

# Westminster Larger Catechism

## *Question 94*

Halifax, 18 October 2009

**Q. 94 Is there any use of the moral law to man since the fall?**

**A. Although no man, since the fall, can attain to righteousness and life by the moral law; yet there is great use thereof, as well common to all men, as peculiar either to the unregenerate, or the regenerate.**

### **Introduction:**

If you have been with us, you know that we have just come to the beginning of one of the largest sections in the Larger Catechism,

- the section that deals with the moral law.
- We have seen that the moral law is binding on all persons.
  - God made us moral beings who have an innate knowledge of our Creator and a clear understanding of how we ought to live as those made in His image.
    - This innate knowledge of God is often suppressed by us now that we are a fallen race, and we also suppress the clear sense we have of right and wrong and are sometimes even blinded to what is required by God as a judgement.
    - But we are still obliged to obey the moral law because it is simply what is required of us as persons made in God's image.
  - In the beginning, God also revealed to us His will about the Sabbath, labour, and marriage, and these ordinances also remain our obligation.
    - We cannot plead it as an excuse that we live in a society in which these ordinances have fallen into disuse.
      - We are responsible to repent, and until we do, we share in the sins of our fathers.
- We also saw last week, that God has graciously condescended to us in our fallen estate in the Covenant of grace,
  - and in His covenant, He has revealed to us not only the way of salvation, but also His moral law which is found in the Holy Scriptures.
  - In other words, He has been pleased to spell it all out to us in written form so that we might clear about what is required of all men...
    - Even though we ought to know it, sin has so affected us that we need to have it written down for us...
      - Even after we have been regenerated, we are still prone to twist and distort the moral law to suit our own taste.
      - By having it all written down in the work, it at least makes it more difficult for us to do that.

- Last week, I showed you in Romans 2 the contrast between those who, through association with God in His covenant, know the written law...and,
  - those who only have the work of the law that is written on every human heart.
  - In both cases, we know, if we are honest, that we are transgressors.
    - We do not live up to even what we know to be right and we know that we are guilty before God.
  - But those who have the written law have a great advantage (or at least they ought to), because they have a clear statement of what is required.
    - The outcome of having such clarity **ought** to be a greater humility—
      - because of all people, we who have a clear statement ought to understand how far short we come of what God requires!
    - But Paul shows that the Jews of his day, rather than being humbled,
      - rested in their superior knowledge of God’s requirements...
        - They prided themselves in being those who knew the law in contrast to their pagan neighbours!
      - Instead of feeling ashamed when they saw, under the greater light they had, just how far short they had come,
        - they boasted that they knew the will of God better than their others!
    - They should have known that God is holy,
      - And that anything short of personal, perfect, and perpetual obedience is completely unacceptable to Him
        - They should have been the most humble people of all!
        - And that is even more the case for us as Christians...
          - For we not only have inherited the written law from the Jews that tells us what is required of us...
            - but we also now have the example of Christ to show us an example of what is required...
            - And not only that, but we see what had to be done by Him to pay for the penalty of our sin!

As we move on to Question 94 today, you see that the question is asked as to whether God’s law has any use to us now after the fall.

- This is very much an introductory question to the next three questions (95-97) were we are asked details...
  - 95: Of what use is the moral law to all men?
  - 96: Of what use is the moral law to unregenerate men?

- 97: Of what use is the moral law to regenerate men?
- So today, I am not going to go into the details of what use the moral law has to us today, but rather,
  - I want to begin by showing you what the moral law cannot do (the use that it does not have and why we might think that it has no use)
  - Then I want to try to clarify the way the Bible uses the word “law.”

For our Scripture reading, I have selected Romans 8:1-11.

