

The Christian & the Law:

A Confessional
Introduction to the
Law of God

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An Exposition & Application of Chapter 19 of the
Second London Confession

This booklet is comprised of a series of letters from the pastor, written by Pastor Jonathan to Lake Wylie Baptist Church. They have been slightly edited to produce this resource.

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The Source of the Arveron

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MADE FOR OBEDIENCE:

UNDERSTANDING THE LAW OF GOD GIVEN TO ADAM

INTRODUCTION

What does the Bible teach about the law of God? Many of you memorized the Ten Commandments in Sunday School, or perhaps you've seen a popular movie depicting Moses receiving the two tablets of stone on Sinai. You may remember the Psalmist declaring his love for the law of God (Ps. 119:97) or Jesus' declaration that he came to fulfill the law. (Matt.5:17-18) What does it mean that Christians are not under the law? (Rom. 6:14) Are we no longer bound to obey the Ten Commandments?

Thankfully, our Baptist forebearers have given us a helpful guide to God's law in chapter 19 of the Second London Confession of Faith.¹ The chapter is divided into 7 paragraphs and can be outlined as such:

- 1: The Law of God Given to Adam²
- 2: The Nature of the Moral Law
- 3: The Mosaic Ceremonial Laws
- 4: The Mosaic Judicial Laws
- 5: The Perpetuity of the Moral Law
- 6: The Moral Law and Our Salvation
- 7: The Moral Law and the Gospel

These seven short paragraphs summarize the Scripture's teaching on the law of God succinctly and will lay our foundation for further discussion on the duties of Christian individuals as well as the duties of the civil magistrate.

SECOND LONDON CONFESSION, 19:1

Today, we will consider paragraph 1 of chapter 19 which reads:

God gave to Adam a law of universal obedience written in his heart, and a particular precept of not eating the fruit of the tree of

¹ <https://www.the1689confession.com/1689/chapter-19>

² I have found Pastor Tom Hick's expositions on the confession helpful. They can be accessed here: <https://www.fbcclintonla.com/ss-1689-Confession.html>

*knowledge of good and evil;*³ *by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience;*⁴ *promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it.*⁵

EXPOSITION

In order to understand the law of God, we must begin not at Sinai, but in Eden. The first sentence describes two kinds of law given to Adam in his pre-fallen state.

First, God gave a “law of universal obedience written in his heart.” Because Adam is made in God’s image (Gen. 1:27) he had a moral obligation to obey God personally, entirely, exactly, and perpetually. Obedience to God is “hard-wired” into humanity’s constitution and nature. The same is true with us, for we are sons and daughters of Adam. We, like Adam owe God perfect and universal obedience.⁶

Second, God gave a positive outward expression of obedience to Adam, that of not eating of the Tree of Knowledge. This “universal obedience” to which Adam was called is known as the Covenant of Works. If Adam perfectly obeyed God in the garden, the reward was “promised life.” If Adam disobeyed, the threat was death. (Gen. 2:17) Remember, there was another tree in the garden; one of eternal life which Adam would have tasted had he obeyed God. (Gen. 1:24)

Third, the confession tells us that Adam was endued by God with power and ability to keep it. Here, the confession references Ecclesiastes 7:29 which states: “See, this alone I found, that God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.” (Eccl. 7:29, ESV) Adam was created in sinlessness purity. He was able to not sin and able to sin. He had within himself the power and ability

³ Gen. 1:27; Eccles. 7:29

⁴ Rom. 10:5

⁵ Gal. 3:10, 12

⁶ Thank God that we are not under the law as a Covenant of Works anymore. Rather, we are under grace through faith in Christ. (Rom. 6:14) The confession will address this in paragraphs 6-7.

to keep God's moral law perfectly. He was also able to refuse obedience and fall into sin.

