

Westminster Larger Catechism

Question 97

Halifax, 15 November 2009

Q. 97 What special use is there of the moral law to the regenerate?

- A. Although they that are regenerate, and believe in Christ, be delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works, so as thereby they are neither justified nor condemned; yet, besides the general uses thereof common to them with all men, it is of special use, to show them; how much they are bound to Christ for his fulfilling it, and enduring the curse thereof in their stead, and for their good; and thereby to provoke them to more thankfulness, and to express the same in their greater care to conform themselves thereunto as the rule of their obedience.**

Introduction:

Today we continue our study of the moral law and its use.

The moral law, I remind you, is the law that God wrote in our hearts at Creation.

- He made us after His image, and so, as such, we were endowed with an innate sense of right and wrong.
- And this sense of right and wrong was perfectly co-ordinate with what pleases God (who is pleased with what is right).
- And, not only that, but this sense of right and wrong was also reflective of God's character as an eternally existing trinity, living unchangeably in perfect love,
 - The Father always loving the Son and the Son always pleasing the Father, and the Holy Spirit likewise being loved by the Father and the Son, and always loving the Father and Son with perfect love and obedience.
 - We were created to be, on a finite level, all that God is in character and love and justice and holiness on an infinite level...
 - and being His creatures, were to be all this through dependency on Him as our instructor and our enabler.

It was a glorious arrangement!

- But God, in His wisdom and divine purpose, also made us subject to fall,
 - even providing us with a way for us to break out of the relationship we had with Him as His moral image by eating of the forbidden fruit.
- And with unspeakable folly, that is just what we did.
 - Adam represented us, and we through him, we broke out of this beautiful relationship with God as His image and became sinners, defiled and cursed.
 - We destroyed the moral beauty that we had and lost our moral rectitude.

- However, the work of the law that was written in our hearts remained as a skeleton so that we are capable of recognising right and wrong, good and evil;
 - though now with many distortions and twists.
 - We are left with a sense of right and wrong that makes us uncomfortable and eager to find ways to excuse ourselves.

And now the question may be asked,

- What use is the moral law to us now that we are fallen?
 - It possesses no power to change us, and in fact, by exposing our moral corruption,
 - the moral law itself tells us that we are hopeless.
 - It tells us that we have transgressed the holy Law of God and that being guilty in any one point, we are guilty of all.
 - As transgressors, we have brought ourselves under God's wrath and curse and are condemned forever as guilty sinners.
 - The law shows, as Romans 3:19 says, that the whole world is guilty before God.
 - So what use is this law that only has power to condemn us?
- Well, of course we have seen the answer to that in previous studies...
 - The law is useful because it vindicates God, showing us our transgression.
 - It shows us that He is fully justified in condemning us, even though this is something we constantly try to deny.
- But it also has another very important purpose.
 - It shows us that we need to be redeemed!
 - The message of redemption begins by exposing us as sinners who have transgressed God's moral law...
 - and then having exposed us, it calls us to repent and believe on Jesus Christ.
 - It calls us to turn away from our sin and come to Jesus Christ for forgiveness!
 - He came to this earth to bear the wrath and curse of God in the place of guilty sinners.
 - And God's promise is that whoever believes in Him will not be condemned but will be pardoned and given everlasting life.
 - So God's law not only vindicates God who has justly condemned us...
 - It also prepares us to receive Christ by showing us our need of Him.
 - It exposes our sin and our guilt and even our condemnation so that we will see our need to turn to Christ for complete forgiveness.

And of course, once you come to Christ and believe, there is no more condemnation.

- There cannot be any more condemnation because you are trusting in the very work Jesus did to redeem guilty sinners... and his work cannot fail.
 - You are doing what God calls sinners to do when they wish to be saved;
 - You are relying on the provision that He has made for complete forgiveness.
 - And now, even though you are a transgressor, you are fully and forever pardoned.
 - It is as if you have done all that Jesus has done for you...
 - It is as if you have fully borne the complete penalty of your sin and as if you are now morally perfect (as perfect as He is).
 - There is no condemnation—you are fully accepted on account of Christ whom you are now trusting.

And that brings us to our topic for this week.

- What use is there of the moral law now that you have been redeemed (if indeed you have been redeemed)?
 - You have seen the hopelessness of trying to establish your own righteousness by keeping of the law—
 - you realise that once a transgressor, there is nothing you can do—
 - and you have turned to Christ alone for your righteousness.
 - So what use does the moral law have now that you are born again?

