

The Ten Commandments - Introduction

Taken from the Westminster Larger Catechism.

Q. 93. What is the moral law?

A. The moral law is the **declaration** of the will of God to mankind, directing and binding **every one** to personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity and obedience thereunto, in the frame and disposition of the whole man, **soul and body**,¹ and in performance of all those duties of holiness and righteousness which he oweth to God and man:² promising **life** upon the fulfilling, and threatening **death** upon the breach of it.³

Q. 94. Is there any use of the moral law to man since the fall?

A. Although no man, since the fall, can attain to righteousness and life by the moral law:⁴ yet there is great use thereof, as well common to **all men**, as peculiar either to the **unregenerate**, or the **regenerate**.⁵

Q. 95. Of what use is the moral law to all men?

A. The moral law is of use to all men, to inform them of the **holy nature** and the **will of God**,⁶ and of **their duty**, binding them to walk accordingly;⁷ to convince them of their disability to keep it, and of the sinful pollution of their nature, hearts, and lives:⁸ to **humble them** in the sense of their sin and misery,⁹ and thereby help them to a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ,¹⁰ and of the **perfection of his obedience**.¹¹

¹ Deuteronomy 5:1-3, 31, 33. Luke 10:26-27. 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

² Luke 1:75. Acts 24:16.

³ Romans 10:5. Galatians 3:10. Galatians 3:12.

⁴ Romans 8:3. Galatians 2:16.

⁵ 1 Timothy 1:8.

⁶ Leviticus 11:44-45. Leviticus 20:7-8. Romans 8:12.

⁷ Micah 6:8. James 2:10-11.

⁸ Psalm 19:11-12. Romans 3:20. Romans 7:7.

⁹ Romans 3:9, 23.

¹⁰ Galatians 3:21-22.

¹¹ Romans 10:4.

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Q. 96. What particular use is there of the moral law to unregenerate men?

A. The moral law is of use to unregenerate men, to **awaken** their consciences to flee from wrath to come,¹² and to drive them to Christ;¹³ or, upon their continuance in the estate and way of sin, **to leave them inexcusable**,¹⁴ and under the curse thereof.¹⁵

Q. 97. What special use is there of the moral law to the regenerate?

A. Although they that are regenerate, and believe in Christ, be delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works,¹⁶ so as thereby they are neither justified¹⁷ nor condemned;¹⁸ yet, besides the general uses thereof common to them with all men, it is of special use, to show them how much they are **bound to Christ** for his fulfilling it, and enduring the curse thereof in their stead, and for their good;¹⁹ and thereby to **provoke them** to more thankfulness,²⁰ and to express the same in their greater care to **conform themselves thereunto** as the rule of their obedience.²¹

Q. 98. Where is the moral law summarily comprehended?

A. The moral law is summarily comprehended in the **ten commandments**, which were delivered by the voice of God upon Mount Sinai, and written by him in two tables of stone;²² and are recorded in the **twentieth chapter of Exodus**. The four first commandments containing our duty to God, and the other six our duty to man.²³

¹² 1 Timothy 1:9-10.

¹³ Galatians 3:24.

¹⁴ Romans 1:20. Romans 2:15.

¹⁵ Galatians 3:10.

¹⁶ Romans 6:14. Romans 7:4, 6. Galatians 4:4-5.

¹⁷ Romans 3:20.

¹⁸ Galatians 5:23.

¹⁹ Romans 7:24-25. Galatians 3:13-14. Romans 8:3-4.

²⁰ Luke 1:68-69, 74-75. Colossians 1:12-14.

²¹ Romans 7:22. Romans 12:2. Titus 2:11-14.

²² Deuteronomy 10:4. Exodus 34:1-4.

²³ Matthew 22:37-40.

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Q. 99. What rules are to be observed for the right understanding of the ten commandments?

A. For the right understanding of the ten commandments, these rules are to be observed:

1. That the law is perfect, and bindeth everyone to full conformity in the whole man unto the righteousness thereof, and unto entire obedience forever; so as to require the **utmost perfection** of every duty, and to forbid the **least degree** of every sin.²⁴
2. That it is **spiritual**, and so reacheth the understanding, will, affections, and all other powers of the soul; as well as **words, works, and gestures**.²⁵
3. That one and the same thing, in divers respects, is **required or forbidden** in several commandments.²⁶
4. That as, where a duty is **commanded**, the contrary sin is **forbidden**;²⁷ and, where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded;²⁸ so, where a promise is **annexed**, the contrary threatening is **included**;²⁹ and, where a threatening is annexed, the contrary promise is included.³⁰
5. That what God **forbids**, is at no time to be done;³¹ what he **commands**, is always our duty;³² and yet every particular duty is not to be done at all times.³³

²⁴ Psalm 19:7. James 2:10. Matthew 5:21-22.

²⁵ Romans 7:14. Deuteronomy 6:5. Matthew 22:37-39. Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28, 33-34, 37-39, 43-44.

²⁶ Colossians 3:5. Amos 8:5. Proverbs 1:19. 1 Timothy 6:10.

²⁷ Isaiah 58:13. Deuteronomy 6:13. Matthew 4:9-10. Matthew 15:4-6.

²⁸ Matthew 5:21-25. Ephesians 4:28.

²⁹ Exodus 20:12. Proverbs 30:17.

³⁰ Jeremiah 18:7-8. Exodus 20:7. Psalm 15:1, 4-5. Psalm 24:4-5.

³¹ Job 13:7-8. Romans 3:8. Job 36:21. Hebrews 11:25.

³² Deuteronomy 4:8-9.

³³ Matthew 12:7.

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6. That under one sin or duty, **all of the same kind** are forbidden or commanded; together with all the causes, means, occasions, and appearances thereof, and provocations thereunto.³⁴
7. That what is forbidden or commanded to ourselves, we are bound, according to our places to endeavour that it may be avoided or performed **by others**, according to the duty of their places.³⁵
8. That in what is commanded to others, we are bound, according to our places and callings, to be **helpful to them**;³⁶ and to take heed of partaking with others in what is **forbidden them**.³⁷

³⁴ Matthew 5:21-22, 27-28. Matthew 15:4-6. Hebrews 10:24-25. 1 Thessalonians 5:22. Jude 23. Galatians 5:26. Colossians 3:21.

³⁵ Exodus 20:10. Leviticus 19:17. Genesis 18:19. Joshua 14:15. Deuteronomy 6:6-7.

³⁶ 2 Corinthians 1:24.

³⁷ 1 Timothy 5:22. Ephesians 5:11.