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THE MIRROR OF THE LAW

(Lord's Day 2, Question 4)

Psalter 363:1, 2, 5

Scripture: Mark 10:17-27

Psalter 281

Psalter 136:1, 3

Psalter 312

Dear congregation,

We ask your attention for Lord's Day 2, Question 4, of our Heidelberg Catechism:

Question 4: What doth the law of God require of us?

Answer: Christ teaches us that briefly, Matt. 22:37-40, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first and the great commandment; and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

With God's help, we wish to expound the theme that we had just begun to touch upon at the close of our previous sermon, namely:

The Mirror of the Law

1. The Law's Great Commandment
2. Our Great Disobedience
3. God's Great Mercy

I repeat: The Mirror of the Law: The Law's Great Commandment; Our Great Disobedience; and God's Great Mercy.

Today we commence a somewhat detailed exposition of the first section of our Heidelberg Catechism — the section that focuses on our sin and misery. It is quite possible that, when we consider these questions on our misery one by one, that we will soon grow weary of hearing about our sin and our dangerous condition. And yet, we would encourage you to bear in

mind that all that we say in these detailed Lord's Days about how we come to know our sins is directed to lead us out of ourselves by faith to Jesus Christ. All is designed to make room for that only Deliverer, the Lord Jesus, of whom His Father says, "In Him I am well-pleased. Hear ye Him."

Thus, today we go a step deeper into the pit of our misery. Even though we aim to expound these questions one by one, congregation, when we come to the end of Lord's Day 4, we will still not be to the bottom of that bottomless pit of our miserable, sinful state and condition. "Our heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." Only God knows the depth of our sin and our corruption.

We saw last time what misery is, what sin is, and we saw as we closed that we come to know our sin through the Spirit convicting us by means of the law. Today, in Question 4, we are invited to gaze at ourselves in the mirror of the law. James calls the law "a looking glass," or, "a mirror." Thus, it is a biblical idea that the Holy Spirit uses the law as a mirror.

Everyone of us knows what a mirror is. Boys and girls, young people, parents and seniors — every day we stand in front of mirrors. When we drive cars, we look into the mirror. When we get ready in the morning, we look into a mirror to see how we look, perhaps sometimes to observe what other people might think of how we look, but today we want to look into a deeper mirror, a mirror that shows us what God thinks of us, what God thinks of how we look. This mirror will not show us how beautiful we are, but this mirror will show us our sin and our misery. This mirror of God's law is set before us as a means of grace to teach us our misery in order to lead us to need the Deliverer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus, our instructor asks us in Question 4, "What doth the law of God require of us?" The law, we saw last time, refers here to the ten commandments. But Jesus summarizes those ten commandments in the answer to Question 4 by saying that the ten commandments, in one word, require "love." "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first and the great commandment, and the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." It is necessary, if we are going to

understand what conviction of sin is and a proper preparation made in the soul to receive the Lord Jesus Christ, to understand what the law is. The law is something more, congregation, than simply a table of "thou shalts" and "thou shalt nots." That is how the Jews viewed the law. They were very upset with Jesus' very short summary of the law. The Jews, instead of summarizing the law, wanted to expand the law. They said, "Some commandments are light; some commandments are weighty. Some are little; some are great; and some are greatest." They made charts of all the different laws. In the commentaries on the Jewish religion and the Talmud, the Mishna, and other Jewish books, you can read that they developed a set of 613 laws, all of which, in orthodox Judaism are still valid today. Of these 365 were negative in nature — they were "thou shalt nots"; 248 were affirmative, or positive, in nature. You can understand how upset the Jews were when they were used to memorizing 613 laws and then came to Jesus and said, "What does the law say?" and He replied, "The law says only one thing — not 613. The law says, 'Love.'" This is the essence of the law. Jesus probed all their laws and man-made additions. He made bare the law in one word. He said as it were, "The law demands love." "You Pharisees," Jesus said many times, in one way or another, "put heavy burdens upon the Jewish shoulders. You give them these 613 laws. You give them burdens heavier than they can bear, and you do not walk that way yourself. You miss the whole point of the law — that the law demands a heart of love."

The amazing thing, congregation, is that in that one word "love" Jesus went deeper than the Jews went with their 613 commandments. With 613 laws they did not say as much as Jesus said in one word. Paul (then known as Saul) was very good at keeping all 613 commandments. So was the rich young ruler. They were Pharisees from their youth. Saul and the rich young ruler could say, "All these things have I kept from my youth up." They obeyed the letter of the law, "Thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not commit adultery, thou shalt not kill, remember the Sabbath day" All these things they did outwardly. They lived obediently, you would say, and they felt good about their obedience. But my dear friends, with one stroke Jesus cut through all mere outward morality. He probes deeper into your heart and into my heart; He gives us a mirror today and says to us, "Do you love Me above all, and do you love your neighbor as yourself?"

