

CLINK EVANGELICAL CHURCH – JUNE/JULY 2018

THE ROYAL LAW OF RELATIONSHIP

*"This book [is] the most valuable thing that this world affords. Here is Wisdom; this the **royal Law**; these are the lively Oracles of God"*

Introduction – the “royal law”

These words are said by the Moderator of the Church of Scotland as he hands a Bible to the new monarch at the British coronation service. Although the term “royal law” can apply to the whole Bible, for this series of messages over Sunday evenings in July I want to apply it in particular to what is known as God’s “**moral law**”, that is the Ten Commandments. There is scriptural warrant for calling it a “royal law” because James chapter 2 v 8 refers it as “the royal law” and the context of this passage is clearly referring to the Ten Commandments, particularly the second part of it which is summarised by “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”. This evening’s message is really an introduction to the series.

But I think it is also important to remember that when the Ten Commandments (or Ten Words as they can be called) were first given to the children of Israel it was not long after they had been delivered from **slavery** in Egypt and as a nation had entered into a covenant **relationship** with God. However, I hope that I can show that this moral law was written onto man’s heart from the very beginning because when he was originally created man was made in the image of God and in some ways reflected God’s character although of course that image was soon defaced when he fell into sin.

On my way to the stadium...

This month sees the start of the World Cup. I have a friend who shared with me recently an illustration he uses (and gave me permission to use) about people on their journey to faith in the

Lord Jesus Christ. Some people, he says, are like people going to a stadium to watch a match – they are on their way there but haven't got there yet. Some people have reached the stadium and have taken their seat in the stands. They are watching the match. However, it is the last group who have really made a commitment – they are likened to the players on the pitch.

It may be some reading this may be like those in the stands watching the game. They may ask questions such as: "Is Christianity all about keeping a set of rules, or coming up to a certain standard?" "Is it all about not doing certain things?" And if I'm living a "good life" isn't that enough?

For others, they may be like the players on the pitch. They have already entered into a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, they turned away from sin and put their trust in Him as Saviour. Yet, there may be questions about the relationship between God's moral law and grace – probably two of the most important words in the Bible – so I want to say some things about grace as well. In fact I believe that God's grace was there from the very beginning as soon as man sinned. The law cannot save, it can only reveal our sin. From the very beginning God's grace has provided a way back to Him through the shedding of blood of an innocent substitute, all pointing forwards to **The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!** (John 1 v 29) and this became clearer as the Old Testament develops.

A blueprint for living

Earlier this year I worked on some Bible Reading Notes (for September and October this year) which focused on the Ten Commandments as God's blueprint for living. The great Confessions of Faith that came out of the Reformation all refer to the abiding relevance of God's moral law as binding on all.ⁱ The **ceremonial laws** (e.g. the sacrificial system in Leviticus) were

fulfilled in Christ; the **civil laws** given to Moses regulated the conduct of the children of Israel in the Promised Land – although not binding on God’s people now they contain biblical principles which can still be applied and in some ways were an application of God’s moral law. There is an interesting example of how Paul applies the law for not muzzling an ox in Deuteronomy 25 v. 4 as referring to a person whose main duty is “labour in the word and doctrine” should be properly rewarded (1 Tim. 5:17–18).

An indication of the permanency of the Ten Commandments (the **moral law**) is the unique way in which it was given to Israel. The Ten Words were spoken by God in a loud voice on Mount Sinai and no more was said and then God inscribed the words on tablets of stone (Deut. 5 v 22); the remainder of God’s laws were written down by Moses. The tablets were then put inside the ark (that central piece of furniture in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle), a copy of the rest of the law was placed beside the ark but not inside it (Deut. 31 v 26).

There is a **unity** about the Commandments as James 2 v 10 shows, because if we were able to keep the whole law, and yet stumble at one point, we would be guilty of all.

The Commandments are not just about the outward act of keeping them; they also address inner attitudes too as Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5 vv. 21–28). Each commandment, it has been said, covers a family of sins.

Although people often characterise the Commandments as being “Thou shalt not” do this or that, in the New Testament the Lord Jesus gave a summary of the Commandments as love towards God and love towards others (Mark 12 vv 28–34), something I hope we shall look at in this series.

One of the main purposes of the Commandments is to show us our sin and lead us to Christ. Nevertheless, although the Commandments cannot save us, they can help us in growing in

our relationship with the Lord Jesus and I hope to say something about that over the coming weeks. One writer describes them as “God’s rules for holiness”.

The royal law is for failures

The present coach of England’s football team is Gareth Southgate. He may be remembered for missing a crucial penalty in the Euro 96 contest against Germany and at that point may have felt his career was a failure. The wonderful thing about the Bible, and even the Ten Commandments, is that it was written for failures like you and me. Above the Commandments in the tabernacle was a covering on the ark called the “mercy seat”. It was here that once a year the high priest put the blood of a sacrifice as an atonement for sin. This all pointed forwards to that one sacrifice for sin by the Lord Jesus on Calvary so that we failures can find forgiveness for our breaking of God’s law and be restored to Him. But He doesn’t leave things there, we are given the gift of the Holy Spirit who acts – to keep with football analogies – as the Referee in the soul and helps us to obey God’s commandments (see John 14 vv 15–18).

John Hobson (June 2018)

¹ The 39 Articles of the Church of England, the Westminster Confession of Faith drawn up in the 17th century and its counterpart, the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith all underline the fact that the Commandments have an enduring character and although cannot save us are of great help for Christians in their walk with the Lord.

Other sources which I have found helpful are:

A small booklet published by the Christian Institute by John L. Mackay, *The Moral Law – Its place in Scripture and its relevance today*. (There is a copy in the Church Library.)

William J U Philip, *The Law of Promise* – a booklet published by The Proclamation Trust. (I’m happy to lend you a copy.)

Peter Masters, *God’s Rules for Holiness – Unlocking the Ten Commandments*