

# The Law Written on Adam's Heart

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[0:00] Now, we also learn from this passage that Adam was made with extraordinary dignity! The very heart of this passage tells us that God very intentionally created Adam in his own image.

! Adam was made to be like God in many important respects. In fact, God goes as far as to give him dominion over the earth. God essentially says, this world is mine. I created it.

And even though you are one of my creatures, one of my creations, I'm giving you authority over it. This is something David will later marvel at in Psalm 8 when he writes, When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him and the son of man that you care for him?

Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands. You have put all things under his feet.

As David says, Adam was crowned with glory and honor. He was made in the very image of his creator. And not only that, but he was given real authority over the earth.

[1:20] However, it's important to note that this is delegated authority. Adam is not king over the earth. He's more like a governor appointed by the king.

Of course, a governor may possess real authority over whatever territory, but he does not own the kingdom. He's not supreme. He governs it only because the king has placed him there.

So that's Adam's position from the beginning. God gives him dominion, but Adam is not sovereign. He serves as an authority under God's authority.

This is what we sometimes refer to as the creator-creature distinction. You see, Adam is made in the image of God. He's given real authority, but he's still not God.

God exists eternally. Adam exists only because God made him. God depends on no one. Adam depends on God for everything. God determines the purpose of creation, and all Adam can really do is receive and accept that purpose.

[2:28] And there are several reasons why we want to be clear about this distinction. But for our purpose this morning, what we really want to see is that Adam never possessed the right to determine good and evil independently from God.

Adam had a mind and a will. He was able to make genuine choices. In other words, he was not a machine. But freedom is not the same thing as complete autonomy.

Adam could choose whether or not he would obey God. But he did not get to choose whether obedience to God was good. And he was not able to define the terms of good and evil.

Now we might ask, where do we even see that in the text? Well, let me answer that question by asking a few questions of my own. Who gave Adam life?

Who determined that he should exercise dominion? Who gave him the world in which to live? Who defined his purpose? Of course, the answer to all of these questions is God.

[3:39] So there's really nothing in the creation story, or anywhere else for that matter, that would indicate that Adam could possibly be in a position to determine for himself good versus evil.

As I talked about last time, God is holy. He's righteous. He's good. He's true. And his moral will simply reflects who he is.

In other words, even God does not make rules arbitrarily. His law simply flows from who he is. All of his commands. And his creatures, namely Adam in this case, are not in a position to create their own rules.

It's not the same, but it's similar to the parent-child relationship. The child is not in a position to determine right from wrong. That's something the child simply learns from his or her parents.

The child's obligation is to obey his or her parents. And this is captured in paragraph 5 of this chapter of the Confession when it says, So yes, the commandments or the law of God, they're wise. [5:04] But we are obligated to obey simply because of that creator-creature distinction. He is God and we are not.

As Isaiah confesses, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay and you are the potter. We are all the work of your hand. And of course, the clay has no power or authority to determine anything apart from the potter, including morality.

But Genesis not only tells us that Adam was placed under God's authority, it also tells us what kind of man God created. So we're told in verse 27 again, God created man in his own image.

Now, for everything that might mean, it means, at least in part, that man was created morally good. In Ecclesiastes 7, verse 29, Solomon says, See, this alone I found, that God made man upright. But they have sought out many schemes. So when Adam was first created, he was not wicked in any sense.

[6:23] He was not morally confused or inwardly divided in this way. There was no sinful impulse already lying dormant inside of him, just waiting to emerge.

In fact, once God finished his creation, he examined everything. And what was his pronouncement? It is very good. And that, of course, included Adam.

So this is a very important part of what it meant for Adam to be made in the image of God. Now, we don't want to reduce that image to moral uprightness.

Not alone. Because human beings remain image bearers even after the fall. In James 3, 9, James writes, With the tongue we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God.

So, even after sin, we remain image bearers of God. Moral purity or uprightness is not the totality of what it means to be made in the image of God.

[7:27] But for Adam, in particular, this is part of what it means. In Ephesians 4, 24, Paul describes the born-again person as created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Then in Colossians 3, 10, he speaks of the new self being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. So when a person is given new life by Christ, he is born again by the Spirit of God, God is essentially restoring in us what was present in Adam before the fall.

