

Definition of Key Terms and Phrases

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Doing theology involves utilizing terms and phrases that have evolved over time which attempt to encapsulate crucial biblical teaching. Technical terms and phrases are used to accommodate wide swaths of biblical truth into brief, theological short-hand. Before we embark upon a survey of Reformed theologians and the Confession of Faith on the law of God, it may be helpful to acquaint ourselves with the theological nomenclature typically utilized in such discussions. We will lean heavily upon Richard A. Muller's *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, which I highly recommend.

Key Terms and Phrases

- **Natural Law**

lex naturalis: *natural law*; also **lex naturae;** *law of nature*; the universal moral law either impressed by God upon the mind of all people or immediately discerned by the reason in its encounter with the order of nature. The natural law was therefore available even to those pagans who did not have the advantage of the Sinaitic revelation and the *lex Mosaica* [i.e., Mosaic law, which includes the natural law, though in a different form] with the result that they were left without excuse in their sins... The scholastics argue the identity of the *lex naturalis* with the *lex Mosaica*...according to substance, and distinguish them...according to form. The *lex naturalis* is inward, written on the heart and therefore obscure [due to sin], whereas the *lex Mosacia* is revealed externally and written on tablets and thus of greater clarity.¹

The natural law is universal because God is the creator of all men. Natural laws are “founded on the natural right of God...(being founded on the very holiness and wisdom of God).”² They are “just and good antecedently to the command of God...”³ They are commanded because just and good in light of who God is and what man is as His image bearer. It is “the practical rule of moral duties to which men are bound by nature.”⁴ Due to man’s created constitution, this law is written on his heart, though now obscured by sin. Natural law is not acquired by tradition or formal instruction. This law was, however, promulgated (i.e., formally published) on Sinai, which differs from the natural law in form though identical to it in substance. Protestant Scholasticism taught

¹ Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), 175.

² Turretin, *Elenctic Theology*, II:2.

³ Turretin, *Elenctic Theology*, II:2.

⁴ Turretin, *Elenctic Theology*, II:2.

that the Decalogue summarily contains the Moral Law and is the inscripturated form of the natural law, as to its substance. A distinction was made between *substance* and *form*. *Substance* is one; *form* (and function) may vary. For example, when the Westminster Larger Catechism Q. 98 says, "The moral law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments," it refers to the fact that the *substance* (i.e., the underlying essence) of the Moral Law is assumed and articulated in the propositions of the Decalogue as contained in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. The *form* (and function) fits the redemptive-historical circumstances in which it was given. The *substance*, or underlying principles, are always relevant and applicable to man because he is created in the image of God. The application may shift based on redemptive-historical changes, such as the inauguration of the New Covenant, but its *substance* and utility never changes.

- **Moral Law**

Richard Muller defines Moral Law in Protestant scholastic thought as follows:

[S]pecifically and predominantly, the *Decalogus*, or Ten Commandments; also called the *lex Mosaica* ..., as distinct from the *lex ceremonialis* ...and the *lex civilis*, or civil law. The *lex moralis*, which is primarily intended to regulate morals, is known to the *synderesis* [the innate habit of understanding basic principles of moral law] and is the basis of the acts of *conscientia* [conscience—the application of the innate habit above]. In substance, the *lex moralis* is identical with the *lex naturalis* ...but, unlike the natural law, it is given by revelation in a form which is clearer and fuller than that otherwise known to the reason.⁵

As noted above, the Moral Law is summarily comprehended in the Decalogue, not exhausted by it. Though the formal promulgation of the Decalogue had a unique redemptive-historical context and use, it is nothing other than the Natural Law incorporated into the Mosaic Covenant. This is one of its uses in the Bible but not all of its uses.

- **Positive Law**

Positive laws are those laws added to the Natural or Moral Law. They are dependent upon the will of God. These laws are "good because God commands them."⁶ They become just because commanded. The first Positive Laws were given to Adam in the Garden (Gen. 1:28; 2:17), as far as we know. Subsequent Positive Laws are spread throughout the Old and New Testaments. Positive laws can be abrogated for various reasons. They are not necessarily universal or perpetual. Some obvious illustrations of Positive Law in the Old Testament are circumcision and animal sacrifices and two New Testament illustrations are baptism and the Lord's Supper under the New Covenant.