- READ Romans 8:1-11

Now I want to move right on into our outline and look at:

### **I. What the moral law cannot do.**

- You see that Paul speaks about this in verse 3-4.
  - Rom 8:3-4: For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

#### **A. That Law tells us what God requires of us, but there is something it cannot do.**

- It cannot meet its own demands.
  - There is not anything wrong with the law itself—no, as Paul said back in Romans 7:12,
    - Rom 7:12: The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.
  - The law itself is perfect.
    - It does its job perfectly.
    - It tells us exactly what God requires.
    - But it has its limitations.
  - It cannot meet its own demands (which are, of course, God’s demands), because it has no power to do so.
    - It informs us as to what is required of us, but it does not attempt to do what is required because that it not its job.

#### **B. Paul tells us where this weakness comes from...**

1. He says, (Romans 8:3) that the law “was weak through the flesh.”
  - Now of course Paul is not suggesting that the law has flesh—but he is speaking about the weakness of human beings.
  - The weakness comes from man who is mere flesh.

- The problem is that we are not able to carry out what the law requires.
2. This weakness of our flesh is evident in two major areas...
- a. First, in that we have this problem that we are incapable of paying the penalty for our sin.
    - We have sinned against a God who is infinite and holy and of purer eyes than to behold evil.
      - As a whole human race together, we fell away from the LORD in the beginning in Adam...
        - and then each one of us are born into that rebellion with that rebellious disposition so that we add to the original sin of our race our own personal sins.
      - God has zero tolerance for our sin, not because He is bad but because He is good; not because He is unreasonable, but because He is just.
        - As I mentioned last week,
          - we should not want God to change because if He adjusted His holy righteous standard to fit with us, there would be no hope of paradise!
        - Can you imagine being stuck forever with your sinful self and the sinful people around you? selfish as we are? to be stuck with that forever and ever?
          - It's a pretty dreadful thought!
      - But I say, God is happily quite inflexible about holiness and justice and will not compromise in the least...
        - but that leaves us sinners with a huge problem!
      - For His justice to be satisfied,
        - we must be cast away from His comfortable presence and bear our condemnation, even eternal death, which is the wages of sin.
          - The death that is required is not annihilation, but everlasting punishment.
            - Nothing else is acceptable.
            - The law says that we are cursed that justice demands of us eternal punishment.
        - Obviously, we do not have what it takes to meet this demand.
          - The law tells us it must be met, but we have nothing with which to pay—we are too weak to meet the demand.

- We are shut up to pay the penalty for all eternity because we, in our own flesh, can never complete our sentence of punishment.
  - There will never be a day when the judge can say, in justice, “It is enough!”
    - We simply do not have the resources as mere human flesh.
    - You are a debtor who can never pay your debt if left to yourself.

TRANS> But our weakness is not limited to this inability to pay the penalty...

- There is a second way the weakness of the flesh is seen...
  - b. Secondly, the weakness of the flesh is seen in that we are unable, if left to ourselves, to obey God’s law now.
    - The law tells us how we ought to live, but we are so corrupt that this knowledge does not benefit us.
      - Instead, it makes us worse!
    - That’s right—our sin is such that when we know what God forbids, it makes us all the more eager to do it!
      - The malice and wickedness in us takes pleasure in doing things that God disapproves of.
        - In Romans 7:5, Paul says:
          - Romans 7:5: For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death.
      - You know what this is like...
        - You hear a prohibition—and it makes you want to do it even more...
          - We are like the boys who steal apples from their neighbour when they have apples at home—just to annoy him.
    - Don’t you find that even as a Christian—you gravitate to certain things you know God disapproves of when you are unhappy with Him?
      - When you don’t like the way things are going—it is not so much that you love the sinful behaviour as it is that you love sinning—
        - Really—you do it as a way to get at God!
          - That is the honest truth about it...isn’t it?
      - And if you have never turned to the Lord,

