



Provided by the Church of the Lutheran Confession - Board of Missions

A Systematic Study of Bible Teachings (Dogmatics)

Lesson 18.4.3 – The Doctrine of Law and Gospel

The Different Kinds of Law: Moral

As indicated in lesson 18.4.1, the moral law is the law that is still valid for us New Testament Christians as a standard of behavior. The moral law is the law that God wrote in man's hearts from the beginning of creation. This moral law applies to all human beings, not just to the Israelites.

In the Old Testament there were no distinctions between moral law and other kinds of law. For the Israelites the entire law was their standard, and they were accountable to God for their keeping of the entire law. But that is not the case for us today. In order to determine what is moral law, and what is not moral law, we need to pay careful attention to all the words of Jesus and His apostles in the New Testament. If a law is repeated in the New Testament as a standard for us Christians today, then we know that that law is a moral law, and not a ceremonial or civil law only.

Jesus Himself summarized the moral law of God in response to a question from a lawyer who asked Him: “**Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?**” Jesus responded: “**You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 22:36-40).**

Another lawyer asked Jesus: “**Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?**” Jesus responded by asking him: “**What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?**” The lawyer responded by saying the same thing Jesus said in Matthew 22:36-40 quoted above: “**You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,’ and ‘your neighbor as yourself.’**” Jesus then said to him: “**You have answered rightly**” (Luke 10:25-28).

Jesus explained love for a neighbor by stating what has been called the Golden Rule: “**Whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets**” (Matthew 7:12).

The apostle Paul also taught that the moral law of God applies to all people can be summarized by one word: love. He wrote to Timothy: “**The purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith**” (1 Timothy 1:5). Similarly Paul wrote to the Galatians: “**All the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’**” (Galatians 5:14).

In his letter to the Romans the apostle Paul explained this at greater length, writing: “**Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law**” (Romans 13:8-10).

The threats contained in the moral law also apply to us today, and to all people. We read in Paul's letter to the Galatians: “**Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God**” (Galatians 5:19-21).

We find a similar statement in Paul's letter to the Ephesians: "**No fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience**" (Ephesians 5:5-6).

Paul gave the same warning to the Corinthians: "**Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God**" (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

In general, the Ten Commandments serve as a summary of the moral law of God. Therefore, in the following lessons we shall examine each commandment and learn how each commandment is repeated and explained in the New Testament. The Ten Commandments themselves can be summarized as Jesus summarized them in the so-called two tables or tablets of the law: love for God and love for neighbor. The first three of the Ten Commandments belong to the First Table. The remaining seven commandments belong to the Second Table. Even the two tables can be summarized with one word: love. "**Love is the fulfillment of the law**" (Romans 13:10).

Questions

1. What is the difference between the moral law and the other kinds of laws that God gave to the Israelites?
2. How can we determine which laws are part of God's moral law?
3. How did Jesus summarize the moral law of God?
4. What is the Golden Rule?
5. How do we know that the threats of the law still apply to us?
6. What is our only escape from these threats of the law?
7. Why can we not be saved by keeping the moral law of God?