

The Ten Words LORD'S DAY 34

92. Q. What is the law of the LORD?
- A. God spoke all these words, saying:
I am the LORD your God,
who brought you out of the land of Egypt,
out of the house of bondage.
1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
 2. You shall not make for yourself a graven image,
or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above,
or that is in the earth beneath,
or that is in the water under the earth;
you shall not bow down to them or serve them;
for I the LORD your God am a jealous God,
visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children
to the third and fourth generation of those who hate Me,
but showing steadfast love to thousands of
those who love Me and keep My commandments.
 3. You shall not take the Name of the LORD
your God in vain;
for the LORD will not hold him guiltless
who takes His Name in vain.
 4. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.
Six days you shall labour, and do all your work;
but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God;
in it you shall not do any work,
you, or your son, or your daughter,
your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle,
or the sojourner who is within your gates;
for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth,
the sea, and all that is in them,
and rested the seventh day;
therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath
day and hallowed it.
 5. Honour your father and your mother,
*that your days may be long
in the land which the LORD your God gives you.*
 6. *You shall not kill.*
 7. *You shall not commit adultery.*
 8. *You shall not steal.*
 9. *You shall not bear false witness against
your neighbour.*
 10. *You shall not covet your neighbour's
house;
you shall not covet your neighbour's
wife,
or his manservant, or his maidservant,
or his ox, or his ass,
or anything that is your neighbour's.*¹

1. Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 5:6-21.

93. Q. How are these commandments divided?

A. Into two parts.
The first teaches us how to live in relation to God; the second, what duties we owe our neighbour.¹

1. **Matthew 22:37-40** Jesus said to him, “You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”³⁸ This is the first and great commandment.³⁹ And the second

is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

94. Q. What does the LORD require in the first commandment?

A. That for the sake of my very salvation I avoid and flee all idolatry,¹ witchcraft, superstition,² and prayer to saints or to other creatures.³ Further, that I rightly come to know the only true God,⁴ trust in Him alone,⁵ submit to Him with all humility⁶ and patience,⁷ expect all good from Him only,⁸ and love,⁹ fear,¹⁰ and honour Him¹¹ with all my heart.
In short, that I forsake all creatures rather than do the least thing against His will.¹²

1. **1 Corinthians 6:9-10** 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,¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

1 Corinthians 10:5-14 But with most of them God was not well pleased, for their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.⁶ Now these things became our examples, to the intent that we should not lust after evil things as they also lusted.⁷ And do not become idolaters as were some of them. As it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.” ...¹² Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.¹³ No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it. ...¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.

1 John 5:21 Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.

2. **Leviticus 19:31** Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your God.

Deuteronomy 18:9-12 When you come into the land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not learn to follow the abominations of those nations.¹⁰ There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer,¹¹ or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.¹² For all who do these things are an abomination to the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD your God drives them out from before you.

3. **Matthew 4:10** Then Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.’”

Revelation 19:10 And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “See that you do not do that! I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

Revelation 22:8-9 Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things.⁹ Then he said to me,

- “See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God.”
4. **John 17:3** And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.
 5. **Jeremiah 17:5** Thus says the LORD: “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD.”
Jeremiah 17:7 Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, and whose hope is the LORD.
 6. **1 Peter 5:5-6** Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for “God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.”⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time,
 7. **Romans 5:3-4** And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance;⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope.
1 Corinthians 10:10 nor complain, as some of them also complained, and were destroyed by the destroyer.
Philippians 2:14 Do all things without complaining and disputing,
Colossians 1:11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy;
Hebrews 10:36 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:
 8. **Psalm 104:27-28** These all wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season.²⁸ What You give them they gather in; You open Your hand, they are filled with good.
Isaiah 45:7 I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do all these things.
James 1:17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.
 9. **Deuteronomy 6:5** You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. (cf. Matthew 22:37)
 10. **Deuteronomy 6:2** that you may fear the LORD your God, to keep all His statutes and His commandments which I command you, you and your son and your grandson, all the days of your life, and that your days may be prolonged.
Psalms 111:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments. His praise endures forever.
Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.
Proverbs 9:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.
Matthew 10:28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.
1 Peter 1:17 And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one’s work, conduct yourselves throughout the time of your stay here in fear;
 11. **Deuteronomy 6:13** You shall fear the LORD your God and serve Him, and shall take oaths in His name (cf. Mt 4:10).
Deuteronomy 10:20 You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in His name.
 12. **Matthew 5:29-30** If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.³⁰ And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.
Matthew 10:37-39 He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.³⁸ And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.³⁹ He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.
Acts 5:29 But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: “We ought to obey God rather than men.”

95. Q. What is idolatry?
- A. Idolatry is having or inventing something in which to put our trust instead of, or in addition to, the only true God who has revealed Himself in His Word.¹

1. **1 Chronicles 16:26** For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.