And what's being restored exactly? It's Adam's uprightness. Adam knew God truly. His affections were rightly ordered.

He was upright, meaning he was morally fitted to the God who created him. Now going back to that verse in Ecclesiastes 7, we see this in the contrast that Solomon makes.

Again, he says, God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes. So God created man upright, but it was man who departed from that uprightness.

[8:42] The moral problem, in other words, did not originate in God's workmanship. Well, this is essentially what the confession means when it says, God gave Adam a law of comprehensive obedience written in his heart.

Now, we shouldn't imagine that Adam was, that Adam consciously possessed the Ten Commandments in precisely the form later given at Sinai.

I don't think he walked around the garden reciting, you shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, and so on. But, he didn't need a written commandment to know that. For example, the God who made him should be worshipped rather than forsaken for the worship of something else. He didn't need a written command to know that Eve should be loved rather than harmed.

He didn't need a written command to know that truth was good and deceit was evil. His heart and mind were made to recognize and to approve what is righteous.

[9:50] We might think of someone learning a foreign language. I can remember taking Spanish classes in high school. Now, when I speak English, for the most part, I don't have to stop and think about every single word.

It just flows out of me because English is my native language. But, when I tried to speak Spanish, I had to stop and think about every single word.

I also had to think about the rules of the Spanish language which are different than English. Well, God's moral law was Adam's native language. Obedience was native to his created condition.

His moral faculties were not fighting against the will of God. At the same time, I want to clarify that Adam did not possess an independent moral light within himself.

Remember that creator? Creature distinction. His knowledge was what we might call creaturely knowledge. In other words, he knew what was good because God made him to know what is good.

[11:00] He was righteous because God had made him upright. So, you see, the law written on Adam's heart and God's authority over Adam are not unrelated ideas.

The same creator who stood above Adam as his Lord and maker also formed Adam's nature to correspond with his moral will. So, even before Adam is given a written or spoken commandment, Adam already lives under God's moral law.

And furthermore, he knows that he belongs to God and he owes him obedience. obedience. But then, God goes one step further in Genesis chapter 2.

So, if you want, turn over to Genesis 2 verses 15 through 17. We're told here, the Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

And the Lord God commanded the man saying, you may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat. For in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.

[12:16] So, remember what the confession says. God gave Adam a law of comprehensive obedience written in his heart and a specific precept not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

So, we have two things happening here in the garden. First, we see that Adam already possesses an inward knowledge of his most basic moral duties to God and neighbor.

He was created upright. The law was written on his heart. And second, God now gives Adam a command that he could not have discovered merely by examining human nature or the created order.

This is not something that was built into him. And that is the command not to eat from this particular tree in the garden. So, if God had said, if God had not said don't eat this fruit, I don't think Adam would have known it was morally evil to eat the fruit.

In fact, it could be argued that it was not morally evil to eat the fruit until God gave the command. After all, once God finished creating everything, he said, everything was very good.

[13:32] I don't think the fruit was poisonous necessarily. So, had God not prohibited it, eating the fruit may not have been sinful. This is what we refer to as a positive command or a positive law.

So, when we talk about God's moral law, we're talking about those duties that are grounded in God's character and in the order he has created. Murder, for example, is wrong because human life bears God's image.

We see this in Genesis 9-6, whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed for God made man in his own image. That's why it's wrong. Adultery is wrong because even in Genesis 1 or Genesis 2, we see God establish marriage as a covenant between one man and one woman. Idolatry is wrong. Because God alone is God. And therefore, he is the only one who deserves to be worshipped. But a positive command is a little different.

This is something that becomes obligatory because God specifically commands it. Think about the way that Americans drive on the right side of the road and the British drive on the left side of the road.

[14:54] Is there something inherently wrong about driving on either side of the road? No, but once the law has been established by a particular nation, then driving on one side or the other does become wrong.

The rule creates the moral obligation. Well, this command that God gives to Adam is something like that. God has authority over Adam, so when he says, you shall not eat of this tree, that command alone is sufficient to bind Adam.

It doesn't have to be written in his heart because what is written in his heart is the goodness of obeying God. So whatever God says, he should obey, and that much he knows.

