

# THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND THE CHRISTIAN



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# THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND THE CHRISTIAN

## Introduction

The place of the Ten Commandments in the life of a Christian is an important issue in our day. It is relevant for both pastors and the people they serve. It is relevant also due to cultural confusion over moral issues. It is quite obvious to the biblically trained mind that we are in a moral crisis in our day. Many are calling things right that not too long ago were agreed upon as very wrong and very shameful. Whether it is the so-called right of a woman to choose to kill a human being in the womb, or the supposed liberty of sexual activity outside of the covenant of marriage, or the homosexual agenda, or the rampant disrespect and disregard for God-ordained authority figures (starting in the home with parents), there is obvious confusion in our day over what is right and what is wrong.

Before we castigate and condemn the world for being guilty of ethical relativism or autonomy, we must acknowledge that there is confusion in many circles of the Christian church over this issue. Even the church cannot agree on the basis for determining right and wrong. Here are things you might have heard before: “We want to do what Jesus did and said, not what Moses commanded”—as if Moses did not command what Jesus commands. “We are not under law but under grace.” But does that mean there are no commands for the Christian life or that they only occur in the New Testament? “I don’t need an external law-code to tell me what to do. I don’t need commands. I have the Holy Spirit.” Then why do we even need a Bible? Still others might say, “I am not under Moses’ law but under Christ’s law. The two are not the same at all.”

There are many things that challenge preachers and teachers of God’s Word when addressing the issue of the abiding validity of God’s moral law for the believer in Christ. Some say there is no such thing as a moral law of God or a law of God that stays essentially the same after Christ comes. Some insert a wedge between the Old and New Testaments which, in effect, makes basic morality look very different this side of the cross and resurrection of Christ. And then there is that vexing issue of the fourth commandment, the Sabbath command. As Alistair Begg says, “Nothing

illustrates the challenge in dealing with the abiding sanctity of God's Law more than the sorry state of the Lord's Day in contemporary evangelicalism.”<sup>1</sup> Though we should not minimize the fact that this is a difficult issue to understand, we must agree that there is confusion among various strands of believers on this subject.

This is an important and very relevant issue. Is the believer in Christ to obey laws revealed in the Bible prior to the giving of the New Testament (especially the Ten Commandments)? If so, upon what basis? What is the believer's relationship to the Ten Commandments? Are Christians to obey them—all ten of them?

### ***Important Disclaimers***

Before we embark upon our study, I want to offer some disclaimers. I want to say very clearly at the outset that the law has no power to justify. It can point to our duty, but it cannot impel us to obey perfectly and perpetually, and it cannot deal with our guilt. That is the office of the gospel. Also, I want to say very clearly at the outset that the law has no power to sanctify. It can point to our duty, but it cannot impel us to obey. That is the office of the Holy Spirit. The law can tell us what holiness looks like, but it cannot make us holy. I want to say, finally, that this study in no way pretends to solve all the issues related to this subject. We will focus on this question alone: Should the Christian obey all ten of the Ten Commandments? As you can probably tell, my answer to that question is yes. Before we look at this issue, some historical perspective may help.

### ***From Calvin to Confusion in our Ranks***

The Reformation of the sixteenth century witnessed to the vital place of the Ten Commandments in Christian ethics. John Calvin, for example, said, “Now that inward law, which we have above described as written, even engraved, upon the hearts of all, in a sense asserts the very same things that are to be learned from the two Tables.”<sup>2</sup> Calvin clearly held that by nature (i.e., creation) Gentiles without special revelation possessed the general knowledge of the Decalogue,<sup>3</sup> though obscured by sin.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alistair Begg, *Pathway to Freedom* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2003), 14.

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill and trans. Ford Lewis Battles, *Library of Christian Classics*, Volumes 20-21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), II.viii.1.

<sup>3</sup> Decalogue literally means “ten words” and will be used synonymously with Ten Commandments.

<sup>4</sup> In Calvin, *Institutes*, II.viii.1, while introducing the Ten Commandments, he says, “The Lord has provided us with a written law to give us a clearer witness of what was too obscure in the natural law.”

Calvin's position used to be common among great preachers and theologians. Sadly, this is no longer the case. Why is this? Let's consider one reason why this may be so.

In the middle part of the twentieth century, a movement within scholarly circles sought to replace law in the Christian life with love. Biblical law was dismissed from Christian ethics and replaced with a nebulous concept of self-defined love. According to this view, the heart becomes a law unto itself. The great twentieth-century Reformed theologian John Murray, commenting on this, says:

In their insistence upon love they have placed love in opposition to law. We have just to remind them with well-balanced emphasis that love is the fulfilling of the law. It is not love in opposition to law but love fulfilling law.<sup>5</sup>

Murray is right. In the Bible, love fulfills the law, not bypasses it. Romans 13:10 says, "Love is the fulfilling of the law." Similarly, 2 John 6 says, "And this is love, that we walk after his commandments." There is no necessary dichotomy between law and love in the Bible. They are not enemies, but friends. The problem between us and the law is not that the law is not love. The problem resides in us. We do not love as we ought.

### ***The Road Ahead***

This study is devoted to whether or not the Ten Commandments have a place in the Christian life. While considering this subject, we will look first at the Bible, the written Word of God, our only infallible source of authority on this subject and every subject it addresses. Then we will look at the position of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689 (2<sup>nd</sup> LCF) to suggest that this Confession is an accurate reflection of what the Bible teaches on this subject and to show that my understanding of the Bible on the Ten Commandments and Christians is not new. In fact, great preachers of the past, such as Charles H. Spurgeon, believed that the Confession accurately reflected the teaching of Holy Scripture on this issue. Finally, we will deal with some typical objections and then draw some practical conclusions. It is hoped that our study will contribute to a proper understanding of the Bible on the place of the Ten Commandments in the life of the believer.

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<sup>5</sup> Murray goes on to say, "What our modern apostles of love really mean is the very opposite of this: they mean that love fulfils its own dictates, that love not only fulfils, but that it is also the law fulfilled, that love is as it were an autonomous, self-instructing, and self-directing principle, that not only impels to the doing of the right but also tells us what the right is." Cf. John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Volume I (Edinburgh/Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1976), 199.

## ***Biblical Exposition***

The primary question of our study concerns what the Bible teaches on this crucial and often misunderstood subject. While considering the issue of the place of the Ten Commandments in the teaching of Holy Scripture, we will examine the Bible on three fronts: 1) The Ten Commandments and the Old Covenant, 2) The Ten Commandments and the New Covenant, and 3) The Ten Commandments and the Moral Law.

### **1. The Ten Commandments and the Old Covenant**

The unique place of the Ten Commandments under the Old Covenant is a fact that cannot be disputed. Several brief observations will illustrate this point.

*First*, the Ten Commandments occur as a unit in two Old Testament texts (Exo 20:2-17 and Deu 5:6-21).<sup>6</sup> The Old Testament clearly assumes that the Ten Commandments function as a unit in other places as well (Exo 25:16; 31:18; 34:27, 28; Deu 5:22; 9:9-11; 9:15; 10:1-5; etc.). The point is established that the Old Testament views the Ten Commandments as a unit of God-given law. It is of interest to note that the form of the Ten Commandments is modified a bit in Deuteronomy though the substance and function is basically the same. But what about the change in wording? This needs to be explored a bit.

If these two passages which contain the Ten Commandments as a unit are compared, it is obvious that they are not *formally* identical. Add to this the fact of Deuteronomy 5:22 and there appears to be an insurmountable difficulty. In Deuteronomy 5:22, we read:

These words the LORD spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice: and he added no more. And he wrote them in two tables of stone, and delivered them unto me.

If this is so, how could Moses' two accounts of the Ten Commandments differ? The best answer for those who hold to the verbal, plenary inspiration of the Bible is that God must have written the Ten Commandments in a simple form on the tablets of stone. In other words, the tablets of stone must have contained a summary form of the two accounts of the Decalogue given to us by Moses. Moses must have added necessary details to fit the covenantal conditions in which Old Covenant Israel existed. He accommodated what God wrote on stone tablets to the

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<sup>6</sup> The reader is highly encouraged to read these two passages.

life of Old Covenant Israel under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Over one hundred years ago, F. W. Farrar said, “It seems clear, ...that on the two tablets they [the Ten Commandments] were carved in their simplest and shortest form.”<sup>7</sup>

This view is supported by several considerations. *First*, elsewhere in Scripture, commands of the Decalogue are summarized by single words (cf. 1Ti 1:9-10). *Second*, both Jesus in Matthew 19:18 and Paul in Romans 13:9 quote the ninth commandment, leaving off the phrase “against thy neighbor.” *Third*, Paul references the tenth commandment in Romans 7:7 and 13:9, stating only its essential elements: “Thou shalt not covet.” This shows us that a commandment could be reduced to its essential elements. *Finally*, there are other places where the whole Old Testament is summarized in two commands:

<sup>36</sup> Master, which is the great commandment in the law? <sup>37</sup> Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the first and great commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. (Mat 22:36-40 and also Mar 12:30-31)

What now becomes clear is that the Ten Commandments contain what can be reduced or added to without the essential command changing. It is the *essence* of the Decalogue that is morally binding.

