**Calvin’s *Institutes of Christian Religion***

Lesson 12 – “The Role of the Law as Part of God’s Work of Salvation, Part 2” (Book II, Chapter 8)

**Chapter 8 – Explanation of the Moral Law (Ten Commandments)**

1. There are 58 sections in this one chapter.
2. First, Calvin begins with the relationship between the Moral Law and Natural Law.
3. “Accordingly, because it is necessary both for our dullness and for our arrogance, the Lord has provided us with a written law to give us a clearer witness of what was too obscure in the natural law, shake off our listlessness, and strike more vigorously our mind and memory.”
4. The law lays down unyielding and righteous claims: “The best remedy to cure the fault of coming up with our own paths to righteousness will be to fix this thought firmly in mind: the law has been divinely handed down to us to teach us perfect righteousness; there no other righteousness is taught than that which conforms to the requirements of God’s will; in vain therefore do we attempt new forms of works to win the favor of God, whose lawful worship consists in obedience alone; rather, any zeal for good works that wanders outside God’s law is an intolerable profanation of divine and true righteousness.”
5. Three Things About the Moral Law Which Helps Us Discern What Each Commandment Requires and How It Functions
   1. The law is Spiritual
      1. Since God is a Spirit, the Law is Spiritual and is directed ultimately at spiritual righteousness, rather than outward appearance.
   2. Each Commandment has a wider scope of meaning and application than what is explicitly stated in the commandment
      1. The laws are general in nature, but application can be made to specifics.
      2. If something displeases God, then the opposite must please God. The negative prohibition implies a positive command.
      3. So even though most of the commandments are stated as a restriction or prohibition, they imply that we are also called to positive action.
   3. The Ten Commandments are divided into 2 tables
      1. Table One: Commandments 1-4 are duties we owe to God
      2. Table Two: Commandments 5-10 are duties we owe toward our neighbor
      3. The order is important. “The first foundation of righteousness undoubtedly is the worship of God. When it is subverted, all the other parts of righteousness, like a building rent asunder, and in ruins, are racked and scattered. What kind of righteousness do you call it, not to commit theft and rapine, if you, in the meantime, with impious sacrilege, rob God of his glory? or not to defile your body with fornication, if you profane his holy name with blasphemy? or not to take away the life of man, if you strive to cut off and destroy the remembrance of God? It is vain, therefore, to talk of righteousness apart from religion. Such righteousness has no more beauty than the trunk of a body deprived of its head.”
   4. The First Commandment (Ex. 20:3): “The duties which we owe to God are innumerable, but they seem to admit of being not improperly reduced to four heads: Adoration, with its accessory spiritual submission of conscience, Trust, Invocation, Thanksgiving.” See Westminster Larger Catechism Questions 104-105
      1. “By Adoration, I mean the veneration and worship which we render to him when we do homage to his majesty; Trust, is secure resting in him under a recognition of his perfections, when, ascribing to him all power, wisdom, justice, goodness, and truth, we consider ourselves happy in having been brought into intercourse with him. Invocation, may be defined the betaking of ourselves to his promised aid as the only resource in every case of need. Thanksgiving, is the gratitude which ascribes to him the praise of all our blessings.”
      2. What is forbidden? Atheism, Superstition, Polytheism
   5. The Second Commandment (Ex. 20:4-6): “The purport [purpose] of the commandment, therefore, is, that He will not have his legitimate worship profaned by superstitious rites. Wherefore, in general, he calls us entirely away from the carnal frivolous observances which our stupid minds are wont [prone] to devise after forming some gross idea of the divine nature, while, at the same time, he instructs us in the worship which is legitimate, namely, spiritual worship of his own appointment. The grossest vice here prohibited is external idolatry. This commandment consists of two parts. The former curbs the licentious daring which would subject the incomprehensible God to our senses, or represent him under any visible shape. The latter forbids the worship of images, on any religious ground.” AKA Regulative Principle of Worship
      1. “We have already shown clearly enough (Book I.11.12) that every visible shape of Deity which man devises is diametrically opposed to the divine nature; and, therefore, that the moment idols appear, true religion is corrupted and adulterated.”
   6. The Third Commandment (Ex. 20:7): “The purport [purpose] of this Commandment is, that the majesty of the name of God is to be held sacred. In sum, therefore, it means, that we must not profane it by using it irreverently or contemptuously. This prohibition implies a corresponding precept, viz., that it be our study and care to treat his name with religious veneration. Wherefore it becomes us to regulate our minds and our tongues, so as never to think or speak of God and his mysteries without reverence and great soberness, and never, in estimating his works, to have any feeling towards him but one of deep veneration.”