So this is one more way it helps to consider the creature-creator distinction because Adam is God's creature. God has not only the right to make him with a moral nature, but God also has the right to speak to him and prescribe his conduct.

And Adam, as the creature, cannot reply, you know, I only want to obey those duties that I can independently see are reasonable and good. Imagine if a child tried that with his parents.

[16:10] They do, don't they? It doesn't work. You see, if God had said, do not murder Eve, Adam could have immediately recognized something of the moral soundness of that command because it was written on his heart.

But he wouldn't have the same intuition, if you will, regarding the forbidden tree. It would have looked to him like any other tree. Good for food. That was Eve's assessment, right? Looks delicious. What's wrong with it? And that's what makes this command such an important test. Adam must decide whether God's word is enough. apart from the command, he doesn't necessarily know that it's wrong to eat from this tree. Again, apart from the command, it wouldn't have been wrong to eat from this tree. And as the creature, Adam must decide whether he is willing to trust God's word or assert his autonomy in defiance of the creator and do what he thinks is right.

So let's see what happens. Turn over to Genesis chapter 3. And notice particularly the serpent's temptation in verse 5. He says, For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God knowing good and evil.

[17:38] What exactly is the serpent offering here? As we've seen, Adam and Eve already possessed moral knowledge in one sense. They already know that obedience is good and disobedience is evil, but this temptation is deeper than simply acquiring moral information.

That may be how it sounds, but that's not it. Not exactly. What the serpent is doing is inviting them to seize a prerogative that belongs only to God, to determine for themselves good and evil, rather than receiving that determination from a higher authority, namely God the creator.

So God says, in effect, this is permitted, and that is forbidden, and the serpent raises the question, why should God be the one to decide?

Why can't you decide that for yourself? And that is precisely what is at the heart of Adam's rebellion. The fruit on this forbidden tree becomes the visible point at which the creator-creature relationship is challenged.

Will Adam remain a creature who receives his life, his wisdom, his moral direction, everything from God, or will he try to become his own final authority? So, it was certainly sin for Adam to eat the fruit, but at the same time, the eating of that fruit expresses something even larger than simply eating a piece of fruit.

[19:16] It expressed Adam's distrust of God's word, his dissatisfaction with God's authority. It expressed his pride and his rebellion, and it was an attempt at moral independence.

Adam was never given the right to invent good. He was created to know what is good and to receive it from God and to obey it. And when he ate from the tree, he rejected all of that. So, now that we've seen the command, the question becomes, how much obedience did Adam owe? Could he obey God most of the time?

Could he possibly compensate for one little act of disobedience with maybe many acts of obedience? Would sincere effort have been enough? Well, listen to what Paul says in Galatians 3.10.

For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse, for it is written, Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all these things written in the book of the law and do them.

[20:28] Now, Paul is quoting here from Deuteronomy, which speaks specifically about Israel under the Mosaic law, but notice the underlying principle. The law requires what the law commands.

So, if righteousness or a right standing before God is to come through doing or keeping the law, the standard cannot be mostly.

It has to be altogether kept. The law has to be perfectly kept. James 2.10 says something very similar, for whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point becomes guilty of all of it.

Now, that doesn't mean every single sin is equal, but we are judged by the entirety of the law. If we fail on one point, God will not grade on a curve.

We have broken the law. We are guilty. This is why the confession uses four words here to describe the obedience that Adam owed. It says, by these, God obligated him and all his descendants to personal, total, exact, and perpetual obedience.

[21:43] By personal, the confession means Adam himself had to obey. He cannot turn to Eve and say, you obey for me. It was on him. By total, it means obedience extended to everything God required.

Adam could not pick and choose from God's moral commands. By exact, it means good intentions could not substitute for obedience.

So, if God said, do not eat, taking even one bite was disobedience. Adam could not later claim, well, I thought you just meant don't eat an entire piece of fruit.

I thought one bite would be okay, truly. I wanted to obey you, but I thought one bite, what's that going to hurt? No, God's law requires exact conformity to his will.

And by perpetual, the confession means Adam never reached a point and would never reach a point where he ceased owing God obedience. No matter how righteous Adam remained, no matter how well he fought temptations, he would always be a creature.