This is quite different from the state of man after the fall in Genesis 3. Post-fall man is able to sin and unable to not sin. (Rom. 7:15-20) Redeemed man, through Christ, is able to sin and able and able to not sin, though we will never reach moral perfection in this life. (Rom. 6:17-18) This is what we call sanctification, growth in grace-propelled obedience to God in this life. Perfection will only be attained after death and in the age to come. When we are glorified, we who are in Christ will be no longer be able to sin. (Rom. 8:29-30; Col. 3:4; Eph. 4:13; Phil. 3:20-21; 1 John 3:2)

CONCLUSION

We will not understand the subject of justice until we see the law as fundamental, not merely to human interactions, but even to what it means to be human. John Reuther, in his commentary on the confession writes: "Man has been united to God by Law and love from the beginning of His creation. Creation in God's image constitutes us, among other things, moral creatures in a moral universe of right and wrong, good and evil."⁷ The interactions between men or between civil magistrates and men find their foundation in man's nature as a moral creature before the Creator and Law Giver.

As we continue our study of the law of God, our next stop is Sinai. There we will learn the three divisions of the Mosaic law and its relevancy and applicability to us today.

⁷ John Reuther, *A New Exposition of the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689*, ed. Rob Ventura (Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2022).

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS:

THE NATURE OF THE MORAL LAW

INTRODUCTION

To summarize last week's letter: Obedience to God is hard-wired into humanity because, as creations, we owe God perfect and universal obedience. The Law, therefore, is fundamental not only to a just society but to our very nature as creatures. Adam was given a Covenant of Works: obey God regarding the tree of the knowledge of evil and live. Adam had both the power and the ability to keep the Covenant of Works, but he failed.

This week we'll see God's further revelation of his Law in the covenant God made at Sinai through Moses. We're also introducing a new term today: moral law. In the following weeks, we'll learn the distinction between God's moral law, which is perpetually binding, and the ceremonial and judicial laws of the Mosaic Covenant which have expired.

SECOND LONDON CONFESSION, 19:2

Today, we will consider paragraph 2 of chapter 19 which reads:

The same law that was first written in the heart of man continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness after the fall, and was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments, and written in two tables, the four first containing our duty towards God, and the other six, our duty to man.

EXPOSITION

From Eden, we make our way through the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) to the foot of Mount Sinai. God has delivered and redeemed his people from their bondage in Egypt (Exodus) where he will now make a covenant with Israel (Ex. 19-24), just as he had made a covenant with Adam.

Contained within the Mosaic Covenant is God's moral law, namely the Ten Commandments. How ought we, as Christian members of the church, think about the Ten Commandments?

1. The Ten Commandments Reveal God's Nature and Character.

Though the Mosaic Covenant contained hundreds of judicial and ceremonial laws, the Ten Commandments are written on stone with the very “finger of God.” (Ex. 31:18) God, of course, does not have fingers. This is metaphorical language signifying that the Ten Commandments as moral law, are uniquely connected to and flow from God's very nature.

For this reason, the moral law contained in the Ten Commandments is a timeless, unchanging standard by which God judges all people. Even those who have never read the law have the law of God written on their hearts and “by nature do what the law requires.” I cannot stress how important it is that you familiarize yourself with Romans 2:12-24 in relation to this paragraph. Sam Waldron writes, “Though [Gentiles] have not received it as a written revelation, they nonetheless are confronted with [the Law].”⁸ The moral law of God confronts us through our conscience.

2. The Ten Commandments Contain Two Sections

Often referred to as the two “tables” of the law, the moral law of God can be divided between the first four commandments which contain our duty to God, and the last six which contain our duty to man expressed as:

Our Duty to God

1. No Idolatry
2. No Images
3. Not Take God's Name in Vain
4. Honor the Sabbath

Our Duty to Man

6. Honor Father & Mother
7. No Murder
8. No Adultery
9. No Theft

⁸ Samuel E Waldron, *Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* (Leyland, England: Evangelical Press, 2013) 280.