In order to answer this question, we are going to have to look at several different passages,

- but I want to begin by showing you with absolute certainty that the law has a purpose in a believer's life.
- There can be no question about this because of what we are told in Hebrews 10:15-18.
- Please turn to Hebrews 10:15-18 and I will read it to you:
 - READ> Hebrews 10:15-18.

Now you can see very plainly that this is talking about what is true of the one who believes on the LORD Jesus Christ for salvation.

- There are two things that the LORD promises to do.
 - Let's look at the second thing first, since it is not our focus this afternoon...
 - The second is found in verse 17. God says:
 - Heb 10:17: "Their sins and lawless deeds I will remember no more."
 - That is forgiveness. God completely forgives us.
 - By not remembering our sins, it does not mean that He develops divine amnesia...

- no, it means that He does not remember them against us—so as to charge us with them or to condemn us for them.
- They are removed as far as the east is from the west.
 - That is His wonderful promise to us.
- That is the second promise in this passage, and as I say, that is not what we are concerned with today as far as our topic.
 - We are concerned with the first thing this passage tells us which has to do with God’s moral law.
 - It is the promise to the believer found in verse 16:
 - Heb 10:16: “I will put my law into their hearts, and in their minds I will write them.”
 - It is quite certain in the overall context of Hebrews that this law that God says He will write on the believer’s heart is **not** the Law of Moses.
 - The author refers to the law of Moses in verse 1 of chapter 10:
 - Heb 10:1 “For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come.”
 - But He is not talking about the Law of Moses when he speaks about God writing his law on our hearts.
 - The whole point of Hebrews is to show that something superior to the Law of Moses has come in place of that Law of shadows and ceremonies of Christ.
 - Now that Christ has come, the shadows are no longer needed.
 - You see here that it is a promise of the new a better covenant that God will put His law on the believer’s heart.
 - You see how absolutely absurd it would be for him to put the Law of Moses that is being replaced upon the hearts of His people under the New Covenant.
 - So what is this law but the moral law?
 - It is “His laws”—what he desires of His people as far as their moral conduct!
 - God will give them a heart to please Him.

Now the point is that if God puts His moral law in our hearts when we become believers, the law obviously has a very important purpose for us as believers!

- That purpose is not to somehow merit the forgiveness of sins or to make up from the wrongs we have done—
 - because that is accomplished by Jesus Christ who shed His blood—
 - That is why there is promise of the complete forgiveness of sin (v. 17 again).

- But the moral law is put into our hearts for other reasons.
 - And today I want to explore with you what those reasons are.
 - In fact, we will look at four particular ways the law helps us as believers.

I. First, having the moral law in your heart helps you to attain a deeper appreciation that Christ has died for a sinner like you.

A. For consideration of this, I would point you to Jesus' saying regarding the immoral woman who washed his feet with her tears.

1. Turn with me to Luke 7:36 and let's look at it.

- Luke 7:36-47: Then one of the Pharisees asked Him to eat with him. And He went to the Pharisee's house, and sat down to eat. And behold, a woman in the city who was a sinner, when she knew that Jesus sat at the table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of fragrant oil, and stood at His feet behind Him weeping; and she began to wash His feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hair of her head; and she kissed His feet and anointed them with the fragrant oil. Now when the Pharisee who had invited Him saw this, he spoke to himself, saying, "This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching Him, for she is a sinner." And Jesus answered and said to him, "Simon, I have something to say to you." So he said, "Teacher, say it." "There was a certain creditor who had two debtors. One owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. "And when they had nothing with which to repay, he freely forgave them both. Tell Me, therefore, which of them will love him more?" Simon answered and said, "I suppose the one whom he forgave more." And He said to him, "You have rightly judged." Then He turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave Me no water for My feet, but she has washed My feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head. "You gave Me no kiss, but this woman has not ceased to kiss My feet since the time I came in. You did not anoint My head with oil, but this woman has anointed My feet with fragrant oil. Therefore I say to you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she loved much. But to whom little is forgiven, the same loves little."
- The point is very clear.
 - This woman has a stronger love for Jesus than Simon does because she has been forgiven for much and she knows it.

