

Lesson 23: Questions 47, 48, and 49

In Lesson 22, we began our introduction to the Law of God. We saw that the duty God requires of man is obedience to His revealed will (Q44), that the rule God first revealed to man for his obedience was the moral law (Q45), and that the moral law is summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments (Q46). That means we are not approaching the Ten Commandments as a ladder by which sinners climb into justification. We come as people who have already been taught the doctrines of sin, Christ, redemption, effectual calling, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, death, resurrection, and judgment. Now, standing in that doctrinal context, we ask how the Ten Commandments are summarized and how God Himself introduces them.

47-49

Question 47: What do the Ten Commandments teach?

Q. What is the sum of the ten commandments?

A. The sum of the ten commandments is, to love the Lord our God, with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength, and with all our mind; and our neighbour as ourselves.

The catechism begins its treatment of the Ten Commandments by asking for their “sum”. That is important. Before it walks through each commandment one by one, it teaches us the inner logic of the whole moral law. ***The Ten Commandments are not a random list of divine rules.*** They are the moral law ***summarized***, and that moral law is ***summarized*** in love: ***love*** for God and ***love*** for neighbor.

But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:34-40, ESV)

The first and great commandment is ***love for God***. The second is like it: ***love for neighbor***.

And on these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. That means love is not a ***replacement*** for God’s commandments. Love is ***the heart*** of God’s commandments. The law shows us what love requires.

This matters because modern people often pit love against law. They assume that love is ***flexible***, ***spontaneous***, and ***sincere***, while law is ***rigid***, ***external***, and ***cold***. But Scripture does not give us that opposition.

Biblical ***love*** is not ***lawless emotion***. Biblical ***law*** is not ***loveless control***.

God’s law teaches us the shape of love, and true love gladly walks according to God’s law.

The ***first table of the law*** teaches us how to love God. We love Him by having no other gods before Him (1), by worshiping Him as He commands (2), by honoring His Name (3), and by keeping His appointed rhythm of worship and rest (4). The ***second table of the law*** teaches us how to love neighbor. We love our neighbor by honoring lawful authority (5), preserving life (6), pursuing chastity (7), respecting property (8), telling the truth (9), and governing our desires (10).

So when someone says, “Christianity is about love, not rules”, we should ask, “What kind of love?” If love is detached from God’s revealed will, then love becomes whatever fallen man wants it to mean. It becomes sentiment, preference, permission, or self-expression. But if love is governed by God’s law, then love is holy. It seeks what God says is good.

Notice also the ***totality*** of love required. We are to love the Lord our God with ***all*** our heart, soul, strength, and mind. That leaves nothing outside. God does not ask for a small religious compartment within an otherwise self-governed life. He requires the ***whole*** person: affections, desires, thoughts, will, body, energy, decisions, habits, relationships, and worship.

This exposes us. If the sum of the law is love for God with all that we are and love for neighbor as ourselves, then who among us can say, “I have kept the law”? We may compare ourselves favorably to other people, but the law does not ask whether we have been more outwardly decent than our neighbor. It asks whether we have loved God perfectly and loved our neighbor rightly.

That is why this question must not become sentimental. The summary of the law in love does not make the law easier. In one sense, it makes it much more difficult. God does not require mechanical rule-keeping only. He requires love. He does not merely command the hands, but the heart. He does not merely forbid outward law-breaking. He requires inward love toward God and neighbor.

At the same time, this question also protects us from treating the commandments as bare externalism. The law is fulfilled by love. A man may avoid certain outward sins because of pride, fear, reputation, convenience, or self-interest. That is not the obedience God requires. God commands love.

Here again we see our need for Christ. Christ alone loved the Lord His God with all His heart, soul, strength, and mind. Christ alone loved His neighbor perfectly. Christ alone fulfilled the law from the heart. And those who are united to Christ are not only justified by His righteousness (i.e., His law-keeping), but also renewed by His Spirit so that we begin to love what God commands.

So Question 47 teaches us how to read the whole moral law. The Ten Commandments are not less than commandments, but they are more than bare commands. They are the revealed shape of love: love for God first, and then love for neighbor under God.

Question 48: What is their preface?

Q. What is the preface to the ten commandments?

A. The preface to the ten commandments is in these words; I am the Lord thy God which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Question 48 turns from the summary of the Ten Commandments to their preface. That may seem like a small detail, but it is not. God does not begin the Ten Commandments with, “here are My rules.” He begins with Himself: *“I am the LORD your God”*. He identifies Himself before He commands.

And God spoke all these words, saying, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. (Exodus 20:1-2, ESV)”

This preface teaches us that the commandments come from the covenant LORD and Redeemer. God’s law is not an abstract moral code floating above God. It is the revealed will of the living God Who speaks to His people. The authority of the commandments rests on God’s authority.

