

THE LAW AND THE CHRISTIAN
By Andy Manning

The title of this sermon is “The Law and the Christian.”

This is the third week in our sermon series on the Ten Commandments, and before we move on to the second commandment, I want to give you just a little more information about how to interpret and apply the law.

Before we move on with the rest of the commandments, we need to answer two questions.

First, is the law binding on Christians today?

Second, how do we interpret the Ten Commandments?

IS THE LAW BINDING ON CHRISTIANS TODAY?

Some verses seem to say that the law is no longer binding on Christians.

Romans 6:14 (CSB) says, “For sin will not rule over you, because you are not under the law but under grace.”

Romans 7:6 (CSB) says, “But now we have been released from the law, since we have died to what held us, so that we may serve in the newness of the Spirit and not in the old letter of the law.”

Luke 16:16 (CSB) says, “The Law and the Prophets were until John; since then, the good news of the kingdom of God has been proclaimed, and everyone is urgently invited to enter it.”

Other verses seem to say that the law is still binding.

Matthew 5:17-18 (CSB) says, “17 Don’t think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I tell

you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or one stroke of a letter will pass away from the law until all things are accomplished.”

Matthew 5:19 (CSB) says, “Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commands and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”

Romans 3:31 (CSB) says, “Do we then nullify the law through faith? Absolutely not! On the contrary, we uphold the law.”

How do we reconcile these two ideas?

Galatians 5:4-5 (CSB) says, “4 You who are trying to be justified by the law are alienated from Christ; you have fallen from grace. 5 For we eagerly await through the Spirit, by faith, the hope of righteousness.”

Are we under the law or not? Yes and no, just as the Bible says.

We are not under in the sense that we are not justified (declared righteous) by obeying the law. Instead, we are justified through faith in Jesus Christ.

Romans 10:4 (CSB) says, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.”

Romans 3:28 (CSB) says, “For we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.”

This means that we do not need to fear eternal punishment for breaking God’s law.

Romans 8:1 (CSB) says, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus.”

Philip Graham Ryken said, “The New Testament... completely rejects the idea that we can be justified by keeping the law. It is in this sense especially that we are no longer under law (Rm 6:14; Gal 5:18). Our salvation does not depend on our ability to keep the law.”

We are under the law in the sense that we are still required to obey the moral law perfectly.

Since we are saved by grace through faith, and not works (Ep 2:8), does this mean we can ignore the law?

Romans 6:15 (CSB) answers that. “What then? Should we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?”

Romans 6:12-13 (CSB) says, “12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, so that you obey its desires. 13 And do not offer any parts of it to sin as weapons for unrighteousness. But as those who are alive from the dead, offer yourselves to God, and all the parts of yourselves to God as weapons for righteousness.”

How does the Bible define sin?

1 John 3:4 (CSB) says, “Everyone who commits sin practices lawlessness; and sin is lawlessness.”

So we are not under the law in the sense that we do not seek to be justified by keeping the law. We do not seek to get to heaven by keeping the law. Instead, we are justified by grace (free gift) through faith in Christ. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the law for us, and then He died in our place for our sins, paying our penalty.

But we are under the law in the sense that we are still required to keep the moral law perfectly.

THE THREE KINDS OF LAWS

Now this is where you need to understand the term “moral law”.

The first five books of the Bible, all written by Moses, are called the Torah, which is the Hebrew word for “law”.

And in the law of Moses there are 613 laws. Those laws can be divided into three categories.

1. The ceremonial law.

The ceremonial law governed the worship of the Jews, including the Jewish priesthood, ritual purity laws, dietary laws, festivals, the sacrificial system, and the tabernacle.

2. The civil law.

The civil law governed the Jews as a nation, including laws about slavery, property laws, laws for waging war, laws about debt, and penalties for breaking the laws.

3. The moral law.

The moral law is God’s eternal rule of righteousness based on His character and binding upon all people for all time.

The New Testament tells us that we are no longer under the ceremonial law and the civil law.

The ceremonial law was meant to be a type and a shadow of Christ, and it was fulfilled by the death and resurrection of Christ.

So the New Testament says we no longer have follow the dietary regulations; we don’t need to offer sacrifices anymore, because Christ is our perfect sacrifice; we don’t need the priesthood anymore, because Christ is our high priest.

Colossians 2:16-17 says, “16 Therefore, don’t let anyone judge you in regard to food and drink or in the matter of a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of what was to come; the substance is the Messiah.”

