

## **Understanding God's Law**

### **By David Feddes**

A preacher friend of mine was pursuing a Doctor of Ministry degree at a prominent seminary. One of his classes was on Christian ethics. This class included 37 ordained preachers, most of whom already had master's degrees. The professor announced that he wanted to start the class with a quiz to see how much these preachers already knew about Christian ethics.

The quiz was this: "Write down the Ten Commandments." Wow! What an easy quiz for pastors with Master's degrees! Any preacher could do that, right? Wrong! Out of those 37 preachers, only 10 could list the Ten Commandments in order. Another 7 at least got all the commandments but in scrambled order. The other 20 pastors couldn't list all Ten Commandments. More than half the pastors in the class, already ordained to ministry, already with master's degrees, couldn't list all Ten Commandments.

Now, when you ask Bible-believing people who profess to be evangelicals, less than half of them can list even five of the Ten Commandments. I guess we shouldn't fall over in shock if people who profess to be evangelicals don't know the commandments if their preachers don't. And what about the general population? About 13% of Americans in general think the Ten Commandments are still binding today.

If the Ten Commandments really are foundational in Christian ethics, we have a long way to go, beginning with pastors, and then with pew sitters who claim to believe the Bible but don't know these commandments, originally written on stone by God himself. As for those further from the church to whom we are witnesses, they are not going to know very much at all about God's will if those of us who are professing Christians don't know God's will very well.

### **Christian Ethics**

Christian ethics is about following Jesus. That means Spirit-directed and heartfelt obedience to Jesus' rules. There's more to it than rules--but not less. Jesus gives orders; he issues commands. Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

When God promised that he would make a new covenant with his people, what did he say would happen? He said "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts" (Jeremiah 31:33). He didn't say, "I'll ditch my law entirely, and my commands aren't going to matter anymore." He said, "I'm going to put my law not just on paper or on stone but write it on their hearts."

The apostle Paul said, "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 Corinthians 3:3). Christian ethics is this Spirit-directed, heartfelt obedience to Jesus' rules as we become more and more like Jesus. Jesus' commands include the Ten Commandments.

Some people are eager to have monuments of the Ten Commandments on public property controlled by the government. That might be okay, but shouldn't we first have preachers and churchgoers who know the Ten Commandments? Monuments of the Ten Commandments on

public property can't replace having the Lord's commands in our hearts. If we want a culture shaped by the Ten Commandments, we don't need government monuments nearly as much as we need people who are letters from Christ, whose hearts and lives are scripted by the Holy Spirit of the living God.

Why push for monuments on government property when most churches don't even have the Ten Commandments posted in their own building, when many churches seldom or never read the Ten Commandments as part of public worship, when many church people do not post the Commandments in their own homes, and when far too many church people are as likely to violate the Lord's Day, commit adultery, lie, or covet, as many of their non-churched neighbors. The most important thing Christians can do to promote the Ten Commandments is to memorize them, cherish them, and obey them joyfully as they seek to become more like Jesus Christ.

### **Three Kinds of Old Testament Laws**

As we think about God's commandments, let me first say a bit about some different kinds of Old Testament laws. The Ten Commandments are very fundamental and basic, but there are other laws in the Old Testament as well. Here are three main kinds of 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.

#### ***Ceremonial Laws***

These are Old Testament rituals that point ahead to Jesus, and are now fulfilled in him. These are no longer required of Christians. The Old Testament has many laws about sacrifices, for instance, and all those are fulfilled in the sacrifice of Jesus, so we don't need to do those sacrifices anymore. It has laws about food and drink restrictions; all of those have been removed with Jesus and the fulfillment in him. Jesus himself declared all foods clean (Mark 7:1). Likewise, the ritual of circumcision and certain feast days were all part of the ceremonial kind of Old Testament laws that pointed ahead to Jesus, are fulfilled in Him, and are no longer required of Christians. When we read the Old Testament, those ritual laws are to be understood as pointers to Jesus, not as abiding requirements on every follower of Jesus.

