

The Giving of the Law

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The Introduction to the Law as Summarized in the Ten Commandments

I. The Bible has two all-important doctrines: The Law and the Gospel (19-21).¹

These two major doctrines are written in Scripture again and again, hundreds of times, from the first pages of Genesis through the last pages of Revelation. Yes, one might even say that every statement in our Bibles is either specifically Law or Gospel or is closely related to these two significant teachings.

Since the Bible uses the word “Law” in various meanings, we must first of all define the term as we shall generally use it in these papers. The Formula of Concord (Article V, 17) presents this excellent definition:

The Law is a divine doctrine which reveals the righteous and immutable will of God, shows how man is to be disposed in his nature, thoughts, words, and deeds in order to be pleasing and acceptable to God, and threatens the transgressors of the law with God’s wrath and temporal and eternal punishment.

We shall have considerably more to say about each part of this definition in the later parts of this paper.

The Gospel, on the other hand, is the exact opposite of the Law. It shows God’s mercy in Christ our Lord who kept the Law perfectly for us, who in our stead bore God’s curse for our transgression of the Law, who thereby freed us from the Law and its punishment, and who will surely one day take us to heaven.

In all of the Bible there is no better summary of the Moral Law than the Ten Commandments. If we understand them correctly, then we shall have in capsule form everything that God requires of us throughout His holy Word.

One of the very best summaries of the Gospel to be found anywhere in Scripture is that outstanding Bible passage, John 3:16. The passage has been arranged like this:

G od so loved the world that He gave His
O nly begotten
S on, that whosoever believeth in Him should not
P erish, but have
E verlasting
L ife

One can hardly read the Bible correctly or truly understand it when the Word is spoken, unless one knows these two essential doctrines. We ought to be fully conscious of them in our private and public reading and hearing of the Word.

In this paper and in those that follow we shall be discussing the Law of God primarily, in its many aspects. Later, when we study the three articles of the Apostles’ Creed, we shall dwell at length on the Gospel. Yet, one cannot adequately discuss the one without at least mentioning the other. Consequently, in this paper and in the ones to follow on the Ten Commandments we shall from time to time be presenting the glorious, comforting message of the Gospel, even though we shall concentrate primarily on the Law.

II. God first gave us his Law by writing it into our hearts (23-28).

¹ Numbers refer to the questions in the 1956 WELS edition of Dr. Martin Luther’s Small Catechism.

In the beginning of time God implanted His Law into the hearts of our first parents. They knew every part of God's will, and they did it perfectly. They did not need the Ten Commandments nor any other written or spoken Word to guide them in holy living.. (The commandment not to eat of the forbidden fruit, Gen.. 2:16,17, was to test their obedience; it was not part of the Moral Law written in our first parents' hearts.)

Sometime after their creation, Adam and Eve fell into sin. With this sin they put a black mark upon all of God's lovely works on this earth. They not only brought sin with all of its frightful consequences into this world, but with their rebellion they caused God's wrath, death, and damnation to come crashing down upon all mankind. "Sin entered the world through one man...and in this way death came to all men," wrote St. Paul in Rom. 5:12 (NIV).

In succeeding generations God continued to write His Law into the hearts of every person born on earth. We know that from Bible passages like Rom. 2:14,15:

Indeed, when the Gentiles, who do not have the law (that is, the written Ten Commandments), do by nature the things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law (the written Ten Commandments), since they show that the requirements of the law-are-written on their hearts (NIV).

These requirements of God, written on the heart of everyone, are called the Natural Law of God.

True, the natural knowledge of God's Law is far from perfect. It has been blurred and diminished by sin. Because of sin natural man gradually knew less and less of God's will. For example, the unbelievers know little or nothing at all about the first three great Commandments, our duty toward God, toward His Name, and toward His holy Word. They fail to understand that sins of the heart against our neighbor are strictly forbidden by our God as St. Paul wrote, "I would not have known what it was to covet, if the law had not said, 'Do not covet'" (Rom. 7:7, NIV). The Natural Law of God has been so blurred by sin that the unbeliever, for example, fails to recognize that coveting our neighbor's wife or having dirty thoughts is truly a sin. Nor does he understand that failure to hear, read, and love God's Word is also a sin worthy of eternal damnation.

Yet, even though one may never have seen or heard a single verse from the Bible, he nevertheless has some knowledge of God's Law. Even the Communists in Russia, as opposed as they are to the Christian religion, nevertheless know by nature that it is wrong to disobey the government, to murder, to steal, etc. That is why they have stringent laws against these crimes. St. Paul wrote about this matter in Rom. 1:32. After mentioning a number of the heathen transgressions, like homosexuality, fornication, disobedience to parents, and the like, he wrote: "Although they know God's righteous decree that they who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things, but also approve of those who practice them" (NIV). In other words, they act contrary to the Natural Law of God, implanted into their hearts.

We can readily understand why God wrote His Law into the heart of everyone. He did this for our good. He did it to bless us, so "that we might lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (I Tim. 2:2). Imagine the chaos that would result, try to picture for yourselves how many times the evils of this present world would be multiplied, if no one knew that it was wrong to steal, murder, disobey the government, and the like. The Natural Law of God is indeed a blessing for which we should be truly grateful.

III. God gave us his Law a second time by both speaking and writing in at Mt. Sinai about 1500 B.C. (23).

A. The need.

The previous section already indicated the necessity of a second giving of God's Law. Sin had so blinded and corrupted peoples hearts and minds that the Natural Law of God was blurred. No one by nature any longer knew that Law perfectly. Consequently, our God decided to make a new start with the Israelite nation, in keeping with the promise made to Abraham, the father of the Israelites (Gen. 12:1-3). God gave His sacred Law to these, His chosen Old Testament people, for themselves and for transmission to all the world, in order that

everyone everywhere might know His will exactly. This second giving of the Law, which was both spoken and written, agrees perfectly with the Natural Law written into man's heart. It is, of course, much clearer, it is much more detailed, it is formally summarized in the Ten Commandments, and it is given to us in many other sections of the Bible. The Natural Law, by contrast, is never stated formally in a series of "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not."

B. The setting.

The setting for the formal giving of the Ten Commandments is described for us in Exod. 19. The occasion was a momentous one, certainly one of the most important in all the history of God's Kingdom on earth. Therefore preparations befitting this solemn occasion had to be made carefully. The time was three months after the Israelites had been miraculously freed from their cruel slavery in Egypt (Exod. 19:1). They had already successfully crossed the Red Sea, and they had seen the defeat of their enemies through the mighty power of our Heavenly Father (Exod. 14). Led by that remarkable pillar of cloud and pillar of fire (Exod. 13:21, 22), they had journeyed to the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula and had pitched their camp before that huge, towering mountain called Sinai (Exod. 19:1,2). (The name "Horeb" is also used frequently in the Old Testament. See, for example, Exod. 33:6; Deut. 1: 2,6,19; 4:10,15; 5:2; etc. It is either another name for Mt. Sinai, or it may possibly be the name of the range of mountains of which Sinai is just one peak. We shall use the term "Mt. Sinai," since this is the name used several times in Exod. 19.)

