

Theology for Life
Faith Presbyterian Church
Lesson 25: God's Law

Last time: *God relates to his people through covenants. We are saved by Christ's work. He faithfully fulfilled the covenant of works. God's covenant of grace with us rests on the covenant of works that Christ fulfilled. The Mosaic Covenant symbolically represented Christ's work.*

Ongoing Usefulness of the Law

The Reformed tradition is often distinguished from other strands of Christianity by its positive view of God's Law. Many churches today are uncomfortable teaching from the Old Testament or viewing God as Lawgiver.

As we saw in lesson 19, man is not justified by performing the law. It is, however, the failure to fulfill the law that condemns us, and Jesus' obedience of the law that counts as our righteousness.

WCF 19.1 *"God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience, promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it."*

After the Fall of Adam, God's Law did not stop serving as our perfect rule of righteousness. God did not lower his standards when he saw that we could not accomplish them.

Apparent Irrelevance of the Law

The New Testament, at times, appears to present the law as obsolete.

- Heb. 10:4 "It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins."
- 1 Corinthians 7:19 "Circumcision is nothing."
- Lev. 20:11 instructs God's people to wield the sword (capital punishment); John 18 tells us to put the sword away.
- Gal. 3:10 "For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse..."

But, then we have very strong statements in the NT affirming the Law's goodness.

- Matt. 5:17-18 *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. [18] For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished."*
- Rom. 10:4 *"For Christ is the end [goal] of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."*
- Rom. 7:7f; 8:3
"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...sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and righteous and good."...For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do."

The Mosaic Law

The Old Testament is part of the covenant of grace not the covenant of works. Yet, there is a **temporary period under Moses** where Israel, though saved by grace, typologically functioned with a **works principle**.

The Law given to Moses and Israel illustrated the need and God's plan. It did the following:

- Separated out Israel from other nations (circumcision, purity laws, civil and ceremonial laws)
- It demonstrated to the world (by separating out Israel) that God would redeem by a representative to stand for humanity and deal with sin (King Jesus)
- It exposed Israel's inability to obey illustrated the depth of human sin: the law pointed out the "Adam-ness" of Israel
- The consequences of temporal "blessing" and "curses" showed the judgment nature of God's relationship with humanity
- Pointed toward a sacrifice that Christ would provide both the spotless satisfaction of completing the law and the just penalty for breaking the law.

"If it be neither a covenant of works, nor a covenant of grace, then must it of necessity be a third kind of covenant:...It was given by way of subserviency to the Gospel and a fuller revelation of the covenant of grace; It was temporary, and had respect to Canaan and God's blessing there, if and as Israel obeyed. It had no relation to heaven, for that was promised by another covenant which God made before He entered the subservient covenant." Samuel Bolton, 1645

The Law of Moses was temporary but a crucial signpost pointing to God's plan of salvation through Jesus. We cannot fully understand Christ without understanding the Law of Moses. We will never understand Christ if we think we still need to obey the Law of Moses.

WCF 7.5 On Covenants

"This covenant [of grace] was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the old testament."

Three Types of the Law

Jesus fulfills all three. All three condemn us in Adam.

- **Civil**-Israel's government and civil laws
- **Ceremonial**-Temple sacrifices and purity laws
- **Moral**-Summarized in the Ten Commandments

The Civil and Ceremonial Laws were only found during Israel's time as a distinct nation, often called the Administration of Moses: from Exodus through Malachi.

The Moral Law also operated during this time, but it could also be found before Moses. The Ten Commandments even appear in the Garden of Eden (Do not murder, do not steal, do not commit adultery, keep the Sabbath, etc.)

We see the Ten Commandments in the NT. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Matt. 5-7. Even Paul in Ephesians (4:24-5:5; 6:1-9) applies Commandments five through ten in his instructions to the church.

The Law and the Christian

Three Uses of the Law: Moral Law remains and functions in the ways.

1. A mirror reflecting the perfect righteousness of God. It exasperates us and shows us our need as sinners for a savior.
2. To restrain evil: It doesn't change our hearts but it can inhibit lawlessness.
3. Moral guide for believers: It tells us what we are being made into.

Richard Gaffin: "Briefly, apart from the gospel and outside of Christ the law is my enemy and condemns me. Why? Because God is my enemy and condemns me. But with the gospel and in Christ, united to him by faith, the law is no longer my enemy but my friend. Why? Because now God is no longer my enemy but my friend, and the law, his will, the law in its moral core, as reflective of his character and of concerns eternally inherent in his own person and so of what pleases him, is now my friendly guide for life in fellowship with God."

Legalism and Antinomianism

Legalism teaches that you were saved by grace, but you stay saved by works. If we do not obey God's Law, then we cannot be a Christian.

Antinomianism teaches that Christians are under no obligation to obey God's Law. The Law is seen as antithetical to the gospel.

What is wrong with legalism? What if you continued to observe the Law?

1. You would be denying Christ's fulfillment of the Law
2. You would be continuing to live in the old age.
3. The Law would bring your sin to light and condemn you.

What is wrong with antinomianism?

If there is no threat of punishment, won't that lead us to antinomianism (lawlessness)? The gospel is the antidote to both legalism and antinomianism.

- "I am more sinful and flawed than I ever dared believe" (vs. antinomianism)
- "I am more accepted and loved than I ever dared hope" (vs. legalism)

For the Christian the Moral Law becomes a way to experience Christ in deeper ways. It convicts us of our need for Christ and it guides our life of thankful obedience.

Heidelberg Catechism 86

Q. Since we have been delivered from our misery by grace through Christ without any merit of our own, why then should we do good works?

A. Because Christ, having redeemed us by his blood, is also restoring us by his Spirit into his image, so that with our whole lives we may show that we are thankful to God for his benefits, so that he may be praised through us, so that we may be assured of our faith by its fruits, and so that by our godly living our neighbors may be won over to Christ.

What stands out to you about this Q&A?

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Q. But doesn't this teaching make people indifferent and wicked?

A. No. It is impossible for those grafted into Christ through true faith not to produce fruits of gratitude.

Connecting the Dots: Where Theology meets Life

Summary: God's Law is good for the Christian. For those justified by the work of Christ, the Law becomes a helpful guide to life. The civil and ceremonial laws give us a full picture of Christ and guide our understanding of what he has accomplished for us.