- part of the reason is that you just don't want to give Him the satisfaction of your giving in to Him.
- The thing that is so sinister about sin is that we do it because we hate God.
  - This is what Paul is talking about in Romans 7:7-8—
    - As soon the commandment came that said, “You shall not covet,” it actually produced more coveting instead of less coveting—it actually stirred up coveting!
  - Look at Rom 7:8—
    - Rom 7:8-10: But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all manner of evil desire.
    - The commandment actually *produced* what it forbade.
- There was nothing wrong with the commandment, but sin was the result when the commandment met up with human flesh.
  - There is something wrong with us—so wrong that commandments actually stir up sin!
  - That is why in verse 18 Paul says,
    - Roman 7:18: For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.
    - There is something good in him now as a converted man, but in his flesh—in what he is in himself—if left to himself—
      - there is nothing good at all.
      - There is this person that hates God so much that he looks for ways to displease Him.
- And Paul recognises that that there are still remains of that sinful person in him because now that he has been converted...
  - now that he wants to do good—he still finds that he does evil.
    - Rom 7:19: For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.
  - And so he finds himself crying out for deliverance!
    - Rom 7:24: O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?
      - Do you not struggle with this too?

- Do you not find that though you have been born again and want to please God, that evil is still with you?
- That you take pleasure in doing what is against God?

TRANS> So that is a description of the weakness of the law!

- It is weak because the flesh is weak—because we are weak and ruined by the fall!
  - The law tells us what is required because of sin, but we cannot pay the debt...
  - The law tells us what is how we ought to live, but we find that we continue to do evil!
- The law has no way to deliver me—it is weak because I am weak!

C. But Paul declares in Romans 8:3 that what the law cannot do (because of our weakness), God has done!

1. He has sent His Son Jesus in the likeness of sinful flesh in order that He might condemn sin in the flesh that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit!

- The Spirit joins us to Jesus Christ by living faith...
  - He joins us to Christ so that we rely upon Him completely to save us!

2. And to rely on Jesus is to rely on the one that God sent to meet the righteous requirement of the law!

- Jesus is the one who came in the likeness of sinful flesh to pay the debt of sinful human flesh!
  - And He is the one who gives us the Spirit who enables us to serve God,
    - and even though this service to God is not perfected,
      - it is a beginning of that which will be perfected according to God's sure promise.

3. And so you see that the law has no power to give us life—only Jesus can do that.

- The law can only show us what is required—
  - It is not designed to provide us with what is required.
    - That is why it is so foolish for anyone to try to obtain righteousness by keeping the law!
    - The law only brings to greater light our own weakness in the flesh!
- Oh how thankful we should be for Jesus Christ!
  - The law does not deliver us!
  - Jesus does!

TRANS> I trust that you understand this... I hope you understand it—it is very important that you do...

- But now I want to move on to clarify something that is often confusing for us when we read the New Testament.

## **II. To what does the New Testament refer when it speaks of the Law?**

- Does the law refer the Law of Moses, or does it refer to the Moral Law?
  - What is the difference between the two?
  - And why is it that sometimes the NT makes it sound like the law is something that ought to be avoided,
    - yet at other times it speaks of it as something that is good, something that we ought to delight in, and even as something that God writes in our hearts in the New Covenant?

A. Let me begin with the question,

- What is the difference between the moral law and the Law of Moses?
  1. The answer is that there is not a whole lot of difference because the Law of Moses contains within it—really as its very core—the moral law.
    - It contains the Ten Commandments that were given at Sinai which are a summary of the moral law...
      - And it contains a summary of the Ten Commandments in the two great commandments—
        - that we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and that we are to love our neighbour as ourselves.
    - That is true as long as we are human and God is God.
      - We are morally obligated to love Him and to love one another.
        - Justice demands it, for God is worthy of such love.
    - So within the writings of Moses, we have a restatement of the law that was written on our hearts at creation.
      - It is a much needed restatement because of our corruption and sin—it brings us back to the standard.
  2. But that is not all that is in the Law of Moses with respect to the Moral Law.
    - Moses also tells us what the penalty is for violating the moral law.
      - He presents to us the holy character of God and teaches us that we are deserving of death because of our sin.
      - He teaches us that we are unable to approach Him because we are defiled.