"On these two commandments hang all the law." Maybe you say, "Two commandments? You have just said that everything was summarized in the word 'love.' That is only one commandment." Well, indeed, in essence there is only one commandment which is love, for Jesus said, "the second is like unto it." Both the first table of the law, which demands love to God above all, and the second table of the law, which demands love to my neighbor as myself, command love. That love is not a divided love, where we say, "Well, with this love I will love God, and with that love I will love my neighbor." Rather, the spirit of the law, the spirit of love that the law demands, is a comprehensive love. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart," and out of the love to God there will flow a love unto our neighbor. This love to the Lord our God is the great commandment. It does not say, "greatest." Jesus was very careful. He already knew that the Jews were very fond of charting their laws in terms of greatest, great, and smaller. But He says, "This is the great, broad-sweeping commandment: love. Love the Lord thy God. 'And the second is like unto it.' The second is not lesser. The second is inseparable from it. 'Love thy neighbor as thyself.' This is also a great commandment. These two great commandments belong together."

Jesus sets before us today the mirror of the law and writes across that mirror the great word "love." He asks you and me to look into that mirror and examine our own hearts. How do we fare in the mirror that demands love, to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, with all thy strength"? Can we say today that this is what we do? Do we love the Lord with all our heart? Our heart is the fountain of our inmost being. It is the spring from which everything flows. Out of our heart, the Bible says, are the issues of life. Can you say today, my friend, that the fountain of your life, the roots of your affections, the very basics of all your desires and of all your thoughts, go out unto God? When you wake up in the morning, is your meditation of God? When you go to bed in the evening, are you filled with love to God? And as you move through your day, are your meditations upon Him? Do you live with God? Are your thoughts unto God? Does your whole heart — that means your whole life — live to the honor and glory of God? Do you really love God with *all* your heart?

Do you love God with all your *soul*? Our soul refers to our deepest purposes and our deepest affections, to our will,

and what our will produces in our daily life. Can you say that twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year, you are always willing to love God? When God strikes you with affliction, with adversity, do you respond to Him in love? Do you love God with all your affections, with all your will, with all your soul?

Do you love God with all your *mind*? That's the third thing Jesus mentions. "Thou shalt love Him with all thy mind." Our mind is our thoughts, our mental powers, including our judgment. Are your thoughts fixed on God? Are your thoughts directed to God, to know Him, to love Him? Is He your greatest delight? Can you say of God, "How precious are Thy thoughts unto me, O God, and my thoughts back unto Thee are also precious as a fruit of Thy preciousness to me"? Do you love God with all your mind?

And then, do you love God with all your *strength*? That refers to all the faculties of soul and body, all that we are able to do. Do you love God with all your strength? What do you do with your hands? What do you do with your feet? What do you do with your eyes? What do you do with every faculty of your body? Do you love God above all things in this world?

Do you love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and do you love your neighbor as yourself? Do heart, soul, mind, and strength, also go out to your neighbor as a fruit of love to God? That is what the law demands, congregation. The law goes much deeper than the rich young ruler thought. The first table of four commandments demands loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; the second table of six commandments demands that you love your neighbor with your whole heart, mind, soul, and strength, even as yourself.

This love is the soul of religion. This love constitutes a true Christian. Love is the queen of all graces. It is the only grace that will abide in glory forever. Faith will become sight and hope will turn to fruition, but charity faileth never. In heaven we shall have no need of repentance because there will be no sin. We shall have no need of faith because there we will see God face to face, but love will abide forever.

By nature, we do not have this burning love to God and this burning love to one another. By nature, at best we have

some outward kind of common-grace love, and usually we have that love in greater abundance for those who do us favors. We have to be ashamed, congregation, for the law demands a perfect love, a constant love, a steady love. As your pulse beats regularly, so the law demands moment by moment that love must emanate from our whole being all our life. What must we say? Does not the needle of the law prick our consciences today? When you hear what the law demands, my dear friend, must you not say, no matter how virtuous your youth was, "All these things I have *not* kept from my youth? Though I have perhaps not been guilty of many outward sins that other youth were guilty of, I have continually transgressed the command of love. I am a law-breaker."

When we have not loved God above all, congregation, all the days of our lives, we are under the curse of the law, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10). Then the wrath of God rests upon us. If we were as spotless in our lifestyle as the rich young ruler, we would still have to hear the law say to us, "One thing thou lackest: Sell all that thou hast and prove to the Lord that thou dost love the Lord thy God above all and thy neighbor as thyself."

