



The Christian and God's Law:
Some Resources

Why study the Ten Commandments (the “Ten”)?

1. “General ignorance”: these days, the Ten aren’t widely known yet they have a prominent place in our national and faith histories.

2. “Centrality to Mosaic Ethics”: the Ten serve as the “Constitution,” the heart of Israel’s moral law.

The other laws regarding the civil and ceremonial life of the nation (for example, Exodus 21, etc.) serve as specific *case law applications* based on the Ten.

3. “Centrality to NT ethics”: NT authors use them and apply them regularly to ethical situations (e.g., the rich young ruler [Mark 10:17]; Romans 13; 1 Timothy 1:8ff;

Looking backward, the summary Jesus gave in the two “Great Commandments” (Matthew 22:37-40) includes all 613 Jewish laws in the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible).

4. “The Law is good” one of its beneficial uses to us is as a guide to moral living, that is, living according to how God made all things.

Why obey the Ten?

1. Because of “who *we* are”: like Israel before us, the church is God’s holy nation (1 Peter 2:9) so we are tasked to live God’s way.

2. Because of “who *God* is in Himself”: “the Law is an expression of the Lawgiver’s heart and character” (22).

3. Because of “who *God* is to *Us*”: He gives us the Ten for our good; “traffic laws” to assist us in navigating life.

4. Because of “*where* we are”: as God’s saved people living in this fallen world, we need instruction; “they are rules for a free people to stay free” not “instructions on how to get out of Egypt” (24).

How do we approach the Law as Christians?

1. “We cannot, by our own strength, fulfil all these commandments, yet doing what we are able, the Lord has provided encouragement for us: (1) In the new covenant, God promised to work in us what He requires. (2) God, for Christ’s sake, will accept of something less than He requires...He will accept sincere [vs. perfect] obedience. (3) Though our obedience be imperfect, yet, through Christ our [Guarantor], God looks upon it as perfect” (Watson, 47).
2. The Law binds everyone to perfect obedience: perfect fulfillment of its duties and perfect avoidance of its prohibitions.
3. The Law is spiritual at heart and so it applies to the understanding, will and affections of the inner man as well as the words and deeds of the outer man.
4. More is required than is stated: where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden; where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded (e.g., “do not steal” [Exodus 20:15] instead work to have “something to share” [Ephesians 4:28]).
5. Each stated sin is never isolated from the causes of it, means to it, occasions of it or provocations to it—the sins themselves and these must be avoided. “Where greater sins are forbidden, lesser [related] sins are also forbidden” (45).
6. Each stated duty is never isolated from the causes of it, means to it, occasions of it or provocations to it—the duties themselves and these must be promoted in every way.
7. God’s law forbids being accessory to or having any hand in the sins of others. (1) By not hindering [others] when it is in our power. (2) By counseling or provoking others to sin. (3) By consenting to another’s sin. (4) By our example.

See the WLC 99 and Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust; 1692), 44-48.

What do our Standards say about the Law for the Church?

Sections of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter 19.

Para 2. This law [given to Adam] after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and...was delivered by God upon Mt. Sinai, in ten commandments.

Paras 3-4. Beside this law...God was pleased to give the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial law...All...which laws are now abrogated under the new testament...To them also, as a body politic, he gave sundry judicial laws which expired together with the State of that people...

Para 5. The moral law does forever bind all... in regard of the matters in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator who gave it...

Para 6. Although true believers are not under the law as a covenant of works...yet it is of great use...[1] as a rule of life [directing and binding] them of the will of God and their duty...[2] discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature...[3] so as examining themselves...they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for and hatred against sin, together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ and the perfection of His obedience...[4] to restrain their corruptions...threatening of it show what even their sins deserve; and what afflictions in this life they may expect for them although freed from the curse...what blessings they may expect upon performance thereof although not as due to them.

The Preface of the Ten Commandments: Ex. 20:2; Deut. 5:6

Westminster Larger Catechism, Q. 101

[In the Preface] God manifests His sovereignty as being Yahweh, the eternal, immutable and almighty God; having being in and of Himself, and giving being to all His words and works: and that He is a God in covenant, as with Israel of old, so with all His people; who, as He brought them out of their bondage in Egypt, so He delivers us from our spiritual [subjugation] and that, therefore, we are bound to take Him for our God alone and to keep all His commandments.

Westminster Shorter Catechism, Q. 43

...because God is the Lord, and our God and Redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all His commandments