10. No Coveting

These Ten Commandments do not exhaustively teach the moral duties owed to God and man. Rather they are a summary.

3. The Ten Commandments Are Not a Means of Justification

The Ten Commandments are given to Israel after their redemption from slavery. Though we are obliged to keep the commandments, they are not given as a means for justifying ourselves before God. “For by works of the law no human being will be justified...” (Rom. 3:20a) “For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law.” (Gal. 3:21b) Later in this series we’ll examine the relationship between the law and the gospel.

4. The Ten Commandments Condemn Us All

“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 things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” (Gal. 3:10) No one has kept all Ten Commandments perfectly. And, as the Apostle James reminds us, anyone who breaks the law in one part is guilty of breaking the entire law. (Jas. 2:8,9) The law makes us aware of our sin and misery. It prepares us, through guilt and condemnation, to see Christ’s obedience and death as our only hope of justification before the Father.

5. The Ten Commandments Are Good

Too many Christians, understanding the condemnation that comes through the law, and loving the grace which comes through Christ have dismissed the law as unnecessary or even denigrated the law as evil. We ought rather to agree with the Apostle Paul, that most ardent expositor of grace, that we “agree with the law that it is good. (Rom. 7:16)

CONCLUSION

I want to give two applications as I conclude.

First, you ought to memorize the Ten Commandments. They train us for loving God and man. Challenge yourself to memorize them and then teach them to your children if you have little ones in your home. If you would like to study them in more depth, the Westminster Larger Catechism will be a great resource.⁹

Second, because the moral law is written on our hearts, we must emphasize the importance of natural law arguments in culture. We need not appeal to Scripture to argue for the evil of murder, theft, adultery or many other sins. The surrounding secular culture has no objective basis for morality. We do. The moral law is written on our hearts by our Creator God from whose nature the moral law derives.¹⁰

So much more could be said regarding the moral law of God. Let us all pray that the Lord grants repentance to our nation which has despised the law of God. May our fellow citizens feel the sting of condemnation the law brings so that they may also see the beauty of Christ, the fullness of his obedience and turn to him in contrition and faith.

⁹ <https://thewestminsterstandard.org/westminster-larger-catechism/#101> Questions 103-148 expand upon each commandment.

¹⁰ For more on natural law theory see *Natural Law: A Short Companion* by David VanDrunen, available in the church bookstall.

CLEAN & UNCLEAN:

THE MOSAIC CEREMONIAL LAWS

INTRODUCTION

Are Christians obligated to keep all of the Old Testament laws? What about the dietary or cleanness laws? If we are not obligated, how do we know which of God's laws we can set aside? Christians have been asking these questions since the days immediately following Christ's resurrection, and we'll do our best to answer them in this week's letter. Today we discuss what has been referred to as the ceremonial laws within the Mosaic Covenant.

Today we're introducing what the Reformers called the "threefold classification" of the Law of Moses; that is the Mosaic laws fall under one of three categories: moral, ceremonial, and judicial.

As we saw last week, the moral law reflects God's unchanging character and is summarized in the Ten Commandments. The ceremonial law, which we will examine this week, relates to Israel's worship under the Mosaic Covenant and the judicial law pertains to civil aspects of the Mosaic Covenant which we will examine next week.

SECOND LONDON CONFESSION, 19:3

Today, we will consider paragraph 3 of chapter 19 which reads:

Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel ceremonial laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties, all which ceremonial laws being appointed only to the time of reformation, are, by Jesus Christ the true Messiah and only law-giver, who was furnished with power from the Father for that end abrogated and taken away.