⁵ Muller, *Dictionary*, 173-174.

⁶ Turretin, *Elenctic Theology*, II:2.

Neither circumcision, animal sacrifices, baptism, or the Lord's Supper are either universal or perpetual.

- **Ceremonial Law**

Muller says:

lex ceremonialis: *ceremonial law*; specifically, the ceremonial or religious regulations given to Israel under the Old Covenant, alongside the moral law of the Decalogue and the civil law of the Jewish nation, such as the Levitical Code. Whereas the *lex moralis*...remains in force after the coming of Christ, the *lex ceremonialis* has been abrogated by the gospel.⁷

This aspect of biblical law is not based on creation but conditioned upon God's purpose to remedy the plight of man due to sin. It is Positive Law, law added to the Natural or Moral Law and, in this case, for the purposes of redemption.

- **Judicial Law**

The civil or political laws revealed through Moses for ancient Israel as God's nation in the land of promise. Though the underlying principles of these laws (i.e., their general equity) are still of moral use, the laws as stated have expired along with the theocracy.

- **Three-Fold Division of Law**

This concept sees the Moral Law as based on creation and, therefore, perpetually binding on all men (though in differing ways) and the Ceremonial and Judicial Law of the Mosaic Covenant as supplemental to the Decalogue under that covenant. The Ceremonial and Judicial Law of the Mosaic Covenant is Positive Law, law added to the Moral Law for temporary redemptive-historical purposes. The three-fold division is based on the fact that the Bible makes distinctions between different types of law functioning under the Mosaic Covenant and views the principles of the Decalogue pre-dating its formal promulgation.

- **Three-Fold Use of Law**

Muller says:

usus legis: *use of the law*; as distinguished by the Protestant scholastics, both Lutheran and Reformed, there are three uses of the *lex moralis*. (1) ...the political or civil use, according to which the law serves the commonwealth, or body politic, as a force for the restraint of sin. The first *usus* stands completely apart from any relation to the work of

⁷ Muller, *Dictionary*, 173.

salvation and functions much as *revelatio generalis*...in bringing some knowledge of God's will to all mankind. (2) ...the elenctical or pedagogical use; i.e., the use of the law for the confrontation and refutation of sin and for the purpose of pointing the way to Christ. ... (3) ...the tertius usus legis, the third use of the law. This final use of the law pertains to believers in Christ who have been saved through faith apart from works. In the regenerate life, the law no longer functions to condemn, since it no longer stands elenctically over against man as the unreachable basis for salvation, but acts as a norm of conduct, freely accepted by those in whom the grace of God works the good. This normative use is also didactic inasmuch as the law now teaches, without condemnation, the way of righteousness.⁸

The first use applies to all men. The second use applies to all men who come in contact with the written Word of God. The third use applies to believers alone.

Concluding Thoughts

This section has been devoted to defining our terms. No attempt was made to prove all the assertions of the definitions. It is simply offered to help us as we enter the thought-world of many theologians who have gone before us. In the pages that follow, we will come in contact with the terms noted above and the concepts they seek to embody. An attempt will be made in the biblical section to show how these concepts actually come from the text of Scripture.

⁸ Muller, *Dictionary*, 320-21.

Some thoughts on the three-fold division of the law

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The Old Testament (as well as the New Testament) makes various distinctions between the Decalogue and other Mosaic laws. The Pentateuch differentiates between the Decalogue and other Mosaic laws in various ways: the Decalogue is considered as “the ten words” (Exod. 34:28; Deut. 4:13; 10:4), as written with the finger of God on stone tablets (Exod. 31:18; 34:1; Deut. 5:22; 9:10), as the covenant itself (Exod. 25:16, 21; 34:28; Deut. 4:13), as put in the ark not beside it (Exod. 25:1-2; Deut. 31:24) and as that to which nothing else was to be added (Deut. 5:22).¹

The Pentateuch also distinguishes between laws in Deuteronomy 4:5, 13-14; 5:31; 6:1; and 12:1. Here are those texts:

