

Sing before the service: Psalm 63:2

Our help is in the Name of the Lord who made heaven and earth.

Beloved, grace and peace be to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the mighty working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Psalm of praise: 86:5

Prayer

Psalm 113:1

Scripture reading: Exodus 34

Scripture text: Exodus 34:10; Catechism Lord's Day 34

Then the Lord said: I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the Lord, will do for you. (Exodus 34:10 NIV-UK)

One of the ways in which God reveals Himself to us is through his Ten Commandments.

- We must distinguish very clearly between God's law and the laws of the country.
- The law of the Lord is unique – the law of the Lord is superior to any laws of man.
- The law of the Lord is also essential for all people.

The law of the Lord was given to the people of Israel to teach them to live according to the will of God.

- They had to be taught by it like we teach our children.
- Of course this also means that they learnt to know God through his law.
- This is one aspect of the matter.

The other aspect of the matter is that a believer is not a daily-paid labourer.

- He does not get paid every evening for the work he has done during the day.
- The believer is a child of God and a child is not treated in the same way as a labourer.

We are saved through Christ. Through Christ we are children of God and therefore we are entitled to the love of God. Every child holds himself entitled to the love of his father.

Talking about the law and saying that we are children of God and saved through Jesus Christ is pregnant with meaning.

- In respect of the law of the Lord it means that we are children who have been set free from the law.
- Also free from the law in that we will not be cursed with hell and death if we do not observe the law.
- We have been set free because Christ did exactly that for us – observing the law and being punished for our sake.

However, this definitely does not mean that we are relieved of responsibility. In fact, because of what Jesus Christ did for us we are under another obligation.

- Being a child of God requires obedience.
 - We are not allowed to ignore the law and do as we please.
 - We must still keep the law.
- We observe the law for another reason.
 - In the Old Testament the people had to observe the law to avoid punishment.

- We do not observe the law to avoid punishment.
- We must observe the law in gratitude for the work of Jesus Christ who observed the law on our behalf so that we would not be found guilty before God.

Let's just consider again why the Lord gave his law to his people.

- Israel had lived in Egypt for a long time – a place with many pagan temples.
- It was also a country where pagan priests and diviners and sorcerers were the most important people.
- We must also bear in mind that this country, through its trading activities, came in contact with even more religions of other gentile countries.

Hence it was absolutely necessary for the Israelites to be taught about true religion.

- They had to be taught that idolatry was of the devil, and that it only existed among people who had turned away from God.
- The Israelites had been living such a long time among the Egyptians that some of them started worshipping their idols.
- Just think about the Israelites' idol cast in the shape of a calf that they worshipped when Moses returned from the mountain. It was a way of worship they became acquainted with in Egypt. They did not think it up in the desert.
- This is why the very first commandment says:
You shall have no other gods before me.

The purpose of these commandments is for us to know that God is the only God and that He alone is God of all mankind.

- The Ten Commandments cover all areas of life.
- The intention is that we must realise that God rules over absolutely everything on earth.

The Ten Commandments teach us that we cannot live without religion.

- Religion encompasses our entire life.
- Religion is not limited to the church and church activities.
- It involves everything we do every moment of our life, because God rules over everything.

Children who obey their Father, expect from Him only what is good. God gives good things to us. Not only spiritually; we tend to narrow down the gifts of God to spiritual gifts only. God also provides for our material needs.

In short, the law of the Lord teaches us to love, to honour and to fear God.

Psalm 119:1:

Blessed are they whose ways are blameless, who walk according to the law of the LORD.
(Psalms 119:1 NIV-UK)

And Colossians 3:17:

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:17 NIV-UK)

Do everything according to the law of the Lord and thank God. Observing the law is purely an expression of gratitude. This is in fact the meaning of the above texts from the Scriptures.

This is true for two reasons:

- First, the law of the Lord enables us to distinguish between good and evil.

- We receive the ability to separate justice from injustice.
- This makes it possible for us to serve God in the right way. However, we cannot, although we want to, because we are too sinful by nature.
- This brings us to the second reason for the law being a rule of gratitude.
 - The Lord Jesus Christ observed this law on behalf of every one of us, because we cannot keep it.
 - It is not true that Christ only died for us to be in heaven after this life. In other words, that He died for us to inherit eternal life, but as long as we are on earth He does not care about us!

The Lord Jesus Christ does not leave it to us to distinguish between right and wrong.

- Least of all are we left just to muddle along as weak as we are.
- No, Jesus Christ fulfilled the law so that we, through his meritorious sacrifice, can distinguish between what God requires of us and what God forbids us to do.

This makes the law a rule of gratitude, because it emphasises everything Christ has done for us and everything we have gained through it without having deserved any of it.

The Lord let the apostle Paul summarise every aspect of our salvation: We are not saved by doing good works and observing the law – but simply and solely by faith in Jesus Christ.

know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no-one will be justified. (Galatians 2:16 NIV-UK)

Of course there are many things about the Lord Jesus Christ we must believe but, in respect of the law, we must believe that God reveals Himself to us through his law, but that we could not know Him entirely through his law. Hence the Lord Jesus Christ observed the law for us so that we can be entitled to grace.

Then the law no longer terrifies us. Then it is a rule of gratitude for us because it reflects the greatness of the work Christ has done to reconcile me to God so that I can inherit eternal life in his kingdom by his grace.

Join me in reading the Heidelberg Catechism 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;*
10. *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] *Ex. 20: 1-17; Deut. 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] *Matt. 22:37-40.*

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 humility[6] and patience,[7] expect all good from Him only,[8] and love,[9] fear,[10] and honour Him[11] with all my heart. In short, that I forsake all creatures rather than do the least thing against His will.[12]

[1] *I Cor. 6:9, 10; 10:5-14; I John 5:21. [2] Lev. 19:31; Deut. 18:9-12. [3] Matt. 4:10; Rev. 19:10; 22:8, 9.*

[4] *John 17:3. [5] Jer. 17:5, 7. [6] I Pet. 5:5, 6. [7] Rom. 5:3, 4; I Cor. 10:10; Phil. 2:14; Col. 1:11; Heb. 10:36. [8] Ps. 104:27, 28; Is. 45:7; James 1:17. [9] Deut. 6:5; (Matt. 22:37). [10] Deut. 6:2; Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7; 9:10; Matt. 10:28; I Pet. 1:17. [11] Deut. 6:13; (Matt. 4:10); Deut. 10:20.*

[12] *Matt. 5:29, 30; 10:37-39; Acts 5:29.*

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] *I Chron. 16:26; Gal. 4:8, 9; Eph. 5:5; Phil. 3:19.*

Amen.

Closing prayer

Closing hymn: Psalm 138:1

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Amen.

Dr MJ du Plessis
 Reformed Church Bellville
 Date: 20 July 2008 (evening)

The contents of the Ten Commandments:

- The first four commandments teach us how to live in relation to the Lord God and *our obligations to Him*. These were written on the first stone tablet that Moses carried from the mountain.
 - The first commandment deals with love to God.
 - The second is about worship (the fact that we may not bow down before idols and serve them).
 - The third commandment deals with the Name of God.
 - The fourth tells us how we should spend the day of God.
- The second stone tablet contained a series of new commandments – how we should live in relation to others.
 - The fifth commandment teaches us about the authority of our superiors.
 - The sixth commandment protects human life.

- The seventh preserves purity of marriage.
- The eighth deals with people's possessions.
- The ninth protects the name of every person. God forbids us to blacken someone's name.
- The tenth commandment teaches us that not even the slightest thought or desire contrary to any of God's commandments should ever arise in our heart.