*Second*, the Ten Commandments were spoken by God (Exo 20:1-17; Deu 9:10) and written by the finger of God on tablets of stone (Exo 24:12; 31:18; 34:28; and Deu 9:10). Deuteronomy 9:10 illustrates both of these points: “And the LORD delivered unto me two tables of stone written with the finger of God; and on them was written according to all the words, which the LORD spake with you in the mount out of the midst of the fire in the day of the assembly.” God takes it upon Himself both to *speak* and *write* the very heart of the Old Covenant. Moses later copied the Ten Commandments into the books of Exodus and Deuteronomy (Exo 20:1-17 and Deu 5:6-21), accommodating them to the life of Old Covenant Israel.

*Third*, the Ten Commandments (on stone tablets) were put in the Ark of the Covenant (Exo 40:20; Deu 10:1-5). In 2 Chronicles 5:10, we read, “There was nothing in the ark save the two tables which Moses put therein.” Deuteronomy 31:26 says, “Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee.” The “book of the law,” which Moses

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<sup>7</sup> F. W. Farrar, *The Voice from Sinai* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1892), 18.



wrote, was put *beside* the Ark of the Covenant. The Ten Commandments, written on the two tablets of stone, which God wrote, were put *in* the ark. In a very unique way, the Ten Commandments comprise *the* law of God. All other Old Covenant laws were both mediated through Moses and first written by Moses. The Ten Commandments were first written by God and then Moses. This indicates the primary character of the Decalogue and the secondary character of the rest of the law of Moses.<sup>8</sup> The book of the law is supplemental to the Decalogue.<sup>9</sup>

*Fourth*, the Ten Commandments functioned as the basic, fundamental law of the Old Covenant and were applied as such to the unique, covenantal conditions in which Israel existed (see Exodus 21-23). Klaus Bockmuehl says, "The Ten Commandments stood at the center of Old Testament ethics and were the touchstones for judging all deeds. They were the basis for all moral and legal accusation."<sup>10</sup> With this we agree.<sup>11</sup>

From the observations above, we conclude that the Decalogue is considered to be a unique unit or body of ethics, that it is in a unique way *the* law of God, and finally, that it was the fundamental, basic law of the Old Covenant.

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<sup>8</sup> William J. Dumbrell agrees, when he says, "That the Ten Commandments come unmediated and the case law [Exodus 21-23] is delivered through Moses indicates the primary character of the Decalogue and the secondary character of the Covenant Code." Cf. William J. Dumbrell, *The Search For Order* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 47.

<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, Dumbrell says, "[The] Ten Commandments together with the social legislation that follows from them are given in chapters 20-23 [Exodus]. The text certainly distinguishes the two codes; Exodus 20 is denominated 'words' and delivered to all Israel [by God Himself], and chapters 21-23 are styled 'ordinances' and derivatively delivered through Moses." Cf. William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel* (1991; second printing, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1988), 35.

<sup>10</sup> Klaus Bockmuehl, *The Christian Way of Living: An Ethics of the Ten Commandments* (1995; reprint, Vancouver, B.C.: Regent College Publishing, 1994), 9.

<sup>11</sup> Old Testament scholar Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. agrees, when he says, "It is difficult to exaggerate the importance and the significance of the Ten Commandments for Old Testament ethics. Its profundity can be easily grasped in its comprehensiveness and simplicity of expression. It is at once the very heart and kernel of a complex system of legislation that follows and elaborates on it." Cf. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 81. Commenting on Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Bockmuehl adds, "The Israelites fulfilled this injunction literally: phylacteries, or pieces of leather worn around the forehead or on the left arm, have been found in Qumran [a famous 20<sup>th</sup> century archeological discovery] which have the *Shema* and sometimes the entire Ten Commandments written on them. The Decalogue was the heart of the Covenant and they were continually read at synagogue services. In early Israel, they were omnipresent." Cf. Bockmuehl, *The Christian Way of Living*, 8.

## 2. The Ten Commandments and the New Covenant

We will look at the issue of the Ten Commandments and the New Covenant under two vital considerations: *The Ten Commandments and the New Covenant in Old Testament prophecy* and *The Ten Commandments and the New Covenant in New Testament fulfillment*. It is vital to realize that the Old Testament speaks about the Ten Commandments in relation to the prophesied New Covenant.

### *a. The Ten Commandments and the New Covenant in Old Testament Prophecy*

While considering the Ten Commandments in Old Testament prophecy, we will focus upon the key text in the Old Testament concerning the law of the New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:33.<sup>12</sup> Jeremiah 31:33 is the key text of the Old Testament clearly showing that the Ten Commandments function under the New Covenant and are, therefore, applicable to Christians. It reads:

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jer 31:33)

A few observations will serve our purpose. *First*, notice that the law under the New Covenant is God's law, something He both authors and possesses. We read, "I will put *my law* [emphasis added] in their inward parts, and write *it* [emphasis added] in their hearts." The phrase "my law" occurs six times in the book of Jeremiah (Jer 6:19; 9:13; 16:11; 26:4; 31:33; and 44:10). In these contexts, it is described as something that can be heard; something that was set before the Old Covenant people of God; something that is equated with God's voice; something that can be broken; something that when broken is considered as forsaking God and committing idolatry; something that can be listened to; something that can be transgressed; something that will be written on the heart; and something that was set before the fathers. It is very clear that Jeremiah is referring to an objective standard of known and expected conduct when he uses the phrase "my law." Whatever this law is, we know that it is God's and that it had already been revealed to God's Old Covenant people at the time of the writing of Jeremiah. Surely, Jeremiah's ancient readers would agree with this.

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<sup>12</sup> Much of this material was taken and adapted, with permission from Founders Press, from the author's *In Defense of the Decalogue: A Critique of New Covenant Theology* (Enumclaw, WA: WinePress Publishing, 2001), 16-23.

*Second*, notice that the law of God under the New Covenant will be put in the inward parts, the mind, and written in the heart of *all* the beneficiaries of the New Covenant. This promised blessing of the New Covenant is to be enjoyed by the whole New Covenant community, just as the saving knowledge of God and the forgiveness of sins:

And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.  
(Jer 31:34)

Though Jeremiah is speaking about a work of God upon the hearts of individuals, each and every one of those individuals becomes a citizen of the New Covenant community and beneficiary of all its promised blessings.

*Third*, notice that God is both the author of the law itself and the one who writes it on the heart. In effect, God says, “I will put and write My law on the minds and hearts of My New Covenant people—all of them.”

These observations provide the exegetical groundwork necessary for identifying the basic, fundamental law of God under the New Covenant. The text of Jeremiah clearly assumes that the law of God under the New Covenant is referring to a law that was already written at the time of the writing of Jeremiah. The phrase “my law,” when referring to God, always refers to something revealed by Him to Israel, not only in the book of Jeremiah, but in the whole Old Testament.<sup>13</sup> The language of God Himself *writing* a law is familiar Old Testament language. Exodus 31:18 says, “And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, *written* [emphasis mine] with the finger of God.” Jeremiah clearly teaches that the law of God under the New Covenant is a law that both *has been* and *will be* written by God Himself. With these things in mind, the only plausible answer to the question concerning the identity of this law is that it must be the same law God Himself wrote previously. Jeremiah is teaching that the law of God under the New Covenant is a law that *was* written on stone by God and that *will be* written on hearts by God. Exodus 24:12 identifies the “tablets of stone” with “a law, and commandments which I have written.” This is a very important verse for it uses the Hebrew word *torah*

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<sup>13</sup> See Exo 16:4; 2Ch 6:16; Psa 89:30; Isa 51:7; Jer 6:19; 9:13; 16:11; 26:4; 31:33; 44:10; Eze 22:26; and Hos 8:1, 12. The phrase is also used in contexts not referring to God in Psa 78:1; Pro 3:1; 4:2; and 7:2.

(law) as a synonym for what God wrote on stones. This gives us further biblical warrant to call that which God wrote on stone His law or the law of God.

A comparison of Exodus 31:18, Jeremiah 31:33, and 2 Corinthians 3:3 is very illuminating. Here are these texts in the order they appear in our Bibles.

