

The Theology of the Westminster Standards
WCF 19.1–2 – The Law in Eden and After the Fall

“Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me.” – John 14:21

I. Introduction

A. The Importance of Rightly Handling the Law of God

1. *“Ignorance of the nature and design of the law is at the bottom of most religious mistakes. This is the root of self-righteousness, the grand reason why the Gospel of Christ is no more regarded, and the cause of that uncertainty and inconsistency of many, who, though they profess themselves teachers, understand not what they say, nor whereof they affirm.”*
 – John Newton (writer of “Amazing Grace”)

B. Two Opposing Quotes

1. *“Sanctification, if it is to be spoken of as something other than justification, is perhaps best defined as the art of getting used to the unconditional justification wrought by the grace of God for Jesus’ sake.”*
 – Lutheran theologian Gerhard O. Forde in *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, 13
2. *“There is no greater mistake than to suppose that a Christian has nothing to do with the law and the Ten Commandments, because he cannot be justified by keeping them. The same Holy Ghost who convinces the believer of sin by the law, and leads him to Christ for justification, will always lead him to a spiritual use of the law, as a friendly guide, in the pursuit of sanctification.”*
 – J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*, 26.

C. Overview of WCF 19

1. Section 1 – The law given “as a covenant of works.”
2. Sections 2–4 – The law’s threefold classification of moral, civil, and ceremonial laws.
3. Sections 5–7 – The ongoing obligation of the moral law (Sec. 5), its various uses for believers and non-believers (Sec. 6), and its compatibility with the gospel (Sec. 7).

II. The Law Given to Adam in the Covenant of Works (WCF 19.1)

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. (WCF 19.1)

- A. Compare WCF 4.2 – *“After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female ... having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it: and yet under a possibility of transgressing ... Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept, they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.”*

1. According to WCF 4.2, how did God deliver his law to Adam? Was Adam aware of this?
2. According to WCF 19.1, what additional features did God add when he gave the law to Adam “as a covenant of works”?
3. Do you think this arrangement in Eden was “fair”? Why or why not?

III. The Moral Law from the Fall to Moses (WCF 19.2)

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 towards God; and the other six, our duty to man. (WCF 19.2)

- A. How would you respond if someone objected to God’s moral law “continu[ing] to be a perfect rule of righteousness” after the fall? Doesn’t God know we can’t keep his law anymore??
- B. What voices today tell us try to water down God’s law? What standards do we sometimes substitute for God’s law? Is there an area where you need correction and need to give the law its due place?
- C. According to WCF 19.2, how did God clarify and reinforce his moral law after the fall? How was God demonstrating his love in this?
- D. Consider the Ten Commandments and think about how each commandment teaches us about the greatness of God and his call on our lives.¹

Ten Commandments	Attribute of God	Human Reflection
1C: do not have other gods	Supreme (absolute)	supreme (among creatures)
2C: do not bow to images	Holy	holy
3C: do not use God’s name in vain	Blessed	blessed (satisfied in God)
4C: keep the Sabbath	Active/Purposeful	active/purposeful
5C: honor your parents	Harmonious	harmonious (with others)
6C: do not murder	Living	living
7C: do not commit adultery	Intimate	Intimate (in marriage)
8C: do not steal	Sufficient/Generous	trusting/generous
9C: do not bear false witness	Truthful	truthful
10C: do not covet	Self-sufficient	contented/thankful

¹ Adapted from a forthcoming book by Vern S. Poythress.