

Understanding God's Law

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Ignorance of ethics

- Of 37 pastors in an ethics course, only 10 listed the Ten Commandments in order. 7 more had all the commandments but in scrambled order. The other 20 pastors could not list all Ten Commandments.
- Less than half of professing evangelicals can list five of the Ten Commandments.
- 13% of Americans in general think all Ten Commandments are still binding today.

Christian Ethics: Spirit-directed, heartfelt obedience to Jesus' rules

- If you love me, you will keep my commandments. (John 14:15)
- I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. (Jeremiah 31:33).
- You are a letter from Christ... written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts. (2 Cor 3:3).

Three kinds of Old Testament laws

1. **Ceremonial:** rituals pointing ahead to Christ that are now fulfilled in Him. These are no longer required of Christians.
2. **Civil:** case laws for governing the old covenant people of Israel. These provide valuable information for a just society but are not laws for every nation in every age.
3. **Moral:** God's timeless will for loving Him and neighbor in all times and places.

Ways to know God's moral law

- 1. Scripture:** God speaks clear commands.
- 2. Conscience:** For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness. (Rom 2:14-15).
- 3. Design:** how the world and humans function
- 4. Consequences:** healthy or destructive

What can God's moral law do for us?

- **Teacher of sin:** God's law can show unsaved people their sinfulness and their desperate need of a Savior, driving them toward Jesus.
- **NOT self-salvation:** God's law cannot help us to earn God's favor or save ourselves.
- **Pattern of love:** God's law shows thankful, saved, Spirit-filled believers the pattern of love toward God and people.

Locked up by the law

Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe. Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed. So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. (Galatians 3:22-24)

What imprisons us?

1. **Sin:** “The whole world is a prisoner of sin.”
2. **Law:** “held prisoners by the law.”

Is the law bad like sin?

1. Crime puts people in prison.
2. Police and guards put people in prison.

Does prison save?

- Does spending time in prison really “pay a debt to society”?
- Does penitentiary create penitence, or is it just “the pen”?
- Do “correctional institutions” really correct?
- Do “reformatories” really reform?

Does prison save?

- 75% of prisoners will commit another crime after they are released.
- 14% of those disciplined while in prison will return to crime.

God's law shows sin

What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, "You shall not covet." (Romans 7:7)

Q. How do you come to know your misery?

A. The law of God tells me.

(Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 3)

God's law stirs up sin

Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. (Romans 7:13)

Teacher of sin

- God's law shows sin and even stirs up sin. This is evidence of how bad we really are.
- The law was added because of transgression until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come... So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith. ” (Gal 3:19).
- “If I hadn't come to prison, I would still be caught up in the black hole of evil. Prison actually rescued me from myself.”

Who needs a Savior?

- C. S. Lewis: “People focus on God’s duties to them, not their duties to Him.”
- “A sense of sin is almost totally lacking.”
- “Moderns approach God Himself as his *judges*. They want to know, not whether they can be acquitted for sin, but whether He can be acquitted for creating such a world.”
- “We have to convince our hearers of the unwelcome diagnosis before we can expect them to welcome the news of the remedy.”

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What is the greatest commandment?

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37-40).

Q. No one in this life can obey the Ten Commandments perfectly; why then does God want them preached so pointedly?

A. First, so that the longer we live the more we may come to know our sinfulness and the more eagerly look to Christ for forgiveness of sins and righteousness. Second, so that, while praying to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, we may never stop striving to be renewed more and more after God's image, until after this life we reach our goal: perfection. (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 115)

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