The Israelite camp must have been quite a sight when viewed from Mt. Sinai. It undoubtedly stretched for miles in every direction, since as many as two million or more people were encamped there (Exod. 12:37 tells us that there were 600,000 men, and one can multiply that figure by three or four to arrive at the total number of people, including women and children.)

Shortly after arriving at Mt. Sinai, Moses went up the mountain, there to receive the blessed promise that Israel would be God's chosen nation, "a peculiar treasure... a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:3-6). (Dr. Alfred Edersheim wrote in his *Old Testament Bible History*, p. 109: "Just as the priest is the intermediary between God and man, so Israel was to be the intermediary of the knowledge and salvation of God to all nations. And this their priesthood was to be the foundation of their royalty." God's covenant with them made them holy by providing forgiveness of sins.) Thus God ratified the covenant which He had made long before (Gen. 12:3; 35:11; etc.) Moses wrote about that in Deut. 5:2: "The Lord our God made a covenant with us in Horeb."

This covenant brought with it not only fabulous blessings and privileges, but also responsibilities, as God said: "If ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people" (Exod. 19:5). God had, entirely out of grace, made this agreement with them that they would be His people; now they were to live accordingly, and they would shortly hear all that that entailed.

When Moses reported God's promise to the elders of the people, everyone answered: "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do" (Exod. 19:8). Thereupon God told Moses exactly how he was to consecrate the people for the coming revelation of God's glory three days hence: Order the people to wash their clothes and to abstain from sexual relations (since this would make them unclean for the day, Lev. 15:18). Both of these acts symbolized inward cleansing. They were also to place a barrier around the mountain so that no one could ascend it or even touch it under penalty of death (Exod. 19:10-15). Shortly thereafter God repeated the command through Moses not to touch the mountain (Exod. 19:20-25). That command reinforced the thought that Israel, unclean because of its sin, dared not approach God, the all holy One, until they were cleansed by the blood of the Lamb of God.

Meanwhile, God was revealing His majesty and His power in one grand, overwhelming display of divine glory. According to Exod. 19:16-19 and Deut. 4:11, there was a frightening storm on Mt. Sinai, thick and dark clouds, rolling thunder and vivid lightning, burning fire and black smoke, piercing trumpet blasts and a violent earthquake. All of this was an overwhelming sign that our eternal, almighty God had come to Mt. Sinai

for a most important purpose. Nor did He come alone, for He was accompanied by hosts of angels, as various Bible passages tell us (Deut. 33:2; Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; etc.)

Small wonder that the people were terrified as they watched this awe-inspiring appearance of the living God. In describing that unforgettable scene to his people in his farewell address, Moses said:

Behold, the Lord our God hath shewed us his glory and his greatness; and we have heard his voice out of the midst of the fire: we have seen this day that God doth talk with man, and he liveth. Now therefore why should we die? for this great fire will consume us: if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more, then we shall die. For who is there of all flesh, that hath heard the voice of the living God speaking out of the midst of the fire, as we have, and lived? Go thou near, and hear all that the Lord our God shall say: and speak thou unto us all that the Lord our God shall speak unto thee; and we will hear it, and do it (Deut. 5:24-27).

Surely, all those who saw and heard what happened on that memorable day at Mt. Sinai never forgot it. That is exactly what God in mind: His people were to be so deeply impressed by all of this that they would never forget a single one of His Commandments. Nor should we ever fail to remember what happened at Mt. Sinai on that great day some 35 centuries ago.

C. The speaking of the Ten Commandments.

Both Exod. 20 and Deut. 5, the two places in the Bible where the Ten Commandments are recorded, emphasize the thought that God first spoke the Ten Commandments. Exod. 20:1 tells us: "And God spake all these words, saying..." Deut. 5:4 says: "The Lord talked with you face to face in the mount out of the midst of the fire."

It is almost impossible for us to imagine what all of this must have been like: In the midst of that tremendous display of divine glory and from the top of the great mountain God rent the air with such a thunderous series of words that everyone of the two million people heard every syllable, "These words the Lord spake unto all your assembly in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice," wrote Moses in Deut. 5:22. That must have been impressive indeed! No wonder that the Israelites again cried out in terror to Moses: "Speak thou with us, and we will hear: But let not God speak with us, lest we die" (Exod. 20:19). Yet, Moses immediately corrected this false fear by telling them that they were rather to be afraid of sinning against God's Commandment (Exod. 20:20). That was the purpose of this magnificent display of God's glory.

D. The two-fold writing of the Ten Commandments.

1. The preliminaries.

After God spoke the Ten Commandments to the assembled multitudes, "Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was" (Exod. 20: 21). At that time God gave Moses another series of instructions for the Israelites, called commandments, statutes, and judgments, "Which the Lord commanded to teach you, that ye might do them" (Deut. 6:1). Edersheim (*op. cit.*, p. 115) explained the reason for these additional laws like this: "As the people of God, Israel must not be like the other nations. Alike in substance and form, the conditions of their national life, the fundamental principles of their state, and the so-called civil rights and ordinances which were to form the groundwork of society, must be Divine."

Therefore God gave Moses a series of statutes regarding the manner in which Israel was to worship God (Exod. 20:22-26), their social relationship with one another (Exod. 21:1-23:13), their three major festivals (Exod. 23:20-33).

The Israelites ratified this part of the covenant also by stating with one voice: "All the words which the Lord hath said will we do" (Exod. 24:3). Thereupon the covenant was formally inaugurated by a one-time

sacrifice that prefigured Christ's one-time sacrifice, by the erection of an altar, and by a sacrificial meal (Exod. 24: 4-11).

Now that God had set apart His reconciled people unto Himself, it was necessary to have some definite place where He would meet with, and dwell among them, as also to appoint the means by which they should approach Him, and the manner in which He would manifest Himself to them. To reveal all this, as well as to give those "tables of stone," on which the Commandments were graven, God now called Moses once more "up into the mountain" (Edersheim, *op. cit.*, p. 22--Exod. 24:12ff.).

What then happened is told us in Exod. chapters 25-31. These chapters contain minute instructions for building the Tabernacle, including the Ark of the Covenant, the shewbread tables, the candlesticks, the altars, and the like. For about 500 years this Tabernacle remained the holiest place in all the nation, the one spot above all where God manifested Himself to His people and where they drew near to worship Him. All of it was a type of Christ's New Testament dwelling within His Church, His children.