- Moses presents this to us in a most marvellous way—the way, of course, that was shown to him by God...
- By God's orders, he sets up a tabernacle amidst the people to represent the dwelling place of God...
  - And then he puts up barriers between God and the people telling them that God is holy and that they cannot come into His holy presence lest they die...
  - And he appoints all sorts of ceremonial washings and cleansings to show them that they must be cleansed because of God's holiness, and that if they do not do it right, they will be cut off.
    - There is a constant requirement that blood be shed to atone for their sins—for their purification as those who live near to God...
    - And all this is but ritual purification!
      - It is pictures—shadows—of what is really required.
      - It is a model or a pattern to show them that the moral law requires a death that is much greater than that in the rituals...
        - They are rituals that point to a requirement that is much much greater than themselves!
        - Of course, I am talking about purification by the blood of Jesus Christ!

TRANS> So you see that the moral law is contained in the Law of Moses in two ways...

- In that Moses restates what is required of any human being whether he is fallen or not...
  - And in that Moses shows us what the moral law requires of us now that we are fallen—for our purification—that there must be an atonement—something much greater than the rituals themselves...
- 3. And now I need to add something very important to this about the rituals appointed by Moses...
  - I want you to understand that **the rituals themselves are not the moral law**...
    - They are tautological.
    - They are given to teach us what the moral law requires,
      - but they themselves are only models given to instruct us about the demands.
  - These rituals were required for those who were under the old covenant,
    - but they themselves are not moral requirements per se.

- They only set forth by shadows what is morally required of human beings now that we have fallen into sin.
- It will help you tremendously to understand this when you read the New Testament (as well as the Old).

B. And so what law is the New Testament talking about when it speaks of the Law?

- What is it speaking about right here in Romans 8:3-4 when it says?
  - Rom 8:3-4: For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.
- Is it the moral law, or is it the Law of Moses?
  - It hardly matters, does it?
    - The moral law holds up what is required of us as human beings, and because we are sinners in Adam, it holds up what is required of us as sinners...
      - And that is the same standard that is up-held by Moses—in the Law of Moses.
        - We learn from him that there is a sin debt that demands a penalty that we cannot pay because of our weakness—
        - and we learn that there is a life that we ought to be living but are not living.
- It should also be recognised that Moses does not pretend to *provide* the solution to our two-fold sin problem—
  - or perhaps I should say, he does not pretend that God has already provided the solution in his day.
  - His entire ministry is about telling the people what is required so that they will look to the LORD to provide it.
    - It is never his intention that the people should become so dull and spiritually blind that they should rest in the ceremonies as if the ceremonies themselves could do anything more than make them ritually clean.
    - He is always pointing them to the LORD who promised.

C. But why is it then, that the New Testament sometimes speaks so negatively of the Law,

- saying things like,

- like the things Paul says in Romans 7:6 where he says:
  - Rom 7:6: But now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the oldness of the letter.
  
- And you know that such statements are often found—
  - in Romans, in Hebrews, in Corinthians, and especially Galatians.
  - Is Paul saying that we have been delivered from the moral law?
    - Would we even want to be delivered from the moral law that is summarised in the commandment to love God with all our heart and our neighbour as ourselves?
      - Do we want some different standard than that to live by?
        - Is there something wrong with the moral law?
        - Well of course not!
      - So what does Paul mean when he says we are delivered from the Law and should now serve in the newness of the Spirit?
        - In the very next verse he unequivocally states that the law is not sin, so what does he mean when he says we are delivered from the law?
  
- Paul is talking about a deliverance from the obligation the law places upon us to pay the penalty of our sin debt.
  - We are freed from that now because Jesus has paid that sin debt for us.
  - And not only that, but we are freed from all the rituals of the Law of Moses that set forth our need of Jesus to come and do this.
    - They are no longer binding on us because now Christ has come and He has done the things that were represented by all those rituals.
    - We don't have to carry out ritual purifications any more as those who are yearning for God to provide what is needed...
      - Now we can rejoice in what Christ has provided!
        - We live by faith in Him instead of by the works of law.
        - Not that the OT people did not live by faith in Christ, but they were attached to Christ as He was shadowed forth in the law.
        - We are attached to Him as He is presented to us the gospel—the good news of what He has done for us on the cross that we believe!
          - and we are given the fullness of the Spirit so that we serve God with a fresh power that enables us to keep moral law

