

The Theology of the Westminster Standards
WCF 19.3–4 – The Ceremonial and Judicial Law

“Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ.” – Col 2:16–17

(Thus he declared all foods clean.) – Mark 7:19

I. Review of WCF 19.1–2

A. The Law was 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)

B. The Moral Law Remained 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)

C. The OT Theocracy of Israel – *A geo-political realm whose inhabitants and land are consecrated to God as holy priests and a holy sanctuary, respectively, by virtue of God’s having established his royal residence in it.*

1. **Ex 19:5–6** – *“Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”*

II. The Ceremonial Laws (now “abrogated”) (WCF 19.3)

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, sufferings, and benefits; and partly, holding forth divers instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated, under the new testament. (WCF 19.3)

- A. Ceremonial Laws (defined) = the laws governing the religious worship of the people of God under the new era inaugurated through Moses and lasting until the coming of Christ.
- B. WCF 19.3 calls Israel a “church under age.” How did Israel act like some toddlers or teenagers you know ☺? How does this help us understand the function of the ceremonial laws God gave to his Old Testament church?
- C. Besides giving gospel instruction, what other role did the ceremonial laws play in Israel’s life as a holy nation?

1. **1 Cor 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.”*
2. **2 Cor 6:17** – *“Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing...”* – God was training them to be different from non-Xns!
3. **Jude 1:23** – *“...save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.”* – extreme avoidance of sin!

- D. What does Scripture teach about the end of the ceremonial law? Although it has ended, what limited use does it have for Christians today?

“[A]lthough the [ceremonial] rites of the law have ceased to be observed, by their termination one may better recognize how useful they were before the coming of Christ, who in abrogating their use has by his death sealed their force and effect.” John Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.7.16)

III. The Judicial Laws (now “expired”) (WCF 19.4)

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. (WCF 19.4)

- A. Judicial Laws (defined): the laws governing the civil life of the people of God under the theocracy inaugurated through Moses and lasting until the coming of Christ.
- B. On the one hand, what might be a danger in imagining that God’s judicial/civil laws were given as a template for all nations today? On the other hand, how does the Confession guard us from legal anarchy?

“The distinction between ‘law’ and ‘equity’ is the distinction between a set of regulations and the higher sense of justice which applies, balances, directs, or restrains those regulations ... Whereas law is the written text (statute), equity consists in the application of justice to situations that those laws were not designed to handle (interpretation).” – A. Craig Troxel and P.J. Williams, “Men in Combat over the Civil Law: ‘General Equity’ in WCF 19.4,” *WTJ* 64 (2002): 308.

- C. Examples of “General Equity” in the New Testament

1. **Deut 25:4** – *“You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.”*
2. **1 Tim 5:17–18** – *“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.”*¹⁸ *For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages.’”*
3. **Deut 22:8** – *“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.”*