#### ***Civil Laws***

Old Testament civil laws are case laws for governing the old covenant people of Israel. These laws still today can provide valuable information for a just society, but they are not laws for every nation in every age. For instance, there are some laws regulating the institution of slavery. Those laws don't approve of slavery; they just regulate it in that particular setting. There are laws regulating divorce. We know from Jesus himself that God never approved of divorce, but there

were some civil laws in the Old Testament for regulating divorce when it did happen among hardhearted people (Matthew 19:8). There were the laws of Jubilee where land would go back to its original owner's family after fifty years. Much can be learned from the civil laws of the Old Testament, but they are not all binding in detail for all believers in all nations in all ages.

### ***Moral Laws***

In addition to ceremonial and civil laws, the Old Testament teaches moral laws. These reveal God's timeless will for loving him and loving our neighbor. These moral laws apply in all times and in all places. The Ten Commandments are one of the great summaries of the moral law, along with the supreme commands to love God with your whole being (Deuteronomy 6:5) and to love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18). There other commands as well that are clearly of moral intent, providing more detail about about how to live in our relationship to God and our relationship to others.

For the rest of this presentation and throughout the rest of my teaching in this Christian ethics class, my main focus is on God's moral law, his timeless will for all of humanity. For now let's try to answer two basic questions: (1) How do we know God's moral law? (2) What can God's moral law do for us?

### **Knowing God's Moral Law**

How do we come to know God's moral law? Here are four important ways:

1. **Scripture:** God speaks clear commands.
2. **Conscience:** inner sense of right and wrong
3. **Design:** how the world and humans function
4. **Consequences:** healthy or destructive results

The first and clearest way to know God's moral law is to listen to what God says. Scripture has God speaking clear commands, and commands in the Old Testament that are repeated as binding in the New Testament are very clearly God's continuing and abiding will for his people. So, we can know God's moral law simply based on what God has told us in the Scriptures. Part of ethics, then, is thinking through those commands and trying to apply them to the various kinds of situations that arise in our lives today.

Another way to know God's moral law is the way God stamps certain moral matters on our hearts through conscience. Romans 2 says "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" (Romans 2:14-15). God's law is written on their hearts to some degree, and their conscience is telling them something, even though they haven't necessarily read God's law in the Holy Scriptures.

A third way to know God's moral law, or at least know some aspects of it, is simply the design

of the world, how the world and humans function. For example, in the area of sexuality, it's quite obvious from male and female anatomy what parts fit together and what kind of sexual union produces children. Male-female is clearly the design for sexuality and marriage; same-sex unions are contrary to basic anatomy. That gives a strong clue to what is right sexually and what is wrong. When we look at the way many other things in society and in our own lives function, the design gives us an idea of what's right and wrong. It's not infallible like God's Word, but it provides clues.

A fourth way to know God's moral law, closely related to design, is observing consequences. Which actions are healthy, and which are destructive? When parents are loving toward their children and are firm with them, often their children grow up with a very healthy sense of themselves and sense of their place in the world. When parents are abusive, cruel, and don't show any love, or when they are just total wimps and never discipline their children for anything, it often results in children who don't have a sense of decency or who don't flourish. When people sleep around, rather than limiting sexual intimacy to the marriage of one man and one woman faithful to each other, it has very bad consequences, such as increasing child poverty and child abuse, spreading sexually transmitted diseases, and the like. You can often tell from consequences and from the design of things what the right thing to do is.

Above all, though, Scripture is the main way to know God's moral law. These other things--conscience, observed design of things in the world, or the consequences of certain behavior--are to be evaluated in light of God's moral law revealed in the Bible.

### **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.

One thing God's law can do is teach us sin. That might seem like a downer, but that is one of the main purposes of God's law: to show us what is wrong with us. We can lie to ourselves, we can fool ourselves, we can pretend we're pretty good people until we really hear and understand what God requires. Then we say, "Oh no! I am not as good as I thought. In fact, I am in a world of trouble." God's law can show unsaved people their sinfulness and their desperate need of a Savior and drive them toward Jesus. That is an extremely important and valuable function of God's law.