See, I have taught you statutes and judgments just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do thus in the land where you are entering to possess it. (Deut. 4:5)

¹³ So He declared to you His covenant which He commanded you to perform, *that is*, the Ten Commandments; and He wrote them on two tablets of stone. ¹⁴ “The LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and judgments, that you might perform them in the land where you are going over to possess it. (Deut. 4:13-14)

³¹ But as for you, stand here by Me, that I may speak to you all the commandments and the statutes and the judgments which you shall teach them, that they may observe *them* in the land which I give them to possess. (Deut. 5:31)

Now this is the commandment, the statutes and the judgments which the LORD your God has commanded *me* to teach you, that you might do *them* in the land where you are going over to possess it (Deut. 6:1)

These are the statutes and the judgments which you shall carefully observe in the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess as long as you live on the earth. (Deut. 12:1)

Notice that some laws revealed through Moses were to be observed in the land of promise (i.e., “statutes and judgments” and “all the commandments and the statutes and the judgments”). What is of interest to note as well is that the Decalogue was delivered to the people prior to entering the land and was not restricted to the land. It can be proven (which I do elsewhere) that the essence of the commands of the Decalogue pre-date its formal promulgation on Sinai. But the Decalogue is not the only part of the Mosaic Law that was applicable outside the land. The laws related to the tabernacle (Exod. 25-Lev. 7) were to be obeyed in the wilderness, though they did not pre-date Sinai. This evidence illustrates the fact that the Pentateuch itself makes distinctions between various aspects of the Mosaic Law. These observations (and

¹ Cf. Ross, *From the Finger of God*, 83ff.

others) are what brought rise to the three-fold division of the law. The words of Philip Ross are worth hearing at this juncture:

So what would Moses think? If the Pentateuch represents what Moses thought, then the basic categories of the threefold division would not have left him in severe shock. The view that the laws of Moses are 'one indivisible whole' finds no support in the Pentateuch. Its labeling of some laws as 'pattern' laws [e.g., laws related to the tabernacle] and others as 'statutes and ordinances' to be observed 'in the land' introduces discrimination, while the Hebrew expressions for law distinguish the Ten Commandments from the rest of the Mosaic code in certain contexts. Above all, the Decalogue's self-understood, divinely-uttered, lapidary [i.e., that which is cut or engraved], apodictic, and constitutional status marks it out as a distinctive collection of laws...²

If these are real distinctions in the Pentateuch, and since all Scripture is inspired by God, it should not surprise us if subsequent Scripture makes similar distinctions between various types of Mosaic Law. This is exactly what happens in many places in both the Old and the New Testament (1 Sam. 15:22-23; Isa. 1:11-17; Jer. 7:21-23 [cp. 17:20-27]; Hos. 6:6; Amos 5:21; 6:6; Micah 6:8; Matt. 12:28-34 [cp. 1 Sam. 21:6]; Mark 7:19). These distinctions made by Moses, many Old Testament prophets, our Lord, and His writing apostles gives ample support for the three-fold division of the law mentioned above.

² Ross, *From the Finger of God*, 119.

Some thoughts on Moral Law, Positive Law, the Ten Commandments, the New Covenant, and the Ground of our Justification

All men are in trouble with God due to a broken law which was revealed prior to the New Testament. This very day, those outside of Christ are condemned due to transgressions of a law revealed before the New Testament came into existence. When Jesus became a curse for elect Jew and Gentile in the first century, he did so based on law revealed prior to the New Testament. Trace this law (and its curse) back to its revelational origins and you end up in the garden of Eden, not Sinai (that does not go back far enough). Sinai, in a sense, is a recapitulation of the Garden. That's why our Confession says, "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..." (19:2; cf. 19:5, "...the moral law binds all men..."). When Paul deals with justification in Romans 5, he goes back to Adam as the disobedient federal head of the old race and Christ as the obedient federal head of the new race. Christ was obedient to the law (i.e., moral law, law written on heart via the creative/revelational finger of God) as revealed prior to his incarnation, first in the garden of Eden but broken by Adam, then republished on stone tablets under the Old Covenant. The promise of the renovation of all souls in the New Covenant includes the promise of the same law written on all the hearts of all New Covenant members. Jeremiah 31:33 seems clear to me that the law to be written on the heart is the same law written previously on stone tablets. The commands of the New Testament, such as the one anothers, are positive laws (i.e., laws added to the moral law) suited to regulate the New Covenant community. The Old Covenant also had moral law and positive law.