EXPOSITION

The Nature of the Ceremonial Law

The ceremonial laws of the Mosaic Covenant regulated the worship of Israel, and contained “typical ordinances.” In other words, the Mosaic laws regarding the Tabernacle/Temple, priests, sacrifices, and rituals served the people in two ways. First, they described how God desired to be worshiped. More importantly, they served as “types” or prefigurements of things to come. They were shadows of a more substantial future reality. Two New Testament passages help us understand this teaching:

For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. (Heb. 10:1, ESV)

These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. (Col. 2:17)

The Abrogation of the Ceremonial Law

Because they were only shadows, when the Son of God appeared in flesh, he fulfilled these laws. Christ is the true temple, the dwelling place of God and man. He’s the true priest who mediates between man and God. He’s the true sacrifice. (Heb. 7:27) And only through faith in him, not outward rituals, can we truly be made clean in order to present ourselves to God in worship. Christ’s fulfillment of the ceremonial law means these laws are now abrogated; they carry no obligation under the New Covenant.

The Abiding Value of the Ceremonial Law

If the ceremonial law has been abrogated, we may ask what value it holds for us today. As we read the New Testament, we notice that the ceremonial system of the Old Testament is often used to instruct us in right living. For instance, the Apostle Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 5:7

Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

Notice that Paul isn’t arguing for the reinstatement of the ceremonial laws, but he knows the ceremonial laws explain and unfold the truth of Christ and our sinfulness. The ceremonial ritual of removing

leaven from one's home during the Passover has become instructive for New Covenant believers in the removal of sin from our lives. In this manner, the ceremonial laws benefit us today. We are not legally bound to remove leaven from our house during Passover; but we are duty-bound before God to confess sin, turn from it, and pursue righteousness before God.

CONCLUSION

You cannot understand the fullness of Christ's work without the ceremonial law. In order to explain what Christ has done for us, the New Testament continually reaches back into Exodus and Leviticus, showing Christ to be the great fulfillment of the religion of Israel.

Desiring to make Christianity "relevant" to modern people, many pastors and Christians downplay the significance of the Old Testament, especially the Mosaic ceremonial and judicial laws. But all of Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for our instruction in righteousness. (2 Timothy 3:16-17) When the Apostle Paul wrote those words to Timothy, the Scriptures he was primarily referencing were the books of the Old Testament. They make us wise for salvation, and therefore, are worth our devoted attention.

Many of you have begun an annual Bible reading plan this month. Pay close attention in the weeks to come as you read the ceremonial law that prepares us to see, understand, and worship Christ in the fullness of his work on the cross as sacrifice and in his office as our Great High Priest.

LAWS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY?

THE MOSAIC JUDICIAL LAWS

INTRODUCTION

“When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring the guilt of blood upon your house, if anyone should fall from it.” (Deut. 22:8 ESV)

“You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.” (Deut. 25:4)

“You shall not have in your bag two kinds of weights, a large and a small. ¹⁴ You shall not have in your house two kinds of measures, a large and a small. ¹⁵ A full and fair weight you shall have, a full and fair measure you shall have, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.” (Deut. 25:13-15)

What do these three Scripture references have in common? They are all commands found within the judicial laws of Moses. These laws governed the civic life of Israel in the Old Testament, and there are roughly 200 of them in the Mosaic law.¹¹

Last week we said that we are not obligated to keep the ceremonial laws of Israel, though we may benefit from their symbolizing of Christ. What about the judicial laws? Must we obey them? Here, the Second London Confession offers a succinct and helpful paragraph.

SECOND LONDON CONFESSION, 19:4

Today, we will consider paragraph 4 of chapter 19 which reads:

To them also he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any now by virtue of that institution; their general equity only being of moral use.

EXPOSITION

¹¹ Estimates vary based on how laws are classified.

The Ancient Expiration of the Mosaic Judicial Laws¹²

The confession says that the judicial laws of the Mosaic Covenant expired, “together with the state of that people...” In other words, when the Mosaic Covenant was ended by the coming of Christ (who fulfills the law), Israel as a theocratic state and the accompanying judicial, or civil, laws expired as well. John Reuther writes, “Israel today is no longer constituted as the people of God as they were under the Old Testament.” We know this because Jesus Christ declared, “Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.” (Matt. 21:43 ESV) Jesus’ statement raises a question: “What is the nation that the kingdom of God was given to?” According to 1 Peter 2:9, the church is the “holy nation” which receives the kingdom of God.

