

—Understanding the Christian’s Freedom in Christ—

Lesson 6—The Moral Law Is a Rule of Obedience

Question 1: Are Christians freed from the moral law as a rule of obedience?

- I. “We’re about to deal with the greatest knot in the practical part of divinity, and men’s judgments are various and Scripture is pleaded on both sides.” We must begin by confessing that there are Scriptures which seem to support both sides of the question.
 - A. The law is said to be abrogated or dead to the believer and the believer is said to be dead to it and no longer under it, Jer 31.31-33; Rom 6.14; 7.1-7; 8.2; 10.4; Gal 3.19; 4.4-5; 5.18; 1Tim 1.8-10.
 - B. The law is also said to be still in force for believers, Rom 3.31; 5.17-18; Rom 13.8-10; Eph 2.10; Tit 2.14; 3.8, 14.
 - C. Though these various scriptures seem like the accusers of Christ, “never speaking like the other; yet if we are able to find out the meaning, we shall find them like Nathan and Bathsheba, both speaking the same things.”
 - D. To untie this knot, it’s necessary that we closely consider *the Scriptural use of the word ‘law’* by answering two questions: 1) what is meant by the word ‘law’ and 2) in what sense is it used in Scripture? When this has been done, there will be a way opened for the clearing of the truth and for the answering of all the questions.
- II. The Scriptural use of the word ‘law’
 - A. What is meant by the word ‘law’? In its natural use in both Testaments, it means any doctrine, instruction, statute, etc, which teaches, directs, commands, or binds men to any duty which they owe to God or man.
 - B. In what sense is the word ‘law’ used in Scripture?
 1. For the OT in general or any part of it, Jn 12.34; 15.25; 1Cor 14.21.
 2. For the whole word of God, its promises and precepts, Ps 19.7.
 3. For the Torah, the five books of Moses, Gal 3.21; 4.21. Jn 1.45; Lk 24.44.
 4. For the teaching of Moses, Jn 5.46.
 5. For the moral law, the Decalogue, Rom 7.7, 14, 21.
 6. For the ceremonial law, Lk 16.16.
 7. For the moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws altogether, Jn 1.17.
 - C. But amongst all these different uses, the controversy is around the last, where the law signifies the moral, judicial, and ceremonial law. With respect to the latter two, there is large agreement, so the difficulty concerns *the moral law*.
 1. The *ceremonial law* was an *appendix to the first table* of the moral law. “It was an ordinance containing precepts of worship for the Jews when they were in their infancy, and was intended to keep them under hope [of the Messiah], to preserve them from will-worship, and to be a wall of separation between them and the Gentiles. This law, all Christians agree, is abrogated both in truth and in fact,” Lk 22.19-20.
 2. The *judicial law* was an *appendix to the second table* of the moral law. “It was an ordinance containing precepts concerning the government of the people in things civil, and it served three purposes: it gave the people a rule of common and public equity, it distinguished them from other peoples, and it gave them a type of the government of Christ.” Again, all agree that that part which was typical of Christ’s government has ceased, but that which is of general equity still remains in force, Rom 13.8-10. Theonomists, however, have some disagreements at this point.
 - D. The moral law is scattered throughout all of Scripture and is summed up in the Ten Commandments. In essence, it contains such things as are good, holy, and agreeable to the will of God, because it’s the reflection of the will and perfect holiness of God, the sum of which is love to God and love to man.

1. All agree that we're free from the curses, indictments, accusations, rigor, etc. of the moral law, but the question of discussion is: *are believers free from obedience to the moral law?*
2. Considered as a rule, the moral law can no more be abolished or changed than the nature of good and evil can. The substance of the law is the sum of doctrine concerning "piety toward God, charity toward our neighbor, and temperance and sobriety toward ourselves." And as such, it is moral and eternal and cannot be abrogated.
3. We agree that the law is good, just, and holy and we desire to obey it as the will of the God we love, but the law is abrogated by Christ for believers in its power to justify or condemn. Yet it remains in full force to direct us in our Christian lives. "It condemns sin in the faithful, though it cannot condemn the faithful for sin." It has no power to condemn us, but it retains its power to direct us. We're not under its curse, but we're under its commands. By its faithful teaching of right and wrong, the moral law directs us in every good work.
4. The moral law is perpetual and immutable. It's an everlasting truth that the creature is bound to worship and obey the Creator and the moral law is the abiding rule for both his worship and his obedience.
5. Therefore against the opinion that the moral law is abrogated and believers are free from obedience to it, we can establish two propositions that will fully answer the question and refute the falsehood. The propositions are:
 - a) That the law, for the substance of it, remains as a rule of walking for the people of God.
 - b) That there was no end or use for which the law was originally given but which is consistent with grace and serviceable to the advancement of the covenant of grace. That is to say, as a rule of obedience, the moral law is consistent with the covenant of grace in which sinners are saved, not by any single part of their obedience, but by faith alone in Christ alone.

III. Proposition 1: The law remains as a rule of walking for the people of God.

A. The testimony of the Reformed Confessions (p.60)

1. The Helvetic (Swiss) Confession
2. The French Church's Confession
3. The Belgic Confession
4. The Wittenberg Confession
5. The Scottish Church
6. The Church of England

B. The testimony of the New Testament

1. Mt 5.17-18, 21-30; Rom 3.31; 7.12, 22, 25; 13.8-10; 1Cor 9.21; Eph 6.1; 1Th 4.3, 4, 7; Js 2.8; 1Jn 2.4; 3.4. Since Christ strengthened and confirmed the law; since faith doesn't supplant the law (as a rule), but rather strengthens it for believers; since the apostles so often press and urge the duties commanded in the law; and since Paul acknowledges that he served the law in his new nature and that he was under the law to Christ, we must conclude that, for the substance of it, the law still remains as a rule of life for the people of God.
2. Therefore if ever the law was a rule of walking, then it must still be and is, since no proof can be shown where either Christ or His apostles abrogated it. If Christ and His apostles commanded the same things which the law required and forbade and condemned the same things which it forbade and condemned, then they didn't abrogate it but strengthened and confirmed it, Mt 5.19.

C. Five proofs of the binding nature of the law, not simply on men as men, but on men as Christians.

1. That which, when a believer observes it, causes his conscience to excuse him, and which, when a believer transgresses it, causes his conscience to condemn him, is binding on his conscience. The moral law of God has this power over believers. Therefore the moral law is binding on the Christian conscience.
2. That which has the power to say to the regenerate conscience, "this ought to be done, and that ought not to be done," is binding on the conscience. The law of God has this power. Therefore though it cannot say "that ought not to be done on pain of condemnation" or "this ought to be

done on promise of justification,” yet it shows what ought to be done as pleasing to God and what ought not to be done as displeasing to God.

3. The authority by which the apostles urged Christians to duty binds the conscience to obedience. The apostles use the authority of the law of God, Eph 6.1-2; Rom 13.8-10. Therefore the law is the rule by which Christians must walk.
 4. If the law of God doesn't bind the conscience of a believer to obedience, then whatever he does which is commanded in the law is more than his duty, and is either meritorious, because it's more than required or sinful, because it's will-worship. But in obeying the law of God, the believer is not guilty of will-worship and neither does he merit anything before God, Lk 17.10.
 5. Either the law binds the conscience of Christians to obedience, or Christians don't sin when they disobey it. But they do sin when they disobey it, 1Jn 3.4. Also, if Christians are bound not to sin, which they are, 1Jn 2.1, then they're bound to keep the law.
- D. Five further arguments for obedience to the law
 - E. Applications against Roman Catholicism
 - F. Applications against Antinomians
 - G. Exhortations to all believers