   7. The Fourth Commandment (Ex. 20:8-11): “First, under the rest of the seventh day, the divine Lawgiver meant to furnish the people of Israel with a type of the spiritual rest by which believers were to cease from their own works, and allow God to work in them. Secondly, he meant that there should be a stated day on which they should assemble to hear the Law, and perform religious rites, or which, at least, they should specially employ in meditating on his works, and be thereby trained to piety. Thirdly, he meant that servants, and those who lived under the authority of others, should be indulged with a day of rest, and thus have some intermission from labor.”
      1. Continental view: Sabbath is abrogated. The principle still remains, but focus is on Christian’s spiritual rest in Christ.
      2. Westminster view: Sabbath is still in effect today, but has been changed to the Lord’s Day. Every Sunday is a type and taste of our eternal rest in Christ.
   8. The Fifth Commandment (Ex. 20:12): “The sum of the commandment, therefore, will be, that we are to look up to those whom the Lord has set over us, yielding them honor, gratitude, and obedience. Hence it follows, that everything in the way of contempt, ingratitude, or disobedience, is forbidden.”
   9. The Sixth Commandment (Ex. 20:13): “The safety of all ought to be considered as entrusted to each. In general, therefore, all violence and injustice, and every kind of harm from which our neighbor’s body suffers, is prohibited. Accordingly, we are required faithfully to do what in us lies to defend the life of our neighbor, to promote whatever tends to his tranquility, to be vigilant in warding off harm, and, when danger comes, to assist in removing it.”
   10. The Seventh Commandment (Ex. 20:14): “The purport [purpose] of this commandment is, that as God loves chastity and purity, we ought to guard against all uncleanness. The substance of the commandment therefore is, that we must not defile ourselves with any impurity or libidinous excess. To this corresponds the affirmative, that we must regulate every part of our conduct chastely and continently [temperately].”
       1. “This commandment bids us to modesty and forbids fornication, as well as seduction by alluring dress, conduct, gestures, or speech.” --J. Mark Beach
   11. The Eighth Commandment (Ex. 20:15): “In substance, then, the commandment forbids us to long after other men’s goods, and, accordingly, requires every man to exert himself honestly in preserving his own. For we must consider, that what each individual possesses has not fallen to him by chance, but by the distribution of the sovereign Lord of all, that no one can pervert His means to bad purposes without committing a fraud on a divine dispensation. There are very many kinds of theft. One consists in violence, as when a man’s goods are forcibly plundered and carried off; another in malicious imposture, as when they are fraudulently intercepted; a third in the more hidden craft which takes possession of them with a semblance of justice; and a fourth in sycophancy, which wiles them away under the pretense of donation.”
   12. The Ninth Commandment (Ex. 20:16): “The purport [purpose] of the commandment is, since God, who is truth, abhors falsehood, we must cultivate unfeigned truth towards each other. The sum, therefore, will be, that we must not by calumnies and false accusations injure our neighbor’s name, or by falsehood impair his fortunes; in fine, that we must not injure any one from petulance [impatience/irritability], or a love of evil-speaking. To this prohibition corresponds the command, that we must faithfully assist every one, as far as in us lies, in asserting the truth, for the maintenance of his good name and his estate.”
   13. The Tenth Commandment (Ex. 20:17): “Since the Lord would have the whole soul pervaded with love, any feeling of an adverse nature must be banished from our minds. The sum, therefore, will be, that no thought be permitted to insinuate itself into our minds, and inflame them with a noxious concupiscence [strong desire] tending to our neighbor’s loss. To this corresponds the contrary precept, that everything which we conceive, deliberate, will, or design, be conjoined with the good and advantage of our neighbor.”
   14. Discussion of the Catholic distinction between “mortal sin” and “venial sin”
       1. Venial – A venial sin is a lesser violation of God’s law in which one sins in a time of weakness and one’s heart is still directed toward God. It doesn’t destroy love in our hearts, but merely wounds it.
       2. Mortal – A mortal sin is a grave violation of God’s law with one’s heart and mind assenting to it. It destroyed love in our hearts and turns us away from God.
       3. “Let the children of God hold that all sin is mortal. For it is rebellion against the will of God, which of necessity provokes God’s wrath, and it is a violation of the law, upon which God’s judgment is pronounced without exception.”
   15. When you understand that the Ten Commandments are not just negative restrictions but also include positive commands and when you understand the full scope of each commandment, you will see just how impossible it is for us to keep the law perfectly.
   16. But as a Christian, when you see the full scope of the Ten Commandments, we should be encouraged and invigorated and motivated and stirred up all the more to seek to please God in every thought, motive, word, and deed.
   17. The Law is God’s perfect standard of righteousness.