The church is not an ethnic, theocratic state. Rather the church is made up of people from every nation, who live in and among the nations of the earth. The true King of the church, in this age, isn’t a monarch ruling from an earthly, but rather a heavenly throne. The church is not tasked with establishing an outward Christian government. Rather the church’s mission is to proclaim the gospel to every creature, baptize converts from the nations, and teach them to obey Christ. In other words, the mission of the church is the church. This will, of course, have spillover effects in surrounding culture and politics.

Therefore, the judicial laws of Moses have expired, or died. We are not obligated to obey the judicial law of Moses.

The Modern Application of the Mosaic Judicial Laws

The expiration of the judicial law does not, however, mean there is no value to reading and following the spiritual principles of these laws. The second half of paragraph 4 teaches that the “general equity” of the judicial law is of “moral use” to New Covenant Christians. In other words, the judicial law has modern

¹² The terminology of “ancient expiration,” and “modern application,” is borrowed from Sam Waldron’s exposition of the London Baptist Confession.

applications. It contains, as Sam Waldron put it, “timeless principles of general equity, justice, goodness, and righteousness.”¹³

Thankfully, the New Testament gives helpful examples of the “general equity” principle. Deuteronomy 25:4 forbids muzzling an ox as he treads grain. The ancient judicial law states that the animal who helps produce grain is owed some of the grain that falls to the ground as he is treading. Muzzling the ox was a way to increase profit margins to the detriment of the workers, in this case, the ox. In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul applies the “general equity” of this judicial law to the compensation of pastors.

*¹⁷Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.
¹⁸For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.” (1 Tim. 5:17-18)*

Though we are not obligated to obey the letter of the judicial laws, as we read them, we are being trained in timeless civic principles. You are not obligated to build parapets on your house (Deut. 22:8) but you should not install shoddy electrical work. Accountants are not required to have literal scales and weights, but they should not have two versions of their ledgers (one for themselves and another for the auditors).

CONCLUSION

Behind the time-bound judicial laws of Israel stands the timeless principles of God’s unchanging moral law. Christians would do well to read the judicial laws and meditate on their modern application today. Our nation would do well to write civic laws that reflect the principles contained in the judicial laws of Israel. On the one hand, we are not trying to build a theocratic Christian state. But on the other hand, we dare not minimize or degrade the value of reading and applying the judicial laws of Moses appropriately.

¹³ Samuel E Waldron, *Modern Exposition of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith* (Leyland, England: Evangelical Press, 2013), 284.

IS OBEDIENCE REQUIRED?

THE PERPETUITY OF THE MORAL LAW

INTRODUCTION

When I began this series last month, I opened it with a question: What does it mean that Christians are not under the law? Are we no longer obligated to obey the Ten Commandments? The first four parts of this series primarily dealt with the nature of moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws of God given in the Mosaic Covenant.

The final three parts of this series will begin explaining how the moral law of God relates to Christians under the New Covenant as well as the relationship between the moral law and the gospel. Today we'll see that while we are under grace, nevertheless we are still obligated to obey the moral law of God.

SECOND LONDON CONFESSION, 19:5

Today, we will consider paragraph 5 of chapter 19 which reads:

The moral law does for ever 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 does Christ in the Gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.

EXPOSITION

Why then the Law?

Galatians, Paul's earliest letter recorded in Scripture, sets forth in clear and bold terms the doctrine of justification by faith alone. We cannot justify ourselves before God by keeping the law, but only "through faith in Christ Jesus." (Gal. 2:16) If that is true, then a reasonable response is, "Why then the law?" If we in the flesh have no hope of keeping the law, why does God demand we keep it?