Hebrews 10:14, 18 says, “14 For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy.... 18 And when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices.”

We are also no longer under the civil law because now that Christ has come, the people of God are no longer the nation of Israel, but the church of Jesus Christ, which consists of Jews and Gentiles from every nation and language.

Colossians 3:11 says, “In Christ there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all.”

Now Christians are called to submit to the laws of the local government where they live, unless that government requires them to sin.

Philip Ryken said, “The civil law has also expired, but for a slightly different reason: The church is not a state. We do have a king (namely, Christ), but his kingdom is spiritual. Therefore, although the civil laws of the Old Testament contain principles that are useful for governing nations today, God’s people are no longer bound by their specific regulations.”

So Christians are no longer under the ceremonial or civil law, but we are and forever will be under the moral law which is summed up in the Ten Commandments.

4 REASONS TO OBEY THE MORAL LAW

These are four reasons we know that the law is still binding upon Christians?

First, the moral law is still binding because it is a reflection of God’s unchanging character, and therefore it does not change.

Why is it wrong to lie? Because lying is against God's nature.

Why is it wrong to steal and murder and commit adultery? Because these are against God's nature.

Second, the moral law is still binding because it will last for all eternity.

In heaven there will be no murder, adultery, lying, stealing, coveting, and rebellion against authority.

There will never be a time when the moral law will pass away.

Third, the moral law is still binding because Scripture says that it was written on human hearts before it was ever inscribed by God's finger on stone tablets.

Romans 2:14-15 (CSB) says, "14 So, when Gentiles, who do not by nature have the law, do what the law demands, they are a law to themselves even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts. Their consciences confirm this. Their competing thoughts either accuse or even excuse them."

Paul was asking how people could be condemned for breaking the law if they didn't have it in written form. He answers his own question by saying that God's law is written on the human heart.

This is why Cain was condemned for murder.

This is why Ham was condemned for dishonoring His father, Noah.

The people of Sodom and Gomorrah were condemned for their fornication and homosexuality.

Abraham was condemned for lying to Abimelech about Sarah being his sister.

Abimelech showed that he knew God's law when he expressed his terror at what might have happened if had committed by unknowingly sleeping with Abraham's wife.

Joseph showed that he knew God's moral law when he refused to commit adultery with Potiphar's wife.

The reason that God sent the Israelites into the Promised Land and commanded them to destroy the Canaanites was because the Canaanites had grossly broken God's moral law.

After commanding the Israelites to avoid incest, and adultery, and bestiality, and homosexuality, God said the following:

Leviticus 18:24-25 (CSB) says, "24 Do not defile yourselves by any of these practices, for the nations I am driving out before you have defiled themselves by all these things. 25 The land has become defiled, so I am punishing it for its iniquity, and the land will vomit out its inhabitants."

The moral law is on our hearts. We know it, even though it has been partially obscured by the Fall.

Fourth, the moral law is still binding because the New Testament upholds every one of the Ten Commandments except for the Sabbath law, which is the only one of the Ten Commandments that is no longer binding upon Christians today.

And this is how we know which Old Testament laws are still binding on Christians today. We look to the New Testament, and if the New Testament upholds it, then we know it is part of God's eternal moral law.

Romans 7:12 (CSB) says, "So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good."

Pastor **Ernest Reisinger** wrote, "It is of the utmost importance to discern the differences between the ceremonial law, which pertained to the worship of Israel

and prefigured Christ; the civil or judicial laws, which detailed the duties to Israel as a nation (having their roots in the moral law, particularly in the second table); and the moral law, by which the Creator governs the moral conduct of all creatures for all times.”

Philip Ryken defined the moral laws as “the righteous and eternal standard for our relationship with God and with others.” He goes on to say, “What the NT never does... is to declare an end to God’s moral law as the standard for our lives. It is still, in the words of the Westminster Confession of Faith, ‘a perfect rule of righteousness’ (19.1), or as Calvin termed it, the ‘true and eternal rule of righteousness.’”

Thomas Watson said this about the moral law. “Though it be not their Savior, it is their guide. Though it be not a covenant of life; yet it is a rule of life. Every Christian is bound to conform to it... Though a Christian is not under the condemning power of the law, yet he is under its commanding power.... They who will not have the law to rule them, shall never have the gospel to save them.”

