

Biblical Topics

Ten Commandments - Law of God

When God created man, He wrote the Law into man's heart. Later He arranged the Law in Ten Commandments and made it known through Moses.

The Gentiles never learned the Law of God from the Bible. Yet they do or avoid some of things required or forbidden in this Law. This shows that by nature they have some knowledge of this Law. They know that it is wrong to kill or steal. This knowledge man inherited from Adam, who was created in the image of God. Adam when first created had a perfect understanding of God's will. When man fell into sin, this knowledge was badly blurred. This natural knowledge of the Law is true, as far as it goes, but it is not perfect.

- Romans 2:14-15: ¹⁴ (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, ¹⁵ since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

Besides this knowledge man has a conscience, which bears witness to the Law, i.e., it urges him to comply with its demands, and accuses and condemns him if he fails to do so. We must never do what we believe to be wrong, to act against conscience is sin.

In order that we might have a better knowledge of God's Law, He revealed it on Mount Sinai and explained it more fully in the Bible. We do not know how many Commandments were written on each of the two tables of stone. We, however, divide them according to their content. On the First Table we place those which speak of our worship of God (Commandments 1-3).

- Matthew 22:37-38: ³⁷ Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.

The Second Table includes those commandments which treat of our service to our neighbor (commandments 4-10).

- Matthew 22:39: And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

The Law requires not a mere external conformity with the letter of the Law. It is an obedience that proceeds from a loving heart. He who complies with the Law from a selfish motive, merely from fear of punishment or in expectation of a reward does not keep the Law in the right spirit. The greater our love, the easier it is for us to keep the Commandments. Hence we must grow in our love of God if we would make progress in keeping His Commandments.

- Romans 13:10: Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.
- 1 John 4:19: We love because he first loved us.

The Law cannot save us because we cannot keep it perfectly. We might then ask: What is the purpose of the Law? The Law has a threefold purpose:

FIRST, the Law checks to some extent the coarse outbursts of sin and thereby helps to keep order in the world. (A curb)

- 1 Timothy 1:9-10: We also know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰ for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers.
- Romans 2:14-15: ¹⁴ (Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law, ¹⁵ since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts, their consciences also bearing witness, and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them.

SECOND, The Law shows us our sins. (A mirror) Comparing our deeds, words and thoughts with the demands of the Law, we learn to know our sins.

- Romans 3:20: Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.
- Romans 7:7: What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet."

In the Law is revealed the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. This fills our hearts with terror and dismay, and makes us realize our lost condition and our need of a Savior. Therefore the Law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ.

- Romans 7:24-25: ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

THIRD, the Law teaches us Christian which works we must do to lead a God-pleasing life. (A rule) Christians are regenerated and have the "new man." Therefore, they are not slaves of the Law in the sense that they keep it because they are forced to do so. As they love God, they are willing to do what pleases Him. To them the Law is a rule and guide. It directs them on their way through life.

- Psalm 119:9: How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word.
- Psalm 119:105: Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.

The above information is taken from: "Luther's Small Catechism" annotated by Edward W. A. Koehler.