2. The more you understand how much you have been forgiven, the more you love Jesus.

- This Pharisee had grown up in the covenant and had outwardly conformed to God's law, so he felt pretty good about himself.
 - He regularly kept up his religious devotions and he worshipped God according to His commandments.
 - He did not steal or commit adultery or murder people; at least, not according to the letter of the law.
 - So for him, even if he believed himself to be in need of forgiveness, he did not have a sense that there was *much* he needed to be forgiven for.

- He was like many who grow up in the church today who have always tried to follow God's commandments...
 - and when they hear a verse like Romans 5:7-8 that says:
 - Ro 5:7-8: For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
 - They agree that they are sinners and that it is a wonderful thing that Christ died for them as sinners,
 - but sometimes the impact of such a tremendous statement doesn't really grip them.
 - When it comes to a real appreciation of what Jesus did,
 - they are more like Simon than the woman with her tears.
 - They love Him and appreciate what He did, but not nearly as much as this woman.

B. And this is where having God's law in your heart makes all the difference!

1. Because when God has put his law in your heart so that it really speaks into your life—so that it is in you and is a part of you...
 - so that you see it not as mere human rules or a mere outward standard, but as the will of a holy God who is too holy for you to come near...
 - a God before whose presence you would be consumed in eternal flames of vengeance because of your sin and corruption...
 - a God before whom you dare not present yourself without the covering of Jesus' sacrifice...
 - I say, when God's law is in your heart so that you begin to see more and more clearly what you really are before Him...
 - your appreciation for the fact that Jesus would die for you begins to go way up!
2. In fact, I would challenge you that even if you are one who has grown up serving the Lord,
 - You can potentially have a greater appreciation for what Christ has done than the woman who had lived an immoral life and been marvellously saved!
 - It does not depend as much upon how wild you have been as it does upon how undeserving you perceive yourself to be of God's salvation!
 - All your life, you have been learning about God and His purity and what He requires...
 - and if His law is in your heart, you ought to have a very good grasp of it by now...
 - and if you do, you will be greatly humbled.

- The problem is that so many who grow up in the church don't really have this grasp of God's law—they only have a superficial understanding like Simon.
 - But it does not need to be this way!
- 3. Isaiah is a great example of a holy man who was laid in the dust when he came to face to face with God.
 - He cried out, confessing, "Woe is me, for I am undone."
 - He felt that he was going to come apart!
 - He knew that he was a gross transgressor.
 - I don't think Isaiah was comparing himself to others.
 - I don't think you would have heard him say,
 - "At least I'm not like this sinful woman over here!"
 - He was before the face of God and He was undone!
 - He had come short of what God requires!
 - You can be sure that because God's law was in his heart,
 - He had a very high appreciation for what the forgiveness of God!
 - He loved much because he knew he had been forgiven much.
 - The potential is there for all of us if we have God's law in our heart.
 - You can all marvel that Christ should come to save a wretch like you!

TRANS> What I have to show you next is closely related to this...

- When you have God's law written in your heart
 - it not only helps you to appreciate that Christ would die for so great a sinner as you...
 - it also helps you to appreciate the depth of what He had suffer.
 - That's right...

II. Second, having the moral law in your heart helps you to attain a deeper appreciation for what Christ had to bear for you.

- A. The Bible tells us that Jesus bore the full punishment for our sins.
 - Consider, for example, a verse like Isaiah 53:6:
 - Isaiah 53:6: All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.
 - When you hear a verse like that, what does it mean to you?
 - What determines how much you appreciate what Jesus has done in bearing our sins for us?
 - When you think about your sin being laid on Him, how well do you understand what that involves?

- Does it not have an awful lot to do with what you understand your sin and its penalty to be?
 - I mean, if God's law is in your heart in such a way that you have a good understanding of it,
 - you know that God's law demands everlasting shame and punishment for your sin...
 - and the very thought that our dear Lord Jesus Christ would come into this world to bear *that* shame and *that* punishment for us is absolutely marvellous to you!
- B. And so here again, as you have God's law in your heart and you grow in your understanding of what God He really requires of you,
- You also grow in your understanding of what Christ has borne for you!
 - Not only are you amazed that He would do anything for a sinner like you...
 - but you are all the more amazed that He would bear so great a curse for you and such great shame for you!
 - You understand more and more how much He despised that shame and that curse.
 - You understand more and more how it was that He agonised so much before the He went to the cross...
 - so much that blood began to ooze from His pours!
 - In Ephesians 3, Paul told the Ephesians that he earnestly prayed for them that they would be able to
 - Eph 3:18-19: comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.
 - Part of that comprehension of Christ's love is dependent upon having God's law in your heart...
 - so that you have a growing understanding of what great things He has suffered for you.
 - As your understanding of what is required from our holy God grows, so does your understanding of the deep, deep love of Jesus!
 - Blessed be His glorious name!
 - What wondrous love is this, for my soul, for my soul,
What wondrous love is this for my soul.
What wondrous love is this that caused the LORD of bliss
to bear the dreadful curse, for my soul for my soul!
- III. Third, having the moral law put into your heart helps you to comprehend the moral perfection of God, of Christ, and of the holy life we are called to live.**