2. The first writing.

Then God "gave unto Moses, when He had made an end of communing with him upon Mt. Sinai, two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God" (Exod. 31:18). This was the first writing of the Ten Commandments, given through Moses to the people, when Moses had been with God for 40 days, neither eating nor drinking (Deut. 9:9). During the first six of these days God had again revealed Himself in a magnificent display of cloud and fire (Exod. 24:16, 17).

3. The smashing of the first tables.

Since Moses had been gone a full 40 days, the people became impatient with his long absence. Perhaps they felt that the "devouring fire" (Exod. 24:17) had killed him. That would leave Aaron as their leader. But they also wanted a visible symbol of the Lord's presence. They therefore came to Aaron with this request, "Come, make us a god (this is probably a better translation than the KJV "gods") who shall go before us" (Exod. 32:1, ASB). Instead of courageously condemning this godless request, Aaron, in an equally remarkable display of unbelief, agreed. He ordered the people to bring their gold earrings and made of them sheets of gold to cover the wooden frame of a calf. Undoubtedly this symbol of God's presence was copied from the Egyptian sacred bull, called Apis. When the people saw the calf, they said, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt" (Exod. 32:4, ASB). Aaron then proclaimed a feast to the Lord, and the Israelites celebrated it with burnt offerings and thank offerings, with eating and drinking, with song and dance (Exod. 32:6).

When God saw that frightful idolatry, He was enraged. He threatened to wipe out the entire wicked nation with one mighty, devastating blow. He said to Moses, "I will make of thee a nation mightier and greater than they" (Deut. 9:14), but Moses pleaded earnestly with God that He spare those ungrateful wretches. He prayed, "They are Your people; Your glory is involved; remember Your promise to our forefathers." God heard this earnest prayer and spared the people (Exod. 32:7-14).

Descending the mountain, Moses suddenly realized that everything God had said was all too true. His "anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain" (Exod. 32:19, ASB). In a burst of fury, he ground the image of the idol into powder and "scattered it over the surface of the water, and made the sons of Israel drink it" (Exod. 32:20, ASB). Thus he effectively showed his people the worthlessness of their idol; he also, so to speak, impressed into their own bodies the fearful consequences of their dreadful sin.

Nor was that all. Moses shouted, "Whoever belongeth to the Lord, come to me" (Exodo 32:26). When only the Levites responded, he commanded them to take their swords and to "go back and forth from gate to gate in the camp, and kill every man his brother, and every man his friend, and every man his neighbor" (Exod.

32:27, ASB). The Levites promptly obeyed and indiscriminately killed 3,000 Israelites in that one day. To explain this dreadful calamity, Dr. C.F. Keil wrote in that well-known *Old Testament Commentary*,

Moses left it to be determined by chance, upon whom the sword of the Levites would fall, knowing very well that even the so-called chance would be under the direction of God...After Moses had thus avenged the honor of the Lord upon the sinful nation, He returned the next day to Jehovah as a mediator...that by the force of his intercession he might turn the divine wrath, which threatened destruction, into sparing grace and compassion.

This prayer of Moses for mercy is one of the most outstanding in all of Scripture—he was actually ready to give up his place in heaven for his people, like St. Paul in New Testament times (Rom. 9:3). God heard the prayer and spared the people. Yet, the chastisement came later when all but two of the older generation died in the Wilderness wanderings (Exod. 32:30-35).

4. The second engraving of the Ten Commandments.

Since the Covenant was thus restored, our Lord asked Moses to cut two other “stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered” (Exod. 34:1, ASB). For the second time Moses “was there with the Lord 40 days and 40 nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And He (God) wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments” (Exod., 34:28). When Moses returned to the camp with the second set of the Commandments, “Behold, the skin of his face shone (with reflected glory from being with God); and they were afraid to come nigh him.” Moses then placed a veil over his face when he talked to the people (Exod. 34:29-35).

Dr. Keil thinks that the stones on which the Ten Commandments were written might have been about two feet long and one and one-half feet wide, large enough to engrave the 172 Hebrew words, yet small enough to carry in Moses’ hand. God engraved the Ten Commandments (Exod. 34:28 and Deut. 4:13 tell us that there are Ten Commandments) on both sides (Exod. 32:15). (The Hebrew text speaks of the “ten words”; consequently, we frequently use the term “decalogue,” which means ten words.)

Afterward the tablets of stone were placed into the Ark of the Covenant (Exod. 40:20; Deut. 10:5). In fact, the Ark of the Covenant derives its name from the two tablets that are sometimes called “the words of the covenant” (Exod. 34:28) or “the tables of testimony” (Exod. 31:18; 32:15). There they remained until Solomon’s splendid temple was built some 500 years later. At that time the Ark with the two tables was placed into the Temple (I Kings 8:9; II Chron. 5:10), where they undoubtedly remained until both Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed about 600 B.C. No one knows what then happened to the original stone tablets; after about 900 years, they simply disappeared from the pages of history. Yet, the Commandments remain forever recorded for us in both Exod. 20 and Deut. 5, exactly as they were originally engraved on stone. Everyone on earth is commanded to obey them, since they are a clear and simple summary of our God’s holy will.

5. Our Lord’s explanation of the Ten Commandments in Matthew 5-7 and elsewhere (23).

We must not think that the Commandments are the only place in Scripture where God’s Law is written. Nor dare we believe that God’s Law is restricted to the single point mentioned in each Commandment. For example, no one dare ever feel that he has fully kept the Fifth Commandment, unless he did actually kill someone. There is much more to the Fifth Commandment and to all others, as we shall learn when we discuss them one by one.

Here we just want to state briefly that Christ gave us an excellent explanation of various Commandments in His incomparable Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) and in other places. He said, for example, that one sins against the Fifth Commandment by speaking damaging words against his neighbor, by being angry at him without a cause, or even by failing to be reconciled with him after a quarrel (Matt. 5:22-25). Jesus continued by stating that one commits adultery by lusting after a woman or by divorcing her without a Scriptural reason (Matt. 5:27-32).

Many another Bible passage shows us that every Commandment of our God is much more inclusive than a first, quick reading of the words from Exod. 20 or Deut. 5 would seem to indicate. For example, the New Testament repeatedly tells us that all of our works must flow from love toward God and toward our neighbor. Jesus expressed that thought in that great Bible passage, Matt. 23:37-39: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” On Maundy Thursday evening our Lord again impressed that thought upon our hearts with His: “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another” (John 13:34). That’s why St. Paul also wrote as follows:

Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom. 13:8-10).

Yes, indeed, the Law of God is broad and wide. We shall devote much time to its study in the papers that follow this one.

6. Dr. Luther’s summary of the Ten Commandments in his Small Catechism.

Some catechisms include all of Exod. 20:1-17 as the Ten Commandments. Their authors correctly state that these are the words that God originally spoke from Mt. Sinai, and later He engraved them on two tablets of stone. Yet, that by no means requires us to include all of these words in our catechisms, as we shall demonstrate in the following paragraphs.

