

The Theology of the Westminster Standards
WCF 19.5–7 – The Usefulness of the Moral Law

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

“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

I. Review of WCF 19.1–4

A. The Law was Given to Adam in the Covenant of Works

God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works ... (WCF 19.1)

B. The Moral Law Remained from the Fall to Moses

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 ... (WCF 19.2)

C. The Ceremonial Law anticipated Christ, taught morals, and is now “abrogated”

Beside this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, as a church under age, ceremonial laws ... prefiguring Christ ... and partly, holding forth divers instructions of moral duties. All which ceremonial laws are now abrogated, under the new testament. (WCF 19.3)

D. The Judicial Law regulated theocratic Israel and is now “expired” (but “general equity”!)

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)

1. “General equity” = principles of justice, fairness, and love that informed their particular expression of Israel’s judicial laws in their unique Old Testament context.

II. The Moral Law (still binding) (WCF 19.5)

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. (WCF 19.5)

1. How should we reconcile WCF 19.5 with Jesus’ statement in Matt 15:17 (“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”)?
2. Why do you think the Confession says that Christ in the gospel “strengthens” our obligation to the moral law?

III. The Usefulness of the Moral Law (WCF 19.6)

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. (WCF 19.6)

A. In his book, *Loving the Law: The Law of God in the Life of the Believer*, Stephen Spinnenwebber refers to the “3 Uses of the Moral Law” by describing the law as (a) a mirror, (b) a muzzle; and (c) a map. What do you think he means?

1. MIRROR – **Rom 7:7–8** – “Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’”
2. MUZZLE – **Ps 119:101** – “I hold back my feet from every evil way, in order to keep your word.”
3. MAP – **Ps 119:4–5** – “You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. ⁵ Oh that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes!”

B. When the law shows us our sin, what does Scripture say should be our response (cf. Rom 7:24–25!)? How do we sometimes respond instead?

IV. The Moral Law is Not Contrary to the Grace of the Gospel (WCF 19.7)

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. (WCF 19.7)

1. Have you ever heard that the law is contrary to the grace of the gospel? How would you respond, showing how they “sweetly comply”?
2. Have you ever heard, “All you need is love!” Is this true?!

*A rigid master was the law,
Demanding brick, denying straw;*

*But when with gospel-tongue it sings,
It bids me fly, and gives me wings.*

– From “Gospel Sonnets,” by Ralph Erskine