

Lesson 14 **THE LAW OF GOD (II)**

14.1 **The Content of the Law**

1. The First Commandment

This is the most important commandment, dealing with our acknowledgment of the one, true God. The LORD has revealed Himself as the one, only God, Deuteronomy 6:4; Psalm 96:4, 5. There are no other gods beside Him, Isaiah 45:5, 6. Therefore He does not permit His people to make any other gods, either in place of Him or along side of Him. The universe and all that is in it belongs to Him, and is subject to Him, Isaiah 6:3.

Therefore we must flee and avoid all idolatry, and all forms of false religion. We are called to know the LORD, confess His Name, and serve Him alone, Deuteronomy 6:5, 10:20, 21.

2. The Second Commandment

This commandment deals with images or representations of the LORD, rather than foreign gods or idols. The LORD expressly forbids any images or representations of His deity, Deuteronomy 4:9f; Exodus 32:8. He must be confessed and worshipped as the sovereign God, and He cannot be manipulated in any way by human power, Isaiah 57:15; 1 Timothy 6:16.

The LORD has always instructed His people regarding the way He wishes to be worshipped. He tells us to avoid all images, and all ways of worship which are man-centred. We may not, either in word, thought or deed, make any image of the LORD; rather, we must **be**

God's image in the world by living in complete obedience to His Word, Colossians 2:9; Ephesians 4:24.

This also requires a faithful and diligent use of the means that the LORD has established in order to nourish and instruct His people, namely the proclamation of His Word, and the use of the sacraments.

3. The Third Commandment

This commandment deals with the **name** of the LORD, and requires us to honour and revere the name of God in all our dealings. The LORD has honoured and magnified His name among His people. From the beginning, He showed His glorious power and might. He exalted His name in creation, and in the redemption of His people, in His mighty deeds of salvation, which show His justice, mercy, kindness and grace. Above all, the LORD magnified His name in the sending of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Therefore God forbids all swearing, cursing, and all profane uses of His name. The name which He has exalted in Christ must not be abased or abused by His children. He commands an obedient use of His Name both in worship and in civil life. We are called to swear by God's name when the authorities require it, but must avoid all swearing of an oath in secret societies, clubs, organizations, and so on. In every way, the name of God must be honoured, 2 Corinthians 1:20f.

4. The Fourth Commandment

This commandment deals with the day of the Lord, the sabbath or rest day which He has set apart for worship and praise to Him. We must serve the LORD every day, but one day has been specifically set

aside for festive praise and worship, Genesis 2:2. In the old dispensation, this day was the seventh, and so foreshadowed the rest to come. In Christ the fulfilment has come, and we celebrate the day of rest on the first day of the week, the day of His resurrection, John 20:19; Revelation 1:10.

All selfish pursuits should be avoided on this day of the Lord, Nehemiah 13:15; Amos 8:4, 5. The festive praise of thanksgiving must be maintained in the freedom of Christ, Colossians 2:16f; Galatians 4:10, 5:1. We are also called to maintain the ministry and the schools and provide for the needy, 1 Corinthians 16:1, 2.

5. The Fifth Commandment

The LORD governs and directs His people by the authorities which He places over them. Here we are called to honour and obey parents, teachers, office bearers and civil magistrates. This spiritual and civil order has been ordained by Christ for our salvation, Matthew 28:18, 19. All authorities are placed over us for our good and wellbeing, and must be honoured by us, Romans 13:1-7; Hebrews 13:17; Ephesians 6:1-3.

The Lord forbids all disobedience to superiors, all rebellion, all rejection of His laws and His guidance. We must be willing to obey, and may only resist the authorities when they command us to do something which the law of God has explicitly forbidden, Acts 5:29. This command also has a rich promise which focusses primarily on civil and temporal blessings, but includes eternal blessings as well, Deuteronomy 5:16.

6. The Sixth Commandment

This commandment is the first dealing with our relationship to our neighbour, and requires that we honour and respect the life God gives him in every way. The commandment goes to the root of murder, and forbids any type of hateful thoughts, words or dealings with regard to our neighbour.

The positive side of this commandment requires love to our neighbour as the image of God. As the LORD loves us and shows His love to us, so we are called to love our neighbour, Colossians 3:14; Matthew 5:44, 45. We must lay aside all desire for personal revenge, and leave vengeance to Him, Romans 12:19.

The command of love here enjoined on the believers does not rule out capital punishment, nor does it forbid war. The commandment deals strictly with unlawful killing or murder, and so governs the relationship we have with our neighbour.

