

A Serious Confession

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I've got a serious confession to make: I've got bad breath. If you're a close friend, that's no news to you! The worse part about it was that I was walking around, talking with people, all the while unaware that this awful smell of death was proceeding out of my mouth. One day, I went to kiss my wife and her nose curled up and she gasped for breath and said, "phew! Your breath is awful!" I felt really bad. I think she said it with pure motives. OK- maybe the motives weren't totally selfless- maybe she wasn't only concerned about my own welfare, but was also looking out for number one- but regardless of mixed motives, regardless of pain, she had the courage to tell me I had bad breath.

Last Sunday morning I looked at my watch while reading the Bible and noticed it was time to head to church. I put my coat and shoes on and then remembered that I hadn't gargled yet with mouthwash. I thought to myself, "I haven't had anything to eat- maybe my breath isn't that bad- maybe no one will notice- I don't want to be late for church." I got all the way through church service without a foul look on anyone's face- "boy, I guess I got by this time." After service, I was in a conversation with my dear friend Tom, and he whipped out his Tic Tacs and threw a couple in his mouth and then offered me and the other man talking with us some. Tom is so tactful! I quickly grabbed them and slapped them into my mouth. Tom didn't have to say anything about my bad breath- I already had come to an understanding that I had a foul breath and needed something to redeem it. Oh wretched breath that I have- who will rescue me from this body of breath! Thanks be to Tic Tac! Oh, in this body of breath I groan, longing for that Day when Christ returns and I'll no longer struggle with this breath of death!

Bad breath is like sin. Until someone tells us we have it, it goes undetected. Once God has awakened us to the fact that we're spiritually dead and in trouble because of our sin before a holy God, we become sensitive to sin by the Holy Spirit and can walk in victory over it with His leading, for we've been raised from the dead to spiritual life- we've been born again.

Some people want to share Christ without sharing the bad news about sin. So people walk about in ignorance of the fact that they are walking dead men, condemned by their sin and one missed heart beat away from eternal condemnation.

So what reveals that they have sin? God's law! **"I would not have known sin except through the law"** (*Romans 7:7b*) Read that again- let it sink into the core of your evangelism teaching, memorize it- God has one tool to reveal sin to lawless men- the law. **"Sin is transgression of the law"** (*1 John 3:4*).

What law is being referred to- the whole Bible, the moral law, or what?

Paul clarifies, "'I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known **covetousness** unless the law had said, '**You shall not covet.**'" (*Rom 7:7*)

The Ten Commandments is the summary of God's moral law. These Ten Commandments are summarized by two commandments. Jesus, when asked what the greatest Commandment was, quoted two in the Old Testament that summarized all of them- to paraphrase: to love God and to love others. In Romans, God summarizes the 5th through the 10th Commandments, "For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'you shall not murder,' 'you shall not bear false witness,' 'you shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law." (*Rom 13:9-10*)

Jesus expounded the Ten Commandments, especially in the Sermon on the Mount, showing how it is spiritual and oh, so deep. It reveals how totally depraved man is and brings man to the cross to find forgiveness in Christ. It brings men to repent and believe. The Ten Commandments are a summary of all of the moral law of God. The New Testament is filled with examples of how God's law is used to convict sinners of their sin, but one has to understand the spiritual nature of the law (*Rom 7:14*) to see this- the Ten Commandments are far broader than what initially meets the eye, as can be seen by the following examples:

2nd Commandment: idolatry is far more than bowing down to statues: "no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an **idolater**, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ" (*Eph 5:5, cf. Col 3:5*)

6th Commandment: Jesus said cussing and name calling, gossip and slander are all forms of murder with words (*Matt 5:22*), hatred is murder (*1 John 3:15*) and fighting is murder (*James 4:2*)- driven by covetousness.

7th Commandment: This commandment is so much more than just adultery. Jesus said lust was adultery of the heart (*Matt 5:28*) and divorce and remarriage (excluding certain special circumstances) is adultery (*Matt 5:31-32*). The marriage bed alone is holy- in action, word and thought.

9th Commandment: exaggerations and failure to keep oaths are forms of lying (*Matt 5:33-37*)

1st Commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me" is a deep, deep commandment with so many implications. Jesus expounded, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of Me." (*Matt 10:37*) What is your first affection? If it isn't Jesus Christ at all times, then the 1st Commandment has been broken- all have broken this commandment (*Rom 3:11-12*).

10th Commandment: Jesus said that we can't love both God and Mammon. Mammon was a Canaanite idol- some of the versions say 'money'. Jesus challenged the rich young ruler to sell all he had and follow Him who alone is good, as He convicted him of covetousness, idolatry and inordinate affection (God wasn't #1 in his life) "Go, sell

everything you have, and come, follow Me.” After the rich young ruler left, Jesus made sure the disciples understood that covetousness and idolatry kept the man from the kingdom, “Children, how hard it is for those who *trust in riches* to enter the kingdom of God!” Interpreting scripture with scripture, Jesus used the “law as a tutor to bring us to Christ” (*Gal 3:24*). The law “stops every mouth and holds the whole world guilty before God.” (*Rom 3:19*) The rich man came to Jesus seeking to be justified by his keeping the law, but in the end he left in silence, his mouth stopped and realizing he no longer was justified, “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” (*Rom 3:20*)

Charles Spurgeon preached,

“The business of the Law is first to teach us our obligations to God. Let us ask ourselves if we have ever heard the Law teaching us in that way. Brethren, read the Law of Ten Commandments, and study each separate precept, and **you will find that in those ten short precepts you have all the moral virtues, the full compass of your accountability to God, and of your relationship to your fellowmen. It is a wonderful condensation of morals. The essence of all just decrees and statutes lies there.**

Perfection is there photographed, and holiness mapped out. No one has ever been able to add to it without creating an excrescence, not a word could be taken from it without causing a serious omission. It is the perfect Law of God, and tells us exactly what we ought to be; if we are in any degree deficient, we are to that extent guilty before God. Now, when the Law comes to a man’s conscience, it reveals to him the divine standard of right- holds it up before him-makes him look at it- and appraises him that the Commandments do not merely refer to acts and deeds, but with equal force to the words and thoughts from whence they proceed.”