If you will compare Exod. 20:1-17 with the Commandments as Dr. Luther wrote them in our catechism, you will quickly note that he omitted a considerable portion of the Exodus account. Does that mean that he changed or mutilated Scripture? By no means! He assuredly made no attempt to remove these words from the Bible, since they still remain there for all of us to read. He did, however, want his Small Catechism to be a summary of the Ten Commandments, nothing more. He intended it for children and therefore wrote it as simply and cleanly as possible. It was to be, literally, a children’s Bible. He succeeded admirably in condensing the Ten Commandments into such a simple presentation for children.

To that end Dr. Luther did not, for example, include the first part of Exod. 20:2 (“I am the Lord thy God”) in his original Catechism (it was included in later editions), since it is a heading or the introduction to all the Commandments. The last part of verse 2 (“which hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage”) is an addition to introduction that applies to the Israelites only, not to anyone else. It is good to know, but not essential to learn.

All of Exod. 20:4 and the first part of 5 were omitted by Dr. Luther, since they simply mention a specific kind of idolatry, already forbidden in verse 3 (“Thou shalt have no other gods”). The last part of verse 5 and all of 6 (“For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God...”) follow the First Commandment in the Exodus account. Dr. Luther placed them at the end of all the Commandments, introducing them with this question: “What does God say of all these Commandments?” They do indeed serve well as the conclusion to the Ten Commandments, since they apply to all of them, as verse 6 (commandments) indicates.

The last part of verse 7 (“for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain”) is also omitted in Dr. Luther’s Catechism. The reason is that it is not a part of the Commandment but God’s threat of punishment against all those who transgress this Word.

Again, all of verses 9-11 (verses that forbid work on the Sabbath Day) is also omitted. The reason is that this is a part of the Ceremonial Law that applied to Israel only. No part of the Ceremonial Law applies to New Testament Christians, as we shall show in the section on the various types of laws and in the discussion of the Third Commandment.

The Fourth Commandment in the original Small Catechism reads simply: “Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother.” Once more all of the last part of Exod. 20:12 (“that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee”) is omitted. The reason is easily understood: These words apply only to the Israelites of Old Testament times. They only were given the land of Palestine. St. Paul himself gives us the New Testament understanding of this Commandment in Eph. 6:2, 3: “Honor thy father and mother...that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.”

The rest of the Commandments in Dr. Luther’s Small Catechism are the exact words as God originally spoke them from Mt. Sinai, engraved them on the two tablets of stone, and then had them written for us in Exod. 20:12-17.

IV. How may the various laws given by God through Moses at Mt. Sinai be divided? (23, note)

A. The three-fold division.

Our Catechism, page 34, has this appropriate note: “The Law which God gave to the Children of Israel, may be divided into three parts: Civil Law, Ceremonial Law, and Moral Law. Only the Moral Law is written in the heart of man and applies to us.” Please notice that the statement reads: “The Law...**may** be divided into three parts.” Actually, the Bible never states anywhere in so many words that one of God’s Commandments is a part of the Moral Law, another of the Civil, and still another of the Ceremonial. (There was, of course, a great difference in the ways these laws were given: The Moral Law was first written in everyone’s heart, then spoken by God to all the Israelites from Mt. Sinai, and finally engraved on the two stone tablets to indicate their permanence for all people.)

We ought to note also that both the Civil and the Ceremonial Laws were to a great extent based upon the Moral Law. Both of them had a moral aspect. For example, the death penalty inflicted upon murderers, kidnappers, and cursers of parents (Exod. 21:12-17) surely had its basis in the Fifth and in the Fourth Commandments. On the other hand, at least one Civil statute was different from the Moral Law: Moses at times granted divorces for unscriptural reasons (Deut. 24:1-4), because of the hardness of some people’s hearts (Matt. 19:3-9). This was contrary to the Sixth Commandment of the Moral Law, but it undoubtedly helped to protect some people’s lives. Had Moses not granted these divorces, it is altogether possible that some godless persons might have murdered their spouses just to be free of them, free to marry another.

When all of this had been said, it still is true that the three-fold division into Civil, Ceremonial and Moral Law is a convenient one. In the paragraphs to follow we shall first define each one, state their purpose, and then tell how they apply to us.

B. The Civil or Political Law.

To understand the Civil Laws which God gave to His people, we must remember that Old Testament Israel was a theocracy. This means that all of its political affairs (in addition to its spiritual affairs) were ruled directly by God. In all matters, Church as well as State, God was the supreme Ruler of His people. He gave their government laws through Moses, He guided His people by a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire, He conquered Palestine through Joshua, He divided the land among the twelve tribes, He preserved His people through the Judges, and even later He ruled Israel through the various kings, sending prophets to announce His will. The great Prophet Isaiah stated this truth emphatically: “The Lord is our Judge, the Lord is our Lawgiver, the Lord is our King; He will save us” (Isa. 33:22). Until the end of the Old Testament Israelite kingdom, Church and State were one, inseparably united.

Since God was the Head of Israel’s government, He necessarily had to publish a number of laws to regulate the affairs of the nation. Many of them are listed in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. There are humane laws regarding slavery (Exod.21:1-11), laws protecting lives (Exod. 21:12-32), laws that treat

of theft and its penalty, injury done to fields, seduction, slander, return of lost property, bribery, waging war, the Sabbatical Year, and many others (see Exod. 22 and 23; Deut. 13:5-10; 14; 19:1-13; 22:22-29; etc.).

One can see that most of these laws were simply an extension of the Moral Law, and they might well be studied by our own governmental leaders as they prepare our laws. The principles on which these civil laws are based are good ones. Consider, for example, the following: Kidnappers are to be put to death (Exod. 21:16); thieves are to restore stolen property four-fold or five-fold (Exod. 22:1, 2); anyone who damages another's property must make restitution (Exod. 22:6); lost property is to be restored to its owner (Exod. 23:4, 5); etc. We shall refer to these and to other principles of the Civil Law, as we discuss the individual Commandments.

Yet, we must remember that no country in New Testament times has ever been a theocracy. Consequently, all of these political laws given by God to Israel through Moses are no longer applicable to any country today. We do not need to observe the Jubilee Year every half century (Lev. 25:8-15), nor stone the adulterer (Deut. 22:22-29), nor refuse to wear clothing made of both wool and linen (Deut. 22:11). Nor do we need to keep any other provision of the Civil Law. Both Sts. Paul and Peter recognized that truth when they asked us to be subject to the heathen government, not to a theocracy (Rom. 13:1-7; I Pet. 2:13,14).

C. The Ceremonial Law.

These laws, and there were very many of them (see Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy), primarily concerned Israel's worship. One chapter after another carefully, even minutely, describes the Tabernacle and all of its furnishings, its worship services (Exod. 25-31; 35-40); the many different sacrifices and directions for the priests (Lev. 1-9); the clean and the unclean foods (Lev. 11); purification laws (Lev. 12-15); and the various festivals (Lev. 23). These laws include far too many regulations for us to discuss here. However, one might profitably read them, bearing in mind the purpose of the Ceremonial Law.