I regularly hear Christians and (God forbid) even Christian pastors conclude that if we are saved by grace through faith alone, then there is little or no need for God's law in our lives.

Here, the London Baptist Confession (as well as Scripture no less) could not be clearer: the moral law of God is perpetually binding both for unbelievers as well as for those who God has declared righteous. Let's hear the testimony of Scripture:

⁸ If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, "Do not commit adultery," also said, "Do not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. (James 2:8-12)

If the Apostle James is not clear enough that we are to keep the moral law of God, listen to the Apostle Paul as he explains justification by faith in Romans 3:28-31.

²⁸ For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. ³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law. (Rom. 3:28-31)

Even Christ himself says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (Matt. 5:17)

Some have used Christ's words to argue that in fulfilling the law, Christ has set it aside for Christians. This is insane. Why? First, as we have seen, the moral law, is connected to and flows from God's very nature and character. In other words, the moral law is as eternal and unchanging as God himself. Second, as the confession states, our obligation to obey this unchanging law stems from our nature as created beings and the debt we owe to our Creator.

This means that every single human being, both the unbeliever and those who have been justified by God through Christ, are perpetually bound to perfect obedience to the moral law. We are no less obligated creatures simply because we have been redeemed and declared righteous. Philip Hughes wrote: "The Christian is still

under solemn obligation to keep the law of God, but with this difference, that he now has the power, the power of Christ by the Holy Spirit within himself, to keep it.”¹⁴

Freedom in Christ is not freedom from obedience. Rather, it is freedom and power unto obedience. Christ does not remove our obligation to obey God. He first obeys God in our stead and his obedience is imputed to us. Because we are born again, of the Spirit, we are empowered by grace to obey.

CONCLUSION

In the final two installments of our series, we’ll discuss in further detail how the law relates to our salvation and the gospel.

For now, remember that the moral law of God is perpetually binding. This is because God has not changed, nor have we as it regards our obligations to him as his creatures. You and I are bound to obedience. We ought to make it our aim to study God’s moral law, specifically as it is revealed in the Ten Commandments and Christ’s Sermon on the Mount, asking God for the grace to obey with a joyful heart.

¹⁴ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 90.

DOES MY OBEDIENCE SAVE ME?

THE MORAL LAW & OUR SALVATION

INTRODUCTION

What is legalism? What makes someone a legalist? Is it legalistic to pay attention to and obey the law of God? These are questions we'll answer today as we consider the relationship between the moral law of God and our salvation.

Without getting too deep in the weeds, let's define legalism as an improper use of the law, whereby an individual believes they can justify themselves before God through personal obedience.¹⁵ If that sounds like justification by works instead of justification by grace to you, then you'd be correct. In this letter, we'll make it clear that we cannot justify ourselves by our own obedience. But, this does not mean the law is now useless for us, or that we are free to disregard the commands of God. We must have a balanced relationship between the law and our salvation otherwise we will become legalists (who try working for our justification) or we will become antinomians¹⁶ (those for whom grace is cheap and the law is worthless).

SECOND LONDON CONFESSION, 19:6

Let's begin by reading Confession 19.6

Although true believers are not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned, yet it is 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 natures, 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,

¹⁵ Another form of legalism is the binding of conscience where God has allowed liberty. (e.g. only permitting women to wear dresses, not pants; or requiring men to be clean shaven.)

¹⁶ Antinomian comes from the Latin meaning against the law.

and what afflictions in this life they may expect for them, although freed from the curse and unallayed rigour thereof. The promises of it likewise show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof, though not as due to them by the law as a covenant of works; so as man's doing good and refraining from evil, because the law encourages to the one and deters from the other, is no evidence of his being under the law and not under grace.

