

Lesson 35: Keep the 10 Commandments

Over the past few weeks, we've been walking through the Catechism and how the Christian is to view the 10 commandments. Hopefully by now you've seen that the 10 commandments' applications are often broader than most people think and reach the heart of what it means to:

- A) Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and strength
- B) Love your neighbor as yourself



However, there are many Christians today who believe that they no longer apply for various reasons. There are a handful of objections raised, but the overarching claim is that the 10 commandments are not binding for the believer.

My hope is that you would not claim to believe this. My hope is that everyone in this room believes in the enduring nature of God's moral law established in the commandments, but there is still a movement even within Christianity to disregard the 10 commandments.

In this lesson, I want to present the primary objection used to argue the commandments are not binding and respond to it from a Biblical worldview so that if you run into it in “the wild”, you are prepared to answer those who might seek to undermine God's Word.

Objection: “The 10 Commandments applied only to those under the Mosaic Covenant”

The Mosaic Covenant is the covenant God established with national Israel through Moses at Mt. Sinai after the Israelites were delivered from Egypt. Deuteronomy 28 summarizes the covenant:

In verses 1-13, God explains to Israel exactly what they will gain if they are fully obedient:

- They will be blessed in the city and country ([v. 3](#))
- Both their people and livestock will be fruitful ([v. 4](#))
- Their food will be plentiful ([v. 5](#))
- They will be blessed wherever they go ([v. 6](#))
- Their enemies will be defeated ([v. 7](#))
- Everything they put their hand to will be blessed ([v. 8](#))
- They will be His holy people ([v. 9](#))
- They will be respected by other nations ([v. 10](#))
- They will lend to nations and borrow from none ([v. 12](#))
- They will be at the most powerful nation ([v. 13](#))

If they fail in their part of the covenant (and they will), the opposite of the above blessings will be true about them. Every aspect of their life will be filled with agony. They will be cursed wherever they go ([v. 16](#)), they will hunger ([v. 17](#)), they will struggle with infertility, disease ([v. 22](#)), and their nation will turn to ruin as the Lord turns them over to their enemies ([v. 25](#)).

It is worth noting that God says throughout the chapter that He will be the one inflicting the suffering. It will not be a happenstance that their suffering will occur, it will be directly caused by the Lord they have rejected through their disobedience. If you want to know how seriously God takes sin, read Deuteronomy 28. The punishments for their disobedience are graphic and stomach-turning — and completely just!

What those who do not believe the 10 commandments are binding will say is that they only apply to this specific covenant with the Israelites. Well-known megachurch pastor Andy Stanley is famous for having said we need to “unhitch” from the Old Testament entirely, but I'm not going to pick on Stanley today because I view him as low-hanging fruit. Instead, listen to this from Thomas Schreiner, a professor of NT Interpretation for The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary:

“When we consider the Ten Commandments, we have to situate them in their covenantal context. After all, they’re part of the Mosaic covenant, and Christians aren’t under that covenant. For instance, the sabbath is the sign of the Mosaic covenant, of Yahweh’s covenant with Israel (Ex. 31:13, 17), but believers in Christ are no longer under the sabbath command, since it’s a shadow that points to Christ (Col. 2:16; cf. Rom. 14:5). The sabbath points to our rest in Christ (Heb. 4:1–11), and I make this case in a book on progressive covenantalism. Since the sabbath is no longer required for believers today, it’s too simplistic to say that believers must obey the Ten Commandments.”¹

Schreiner does his best to distance himself from Stanley in the rest of the article because he understands how this sounds. It sounds like he’s saying people don’t have to obey the commandments, leaving morality up to the individual. He knows Stanley has invented his own unbiblical set of morality.

Instead, Schreiner refers to “moral norms”, a set of universally understood morals, which he claims we can know because of different New Testament passages. Weirdly enough, all of the moral norms he points to sound a lot like the 10 commandments!

The problem both Schreiner and Stanley have is that without leaning on the 10 commandments as their base for the moral law, they have to pull from all kinds of places to prove what is and is not God’s moral standard. I’m going to the opposite approach:

God’s universal moral law is summarily comprehended in the 10 commandments (see Q46).

The 10 Commandments are Unique from the Other Laws given in the Mosaic Covenant:

Schreiner’s assumption that the Sabbath command is not binding on the believer is more common than you might think. If you didn’t get to listen to it, lessons 27 and 28 from Mike several weeks ago, which are available online², explain in detail why you should keep the Sabbath. I don’t want to rehash his lessons. Had Mike not already taught those lessons, I would have explained why the Sabbath is key to believing in the binding nature of the 10 commandments. Since it’s already been covered in this class...

Here are 5 reasons why the 10 commandments are unique from the rest of the law:

1) The 10 commandments are clearly broken and punished for prior to the Mosaic Covenant:

- Adam and Eve break the **1st commandment** when they attempt to become like God.
- Jacob’s household breaks the **2nd commandment** and are instructed to throw away their idols.
- The serpent breaks the **3rd commandment** when he accuses God of lying.
- An unidentified man in **Exodus 16** breaks the **4th commandment**, violating the sabbath **prior** to Israel arriving at Mt Sinai.
- Ham breaks the **5th commandment**, dishonoring his father Noah when he found him naked.
- Cain breaks the **6th commandment**, murdering his brother out of jealousy.
- Reuben breaks the **7th commandment** when he sleeps with his father’s concubine.
- Rachel breaks the **8th commandments** when she steals an idol from her father
- Abraham breaks the **9th commandment** when he lies about his wife being his sister.
- Eve breaks the **10th commandment** by coveting after the knowledge in the forbidden tree.

All of these stories happened before Moses and it was understood that they had broken God’s moral law.