- As you understand what the moral law requires, you understand the character of God, the character of Christ, and the character you are called to cultivate.
 - Let us begin with a look at how the law helps us to understand God's character, then at Christ's, and finally at the perfected believer's.
- A. When we think of God's character revealed in the law, it takes us back to the study we looked at a few weeks ago in Deuteronomy 5:23-33.
- That is the passage that speaks about Israel's right response after God had presented the Ten Commandments to them at Sinai.
 - You remember—they pled with Him to never appear to them like that again because they were so terrified they felt sure they would die!
 - By revealing His law to them,
 - God was revealing Himself!
 - When they saw what God requires of us as human beings, they saw His own glorious holiness and moral perfection.
 - As I showed you at that time,
 - God's law for us is a reflection of who He is...
 - We, who are made in His image, are called to imitate the love that has been between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
 - And that love is revealed to us, in part, in the standard that God has given to us as human beings.
 - When we have God's law in our hearts and our delight in it and our understanding of its implications is growing,
 - so also is our understanding of who God is and of His moral perfection.
 - When He made His moral law known afresh at Sinai, He was making Himself known.
 - When you learn the law, you learn how much God hates sin and loves righteousness.
 - And that makes you a better worshipper of God.

TRANS> But you not only learn more of God in His own nature when the law is in your heart,

B. You also see more and more the glorious moral perfection of Christ incarnate.

1. We are told in scripture that our Lord Jesus was righteous.
 - He Himself tells us that He always does what pleases the Father...
 - And Hebrews 7:26 says that as our priest, He was
 - Heb 7:26: holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners

- This does not refer to Him in His eternal state, but in human flesh—as the one who became flesh and dwelt among us!
 - He was a perfect, completely sinless human being.
 - That was absolutely necessary if He was to save us—He had to Himself be without sin so that He could bear our sins.
 - And so He was without sin!
2. But what does that mean?
- I mean, what do you understand that to mean?
 - Your understanding of what it means for Him to be without sin is only as great as your understanding of God’s holy law.
 - The more you understand God’s moral requirement, the more you understand the perfection of Jesus.
 - For example, when you read that Jesus was holy and undefiled, your understanding of that depends on your understanding of what God considers holiness to be.
 - When you know that the Law commands us to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength, and you realise that Jesus actually did that,
 - then you gain a fuller understanding of just how unique Jesus really is when we say that He is without sin!
 - Of course, it works that other way too...
 - The more you understand about Jesus, the more you understand about God’s moral requirement (because He is a perfect example).
 - I have spoken to you about this many times—
 - You gain a tremendous understanding of what the command to “love your neighbour” means when you see how Jesus loved His neighbour—by going to the cross for us!
 - You gain a renewed understanding of what it means to “have no other gods before me” when you see Jesus devoting Himself to obey the Father even to the point of going to the cross.
3. And so it is that as we grow in our understanding of God’s law, we grow in our delight in our dear Lord Jesus and in all that He is as a perfect man who has no sin!
- And of course, because He is also the Son of God, it is only proper for us to worship Him in His perfections...
 - We say to Him with pure delight and admiration, as in Psalm 45,
 - Ps 45:7: You love righteousness and hate wickedness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.

- And the more we understand what it really means to love righteousness and to hate wickedness,
- the more we delight in Him.

TRANS> So you see how growing in your understanding of God's law helps you to understand the moral perfection of God and of Christ incarnate.

C. Now I want you to see that it also helps you to understand the glorious moral perfection to which God has called you... because it is the same as His!

