

The Law of God & the Christian

–Lesson 3–

- I. The moral law in the hand of Christ the blessed Mediator as a rule of life to all true believers
 - A. To all who are united by faith to the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, and members of the covenant of grace, the moral law (the Ten Commandments) is *divested* of its *covenant form*.
 1. It's no longer a covenant of works to them. And considered as a covenant of works, neither its commands nor its threats have any authority over them. It can neither promise nor give them life, and it can neither punish nor exact payment from them for sin.
 - a) Why? Because by faith in and union with Christ, they already have the righteousness it demands and therefore the life it promises (Rom 10.4; Jn 3.16); and because by faith in and union with Christ, they have already paid the penalty it demands (Rom 6.6; Gal 2.20; 3.13).
 - b) Therefore the Ten Commandments, as a covenant of works and as the law of works, is *dead* to them and they are *dead* to it, Rom 7.4-6. It's not only foolish, but dishonoring to our beloved Saviour, to seek anything or fear anything from the Ten Commandments as a law of works.
 2. However, as the Ten Commandments are the substance of the moral law of God, they've lost nothing of their original authority and obligation over man as a creature of God.
 - a) In Christ, the Commandments have been taken in *under* the covenant of grace and made the instrument of government in His spiritual kingdom. Therefore the Ten Commandments retain all their original divine authority over believers, but instead of standing as a *covenant of works*, they stand as a *rule of life* to direct them in obedience.
 - b) This "law of Christ" under which every believer comes (1Cor 9.21; Gal 6.2) is therefore not a new law, but the old law, which was from the beginning, issued to believers under a new form subservient to the covenant of grace.
 - B. Christ issues this law to His church as its divine Redeemer and Mediator, with all the authority of the eternal Jehovah (Isa 55.1-4). It's given to all who believe in Him and are justified by faith in Him, as the only rule of their obedience. It's a law which He clearly explained and vindicated (Mt 5-7), enforced by His own conduct (Mt 3.15; Jn 8.29) and commands (Jn 14.15; Mt 11.28-29), and inscribes on His people's hearts (Heb 8.10).
 1. Thus the Ten Commandments lose nothing of their authority and obligation over believers, though they are no longer to them a covenant of works, but are annexed to the covenant of grace. Rather, believers are under greater obligation to obey them because they come from both God as Creator and Christ as Mediator.
 2. Likewise the precepts of the law as a rule of life to Christians are the same with those of the law as a covenant of works (i.e. they are the same Ten Commandments), and they require the same perfection of obedience. But the covenant of grace affords Christ's strength for their obedience, whereas the covenant of works afforded no such help.
 3. Note: many have suggested that the demands of the moral law in the New Testament have been lowered, requiring no longer *perfect* obedience, but rather *sincere* obedience. It should be clear that this is an impossibility and dishonors both God and Christ, Lk 1.73-75; Tit 2.11-14; 2Cor 7.1.
 - C. But let's understand this: the great design of God in giving the law in the hand of Christ to His people is not that by their obedience to it they may procure for themselves a right to divine favor and eternal life; but rather that it may direct and oblige them to walk worthy of

their union with Christ, of their justification in Him, of their legal title to and begun possession of eternal life, and of God Himself as their God in Him. Their conformity of heart and life to its commands, instead of procuring their title to salvation, is a principal part of their salvation already begun, and a necessary preparative for the consummation of it through eternity (Heb 12.28; 1Pet 2.9).

1. Thus the design of the Ten Commandments *as a rule of life to believers* is very different from their design *as a covenant of works*. The precept of the law as a covenant says, “Do and live,” but the command of the law as a rule says, “Live and do.” The law of works says, “Do or be condemned to die,” but the same law in the hand of Christ says “you are delivered from condemnation, therefore do.”
2. And although the moral law as a rule requires *perfect* obedience from Christ’s people, yet since it’s annexed to the covenant of grace, it admits of God’s accepting their *sincere* obedience done in faith, though imperfect. And it admits of God’s accepting this obedience, not as any part of their justifying righteousness (which is already perfect and complete in Christ), nor as the foundation of His favor to them (which is already secured in Christ), but as *the fruit and evidence* of their being united to His beloved Son and already accepted in Him (Eph 1.6; Heb 13.16).
3. Lastly, since true believers are already irrevocably full-participants in the covenant of grace, in the righteousness of Christ, and in the favor of God—and since they have in Christ, and on the ground of His imputed righteousness, a complete security against eternal death and a full title to eternal life—*the law as the law of Christ has no sanction of judicial rewards or punishments attached to it*, i.e., it has no promise of life or threat of death attached to it. It cannot condemn those who disobey it and it cannot give life to those who obey it. It’s a *rule* for them and not a *covenant* to them. Their covenant is in and with Christ, whose rule it is.
 - a) The promise of eternal life to the saints is the promise of the covenant of grace and *not* of the law as a rule of duty. Eternal life is promised to them *irrespective* of their sincere obedience to the law as a rule of life, but strictly on account of Christ’s perfect obedience to it as a covenant of works, received by faith and imputed to them by God. It’s promised to them *not* as a reward for their sincere obedience, but as the *free gift* of God through Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom 6.23). They therefore already have a title to eternal life and have already begun possession of it. In fact, their sincere obedience to the law as a rule of life is the *fruit* of union with Christ and the very *proof* of their already being in possession of both His righteousness, His life, and the favor of God.
 - b) No threat of eternal death belongs to the law for saints since the whole penal sanction of it was wholly endured by Christ, their Surety. The law is satisfied with regard to those who are in Him and it *cannot* condemn them—no matter what they do. And as the law of works cannot condemn them (since Christ already satisfied its penalty), neither can the law of Christ, Rom 8.1. Believers are perfectly and irreversibly justified; and therefore, though their sins deserve eternal wrath, yet they cannot make them liable to that wrath because they are, in Christ, set forever *beyond* the reach of condemnation and *under* the law of Christ, which has no penal sanctions attached to it. The believer ever continues in a state of justification and can never come into condemnation, Rom 8.34; Heb 8.12.
 - c) *Yet*, though the law as a rule of duty can neither give life nor inflict wrath, *it does have a sanction of gracious rewards and paternal chastisements* (Ps 19.11; 2Tim 4.7-8; Ps 89.30-36; 1Cor 11.30-32; Heb 12.6-11). And the fact is, to a believer, these paternal chastisements are no less awful, and much more forcible restraints from sin than even

the prospect of vindictive wrath would be, so great and so sweet is the blessing and joy of communion and fellowship with God in Christ.

- D. **It should be clear that no distinction is more necessary and helpful to the Christian life than between the law as a covenant of works and the law as rule of life. To distinguish truly and clearly between them is, as Luther said, “the key which opens the hidden treasure of the gospel.”
- E. There are two sorts of sinners who greatly offend against the law in its covenant form: legalists and antinomians.
 - 1. Legalists transgress against it by seeking to be justified by their own pretended obedience to it. Legalists believe that believers are still under the law as a covenant of works.
 - 2. Antinomians offend against it by despising the divine authority and obligation of it. Antinomians assert that believers are neither under the law as a covenant of works nor under the law as a rule of duty.
 - 3. The Scriptures teach that while believers are not under the law as a covenant of works, they are very much under it, and delight to be under it, as a rule of life, the law of Christ.

**Next week: we’ll consider the sad reality that though we are believers in the covenant of grace, yet we are ever prone to legalism and therefore constantly fall short of enjoying the comfort of Christ’s righteousness and the joy of Christ’s law.