

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—
Lesson 36—Man’s Duty is Revealed in the Moral Law, Q. 40

What is the moral law?

- I. The moral law is that law *which* God, as the Creator and Law-giver and Judge of all men, laid on all men’s consciences, *according to which* all men are to live, *and according to which* all men will be judged.
 - A. WLC 93: *The moral law is the declaration of the will of God to mankind, directing and binding everyone to personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity and obedience thereunto, in the frame and disposition of the whole man, soul and body, and in performance of all those duties of holiness and righteousness which he oweth to God and man: promising life upon the fulfilling, and threatening death upon the breach of it.*
 - B. It’s *moral* because it concerns a man’s character, questions of right and wrong, and holiness and sin.
 - C. *All men are *necessarily* under the moral law for several reasons: 1) we were created by God for fellowship with God, 2) God is holy and cannot have fellowship with anyone but in the context of perfect holiness, 3) the moral law is a reflection of God’s holy character and the nature of His fellowship, 4) man is made in God’s image and therefore was created to reflect God’s holiness by his character and holy conduct, 5) therefore in order for man to have fellowship with God, it must be holy fellowship, or fellowship in holiness, Ps 15.

How is the moral law distinguished from other laws given by God?

- I. The *moral law* is distinguished from two other kinds of laws in Scripture: the *ceremonial law* and the *judicial law*.
 - A. The *ceremonial law* was given to the OT church by Moses and was binding only on Israel. It contained all the laws which governed their worship, enabled them to walk in fellowship with God, and regulated all the duties of the Levitical Priesthood. It’s goal was not to save sinners, but to direct their faith to the coming of Christ, who would come both as *the* Lamb of God and a High Priest according to *the Order of Melchizedek.*, Heb 10.4; 9.13; 7.11-28.
 1. Thus, the ceremonial was never meant to be permanent—it couldn’t be—but was a shadow of good things to come, a type that pointed to Christ and therefore must not only be *fulfilled* in Christ, but upon Christ’s fulfillment be completely and forever *abrogated*, Heb 10.1-14; WCF 19.3. These laws could never be imposed on the NT church because Christ fulfilled them.
 - B. The *judicial law* was given by Moses to Israel *as a theocratic nation*. It was the civil law which regulated and governed Israel *as a society* over which *God* was King and in the midst of whom God dwelt as *holy*.
 1. These laws were therefore restricted to Israel as a nation and all *expired* with the nation in 70 AD when Jerusalem fell to the Romans, WCF 19.4. These laws can have no binding force on the NT church (any more than the general equity of them requires, 1Cor 9.8-10) because the church is neither a nation nor a theocratic society.
 - C. The *moral law* was given to Israel by Moses on Mount Sinai, Ex 20; Jn 1.17, when he received the two tablets of the Ten Commandments from God.
 1. But because these Commandments summarily comprehended the moral law already written on man’s heart in his creation, and because they reflect God’s permanent holiness and man’s permanent duty before Him, these laws were given to Israel in common with all men, and not as a nation or as an OT church. The moral law is permanent, unchangeable, and binding on all men, WCF 19.5.
- II. The moral law
 - A. The *moral law* was given by God to all men as a binding rule for his obedience as a creature in covenant with God, Gen 1.26-27; WSC 1.

- B. It serves to reason, then, that the moral law was given to man immediately upon his creation. In his innocence, Adam had the moral law written on his heart as an indelible part of his image-bearing. It contained all the moral principles of good and evil to which man was bound in order to walk in fellowship with God.
1. His *conscience* was informed by that law and bound by it.
 2. His *reason, intellect, and understanding* were subject to that law as the absolute truth to be believed and the standard by which all things were to be judged.
 3. His *affections* found delight in that law and called it holy, just, and good.
 4. And his *will* was bound by that law and, in submission to his conscience and reason, was bound to choose it, believe it, submit to it, and obey it.
- C. This means: 1) the moral law is still written on the hearts of all men, Rom 1.18-21, 28-32; 2) every man's conscience knows the moral law and is bound by it, Rom 2.14-15; 3) the moral law is perfect, comprehending *the whole* of a man's duty to God and to his neighbor, Ps 19.7; 4) the moral law is universal, binding on all men, in all places, at all times, Rom 2.14-15.
- III. After the fall, the corrupted nature of man suppresses his innate knowledge of the moral law, Rom 1.18. He knows enough to be without excuse, but in order that he might have a clear and indelible declaration of his obligation and in order that his sin might be shown to be sin, God was pleased to put the Law in writing in the Ten Commandments, Rom 7.13.

What are the uses of the moral law?

- I. For all men: 1) to reveal to man his duty, Mic 6.8; 2) to convince him of his inability to keep it and therefore humble him in the sense of his sin and sinfulness, Ps 19.11-12; 3) to give him a clear sense of his need for Christ, Gal 3.24.
- II. For believers: 1) to magnify Christ by showing us our obligation to Him for fulfilling it in our place, Rom 7.24-25; Gal 3.13-14; 2) to be a rule of life by which we may express our gratitude by obedience to it, Jn 14.15, 21, 23-24.
- A. What about Rom 6.14; 10.4 and Gal 5.22-23?
1. Believers are not under the moral law as a covenant of works, to be either justified or condemned by it, Gal 2.16; 3.13; Rom 8.1. We are neither under the *commanding* nor the *condemning* power of that law because Christ has rendered its commandments a *perfect obedience* in our place (Rom 10.4) and its condemnation and curse a *satisfying sacrifice* in our place (Rom 8.1; Gal 3.13).
 2. Thus, *as a covenant of works*, we're entirely delivered from it, Rom 6.14.
 3. *But*, we're still under the law *as a rule of life as it is to us the law of Christ* (1Cor 9.21), according to which we're to regulate our hearts and lives, 1Jn 2.6. It's the pole star that must direct our course to heaven and is of singular use to provoke our gratitude to Christ for fulfilling it in our place.

Inferences

- I. The law of God is to be preached to God's people together with the gospel of God. It convinces us of our sin and inability to yield perfect obedience to it in order that we may run to Christ who fulfilled it for all who will seek their refuge in Him, Gal 3.19-24.
- II. The law of God is to be studied and learned by God's people in order that we might attain to true holiness both in heart and life, which lies principally in a sincere and upright obedience to the law of God in dependence upon the grace in Christ, Jn 15.14; 1Jn 2.1-6.