When the Holy Spirit convicts me of my sin, He sets before me the mirror of the law with that large word "LOVE" written across it. Then it does not just become my actual sins of commission with which my conscience has to deal, but then my sins of omission and my sins of lovelessness become overwhelming. Then I see that my whole life has been a stream of iniquity. Even if I am highly esteemed in the church, at work, and in my family, I say to myself, "No one knows my lovelessness. No one knows that every moment of every day I am not loving God above all and my neighbor as myself. No one knows how wicked I am. No one can understand that my whole being is corrupt and that I am always sinning before a holy and a righteous God." Do you understand, my friend, that God has a right to require of you and me perfect love? Yes, perfect love. I say it again, *perfect love*. That is what the law requires — and justly, because God created us perfectly able to obey the law.

Before we fell, what did Adam do? He loved God above all. He walked with Him in the garden in the cool of the day.

And when he received Eve for his wife, he loved her as himself. He entered willingly into a covenant of works with God, that he would not transgress this love bond by eating of the tree of the fruit of knowledge of good and evil. How long Adam and Eve stood we do not know, but this much we know: As long as they remained obedient, they could say perfectly, "I love the Lord my God with all my heart, with all my soul, with all my mind, and with all my strength," and they loved each other truly, not just with common-grace love but with true love flowing out of their love for God. But when they fell, congregation, this was all reversed. Then Adam's order of serving God above all and placing Eve before himself was reversed. Then Adam served Adam. Then the Lord was placed last on Adam's list. Who changed? Did the law change? No. Did God change? No. Adam and Eve changed.

Congregation, the mirror of God's law never changes; the law continues to demand perfect love, notwithstanding that we too are law-breakers in Adam. We have reversed our original state of love. We have become enemies of God, and so now the law besets us on all sides. It surrounds us. There is no escape from the law. The law concerns our whole man. The law is not only concerned about our outward performances or our show of goodness, but it lays hold upon our heart, shakes us and says, "Oh man, oh woman, oh boy or girl, do you love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength?" The law does not ask so much what we must *do* as it expresses what we must *be*. May I emphasize (for this lies at the very heart of genuine conviction of sin): When the Holy Spirit makes a sinner bare before a holy God, he is not only guilty on account of all that he has *done* — that is enough guilt already — but he is even more guilty on account of what he *is*, what he *must be* and *is not*. He is guilty in the very core of his heart. What must I be? I must be a lover of God. I must be a lover of my neighbor. And that love must be all-inclusive. It must include my thoughts, my words, and my actions, when I am awake and when I am sleeping. It must include the whole of my life. But I experience again and again that I can never love God as I ought and can never love my neighbor as myself.

Must we not cry out, "Oh God, be merciful to me, a sinner"? Has that word "love" written across the mirror of the law

never pierced your heart? If you are taking a trip and you use the restroom in a restaurant or motel, sometimes there are things written on mirrors that make you feel sorry for the people who wrote them there. But have you ever felt sorry when you saw the handwriting of God in the mirror of your life by that one word "love"? Has that word love ever convicted you; has it ever left you guilty, condemnable, rejectable in the sight of God? Has the spirituality of the law — for the spirituality of the law is love — ever left you as a heap of rubble at the feet of a holy God? Have you looked into the mirror, maybe even literally looked into the mirror and said to yourself, "Everyone around me thinks I am pretty decent, but no one knows what lives in my heart. The love demand of the law condemns me through and through."

When a sinner is brought back to Paradise, he sees that there he broke that love bond with God, severed his relationship with the Most High, and that there is no ability to repair that relationship from his side. Then that sinner signs his own death sentence, so to speak, confessing, "Lord, I cannot give myself that love that the law requires. If I am ever to be saved, it must be by some righteousness alien to myself. It must be from a righteousness which Thou hast merited. It must be from someone else. Someone else must obey that love demand for me. Someone else must be able to look into the mirror and say, 'I have loved Thee, oh God, above all, and I have loved my neighbor as myself,' and He must take my place shall I ever be acceptable in Thy sight." That is exactly where God wants to meet His people. He shows them His great commandment, the great commandment of love, in order to teach them their great disobedience, their great disobedience of a lack of love. But He shows them that, to lead them to His great mercy; and that great mercy is this: that Jesus Christ came and looked into the mirror of the law and was able to say, "I have finished everything, oh heavenly Father, that Thou gavest Me to do." Jesus Christ for thirty-three years lived in this world and loved God above all and His neighbor as Himself. He had nothing to prove for Himself, for He was God-Man, but He gave perfect love to stand in the place of imperfect, sinful sinners. Today, yet today, He invites those poor sinners who are undone by the breaking of the law to come unto Him to find law obedience in His active obedience and to find in His passive obedience payment for all their breakings of the law, so that God can be just and the Justifier of him

that believeth in Jesus. For a great disobedience to a great commandment there is great mercy in the law fulfiller, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us consider the application of that after we sing from Psalter 136, stanzas 1 and 3.

