

The Big 10: God's Moral Law

Q. What rules did God first reveal for man to obey?

A. The rules He first revealed were the moral law.

Q. Where is the moral law summarized?

A. The moral law is summarized in the ten commandments.

(Westminster Shorter Catechism Q&A #40-41)

In yesterday's devotional we began to take a look at the second half of the Westminster Shorter Catechism. We spent the first 38 questions and answers focusing on what it is that we are to BELIEVE as Christians. We've studied various doctrines such as the doctrine God, creation, providence, sin, and salvation. And now in questions 39-107 we will be focusing on what it is that you and I are called to DO in light of all that Christ has already done for us. The first 38 questions and answers were all about the basics of Christian DOCTRINE, whereas the last 69 questions and answers are all about the fundamentals of Christian DISCIPLESHIP. In order to do that, over the course of the next 14 devotionals we will be conducting an in depth study of the Law of God.

If you've ever spent time reading through the Bible, you're aware that the Scriptures are full of various laws and regulations that are laid out for God's people to obey. In fact, there are 1,663 laws contained in the Old and New Testaments. There are 613 laws recorded for us in the Old Testament as well as 1,050 laws found in the New Testament. That's a lot of commands! And if you've ever read through the entire Bible from cover to cover you've probably found yourself wondering, "*which of these laws am I called to obey as a believer in Christ? Which of these 1,663 laws still apply to me today as a New Testament believer?*". That's a great question to ask because as we know from the New Testament, one of the ways that we can have true assurance of our salvation is by living our lives in obedience to God's Law. Jesus makes it very clear in the Gospels that someone who truly loves Christ will seek to obey His commands. Jesus Himself tells us that, "*If you love Me, keep My commandments.*" (**John 14:15**). In the Apostle John's first epistle he echoes Jesus' words by saying, "*By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments.*" (**1 John 5:2**).

All true believers in Christ will seek to live their lives in accordance with God's Law. Obedience to the Law of God is actually proof that we possess true saving faith. In fact, James makes it very clear that if we claim to be believers in Christ, but don't manifest obedience to the Law of God, our faith is in fact a sham (*see James 2:14-17*)! So we understand that all true Christians will seek to obey the Law of God as best as they can in their lives. But the question then becomes: which laws does God require me to obey? Are we as Christians required to obey all 1,663 laws contained in the Old and New Testaments? Our catechism, in summarizing the Bible, helps us come to the biblical answer to this question by asking, "*What rules did God first reveal for man to obey?*". And the answer given is this: "*The rules He first revealed were the moral law.*".

You see, there are three types of Laws given to us in the pages of the Bible. The first type of Law that we see is commonly referred to as the CEREMONIAL law. These laws are found in the Old Testament sacrificial system. The Jewish ceremonial law including regulations regarding ritual washings, purification rites and various animal sacrifices. Each of these ceremonial/sacrificial laws were *typological*, which means that they were practices God commanded the Israelites to obey in order to *foreshadow* or point to, the future work of Jesus Christ. **Hebrews 10:1** tells us that all of the sacrificial and ceremonial laws of the Old Testament were, “*a shadow of the good things to come...*”. And **Colossians 2:17** reminds us that all of the ceremonial and sacrificial laws were given to the Old Testament Church as a, “*shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ.*” In other words, all of the sacrificial laws, ceremonial washings and purification rites were intended only to point forward to the work that Jesus would one day do on the cross. So as New Testament Christians, we are no longer obligated to obey any of the ceremonial/sacrificial laws, as they have been fulfilled for us perfectly by Christ (*see Colossians 2:14 & Acts 10:9-16*).

The second type of Law that we find in the Old Testament is known as the CIVIL law. These are laws that were given to God’s people whose form of government was that of a *theocracy* (*a system of government in which God rules His people through the mediation of His appointed priests*). Since we as New Testament Christians no longer live under a theocratic form of government, but under a democratic republic, just as the ceremonial laws, the civil laws are no longer binding on Christian believers. Instead, Christians are to submit to the laws of the land in which they find themselves, under their own particular forms of government (*see 1 Peter 2:13-14*).

Finally, the third type of Law that we find in the Scriptures is that of God’s MORAL Law. God’s moral Law provides for us timeless and perpetual rules that God has laid out for us, in order that we might live our lives in a way that is pleasing to Him. The Moral Law is always and everywhere binding on Christians. As our catechism tells us, God’s “*moral law is summarized in the ten commandments*” (WSC #41). The 10 Commandments provide for us a summary of all of God’s moral law contained in the Scriptures. And over the next few weeks, we will be taking an in depth look at each of God’s Laws found in the 10 commandments.

Dig Even Deeper into God’s Word!

Romans 10:5

Deuteronomy 4:13

Matthew 19:17-19