EXPOSITION

A Rule for Life

The Confession reminds us that true believers are not “under the law as a covenant of works.” In other words, our obedience to the moral law of God is not required for the purpose of justification. If a Christian obeys the law that obedience does not result in his or her acceptance by God. Conversely, if a Christian disobeys the law, that disobedience does not result in their condemnation. We are justified not by our moral record. We are justified by grace through faith in the moral record and sacrificial death of Christ. (Rom. 6:14)

Though we are not under the law as a covenant of works, the law is still of use to us as a “rule of life.” The law teaches us what God requires of us. It informs us of our duty to God. How does it do that?

A Tool for Discovery

The law is a tool for discovering sin and convicting us. Romans 3:20 teaches us that “through the law comes conviction of sin.” We commit many sins knowingly, but there are many that we commit in ignorance. Reading the law expands our understanding of lying, deceit, manipulation, anger, hatred, bitterness, envy, jealousy, etc.

Not only does the law reveal sin, but it also convicts of sin. By meditating on the law, we see how great our sin and misery is. The law humbles us out of any sense of moral superiority. It promotes hatred of sin.

A Lens for Sight

Having convicted and humbled us, the law also gives us a “clearer sight” of the need we have for Christ and his perfect, full obedience.

You might call this the evangelical use of the law. The law can only condemn, but in its condemnation of us, we begin to feel or sense the need we have of God's salvation. God's law is like a taskmaster driving us with the biting whip to God's grace in Christ.

A Restraint for Sin

As we read the law, we learn the stern warnings and threats God makes toward sinners. These threats ought to terrify us, not because we fear losing our salvation, but because they show how serious sin is and its terrible cost. The threats of the law ought to restrain sin in our lives. Though we cannot lose our salvation, our sins break fellowship with God and can even incur temporal afflictions and hardships. "For the Lord disciplines the one he loves and chastises every son whom he receives." (Heb. 12:6) When we experience suffering and difficulty, we ought to examine ourselves in light of the law.

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!

²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

(Ps. 139:23, 24)

A Promise of Blessing

It is not wrong for a Christian to obey the law out of fear of consequences on the one hand or of a desire for blessing on the other. Just as the law threatens affliction for disobedience, the law also promises blessing for obedience. This is not legalism for we are not speaking of the promise of eternal life. So, what kind of blessings ought we to expect from obeying God.

The first blessing is ongoing fellowship with God. We cannot enjoy close communion with a God we disobey. The second blessing is that of a clear conscience. There may also be temporary, earthly blessings associated with obedience to the law. As a general rule, the fifth commandment (honor parents, those in authority) promises long life on the earth.

CONCLUSION

The law of God is good. Though it condemns us in our sin, it drives us to Christ, restrains evil in the world, and offers us a rule of life whereby we enjoy many blessings.

Christian, do not despise the law of God. Read it. Meditate upon it. See how Christ has fulfilled it in your place and obey it through his supply of empowering grace.

GROWING IN OBEDIENCE:

THE MORAL LAW & THE GOSPEL

INTRODUCTION

There is no contradiction between the law of God and the gospel of grace. There is no contradiction between Christians being justified freely and obeying the law of God. In fact, evangelical obedience is the natural product of being justified by grace through faith.

As we conclude our seven-part series on the law of God, let's ask one final question: how and why do Christians obey God's law? This question deals with the relationship between the moral law of God and the gospel's work in our lives.

SECOND LONDON CONFESSION, 19.7

Let's begin by reading Confession 19.7

Neither are the aforementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the Gospel, but do sweetly comply with it, the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely and cheerfully which the will of God, revealed in the law, requires to be done.

EXPOSITION

The Work of the Spirit

Christian obedience is a fruit, or product of the enabling of the Holy Spirit. This is what God promised to do centuries before Christ through the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

³¹ "Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.

