burden of those kinds of illegitimate threats for those who are in Christ. Understand this, my Christian brother, my Christian sister, we do not obey the moral law out of fear that we will be punished if we fall short. We are not afraid of the punishment of God any longer as true Christians and you must understand this, this is central to what it means to be a believer. The whole point of Christ being on the cross, what he did was that he was there as our substitute. The whole point was that he bore our sins, he bore the wrath of God against our sins in his body on the cross. He did that so that we wouldn't have to bear that punishment ourselves. We could not bear that punishment ourselves. It would destroy us. It would ruin us. We could never recover from it. So the whole reason that Christ came for your soul, my beloved Christian friend, was in love he wanted to deliver you from that punishment and deliver you from fear of that punishment.

Let me show you a few Scriptures. You're in Romans, let's go to Romans 8. We're speaking now to those who are in Christ. True believers. This is what Christ has accomplished for you. Romans 8:1, "Therefore there is now no condemnation for those



who are in Christ Jesus." No condemnation. No punishment. Christ bore that on our behalf. We're set free. We're not afraid of the judgment of God because we understand based on the testimony of Scripture that Christ took that punishment for us. He suffered it in our place. It was a penal substitutionary atonement that he made for us.

Look over at verse... oh, we should read the whole eighth chapter of Romans, right? Verse 29, "those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified." If you have been justified in Christ, you will be glorified in Christ. No one drops out. There is no break in that golden link of salvation, that golden chain of those things. Called. Justified. Glorified.

Verse 31, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; who is the one who condemns?" And on it goes so that he says in verse 38, "I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Because of what Christ has done, we do not fear the eternal punishment of God any longer because Christ has delivered us from that. He endured it on our behalf.

Look at Galatians 3. In fact, you can see both of these points in this quick passage. The moral law is not for justification, the moral law does not threaten to punish Christians. Verse 11, "Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, 'The righteous man shall live by faith.' However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, 'He who practices them shall live by them.'" In other words, if you want to try to attain righteousness by obeying the law, that's what you're left with and you're going to fail.

Verse 13, for those of us in Christ, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.'" The law of God condemns us, brings a curse upon us, and Christ redeems us from that curse by the work that he has done on our behalf at the cross and as a result of that, we do not fear the judgment of God.

Look at Hebrews 2:14, "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives." The fear of death, the fear of punishment waiting for us when we come to death, that's all been removed from us in Christ. This is how great his love, how great his sacrifice on our behalf was, so that the Apostle John could say this in chapter 4, verse 17. You don't need to turn there, 1 John 4:17, "By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love."

Do you see it? The moral law does not come to us to threaten us with punishment. The punishment has been paid. There is no fear and anticipating standing before God and being ultimately cast into hell if you are in Christ. All of that's been taken away.

This is blessedly liberating news for those who grew up in a legalistic environment, who had rule upon rule upon rule laid upon them, most of which in some places can't be found anywhere in Scripture. What a blessed liberation it is to be set free from that and to realize that the purpose of Scripture is to point us to Christ who loves us and has saved us and keeps us. That's blessed truth. Christ paid the penalty at the cross. The law does not threaten us. If you are in Christ, you have objective peace with God. He is satisfied with his Son and if you are in his Son, he is satisfied with you for the sake of Christ.

Now with those things said, there's a third use of the law that we need to understand and is the subject matter of our study over these coming weeks. The moral law is not for our justification. The moral law does not threaten to punish us if we disobey in Christ. However, the moral law, number three, the moral law is the Christian's rule of life. It does instruct us on how we are to live. It instructs us on the holiness of God. It instructs us on what pleases him. It brings promises to us of his blessing and it threatens us and it shows us his displeasure through its threatenings. The moral law teaches us the proper way to love God and to love men. It teaches us the will of God. It exposes sin in our lives thus it humbles us and teaches us our need for Christ. So the New Testament uses the moral law to instruct us in those ways. Think about it this way. Here I am now, I am in Christ now. How shall I live? The moral law lays that before you in multifaceted splendor and this is going to be the subject matter of our future studies and so I'm just going to leave it there. My two most recent messages in this series give a preview of it. You can go back to review it further by picking up those messages.

So we see why is it difficult to understand the law? Well, there's the definition of law, there's the types of law, the three types of law, the use of the moral law makes it difficult. There's one more. I nearly didn't include this one. I'm really glad I did. The fourth one is the most personal and in some ways the most difficult to come to grips with. Do you know what makes it difficult to study the law of God? Point number four: it's the sinfulness of our own hearts. It's the sinfulness of our own hearts.

