

Fundamentals, Study 19. The Law Of God (Rom 6:15-23)

by BS Poh

o Is the law of God still relevant to Christians today?

1. The law of God consists of three categories: (a) the moral law; (b) the ceremonial law; and (c) the civil law. The *moral law* is a reflection of God's character, and is binding upon all men for all time. Christ has not cancelled it in the Gospel. Instead, He has strengthened our obligation to obey it.¹ The *ceremonial law* was given to the nation of Israel in the Old Testament time as a system of worship which pointed to the coming of Jesus Christ as the Saviour of world. With the coming of Christ the ceremonial law has been cancelled.² The *civil law* was given to govern the nation of Israel, as a people separated unto God. Only its underlying principles of justice and fairness continue to be applicable in modern times.³ Those who deny the continuing relevance of the moral law are known as *Antinomians*, although this is not to suggest that they necessarily practise, or advocate, lawlessness. Numbered among these are Christians who hold to so-called New Covenant Theology. Those who insist on the continuing relevance of the ceremonial law are known as *Legalists*. Those who believe in the continuing relevance of the civil law are known as *Theonomists* (or *Reconstructionists*). (1. Matt 5:17-19; Rom 3:31; 2. Heb. 9:11-12; 10:1; Col. 2:13-14; 3. 1 Cor. 9:8-10; Mic 6:8)

2. The moral law is summarised in the Ten Commandments, which God first gave to the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, on two tables of stone.⁴ The first four commandments spell out our duty towards God, and the other six deal with our duty to man.⁵ The Lord Jesus Christ summarised the Ten Commandments further into two, viz. "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength," and "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."⁶ A careful study of these commandments will show that they are all-encompassing, covering all our duties to God and man. (4. Deut 10:4; 5. Exod 20:1-17; 6. Mark 12:30-31.)

3. Before the moral law was reduced to writing as the Ten Commandments, God had already written it in the heart of man, from the time of Adam. God required Adam to live in complete obedience to Him, promising him life upon the fulfilling of the law, and death upon breaking it. That the moral law is written in the heart of man is clear from the following: (a) all men everywhere exercise moral judgement, condemning wrongs in others even though they are themselves sinful; (b) all men have a conscience which, although it is distorted or suppressed to varying degrees, convicts them when they do wrong.⁷ (7. Rom 2:1, 14-15.)

4. John Calvin wrote of the "Threefold Use of the Law".⁸ The first use is as a mirror, to reflect the righteousness of God. It exposes our sinfulness and drives us to Christ for salvation. The second is the "civil use", as a restraint from evil. The law works on the conscience and through civil authorities, punishing the guilty and protecting the righteous. The third use is to guide believers into what is pleasing to God. This is the highest function of the law, guiding the Christian to serve and honour God. The 1689 Confession, following the Westminster Confession, gives four uses of the

law directed at believers. First, it reveals the will of God, and our duty to obey it.⁹ Second, it exposes sin, so that by self-examination we are kept humble and led to a greater appreciation of our salvation in Christ.¹⁰ Third, it restrains corruption in the believer by warning of the punishment due to its transgression.¹¹ Fourth, it encourages to good, showing the approval and blessing of God for its obedience.¹² Believers keep the law, not as a covenant of works to gain salvation, but because they are already saved by grace. They, therefore, keep it joyfully, and not grudgingly.¹³ (8. Gal 3:19-24; 1 Tim 1:8; Rom 13:3-4; John 14:15; 9. Mark 12:30-31; Eph 2:10; 10. Rom 3:20; 7:7; 1 John 1:8-9; 11. Gal 5:18-21; Eph 5:1-7; Heb 12:14; 12. 1 Pet 3:8-13; Rev 21:12; 13. Psalm 19:7-11)

= “Oh, taste and see that the LORD *is* good; blessed is the man *who* trusts in Him (Psalm 34:8)!”

Review Questions

1. Name the three categories of God’s law.
2. Which of these is still binding upon us, and which have been cancelled?
3. Where is the *moral law* summarised?
4. What do the first four commandments deal with?
5. What do the other six commandments deal with?
6. What does a careful study of these commandments reveal about them?
7. Where was the moral law found before it was written down as the Ten Commandments?
8. How may we know that the moral law has been written in the heart of man?
9. State “the three uses of the law” according to John Calvin.
10. Why and how do believers keep the law?

Assignment/Discussion

“Legalists cannot be true Christians. Antinomians and Theonomists may possibly be true Christians.” Comment.

Memory Passage (Matt 5:17-19)

17 “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. 19 Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

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