Galatians 4:8-9 But then, indeed, when you did not know God, you served those which by nature are not gods. ⁹ But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage?

Ephesians 5:5 For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Philippians 3:19 whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame; who set their mind on earthly things.



We confessed in Lord's Day 33 that God regards only those works good which are done according to the norm of God's law. From this statement follows the question: *What is the law of God?*

In the Hebrew Bible, the first five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy) are together called "*the law*" (Torah). This is the law in its broader sense, and it is in this sense that the Belgic Confession uses it in Article 25. The laws in the five books of Moses are divided into three types: ³

1. Civil laws
2. Ceremonial laws
3. Covenantal laws

1. In the Old Testament, there were **civil laws** that were used in governing the people. For example, there were laws for restoring that which was stolen. There were laws for criminals, etc. Although these can and should be used as a guideline for us in the New Testament, we cannot apply them directly. For in the Old Testament Israel was a theocratic nation, which means that both the church and the state were identical. The church leaders were also the civil leaders. In the New Testament, however, church and state are separate.

2. In the Old Testament, there were also **ceremonial laws** that involved matters of worship. There were laws regarding holy days, sacrifices, cleanness and uncleanness. These also are no longer in force because they were intended to direct people's attention to the coming

Christ. However, Christ has come and the "shadows" have passed away. We should still study them and learn from them, for they give us a better understanding of Who Christ is and what He has done.

3. In the Old Testament, there were also **covenantal laws**. They are laws which apply for life in the covenant. These laws are summarised in the Ten Commandments as we find them in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, and they are worked out further in Scripture. These laws do not pass away. They remain in force always. Just as God's covenant with man is eternal, so these covenant laws will apply eternally. They are the standard by which we must govern our daily life at all times. And when we examine our lives in the light of these commandments, we realise that we fall grievously short of that obedience which Christ requires of us.

When we speak of *the law* in this Lord's Day, we are referring not to the civil law, nor to the ceremonial law, but to the covenantal law, the Ten Commandments which form the pattern for our Christian walk of life.

The covenantal laws differ from the civil and the ceremonial laws in that the covenant laws are **creation ordinances**. This means that they were instituted at the time of creation. From the very beginning man was required to serve God only and in the manner which God set forth. Man was created to glorify God's name. Man was to rest on the Sabbath day. Adam had to obey God, and Adam's children would have had to obey their parents. There was to be no

3. These were discussed already in Lord's Day 2, but are repeated here for completeness.

killing, no unfaithfulness, and no stealing. All that is required in God's covenant law was required of man at creation, which is what we mean when we refer to the covenant laws as creation ordinances.

Because the Ten Commandments are creation ordinances, they have always and will always be in force. There has never been, nor will there be a time when these laws are not binding upon man. On the new earth these laws will be written perfectly on the hearts of everyone, and everyone will always keep all of them perfectly.

We should understand that the Ten Commandments are actually a reflection of God's being, His virtues and His actions.

1. We may not have any other gods before Yahweh for the simple fact that there is no other god besides Him.
2. Because God is altogether different from anything in creation, He forbids us to make creaturely images of Him.
3. Because He is great and glorious, He demands that we praise and glorify His Name.
4. Because God rested on the Sabbath, we are to do the same.
5. God is sovereign and appoints men in authority over us. Therefore we must submit to these men as to God.
6. Because God is love (1 John 4:8), we are commanded to love one another.

In like manner we could go through all the commandments. The Ten Commandments reflect God.

Now we are called to reflect God. We are appointed as His image-bearers. The way in which we reflect God is by walking in accordance with God's law.

In God's plan of redemption the law receives a two-fold purpose. This two-fold purpose is reflected in the fact that the Catechism mentions the law in the first section of the Catechism which deals with our sin and misery, and again in the third section which deals with our thankfulness. This shows the two purposes of the law:

1. ***The law convicts us of our sin and brings us to Christ.*** Our corruption

or depravity is so deep that we are not even aware of it. We do not know about our sins or our sinful nature unless God reveals it to us. He does this by means of the law. The law serves as a mirror. When we look into it, we see how dirty we have become because of our sin. Thus in Lord's Day 2, we read, "*From where do you know your sin and misery? From the law of God.*" Only when we look in the mirror of God's law and see how dirty we are will we see the need for cleansing with the blood of Jesus Christ, and with His Spirit. Thus the law of God also serves to bring us to Christ.

2. ***The law teaches us how to live in thankfulness.*** The law of God also serves as a pattern for the Christian walk of life. Those who are redeemed by the blood of Christ will also be recreated in God's image through the Spirit of Christ (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18, Colossians 3:10). We have discussed this already when we spoke of the covenantal law. Those who have been restored in the covenant of grace must now work out their salvation (cf. Philippians 2:12). They must live a life of love and thankfulness to God. And Christ says that if a man loves Him, then he will keep His commandments (John 14:15,23).

