

Blueprints for Belief

Laying the Theological Foundations for Constructing Your Faith

Westminster Confession of Faith 19.1-7 – The Law of God

1. 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.
2. 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 toward God, and the other six our duty to man.
3. Besides 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, sufferings, and benefits; and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated under the New Testament.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. Neither are the forementioned 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, requireth to be done.

- 1) God expects obedience.
- 2) Old Testament laws fall into three categories: moral, civil, and ceremonial.
- 3) The moral law is an expression of God's character, and we are forever obligated to obey it.
- 4) The civil laws were limited to Israel, and the ceremonial laws have been fulfilled in Christ.
- 5) We are not justified by our keeping of the moral law.
- 6) The moral law has three uses in the life of a Christian:
 - a. Civil – God's law can be used to restrain evil and promote order in society
 - i. Romans 13:3-4 – civil authorities are God's servants
 - ii. 1 Timothy 1:8-10 – the law is given for the lawless and disobedient
 - b. Conviction – God's law reveals our sin and drives us to Christ
 - i. Romans 3:9-10 – the law brings knowledge of sin
 - ii. Galatians 3:22-24 – the law is our schoolmaster to lead us to Christ
 - c. Rule of Life – God's law shows us how to live in love, holiness, and gratitude.
 - i. Matthew 5:17-19 – Christ fulfills the law but doesn't abolish it
 - ii. Psalm 119 – the longest Psalm is devoted to the law of God

- 7) The law and the Gospel are not at odds, rightly understood. (Legalism vs. License)
a. Romans 7:7-12 – “if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin.”

Discussion Questions

- 1) WCF 19 helps us guard against two significant errors in the church: legalism and antinomianism. Do you see Christians today tempted toward either of these errors?
- 2) Where do you personally feel the tension between resting in Christ’s finished work and pursuing obedience?
- 3) What is one area of your life where obedience feels difficult right now?

Illustration – Imagine You Were Born in a Prison

Imagine that you were born in a prison. All you’ve ever known was the inside of a prison. All you’ve ever seen is bars and cement. You get the same meals every day – bland, simple food. You wear the same clothes every day. And that’s all you remember because it is all you’ve ever known.

How could someone convince you that the world is better outside of that prison? They could describe it to you. They could show you pictures. They could sneak in better food. But all of that would be very depressing unless you also had some hope of getting out!

In a similar way, the law is good, but it can’t get us out of prison. It holds up a mirror, showing us our chains, showing us the bars and the cement. It doesn’t let us stay comfortable in the prison of our own sin. It makes us long for something better.

But it would be very depressing if all we had was the law, showing us and reminding us of our folly with no power to change the circumstances. Instead, we also have a promise that Jesus will rescue us from the prison of sin and death!