And he gave unto Moses, when he had made an end of communing with him upon mount Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God. (Exo 31:18)

But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jer 31:33)

Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart. (2Co 3:3)

Thus, considering the language of a text prior to Jeremiah 31:33 (Exo 31:18) and a text after Jeremiah 31:33 (2Co 3:3) forces us to reckon with the fact that the law of God written by God Himself was what He wrote on stone and will write on hearts. Remember, in a very unique way, the Ten Commandments comprise *the* law of God.

We conclude, the blessings of the New Covenant include the writing of the Ten Commandments on the hearts all of God's people under it. Jeremiah 31:33 teaches that the Decalogue will function under the New Covenant as the basic, fundamental law for Christians.

### ***b. The Ten Commandments and the New Covenant in New Testament Fulfillment***

Though there are many texts we could examine to prove that Jeremiah's prophecy of the abiding usefulness of the Ten Commandments is being fulfilled under the New Covenant, we will concentrate on only two: 2 Corinthians 3:3 and Romans 13:8-10.

### **2 Corinthians 3:3**

Second Corinthians 3:3<sup>14</sup> reads: "Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink,

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<sup>14</sup> Much of this material was taken and adapted, with permission from Founders Press, from the author's *In Defense of the Decalogue*, 34-38. Ephesians 6:2-3 and 1 Timothy 1:8-11 (and many others) are other texts which prove the abiding utility of the Decalogue under

but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.” The section begins in 2:17 as an extended argument for the validity of Paul’s ministry. In 3:1 Paul offers a regulating question, “Do we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you?” In 3:2 Paul uses a metaphor depicting the Corinthians themselves as a letter written on his heart. In 3:3 he uses a similar metaphor for a different purpose, stating that the Corinthian believers “are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.”

Consider the following observations. *First*, in the context, Paul is obviously talking about the New Covenant as prophesied by Jeremiah. This assertion is proved by the language used by Paul in verse 6, “new testament,”<sup>15</sup> and in verse 3, where the parallels with Jeremiah 31:33 are striking. As John Calvin says, “He alludes to the promise that is recorded in Jeremiah 31:31, and Ezekiel 37:26, concerning the grace of the New Testament...Paul says that this blessing was accomplished through means of his preaching.”<sup>16</sup>

*Second*, Christ is the author of this epistle written on the heart. The phrase “of Christ” is best understood as Christ authoring the epistle written on the heart. Christ authenticates Paul’s ministry by doing the work only God can do in writing upon the souls of men.

*Third*, Christ uses not ink but the Holy Spirit to write on the hearts of men.

*Fourth*, the tablets of stone refer to the Ten Commandments as originally written by God (2Co 3:7 and Exo 31:18).

*Fifth*, the fleshy tablets (i.e., the heart) refer to the Corinthians.

*Sixth*, unlike the writing on tablets of stone under the Old Covenant, which had as one of its functions the ministry of death, the writing on the tablets of hearts under the New Covenant is a ministry of the Spirit, which gives life (see vv. 6-7).

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the New Covenant. See *In Defense of the Decalogue*, 38-57, for exegetical treatments of these crucial texts.

<sup>15</sup> The Greek word Paul uses is the normal word for “covenant.”

<sup>16</sup> John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries, Volume XX* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, re. 1984), 168.

*Seventh*, what Christ writes on the heart is the law of God as promised in Jeremiah 31:33. Commentator Colin Kruse agrees:

At the end of the verse [verse 3], while furthering his argument, Paul varies the metaphor by saying this letter writing was carried out not *on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts*. Here Paul leaves behind the contrast between the work of a scribe using pen and ink and the work of an apostle ministering in the power of the Spirit, and introduces another contrast, that between writing on tablets of stone and on human hearts. This latter contrast is clearly an allusion to the prophetic description of the new covenant (*cf.* Jer 31:31-34; Eze 36:24-32) under which God would write his law on human hearts.<sup>17</sup>

It is important to see that Paul shifts the metaphor at the end of verse 3. He goes from what the Corinthians are to him in verse 2, “our epistle written in our hearts,” to what Christ did in the Corinthians to make them Paul’s epistle.

Paul’s ministry is in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. The movement in Paul’s thought is not from one law to no law or to a totally new law, but the same law from *stone* to *heart*. Philip Hughes gives these helpful comments in his commentary on 2 Corinthians.

It is evident that Paul has in mind the contrast between the giving of the law to Moses on Mount Sinai and the establishment of the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah. At Sinai the law had been written by the finger of God on tablets of stone (Exo 31:18)...Jeremiah 31:33, however, promises a law-giving that is internal, namely, the writing by God of His law in the very heart itself. It is most important to realize that it is the selfsame law which was graven on tables of stone at Sinai that in this age of the new covenant is graven on the tables of the human heart by the Holy Spirit. The gospel does not abrogate the law, but fulfills it...The Christian is still under solemn obligation to keep the law of God, but with this vital difference, that he now has the power, the power of Christ by the Holy Spirit within himself, to keep it. The law, therefore, is neither evil nor obsolete, but, as Paul says elsewhere, “the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12). Nor is the law opposed to love; on the contrary, love of God and love of one’s neighbor are the sum of the

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<sup>17</sup> Colin Kruse, *The Second Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (1997; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 91.

law, as our Lord Himself taught (Mar 12:28-31): love, the apostle affirms, is precisely “the fulfillment of the law” (Rom 13:8-10).<sup>18</sup>

Paul’s understanding of the law of God written on the heart under the New Covenant from 2 Corinthians 3:3 now becomes clear. That law is the Ten Commandments, the fundamental, basic law of the Old Covenant, that which God wrote on stone tablets. The function of the Ten Commandments under the New Covenant is similar to their function under the Old. They still function as the fundamental pattern for righteous living. Second Corinthians 3:3 is one New Testament text which clearly teaches the abiding validity of the Ten Commandments for Christians in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

### **Romans 13:8-10**

In Romans 13:8-10 we read:

<sup>8</sup> Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. <sup>9</sup> For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. <sup>10</sup> Love worketh no ill to his neighbour: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Rom 13:8-10)

Here it is obvious that love and law are not enemies but blessed friends in the process of a believer’s sanctification. In the teaching of Paul and the rest of the Bible, love and law for the believer go together and are even inseparable. Listen to John Murray on this point:

Upright conduct can never co-exist with impurity of heart. Mere external and servile conformity to precepts of law does not constitute obedience...Without the inward condition of purity and the inward impulsion of love, obedience is impossible.<sup>19</sup>

Murray is right. Both love and law are necessary for the Christian. Obedience to law is useless without love. Expressing our love is impossible without law.

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<sup>18</sup> Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (1986; reprint, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), 89-90. Likewise, commentator Geoffrey Wilson says, “The superiority of the new covenant over the old dispensation is not that it sets aside the Decalogue (the moral law), but that it transfers that law from tablets of stone to ‘tables that are hearts of flesh’ [cf. Eze 11:19; 36:26]. This is the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy, ‘I will put my law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it’ [Jer 31:33].” Cf. Geoffrey B. Wilson, *2 Corinthians, A Digest of Reformed Comment* (Edinburgh/Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 41.

<sup>19</sup> Murray, *Collected Writings*, I:198-199.

Of interest for our study, we will make three observations from this text. *First*, Paul does not hesitate to illustrate what he means by law in verse 8 by quoting part of the Decalogue in verse 9. That the New Testament references the Decalogue in the context of Christian sanctification suggests at least two things: *first*, that the New Testament views the Decalogue as the heart of Old Testament law just as the Old Testament does; and *second*, that the New Testament finds in the Decalogue a convenient summary of moral law. (See Mat 19:18-19; Rom 13:8-10; 1Co 6:9-10; Eph 6:2-3; 1Ti 1:8-11; and Jam 2:8-11 where the Decalogue is referenced in both evangelistic and teaching contexts.) Commenting on Romans 13:8-10, Murray says perceptively, “But what I wish especially to stress is, first, that these four<sup>20</sup> he enumerates are four of the well-known Ten Commandments. It is in the Decalogue that Paul finds the epitome of Moral Law.”<sup>21</sup>

*Second*, Paul teaches us that all legitimate commandments for Christians may be “comprehended” or summed up. The Greek word for “comprehended” is a rare word in the New Testament. In Romans 13:9, love is a comprehensive command which implicitly contains others. In other words, that which comprehends or sums up necessarily contains that which is comprehended or is summed up. “Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself” necessarily contains the commands of the Decalogue mentioned previously by Paul. Love of neighbor is that which comprehends or sums up that which is comprehended or summed up. The individual commands are summarized, and therefore implicitly contained in the one command to love your neighbor. Here Paul refers to five of the Ten Commandments as illustrations of the law that love fulfills. Loving your neighbor summarizes the five commandments of the Decalogue just referred to and suggests that all moral law can be reduced to its bare essentials. We have seen this happen in our previous discussion. Murray’s helpful comments on 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 apply to Romans 13:8-10 as well, when he says:

He [Paul] has not exhausted the list of sins; elsewhere he mentions others not specifically mentioned here. But he has enumerated enough to evince to us that the underlying presupposition of his thought is, that summarily, at least, the Decalogue is the norm by

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<sup>20</sup> The English text Murray quotes and the KJV as quoted above are based on different Greek texts which explains his reference to four instead of five commandments. Some English versions omit “You shall not bear false witness” due to the underlying Greek text from which they were translated.