¹ Schreiner, T. (2018, November 1). The Old Covenant is over. The Old Testament is authoritative. The Gospel Coalition. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/old-covenant-response-andy-stanley/>

² <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/theology-matters/id1843387755>

Just because the 10 commandments were not written on the stone tablets until much later does not mean that God had not already written on the heart of man what His expectations for them were. It is clear that every person prior to Moses knew what was right and what was wrong, even if it was not written on tablets or in the KJV.

2) They were separated from the rest of the law.

They were put onto stone tablets and given a special place in the ark of the covenant (**Exodus 25:16**). No other laws were placed in it.

3) They were the only laws written by the hand of God.

After the first tablets are broken and Moses returns to Sinai:

The Lord said to Moses, "Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. ~ Exodus 34:1

The 10 commandments are unique, in part, because God wrote them. The rest are dictated by God to Moses who writes them down in the rest of the Torah (**Exodus 34:27**). This is not to say the rest of the law is unimportant, but rather to speak to the importance of the commandments that summarize the entirety of the others. For instance, in **Mark 12:28-34**, Jesus summarizes the Law by summarizing the 10 commandments. Mike has said before that the rest of the law is 'case law' to exemplify the 10 commandments for Israel.

4) The Apostle Paul also hinges many of his arguments in his letters on the continuing application of the 10 commandments to the New Testament believer:

For this, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. ~ Romans 13:9-10

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 2 Honor your father and mother (which is the first commandment with a promise), 3 so that it may be well with you, and that you may live long on the earth. ~ Ephesians 6:1-3

I use these because they are direct quotes to the decalogue, but all of Paul's letters are filled with affirmations of the commands of the 10 commandments. He may not use the exact language, but the commands are the same. While Paul rejects the moral law as means of justification, he consistently upholds it as a universally binding law and a measure of sanctification in the life of a believer. When Jesus speaks of the Christian bearing fruit, He ultimately means the Christians obedience to His word. Our growing more like Christ is to learn and obey the commands to love God and neighbor.

5) Just because the 10 commandments were given during the Mosaic covenant, it does not mean they have expired or lapsed.

They were codified at Sinai, but they precede and outlast Moses:

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ~ Matthew 5:17-19

If the 10 commandments no longer applied, somebody should probably tell Jesus that! In the sermon on the mount, Jesus is not establishing new laws, he's explaining what the 10 commandments mean and how they still apply to them by showing the people how they regularly break them. If the 10 commandments were only binding to national Israel under the Mosaic covenant, why would He quote them to a group of people who would soon belong to the New Testament Church?

I think the answer is simple—the 10 commandments still apply because Jesus says they still apply. These commandments are not merely "moral norms." It is the desire and revealed will of God that we should obey them.

What I am Not Saying:

When the arguments above are presented, somebody who holds to the view that the commandments are no longer binding will usually respond with something like “We aren’t under the law anymore. We are under the law of Christ!” In the article I quote above, Thomas Schreiner says *“The law of Christ functions as a norm for believers (Rom. 13:8–10; Gal. 5:14; 6:2; 1 Cor. 9:20–21), the heart and soul of which is love for neighbor. And this love was exemplified supremely in Christ’s self-giving on the cross.”*

He’s not wrong on this: we are under the law of Christ. Where Schreiner diverts is when he claims that the law of Christ is a replacement for the Mosaic law and 10 commandments. If he had stopped at the Mosaic law, we’d probably be in agreement, but including the 10 commandments in the replacement is replacing laws that are enduring.

The book of Galatians is clear. The law does not have power to save and we are not “under” the law as a covenantal administration or in the sense that we still stand condemned underneath it. In Christ, we know we do not find salvation in the law. The question in all of this is not whether or not the 10 commandments have the power to save, but whether the law should still be obeyed. The Christian is not saved by the law. I am not saying that all of the Mosaic law applies to you.

I am saying that God’s moral law summarized in the 10 commandments remains the standard for loving God and our neighbor. As it was for Adam, and Eve, Abraham, Jacob, Noah, Moses, and David, so it is for us. To say that the 10 commandments no longer apply to the believer is to undermine the foundation of morality God has built from the beginning of time.

If you no longer have the 10 commandments, you’re forced to do what Schreiner does for the rest of the article:

“Someone might say at this point, ‘You do hold the same view as Andy Stanley!’ Not so fast. Romans 13:8–10 helps us unpack the nature of love, and Paul tells us that love keeps particular commands, which include commands that prohibit adultery, murder, stealing, and coveting. Paul tells us that other commands fall under this umbrella as well. In fact, when we read the New Testament, we discover that nine of the ten commandments are repeated in the New Testament (again, the exception is the sabbath). Such moral norms prevent us from sentimentality in defining what love is. So we know from the New Testament itself—from the new covenant, from the fulfillment in Jesus—the moral norms that guide our lives. No one can claim to be living a life of love while transgressing such moral norms.”

Instead of using one place to pull from and summarize God’s eternal moral law, he has to pick and choose various places that commandments are affirmed in scripture. In the very passage Schreiner quotes to support his argument in **Romans 13**, Paul is actually grounding his argument for Love of God and Brother in the 10 commandments!

The same passages I use above for OT characters disobeying various commandments, he has to use to prove that there are “moral norms” instead of relying on what God has plainly given us in His word.

Why should I care?

Understanding the 10 commandments and the ways we break them are crucial to seeing the ways we have transgressed against a holy and just God.

When His commands are not obeyed, death and calamity follow.

Only when we see our transgressions against God’s law can we see our need for Christ.

When we know what God requires of us through His law, the Holy Spirit helps us in obeying it.

God’s moral law is not some abstract concept that we have to piecemeal throughout the New Testament to find out what applies to us.

We know what applies to us.

It is God’s eternal law summarized in the 10 commandments.