And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jeremiah 31:31-33, ESV)

²⁶ And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

In both these passages, God promises to make a New Covenant with his people. In the Jeremiah passage, we see that there will be a kind of discontinuity between the covenant God made with Moses and the New Covenant to come. What is that discontinuity? Obedience. Under the Mosaic Covenant, the nation is characterized by disobedience to and inability to keep the law. But, under the New Covenant, God says that “all shall know me.” (Jer. 31:34) What causes the obedience of New Covenant Christians? Ezekiel 36 tells us that the Spirit of God is placed within us, causing us to walk in God’s statutes. By grace, the Spirit molds and shapes our wills in order that we might obey the law “freely and cheerfully.”

William Cowper, author of the famous hymn *There is a Fountain Filled with Blood*, also wrote a hymn entitled *Love Constrained to Obedience*. Here are the lyrics of the final stanza:

To see the law by Christ fulfilled,
And hear his pardoning voice,
Changes a slave into a child,
And duty into choice.

These lyrics summarize exactly what the confession teaches. How does the Holy Spirit do his enabling work? He points us to the fullness of Christ’s work. He reminds us of our pardon. He reminds us that Jesus made full satisfaction. It is as we dwell on our free justification that our hearts are moved to free and cheerful obedience. G. C. Berkouwer put it this way, “The believer’s constant ‘commerce’ with the forgiveness of sins and his continued dependence on it must be laid bare, emphasized, and kept in sight.”¹⁷ In a sense, the path to personal obedience doesn’t begin with a focus on personal obedience at all. Obedience begins by

¹⁷ Gerrit Cornelis Berkouwer, *Faith and Justification* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1954), 84.

meditating on the obedience of Christ. Obedience to the law of God is the destination of the ship, and the gospel is the wind in the sail.

CONCLUDING THE SERIES

I want to end this series by making several summary applications from the former chapters.

First, the law is fundamental to humanity. We are creatures, made in God's image, and any worldview that permits lawlessness degrades our self-understanding. Disobedience to the moral law dehumanizes us. More specifically, it demonizes us.

Second, God has written his moral law on the hearts of every person, and Christians ought to be comfortable making "natural law" arguments to unbelievers. Just because they do not profess faith in Christ or recognize the authority of the Scriptures does not mean unbelievers are ignorant of the law. We ought to expect our civil magistrates to enforce the moral law of God, not in order to create a "Christian nation," but to promote true humanity, restrain evil, and allow the Church to accomplish her gospel mission without hinderance.

Third, the only way we will be able to accomplish the previous application is if we pay close attention to the moral and judicial law. The Scriptures are filled with numerous examples of justice and love. Christians must immerse themselves in the Scriptures. We must memorize the Ten Commandments and seek to obey them faithfully. We cannot hope for a more just society until the Church takes the law of God seriously.

Fourth, as we seek to obey the law of God, we must remember that we are not under the law as a covenant of works. We are not obeying the law to justify ourselves before God. Rather, the law is a rule of life. Having been justified freely, we obey out of love and honor for Christ and our fellow man.

Fifth, and finally, if it is true that only Christians are able to obey God's moral law freely and cheerfully, then we must prioritize evangelism in our life and church. It is the job of the civil magistrate to enforce the law through the power of the sword. (Rom. 13:4) But only a move of God's Spirit across our nation, through the preaching of the gospel will bring free and cheerful, rather than fearful

obedience to the law. As much as we pray for and thank God for good civil magistrates, we ought to pray for good churches and ask God for more preachers and teachers of the gospel. Christian, even as you pray for the President, pray for conversions in our nation and the nations of the world. Proclaim the gospel in your homes and neighborhoods. Tell of the goodness of Jesus to those who do not yet know him. Call them to faith and repentance.

Thank you for the joy of pastoring a wonderful church, and for the joy of writing and publishing these letters. I pray that this labor will confirm you in the faith and that it will be a guide for your Christian walk in the days to come.

In Christ,
Pastor Jonathan

Although true believers are not under the law as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified or condemned, yet it is of great use to them as well as to others, in that as a rule of life...

LCF 19.6