Denying moral law as a constant, non-dynamic principle, as some have done, ends up tinkering with the grounds of our justification. The ground of our justification is Christ's obedience to the law all men have broken, which existed prior to the publication of the New Testament and prior to the promulgation of the Ten Commandments on Sinai.

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Typical Objections to the Ten Commandments and Christians

Jeremiah prophesies that Christians have the law that God wrote on stone tablets, the Ten Commandments, written on their hearts by the Spirit of God sent by the Son of God (Jer. 31:33; 2 Cor. 3:3). The Spirit of God also causes us to delight in God's law and obey it (Ezek. 36:27, "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do *them*."). The New Testament gives us the way in which the Ten Commandments are to be applied by Christians. Though this seems clear and is, by far, the majority view of the Christian church throughout her history, some disagree. To be fair to those who may disagree, we must admit that some statements of the New Testament make this issue difficult to understand (Rom. 6:14, for example). In light of this, let us consider four typical objections and interact with them.

1. The Mosaic law in the Old and New Testaments always refers to the entirety of that law, the whole thing, the whole law of the Old Covenant, the law for ancient Israel.

"Since Christians are not under the Mosaic law as a whole, then they cannot be under it in any of its parts," so goes this objection. "So the law in Jeremiah's prophecy cannot have anything to do with the Old Covenant and its law." At first glance, this appears to be a very strong objection, but let us interact with it.

We are not arguing that the law in Jeremiah's prophecy has anything to do with Christians in their present relationship to the Old Covenant or being under any law in order to obtain either the temporal blessings promised to God's ancient people in the Land of Promise or worse salvation and eternal life. This is a prophecy of the New Covenant, of a new day for God's people. What I am arguing is that Jeremiah's prophecy refers to the basic fundamental law of the New Covenant, which is the same for the Old or Mosaic Covenant. We are not under Moses' law like the ancient Jews were, but we are creatures created in the image of God, just as they were, with the law re-written on our hearts. We do have duties as Christians that are very much the same as Israel did under the Old Covenant. We are to love God and neighbor, which Jesus quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18 in Matthew 22:37 and 39. One thing we learn from this is that some laws of the Mosaic Covenant transcend that covenant and can function outside of it. For example, we are to worship the one and only true God of the Bible. This has always been the case. We are to worship the one and only true God of the Bible the way He says to. This has always been the case. We are not to take God's name in vain. This has always been the case. We must rest for the purpose of public worship and we must work or labor. This has always been the case. We owe respect and obedience to parents and all authority figures in our lives. This has always been the case. We must respect life and not murder others either by taking their lives unlawfully or even by hating them. This has always been the case. We must keep ourselves sexually pure, neither committing adultery in our acts, words, or thoughts. This has always been the case. We must respect the property of others and not steal. This has always been the case. We must tell the truth and not lie. This has always been the case. And we must be content with what we have and not commit idolatry by coveting things and people. This has always been the case. These are the Ten Commandments. As a matter of fact, the Ten Commandments did not become holy and good at Sinai. These things are always right or wrong in light of who we are as creatures made in God's image. These simply reflect the ethical absolutes woven into the fabric of our being.

Maybe looking at it this way will help. Just as God incorporated the law written on man's heart at creation (Rom. 2:14-15) into the Old Covenant (Exod. 20:1ff.), He does the same in the New Covenant (Jer. 31:33; 2 Cor. 3:3). This natural law became what it was not at Sinai; it was formally published by God Himself on stone tablets. That same law is incorporated into the New Covenant. This law, then, is not only trans-cultural but trans-covenantal. Since it is coextensive with our status as image bearers, this should not surprise us at all.

2. If the law in Jeremiah refers to the Ten Commandments, why didn't God repeat them word-for-word in the New Testament exactly as they come to us in the Old Testament?