What is the purpose of these many Ceremonial Laws? The answer becomes evident when we read the regulations. The various washings to remove the people's physical uncleanness surely pointed to the urgent need for cleansing from their spiritual defilement and corruption, from their sin.

Another purpose of these various statutes was to isolate the Jews from their heathen neighbors. At all costs the Jews were to stay away from the idolatry of the heathen, and the Ceremonial Law aided them in this separation. The heathen, for example, could not easily learn all of these many ceremonies, while they were ingrained into the very nature of the Jews.

Thirdly, as St. Paul mentions in Gal. 4:1-3 and as St. Peter testifies in Acts 15:10, the Ceremonial Law was a tutor, a governor, a slave master, or a heavy yoke that literally imprisoned the Jewish people. When we read all of these regulations with their requirements for tithing, washing, and worship, with their restrictions on food, dress, and everything unclean, with their laws on every side, with their severe punishment for disobedience (the death penalty in some cases), we can see that Jewish life in Old Testament times was difficult indeed. It pressed upon them like a heavy yoke and made them long for the Messiah who would release them from their bondage. They must have cried frequently, "O that the salvation of Israel were come out of Zion" (Ps. 14:7; 53:6).

Finally, and most important of all, the Ceremonial Law pointed forward to Christ, as the Epistle to the Hebrews and other Bible passages clearly tell us. The various festivals and the provisions regarding foods formed shadows that were cast by Christ, who is the body (Col. 2:16,17). The various sacrifices, especially the Passover Lamb, foreshadowed the sacrifice of Christ on Calvary (see, for example, Heb. 9:13,14; Heb. 10; I Pet. 1:18,19). The High priesthood prefigured Christ (Heb. 5), as Heb. 7:26-28 says:

Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever. (NIV)

The Old Testament Israelites were bound to observe the Ceremonial Law exactly. Severe, even death penalties, were decreed for transgression. For example, Exod. 31:14 reads as follows: “Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: everyone that defileth it shall surely be put to death: for whosoever doeth any work therein, that soul shall be cut off from among his people.” Scripture even mentions an example of a man who picked up some sticks on the Sabbath Day—he was put to death (Num. 15:32-35).

However, we must note also that these laws applied to the Israelites alone, not to us. Lev. 26:46 tells us that all of these statutes, judgments, and laws were matters between God “and the Children of Israel” alone. We do not need to keep a single one of them. For us there is no need for the sacrifices, the priesthood, the Old Testament festivals, the restrictions on food and drink. All of them simply pointed forward to Christ. They were to remain in effect only until He came. Now that we have Him, we don’t need the signs that point forward any longer. When Jesus cried out, “It is finished,” the veil in the Temple that separated all sinners from God; was torn from top to bottom (Mark 15: 37,38). This signified that all people now had direct access to God through Christ. There is no longer any need for high priests or priests, temple or sacrifices.

We shall mention a few Bible passages to show that those strict Old Testament Ceremonial Laws no longer apply to us. At the first great Church convention in Jerusalem, certain Pharisees complained that the Gentile converts were not keeping the Ceremonial Laws. Peter defended them by responding: “Why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear (Acts 15:10). St. Paul refused to have Titus circumcised., when certain Jews demanded that (Gal. 2:3-5). St. Paul also showed in Rom. 14:5,6 that the Old Testament festival days need no longer be observed and that no food is unclean to us New Testament Christians (Rom. 14:1-14). When Peter, in a trance, saw the clean and unclean animals and was called upon to eat of them, he objected: “I have never eaten anything impure or unclean.” Thereafter “the voice spoke to him a second time, ‘Do not call anything impure that God has made clean’” (Acts. 10:9-16, NIV). One of the clearest of all Bible passages is written in Col. 2: 16,17: “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.” In New Testament times no one dare judge us in these matters that are a part of the Ceremonial Law, for it no longer applies to us.

In fact, St. Paul goes even one step farther. To all people like, for example, the Seventh Day Adventists, who insist on keeping the Sabbath Day on Saturday, the food laws that forbid eating pork, etc., St. Paul wrote:

Now that you know God—or rather are known by God—how is it that you are turning back to those weak and miserable principles? Do you wish to be enslaved by them all over again? You are observing special days and months and seasons and years! I fear for you, that somehow I have wasted my efforts on you (Gal. 4:9-11, NIV).

Or, still stronger: “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say to you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing” (Gal. 5:1,2). If you believe that the Ceremonial Laws are necessary for salvation, you have actually lost Christ, who has freed us from every one of them. (The entire letter to the Galatians, stresses this point emphatically.)

D. The Moral Law.

The Moral Law is really a reiteration, a refreshing or a reviving of the Natural Law, originally written into everyone’s heart by our God. The provisions of this Moral Law are the only ones that apply to us in New Testament times. They alone were engraved by God on those two, well-nigh imperishable stone tablets to denote their application to all people for all time. They alone were kept in the Ark of the Covenant, the holiest place in all Israel. Of them Jesus Himself said, “Until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished” (Matt. 5:17,

18, NIV). They alone are the sure criterion of what is right and wrong, no matter how many people may deny this. They reveal God's will, and we cannot disobey that will without incurring God's dreadful wrath. (Exod. 20:5 tells us that God will punish the sins of those who disobey these Commandments out of hatred toward Him unto the third and fourth generation.)

What are the provisions of the Moral Law? Answer: The Ten Commandments, as written in Exod. 20:1-17 and Deut. 5:6-21, are an excellent summary, although we must remember that a few parts of these Commandments, as originally given, are Ceremonial Law (for example, Exod. 20:9-11; 12b). In fact, one cannot imagine any moral laws, and they are frequently mentioned in Scripture, that are not summarized in one way or another in one of the Ten Commandments. Every prohibition written in the heart of man (like murder, adultery, and theft), everything for which the heathen will surely be punished (like transgressions against the prohibited degrees in marriage, Lev. 18), everything that God says is applicable to all mankind (Matt. 5-7) and everything that the New Testament considers binding for all people—all of these precepts, no matter where they are written in Scripture, are a part of the Moral Law.

We must know the provisions of the Moral Law. St. Paul wrote in Eph. 5: 17: "Understand what the Lord's will is," and we owe it to our God to obey every one of these Commandments. They are the laws that we shall be discussing in the following papers on the Ten Commandments.

V. How may the Moral Law, given at Mt. Sinai, be divided? (123)

A. The introduction.

We have heard previously (III, D) that God engraved the Ten Commandments on both sides of two stone tablets. We do not know how many Commandments were written on each tablet, nor, for that matter, do we really know which Commandment is to be considered the First, the Second, and so on. This shows us that the answers to these two questions (what was written on each table and how should the Commandments be numbered) are really not essential. However, it is good for us to agree on some system of division and numbering so that we speak the same language, when we refer to the first Table of the Law or the First Commandment. In the paragraphs to follow we shall therefore present what is commonly taught in our Church on these points.