The first thing God says is, *“I am the LORD”*. This is Covenant Name language. God is not merely a vague deity, a higher power, or a religious concept. He is the LORD, Yahweh (YHWH), the God Who is, the God Who has spoken, the God Who keeps covenant, the God Who reveals Himself, the God Who rules, saves, and judges. The law comes from Him.

That means obedience is personal. We are not obeying an impersonal rulebook. We are obeying the living God. This is one reason sin is so serious. Sin is not merely breaking a principle. It is rebellion against the Lord. To disobey God’s law is to disobey God Himself.

Then God says, *“your God”*. That is covenant relationship. He is not only the LORD in the abstract; He is the LORD Who has taken a people to Himself. He has claimed them. He has bound them to Himself. He has set His Name upon them. The commandments come in the context of covenant.

That matters because some people imagine law and relationship are opposites. They think relationship means warmth without command, and law means command without warmth. Scripture does not speak that way. God’s covenant relationship includes commands, and His commands come within covenant relationship. The God Who says *“your God”* also says *“you shall”* and *“you shall not”*.

Then God says He brought them *“out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.”* Before Sinai, there was redemption. Before the commandments were written on tablets of stone, God had delivered His people from slavery. That order matters enormously.

Israel was not given the law so that they might earn deliverance from Egypt. God did not say, “Keep these commandments, and if you do well enough, I will bring you out of bondage.” No, He redeemed them first. Then He commanded them. Redemption came before Sinai obedience.

This does not mean Israel was redeemed in exactly the same way we speak of redemption accomplished by Christ in the New Covenant. The Exodus was a historical redemption from Egyptian bondage and a type of the greater redemption to come. But the pattern (type) is still important: God’s commands come to a redeemed people. He saves, then He instructs. He delivers, then He commands.

This guards us from legalism. The law is not a ladder out of Egypt. God brought them out. They did not climb out by obedience. But it also guards us from antinomianism. The same God Who redeemed them also commanded them. Grace does not mean, “I brought you out, so now live however you want.” Grace means, “I brought you out; therefore, you belong to Me and must obey Me.”

This is exactly why the preface matters for Christian obedience. We must not detach commandment from redemption. If we do, we will either turn them into a system of self-salvation or reject them as if they were hostile to grace. But when we read them in light of redemption, we see them rightly: the redeemed life has a shape. God saves His people and teaches them to walk before Him.

The Exodus also reminds us that sin is bondage. Egypt is not only a geographical memory; it becomes a picture (type) of slavery from which God delivers. The Israelites were not brought out so they could invent their own freedom. They were brought out to worship and serve the LORD. Likewise, Christ does not redeem us from sin so that we may become autonomous. He redeems us from slavery to sin so that we may become servants of righteousness.

What is righteousness? The opposite of sin. What is sin?

Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. (1 John 3:4, ESV)

It follows, then, that the righteousness after which we strive is lawful obedience.

So Question 48 teaches us that the Ten Commandments begin with God Himself: the LORD, our God, the Redeemer. The Law comes from the One Who has authority to command and has given grace to redeem. Therefore, the preface prevents us from reading the commandments as cold legalism. They are covenant words from the redeeming LORD.

Question 49: What does the preface teach?

Q. What doth the preface to the ten commandments teach us?

A. The preface to the ten commandments teacheth us that because God is the Lord, and our God and redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all his commandments.

Question 49 explains the theological meaning of the preface. Because God is the LORD, because He is our God, and because He is our Redeemer, therefore we are bound to keep all His commandments. That word “therefore” matters. Obedience is not detached from God’s identity or God’s saving work. It flows from both.

FIRST, we are bound to obey because God is the LORD. He is Creator, King, Judge, and Sovereign. He does not need to ask permission to command His creatures. The LORD has absolute authority over everything He has made. His commands are not suggestions. They are binding.

This is where modern man often stumbles. He wants a god who advises but does not command, comforts but does not rule, forgives but does not judge. But God is the LORD. We are bound to obey.

SECOND, we are bound to obey because He is our God. That brings the matter closer. The commandments are not merely imposed from outside, as though God were an unknown ruler issuing distant decrees. He is our God. For Israel, the preface reminded them that the LORD had taken them to Himself in covenant. For believers in Christ, the point is even richer. The God Who commands us is the God Who has made us His people in Christ.

“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us; to show the mercy promised to our fathers and to remember his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our father Abraham, to grant us that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. (Luke 1:68-75, ESV, emphasis added)

Zechariah speaks of deliverance in order that God’s people might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all their days. Notice the purpose of redemption: service, holiness, righteousness. God delivers His people so that they may live before Him.