We sing from Psalter 426:3, "The Lord is just, His grace wide as the ocean." When you stop and think about that one phrase, congregation, I think it summarizes everything I am trying to say to you today. I would say more: It summarizes the whole gospel. "The Lord is just." He demands payment for all iniquity. "All we like sheep have gone astray." We are all corrupt. But how can God be just and still have grace wide as the ocean? What is grace? Grace has been rightly said to be: God's Riches At Christ's Expense. Grace, His grace at the price of the bloody obedience of Christ, is wide as the ocean. There is great mercy for great sinners who become sinners before God. This is what makes true believers humble and sometimes to weep openly as they confess: "Oh, what a wonder that there is wide grace, great grace for a great sinner who does not and cannot love God and his neighbor as he should!"

If we want to understand God's great mercy rightly, then there are two places where our soul must encamp. We must know what it is to have our soul encamp by the Garden of Eden, and there see our original righteousness, see what we once were. We cannot understand how far we have fallen if we do not understand what rugged heights of obedience and glory we once possessed. Once we perfectly loved God above all — think of it — twenty-four hours a day with our affections, our thoughts, and our entire being; with soul, heart, mind, and strength. And we loved our neighbor as ourself. Adam and Eve had a perfect relationship before they fell, and from that height we fell so deeply that by nature we do not even realize the prison house in which we are, do not realize that the law demands love, do not realize that our whole being is turned against God and against our neighbor. We live in this world to be as gods unto ourselves, as Satan predicted. Thus everything has been turned around. Our knowledge has become our ignorance, our righteousness has become unrighteousness, our holiness has become perversity. We have destroyed the image of God. We have trampled underfoot His law. We have broken His covenant. We have

despised His attributes. We have challenged Him to His face. We have called Him a liar. We have destroyed everything in Paradise.

If that becomes real, congregation, then God will bring us to another garden, the Garden of Gethsemane, where Jesus had to obey perfectly — even when He had to endure soul-rending agony, crying out, "O My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." The Father said, "No, My Son" — no, by His silence — and the Son had to drink it because He loved God His Father and His Father's will above all, and because He loved His people as Himself. He had to deny Himself. He had to obey the law perfectly. And there in the Garden of Gethsemane the Lord Jesus paid for what His people had done in the Garden of Eden. Adam came out of hiding in the Garden of Eden; he was forced out of hiding. His hands reached out for sin. He chose sin. Even though He was surrounded with beauty, with glory, yes, with God Himself, He chose to disobey. But Jesus Christ came voluntarily out of the Garden of Gethsemane and said to His captors, "Whom seek ye?" He reached out His hands and let them bind Him, His blessed hands that had never sinned, to pay for sin. He came out of the Garden in the midst of darkness. He gave Himself away as the second Adam to cover the sins of the first Adam. This is beautifully symbolized in the Lord's Supper where Christ comes so low, and says as it were to His people, "Here I hold up My hands. Do you not see the scars? Here I break the bread for you. Do you not see My broken body? Here I pour out the wine for you. Do you not see My shed blood, and all this for you, not only in Gethsemane but also on Golgotha, to take your place as law-breakers, as covenant-breakers!"

Congregation, the Lord's Supper is for those who must say: "The mirror is holy, just, and good, but I am a transgressor for whom there is no remedy in any of my works, but my only hope is in the perfect, substitutionary righteousness of the Son of God, in Him who has done everything for a sinner who can do nothing." Here great justice and great mercy meet together on Golgotha's hill, and that is duplicated (not in essence, of course, because He died but once) but in symbolic form at the Lord's Supper, for the bread and the wine signify and seal His broken body and His shed blood. Thus, at the Lord's Supper great justice and great grace meet together. At the Lord's Supper righteousness and peace meet each other, justice and truth kiss each other.

Do you want to see how serious sin is? Then behold the poured wine and the broken bread. Do you want to see how wide His grace is? Behold the broken bread and the poured wine. The Lord's Supper is an open display that the Lord is just, His grace wide as the ocean.

Congregation, the law is a mirror with one word, "love," and we have broken it, but Jesus has come with the gospel and across the gospel He has written "divine love," and that love, that mirror is forever unbreakable. Therefore Calvin said, "We see our salvation not in the mirror of the law but only in the mirror of the gospel when we see ourselves adorned with the righteousness of Jesus Christ." That is our wish for God's children, that we may see ourselves — oh, wonder of wonders! — clothed in the white-robed righteousness of the pure gift and the free, wide-as-the-ocean grace of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Needy believers who are guilty before the law but long to catch a glimpse of Prince Immanuel in the mirror of the gospel, to find all their hope in Him, shall not be disappointed. For a great sinner who cannot obey the great commandment but who rests upon great mercy shall experience, "His mercy endureth forever." Amen.

Psalter 312:All stanzas