

Biblical Theology by Dr. Chuck Baynard

Lesson 29 (HCLD 2)¹

Preparation: Begin and end each study time with prayer. Pay particular attention to the background reading and pray over each passage asking God to reveal Himself to you.

Background Reading: Read all the Scripture verses in footnote # 1 & 2.

Vocabulary: Moral Law, Holiness, Righteousness

Question: : What is the moral law

Answer: The moral law is the declaration of the will of God to mankind, directing and binding everyone to personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity and obedience thereunto, in the frame and disposition of the whole man, soul and body,[a] and in performance of all those duties of holiness and righteousness which he owes to God and man:[b] promising life upon the fulfilling, and threatening death upon the breach of it.[c]²

This is the beginning of the series of questions that will lead into the discussion of the Ten Commandments, whereby each command is dealt with separately. Of all the doctrines of Scripture, and of all the work of the Westminster Divines, here is the work of the greatest importance to us. While it can be dangerous to try and put a system of priorities to the Word of God, it is an easy to see thing that if we do not understand what this Word is and what it means it is of no use to us. Since the foremost duty of man is to obey God's Word and be conformed to it, even as he is transformed by and through it by such obedience, here we need pause for much prayer and reflection. All the more so when we understand that God's Word is as much of a unity as the awesome person of God Himself. This is why Christ said that if

¹ The Heidelberg Catechism, First Part: Of Man's Misery Lord's Day 2

Q3: From where do you know your misery?

A3: From the Law of God.[a]

a. Rom. 3:20; 7:7

Q4: What does the Law of God require of us?

A4: Christ teaches us in sum, Matthew 22: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.[b]

b. Luke 10:27; Deut. 6:5; Gal. 5:14

Q5: Can you keep all this perfectly?

A5: No,[1] for I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor.[c]

c. Rom. 3:10-12, 23; I John 1:8, 10

d. Rom. 8:7; Eph. 2:3

² a. Deut. 5:1-3, 31, 33; Luke 10:26-27; Gal. 3:10; I Thess. 5:23

b. Luke 1:75; Acts 14:16

c. Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:10, 12

you offend in one point you offend in all. God, as sovereign of the heavens and earth has spoken, if obedience of this word were not then the most important thing in His kingdom, why did He speak?

Perhaps that doesn't make a lot of sense to some. However the analogy of sovereignty to the extent it belongs to God escapes all mere worldly analogies. We come close to seeing the perfection of the spoken word of one in authority being obeyed both by fear of the consequence of not doing so, while at the same time being obeyed for the pure joy of pleasing one they love in the young child eagerly moving to the spoken word of a parent whom they love, and respect, while at the same time having been trained that disobedience has consequences. The marriage of love and fear in the obedience of a parent perhaps can be vaguely comprehended, though by the time most of us pass that point in life we have forgotten the inner feeling of satisfaction and joy when with no notice of the element of fear we eagerly sought to obey our parent(s). If His word is not obeyed perfectly, whether from fear or love doesn't matter in theory at this point, God is honor bound to discipline the offender. I use the word discipline here with great care. There is a difference in discipline as contrasted with punishment. Discipline contains the idea of teaching, or learning depending upon the end one is associated with. Punishment is in payment for an offense. We must be careful then for in no way can there be punishment assigned for disobedience other than eternal damnation. For this reason God is long suffering toward the children of wrath, carefully bringing chastisement in various ways, that they might turn from their disobedience. Even as Scripture so says that those whom He loves, God does chastise. The difference being that the same chastisement that draws the child of God to His bosom in repentance, will bring forth hatred and violence in the heart of the children of wrath. Thus we see that this does no harm to the first two points of the Classic Christian tenets of faith and once more affirms the third (1. Total Depravity 2. Unconditional Election 3. Limited Atonement).