Strong words. Watson is saying that if you reject God’s moral law, then you reject God Himself, and if you reject God, then you cannot be saved.

And, of course, the moral law is summed up best in the Ten Commandments.

If you want to know how God wants you to live, then study the Ten Commandments.

7 PRINCIPLES FOR INTERPRETING THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Now before we continue our study of the Ten Commandments with the second commandment next week, I want give you some principles for interpreting the Ten Commandments.

And I just want to let you know that I am relying heavily upon the work of Philip Ryken, Phil Johnson, Thomas Watson, and the Westminster Catechism.

1. The Ten Commandments must be interpreted in the context of the entire Bible.

Philip Ryken calls this the Biblical rule. He says, “The way to know the full and true meaning of any Bible passage is to know what the rest of the Bible says on the same theme.”

The most important rule for interpreting scripture is to interpret scripture with scripture.

In other words, we learn how to interpret the Ten Commandments by reading them in the context of the entire Bible.

What does the rest of the Bible say about each commandment?

And what we learn is that the Ten Commandments are much bigger, much broader, much deeper than initially meets the eye.

2. The Ten Commandments are inward and outward.

Romans 7:14 says, “The law is spiritual.”

The Ten Commandments are spiritual.

The moral law doesn't merely govern the physical acts of man, but the spiritual acts of man – his thoughts, emotions, and attitude.

The idea is that since God sees everything, including our emotions, attitudes, and thoughts, then He requires us to follow His commands there as well.

The Puritan **Thomas Watson** said, “The threats and prohibitions of the moral law reach the heart. The law of God forbids not only the act of sin, but the desire and inclination.... Man's law binds the hands only, God's law binds the heart.”

Jesus made this clear in the Sermon on the Mount.

It is not enough to avoid adultery; you must also avoid lust with your eyes and heart.

It is not enough to avoid murder; you must also avoid hatred.

Even the Great Commandment illustrates this principle.

We are to love God not just with our outward actions, but with our hearts, souls, and minds.

The Beatitude in **Matthew 5:8** says, “Blessed are the pure in heart.”

Pure behavior is not enough. All sin starts in the heart, and so the law requires a pure heart.

3. The Ten Commandments are positive and negative.

Philip Ryken calls this the two-sided rule, or the law of opposites, or the law of contrapositives. **He writes,** “Where a sin is forbidden, the corresponding duty is required; and where a duty is required, the corresponding sin is forbidden. There is a flip-side to every commandment. Each one contains a particular vice, while at the same time commands a particular virtue.”

For example, don’t murder also means protect life.

Don’t steal also means protect your neighbor’s property and help your neighbor when he is in need.

Don’t covet also means be content.

Honor your parents means don’t dishonor your parents.

Don’t lie means always tell the truth.

Keep the Sabbath also means that you should not be resting and lazy the rest of the work when you should be working and productive.

We see this in **Ephesians 4:28 (CSB)**. “Anyone who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to share with those in need.”

The command is not merely to stop stealing, but to get a real job, and then share with those in need.

4. The Ten Commandments are categorical.

This is called synecdoche, a figure of speech where more is intended than spoken. A part is used to signify the whole.

For example, if I bought a brand new car and said to you, “I got some new wheels,” obviously I’m not saying that I only got some new wheels; I mean that I got a new car. That’s a synecdoche.

Or if I were to say before the sermon, “It looks like we have some new faces here today,” obviously I’m not saying that we only have new faces, but also full bodies. That’s a synecdoche.

The Ten Commandments are like that.

Philip Ryken writes, “Each commandment stands for a whole category of sins. It governs not only the specific sin that is mentioned, but all the sins that lead up to it, and all the supposedly lesser sins of the same kind.”

Each of the commandments stands for the worst form of sin in that category.

For example, murder is the worst form of physical violence, and all physical violence is condemned.

Philip Ryken wrote, “In addition to murder, the sixth commandment forbids any form of physical violence. It even condemns fistfights, bodily injury, and domestic violence. It condemns neglecting our personal health. It also includes everything that leads up to these sins, such as fits of anger, reckless driving, or even playing violent video games. What God forbids is not simply murder, but everything that harms the body, threatens physical well-being, or inures us to the dangers of violence.”