This is deeply important. Redemption is not merely rescue from consequences. It is rescue unto worship and obedience. Christ does not save us so that we can remain devoted to the same sins that enslaved us. He saves us so that we may serve God without fear.

That phrase “without fear” matters. Gospel obedience is not servile terror. The believer does not obey in order to make God merciful. God has shown mercy in Christ. The believer obeys as one delivered, forgiven, adopted, and loved. But “without fear” does not mean without reverence, holiness, or seriousness. Zechariah immediately says “in holiness and righteousness”. Freedom from condemnation does not produce freedom from obedience. It produces freedom for obedience.

THIRD, we are bound to obey because God is our Redeemer.

Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one’s deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Peter 1:13-19, ESV)

Peter grounds holy conduct in both God’s holiness and Christ’s redemption (by precious blood). That is exactly the logic of the catechism.

Because God is holy, we must be holy.

Because Christ has redeemed us, we must live with holy conduct.

Notice how Peter speaks. He does not say, “You were ransomed, therefore obedience no longer matters.” He says the opposite. You were ransomed from futile ways. You were bought with precious blood. Therefore, be holy in all your conduct as obedient children.

This means redemption strengthens the obligation to obey. It does not weaken it. Since God made us, He has authority over us. Since God redeemed us, He has claim upon us twice over. We belong to Him by creation and redemption. The Christian is not less obligated to obey because he is saved by grace. He is more deeply bound, but now gladly, as one who has been bought with blood.

This is where we must be careful and pastoral. Some people hear “bound to keep all His commandments” and immediately fear legalism. That is understandable, especially if they have seen God’s law abused. But legalism is not the same as obedience. Legalism uses obedience as the ground of acceptance with God. Gospel obedience rests on acceptance in Christ and responds with love.

It’s also important to note that it’s not legalism if it’s right. It’s not legalism for me to be faithful to my wife. It’s not legalism for me to be honest on my taxes. It’s not legalism for me to honor my Father and Mother.

Others hear “grace” and assume that commandment-keeping must be contrary to the gospel. But that is antinomianism. Grace does not make God’s will irrelevant. Grace writes God’s law on the heart and teaches us to walk in His ways. Grace does not destroy obedience; it enables it. Listen to what Jesus says:

Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. (John 14:21, ESV, emphasis added)

What commandments would His hearers have heard? The Ten Commandments!

So the preface to the Ten Commandments teaches gospel-shaped obedience.

God is the LORD, so He has *authority*.

God is our God, so obedience is *covenantal*.

God is our Redeemer, so obedience is *grateful*.

We obey not as slaves trying to *earn* release from Egypt/sin, but as those *already* redeemed.

This also means partial obedience is not the goal. The catechism says we are bound to keep “all his commandments”. We do not get to choose our favorite commands and ignore the rest. God’s authority is not selective. His Word does not come to us as a buffet. We are not permitted to obey where obedience is easy and then negotiate where obedience is costly.

At the same time, we must remember that our obedience in this life remains imperfect. *We are not justified by the quality of our commandment-keeping*. Christ is our righteousness.

But *imperfect obedience* is not the same as *indifferent disobedience*. The believer’s obedience is real, growing, Spirit-wrought, and grateful, even though it is not yet perfect.

Q49 teaches the foundation of Christian duty. God is the LORD, our God, and our Redeemer, so we are bound to keep all His commandments. Authority, covenant, and redemption stand together.

Conclusion

Questions 47, 48, and 49 prepare us to walk through the Ten Commandments rightly.

47. **The sum of the law:** Love God with all that we are, and love our neighbor as ourselves.

48. **The preface summarized:** The God Who commands is the LORD our God, Who brought His people out of bondage.

49. **The preface explained:** Because God is the LORD, our God, and our Redeemer, we are bound to keep all His commandments.

So, let’s take this lesson with us this week in a few ways:

FIRST, we should *believe differently*.

We should stop thinking of law and love as enemies.

The law shows us the shape of love.

Love for God and neighbor is not a vague feeling; it is obedience ordered by God’s revealed will.

SECOND, we should *read* the commandments redemptively.

God does not bring His people to Sinai before bringing them out of Egypt.

Redemption comes first.

The commandments are not a ladder into salvation.

They are covenant instruction for those whom God has delivered.

THIRD, we should *obey differently*.

We do not obey to become justified.

We obey because God is the LORD, because He is our God, and because He has redeemed us.

Our obedience should therefore be humble, grateful, serious, and joyful.

So as we move into the commandments themselves, we should come *neither* as legalists *nor* as antinomians. We come as redeemed people, trusting Christ’s righteousness, depending on the Spirit’s help, and desiring to love the God Who first loved us.

The LORD has brought us, His people, out of bondage.

Therefore, we are bound to keep all His commandments.