

New City Catechism, Question 8

Q. What is the Law of God stated in the Ten Commandments?

A. You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below—you shall not bow down to them or worship them. You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Honor your father and your mother. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony. You shall not covet.

Key Text: Exodus 20:1-17

Kevin DeYoung begins his book on the Ten Commandments, saying:

The way to find moral instruction is not by listening to your gut but by listening to God. If we want to know right from wrong, if we want to know how to live the good life, if we want to know how to live in a way that blesses our friends and our neighbors, we'd be wise to do things God's way, which means paying careful attention to the Ten Commandments.¹

Despite this, it seems that the Ten Commandments have fallen on hard times, both inside and outside of the church. As Michael Moriarty says, “The steady growth of biblical illiteracy and the neglect of God’s moral law have left the church with a shaky foundation...Without a return to our biblical roots and a renewed emphasis on God’s law, the church will coast like a ship at sea without a rudder.”²

This was Israel’s problem, which tragically resulted in their tragic exile out of the Promised Land:

Thus says the LORD of Hosts, the God of Israel: “Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat the flesh. For in the day that I brought them out of

¹ Kevin DeYoung, *The Ten Commandments* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 15.

² Michael G. Moriarty, *The Perfect 10: The Blessings of Following God’s Commandments in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 12.

the land of Egypt, I did not speak to your fathers or command them concerning burnt offerings and sacrifices. But this command I gave them: 'Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be My people. And walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.' But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward. From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all My servants the prophets to them, day after day. Yet they did not listen to Me or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck. They did worse than their fathers." (Jeremiah 7:21-26)

Simply put, they forgot “the ancient paths, where the good way is” (6:16). Their refusal to pay attention Yahweh’s “words” inevitably led to their wholesale rejection of His “law,” which inevitably invited God’s judgment upon the nation (7:19), the very thing Moses warned Israel of centuries before.³

Thankfully, judgment for Israel was not Yahweh’s final word to her:

For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal, declares the LORD. (30:17)

Why?

I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued My faithfulness to you. (31:3)

Jeremiah goes on to use language reminiscent of Exodus, where Yahweh will rescue His people out of bondage – this time from Babylon – and bring them safely into the Promised Land, where He would again make a covenant with the people to be their God:

Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant that they broke, though I was their Husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I

³ See Deuteronomy

will make with the house of Israel after those days,⁴ declares the LORD: I will put My law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more. (31:31-34)

The new covenant does not do away with God's law; rather it internalizes God's law in the [regenerate] heart of every believer.

As we saw in our previous study, Jeremiah affirms that the problem is not God's law, but rather the human heart:

The heart is more deceitful⁵ than anything else, and incurable – who can understand it? (17:9, HSCB)

Israel needs not a new law, but a new heart – a circumcised heart (4:4) that is able to receive and love Yahweh's law.

Jeremiah promises the house of Israel two things:

1. The putting of our sins away through forgiveness
2. The putting of God's law within through regeneration

Sadly, many Christians focus only on the first [good] promise and neglect – to their own harm – the second.

But, as James says,⁶ *all* of God's gifts to us are good, including (and especially!!) His Law.

So, before we spend the next month or so working through the Ten Commandments and their implications for us as God's people – the true Israel – in

⁴ That is, after a time of judgment, God will again deliver His people (see 30:8-24; cf. Isaiah 40:1-5).

⁵ The Hebrew word is literally 'Jacob' (עַקֵּב), who as Israel's father was originally known as the deceiver before God miraculously converted him. The NET translates עַנּוּשׁ (*anush*), which in Hebrew sounds like the word for 'mortal man') as "incurably bad."

⁶ See James 1:17-18

the new covenant inaugurated by Jesus Christ,⁷ here are a couple of things we need to keep in mind:

1. Exodus 20 follows Exodus 19

Too often when we hear 'law,' we think 'works-righteousness' or legalistic religion. But in the Bible, nothing could be further than the truth.

- In 19:1-4, Yahweh reminds the people that He sovereignly, graciously, and unilaterally redeemed and rescued His people out of slavery in Egypt.
 - Thus, in the words of DeYoung, "law comes after gospel."⁸

That is, God did not come to the people as slaves and say, "I have Ten Commandments. I want you to get these right. I'm going to come back in five years, and if you've gotten your life cleaned up, I'll set you free from Egypt."

- Rather, God says to these slaves, "I heard your cry. I will save you because I love you. And when you are saved, free, and forgiven, I'm going to give you a new way to live."⁹
- That is, salvation is not the *reward* for obedience; salvation is the *reason* for obedience.¹⁰

God gives His covenant law to His covenant people¹¹, who He repeatedly says are dear to His heart and essential for His purposes.

2. The God who gives His people His Law is the God who is love: Father, Son, and Spirit

- The Law is an expression of the Lawgiver's heart and character. His commands not only show us what He desires; they show us what He

⁷ See Hebrews 10 (especially verses 15-18), where the author/preacher quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34 in its entirety and declares that it has been fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

⁸ *TTC*, 24.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ That is, God's Law is relational, given within the context of love and commitment (like wedding vows).

is like: His honor, His worth, and His majesty. They tell us what matters to God.¹²

- God's Law is an expression – as well a gift – of His love for us.
 - Any parent who loves their children and desires their safety and flourishing can identify with this.
 - DeYoung: When you drive on a switchback on a mountain pass, do you curse the guardrails that keep you from plunging to an untimely death? No, someone put them there at great expense, and for our good, that we may travel about freely and safely.

3. For those with new hearts,¹³ God's Law is not a burden but a delight.

- The Ten Commandments are not instructions on how to get out of Egypt. They are rules for a people to stay free.¹⁴
- God's Law reveals not only His character *to us*, but His will *for us*.
 - Thus, those who delight to do God's will, will delight to read, know, and obey His Law.

4. That Jesus' command to love God and neighbor does not get rid of the Ten Commandments; it sums them up.¹⁵

- In other words, the Ten Commandments provide a tangible, visible way to see where our hearts are at, and if we really do love God with all our being.

5. The Ten Commandments have implications for *all* people

- *Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. (Romans 3:19)*

¹² DeYoung, *TTC*, 22-23.

¹³ That is, those born of the Spirit (see Romans 2:28-29; John 3:3-7).

¹⁴ *TTC*, 24.

¹⁵ See Matthew 22:34-40; cf. Romans 13:8-10. Likewise the Ten Commandments sum up the other 613 laws Yahweh gives to His people.

- In Christ, God's Law is our friend, and is meant to guide us into God's blessing; apart from Christ, the law only can condemn those under it to spiritual and eternal death.

6. Thus, whether one is a believer or unbeliever, the Law was graciously given by God to drive us all to Him: to Christ¹⁶ for forgiveness of our breaking of the Law; to the Spirit of Christ, who then empowers us to obey the Law; and to the Father, from whom all blessings flow.

Application:

Try to memorize and meditate upon the Ten Commandments this week, asking God to give you a greater love for, as well as obedience to, them.

Ask God to give you a greater appreciation for the Person and work of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. May learning and living the Ten Commandments increasingly become an act of our reasonable service and worship of our great and glorious Triune God!!¹⁷

¹⁶ Like the rest of Scripture, the Law is Christ-centered, and thus Father and Spirit centered. See Luke 24:27, 44-49; cf. 2 Corinthians 1:22, etc.

¹⁷ See Romans 12:1-2