<sup>21</sup> Murray, *Collected Writings*, I:199.



which sin is to be known, as it is also the norm of that righteousness which characterizes the kingdom of God and those who belong to it. He says in effect what the Apostle John says, that “sin is the transgression of the law.”<sup>22</sup>

*Third*, Paul teaches us that “love is the fulfilling of the law.” Love expresses itself by keeping the law of God. Love obeys God’s law.

These observations confirm some of the things established already. The Old Testament views the Ten Commandments as the heart of its law, and so does the New Testament, with the law still reducible to its bare essentials. The Old Testament prophesies of a day when the Decalogue will function under the New Covenant as the basic, fundamental law of God for New Covenant believers. The New Testament confirms this expectation in 2 Corinthians 3:3, Romans 13:8-10, and many other places (Eph 6:2-3; 1Ti 1:8-11; Jam 2:8-11; etc.). The Ten Commandments function as basic and fundamental law in both testaments and under both the Old and New Covenants.

### 3. The Ten Commandments and the Moral Law

We have learned that the Bible teaches that the Ten Commandments function as the basic, fundamental law of both the Old and New Covenants. We will now consider what place the Ten Commandments have in the basic, fundamental ethical scheme of the Bible. Different terms are often used to attempt to define the basic law of God applicable to all men. Some use the phrase *natural law*.<sup>23</sup> Others use the phrase *moral law*. We will use the phrase *moral law*.<sup>24</sup> It is more commonly used than

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<sup>22</sup> Murray, *Collected Writings*, I:200.

<sup>23</sup> According to Muller, the natural law, *lex naturalis*, is “the universal moral law either impressed by God upon the mind of all people or immediately discerned by the reason in its encounter with the order of nature. The natural law was therefore available even to those pagans who did not have the advantage of the Sinaitic revelation and the *lex Mosaica* [Mosaic law]...with the result that they were left without excuse in their sins, convicted by *conscientia* [conscience]...The scholastics argue the identity of the *lex naturalis* with the *lex Mosaica* or *lex moralis* [the moral law, especially the Decalogue] *quoad substantiam*, according to substance, and distinguish them *quoad formam*, according to form. The *lex naturalis* is inward, written on the heart and therefore obscure, whereas the *lex Mosaica* is revealed externally and written on tablets and thus of greater clarity.” Muller, *Dictionary*, 174-75.

<sup>24</sup> Richard A. Muller defines the moral law as “specifically and predominantly, the *Decalogus*, or Ten Commandments; also called the *lex Mosaica*...as distinct from the *lex ceremonialis*...and the *lex civilis*, or civil law. The *lex moralis*, which is primarily intended to regulate morals, is known to the [innate habit of understanding basic principles of moral law] and is the basis of the acts of [conscience—the application of the innate habit above]. In substance, the *lex moralis* is identical with the *lex naturalis*...but, unlike the

*natural law* and is used by the Confession, which we will study briefly below.

The question we are posing is whether or not the Bible reveals to us what the basic, fundamental law is which is applicable to all men: Jew or Gentile, Christian or non-Christian, possessor of special revelation or not. We will examine three texts (Rom 1:18-32; 2:14-15;<sup>25</sup> and 3:19-20) that give us the answer to our question.

### ***Romans 1:18-32***

<sup>18</sup>For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; <sup>19</sup>Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. <sup>20</sup>For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: <sup>21</sup>Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. <sup>22</sup>Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, <sup>23</sup>And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. <sup>24</sup>Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves: <sup>25</sup>Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen. <sup>26</sup>For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: <sup>27</sup>And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet. <sup>28</sup>And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient; <sup>29</sup>Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity;

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natural law, it is given by revelation in a form which is clearer and fuller than that otherwise known to the reason." Muller, *Dictionary*, 173-74.

<sup>25</sup> First Timothy 1:8-11 illustrates the same thing. See the author's *In Defense of the Decalogue*, 41-57 for an exegetical treatment of 1 Tim. 1:8-11, showing that Paul's list of vices follows the order and content of the Decalogue from the first though the ninth commandments.

whisperers, <sup>30</sup> Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, <sup>31</sup> Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: <sup>32</sup> Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

Romans 1:18-32 is a crucial text for understanding the ethical implications of man's creation. The doctrine of creation is not an abstract, isolated doctrine disconnected from practical implications. Creation in the image of God (Gen 1:26-27) demands moral conformity to that image (Ecc 7:29). Romans 1:18-32 is God's indictment upon man as creature in sin. Both *being created* by God and *being sinful* are universal realities since the fall of Adam. In other words, everyone is a creature and everyone is a sinner. Paul is describing God's attitude toward his creatures that find themselves in sin and outside of Christ. The very fact of their creation makes all men ethically responsible to God (Rom 1:18-23). Creation by God's hand demands moral conformity to God's law. Man is responsible to God for his conduct and is held to a standard of conduct and indicted and judged for not upholding that standard, even if he has never read or heard of the Bible. According to Paul, by virtue of being created by God, man has an innate knowledge of some of God's attributes (Rom 1:20), an innate knowledge of God's person (Rom 1:21), an innate knowledge of God's law (Rom 1:32 and 2:14-15), and an innate knowledge of God's judgment (Rom 1:32).

The fact that man in sin and outside of Christ is culpable for his sin is borne out in several places in this passage. *First*, notice that at least three sins are mentioned in verse 21: the sin of not glorifying God as God, the sin of not being thankful to God, and the sin of futile thinking. *Second*, notice the sin of not worshipping God, mentioned in verse 25. *Third*, notice sexual sins, mentioned in verses 26 and 27. And *fourth*, notice the list of vices in verses 29-32 of which all mankind partake.

This passage assumes that man by creation is responsible to God to uphold an assumed code of ethics that comes from God and is known by all men. Many of the sins mentioned in this section of Romans 1 are direct violations of aspects of the Decalogue. Men are culpable for not worshipping the true God and hating Him, for sexual immorality, covetousness, murder, lying, and for disobedience to parents. This at least suggests that the Ten Commandments can easily be consulted when pointing out the sins of men without special revelation. This means that the commandments contained in the Decalogue predate their special

promulgation on Mount Sinai. This also suggests that the Ten Commandments are foundational to the biblical ethic. This will become increasingly evident as we examine Romans 2:14-15.

### ***Romans 2:14-15***

Romans 2:14-15<sup>26</sup> is another crucial text for understanding the ethical implications of man's creation. It reads:

14 For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves: 15 Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another. (Rom 2:14-15)

These verses come in the broader section that begins in verse 12 and ends in verse 16. In verse 12, Paul's concern is to defend the justice of God in the condemnation of Gentiles without externally written law or Holy Scripture. Focusing in on verses 14 and 15, Paul gives his defense, and three questions confront us. What is the law possessed by the Jews in this context? Do Gentiles without special revelation possess law? What law do Gentiles without special revelation possess?

*First*, what is the law possessed by the Jews in this context? The first reference to the law in verse 14 obviously refers to the law possessed by the Jews. This is clearly the law the Jews possessed via special revelation, the Holy Scripture. This law is mentioned at the end of verse 12, in verses 13 and 14, and in several places in verses 17-27. In verses 21 and 22 reference is made to commands contained in the Decalogue. Paul therefore gives the impression that what he means by the law the Jews possessed is the basic, fundamental law of the Old Covenant, the Decalogue. Elsewhere in Romans, Paul refers to the law of the Old Testament and immediately quotes parts of the Decalogue (see Rom 13:8-10).