7. The Seventh Commandment

In this commandment, the Lord shows how we are to honour Him and our neighbour in all our relationships. God has instituted marriage for the wellbeing of man, the propagation of the human race, the building of His Church and the honour of His name, Malachi 2:15. Thus, we must live in the body as children who belong to the Lord and who wish to use their bodies for His service. We are **temples** of the Holy Spirit in body and soul, 1 Corinthians 3:16, 6:19.

Therefore we may not follow the pattern of the world, and live as children of darkness, 1 Corinthians 5:1, 2; Ephesians 2:3f, 4:22, 23. All our relationships, both within and outside of holy marriage, must reflect the holiness and glory of Christ our Head.

8. The Eighth Commandment

This command deals with our neighbour's property and our attitude towards it. The LORD is owner of all, Psalm 24, and appoints us as His stewards. As stewards, we must labour faithfully with what has been given to us, Matthew 25:14f. Many of the civil laws given by the LORD were designed to prevent extortion and oppression, Leviticus 19; Deuteronomy 10:18; Psalm 146. We are also taught to respect the rights and place of the poor and needy, Job 29:12f.

We must flee and avoid all sloth, theft, injustice and commercial corruption. We must strive as employers and employees to be honest and fair in our dealings, and also give faithfully to the Lord for the support of the needy, Ephesians 4:28. We must labour to support our own families, and those who are in need, 1 Timothy 5:4f.

9. The Ninth Commandment

In giving us His salvation, the Lord has shown Himself trustworthy for us. In saving us, He also redeems and saves our name among men. We always have in our Saviour a witness who pleads our cause at God's right hand, 1 John 2:1. So we must also seek to defend and promote the name of our neighbour, and be trustworthy and truthful in our dealings with him. Part of showing love and honour to him includes respecting and honouring his name and reputation.

Any lying or falsehood by which we seek to destroy our neighbour's place and position is forbidden by God. Many false charges were brought against the Lord Jesus in an effort to destroy His work, Luke 23:1-3. By the power of His Spirit, we are called to speak the truth in love, Ephesians 4:29f, 4:16f; Titus 1:10-12. As much as

we are able, we are to defend and promote our neighbour's honour and reputation, both within and outside the body of Christ.

10. The Tenth Commandment

The commandment concerns itself with the root of our actions, and with what lives in our hearts. The offering of our thankfulness which we present to the Lord must be perfect and blameless, Romans 12:1, 2. The law of God must grasp us totally, in all aspects of our being, Romans 7:7.

We realize that in ourselves we only have a small beginning of the obedience required, but Christ works in us with His Spirit so that we love God's law, and seek to live in accordance with it more and more. Our perfection lies in Christ, and in Him we strive to perfection daily, fleeing all covetousness and giving our hearts to His service, Colossians 3:15f.

14.2 The Understanding of the Law

Several things are important to remember in properly understanding the law of God:

1. With each negative command, we must see that a positive injunction is enjoined upon us. The law always tells us exactly what we must do.

2. When a specific sin is forbidden, the LORD automatically includes all related sins, for example, the sixth commandment forbids all forms of murder, and its root.

3. In the law, we do not deal with strictly outward things. The essence of the law is spiritual in the sense that it concerns the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. It must not be read according to the letter but according to the Spirit, 2 Corinthians 3:6.

4. Two aspects are present in every commandment, the sin which must be avoided, and the new life which we are to cultivate through the grace and power of Christ. We must always keep both aspects of the law in mind when using it as our rule of thankfulness.

5. Briefly stated, the law cannot be accepted or understood without believing in Christ's work on our behalf.

Exercises Lesson 14

I. Reference Passages

Study and Review: Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Days 34 to 44.
Canons of Dort, Chapter III/IV. 4, 5, 6, 7.

II. Review Questions

1. Why is the first commandment the most important commandment in the law?
2. Show from Scripture that if you break one of the commandments you break them all.
3. How do we divide the law into two tables? Why?
4. What elements of the law about the sabbath have been fulfilled, and what elements still apply today?
5. What is the relationship of the tenth commandment to the rest of the law? To the first commandment?
6. What is the relationship between the civil and the ecclesiastical authorities in maintaining the law of God?

III. Extra Questions

1. Is God's law to be applied only to the Church, or does it apply to all men?

2. Why must the law of God be read in our services every Sunday?
3. What must be the attitude of the civil authorities to the work of the gospel?