

## —Westminster Shorter Catechism—

### *Lesson 64—What does the preface to the Ten Commandments teach us? Qs. 43-44*

This preface is set as an entrance to the Law of God and teaches us two things in particular: 1) *who it is* that commands our obedience, and 2) the *reasons* enforcing that obedience.

#### **Who it is that commands our obedience**

- I. The law comes, not from an abstract principle, but from a real Person who's in a personal relationship with those whom He commands, Gen 1.26-27; 2.7.
- II. That Person is YHWH, the self-existing, immutable, eternal, and almighty Sovereign, WSC 4-6.
  - A. He is Jehovah, opposed to all false gods, the I AM, Ex 3.14.
  - B. He is the Lord, even Christ, the Son and Word of God. Christ gave this law in the name of the Triune God, Acts 7.38; Heb 12.24-26; Jude 5. Yet, as this is an act and revelation of the Triune God, so the Father, Son, and Spirit were all present and engaged.
  - C. He is God, Elohim (God, God Most High), the only object of supreme worship, trust, and obedience, Mt 4.10; Dt 6.4-5; Mk 12.30-31.
  - D. He is the Creator, the Ruler, the Guide, the High and Lofty One, the Most High, the Magnificent One, the Deity, the one and only, the true and living GOD.
    1. All the gods of the nations are useless, lifeless idols of men's imagination and making. Gods that have to be made and carried and protected. They are not gods, Acts 19.26.
    2. There is no GOD but GOD, and He is the God who delivered Israel out of Egypt, and us out of our spiritual bondage, and gave His Law to us, Dt 4.32-40.
- III. He is *our* God, in a special relationship with us, in covenant with us, not by our act or will, but because He chose us, first loved us, accepted us as His people, and claimed a proprietorship in us: *I am the LORD, your God*.
  - A. Notice that the God who appeared on Sinai and gave His Law to Israel was *already* in a covenant of grace with them by His promise to Abraham and His seed, Gen 12.1-3; 15.7, 18; 17.5-8. Their deliverance out of Egypt by God was the fruit of this covenant relation (Ex 2.23-25; 3.7-10) and now the giving of this Law to them by God is the fruit of this same covenant relation, Ex 20.1-2.
    1. All Israel was in this covenant in an *external* manner (as are all who members of the visible church today); but only the true believers among them, the elect, were in this covenant in a *saving* manner, Rom 9.4-8; 2Cor 13.5; Heb 3.12-4.3.
  - B. A preface is something an author wishes the reader to know before reading the book. God's preface is a simple statement of historical fact. He delivered us. He acted for us. He took the initiative. We were helpless and hopeless, and He came in with Help and Hope. He is our God and calls us to honor Him with our life.
  - C. While God made this covenant with Abraham and his seed, Paul says we're incorporated into it by faith, showing ourselves to be the true, spiritual offspring of Abraham, heirs of this covenant God and His Law, by faith in Christ, Gal 3.7-9, 13-14, 29.

#### **The reasons enforcing that obedience**

- I. Notice the singular pronoun used in the preface and throughout the Ten Commandments. This indicates that the Law was given, not merely to a nation or the multitude of the redeemed, but to each and every one personally, who must render a personal obedience.
- II. Notice from the preface that the central motivation for our obedience to all God's laws, with all the heart, all the time, is *gratitude for His covenant relation with us*.
  - A. He has delivered us. We should be thankful. And as a sign of our gratitude, we're bound to keep His laws. This is not salvation by works, but works as a fruit of our thanks for His saving. And the more we grow in our gratitude and love for God, the more readily, cheerfully, fully, and diligently we'll

strive to obey Him. None can keep the law perfectly, but we're to have a mind to do so, a heart that desires to do so, and a will consented to the doing of it.

- B. We are bound to God by covenant, all of us *externally* and, if by faith, then also *savingly*. And it's as those bound already that God gives us His law.
1. That means our obedience isn't the condition of the covenant, Rom 4.11-12; Ex 2.23-25; 3.7-10; Eph 2.8-10; Tit 2.11-14. The covenant of works was conditioned upon obedience, Gen 2.17; Gal 3.10; but the covenant of grace enables obedience, Eph 2.8-10; Gal 3.21-24.
  2. When God comes to us in covenant grace, giving Himself to us to be our God (particularly in the case of our covenant children), He calls for our consent, Gen 17.1; Eph 4.1. And when we give that consent—in the exercise of faith in Him—we take Him for our God and we take the yoke of all His Commandments upon us, that we might live only for Him, wholly and forever, Isa 44.5.
  3. Faith lays hold of God to be *our* God, to be the One who *delivers us from sin* and who *enables us to obey Him*. Faith brings nothing to God, because it denies all self-righteousness, and lays hold of God for both righteousness (justification) and holiness (sanctification), Tit 3.5-8; Ezk 36.25-27. Faith believes in order to be justified (Rom 5.1) as well as in order to be sanctified (Gal 2.19).
  4. God comes to us in saving grace with His Law and we prove ourselves recipients of that grace by our obedience to His Law, which is the sure fruit of His saving work in our hearts, Eph 2.10; Jn 14.21.
- III. The obedience called for in the Law of God is neither a mechanical, heartless obedience out of a sense of obligation nor a slavish, fear-filled obedience out of a sense of the dread of punishment. Rather, it is, on our part, the exercise and practice of our *love for God*, Rom 13.10; Jn 14.15, 21, and on God's part, the fruit of His redeeming *grace in us*, Ezk 36.25-27; Eph 2.10; Gal 2.20.
- A. This is why in the *Guilt, Grace, Gratitude* division of the Heidelberg Catechism, the exposition of the Ten Commandments is found in the *Gratitude* section, following the section on God's initiating grace to us. Likewise, in Godefridus Udemans' exposition of the Apostles' Creed, the Ten Commandments, and the Lord's Prayer, entitled *Faith, Hope, and Love*, the Ten Commandments are in the section called, "The Practice of Love".

### Inferences

- I. Watson, "Though the moral law be not a Christ to justify us, it is a rule to instruct us, Pr 6.23. The moral law is a hedge to keep us within the bounds of sobriety and piety. Believers are not under the curse of the law, but they are under its commands. They who cast God's laws behind their back, God will cast their prayers behind His back. For they who will not have the law to rule them here will have the law to judge them hereafter."
- II. Thus the Ten Commandments were not given to Israel or to us as a covenant of works, but within the context of the covenant of grace. Amongst all the reasons for our obedience, there's not one of terror, but only the sweet savor of gospel grace. Review the lessons on the Marrow of Modern Divinity.
- III. The true and only way to attain to the obedience of God's Law is *first* to believe that God is our God in Christ (that He has come to us in grace to save us), *and then* to give ourselves to them out of gratitude and love for His redeeming and enabling grace. The covenant of works said, "Do and live", but the covenant of grace says, "Live and do" or "Believe and do". Obedience must follow faith in the gospel, without which it's impossible to please God, Heb 11.6. God only accepts that obedience which is rendered by faith in Christ's justifying and atoning work as our Redeemer.
- IV. The Ten Commandments are binding on all men because God is their Creator, but they are especially binding on the church, in which God is their Covenant Maker, and most of all on believers, of whom God is their Redeemer and Saviour. Thus, Christians are more strongly bound than all others. Their love for Christ constrains them to run in the way of His Law, Ps 119.32, and their gratitude to God for their salvation causes them to walk in the fear of Him all their days, Lk 1.74-75.