"If repeated then binding; if not repeated, not binding," so goes the argument. Again, this appears to be a sound objection, but is it really? God already revealed the Ten Commandments twice in the Old Testament (Exod. 20 and Deut. 5). He prophesied their presence in the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:33. He confirmed their presence under the New Covenant in 2 Corinthians 3:3 (and elsewhere). The Ten Commandments are either quoted or assumed to be good and right by the New Testament writers in many places. Remember, it is the essence of the Ten Commandments that are binding, not any particular form in which they have been revealed in Scripture.

For example, Paul references the fifth commandment as that which is right for children to obey (Eph. 6:1-3). Do you really need God to repeat, for example, the sixth commandment—"You shall not murder"—in order to believe that murder is sinful? By the way, it is interesting to note that murder was wrong and sinful prior to Sinai—Cain killed his brother Abel, which is recorded in Genesis 4, and John tells us in 1 John 3:11-12 that Cain was of the evil one and an example of someone who did not love. There is no command to love or any prohibition of murder recorded in Scripture prior to Genesis 4. Do you want to argue that love was not expected and murder was not prohibited until we read of an explicit command to love or an explicit prohibition concerning murder? I hope not.

How about the tenth commandment—"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his male servant or his female servant or his ox or his donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor"? That command, as given here, is not repeated in the New Testament (i.e., word-for-word). It is, however, reduced to its essence—"You shall not covet" (Rom. 7:7; 13:9). God does not have to repeat the Ten Commandments word-for-word for them to be relevant for Christians.

Did you know that the first four commandments are not repeated in the New Testament word-for-word and neither are the ninth and tenth? In light of this, no one in their right mind argues that only the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth commandments carry over into the New Testament and, therefore, are the only ones applicable to Christians. The essence of all ten of the Ten Commandments carries over into the New Testament. This is what we expect from Jeremiah's prophecy (and elsewhere).

3. The New Testament says that we are not under law but under grace. We do not have to obey the law of God; we just need to bathe our souls in the grace of God.

This objection is often based on Romans 6:14, which says, "For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace." At first glance, this verse may appear to undo much of what has been said above. How should we respond? It is one thing to be under law as a

sinner as a means to life (which is impossible to attain since the fall), as a means whereby one obeys to get salvation and eternal life, as a means to get right with God or earn an inheritance; but it is quite another thing to obey because we have received eternal life, because someone else made us right with God, because someone else has earned an inheritance for us. We are bound to obey God's law, not that we may live, not that we may gain salvation and inherit eternal life, not that we may be right with God, but because we live, because we have received eternal life, because we are heirs of life. We do not obey to life; we obey from life. Being a Christian does not mean we do the right things to get to heaven. It means that we believe the gospel. Christians believe that Christ has done everything necessary to earn heaven and the eternal state of glory for them. Our obedience does not get us to glory; Christ's does. The basis of our justification and entitlement to glory is what Christ did *for* us. What we do for Christ is a result of His work. The efficient cause of what we do for Him is that which He does *to* or *in* us by His Spirit, a promised blessing for all in the New Covenant. What we do is a reflection of our love for Christ in light of what He has done for us and it is impelled by His Spirit in us forming us into Christ's image in conjunction with the written word of God. Obeying God as a believer is a *result* of grace in our lives; it is an *effect* of God's grace in us (Eph. 2:8-10). But, it is also a *response* to the grace of God in us (1 Cor. 15:10). We obey God's law by grace. Because our souls are soaked by God's grace, we want to obey God's law.

4. This would mean that the fourth commandment carries over into the New Covenant.

Well, my short answer is, "Yes, that is certainly true." The essential principles of all ten of the Ten Commandments carry over. Time to work and time to stop work for the purpose of special worship are both necessary if we are to please God. But, someone says, "The fourth commandment is not repeated in the New Testament." Neither is the first commandment (at least not word-for-word) but that does not make having other gods before the true God virtuous or only for Old Covenant Israel. And the second commandment is not repeated (at least not word-for-word) but that does not mean you can make idols and expect that (or any other humanly devised forms of worship) to be acceptable worship to God. And neither is the third commandment (at least not word-for-word) but that does not mean you can take the name of the Lord in vain.