B. The division of the Commandments on the two tablets.

The Jews and the Christians during the first several hundred years after Christ spoke of two sets of five Commandments, one set on each stone tablet. According to this reckoning, the Commandments regarding other gods, graven images, God's name, the Sabbath Day, and duties toward parents were written on one stone, the rest on the second. However, that can hardly have been the way the Commandments were originally written on the two tables, for then there would be about 145 Hebrew words on one stone and only some 25 on the other (the Ten Commandments as written in Exodus have 172 Hebrew words).

About 400 A.D. St. Augustine introduced a different method of dividing the Commandments on the two stones. He suggested calling Commandments 1-3 (according to our numbering system) the First Table of the Law and Commandments 4-10 the Second Table. That suggestion was adopted by the Western Church and kept by Dr. Luther, because it is based upon our Lord's words written in Matt. 22:34-40. There Jesus described the Moral Law as containing two major requirements: Our love toward God (Commandments 1-3, according to our reckoning) and our love toward our neighbor (Commandments 4-10). That, He said, is really the summary of the entire Moral Law, a thought that was echoed by St. Paul, when he wrote in Rom. 13:10: "Love is the fulfillment of the Law."

Even though both the Roman Catholics and the Lutherans regard Commandments 1-3 as the first and Commandments 4-10 as the second Table of the Law, we must recognize that this was hardly the way in which they were engraved on the two stones. If it were, then there would be 131 Hebrew words on one stone and only

41 on the second, or a ratio of about 3-1. In any case, the Bible does not answer the question: Which Commandments were engraved on each stone? The matter is therefore an adiaphoron, and we are free to use whichever system of numbering we prefer. The 1-3 and 4-10 system has merit, and we shall follow that in our papers.

C. The numbering of the Ten Commandments.

The Bible says that there are Ten Commandments (see III, D, 3), but it never tells us which words of Exod. 20 or Deut. 5 constitute the First Commandment, which form the Second, etc. Consequently, three different numbering systems have been developed over the course of the years: the Jewish, the Reformed and Greek Orthodox, and the Roman Catholic-Lutheran.

1. The Jewish system of numbering the Ten Commandments.

Since about 400 A.D. the Jewish numbering system has been as follows: Exod. 20:2 (“I am the Lord thy God...”) is their First Commandment; verses 3-5, the section that forbids other gods and graven images is their Second Commandment; verses 7-11 that treat God’s name and the Sabbath Day are their Third and Fourth Commandments. Then their numbering continues from verse 12 through verse 16, which is their Ninth Commandment; verse 17 with its two sections on coveting is their Tenth Commandment. The great objection to this system of numbering is that verse 2 with its “I am the Lord thy God” is a statement of fact, not a Commandment.

2. The Reformed-Greek Orthodox system of numbering the Commandments.

This is the numbering of the early Church fathers and of the Greek Orthodox Church up to this day. It was introduced into the Protestant Church by Calvin in 1536. The arrangement regards Exod. 20:3 (“Thou shalt have no other gods before Me”) as the First Commandment; verse 4 and the first part of verse 5 (the Commandment against -graven images) as the Second Commandment. From verse 7 through 17 this numbering system is then exactly like that of the Jews. In support of this order, many claim that there is a difference between having other gods and making an image of God, as one can see from the story of the Golden Calf at Mt. Sinai. Opposed to it is this fact: The command not to make a graven image seems to be just one method of having other gods. Both Commandments in this system of numbering then would treat the same subject: idolatry.

3. The Roman Catholic-Lutheran system of numbering the Commandments.

In this division Exod. 20:3 (“No other gods”) is the First Commandment, while verse 4 and part of verse 5 (the prohibition of graven images) is regarded as an example, an explanation, or an amplification of verse 3. Consequently, these two verses are omitted in the numbering system of the Commandments. Exod. 20:7 (God’s name) is regarded as the Second Commandment; verse 8 (the Sabbath Day) is the Third; verse 12 (honor father and mother) is the Fourth; etc., until we reach verse 17. That verse, because of its repetition of the command, “Thou shalt not covet,” is regarded as the Ninth and Tenth Commandments. When one asks why God gave two Commandments forbidding coveting, the logical answer is that coveting is such a universal, dreadful sin, it is the source of such a multitude of other sins that God repeated the command forbidding it. He thereby emphasized the truth that coveting is indeed a grievous sin.

This arrangement was introduced into the Western Church by St. Augustine about 400 A.D., although he generally seems to follow Deut. 5:21 instead of Exod. 20:17 in the Ninth and Tenth Commandments. The Deuteronomy passage places the coveting of our neighbor’s wife before the coveting of his house, the opposite of the arrangement in Exod. 20:17.

Everything that has been said in this section V reinforces the thought that the division and the numbering of the Commandments are an adiaphoron. That truth is reinforced by our Lord and also by St. Paul

in New Testament times. Both of them mention a number of Commandments, but do not give them in the order in which they appear in Exod. 20 (see Mark 10:19; Rom. 13:9). The numbering of the Commandments is therefore comparatively unimportant, although it is necessary for a Church body to agree on some system. The keeping of the Commandments is all-important, as St. Paul wrote in I Cor. 7: 19: “Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing (he would have said the same thing about the numbering of the Commandments). Keeping God’s commands is what counts.” (NIV)

VI. What is the purpose of the Moral Law? (137)

A. The introduction.

One might think that God gave us His Law in order that we might be saved by keeping it. Yet, that is manifestly impossible, since the Law demands that we be absolutely perfect, that our lives be completely holy in thought, word, and deed. “Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect,” says our Lord in Matt. 5:48. “Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy,” is the command which God gave to His people in Lev. 19:2.

Who among us would ever be so brash as to claim that he is perfect for even one hour of the day, to say nothing about every hour of every day in our lives? Solomon asked a similar question in Prov.20:9: “Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from sin?” Surely, the answer is no one. That is why St. Paul wrote: “If a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law” (Gal. 3:21, NIV). But the Law was not given to impart life, as the same Apostle wrote in Gal. 3:11: “Clearly no one is justified before God by the Law” (NIV).

Why then was the Law given? If we examine God’s Word, the answer will soon become clear: The Law has a three-fold purpose. That three-fold purpose is well stated in our Catechism (137, p. 90) as follows:

- As a mirror it shows us our sin and the need of a Savior.
- As a curb it checks to some extent the coarse outbreak of sin, thereby also helping to preserve order in this sinful world.
- As a rule it guides us in the true fear, love, and trust in God, that we willingly do according to His commandments.

We shall discuss each one of these points in the rest of this section VI.