It is sometimes thought that the law no longer has any purpose in the life of the New Testament Christian. The law of God is thought to belong to the Old Testament, and thus its use is outdated. In place of the law has come love. This is not true. Love was demanded in the Old Testament just as much as in the New Testament (cf. Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18). Likewise, obedience to the law is still required in the New Testament just as it was in the Old Testament (cf. Matthew 5:19).

Neither should we make a false distinction between the law as the means to salvation in the old dispensation, and faith (or grace) as the means to salvation in the new. Scripture clearly shows us that Abraham did not earn his salvation through the law. He was saved by grace through faith (cf. Romans 4:9-16). Both in the Old and the

New Testament salvation comes only by grace through faith.

But what do statements like Deuteronomy 30:16 mean? "... *I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess.*" It sounds as though obedience earns salvation. Let us keep in mind, however, what stands at the very beginning of the Ten Commandments. There we read the statement, "*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.*" **God first gives salvation, and then comes with the commandments.** If we live according to these commands, then we will be kept in our salvation. If we obey, we will keep ourselves in the love of God (Jude vs 20) and in the love of Jesus Christ (John 15:10). But if we refuse to obey we will not be blessed, but cursed!

We are saved by grace, and yet God demands obedience to His law. But doesn't Paul say that we are under grace, and not under the law? (cf. Romans 6:14) Doesn't Paul teach us that we are freed from the law? (cf. Galatians 5:1) What Paul means is that we are freed from the law as a means to salvation. He does not mean that we are freed from the law as a means of showing love to God and living a sanctified life.

In both letters Paul had to fight against those who thought they could earn their salvation through their obedience to the law. Paul said they could not. If they wished to be saved through the law, then they would need to render perfect obedience, which they could not do. Man cannot render such obedience as would earn him salvation. But he should not despair. For in the covenant of grace God has provided us with a Mediator who has taken our place, and rendered the obedience which God's law requires but which no man could render.

We who by true faith accept Christ as our Saviour receive the perfect obedience (righteousness) of Christ as our own (cf.

LD 23). We are granted eternal life on the basis of Christ's perfect work and not on the basis of our works of the law. Thus we are freed from the law as a means to salvation. But we are still bound to the law as the norm by which we show thankfulness to God and live sanctified lives.

Thus we conclude that in the Old Testament men were saved only through faith. Both law and grace stood side by side in the Old Testament. It is the same in the New Testament; the law and grace stand side by side.

THE FIRST COMMANDMENT

Having discussed the purpose of the Ten Commandments, we now may turn to an explanation of the commandments themselves. The first commandment is, "*You shall have no other gods before Me.*"

When the commandment speaks about "*other gods*," it does not thereby imply that there really are other gods. Sometimes the Bible speaks about "gods," but only because men declare them to be such. Scripture clearly shows us that what men call gods, are really no gods at all. Though men make gods of wood, stone or silver, they exist only in the minds of those who believe in them. (cf. Isaiah 44:9ff.) This is idolatry.

The literal transgression against this commandment is not so common any more, at least not in the nations where this writer has lived and lives, such as Canada, America and Australia. And neither is there much temptation for us to transgress this commandment literally. While there may be some Asians who worship *Budda*, or Moslems who worship *Allah*, I don't think that many of us would be inclined to go after these false gods. But that does not mean that transgression against this commandment is minimal. To the contrary, sin against this commandment is common, even among us as Reformed people. To understand this, we need to understand what idolatry is. *Idolatry is having something or someone else in which to place our trust besides God.*

What does it mean to *trust*? Many different definitions could be given for this word.

For our purposes we will define trust as *reliance*. To **trust** someone is to **rely** on him, to **depend** on him. Now it should be evident to us that men place their trust, their reliance, their dependence upon many things. ***Whatever things man relies upon and in which he trusts are modern gods.***

One very common form of idolatry is placing our trust in money. Take the example which Scripture gives of the rich fool (cf. Luke 12:16-21). He gathered in so much that he had to build new barns. Once these were full he thought that his future was secure. He relied upon his earthly goods. He depended upon his money. But then he died. He could not take his money with him. And even if he could, his money would have done him no good.

Depending upon money (or Mammon, as this god is called) is still very common. People think that as long as they have a good, secure job with a good pension, then their future is wrapped up tight. Then they think they are secure. Lotteries have also become very popular. The desire to win a large sum of money has as basis the desire for security. Men rely on money. That is idolatry.

Another example of idolatry is the matter of insurance. To have insurance is a matter of good stewardship. But we must not place our trust in our insurance policies. If any Christian falls for that weakness, it would be better for him not to have it. Let him learn to place his trust in the Lord.