But, someone says again, "In order for the fourth commandment to carry over we would expect the New Testament Christians to meet for worship on the seventh day of the week. In fact, they did not; they met on the first day of the week, the Lord's Day." Yes, they did. But they met on the first day of the week because of the resurrection of Christ in celebration of redemption won and the inauguration of a new creation. Let's think through this a bit.

This objection assumes that the application of the Ten Commandments must look the same as it did in the Old Testament era if they are to be obeyed under the New Testament era. Is this, in fact, the case? Must the application of one of the Ten Commandments look the same as it did under the Old Covenant if it is to be applicable under the New Covenant? I think not. For example, the second commandment is still in force but the laws for what constitutes acceptable worship have changed (Heb. 9:1-10). This change is due to the coming of Christ and His work which is the fulfillment to which the ancient elements of worship pointed. We worship the way we do in light of the coming and resurrection of Christ and the revelation explaining the implications of those events recorded in the New Testament. However, idolatry is still a sin (1 Cor. 10:14; Col.3:5; 1 John 5:21). We do not offer animal sacrifices at a physical temple through

a Levitical priest, though all believers are priests who offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Christ (1 Pet. 2:5) in the new house of God, the new temple, the church (1 Cor. 3:16-17; Eph. 2:21-22; 1 Tim. 3:15). Things have changed due to fulfillment in Christ, but fulfillment does not cancel the moral principle of the law, though it may change its application. In other words, the application of the second commandment looks different than it used to in light of the coming of the Son of Man and His entrance into glory. We worship *how* we do in light of the coming and resurrection of Christ. It is the same for the application of the fourth commandment. We worship *when* we do in light of the coming and resurrection of Christ (Heb. 4:9-10; Rev. 1:10¹) but Sabbath-keeping is still our privilege (Heb. 4:9) and we do not meet on the seventh day of the week, looking back to the original creation and redemption from Egypt or forward to the first coming of Christ. Just as the historical basis for the application of the fourth commandment under the Old Covenant is two-fold—creation (Exod. 20:8-11) and redemption (Deut. 5:12-15), so the historical basis for the application of the fourth commandment under the New Covenant is also two-fold—the resurrection is both the formal inauguration of a new creation and the guarantee of our redemption.

A similar case can be made with the fifth commandment on two levels. The fifth commandment is ours to obey irrespective of our age. However, honoring parents when you are two years old looks different than when you are 50. Also, in Eph. 6:2-3, Paul references the fifth commandment, applying it to children in first-century Asia Minor. However, in its first revelation to us in the Bible, obeying the fifth commandment promised longer life in the Promised Land (cf. Exod. 20:12, “that your days may be long upon the land which the LORD your God is giving you”). The application may change due to various factors, like the inauguration of the New Covenant due to the sufferings and glory of Christ, without cancelling the essence of the commandment.

Just as the application of the second commandment looks different under the New Covenant due to the sufferings and glory of Christ (i.e., the *elements* of public worship have changed), so the application of the fourth commandment (i.e., the *day* for public worship has changed). The application of the fourth commandment takes its shape based on redemptive-historical realities connected to Christ’s death and resurrection. The Christian’s Sabbath does not look backward to the original creation or to redemption from Egyptian bondage, and neither does it look forward to the first coming of Christ. It looks back to the inauguration of the New Covenant (i.e., the new creation and much better redemption) and is a foretaste of His second coming and the eternal rest that will be brought to eschatological fulfillment at that time and forever afterward. The Lord’s Day or Christian Sabbath is a present symbol of a better creation and a better redemption which we enjoy in part now, but in full in the state of consummation.