B. The Law, as a mirror, shows us our sin and the need of a Savior.

Just as a mirror reveals what we look like, so the Law quickly shows us what we are really like. It shows us our sin, our spiritual rottenness, our total inability by nature to please God in any way, our consequent punishment for sin, and our eternal damnation.

For example, the Law tells us, “The imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen. 8:21). “They (meaning all mankind) are all gone aside, they are altogether become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one” (Ps. 14:3). Eccles. 7:20 has a similar thought: “There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” And St. Paul in Rom. 3:20 particularly stresses this thought that the Law is a mirror: “By the Law is the knowledge of sin.”

If we did not have the Law, we might feel that we are quite good morally and that all is well with us. That is exactly the experience that St. Paul had: He wrote about it in Rom. 7:7-13. “I was alive without the law once,” that is, once upon a time I really thought, mistakenly, of course, that I was righteous before God. I felt that I possessed eternal life. “But when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.” God’s Commandments showed me my sin and its result: death. If the Law had not acted as a mirror for me, I would

never have known my desperate condition. I would not have known “what it was to covet if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet.’”

Without the Law, sin, so to speak, is like a sleeping lion. But just grab a board and give that lion a good blow, and you will quickly realize what he is like. God’s Law is like that. Like a ferocious lion, it roars into our hearts these horribly alarming truths: You have not always obeyed your parents, you have had unclean thoughts, you have spoken loveless words to your neighbor, you have coveted things; all of this and much, much more is sin, strictly forbidden by God. Even if you could have kept the entire Law and sinned against only one little point, something that no one would dare to claim, you are guilty of transgressing the entire Law, as St. James clearly wrote in 2:10: “Whosoever shall keep the whole law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.” The Law shows us that there are two kinds of sin: original and actual.. Original sin is our inheritance from our first parents, as Ps. 51:5 tells us: “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Jesus said, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (John 3:6)—sinful parents have sinful children. This original sin makes us totally unable by nature to fear, love, and trust in God and to keep His Commandments. It is the old evil nature, sometimes called the Old Adam, within us that wants only to sin in thought, word, and deed.

Actual sin begins in the heart with our original sin. “Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies,” said our Lord in Matt. 15:19. It consists of actual transgressions of God’s Law in thought, word, and deed. It may take the form of something forbidden (sins of commission) or of failure to do something required (sins of omission). It might be deliberate, as was the case with Judas when he betrayed our Lord for 30 pieces of silver, because he was a thief who coveted money (John 12: 6); or, it might be a sin out of weakness, like that of Peter who denied our Lord, but then being brought to repentance by Jesus, he went out and wept bitterly (Matt. 26:69-75).

What are the consequences of our sins? Oh, they are horrible beyond anything that we could ever know on this earth. They deserve nothing but God’s wrath, His curse, our death, our everlasting damnation. Even a tiny sin is so revolting to God that it is sufficient to shut us out of heaven forever. All that is clearly told us in many Bible passages of which the following are only a sample:

Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them (Deut. 27:26; see also Deut. 28:15-68).

The soul that sinneth it shall die (Ezek. 18:20).

The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

Nothing impure will ever enter it (heaven), nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful (Rom. 21:27, NIV).

Thus the Law of God destroys every bit of self-righteousness within us. Not a single one of us could ever dare to say that by nature there is some good within all of us. Indeed not, for “We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses (our so-called “good” works) are as filthy rags” (Isa. 64:6). We cannot excuse ourselves or try to cover our wickedness in some way, for Scripture says, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (I John 1:8).

When we thus learn how the Law reveals our sin, condemns every person, leaves all mankind without hope or help, then we can begin to understand how that first Pentecost crowd felt after Peter had forcefully preached the Law. “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’” (Acts 2:37, NIV). The jailor at Philippi was similarly terrified, when he saw death and damnation staring him in the face. Panic-stricken, he could only cry to Paul and Silas, “Sirs, what must I do to be-saved?” (Acts 16:30) Our fright must also be tremendously great, when the mirror of the Law shows us exactly what we are like in God’s sight and what we can therefore expect.

That, in turn, moves us to cry out in alarm with St. Paul, “What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:24, NIV) When we pray repentantly in this manner, then we are ready to hear the precious Gospel message of our Lord Jesus Christ, who alone can provide the forgiveness, hope, help,

and salvation that we so sorely need. That is the sense also in which St. Paul wrote that “the law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24, NIV). The Law does not save us, it does not make us believe in Christ (only the Gospel can do that); but it does, like a mirror, show us our sinfulness and our utter hopelessness; it thus prepares the way for the blessed Gospel of our Lord. (We recall that John the Baptist, Jesus’ forerunner, preached repentance and thus prepared the way for our Lord and His life-giving, life-saving Gospel.)

C. As a curb the Law checks to some extent the coarse outbreak of sin, thereby also helping to preserve order in this sinful world.

Our God wants order in this world so that we and our institutions are not harmed or destroyed. Therefore He urged “that requests, prayers, intercession, and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness” (I Tim. 2:1,2, NIV). That is why St. Paul wrote: “We know also that the law is made not for good men, but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers” (I Tim. 1:9,10, NIV).

St. Paul was thinking of the Law as a curb that would stop some of the more violent crimes. We know that laws, no matter how drastic they may be, will not stop all crimes and violence. The Devil always succeeds in driving some unbelievers to every kind of sin and shame, as St. Paul clearly wrote in Rom. 1:18-32, despite plain laws against these sins. Yet, the Law of God with its threats of temporal and eternal punishment does to some extent stop the worst kind of sins.

Those violent outbursts of crime must be stopped or at least hindered to some extent; otherwise none of us nor our property will be safe for even one moment. To assure some semblance of orderly, decent living, God gave His laws against murder, adultery, theft, slander, etc. As a curb stops many, not all, cars before they can reach the sidewalk and injure the pedestrians, so the Law of God also acts as such a curb against the most violent crimes.

To illustrate this second use of the Law, Dr. Luther used the example of those whose bodies were possessed by the devil in Bible times. Some of these unfortunate people had to be bound with chains (see Mark 5:1-5) in order that they might not harm themselves and others. In the same manner the government must, so to speak, bind the godless hands with laws so that they do not destroy themselves and others.

We realize, of course, that the world would love to cast aside these laws. It maintains that there should be no laws regarding sexual behavior between consenting adults, no restrictions on marijuana and some other drugs, no capital punishment for murderers, no laws about abortion or euthanasia, etc. Their slogan is this: “You cannot legislate morality,” which, of course, is true. Yet, these laws do to some extent stop or hinder the worst crimes; they do help to preserve some outward semblance of order and morality; and that is in keeping with God’s will. That is the second reason for giving the Moral Law.

D. As a rule it guides us in the true fear, love, and trust in God, that we willingly do according to His’ Commandments.

It is true that in one sense of the word the Christian is no longer under the Law of God. St. Paul expressed that thought clearly in Bible passages like Rom. 6:14 and Gal. 3:25: “For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.” “Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law” (NIV).