The law is the only tool in God’s toolbox of scripture that is specifically designed to “make sin exceedingly sinful” (*Rom 7:13*) and to bring a sinner to realize his true condition of spiritual death (*Rom 7:4,9-10, 8:2*). The law has dominion over a man until he dies to the law through another law- the law of life through Christ (*7:1*).

My brother or sister in Christ- are you using the law in your witnessing? There’s a time for the law and a time for the gospel of grace and the glories of the Lord Jesus Christ who paid the ultimate price, rose from the dead and is now seated in glory at the right hand of God. There’s a time for prophecy and a time for speaking of rebirth, there’s a time to speak of repentance and a time to speak of redemption- **if you’re not using the law at all in witnessing, then you’re not understanding man’s total depravity and the tool God has given us to reveal it.**

Some who don’t use the law in their evangelism have accused evangelists who use the law as being harsh, judgmental and condescending. Just like my wife telling me about my bad breath, we all need to check our motives for why we evangelize the way we do- but true motives or false, the truth of God’s law and its purposes in converting the soul (*Psalms 19:7*) never changes. Let God be true and every man a liar. Paul even said this about motives and preaching Christ, “The former preach Christ from selfish

ambition...What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice.” (*Phil 1:18*) Do you want to question the motives of preachers that use the law to convict of sin? I’ll confess for all of us: our motives aren’t perfect. We groan in this body of death. We long for pure motives, while we fail miserably to live up to God’s perfection. Our hearts, though redeemed by Christ, are at times deceitfully wicked- we know not the sin we do- but, like the bad breath scenario, we’re aware now of our bad breath- we’re painfully aware of our motives not being perfect- and we’re seeking to live a lifestyle of repentance and growth- forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead! Pray for us, and we’ll pray for you- and while you’re working on your motives for evangelism and maybe for the first time using the law as a tutor to lead people to Christ, we’ll work on ours, too, while we continue to preach the law and the gospel of grace!

I’d like now to give you a little practice doing what Charles Spurgeon has suggested- seeing all of the morals of the Bible condensed into the Ten Commandments. In his wonderful study Bible, John MacArthur picks this passage in *1 Tim 1:8-10* and shows how virtually all Ten Commandments are contained in it. Can you pick them out? Give it a try:

“But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and **insubordinate**, for the **ungodly** and **profane**, for **murderers of fathers** and **murderers of mothers**, for **manslayers**, for **fornicators**, for **sodomites**, for **kidnappers**, for **liars**, for **perjurers**, and if there is **any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine** according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God...” (*1 Tim 1:8-10*)

Here’s another exercise: I found 35 witnessing encounters in the book of Acts- some are just one verse summaries, others are longer texts with messages. Look over these passages and see where there is conviction of sin, and see how it relates to one or more of the Ten Commandments. See how central the conviction of sin is- how it is a turning point. As an example, let’s observe Peter’s preaching at Pentecost- quite a long sermon for the book of Acts. He convicts the crowd of murder of the Messiah- isn’t that interesting? Only the High Priest and those who held council with him, and Pilate and the executioner could literally be accused of murdering the Messiah, right? Wrong. Why did Peter accuse the whole crowd of murder? The law is spiritual- it summarizes all the moral lapses of mankind.

“Jesus of Nazareth... you have taken by **lawless** hands, have crucified, and put to death...Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.” (*Acts 2:23, 36*)

The result of using the law? “The law is a tutor, leading us to Christ” (*Gal 3:24*)

“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’” (*Acts 2:37*) The law humbled them- their mouths were stopped, they knew they were guilty (*Rom 3:19-20*). The law had done its work!

Now it is a “mop up” operation of the Holy Spirit to share the gospel, which is summarized in two words: repent and believe...

“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”
(Acts 2:38)

So here’s a challenge: 34 times in Acts the gospel was shared- what patterns do you see in the messages? Where do you see the law being used to convict of sin to those who are self-righteous? Notice how quickly in these witnessing encounters that the witnesses go from talking of natural things to sharing the gospel- they didn’t wait an extended time of days or weeks or months or years to build a relationship- a relationship was built in a few minutes and the gospel was shared!

Acts 2:14-47, 3:11-4:4, 4:5-33, 5:17-42, 6:8-8:3, 8:4-12, 26-38, 40, 9:20-29, 10:1-11:18, 11:19-24, 13:5, 6-12, 13-52, 14:1-7, 15-20, 21, 16:6-15, 25-33, 17:1-4, 10-14, 16-34, 18:1-17, 19, 27-28, 19:1-6, 8-10, 20:21-25, 21:40-23, 23:3-10, 24:10-21, 24-25, 26:1-32, 28:23-29, 30-31.

Ray Comfort stated, “It is a perfect Law of a perfect God that demands moral perfection. That is what we are commanded to warn every man, that we may present every man perfect in Christ.”

So fear not to expose people’s bad breath- fear not that your motives may not be perfect, but pray that the love of Christ compels you to warn people- there’s a hell to avoid and a glorious kingdom to attain and a righteous law that makes it impossible to attain but through the blood of the Savior.

In Christ’s Love,
Mike Porter