1. God has called us to holy as He is holy, to be perfect as He is perfect...
 - That is the standard, and as we grow in our understanding of God's moral law, we realise more and more what a truly marvellous standard that is!
 - And there is not a one of us, when the law is written in our hearts, who could ever dream that we could attain to righteousness by law keeping!
 - We realise that the standard is way too high for us.

2. Yet, at the same time, we delight all the more in God's promise that when we see Jesus, we will be like Him (1 John 3:2)
 - And in the promise that He has predestinated us that we should be conformed to the image of His Son!
 - The very thought that we are going to love like Jesus loved and be perfect as He is perfect!
 - It is a marvellous thing indeed!
 - And all the more marvellous the more you understand what that perfect standard is.

TRANS> And this brings us to our final point...

IV. Fourth, having the moral law in your heart helps you to keep it.

A. When God puts the law in your heart, what He is actually doing is changing your heart by the powerful working of the Holy Spirit.

1. He gives you a yearning to do what is pleasing to God, and a delight in the things that please Him.
 - He causes you to repent, to turn away from your sin with an aversion toward it.
 - And then to turn to His holy ways.
 - You want to have God's law fill every part of you—to permeate you so that you are indeed like Jesus Christ in every way—morally speaking.

2. The scriptures teach us this about conversion...
 - For example, in Romans 7:22, Paul says:
 - Rom 7:22: "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man."

- And in Titus 2:14, we are told that this is one the reasons that Jesus gave Himself for us. It says of Him:
 - Titus 2:14: “who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself *His* own special people, zealous for good works.”
- David is a great example of this.
 - He is called a man after God’s own heart because he wanted to please God.

B. But there is more than just a new desire to do God’s commandments.

1. When God puts His law in your heart and His Spirit within you,

- He also enables you to actually begin to keep God’s commandments—to walk in them—to do them!
 - Not perfectly, but you begin to do it more and more...
 - You are given power to obey!

2. Look with me at 1 John 5 and you can see that this is so:

- 1 John 5:1-5: “Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?”
- You see here that there is actually progress made in the believer’s life...
 - He begins to love God, and His love is expressed in the same way that love is always expressed for God—
 - He begins to keep His commandments.
 - It is obvious that the one who loves God keeps God’s commandments.
 - What kind of love would it be for God to say that you love Him if you do not give yourself earnestly to do what pleases Him?
 - Would you say that a woman really loves a man (provided he is a godly man) if she is always doing things that he hates?
 - Of course not!
 - We show our love for God by doing what pleases Him.
 - Of course we still struggle with our weakness because there is not a righteous man on earth that does not sin...
 - But as John tells us here in 1 John 5,
 - 1 John 5:4: “Whatever is born of God overcomes the world! And this is the victory that overcomes the world—our faith”

- When we have faith in Jesus Christ—true saving faith—there will always be a change in the way we live—
 - we will begin to live a commandment-keeping life.
 - By the grace of God, you begin to walk in the new life into which God has brought you,
 - the moral law being your guide to show you what is pleasing to Him.
 - The Law is not burdensome to you as it was when you were an unbeliever.
 - It is a most welcome help because it shows you what is pleasing to the one you love...
 - You can't wait to get to heaven where you will only do what is pleasing to Him,
 - but until then, you will make it your aim to do what is pleasing to Him—to walk according to His moral law which is in your heart.
 - And by the grace of God, you will.

Conclusion:

- So you see, my brothers and sisters, that the moral law is very useful to the believer!
 - God has not put it in our hearts for nothing!
- There are so many Christians that have a very deficient view of what God requires.
 - They look at the law as almost an evil thing...
 - This is very sad because it is not evil at all—
 - Of course it is evil to us if we are without Christ because it utterly condemns us...but not after we are saved...
 - And of course it is evil for someone who tries to attain to it without grace or tries to be saved by it...
 - but the law itself is holy and righteous and good!
 - It is very beneficial for us!
- It is sad to have a deficient view of the very thing that God has written in our hearts by His Holy Spirit in the New Covenant—and to look at it as an evil thing!
 - For then we are hindered from really appreciating what Christ has done in saving sinners like us...
 - We are hindered from grasping more fully what great things He suffered for us...
 - We are hindered from seeing the holy character of God, and of Christ, and of the life to which God has called us...
 - And we are hindered in making the progress that God has called us to make in becoming holy—in being conformed by His grace to His holy Standard.