Some might want to claim that the law of the Jews being referred to by Paul is either the whole Old Testament or the whole law of Moses, which includes the moral, ceremonial, and civil law of the Old Covenant. This would mean that, by way of general revelation, through creation, God writes Old Covenant ceremonial and civil laws on the hearts of all men, an untenable proposition. Ceremonial law is revealed after the fall into sin as part of special revelation. It is not general revelation. It presupposes the entrance of sin and is aimed at pointing toward the reparation of the

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<sup>26</sup> Much of this material comes from the author's *In Defense of the Decalogue*, 78-83 and is used with permission.

damage inflicted by sin. No, the law referred to here by Paul is more basic and fundamental than ceremonial law. The law of the Gentiles referred to in this context is a law based on creation, not sin or even redemption. Therefore, the law that the Gentiles possess via general revelation cannot refer to the Old Testament as a whole or the law of Moses as a whole. It must be referring to law that is basic and fundamental to man's status as creature and image bearer of God. It is a law all men possess by nature, because all men are created, and a law contained somewhere within the whole body of special revelation given to the Jews. Commentator H. C. G. Moule agrees, when he says:

Manifestly "*the Law*" in this passage means not the ceremonial law of Israel, but the revealed moral law given to Israel, above all in the Decalogue. This appears from the language of verse 15, which would be meaningless if the reference were to special ordinances of worship. The Gentiles could not "shew the work of" *that* kind of "law written in their hearts"; what they shewed was, as we have explained, a "work" related to the revealed claims of God...on the will and life.<sup>27</sup>

*Second*, do Gentiles without special revelation possess law? It is clear that the Gentiles did not possess the *externally* written law of the Jews as an *externally* written law; they did not possess the Old Testament. Does this mean that the Gentiles had no law? Scripture is very clear that if there is no law there cannot be sin (see Rom 4:15; 5:12-14 and 1Jo 3:4). Surely Paul could not be saying the Gentiles did not possess law altogether. On the contrary, the Gentiles did possess law, but did not and could not live up to it and were thus indicted in Romans 1.

The law that the Gentiles did not possess was the *externally* revealed law of the Old Testament, as an externally written law. However, this in no way implies they did not possess law. Paul is very clear that they did. He proves this by asserting in verses 14 and 15 that "when the Gentiles, which have not the law [the law in context refers to the *externally revealed* law of the Jews contained in the Old Testament], do by nature the things contained in the law [i.e., the *externally revealed* law of the Jews contained in the Old Testament], these, having not the law [i.e., the *externally revealed* law of the Jews contained in the Old Testament], are a law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the law [i.e., the *externally revealed* law of the Jews contained in the Old Testament] written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness." Commenting on this

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<sup>27</sup> Handley C. G. Moule, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London, England: Pickering & Inglis Ltd., nd), 65.

passage, Robert Haldane says, “This evidently shows that they have a law, the work of which is written in their hearts, by which they discern the difference between right and wrong—what is just, and what is unjust.”<sup>28</sup> John Murray agrees, when he says, “Although the Gentiles are ‘without the law’ and ‘have not the law’ in the sense of specially revealed law, nevertheless they are not entirely without law; the law is made known to them and is brought to bear upon them in another way.”<sup>29</sup> Gentiles without special revelation were not and are not without law absolutely.

*Third*, what law do Gentiles without special revelation possess? It should be obvious by now that what the Gentiles possess is the Ten Commandments, though not necessarily in the identical *form* as they appear in the Decalogue of our Old Testaments. Murray says, “It is not therefore a different law that confronts the Gentiles who are without the law but the same law brought to bear upon them by a different method of revelation.”<sup>30</sup> This is why some have sought to show that the *essence* of the Decalogue is found scattered throughout the book of Genesis. This would prove that the essence of the individual commands of the entire Decalogue were the expected ethical norms for man before the promulgation of the summarization of the moral law in the form of the Decalogue via Moses.<sup>31</sup> In other words, what the Jews get via special

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<sup>28</sup> Robert Haldane, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Romans* (Mac Dill AFB, FL: Mac Donald Publishing Company, nd), 90.

<sup>29</sup> John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., re. 1984), 72. Murray adds these further comments on Rom 2:14: “The omission of the definite article before [law] on three occasions in verse 14 is an interesting example of the omission when the subject is specific and definite. On the first two occasions the law in mind is the specially revealed law as exemplified in Scripture. That it is definite is shown by the expression [the things of the law]. For this reason we should most reasonably take [law] in the concluding clause as definite—the Gentiles are not simply *a* law to themselves but *the* law spoken of in the other clauses of the verse. This is confirmed by verse 15 where we have the expression [the work of the law]. The point is that it is not an entirely different law with which the Gentiles are confronted; the things of the law they do are not things of an entirely different law—it is essentially the same law. The difference resides in the different *method* [emphasis added] of being confronted with it and, by implication, in the less detailed and perspicuous knowledge of its content.” Cf. Murray, *Romans*, 74. See also Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, re. 1979), 124, where he says that the Gentiles “have it [the law the Jews possess] in another way” and “he [Paul] wishes to establish the identity of the Gentile’s moral instinct with the contents of the *Mosaic* [emphasis Godet’s] law strictly so called.”

<sup>30</sup> Murray, *Romans*, 74.

<sup>31</sup> See for instance, F. W. Farrar, *The Voice from Sinai* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1892), 4, where he says, “The moral law of Sinai, written on the tablets of stone, was, as Bishop Andrewes points out, a promulgation of the law always written on the flesh in tables of the heart. Thus (he says) we have all the Ten Commandments in Genesis.” See also Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan

revelation (and general revelation because they are image bearers), the Gentiles get via general revelation alone. They get the same law but through different means of revelation and in a different form. The substance is the same though the form differs. The great Reformed theologian Francis Turretin agrees:

If it is asked how this natural law agrees with or differs from the moral law [the moral law in the context of Turretin's statement refers to the Decalogue], the answer is easy. It agrees as to substance and with regard to principles, but differs as to accidents and with regard to conclusions. The same duties (both toward God and toward our neighbor) prescribed by the moral law are also contained in the natural law. The difference is with regard to the mode of delivery.<sup>32</sup>

A careful exegesis of Romans 2:14-15 demonstrates that the moral law is summarily contained in the whole Decalogue and is at the same time common to all men through general revelation.

### ***Romans 3:19-20***

In Romans 3:19-20, we read:

<sup>19</sup> Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. <sup>20</sup> Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. (Rom 3:19-20)

In the context of these crucial verses, Paul is establishing the fact that all men, Jews (people with Holy Scripture) and Greeks (people without

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Publishing House, 1991), 81-82, where he says, "In spite of its marvelous succinctness, economy of words, and comprehensive vision, it must not be thought that the Decalogue was inaugurated...at Sinai for the first time. All Ten Commandments had been part of the law of God previously written on hearts instead of stone, for all ten appear, in one way or another, in Genesis. They are: The first, Genesis 35:2...The second, Genesis 31:[30]...The third, Genesis 24:3...The fourth, Genesis 2:3...The fifth, Genesis 27:41...The sixth, Genesis 4:9...The seventh, Genesis 39:9...The eighth, Genesis 44:4-7...The ninth, Genesis 39:17...The tenth, Genesis 12:18; 20:3." See Ernest C. Reisinger, *The Law and the Gospel* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1997), 18-22, for an attempt to show "that the violation of each of the Ten Commandments was either severely punished or openly rebuked before Sinai." *Ibid*, 18. The best treatment of this issue I have read can be found in Philip S. Ross, *From the Finger of God: The Biblical and Theological Basis for the Threefold Division of the Law* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, Mentor Imprint, 2010), 52-82. Another helpful piece is *The Threefold Division of the Law* by Jonathan F. Bayes. It can be found at <http://www.christian.org.uk/html-publications/theology/threefold.pdf>, accessed on March 4, 2013.

<sup>32</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology, Volume Two* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 6.

Holy Scripture), are under sin (Rom 3:9). In order to do this, he quotes from the Old Testament (Rom 3:10-18). In 3:19, Paul bases universal guilt on universal culpability for violations of the law of the Old Testament. Both Jews and Greeks are under sin because they are guilty of being Old Testament law breakers. It is of interest to note that none of the sins listed in 3:10-18 are ceremonial sins. These sins reflect breaches of moral law which is common to all men contained *both* in the Old Testament *and* in the hearts of all men. (See the exposition of Romans 2:14-15 above.) It has been shown from Romans 1 and 2 that Gentiles are not without law altogether. They are without the Old Testament as a whole but not without the basic, fundamental law of the Old Testament, the Ten Commandments. Jews are under sin because they have broken God's law, Greeks are under sin because they have broken God's law, and the Old Testament indicts both of them. Both Jews and Greeks are "under the law"<sup>33</sup> and therefore guilty before God. The only way that this can be possible is if the law the Jews are under and the law the Greeks are under correspond at least to a degree. Since the Jews had the whole Old Testament and the Greeks had only the law written on their hearts, then the law being referred to here by Paul could mean one thing for Jews and another thing for Greeks. A well-known older theologian, W. G. T. Shedd, says:

["The law,"] the written law, primarily, because St. Paul has been speaking, last, of the Jew; yet not the written law exclusively, because the Gentiles are included in ["every mouth"] and ["all the world"]. The written law contains the unwritten, by implication, and hence may be put for all law, or law generally...This passage throws light upon the true interpretation of 2:14-15; 2:26-27.<sup>34</sup>

The law with reference to Jews refers to the whole Mosaic law. The law with reference to Greeks refers to the law written on the heart, the Ten Commandments in their natural form, the natural law. This interpretation is strengthened when one considers the language at the end of verse 19: "that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." This argues that the law being referred to is a law common to all men. The only law common to all men, and therefore, the law of which all men can be held guilty for in common, is the Decalogue. However, this does not negate the fact that the Jews were more culpable because they

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<sup>33</sup> The phrase is literally "in the law." The word "in" refers to those who are within the sphere of the law's authority.