The Catechism also speaks about witchcraft. We might think that witchcraft is something that belongs to the 17th and 18th century. But statistics show that witchcraft is becoming ever more popular again. There are those who call themselves "*white witches*." They believe that there are powers in the universe which can be harnessed and controlled by means of magical potions and phrases. They use these potions and phrases in order to govern their well-being and their destiny.

There are also those who practice "*black magic*", which is an alliance with the powers of Satan. Combined with this is the worship

of the devil. Those who seek to control such powers themselves are controlled by Satan. Instead of mastering these powers, these powers master them.

The Catechism speaks about superstition. This is the belief that certain objects or numbers or actions have power that can bring us good fortune or ill fortune. There is the belief that a rabbit's foot or a four-leafed clover will bring good luck. There is a belief that the formation of the stars can affect us for good or ill. There is the belief that a broken mirror, or a black cat, or the number 13 bring ill fortune. Thus many fear Friday the 13th, and many apartment buildings lack a 13th floor.

The Catechism also mentions the prayers to saints. In the church of Rome, the thought was propagated that various saints have received power over various areas of life. There was a saint to give travelling mercies (Saint Christopher). There was a patron saint of children (Saint Nicholas). There was a patron saint of lovers (Saint Valentine). You would pray to these saints when you needed help in the area over which they had received power. But the Bible teaches us that we are to seek help in no other name than God through Jesus Christ.

The first commandment says that we are to trust wholly in God and in no other. We must depend completely and only upon Him. We must expect all good from Him alone.

There are a number of things which we must know before we can really trust God.

1. ***God's omnipotence.*** Unless we believe that God has complete power, we cannot have complete trust in him. We must believe that He is able to do anything that He wants to do. We must believe that nothing is impossible with Him.
2. ***God's love.*** If we have any doubts about God's love for us, we will not fully trust Him. For we do not trust one who hates us. We do not trust our enemies. We trust our friends who love us. Now God has revealed His great love for us in His Son. Surely if God has given us such a

great gift as His only begotten and well-beloved Son, He will surely give us all that we need (Romans 8:32).

3. **God's faithfulness.** There are times when we must experience sorrow and pain. That might come through illness, poverty, persecution, or death. In all these things we must believe that God is still our faithful Father. He has not forgotten us, neither has He forsaken His promises to us. In all tribulation we must believe that God is working for our good and our salvation (Romans 8:28).
4. **God's wisdom.** The Catechism says we must submit to Him. In times of difficulties, we must not rebel against God. We must not fight against Him. We must not act so proudly as though we understand better than He what is good for us. For we are very limited in our

understanding. We often wonder what good can come from difficult situations. But we may be assured that good will come. In this too, we must not complain, but show patience, waiting for God's time for good to come. I think Psalm 131 shows beautifully that child-like trust which we must have:

LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor my eyes lofty. Neither do I concern myself with great matters, nor with things too profound for me. Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with his mother; like a weaned child is my soul within me. O Israel, hope in the LORD from this time forth and forever.



Questions:

1. What does the term "law" refer to in the Hebrew Bible? What three types of laws are there in this part of the Hebrew Bible?
2. What does the term "law" mean in this Lord's Day? What do these laws form?
3. How do the civil and ceremonial laws differ from the covenantal laws? Explain your answer thoroughly with examples.
4. When were the covenantal laws first instituted? How long will they be in force?
5. What do the covenantal laws reflect? Give some examples.
6. Who are we to reflect? How are we to do this?
7. What is the first purpose of the law? How does it fulfil this purpose?
8. What is the second purpose of the law?
9. How is this two-fold purpose of the law shown in the Catechism?
10. Is it correct to say that in the Old Testament God demanded obedience to the law, while in the New Testament God demands love? Explain why or why not.
11. Is it correct to say that the law was the means to salvation in the Old Testament, while faith is the means to salvation in the New Testament? Explain why or why not.
12. What did God say just before giving the Ten Commandments? What does this imply?
13. What does Paul mean when he says (cf. Romans 6:14 & Galatians 5;1) that we are not under the law or that we are free from the law? In what sense are we free from the law? In what sense are we still bound to the law?

First Commandment

14. When the commandment forbids us to have "other gods," does it imply that there are other gods? Why does it speak about other gods, then?
15. Is literal transgression against this commandment still common in our nation? Why (not)?
16. What is idolatry? What does it mean to trust?
17. What are our modern gods? Give an example of a common form of idolatry in society today. What name do we give this god?
18. What do those who call themselves "white witches" believe?
19. What do those who practice "black magic" want to do? What really happens?
20. What is superstition? Give some examples.
21. What did Rome teach concerning the saints?
22. What four things must we know about God before we can really trust Him? Explain why this knowledge is necessary for trust.