[22 : 52] He would never become independent of God's authority. So the requirement was comprehensive. Adam owed God his whole life, everything.

Now, that might sound severe, especially to fallen people, because we instinctively think in terms of percentages. We like to compare the good and the bad in our lives, weigh one against the other, and we usually manage to give ourselves a passing grade, don't we?

But Adam was created upright. God had not withheld from him anything that was necessary for obedience. Complete obedience was not an unreasonable demand placed upon a defective creature.

It was the appropriate response of an upright creature to his holy creator. Now, what was at stake in Adam's obedience?

Well, returning to Genesis 2.17, God says, in the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die. So God doesn't stop at giving Adam a command.

[24 : 05] He also attaches a consequence to disobedience of that command. Disobey, and you will die. Sometimes the Bible expresses the same idea, but does so positively.

For instance, Romans 10.5 says, for Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them.

Or Galatians 3.12 says, the one who does them shall live by them. Now, those statements come from a slightly different context, but the principle is the same.

Obey and live. Disobey and die. And that's the arrangement we see in the garden. God gives Adam life, places him before the tree of life, commands obedience, and he threatens death for disobedience.

And after Adam sins, Genesis 3.22 tells us that God bars him from the tree of life, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat and live forever.

[25 : 16] So this is what we sometimes call a covenant of works. But to be clear, the term works does not mean Adam could somehow put God in his debt.

Adam already owed obedience simply because he was a creature. So, for example, let's say a father tells his son, son, if you clean your room, afterward, I'll take you for ice cream.

Now, obviously, the father has freely attached a promise to that particular act of obedience, but the father does not owe his son ice cream.

No, it's actually the opposite of that. The child already owes his father obedience. Cleaning his room does not make the father indebted to the son. And we see something similar here in Genesis. God was not obligated by Adam's obedience to grant some higher reward and yet God freely bound himself by a promise. Once God promises, the promise is certain because God is faithful.

[26 : 19] And what was the promise? Well, it's implied. Adam, if you obey, if you don't eat of that fruit, you will live. But, if you disobey, if you do eat, you will surely die.

And that's what the confession says. God promised life if Adam fulfilled it and threatened death if he broke it. But, as people have pointed out along the way, Adam did not physically collapse the instant he ate from that forbidden tree.

However, Genesis 3 does show death beginning immediately. He hides from God. He's ashamed. We see that his relationship with Eve as well was instantly distorted.

The ground is cursed. Human nature is corrupted. Physical death begins its reign. And God eventually says to him, you are dust and to dust you shall return.

Paul summarizes it this way in Romans 5.12. Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin. So, that's what was at stake.

[27 : 33] It wasn't merely a question of whether Adam would lose access to a nice garden. Life and death stood before him. God had given him everything necessary for obedience and yet Adam

chose rebellion.

Now, at this point we might ask, did Adam really have a chance? If God knew the fall would happen, was Adam really capable of obeying?

Well, I think we've covered this already. I believe the answer the Bible gives is yes. Ecclesiastes says God made man upright. Genesis says his creation was very good.

There was no sinful nature in Adam pushing him toward rebellion, which is in stark contrast to what we experience after the fall, isn't it? After sin entered into the world, we're told the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law.

Indeed, it cannot. That's Romans 8, 7. But Adam wasn't created with that hostility. His mind was not at war with God.

[28 : 43] His affections were not disordered. His will was not enslaved to sin. He was genuinely able to obey. Meanwhile, as real as Adam's righteousness was, he could still fall.

Sometimes we describe Adam as mutable, which means he was capable of changing. So think of a young tree. It can be legitimately healthy and upright.

Its present condition is genuinely good, but there's still time for it to grow crooked or bent. So Adam was righteous with the ability to commit unrighteousness.

since the fall. We are conceived in unrighteousness, aren't we? We still bear parts of God's image, but we are not righteous as Adam was. And glorified believers one day, they will be righteous, but unlike Adam, they will not have the ability to commit unrighteousness.

In other words, Genesis 3 will never happen again. But for Adam, as the confession says, God promised life if Adam fulfilled it and threatened death if he broke it and he gave Adam the power and ability to keep it.