<sup>34</sup> W. G. T. Shedd, *Commentary on Romans*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 71.



possessed more law. This understanding of these verses corresponds with what Paul taught in Romans 2:14-15 and 26-27.

These three texts (Rom 1:18-32; 2:14-15; 3:19-20) confirm a fact already displayed. The Ten Commandments function as the basic, fundamental law of the Old Covenant, the New Covenant, and as the specially revealed form of the natural law, which was first written on Adam's heart. The Ten Commandments do not exhaust moral law but summarily contain it. The Westminster Larger Catechism says in Question 98, "Where is the moral law summarily comprehended?" A. "The moral law is summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments..."

### ***Conclusion***

The Ten Commandments function in three ways in the Bible: 1) as the basic, fundamental law of the Old Covenant, 2) as the basic, fundamental law of the New Covenant, and 3) as the basic, fundamental law for all men: the moral law. The Ten Commandments began to function in the life of man in the Garden of Eden.<sup>35</sup> They were then written by God upon stone tablets and functioned as the heart of God's law for Old Covenant Israel and as the specially revealed form of the law written upon man's heart. Finally, the Ten Commandments are written upon the hearts of all New Covenant Christians as one of the blessings of that covenant. The Ten Commandments are trans-covenantal because they are basic and fundamental. They transcend all covenants and all cultures. John Murray says:

The Ten Commandments, it will surely be admitted, furnish the core of the biblical ethic. When we apply the biblico-theological method to the study of Scripture it will be seen that the Ten Commandments as promulgated at Sinai were but the concrete and practical form of enunciating principles which did not then for the first time come to have relevance but were relevant from the beginning. And it will also be seen that, as they did not *begin* to have relevance at Sinai, so they did not cease to have relevance when the Sinaitic economy had passed away. It is biblico-theological study that demonstrates that these commandments embody principles which belong to the order which God established for man at the beginning, as also to the order of redemption. In other words, we discover that they belong to the organism of divine revelation respecting God's will for man.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> The function of the natural law, the law written on the heart, for Adam as the representative of mankind in the Garden is beyond the scope of our purpose.

<sup>36</sup> John Murray, *Principles of Conduct: Aspects of Biblical Ethics* (1999; reprint, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1957), 7-8.

## 4. A Voice from the Past

We will now look at an old Calvinistic Baptist confession of faith, the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689. The theology of this Confession concerning the Ten Commandments begins at creation (LBC 4). However, the first *explicit* mention of the Ten Commandments is not in the chapter on creation but the chapter on the law of God (LBC 19:2). Therefore, we will use chapter 19, “Of the Law of God,” as a guide to unfold the theology of the Confession concerning the Ten Commandments. Four themes will emerge which will function as the outline for our study of the Confession: 1. The Ten Commandments and Creation; 2. The Ten Commandments and Sinai; 3. The Ten Commandments and Christians; and 4. The Ten Commandments and Non-Christians.

### *a. The Ten Commandments and Creation*

In chapter 19 of the Confession, we are faced with language which asserts that the function of the Ten Commandments predates Mount Sinai and the giving of the law to Old Covenant Israel. The pertinent language is as follows:

God gave to Adam a law of universal obedience written in his heart... (LBC 19:1)

The same law that was first written in the heart of man continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness after the fall, and was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in Ten Commandments, and written in two tables, the four first containing our duty towards God, and the other six, our duty to man. (LBC 19:2)

Besides this law, commonly called moral... (LBC 19:3)

The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it; neither doth Christ in the gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation. (LBC 19:5)

Several observations are necessary at this time for our purposes. *First*, notice the Confession asserts that Adam was given “a law of universal obedience written in his heart” (LBC 19:1). Chapter 4, *Of Creation*, asserts that Adam and Eve had “the law of God written in their hearts” (LBC 4:2; cf. also 4:3 “the law written in their hearts” and 6:1 “the law of their creation”).

*Second*, this law, written in the heart of Adam, remained in men subsequent to Adam's sin and functioned as "a perfect rule of righteousness after the fall" (LBC 19:2).

*Third*, the "same law that was first written in the heart of man...was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in Ten Commandments" (LBC 19:2).

*Fourth*, this law is called *moral law*<sup>37</sup> and applicable to all men—saved and lost—because all men have at least one thing in common: creation in the image of God. The Confession asserts, "The moral law doth forever bind all...in respect of the authority of God the Creator" (LBC 19:5).

#### ***b. The Ten Commandments and Sinai***

The claims of the Confession concerning the Ten Commandments and Sinai are very clear.

The same law that was first written in the heart of man continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness after the fall, and was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in Ten Commandments, and written in two tables, the four first containing our duty towards God, and the other six, our duty to man. (LBC 19:2)

Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel ceremonial laws... (LBC 19:3)

To them [Old Covenant Israel] also he gave sundry judicial laws... (LBC 19:4)

Four observations will assist us at this point. *First*, the "same law that was first written in the heart of man" (LBC 19:2) via the *creative* finger of God was delivered by the redemptive-historical revelatory finger of God on Mount Sinai.<sup>38</sup> It is important to note that it is the same law revealed in a different way.

*Second*, this law "was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, *in* Ten Commandments" (LBC 19:2; italics mine). The form in which God chose to reveal this law was "*in* Ten Commandments" (LBC 19:2). This is important to note as well. The *essence* of the law is the same, though the *form* may differ.

*Third*, this law, "delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in Ten Commandments" (LBC 19:2) is "commonly called moral" (LBC 19:3).

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<sup>37</sup> See the definition of moral law referenced above.

<sup>38</sup> I do not mean to deny that God's *creative finger* is revelatory. General revelation is based on creation (i.e., God's *creative-revelatory finger*). The finger of God refers to divine power in historical execution.

*Fourth*, the Ten Commandments played a unique, central role in the life of Old Covenant Israel. “Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel ceremonial laws...” (LBC 19:3). “To them [Old Covenant Israel] also he gave sundry judicial laws...” (LBC 19:4). The “ceremonial laws”<sup>39</sup> and “judicial laws”<sup>40</sup> are viewed as supplementary to the Ten Commandments. Therefore, the Confession sees the Ten Commandments functioning as a specially revealed law for Old Covenant Israel and, at the same time, as a specially revealed form of the natural law, which is written on the hearts of all men (LBC 4:2-3; 6:1; 19:1, 2, 3, 5, 6).

### ***c. The Ten Commandments and Christians***

The position of the Confession concerning the Ten Commandments and Christians is very clear as well.

The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it; neither doth Christ in the gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation. (LBC 19:5)<sup>41</sup>

Consider these observations. *First*, the Confession sees the Ten Commandments as applicable to Christians because of the Commandments’ content. “The moral law<sup>42</sup> doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof...in regard of the matter contained in it” (LBC 19:5).

*Second*, the Confession sees the Ten Commandments as applicable to Christians because they are creatures. “The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, and that

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<sup>39</sup> According to Richard A. Muller, ceremonial law, *lex ceremonialis* is “specifically, the ceremonial or religious regulations given to Israel under the Old Testament, alongside the moral law of the Decalogue and the civil law of the Jewish nation, such as the Levitical Code. Whereas the *lex moralis* [moral law] remains in force after the coming of Christ, the *lex ceremonialis* has been abrogated by the gospel.” Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (1985; second printing, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 173.

<sup>40</sup> The civil law of the Jewish nation under the Old Covenant.

<sup>41</sup> The functions of the law in the life of the Christian are delineated in LBC 19:6. However, it is beyond the scope of this study to deal with *the way* the law functions in the life of the believer. I am simply attempting to show *that* the Confession teaches the law functions, not *how*.

