

The Law of God & the Christian

–Lesson 1–

**In order provide a proper overview of our study as it relates to the Law of God, we need to consider *the moral law* relative to creation, relative to the covenant of works made with Adam, and relative to the Christian life.¹

- I. Introduction: the Law of God, or the *Moral Law* in General
 - A. “The law” in its most restricted sense (cp. Lk 24.44) expresses the rule which God has prescribed to His rational creatures in order to direct and oblige them to the right performance of their duties before Him: to do that which pleases Him and to abstain from that which displeases Him.
 - B. The law of God may be considered as either natural or positive.
 1. Considered as the *natural* law of God it’s that necessary and unchangeable rule of duty which is founded on the infinitely holy and righteous nature of God. All men, as the reasonable creatures of God, cannot but be indispensably bound to it, Dt 6.1-5, 13-15.
 2. Considered as the *positive* law of God it comprises institutions which depend merely on His sovereign will and which He may have never prescribed, Dt 22.9-11.
 - C. The dictates of God’s *natural* law are delivered with authority because they are just and reasonable in their own nature—founded on the infinite holiness, righteousness, and wisdom of His own nature (Ps 3.7-8). The dictates of God’s *positive* law become just and reasonable because they are delivered its authority. Thus the former are holy, just, and good, and *therefore* are commanded; while the latter are holy, just, and good *because* they are commanded by God.
 1. The former are unalterable and perpetually the same; while the latter are alterable—though until He alters them, they are of immutable obligation.
 2. Some alterations have been: the change of the seals of the covenant of grace, the change of the day of rest, the change in the institutions for worship and church government, all which Christ, as God, altered for His church in the New Testament (cf. Col 2.20-23).
- II. The law (the Ten Commandments) as inscribed on the heart of man in his creation, WLC 17, 91-93, 98.
 - A. God created man in His own moral image—in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness—by inscribing His law on man’s mind and heart (Gen 1.27; Ecc 7.29; Eph 4.24; Col 3.10). This inscription was therefore a *natural* and necessary part of his creation as after God’s image.
 - B. Though this inscribed law contained no *positive* precepts at first, it naturally required man—as God’s creature—to believe everything which God should reveal and to do everything which God should command, Dt 11.1; 12.32.
 1. This inscribed law is often called the *law of creation*, because it was the will of the Creator revealed to the creature. This law indispensably binds all men in all possible conditions to all subjection and obedience to God their Creator.
 2. This same law is called the *law of nature*, because it was founded upon the holy and righteous nature of God and was interwoven with the nature of man.
 3. And it is also called the *moral law*, because it was a revelation of the will of God as man’s moral Governor and was the standard and rule of all the man’s moral qualities and actions. Being concomitant with man’s creation and nature, it is of perpetual obligation to all men.

¹ John Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*, Chapter 1.

- a) **This moral law is summarily comprehended in the *Ten Commandments*, WSC 39-41, WLC 98.
- C. The obligation of the moral law upon mankind, since it results from the nature of God and from the relationship between God and man, is such that even God Himself cannot dispense with it.
 - 1. It cannot cease to bind so long as God continues to be God and man continues to be man—God to be sovereign Creator and man to be His dependent creature.
 - 2. It must continue forever without the least diminution upon all men, whether sinners or saints, at all times. Man has no life, no being, no activity without God. Therefore so long as man continues in existence, he is bound to render that obedience which is according to God's holy will.
- D. The fall of man into sin greatly defaced this inscribed moral law both for Adam and for all his posterity (Gen 6.5; 8.21). Indeed, it was so defaced and marred that the Lord saw it necessary to make it known both externally (on tablets and in Scripture, Ex 24.12; 20.2-17) and internally (upon the hearts of the elect, Heb 8.10).
 - 1. Yet, though this inscribed moral law was greatly defaced by the fall, it was not wholly obliterated (Rom 1.19-20). An indelible impression of the Ten Commandments remains on the hearts of all men (Rom 2.14-15); but by the darkness and depravity of man's heart, he wholly perverts it (Rom 1.21-23, 32) and suppresses the truth of it in ungodliness and unrighteousness (Rom 1.18; Eph 4.17-19; Col 1.21).
 - 2. These inescapable remains of the moral law are seen essentially in the dictates of *conscience*, which is God's tribunal since the law by which man's conscience operates is the moral law of his God.
 - a) "There is a tribunal erected in every man, where conscience is accuser, witness, and judge" (Boston).
 - b) "Conscience is pacified by nothing which does not pacify the justice of God" (Smeaton).
 - c) "All are rendered inexcusable, as they carry in their hearts a law which is sufficient to make them a thousand times guilty" (Calvin).
 - d) "Conscience is God's spy and man's overseer"; "the domestic chaplain" (Trapp).
 - e) "A quiet conscience is never produced by an unquiet conversation" (Flavel).
 - f) "The Lord God has set conscience as a deputy in the breast of man, which, though it be oftentimes a neuter when the act is doing and while sin is committing, yet afterwards it will prove a friend and faithful witness for the Lord, but an adversary against man" (N. Rogers).
 - g) "Conscience is God's sergeant He employs to arrest the sinner. The sergeant has no power to release his prisoner...but listens, whether the debt be fully paid, or the Creditor be fully satisfied; then, and not till then, he is discharged of his prisoner" (Gurnall).

**Next week: we'll consider the moral law (Ten Commandments) as it was given under the form of a covenant of works to Adam. We'll learn that unless a man has come by God's grace into the covenant of grace in Christ, he is still under the demands of the covenant of works in Adam before God.