Because of Bible passages like these, some people have wrongly taught that a Christian does not need God’s Law. The Formula of Concord speaks of that false doctrine as follows:

The one party taught and held that the regenerated do not learn the new obedience (that is, in what good works they should walk) from the law; nor should this doctrine in any way be urged

on the basis of the law, since they have been liberated by the Son of God, have become His Spirit's temple, and hence are free, so that just as the sun spontaneously completes its regular course without any outside impulse, they, too, through the inspiration and impulse of the Holy Spirit spontaneously do what God requires of them.

It is true, of course, that Christ has freed us from the curse of the Law, as St. Paul writes in Gal. 3:13: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us." The Law with all of its threats and curses may not torture us in the least nor trouble our conscience, as it tortured Dr. Luther until he was almost 30 years old.

It is also true that the Christian, the one who is truly reborn by the working of the Holy Spirit, loves God and desires only to do His will. Ps. 119 expresses that thought repeatedly: "I will delight myself in Thy statutes (v. 16); "I will delight myself in Thy commandments, which I have loved (v. 47); O how I love Thy law (v. 97)"; etc. "We love Him, because He first loved us" (I John 4:19). That's why Dr. Luther began his explanations to every Commandment with "We should fear and love God." That fear and love toward God is the motivating power that moves us to do good works willingly and joyfully. We do not need the threats and the curses of the Law to move us to such good works. The Law, in fact, cannot give us the power to love and to serve God; that comes about through the influence of the Gospel alone.

Yet, the Christian surely needs the Law of God for two reasons: 1) We still have the Old Adam clinging to us and 2) We need a guide to tell us which works are good and which are evil in God's sight. The Formula of Concord has some excellent thoughts on both parts. We shall quote the pertinent paragraphs first as a curb, then as a rule:

If believers and the elect children of God were perfectly renewed in this life through the indwelling Spirit in such a way that in their nature and all its powers they would be totally free from sins, they would require no law, no driver. Of themselves and altogether spontaneously without any instruction, admonition, exhortation, or driving by the law they would do what they are obligated to do according to the will of God, just as the sun, the moon, and all the stars of heaven regularly run their courses according to the order which God instituted for them once and for all, spontaneously and unhindered, without any admonition, exhortation, compulsion, coercion, or necessity, and as the holy angels render God a completely spontaneous obedience.

But in this life Christians are not renewed perfectly and completely. For although their sins are covered up through the perfect obedience of Christ, so that they are not reckoned to believers for damnation, and although the Holy Spirit has begun the mortification of the Old Adam and their renewal in the spirit of their minds, nevertheless the Old Adam still clings to their nature and to all its internal and external powers. Concerning this the apostle writes, "I know that nothing good dwells within me." And again, "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do." Likewise, "I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin." Likewise, "The desires of the flesh are against the spirit and the desires of the spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would."

Hence, because of the desires of the flesh the truly believing, elect, and reborn children of God require in this life not only the daily teaching and admonition, warning and threatening of the law, but frequently the punishment of the law as well, to egg them on so that they follow the Spirit of God, as it is written, "It is good for me that I was afflicted that I might learn thy statutes" (Ps. 119:71). And again, "I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified" (I Cor. 9:27), and again, "If you are left without discipline in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons" (Heb. 12:8).

This is what the Formula of Concord states regarding the use of the Law as a rule for us Christians to determine whether our works are good, or evil:

The Law indeed tells us that it is God's will and command that we should walk in the new life, but it does not give the power and ability to begin it or to do it. It is the Holy Spirit, who is not given and received through the law but through the preaching of the Gospel (Gal. 3:2,14), who renews the heart. Then he employs the law to instruct the regenerate out of it and to show and indicate to them in the Ten Commandments what the acceptable will of God is (Rom. 12:2) and in what good works, which God has prepared beforehand, they should walk (Eph. 2:10).

We Christians need the Law as a rule or a measuring stick. Just as a surveyor uses a transit and other tools to measure angles, distances, etc., so we need a guide to tell us whether our works are pleasing to God or displeasing to Him.

We certainly do not want to follow the way of the unbelieving world that uses its polluted mind to determine what it feels is right or wrong. The world consults the "experts, the authorities," and then arrives at such damnable conclusions as this: Abortion is good; any form of sexual relations outside of marriage may be practiced by consenting adults; proved murderers should never be executed; marijuana smoking should be legalized, even though it harms the body and the mind.

We who are Christians, on the other hand, say with the Psalmist (119:105): "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." In order that we might not be led astray by our perverted minds, we compare our actions with God's Word. That will very quickly tell us what is a good work and what is sinful. Thus the Law acts as a rule for us.

From all that has been said in parts B, C, and D of this section, we can tell that the Law as a mirror needs to be preached to all people, especially to those whom we are trying to convert with the Gospel of Christ. They must first realize their sinful condition and their resultant damnation before they can believe in Christ and appreciate what He has done for them. We who are Christians also need the Law as a mirror to remind us of our sinfulness so that we do not begin to trust in our own merit.

As a curb the Law is meant particularly to restrain the violence and the wickedness of the unbeliever. St. Paul wrote that the Law is for the "lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners..." (I Tim. 1:9). Yet Christians can also make use of the Law at times to restrain the Old Adam within us.

As a rule, the Law is meant primarily for Christians, since they are the only ones who are truly concerned about pleasing our Heavenly Father.

VII. What are the differences between the Law and the Gospel? (140)

Our Catechism does not answer this question until after it has treated the Ten Commandments. Yet, it may well also be answered at this point, since a treatment of the Law without mentioning the Gospel could well lead to despair. Consequently, while we shall be emphasizing the Law in the papers on the Ten Commandments, we shall also show that Christ lived under the Law to fulfill it in our stead, "To redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4:4,5). By His obedience we are declared righteous (Rom. 5:19). Isn't this a remarkable thing? He who gave us the Law, willingly obeyed it Himself to save us from our sins. Be sure to praise and to thank Him for it.

From the definitions of the Law and the Gospel that have been given in the preceding sections of this paper, we can then summarize the differences between these two major doctrines as follows:

Law

1. The Law tells us what we are to do, not to do, and how to be.
2. The Law shows us our sin, God's wrath, and our eternal punishment.
3. The Law demands righteousness of us that it cannot produce in us.
4. The Law gives us no strength for a godly life.
5. The Law must be preached to all people, especially to the impenitent.

Gospel

1. The Gospel tells us what God did and still does for our salvation.
2. The Gospel shows us God's grace, our Savior from sin, and our salvation.
3. The Gospel gives us Christ's righteousness through faith in Him.
4. The Gospel is the power of God to a God-pleasing life.
5. The Gospel must be preached to all people, especially to the penitent.