<sup>42</sup> The moral law, in the context of the Confession, refers to the essence of the Ten Commandments as a specially revealed form of the law written on the heart (i.e., the natural law) via the creative act of God. See the definition referenced above.

not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator” (LBC 19:5).

*Third*, the Confession sees the Ten Commandments as applicable to Christians because they are Christ’s. “Neither doth Christ in the gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation” (LBC 19:5). Clearly, the Ten Commandments, according to the Confession, have a unique place in the Christian life.

#### ***d. The Ten Commandments and Non-Christians***

Finally, the position of the Confession concerning the Ten Commandments and non-Christians is also very clear.

The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it; neither doth Christ in the gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation. (LBC 19:5)

Consider these observations. *First*, the Confession sees the Ten Commandments as applicable to non-Christians because of their content. “The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof...in regard of the matter contained in it” (LBC 19:5).

*Second*, the Confession sees the Ten Commandments as applicable to non-Christians because they are creatures. “The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator” (LBC 19:5). Because the Confession views the Ten Commandments as a specially revealed form of the law written on the heart, the natural law, it sees them as binding upon Christians and non-Christians alike. This is due to the content of the Ten Commandments and the fact that all men are creatures and, therefore, under this law.

In summary, according to the Confession, the Ten Commandments function as 1) the law written on man’s heart at creation, 2) the heart and soul of the Old Covenant’s law, and 3) the basic, fundamental law for all men: the moral law. The Ten Commandments began to function in the life of man in the Garden of Eden. They were then written by God upon stone tablets in Ten Commandments, functioning as the heart of His law for Old Covenant Israel and as the specially revealed form of the law written upon man’s heart. Since the coming of Christ, they are still applicable to both

Christians and non-Christians. The Ten Commandments are, therefore, trans-covenantal because they are basic and fundamental.

The Confession attempts to summarize what God has already clearly said in His Word. To the degree it has done this, to that degree it is a faithful expression of what the Bible teaches on this issue.

## 5. Typical Objections

I have sought to prove to you, among other things, that Jeremiah prophesies that Christians have the law that God wrote on stone tablets, the Ten Commandments, written on their hearts by the Spirit of God sent by the Son of God (Jer 31:33; 2Co 3:3). The Spirit of God also causes us to delight in God's law and obey it (Eze 36:27, "And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."). The New Testament gives us the way in which the Ten Commandments are to be applied by Christians. Though this seems clear and is, by far, the majority view of the Christian church throughout her history, some disagree. To be fair to those who may disagree, we must admit that some statements of the New Testament make this issue difficult to understand (Romans 6:14, for example). In light of this, let us consider some typical objections and interact with them.

**a. The Mosaic law in the Old and New Testaments always refers to the entirety of that law, the whole thing, the whole law of the Old Covenant, the law for ancient Israel.** "Since Christians are not under the Mosaic law as a whole, then they cannot be under it in any of its parts," so goes this objection. "So the law in Jeremiah's prophecy cannot have anything to do with the Old Covenant and its law." At first glance, this appears to be a very strong objection, but let us interact with it.

We are not arguing that the law in Jeremiah's prophecy has anything to do with Christians in their present relationship to the Old Covenant. They are not under any law in order to obtain either the temporal blessings promised to God's ancient people in the Land of Promise, or, worse, salvation and eternal life. Jeremiah's prophecy is a prophecy of the New Covenant, of a new day for God's people. What has been argued is that Jeremiah's prophecy refers to the basic fundamental law of the New Covenant, which is the same for the Old or Mosaic Covenant.

We are not under Moses' law as the ancient Jews were, but we are creatures created in the image of God, just as they were, with the law written again on our hearts. We do have duties as Christians that are very

much the same as Israel did under the Old Covenant. We are to love God and neighbor, which Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 in Matthew 22:37 and 39.

One thing we learn from this is that some laws of the Mosaic Covenant transcend that covenant and can function outside of it. For example, we are to worship the one and only true God of the Bible. This has always been the case. We are to worship the one and only true God of the Bible the way He commands. This has always been the case. We are not to take God's name in vain. This has always been the case. We must rest for the purpose of public worship and we must work or labor. This has always been the case. We owe respect and obedience to parents and all authority figures in our lives. This has always been the case. We must respect life and not murder others either by taking their lives unlawfully or even by hating them. This has always been the case. We must keep ourselves sexually pure, neither committing adultery in our acts, words, or thoughts. This has always been the case. We must respect the property of others and not steal. This has always been the case. We must tell the truth and not lie. This has always been the case. And we must be content with what we have and not commit idolatry by coveting things and people. This has always been the case. These are the Ten Commandments.

As a matter of fact, the Ten Commandments did not become holy and good at Sinai. These things are always right or wrong in light of who we are as creatures made in God's image. They simply reflect the ethical absolutes woven into the fabric of our being.

Maybe looking at it this way will help. Just as God incorporated the law written on man's heart at creation into the Old Covenant, He does the same in the New Covenant. This natural law became what it was not at Sinai; it was formally published by God Himself on stone tablets. That same law is incorporated into the New Covenant. This law, then, is not only trans-cultural but trans-covenantal. Since it is coextensive with our status as image bearers, this should not surprise us at all.

**b. If the law in Jeremiah refers to the Ten Commandments, why didn't God repeat them word-for-word in the New Testament exactly as they come to us in the Old Testament?** "If repeated then binding; if not repeated, not binding," so goes the argument. Again, this appears to be a sound objection, but is it really? God already revealed the Ten Commandments twice in the Old Testament (Exo 20 and Deu 5). He prophesied their presence in the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:33. He confirmed their presence under the New Covenant in 2 Corinthians 3:3

(and elsewhere). The Ten Commandments are either quoted or assumed to be good and right by the New Testament writers in many places. Remember, it is the essence of the Ten Commandments that is binding, not any particular form in which they have been revealed in Scripture.

For example, Paul references the fifth commandment as that which is right for children to obey (Eph 6:1-3). Do you really need God to repeat, for example, the sixth commandment—"Thou shalt not murder"—in order to believe that murder is sinful? By the way, it is interesting to note that murder was wrong and sinful prior to Sinai—Cain killed his brother Abel, which is recorded in Genesis 4, and John tells us in 1 John 3:11-12 that Cain was of the evil one and an example of someone who did not love. There is no command to love or any prohibition of murder recorded in Scripture prior to Genesis 4. Do you want to argue that love was not expected and murder was not prohibited until we read of an explicit command to love or an explicit prohibition concerning murder? I hope not.

How about the tenth commandment? "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's" (Exo 20:17). That command, as given here, is not repeated word-for-word in the New Testament. It is, however, reduced to its essence: "Thou shalt not covet" (Rom 7:7; 13:9). God does not have to repeat the Ten Commandments word-for-word for them to be relevant for Christians.

Did you know that the first four commandments are not repeated in the New Testament word-for-word, and neither are the ninth and tenth? In light of this, no one in their right mind argues that only the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth commandments carry over into the New Testament and, therefore, are the only ones applicable to Christians. The essence of all ten of the Ten Commandments carries over into the New Testament. This is what we expect from Jeremiah's prophecy (and elsewhere).

**c. The New Testament says that we are not under law but under grace. We do not have to obey the law of God; we just need to bathe our souls in the grace of God.** This objection is often based on Romans 6:14, which says, "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." At first glance, this verse may appear to undo much of what has been said above. How should we respond? It is one thing to be under law as a sinner as a means to life (which is impossible to attain since the fall), as a means whereby one obeys to get salvation and eternal life, as



a means to get right with God or earn an inheritance; but it is quite another thing to obey because we have received eternal life, because someone else made us right with God, because someone else has earned an inheritance for us. We are bound to obey God's law, not that we may live, not that we may gain salvation and inherit eternal life, not that we may be right with God; but because we live, because we have received eternal life, because we are heirs of life. We do not obey to life; we obey from life. Being a Christian does not mean we do the right things to get to heaven. It means that we believe the gospel. Christians believe that Christ has done everything necessary to earn heaven and the eternal state of glory for them. Our obedience does not get us to glory; Christ's does. The basis of our justification and entitlement to glory is what Christ did *for* us. What we do for Christ is a result of His work. The efficient cause of what we do for Him is that which He does *to* or *in* us by His Spirit, a promised blessing for all in the New Covenant. What we do is a reflection of our love for Christ in light of what He has done for us, and it is impelled by His Spirit in us, forming us into Christ's image in conjunction with the written Word of God. Obeying God as a believer is a *result* of grace in our lives; it is an *effect* of God's grace in us (Eph 2:8-10; 1Co 15:10). But, it is also a *response* to the grace of God in us (Rom 12:1-2). We obey God's law by grace. Because our souls are soaked by God's grace, we want to obey God's law.