If we could possibly reduce the Reformed faith to a single word, that word would of necessity be sovereignty. As we then begin this introduction of the moral law, it is of utmost importance we grasp both the importance of God's sovereignty, and understand how that affects the history of man and God's involvement in that history. Though I have had many fail to see any connection, in my mind the best earthly example of a sovereign is given in the book of Esther. An earthly sovereign in this case speaks, giving permission for the destruction of a people. Despite the fact that he spoke because of deception, he has spoken, that word cannot be broken or changed, or he is not sovereign. However he can issue another word to stand beside that word and alter the consequence as long as the first word is not changed or harmed in the issuance of the second. This we see in Esther, where the king gives the Jews permission to fight back, or defend themselves. He has not altered the first decree that the people may freely attack and kill the Jews. He has given the Jews permission to resist. Now the first thing that comes to mind is they had this right anyway. Not unless expressly given from the monarch. The same monarch could issue a decree that on a certain day all of a given nation would commit suicide, and fully expect it to be done. Even an earthly sovereign has the power of judgment, or life and death in his hands. There is no area of life that is not his to rule in all his subjects. For this reason I find this book as good an example of the principles of sovereignty as I do providence.

God has made manifest (declared) His law unto mankind. Not just the elect or not just the non-elect, but all mankind. Both the righteous and the reprobate came from the same original seed of man and both stand equally guilty before the throne of a sovereign God. As we study the unfolding of God's plan of redemption in history, which some see the Bible as being, remember this principle of sovereignty, and that God cannot change nor corrupt anything He has decreed in the earlier revelation of Himself. Even if we were not looking back at past history, you can almost see what will happen next because of the consistency this principle of sovereignty brings to God's interaction with His creation. This is the great error of the dispensational theories, God changes how he deals with people from age to age and has two classes of people in that there is a separate program for Israel. Yet we find it clearly written that God is no respecter of persons. He cannot be, but is bound by the principle of sovereignty to deal justly with all mankind, just or unjust.

How awesome the burden of the law becomes when we see that God has spoken and cannot but demand payment to the last penny so to speak for the smallest infraction of the revealed will of the Godhead. How flippant such comments then of those who see two ways of salvation and say if it were possible for man to perfectly obey he could enter the gates of heaven by the law. The law was never intended for this purpose, but like the king in Esther, was intended by the King of Heaven to provide the same effect, provide a way without conflict with another royal edict for a condemned people to live. It is for this very reason that the completion of the revelation of God's salvation for the elect had to end not in the perfect obedience to the law of God, but in the death of Jesus Christ. For Christ indeed lived the perfect and sinless life, but His glorification could not be until the death of the flesh, that He might be raised in spiritual perfection and glory. From the beginning it was not intended that the flesh of man be glorified. This isn't to diminish the doctrine of the sacrifice, but rather to help us understand why the sacrifice was God's own Son, as the one who could be the perfect sacrifice without spot. This is why it is written that Christ was obedient even to the death of the cross. It had been decreed from the foundation of the earth.

This is why I hold to the supralapsarian position of the eternal counsel of God. Though even here I do not accept the classic position without my own twists to the theory. My God can't be guilty of the sequencing of events that led to the election and reprobation as such, because any sequence whatsoever, even in eternity makes God the prisoner of time and logic so to speak. In His perfection the complete story is before Him at once. The sequence as such less than that we have instruments to measure. Perfection in thought and deed we cannot begin to comprehend. Being but an image in a dark mirror before the fall, and since having that image crushed beyond recognition, that even in our wildest dreams we cannot imagine God, much less probe the depths of the counsel of God. Can we begin to see that God doesn't only see the end from the beginning, He is the beginning and end, and as such is present in both at the same instant to us, for He has no time?

It is such times as this I know my limitations and can only bow before my Lord, knowing the limitations of the ability of the created to describe the Creator, much less the deeper things of God. I am overwhelmed with humility, and can only pray for abilities I don't have to find the words to convey these thoughts in a way another might comprehend.