- To put it another way, we are actually purified rather than ritually purified...
  - understand, of course, that this relatively speaking.
- The OT people had the Spirit too,
  - They just did not have the fullness that we now have.
- But you see, when Paul speaks negatively of the law,
  - he is not speaking negatively of the moral law which is established by Christ...
    - nor is he speaking negatively of what Moses taught as far as showing us what is morally required of us.
    - He is speaking rather of those who were returning to the OT rituals as if they could be blessed through the observance of them now that Christ had come!
      - Those rituals were only temporary.
        - They were only to be observed until Christ came.
        - To return to them is to imply that Christ has not come and fulfilled the demand for death and blood atonement that is presented in those rituals!
          - And if you are going to ignore what He has done, then you still don't have an atonement from Christ
            - and you are under obligation to pay the whole debt of your sin.
      - And then you are stuck with the problem of the weakness of the flesh...
        - Romans 8:3-4: What the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh...
          - You have no strength to do what is morally required.
          - God did that by sending His Son.
- Paul makes this temporary purpose of the law crystal clear in Galatians 3:19 and following:
  - Turn there, and let me show you.
  - He tells you here, not what the purpose of the moral law is, but what the purpose (the temporal purpose) of the ceremonial law was:

- Gal 3:19: What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made;
- It was appointed until Christ came because of transgressions.
  - It was there to keep saying to us what we want to deny—
    - “you are sinful and you need a great curse bearing death to make things right.”
  - These rituals taught us and reminded us that we were in need of deliverance—
    - If observance of rituals could have saved us—or some law—something we could do—salvation would have been by law...
      - That’s what it says in verse 21:
      - Gal 3:21: ...if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law.
  - But remember our text—the law is weak through the flesh!
    - So Gal 3:22 says:
      - Gal 3:22: But the Scripture has confined all under sin, that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.
      - We were constantly shown our sin—so that we might believe in Christ instead of trusting in what we do.
  - When Jesus came and did His work, that was when “faith came,” as Paul puts it in verse 23:
    - Gal 3:23: But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed.
  - He does not mean that there was no faith, but again, relatively speaking there was no faith...
    - It was not until Jesus came and did His work that we had the good news of Him and His work to believe in.
      - Faith came when the work of our salvation was complete and we could trust in the person who did that work to save us.
      - Before faith came, God’s people were kept under guard by the law—kept waiting by the law which reminded them of their need that was to be provided by God.

- In this way, the law *led* them to Christ that they might be justified by faith in Him.
  - Gal 3:24-25: Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.
- And so now it would be ludicrous to go back to the ceremonies of the law.
  - That is the sense in which the Law of Moses is no longer binding on us.
    - We are no longer under it and all its ritual requirements.
    - Nor are we under it as those waiting to have the demands that it points to in its ceremonies met—because they have been met.

And so brothers and sisters, I hope that helps you to understand how the NT speaks of the law.

- The moral law remains—it does not provide anything—it is simply what we owe to God as creatures and to one another under Him.
  - It is clearly taught to us in the Old Testament, and then in the NT we have the record of the God’s sending of His Son to provide all that is required.
  - The requirements of the moral law are not set aside at all—they are completely fulfilled by Jesus Christ...
    - not that we may live in licentiousness,
      - but rather that by His grace we may now begin to live as we have always been meant to live—as morally pure and holy human beings who walk in obedience to the moral law as a new creation in Jesus Christ.
    - This new life in the Spirit does not come by observing the rituals appointed by Moses,
      - but by trusting in the One that God provided to take away our sins, even our dear Lord Jesus Christ!
        - To return to the rituals is to reject Him.
        - To turn to Him is to find complete forgiveness and grace to walk in obedience to our God’s moral law.

We will look at the use of the moral law now that Christ has come in the weeks to come.