

THE WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH  
XIX. OF THE LAW OF GOD

Second Presbyterian Church, Greenville, SC

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## I. THE LAW AS COVENANT OF WORKS

God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience, promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it.

# I. THE LAW AS COVENANT OF WORKS

- **Adam as God's Image-Bearer**

- “The law was founded in the infinitely righteous nature of God, and the moral relations necessarily subsisting between him and man. It was originally written on the heart of man, as he was endowed with such perfect knowledge of his Maker's will as was sufficient to inform him concerning the whole extent of his duty.” (R. Shaw).
- “The work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness” (Rom. 2:15).
- “God made man upright” (Eccl. 7:29).

- **The Covenant of Works**

“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” (Gen. 2:16-17).

- As law, the covenant of works prohibited sin and demanded obedience; as covenant, it also included the promise of life.
- Required obedience – “personal, entire, exact, and perpetual”
- Promised life – analogy to Christ: “Adam, who was a type of the one to come” (Rom. 5:14; 19).

## II. THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness; and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables: the first four commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six, our duty to man.

- While Gen. 2 does not record the Ten Commandments, they were the sum of what God required of Adam.
- Just because Adam broke God's Law, God did not therefore change his moral requirements, which are based on his own perfect nature.
- As such, God's moral law – the Ten Commandments – are perpetually binding on all mankind and at all times.
- Contra *New Covenant Theology*, which holds that the Ten Commandments do not continue in the New Testament era (all 10 of which are repeated in the NT).

### III. THE CEREMONIAL LAW

Beside this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, and sufferings, and benefits; and partly holding forth diverse instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated under the new testament.

# III. THE CEREMONIAL LAW

- **The Old Testament Rites and Ceremonies**
  - “The ceremonial law respected the Jews in their ecclesiastical capacity, or as a Church, and prescribed the rites and carnal ordinances which were to be observed by them in the external worship of God. These ceremonies were chiefly designed to prefigure Christ, and lead them to the knowledge of the way of salvation through him” (R. Shaw).
    - One way the gospel was preached in the OT: “Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean” (Ps. 51:7).
  - Explicitly abrogated in Hebrews 10:1-2 – “The law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities. . . They have ceased to be offered.”
    - Signs are abolished when the thing signified appears.
  - Replaced by the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

## IV. THE CIVIL LAW

To them also, as a body politic, he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the State of that people; not obliging any other now, further than the general equity thereof may require.

- Applications of the Ten Commandments to the situation of Israel as an earthly nation.
  - Christians do not observe them, except to note the biblical principles involved (1 Cor. 9:8-10).
  - When critics scoff at Christians for not keeping the details of the OT, they are referring to these civil rules.
- Included restrictions on dress, eating / cleansing, and social contacts that were designed to keep Israel from assimilation during the long centuries leading up to the coming of Christ.
  - “I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:1-5).
- Contra Theonomy, which holds that all the civil law of Israel continues to be binding today.

## V. OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S LAW

The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. Neither doth Christ, in the gospel, any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.



## V. OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S LAW

- **The Law as Covenant of Works has been fulfilled by Christ.**

“For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14).

- **But Christians Still Live Under God's Rule and Law as a Way of Life**

- The NT is filled with references to the moral law and expectations to observe it.

“And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments” (1 Jn. 2:3).

“Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law” (Rom. 3:31).

“He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:3-4).

- **Christ Upholds and Strengthens This Obligation**

- “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. . . . Then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’” (Mt. 7:21-23).

## VI. THE GREAT VALUE OF GOD'S LAW

Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly; discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts, and lives; so as, examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin, together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of his obedience. It is likewise of use to the regenerate, to restrain their corruptions, in that it forbids sin: and the threatenings of it serve to show what even their sins deserve; and what afflictions, in this life, they may expect for them, although freed from the curse thereof threatened in the law. The promises of it, in like manner, show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof: although not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works. So as, a man's doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law; and, not under grace.

## VI. THE GREAT VALUE OF GOD'S LAW

- **As a Rule of Life:**

- Informs us of the will of God, and our duty

“So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12).

- Directs and binds us to walk accordingly

“Do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Gal. 5:13-14).

- Discovers the sinful pollutions of our nature, hearts, and lives.

“if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin . . . For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin” (Rom. 7:7, 14).

## VI. THE GREAT VALUE OF GOD'S LAW

- **As a Mirror:**

- To Humble Us for Sin, with a Clearer Sight of our Need for Christ

“Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 7:24-25).

- To See the Perfections of Christ in His Obedience

“For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh” (Rom. 8:3).

- Shows What Our Sins Deserve and What Afflictions We May Expect from Them

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” (Gal. 3:13).

## VI. THE GREAT VALUE OF GOD'S LAW

- **As a Blessing:**

- Show God's Approbation of Obedience and the Blessing of It

“But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing” (Ja. 1:25).

“‘Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land’” (Eph. 6:2-3).

“What man is there who desires life and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn away from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (Ps. 34:12-14).

- Obedience Is Not Legalism!

“Doing good, and refraining from evil, because the law encourageth to the one, and deterreth from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law; and, not under grace.”

“Now may the God of peace. . . . equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ” (Heb. 13:20-21).

“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness” (Rom. 6:12-13).