[30 : 04] And this deliberately places the responsibility where it belongs. God made man upright, but it was man who sought out many schemes. It was man who departed from that uprightness.

Now, that brings us to the end of paragraph one, but I want to touch on something that we'll deal with more extensively later.

If you want, turn over to Romans chapter five. Romans chapter five. Briefly, I just want to show how Adam's failure in the garden is relevant to us.

Someone might be tempted to think that Adam's sin, as tragic as it was, is not personally relevant. After all, he lived thousands of years ago. Why should his sin have anything to do with us?

Well, notice what Paul writes in verse 12. Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.

[31 : 11] And Paul continues to repeat the same idea. In verse 15, he speaks of one man's trespass. In 17, he says that because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man.

In verse 18, he says that one trespass led to condemnation for all men. And then in verse 19, he says, for as by the one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners.

So by the one man's obedience, the many will be made righteous. we'll come to that. So Adam is, he's more than merely the first sinner. He's more than a cautionary tale or a bad example for the rest of us.

His sin had consequences for the entire human race. This is what we mean when we use the term federal headship. Adam was the representative head for the entire human race.

Now, it's not exactly the same thing. Illustrations always fall short, I feel, but think of the way the president might sign a peace treaty with another nation. Or any kind of treaty for that matter.

[32 : 22] Obviously, not every citizen of the country is going to sign that treaty. We may not even agree with that treaty, but we're still bound to it as citizens. Well, Adam stood before God as the representative of humanity, all of us.

And when he disobeyed, condemnation and death fell on everyone he represented. This is why the confession says God obligated him and all his descendants.

So, even though we did not personally receive the commandment not to eat of that one tree of the garden, Adam and his choice represented all of us.

When he fell, we all fell. Now, I realize that concept can be very difficult to accept for people who live in modern Western culture with our hyper-individualism.

We hear this and we think, why should another man's sin count against me? But don't be so quick to reject this principle because notice where Paul goes with this.

[33:34] he does not use representation only to explain our condemnation in Adam. He uses it to explain our salvation in Christ.

Look again at verse 19. For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Paul places Adam and Jesus side by side here. Adam disobeyed but Christ obeyed. Adam brought condemnation but Christ brought righteousness.

Adam brought death but Christ brought life. So the answer to our problem of sin and condemnation and death is not to reject the biblical truth of representation or federal headship.

The answer is that God gives his people a better representative. As we look at the life of Christ we see that he succeeds precisely where Adam failed.

[34:47] Over and over again but think about his temptation in the wilderness in Matthew chapter 4. Adam he was tempted in a garden surrounded by abundance and then Jesus he was tempted in a wilderness after fasting for 40 days Adam had every kind of food he needed while Jesus was starving and yet when Satan attempted to tempt him to turn stones into bread Jesus resisted man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God do you see the parallel do you see the contrast that is precisely what Adam failed to do Adam had the word of God but he refused to submit to it Christ on the other hand lived in complete submission to the word of his father and that's despite not having the abundance that

Adam had Jesus obeyed God perfectly in thought word desire and action through his entire life he loved God perfectly he loved his neighbor perfectly he resisted every temptation and that obedience continued all the way to the cross as Philippians 2:8 says he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death even death on a cross earlier I read from Galatians 3 which says cursed be everyone who does not abide by all these things written in the book of the law and do them so that's what God's law demands but then Paul says in verse 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us so again Christ did what Adam failed to do he rendered the obedience God requires and then he bears the curse deserved by everyone who has disobeyed in

Adam again we'll come back to this but as we see the gospel does not mean that God lowers his standard after Adam failed God's standard his law which emanates from his very person remains you must be perfectly righteous and our hope of the gospel is that Christ has supplied what Adam failed to give us and what we could never produce for ourselves the first Adam disobeyed and brought death the second Adam he obeyed perfectly and brought life let's pray father we confess that we have not obeyed you as we should and Adam we fell into sin and death and in our own lives we have repeatedly broken your good law but we thank you that you have not left us without hope thank you for

Christ who obeyed where Adam failed who bore the curse for sinners who gives righteousness and life to all who trust in him I pray that you would help us to rest in his finished work and to walk in obedience to you and it's in his name we pray amen