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¹ The word translated “Lord’s” is found two times in the New Testament, here in Rev. 1:10 and in 1 Cor. 11:20. Both times it refers to something (i.e., a day [Rev. 1:10] and a covenantal meal [1 Cor.11:20]) that peculiarly belongs to the Lord Jesus after His resurrection. Just as the Old Covenant had a sacred day (i.e., the seventh-day Sabbath) and a sacred meal (i.e., Passover), so the New Covenant has its own sacred day and sacred meal. Both the sacred day (Rev. 1:10; “the Lord’s Day”) and the sacred meal (1 Cor. 11:20; “the Lord’s Supper”) get their official titles after the resurrection. Though it is true that all days and all meals come from the Lord, all days and all meals are not identified as “the Lord’s,” in the sense that this word is used in Rev. 1:10 and 1 Cor. 11:20.

The Second London Baptist Confession of 1689 on the Decalogue

The theology of the Confession concerning the Ten Commandments begins at creation (2nd LCF 4). However, the first *explicit* mention of the Ten Commandments is not in the chapter on creation but the chapter on the law of God (2nd LCF 19:2). Therefore, we will use chapter 19, *Of the Law of God*, as a guide to unfold the theology of the Confession concerning the Ten Commandments. Four themes will emerge which will function as the outline for our study of the Confession: 1. The Ten Commandments and Creation; 2. The Ten Commandments and Sinai; 3. The Ten Commandments and Christians; and 4. The Ten Commandments and Non-Christians.

The Ten Commandments and Creation

In chapter 19 of the Confession, we are faced with language which asserts that the function of the Ten Commandments predates Mount Sinai and the giving of the law to Old Covenant Israel. The pertinent language of the Confession is as follows:

God gave to Adam a law of universal obedience written in his heart... (2nd LCF 19:1)

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. (2nd LCF 19:2)

Besides this law, commonly called moral, ... (2nd LCF 19:3)

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. (2nd LCF 19:5)

Several observations are necessary at this time for our purposes. *First*, notice the Confession asserts that Adam was given “a law of universal obedience written in his heart” (2nd LCF 19:1). Chapter 4 of the Confession, *Of Creation*, asserts that Adam and Eve had “the law of God written in their hearts” (2nd LCF 4:2; cf. also 4:3 “...the law written in their hearts...” and 6:1 “...the law of their creation...”).

Second, this law, written in the heart of Adam, remained in men subsequent to Adam’s sin and functioned “as a perfect rule of righteousness after the fall” (2nd LCF 19:2).

Third, “[t]he same law that was first written in the heart of man ... was also delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments...” (2nd LCF 19:2).

Fourth, this law is called *moral law* and applicable to all men—saved and lost—because all men have at least one thing in common—creation in the image of God. The Confession asserts: “The moral law doth forever bind all ... in respect of the authority of God the Creator” (2nd LCF 19:5).

The Ten Commandments and Sinai

The claims of the Confession concerning the Ten Commandments and Sinai are very clear.

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. (2nd LCF 19:2)

Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel ceremonial laws... (2nd LCF 19:3)

To them [Old Covenant Israel] also he gave sundry judicial laws... (2nd LCF 19:4)

Four observations will assist us at this point. *First*, “[t]he same law that was first written in the heart of man” (2nd LCF 19:2) via the *creative* finger of God was delivered by the redemptive-historical revelatory finger of God on Mount Sinai.¹ It is important to note that it is the same law revealed in a different way.

Second, this law “was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, *in* ten commandments...” (2nd LCF 19:2; emphasis mine). The form God chose to reveal this law in was “*in* ten commandments” (2nd LCF 19:2). This is important to note as well. The *essence* of the law is the same, though the *form* may differ.

Third, this law, “delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments...” (2nd LCF 19:2) is “commonly called moral” (2nd LCF 19:3).

Fourth, the Ten Commandments played a unique, central role in the life of Old Covenant Israel. “Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel ceremonial laws...” (2nd LCF 19:3). “To them [Old Covenant Israel] also he gave sundry judicial laws...” (2nd LCF 19:4). The “ceremonial laws”² and “judicial laws”³ are viewed as supplementary to the Ten Commandments. Therefore, the Confession sees the Ten Commandments functioning as a specially revealed law for Old Covenant Israel and, at the same time, as a specially revealed form of the natural law,⁴ which is written on the hearts of all men (2nd LCF 4:2-3; 6:1; 19:1, 2, 3, 5, 6).