The world of man demands such sequence of events and the logical presentation of facts that can be examined. Oh foolish creatures that we are, for it is by faith that Abraham saw the day of the Lord. It was of faith that Abraham obeyed God and became the father of the faithful. And my friend it is by faith the Holy Spirit will speak to us from the pages of God's written Word. Fear of God is the beginning of wisdom says the Sacred Book. Faith is the beginning of understanding the moral law, given by the hand of God, that the children of the kingdom might live in obedience to their sovereign God. Here then is the school master that teaches us both what we should do in positive commands and at the same time telling us what we must not do by way of negative sanctions. The natural law will bring us to the foot of the mountain to pray, but it is faith that will lift us to the top of the mountain of God where we learn from the Master Himself, this do my son that you might have life and that more abundant. So it is from the top of

this selfsame mountain that God handed to Moses the moral law that is an edict of obedience to all mankind.

The definition in the answer above of the moral law is the accepted definition in the reformed churches. We need to understand the difference between a so-called natural law and the moral law. Paul deals with this difference in Romans one where he notes that those who did not have the law but that obeyed the law were a law unto themselves. Not that they had the right to create their own law, but were considered by God to have obeyed the moral law when by nature they did the things required in the moral or revealed law. There resides within mankind a certain knowledge of God and what God requires of man apart from the law as revealed by God at Sinai. The Ten Commandments have been called the moral law. The Ten Commandments are a summary of the law, not the whole of the moral law.

By way of a refresher, note that righteous means complete obedience to the prevalent law and holiness means to set apart. While both of these words can and do have more nuance of meaning, this basic understanding of their application is needed to understand the moral law because sin is defined as transgression of God's law and mankind is commanded to be holy or set apart to this particular attention to and obedience of God's word.

Suggested Sermon Outline

Human Guilt - How Bad Is It?

Romans 3:19-31

Where do you learn of your sin and its wretched consequences?

From the Law of God.

What does the Law of God require of us?

Jesus Christ teaches this in a summary in Matthew 22:37-40: Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (cf. Luke 10:27)

Can you keep all this perfectly?

No, for by nature I am prone to hate God and my neighbor.

I. The Bible Exposes the Human Heart

A. The Law of God teaches people about sin. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)

B. The Law reveals our proper relationship with God. And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. (Deuteronomy 6:5)

+ Because Love and Law are part of the same expression of God's interest and expectation, setting them in opposition to each other is heresy.

C. The Law also reveals God's plan for dealing with others. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:18)

II. People Hate God and Other People

A. No one is righteous. As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: (Romans 3:10)

+ Schemes to get around reality compound the problem generating false hopes which inevitably disappoint.

B. Everyone comes up short. For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; (Romans 3:23)

+ If the parachute doesn't open, does it matter how much cord plays from the pack?

C. Failure to see the magnitude of the problem is self-deception. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. (1 John 1:8)

+ Shorter Catechism 14: What is sin? Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God.

D. The corrupt heart cannot come to terms with God's expectations. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. (Romans 8:7)

+ It is not in the nature of a squirrel to ignore an acorn.

E. Death is the only adequate term for sin. And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. (Ephesians 2:1-3)

F. Righteous behavior is abnormal. For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. (Titus 3:3)

III. The Problem Is the Sinner - Not the Law

A. Attacking God's system is not the solution to the human problem. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. (Romans 7:7)

B. The law reveals the true nature of our inner life and provokes rebellion. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. (Romans 7:8-9)

C. Resources become defects. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me. (Romans 7:10-11)

D. The struggle with law and sin clarifies the human rebellion and the magnitude of our need for God's intervention. Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good. Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful. (Romans 7:12-13)

E. The believer suffers from the inner struggle of incompatible forces. For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I. If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good. Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. (Romans 7:15-17)

F. Wanting to do good isn't enough. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. (Romans 7:20-23)

G. The knowledge of sin shatters delusions of self-control and personal adequacy to do what is in one's best interest. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death? (Romans 7:24)

+ I must have a savior because I cannot save myself.

D. The revelation of sin removes all excuses and throws people entirely on God's grace. Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; (Romans 3:19-23)

Heidelberg Catechism
Lord's Day 2
Questions 3-5
Dr. Edwin P. Elliott, Jr.
File: Lord's Day 002