The writer of Hebrews speaking on a different issue said this, said, "It's hard for you to understand what I'm writing. It's hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing. You're dull of hearing." And I'm not going to expound this in detail here, I just want to lay out what the challenge for you is going to be going forward. You see, my friend, and I'm in this same sad boat as you, your heart is not naturally receptive to the law of God. There is still remnants of sin which resist the law of God. Oh, God has written it on your heart but there's a conflict between the flesh and the spirit and there are still remnants of our flesh that are resistant to these things.

Let's look at it from the perspective of an unsaved man to simplify the point. Do you know what's true of sinners? Do you know what's true of unregenerate men? They love the world more than they love Christ so the law is not appealing to them. Sinners love their sin more than they love obedience and so the law is a threat to them. They don't

want to come to the light because they don't want to give up their sin. Sinners do not want anyone to tell them what to do. They want to be their own boss. That's why children rebel against their parents, why workers rebel against authority, why people resist legitimate government authority as expressed in legitimate police actions. People are rebels. Sinners rebel. They do not want anyone to tell them what to do. The Jews said, "We will not have this man reign over us." And that's a problem. When God comes in his law and says, "This you shall do and this you shall not do," there's a natural rebellion against it.

Sinners, when it comes to spiritual teaching, want their ears tickled far more than they want to be truly instructed out of Scripture, and do you know what else? Sinners are often just downright lazy. Just downright lazy. That was the condition of all of us before God saved us, and when he saved us, he gave us a perfect standing but the new life in Christ has not yet made us perfect and there's a hangover, there are remnants of that kind of sin in us that we have to overcome, that we have to subdue, that we have to ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to overcome and to put away so that we're in a position to receive the word of God about his moral law with obedience and receptivity. Because, my friends, if you have allowed those kinds of sins to grow up in your Christian life, if those kinds of weeds have taken root, let me tell you the word of God is not going to take root in you in that kind of rocky soil. Unspiritual men will not understand the spiritual law. Pride and rebellion will quench the word.

So our study of the 10 Commandments, there's a potential throttle on it based on the condition of your own heart. Our study of the 10 Commandments requires us to come in a spirit of repentance, a spirit of teachability, of receptivity, of a tender heart, of the prayer of the psalmist in Psalm 119, "Lord, give me understanding that I may know Thy testimonies. Give me understanding that I may keep Your law." There's a condition of the heart that is exposed as we come to this, and this lays its umbrella over all of us. This is the surgical scalpel of the word of God coming and exposing what's in our hearts as we see these things.

So what are we to do? Well, turn to the book of James and with this I'll close. We need to take honest stock of our spiritual lives. We need to humble ourselves before a holy God and his holy word and then rely on his promises to help us. His Spirit indwells us in order to help us. James 4:6, "But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, 'God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you." Beloved, look at that last verse again as we approach these things. The law of God is going to humble us. It humbles our intellect by showing us there's so much that we don't understand and it humbles us in our souls by realizing that even now our obedience is imperfect, it's flawed. It humbles us even more by recognizing how much we were dependent upon Christ to save us and how he gets all of the glory and we get none of it. And so we humble ourselves in light of all of these things, and yet we look at the promise in verse 6 that God gives grace to the humble.

So it's all laid out here before us, my friends. It's all laid out before us. There is a promise of the blessing of God as we embark on this study. There is a promise of the blessing of God if we will simply humble ourselves in his presence before his word. The ones who will do that will be greatly blessed by the Spirit of God in their lives. The ones who don't, those of you who are resistant inside even if you're outwardly compliant, it says God's opposed to you. The God of heaven is opposed to the proud but he gives grace to the humble. So my prayer as we set off from shore, set off on this journey is this, is that the Lord would help us turn to Christ as we come under the authority of his matchless word.

Let's pray together.

*Gracious God, we humble ourselves and we submit to You. We pray that You by Your Holy Spirit would teach us from the hard parts of Your word. We resist the devil in this moment, O God, and we draw near to You. As You have promised, draw near to us now. Father, we thank You that Christ has made an atonement for sinners, a blood sacrifice, in order to reconcile us to God. Having reconciled us in Christ, having placed Your Spirit within us, O God, now help us to walk a life of obedience that brings glory to You. Bless us in the days to come as we study Your precious word. In the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*

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