One thing God's law doesn't do and cannot do: it cannot help us to earn God's favor or save ourselves. We cannot undo the results of our own sin. We cannot make up for sins that we have already committed. We can't just change our own character by trying a little harder to keep God's commands. Sure, we can change a few behaviors, but our sinful character cannot become good without God giving us new birth and new life. Our past record can't be taken away except

by the blood of Jesus Christ. So whatever the law can do for us, one thing it can never do is earn God's favor and save us by our own efforts to obey.

God's law can't save us, but it can teach us our sin, and it can show us the pattern of love. Once we are saved, God's law shows thankful, saved, Spirit-filled believers the pattern of love toward God and toward other people. An important reason to study biblical ethics--God's moral law--is to show how far short we fall of the glory of God and how desperately we need Jesus. Another reason to study God's moral law is that it shows redeemed, born again people how we can become more and more like Jesus as his Holy Spirit enables us to follow his commands and his patterns for love.

### **Teacher of sin**

The law can't save us, but it can show us our need for Christ. The apostle Paul says in Galatians 3. "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). To be right with God comes through faith in Jesus Christ, and the purpose of the law is to lock us up as prisoners.

What is it that imprisons us? This passage we just read says that *sin* imprisons us: "the whole world is a prisoner of sin." Jesus said, "Everyone who sins is slave to sin" (John 8:34). Sin imprisons and enslaves us. But Galatians 3 also says we are held prisoners by *the law*. The law imprisons us. When you hear those two statements side by side in the same passage--"the world is a prisoner of *sin*" and "we were held prisoners by the *law*" you might wonder, "Is the law bad like sin is bad? It sounds like the law is a jailer just like sin is a jailer."

Think of it this way. When people go to prison, we might say crime puts them in prison, but we also say police and guards put people in prison. When we say this, we are not saying that the police and the guards are crime. They are the enforcers who deal with crime, but they are not the same as crime.

So it is in relation to sin and God's law. Sin is the bad thing that makes us guilty and deserving of punishment, so sin puts us in prison. God's law is the enforcer that shows us the badness of sin and locks us up, so God's law puts us in prison. The law is actually holy and righteous and good, and yet it acts as the police and the prison guards to lock us up where our crime has put us.

If we think of the law as a policeman or prison guard, does it save? Sometimes we speak of a person going to prison and "paying their debt to society." But does spending time in prison really pay a debt to society? What happens is that society spends many thousands of dollars every year to lock convicted criminals in prison, and society gets poorer because of the cost of keeping people in prison. The convicted criminals haven't paid any debt to society by sitting in prison. Likewise, if God's law holds us in a prison, this does not mean that the law pays for the wrongs we did toward God and others.

Another word for prison is *penitentiary*. Does a penitentiary create penitence? The two words come from the same root, but does a penitentiary create penitence? Or is it just “the pen,” a place that houses convicted criminals but doesn't make them really repent? The place where you're locked up doesn't create penitence.

Prisons are sometimes called "correctional institutions." Do “correctional institutions” really correct? Do “reformatories” really reform? 75% of prisoners will commit another crime after they are released. So correctional institutions don't often correct a person. Often prison itself is just a graduate school in crime. If you're in prison, you are with other people who are maybe even worse than you are and leading you into terrible things.

Some people do change while in prison, but it's not because prison itself saved them. I have worked with prison ministry, and my father was involved in visiting prisoners and mentoring them on their release. 75 percent of people who are in prison for a crime will commit another crime when they get out, but only 14 percent of people who were disciplined in the way of Jesus Christ while they were in prison will return to crime. Prison doesn't save or transform, but the gospel does. So prison itself won't save you, but Jesus does save prisoners.

Now apply all of that to God's law. God's law imprisons sinners. God's law does not save us; it shows us our sin. “What shall we say then? 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)

There are many things we do wrong that we don't know are wrong until we are told. One of those is coveting, which the Tenth Commandment prohibits. It is natural as a sinful person to want what is not rightfully mine and desire what I don't have a right to. I may think, “I want it! Nothing wrong with that!” Oh yes there is! The Bible says when you covet, you are doing wrong.