Philip Ryken goes on, “So the seventh commandment includes not simply the act of adultery, but every form of sexual misconduct. Premarital sex, the use of pornography, self-stimulation – all of these sins are forbidden. Also forbidden are all the sins that lead up to adultery. God calls husbands and wives to nurture their fellowship with one another. It is unlawful for a couple to grow apart from one another physically, spiritually, emotionally, or sexually. It is also wrong for a husband or wife to have intimate relationships with other men or women, even if those relationships are not sexual – adultery begins long before two people get in bed together.”

Philip Ryken said, “The rule of categories also warns us not to commit lesser sins that by their very nature are bound to lead us into greater sins. People generally do not start out with grand larceny; they start with petty theft.”

Phil Johnson said, “When God condemns the effect, he also condemns the cause. Hatred is the cause of murder, and that’s why Jesus said it was equivalent.”

This is one of the primary reasons that Jesus condemned the Pharisees.

They reduced the law to its letter.

They were only concerned with following the letter of the law; and they ignored the spirit of the law, which is all about love for God and others.

It’s so important to remember that the ultimate aim of the law is love – love for God and love for others.

The goal is not to make ourselves look good, or to get people to respect us.

That was the mistake of the Pharisees. They used the law to exalt themselves.

The law is all about love.

Paul wrote in **1 Timothy 1:5**, “Now the goal of our instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.”

1 Corinthians 13:13 tells us that the greatest of all the virtues is love. “Now these three remain: faith, hope, and love—but the greatest of these is love.”

When we remember that the law is all about love, we’ll remember that there is much more to the Ten Commandments than just the letter of the law.

We need to stay away from not only the sin mentioned, but all the lesser sins and the actions which will tempt us to sin and lead us into sin.

Ephesians 4:27 says, “Don’t give the devil an opportunity.”

5. The Ten Commandments are personal and social.

Philip Ryken calls this the brother’s keeper rule. **He said**, “We are not allowed to encourage someone else to do what God has told us no to do. We must do everything in our power to help other people keep God’s law.”

Ernest Reisinger writes, “Whatever is forbidden or commanded of us, we are bound, according to our position, to discourage or encourage in others according to the duty of their positions.”

Romans 14:13 (CSB) says, “Therefore, let us no longer judge one another. Instead decide never to put a stumbling block or pitfall in the way of your brother or sister.”

This is explicit in the fourth commandment, Exodus 20:10. Not only must a man keep the Sabbath, but he must not allow anyone under his authority to work – his son or daughter, his servants, or even his livestock.

Thomas Watson said, “God’s law forbids not only the acting of sin in our own persons, but being accessory to, or having any hand in, the sins of others.”

6. It is never okay to commit a sin in order to avoid or prevent a greater sin.

Romans 3:8 (CSB) says, “And why not say, just as some people slanderously claim we say, “Let us do what is evil so that good may come”? Their condemnation is deserved!”

We can’t do evil so that good may come. A righteous end never justifies sinful means.

James 2:10 (CSB) says, “For whoever keeps the entire law, and yet stumbles at one point, is guilty of breaking it all.”

If you break one law in order to avoid breaking another law, you are still guilty of breaking the law. It’s never okay break the law, period.

1 Corinthians 10:13 (CSB) gives us a promise, “No temptation has come upon you except what is common to humanity. But God is faithful; he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation he will also provide a way out so that you may be able to bear it.”

There’s never an excuse to sin. God will always provide us a way out.

7. Our obligation to God is greater than our obligation to our neighbor.

The Bible makes it very clear that we are to love God first, and more than people.

Luke 14:26 says, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, and even his own life—he cannot be my disciple.”

John Piper commented on this verse, “John Piper wrote, “Following Jesus is so supremely important that it calls for behaviors that are sometimes going to look like hate to the world (*What Jesus Demands*, p. 72).”

The Great Commandment says that we are to love God with our entire being, but only love our neighbor as ourselves.

Phillip Johnson said, “All love for people must be subjugated to our love for God.”

Matthew 10:37 says, “The one who loves a father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; the one who loves a son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

Acts 5:29 says, “Peter and the apostles replied, ‘We must obey God rather than people.’”

Another way to put it is that we must never allow anyone to distract us or prevent us from loving God to the fullest.

Conclusion

When you understand the breadth of the law, how deep it is, then you can see how impossible it is to fully keep the law.

And this is a good thing.

First of all, it will prevent you from thinking that you can actually earn your way to heaven, because you will find that that’s impossible. And second, it will prevent you lowering God’s standard to the merely letter of the law.