

## Q. What is wrong with the reading of the Ten Commandments each Sunday in church or with Christians wanting them posted in public places?

The question stems from a statement I made in another article. I began by quoting a nineteenth-century Baptist preacher:

Notice what the Baptist preacher, Gilbert Beebe, wrote in 1869: "There are but few lessons in the gospel, which the saints have been more slow to learn and fully comprehend, than that of our release from the law, and marriage to Christ" ("Loosed From the Law" <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/loosedlaw.html>).

Beebe's claim that this is a lesson that the saints are slow to learn can be seen in the battle Christian conservatives have fought to allow the Ten Commandments to be posted in public places. I understand the issues of religious freedoms and free speech involved, but why the Ten Commandments? Why not the Sermon on the Mount? Or the Golden Rule, "And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise" (Luke 6:31). Another example can be heard in many churches every Sunday morning. If you attend one of these churches, you will likely see the pastor stand at the pulpit and read the Ten Commandments every Sunday morning. But this is an error.

"Dead to the Law,"  
<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/deadtothelaw.htm>

I don't want to be misunderstood as saying that it is wrong for Christians to read the Ten Commandments as we study the Old Testament or to ever refer to the existence of the Ten Commandments in a sermon. What I am saying is that it is wrong to hold the Ten Commandments up as the law for Christians, which is what is implied when Christians want them posted in public places or when preachers

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readtencommandmentsqa.pdf

read them over their congregations. Christians of many denominations have fought to get the Ten Commandments posted in places such as courtrooms and city halls. The reading of the Ten Commandments on Sunday might also be practiced in churches of any denomination, but it is particularly prevalent in Reformed churches. Reformed churches use what they call the Three Forms of Unity—the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dordrecht—as their statements of faith.

Concerning the preaching of the Ten Commandments, the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 44, Q. 115 says this:

Q. Why will God then have the ten commandments so strictly preached, since no man in this life can keep them?

A. First, that all our lifetime we may learn more and more to know our sinful nature, and thus become the more earnest in seeking the remission of sin and righteousness in Christ; likewise, that we constantly endeavor, and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us in a life to come.

I could write several articles explaining why the catechism's answer here is so abysmally wrong, and, thus, why it is wrong for a preacher to read the Ten Commandments over his congregation. I will at least try to make some quick points.

1. If we are converted Christians who are forgiven our sins, filled with the Holy Spirit, and living under the New Covenant, why should we continually hit ourselves over the head with a law given only to Jews under a now fulfilled and defunct covenant? (see, among many other articles on this website, "The Superiority of Jesus Christ and His New Testament Revelation" <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/ntsuperiorot.htm>). Why not use the Code of Hammurabi? Or perhaps we should flagellate ourselves like medieval monks. If God wants us to know something about ourselves, He is perfectly capable of communicating this information to us using the Holy Spirit and the New Covenant laws written on our hearts without resorting to laws written on stones that were given to an ancient people. The Ten Commandments were only a shadowy type of the laws that are written on our hearts; the Israelites were only a shadowy type of God's spiritual nation today.

2. The second half of the first sentence of the catechism's answer suggests that the reading of the Ten Commandments is to make us "more earnest in seeking the remission of sin and righteousness in Christ." Where does the Bible say that converted Christians are to continue to seek "the remission of sin and righteousness in Christ"? Christ's atonement on the Cross is a completed historical fact. It is applied to us completely and wholly when we trust in Jesus as our Savior. Period. To say that we must continue to more earnestly seek the remission of sin and to more earnestly seek His righteousness is a Protestant form of the Catholic mass—sacrificing Christ over and over again. Either that, or it is saying that we didn't receive remission of sin and righteousness in Christ in the first place, thus leaving us in continual doubt as to our salvation. How earnest must we be before we receive it? Maybe I wasn't earnest enough last Sunday when I heard the law; I'll try it again this week. I hope you see how blasphemous this answer in the catechism is. It is one of the reasons why I say in the article "Are You Following the Doctrines of Antichrists?" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/antichrist.htm>) that Reformed preaching is a preaching of antichrists.

3. The second part of the catechism's answer suggests that the reading of the Ten Commandments will result in our becoming "more and more conformed to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us in a life to come." Did the writers (Ursinus and Olevianus) of the Heidelberg Catechism and its approvers (Elector Frederick III and the Synod of Heidelberg) never read Galatians 2:21? "I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." Did they never read any of Galatians? The word "law" appears 25 times in Galatians, and it is a good education to read each of those verses in succession. But for now, just notice eight of those verses:

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Galatians 2:16

For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

Galatians 2:19

For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them. But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith. And the law is not of faith: but, The man that doeth them shall live in them. Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:

Galatians 3:10-13

Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.