**d. This would mean that the fourth commandment carries over into the New Covenant.** Well, my short answer is, "Yes, that is certainly true." The essential principles of all ten of the Ten Commandments carry over. Time to work and time to stop work for the purpose of special worship are both necessary if we are to please God. But, someone says, "The fourth commandment is not repeated in the New Testament." Neither is the first commandment (at least not word-for-word), but that does not make having other gods before the true God virtuous or restrict the commandment's application to Old Covenant Israel alone. And the second commandment is not repeated (at least not word-for-word), but that does not mean you can make idols and expect that (or any other humanly-devised forms of worship) to be acceptable worship to God. And neither is the third commandment (at least not word-for-word), but that does not mean you can take the name of the Lord in vain.

But, someone says again, "In order for the fourth commandment to carry over we would expect the New Testament Christians to meet for worship on the seventh day of the week. In fact, they did not; they met on the first day of the week, the Lord's Day." Yes, they did. But they met on

the first day of the week because of the resurrection of Christ in celebration of redemption won and the inauguration of a new creation. Let's think through this a bit.

This objection assumes that the application of the Ten Commandments must look the same as it did in the Old Testament era if they are to be obeyed under the New Testament era. Is this, in fact, the case? Must the application of one of the Ten Commandments look the same as it did under the Old Covenant if it is to be applicable under the New Covenant? I think not. For example, the second commandment is still in force but the laws for what constitutes acceptable worship have changed (Heb 9:1-10). This change is due to the coming of Christ and His work which is the fulfillment to which the ancient elements of worship pointed. We worship the way we do in light of the coming and resurrection of Christ and the revelation explaining the implications of those events recorded in the New Testament. However, idolatry is still a sin (1Co 10:14; Col 3:5; 1Jo 5:21). We do not offer animal sacrifices at a physical temple through a Levitical priest, though all believers are priests who offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ (1Pe 2:5) in the new house of God, the new temple, the church (1Co 3:16-17; Eph 2:21-22; 1Ti 3:15). Things have changed due to fulfillment in Christ, but fulfillment does not cancel the moral principle of the law, though it may change its application. In other words, the application of the second commandment looks different than it used to in light of the coming of the Son of Man and His entrance into glory. We worship *how* we do in light of the coming and resurrection of Christ.

The application of the fourth commandment is similar. We worship *when* we do in light of the coming and resurrection of Christ (Heb 4:9-10; Rev 1:10<sup>43</sup>), but Sabbath-keeping is still our privilege (Heb 4:9). We do not meet on the seventh day of the week. The seventh-day observance looked back to the original creation and redemption from Egypt, and was symbolic of a greater creation and redemption to come in the first coming

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<sup>43</sup> The word translated "Lord's" is found two times in the New Testament, here in Revelation 1:10 and in 1 Corinthians 11:20. Both times it refers to something (i.e., a day [Rev 1:10] and a covenantal meal [1Co 11:20]) that peculiarly belongs to the Lord Jesus after His resurrection. Just as the Old Covenant had a sacred day (i.e., the seventh-day Sabbath) and a sacred meal (i.e., Passover), so the New Covenant has its own sacred day and sacred meal. Both the sacred day (Rev 1:10; "the Lord's Day") and the sacred meal (1Co 11:20; "the Lord's Supper") get their official titles after the resurrection. Though it is true that all days and all meals come from the Lord, all days and all meals are not identified as "the Lord's," in the sense that this word is used in Revelation 1:10 and 1 Corinthians 11:20.

of Christ. The historical basis for the application of the fourth commandment under the Old Covenant was two-fold: creation (Exo 20:8-11) and redemption (Deu 5:12-15). In the same way, the historical basis for the application of the fourth commandment under the New Covenant is also two-fold: the resurrection is both the formal inauguration of a new creation and the guarantee of our redemption.

A similar case can be made with the fifth commandment on two levels. The fifth commandment is ours to obey irrespective of our age. However, honoring parents when you are two years old looks different than when you are 50. Also, in Ephesians 6:2-3, Paul references the fifth commandment, applying it to children in first-century Asia Minor. However, in its first revelation to us in the Bible, obeying the fifth commandment promised longer life in the Promised Land (cf. Exo 20:12, “that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee”). The application may change due to various factors, like the inauguration of the New Covenant due to the sufferings and glory of Christ, without cancelling the essence of the commandment.

Just as the application of the second commandment takes a different form under the New Covenant due to the sufferings and glory of Christ (i.e., the *elements* of public worship have changed), so it goes with the application of the fourth commandment (i.e., the *day* for public worship has changed). The application of the fourth commandment takes its shape based on redemptive-historical realities connected to Christ’s death and resurrection. The Christian’s Sabbath does not look backward to the original creation or to redemption from Egyptian bondage, and neither does it look forward to the first coming of Christ, as the Old Testament Sabbath did. Rather, it looks back to the inauguration of the New Covenant (i.e., the new creation and much better redemption) and is a foretaste of His second coming and the eternal rest (first symbolized by God’s rest at creation<sup>44</sup>) that will be brought to eschatological fulfillment at that time and forever afterward. The Lord’s Day or Christian Sabbath is a present symbol of a better creation and a better redemption which we enjoy in part now, but in full in the state of consummation.

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<sup>44</sup> For more on this subject, see J. V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1-3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Fearn, Ross-Shire, Scotland, UK: Christian Focus Publications/Mentor Imprint, 2007), 183-203.

## 6. Practical Conclusions

This study has been devoted to the place of the Ten Commandments in the life of the Christian. Scripture itself was called upon for the final verdict. The Ten Commandments function in three ways in the Bible: 1) The Ten Commandments began to function in the life of man in the Garden of Eden as the basic, fundamental law of the Old and New Covenants and as the basic, fundamental law for all men: the moral law. 2) They were then written by God upon stone tablets and functioned as the heart of God's law for Old Covenant Israel and as the specially revealed form of the law written upon man's heart. 3) Finally, the Ten Commandments are written upon the hearts of all New Covenant Christians. The Ten Commandments are trans-covenantal because they are basic and fundamental.<sup>45</sup>

Let us consider three closing practical considerations.

**a. The basic law of the Old and New Covenants is the same and finds its origins in God who first wrote it in the hearts of our first parents (Rom 2:14-15).**

The Confession says:

After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, rendering them fit unto that life to God for which they were created; being made after the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfil it, and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change. (LBC 4:2)

Sadly, their wills changed. They sinned. However, God sent His Son to save sinners. God works by grace in our soul and renovates His image in us, *re-creating* us in righteousness and holiness of the truth (Eph 4:24) and *re-writing* the law on our hearts (Jer 31:33; 2Co 3:3). Just as at the first creation God wrote His law on the heart of the first image bearers, so in the work of re-creation He does the same. The internal law that Adam

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<sup>45</sup> Dumbrell's words are worth hearing. "Biblical scholars generally acknowledge the distinctive character of the Ten Commandments...Obligatory in nature and containing virtually no defined penalties, the Decalogue transcends all social frameworks. Though it was specified to Israel first by covenant, the Decalogue is God's universal demand on all human society." Cf. Dumbrell, *The Search for Order*, 46. "The ten words objectified on Sinai seem merely to have codified the divine will for humankind. Most of their content is contained directly or by implication in the preceding material of Genesis and Exodus." Cf. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 35.

violated is what Christ obeyed perfectly on our behalf, and it is that same law He writes on the hearts of all He came to save.

**b. The law in the life of the believer is a guide not a force.** The force, the power to obey God out of love, comes not from the law but from the Holy Spirit. The law does not have empowering or impelling ability. It is a guide without wings. In the promise of the New Covenant in Ezekiel, God says, “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them” (Eze 36:26-27). The law is like train tracks. Tracks can guide but they cannot impel. The power comes not from the tracks but from the train’s engine. The power to obey God’s law does not come from the law. The power to obey God’s law is a gift, one of the gracious provisions of the New Covenant for all its participants.

**c. The law is a means to express our love** (Mat 22:36-40; Rom 13:8-10). Believers in Christ go from guilt to glory, condemnation to consummation, lost sinners to lavished sons—and all of this due to what Christ has done for them. The Heidelberg Catechism, Question 1, asks, “What is thy only comfort in life and death?” Here is its answer:

That I with body and soul, both in life and death, (a) am not my own, (b) but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ; (c) who, with his precious blood, has fully satisfied for all my sins, (d) and delivered me from all the power of the devil; (e) and so preserves me (f) that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; (g) yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, (h) and therefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life, (i) and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto him. (j)

May this study assist all to possess a proper appreciation for the Ten Commandments in the life of the believer.