Other commandments show other things that we think are okay but God opposes. Some people use God's name in vain every other word. “Oh my god” is not a prayer; it's their way of exclaiming. They don't know or heed the Third Commandment, “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God,” also translated, “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” They ignore that commandment and see nothing wrong with using God's name lightly. Some people will bow down to images of their god or bow down to an image of Jesus Christ and pray toward that image. If you told them it's wrong to worship images, they might reply, “Says who?” Well, God says so. The Second Commandment says so. In one case after another, there are commands that we break. We might see nothing wrong with what we do, but God's law shows it to be sinful. As Paul said, “I wouldn't have known coveting was wrong if the law hadn't said you shall not covet.”

The Heidelberg Catechism says, “How do you know your misery? The law of God tells me” (Q & A 3). Sometimes you feel your misery from things going wrong in your life or from your guilty conscience, but sometimes the only way you know misery is when God tells you in Scripture. When God's law says, “This is wrong,” you discover that you are at odds with God.

Let's go a step further. God's law doesn't just show the sinfulness of the wrong things that we do, but God's law actually stirs up sin and makes sinners worse than they would be without God's law. Back in my college days, one of my friends was a chemistry geek. One day he decided to brew up a concoction of foul-smelling stuff. It wasn't actually harmful. It wouldn't kill anybody. It just smelled so bad that it might make you wish you were dead if you got a whiff of it! Anyway, my friend created this awful smelling mixture of chemicals and put his concoction in a jar. He screwed the lid on the jar very tightly. Then he wrote three words on that lid: "Do not open." He then took the jar and put it in the hallway of the college dormitory. Guess what hallway smelled like less than an hour later? Some dunce had to go ahead and open it, simply because it said, "Do not open"! Being told not to do something makes us more eager than ever to do it. So it is with God's law.

Do you have little children? If you tell a child, "Don't touch this!" what does the child do? As soon as you say not to touch something, the child just has to touch it. When something is forbidden, we want it all the more. That's because we are sinners. The moment we hear a command from someone else, we want to do the opposite. When we're commanded to do something, we would rather not do it. When we're commanded not to do something, then all of a sudden, we want to do it more than we ever did before. That's because we want self on the throne.

God's law, therefore, actually stirs up sin. In many cases, the law makes us even worse than we might otherwise be, even more deserving of death and hell. Does that mean God's law brings death. No! As the apostle Paul puts it, "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" (Roman 7:13).

One of God's purposes for the law is not only to show us how sinful we are but actually to make us even worse. That way we can't fool ourselves that we're actually good-hearted and don't need a Savior. The condition of our heart comes out in the way we react to commands that we don't happen to like. God's law stirs up sin and makes us worse.

Sometimes, when we're told something is right and even start to agree it's right, we somehow get addicted to wrongdoing. The good that I want to do, I can't do. The bad stuff I don't want to do, I keep on doing (see Romans 7:14-25). Having the law hanging over me can deepen my addiction. The law, then, is a teacher of sin. God's law shows us sin and even stirs up sin as evidence of how bad we really are.

"The law was added because of transgression until the Seed [Jesus], to whom the promise referred had come...So the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ so that we might be justified by faith." (Galatians 3:19)

I remember a letter from a man who said "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." Now he didn't mean that prison had saved him; he meant Jesus had saved him. But he never would have met Jesus if he hadn't had gone to prison. Only there did he realize, finally, what path his life was on and how rotten a person he had become. Prison helped him to see his sin and his desperate need to change, to be forgiven, to have a Savior. That's what God's law can do for us. We are caught in a black hole of

evil, and when we finally realize our horrible condition as God's law shows it to us, we're ready to turn to Christ.

### **Who needs a Savior?**

If people don't know God's law, if God's law is not preached by pastors anymore, if people are not reading God's Word anymore, after a while the Gospel doesn't make much sense. Without awareness of God's law and our own guilt, who needs a Savior?

C. S. Lewis wrote about this extensively. He observed that in modern western society, "People focus on God's duties to them, not their duties to Him." If something unpleasant happens to them, they say, "How could God let this happen to me?" When they're just going about their lives sinning like crazy from day to day, they don't ever say "How can I be doing this to God?"

People focus on God's duty to them because they don't know God's law. They don't know that they're in the presence of the holy God. "A sense of sin," says Lewis, "is almost totally lacking." He states, "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." As a result, says Lewis, "We have to convince our hearers of the unwelcome diagnosis before we can expect them to welcome the news of the remedy."