Galatians 5:4

But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

Galatians 5:18

How can anyone who has any understanding of the Bible read those verses and then turn around and tell people that we are to use the law to conform to the image of God and arrive at perfection? They may say that some of the Scriptures I have quoted say not to use the law for justification, and that they do not teach using the law for justification. But can they then tell me precisely the difference between justification (which is exactly the same Greek word in the Bible as righteousness, and is the same thing) and what they call conforming to the image of God and arriving at perfection? If they say they mean sanctification, then I ask where the Bible says to be sanctified by the law. It says to be sanctified through the truth (John 17:19); to be sanctified by faith in Jesus (Acts 26:18); sanctified by the Holy Ghost (Romans 15:16); sanctified by the word of God and prayer (1 Timothy 4:5); sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all (Hebrews 10:10); and sanctified by God the Father (Jude 1:1). But it never says that Christians are to be sanctified by the law or by the Ten Commandments or by the Old Covenant.

This teaching in the catechism is blindness, and it is a blindness brought on by the law itself: "But their minds were blinded: for until this day remaineth the same vail untaken away in the reading of the old testament; which vail is done away in Christ. But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart" (2 Corinthians 3:14-15).

Even if we were to take the catechism's answer as referring to unconverted people sitting in church, it would still be wrong. I address the mistaken idea of using the law to evangelize the unconverted here: "Should we preach the law to bring people to Christ?" <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/preachlawqa.htm>.

I explain in the article "In what way did Jesus fulfill the law?" (<http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/jesusfulfilllawqa1.htm>) that Jesus has fulfilled all of the law, including the Ten Commandments. Since He has fulfilled the commandments, they are ended. The disagreement between Reformed/Covenant Theology and New Covenant Theology is that Reformed/Covenant Theology does not accept that the Ten Commandments are ended.

Reformed/Covenant Theology conflates the Old and New Covenants together. It says that the New Covenant is merely a new administration of the Old Covenant. By saying this, they are saying that everyone is still under the Old Covenant with merely some administrative changes. To maintain this position, they have created a tangled web of muddled theology to try to explain away the clear meaning of such Scriptures as Hebrews 8:6-13:

But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first

old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

But Reformed theologians don't want that Old Covenant to decay and wax old and vanish away (which vanishing was completed in AD 70). Like a blind and stupid puppy, they want to chew on that old worn out slipper and play with it as if it were something wonderful, all the while ignoring the filet mignon the master gives.

The saints under the Old Covenant looked ahead by faith to the Messiah who would provide salvation. This was the promise and the promise was by grace through faith (read Romans 4). The saints living in the time of the Old Testament were not saved by finding grace in the Old Covenant; grace wasn't there except as it was pictured in types and shadows. They were saved by believing the gracious promise in God's covenant to Abraham of the Seed, which promise predated the Old Covenant with Israel: "And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect. For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise: but God gave it to Abraham by promise" (Galatians 3:17-18).

In the Old Testament, the saints looked ahead and continued to observe the types that pointed ahead to Christ and the Cross. Today, we don't look ahead to these. Now we look back on the completed work of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament types have ended and are to be discarded. The Ten Commandments are among these types. There is no more reason for someone to stand in front of a congregation and read the Ten Commandments on Sunday than there is for him to sacrifice a lamb.

Many Reformed people cite Matthew 5 and say that Christ expounded on the Ten Commandments. But a careful reading of Matthew 5 shows that Jesus was merely using the Ten Commandments and other laws as springboards from which to introduce his new laws (see "The Sermon on the Mount part 3" <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/sermononthemount3.htm>). Matthew 22:35-46 is also mentioned by those who would have us keep the Ten Commandments. But notice that Jesus is answering a question from a Jewish lawyer living under the Old Covenant. The question is, "Which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus answers the question according to the law that was in force for Israel at that time. In the New Covenant instituted at His death, He does not tell His followers to keep the Ten Commandments. He also does not say, as

He is commonly misinterpreted as saying, that what matters is the heart or love in keeping the Ten Commandments. The Old Covenant command to love our neighbor as ourselves was a shadowy forerunner of Jesus' New Covenant commands concerning love—to love one another and to love even our enemies. But Jesus did not say that keeping His New Covenant commands were a way of keeping the Old Covenant Ten Commandments.

When we read the Gospels, we must understand that Jesus was a Jew living under the law. Thus, He kept the law (see Galatians 4:4-5). Notice what He said to a rich Jew living under the law: "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17). He even listed some of the Ten Commandments (verses 18-19). The Jews were required to keep the law. They couldn't succeed and were thus condemned unless saved by grace. Nevertheless, Jesus was perfectly right to tell this Jew to keep the Ten Commandments. But Jesus did not tell Christians to keep the Ten Commandments.

Reformed Theology itself is rife with legalism being pushed under such disguises as teaching the "moral law" and using the law as a rule of life (see "What Really Happened in the Garden of Eden?" <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/eden.htm> for more on this). But the Bible teaches there is no sense whatsoever in which Christians are under the law (see "Gadsby's Questions About the Law" <http://www.wordofhisgrace.org/gadsbylaw.html>).

*For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.*

*John 1:17*

*For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*

*Romans 6:14*

*I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.*

*Galatians 2:21*