

Shorter Catechism: Question 40

The Moral Law

"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul" –Psalm 19:7

Word of God (Romans 2)

¹²For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law ¹³(for not the hearers of the law *are* just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; ¹⁴for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves *their* thoughts accusing or else excusing *them*) ¹⁶in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel.

¹⁷Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, ¹⁸and know *His* will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, ¹⁹and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, ²⁰an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. ²¹You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? ²²You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? ²³You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law? ²⁴For "*the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,*" as it is written.

Question

- **Q: What did God at first reveal to man for the rule of his obedience?**

A: The rule which God at first revealed to man for his obedience, was the moral law. (Rom. 2:14–15, Rom. 10:5)

Moral Law – What is it?

- **Webster's 1828**

MOR'AL, *adjective* [Latin *moralis*, from *mos*, *moris*, manner.]

1. Relating to the practice, manners or conduct of men as social beings in relation to each other, and with reference to right and wrong. The word *moral* is applicable to actions that are good or evil, virtuous or vicious, and has reference to the law of God as the standard by which their character is to be determined.

- **James Fisher** - What is the meaning of the word *moral*, when applied to the law? A. Though the word literally has a respect to the manners of men, yet, when applied to the law, it signifies that which is perpetually binding, in opposition to that which is binding only for a time.

Moral Law – First Given At Sinai?

- **Romans 5** - ¹²Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned—¹³ (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.
 - **Shorter Catechism, Q. 14 - What is sin?** A: Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God. (1 John 3:4)
- **John Murray** – “In this period, the apostle says, “sin was in the world (v. 13). In accord with the principle stated above, this implies that there must also have been law. And the thought is that, even though the law had not been promulgated as it was by Moses at Sinai, nevertheless there was law and this is shown by the fact that there was sin – if there had been no law there would have been no sin. There is no difficulty in discovering the respects in which law was in effect during this period, and neither is there difficulty in discovering examples of the sin to which the apostle refers.”

Moral Law – Given when?

- **Larger Catechism, Q. 17** - How did God create man? A. After God had made all other creatures, he created man male and female; (Gen. 1:27) formed the body of the man of the dust of the ground, (Gen. 2:7) and the woman of the rib of the man, (Gen. 2:22) endued them with living, reasonable, and immortal souls; (Gen. 2:7, Job 35:11, Eccl. 12:7, Matt. 10:28, Luke 23:43) made them after his own image, (Gen. 1:27) in knowledge, (Col. 3:10) righteousness, and holiness; (Eph. 4:24) having the law of God written in their hearts, (Rom. 2:14–15) and power to fulfill it, (Eccl. 7:29) and dominion over the creatures; (Gen. 1:28) yet subject to fall. (Gen. 3:6, Eccl. 7:29)
- **Larger Catechism, Q. 92** - What did God at first reveal unto man as the rule of his obedience? A: The rule of obedience revealed to Adam in the estate of innocence, and to all mankind in him, besides a special command not to eat of the fruit of the tree knowledge of good and evil, was the moral law. (Gen. 1:26–27, Rom. 2:14–15, Rom. 10:5, Gen. 2:17)
- **Confession of Faith, Chapter 14 – Of the Law of God**
 1. God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which He bound him and all his posterity, to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience, promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it.
 2. This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables: the first four commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six, our duty to man.

Moral Law – Why Sinai?

- **Vos** – “It was not necessary for God to address Adam and Eve with a special revelation of the moral law, for the moral law was already written by God in their own nature. No special

revelation of the moral law was needed so long as mankind had not fallen into sin.”

- **Robert Shaw** – “That fair copy of the law which had been inscribed on the heart of the first man in his creation, was, by the fall, greatly defaced, although not totally obliterated. Some faint impressions of it still remain on the minds of all reasonable creatures. Its general principles, such as, that God is to be worshipped, that parents ought to be honoured, that we should do to others what we would reasonably wish that they should do to us—such general principles as these are still, in some degree, engraved on the minds of all men. - Rom. ii. 14,15. But the original edition of the law being greatly obliterated, God was graciously pleased to give a new and complete copy of it.”

Moral Law - Who Must Obey It?

- **Confession of Faith 14. 5** - The moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; (Rom. 13:8, 9, Eph. 6:2, 1 John 2:3–4, 7–8) and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. (James 2:10, 11) Neither doth Christ, in the Gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation. (Matt. 5:17–19, James 2:8, Rom. 3:31)
- **First Purpose** – Shows us our sin, and God’s wrath towards sinners. Leads us to Christ.
 - **Romans 3** - ¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.
- **Second Purpose** – Restraint of Evil, For Civil Use.
 - **Calvin** - “The law allows for a limited measure of justice on this earth, until the last judgment is realized.”
- **Third Purpose** – Rule of Life for our Obedience.
 - **WCF 14.6**, “...it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly;”
- **Compatible with the Gospel: Confession of Faith, 14.7** – “Neither are the forementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the Gospel, but do sweetly comply with it; (Gal. 3:21) the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely, and cheerfully, which the will of God, revealed in the law, requireth to be done. (Ezek. 36:27, Heb. 8:10, Jer. 31:33)”

Moral Law – Eternal Life Requires Obedience to It

- **J.G Vos** – Can eternal life be obtained in any other way than by the fulfilling of God’s moral law?

Absolutely not.

There is and can be no other way. God's standard has never been changed or lowered. Adam and Eve could have obtained eternal life by themselves personally fulfilling God's moral law. If they had done that, we too would thereby have obtained eternal life, and we would have been born into the world unable to commit sin. However, Adam and Eve disobeyed God, and the human race fell into sin, with the result that no one can adequately fulfill God's moral law now. Still God's standard has not been lowered.

Eternal life still depends upon absolute obedience to God's moral law. But God himself has provided the second Adam, the Lord Jesus Christ, who perfectly fulfilled God's moral law on our behalf, as our representative, so that "by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous (Rom. 5:19). We should always be careful to avoid the error that the gospel involves a lowering of the terms on which mankind can obtain eternal life.

The gospel does not involve a lowering of the terms; it involves a substitution of the person who complies with the terms: God graciously accepts Christ's fulfillment of the moral law as if it were our own attainment, and imputes or reckons it to our credit.

- **J. Gresham Machen's deathbed telegram to John Murray** - "I'm so thankful for the active obedience of Christ. No hope without it."