In his book *Mere Christianity*, the first main section is called, "Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe." Lewis suggests that when you have an inner sense of right and wrong, it's pointing to something or somebody who's out there. It's a clue that there is a God who defines right and wrong. But Lewis's main reason for focusing on right and wrong isn't just to give one more piece of evidence for the existence of God. His main reason is to show us that we have reason to be uneasy in the presence of God, whose standards of right and wrong we have violated. Lewis wanted to help people see their need of a Savior.

Who needs a Savior? Without awareness of sin, nobody feels the need for a Savior. Someone came up with a bumper sticker stating, "Jesus is the answer." Then someone else came up with a different bumper sticker, "If Jesus is the answer, what's the question?" We need God's law in order to know the question. The question is, "How can I be saved from such a sinful mess? How can I be forgiven and transformed?"

### **Pattern of love**

God's moral law can show us our sin, but it can't save us. Only Jesus can do that. After the law has taught us sin and has driven us to the Savior, there is another extremely valuable thing that God's moral law does: it shows thankful, saved, Spirit-filled believers the pattern of love toward God and people.

What's the greatest commandment in the whole Bible? We don't have to guess. Jesus was asked that question and he replied, "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). Jesus was quoting those two commands from the moral law of the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18). Love for God and love for neighbor are the two greatest commandments.

The word *love* doesn't appear in the Ten Commandments. Is that because none of them are about love? No, it's because *all* of them are about love. As Jesus said, ALL of the law and the prophets hang on the commands to love God and to love our neighbor. The first four commandments are about loving God. The other six commandments are about loving people. Those are sometimes called the two tables of the law: the first table is four commands about our relationship to God, and the second table is six commands about our relationship to people. We don't understand God's commands apart from love--nor do we understand love apart from God's commands.

Love is a deep, inner affection, but it takes a definite, outward form. Love is not a formless fog; it has shape and boundaries. The Ten Commandments define the shape and boundaries of love. If we love the God who saved us, we will not serve other gods, make images of God, misuse his name, or cram the Lord's Day with our own work or hobbies. If we love people, we will honor parents and value family; we won't kill, commit adultery, steal, lie, or wish that someone else's blessings could be ours instead. Love comes from heaven, but it's down-to-earth. Love comes from the eternal God, but it shows up in day-by-day obedience to his commands. The Ten Commandments and all other related commands show us the pattern for love in real life.

Heidelberg Catechism Q & A 115 says,

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.

That's why the Ten Commandments have to be preached. That's why Christian ethics must be taught and studied. When we do not preach God's law yet try to talk about Jesus, people may eventually yawn and ask, "Who needs Jesus?" They have no sense of sin. In addition, if there are genuine believers in Jesus but they don't learn God's rules and don't learn Christian ethics in the way of Jesus, then they do not make progress in becoming more and more like Jesus. Therefore, we as Christian leaders need to proclaim God's law in order to drive people to Christ as needy sinners, and once they've been saved, we need to keep preaching our Lord's commands to help believers to become more and more like Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit and through the guidance of those very commands from God's Word.

### **Commands in your heart**

So welcome to the study of Christian ethics. You're not going to be able to reach the end of the course and say, "I don't know the Ten Commandments" and get away with it. We're going to

study the Ten Commandments one by one, and you're going to memorize them. You will also be required to memorize Jesus' summary of God's law. You will memorize the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). In addition, you will memorize the call to put on God's armor in your warfare against Satan (Ephesians 6:10-11).

It is important to know these mighty truths and hide them in your heart. Jesus says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). We want to get God's law not just on paper or in a lecture. We want to experience God's new covenant promise, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. (Jeremiah 31:33). We want to be "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 Corinthians 3:3). We want to be Jesus' letter to the world around us, so that when people see us, they see something of Jesus Christ himself living and working in us.

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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

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- 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).

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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.
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### **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.
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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)

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- 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.”

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- **Pattern of love:** God's law shows thankful, saved, Spirit-filled believers the pattern of love toward God and people.

### **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)

### **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.

## **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)