The Ten Commandments and Christians

¹ I do not mean to deny that God’s *creative finger* is revelatory. General revelation is based on creation (i.e., God’s *creative-revelatory finger*). The finger of God refers to divine power in historical execution.

² According to Richard A. Muller, ceremonial law, *lex ceremonialis* is “specifically, the ceremonial or religious regulations given to Israel under the Old Testament, alongside the moral law of the Decalogue and the civil law of the Jewish nation, such as the Levitical Code. Whereas the *lex moralis* [moral law] remains in force after the coming of Christ, the *lex ceremonialis* has been abrogated by the gospel.” Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (1985; second printing, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), 173.

³ The civil law of the Jewish nation under the Old Covenant.

⁴ According to Muller, the natural law, *lex naturalis*, is “the universal moral law either impressed by God upon the mind of all people or immediately discerned by the reason in its encounter with the order of nature. The natural law was therefore available even to those pagans who did not have the advantage of the Sinaitic revelation and the *lex Mosaica* [Mosaic law] ... with the result that they were left without excuse in their sins, convicted by *conscientia* [conscience] ... The scholastics argue the identity of the *lex naturalis* with the *lex Mosaica* or *lex moralis* [the moral law, especially the Decalogue] *quoad substantiam*, according to substance, and distinguish them *quoad formam*, according to form. The *lex naturalis* is inward, written on the heart and therefore obscure, whereas the *lex Mosaica* is revealed externally and written on tablets and thus of greater clarity.” Muller, *Dictionary*, 174-75.

The position of the Confession concerning the Ten Commandments and Christians is very clear as well.

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. (2nd LCF 19:5)⁵

Consider these observations. *First*, the Confession sees the Ten Commandments as applicable to Christians because of their [i.e., the Ten Commandments'] content. "The moral law⁶ doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, ...in regard of the matter contained in it..." (2nd LCF 19:5).

Second, the Confession sees the Ten Commandments as applicable to Christians because they are creatures. "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" (2nd LCF 19:5).

Third, the Confession sees the Ten Commandments as applicable to Christians because they are Christ's. "[N]either doth Christ in the gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation" (2nd LCF 19:5). Clearly, the Ten Commandments, according to the Confession, have a unique place in the Christian life.

The Ten Commandments and Non-Christians

Finally, the position of the Confession concerning the Ten Commandments and non-Christians is also very clear.

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. (2nd LCF 19:5)

Consider these observations. *First*, the Confession sees the Ten Commandments as applicable to non-Christians because of their content. "The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, ...in regard of the matter contained in it..." (2nd LCF 19:5).

Second, the Confession sees the Ten Commandments as applicable to non-Christians because they are creatures. "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" (2nd LCF 19:5). Because the Confession views the Ten Commandments as a specially revealed form of the law written on the heart, the natural law, it sees them as binding upon Christians and non-Christians alike. This is due to the content of the Ten Commandments and the fact that all men are creatures and, therefore, under this law.

⁵ The functions of the law in the life of the Christian are delineated in 2nd LCF 19:6. However, it is beyond the scope of this study to deal with *the way* the law functions in the life of the believer. I am simply attempting to show *that* the Confession teaches the law functions not *how*.

⁶ The moral law, in the context of the Confession, refers to the essence of the Ten Commandments as a specially revealed form of the law written on the heart (i.e., the natural law) via the creative act of God.

Conclusion

This study has been devoted to the place of the Ten Commandments in the theology of the 2nd LCF. According to the Confession, the Ten Commandments function as follows: 1) as the law written on man's heart at creation, 2) as the heart and soul of the Old Covenant's law, and 3) as the basic, fundamental law for all men—the moral law. The Ten Commandments began to function in the life of man in the Garden of Eden. They were then written by God upon stone tablets in Ten Commandments and functioned as the heart of His law for Old Covenant Israel and as the specially revealed form of the law written upon man's heart. Since the coming of Christ, they are still applicable to both Christians and non-Christians. The Ten Commandments are, therefore, trans-covenantal because they are basic and fundamental.

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On the use of the word “law” (*nomos*) with and without the Greek article

You have probably heard preachers make a big deal about the presence or absence of the Greek article before Greek nouns. They might have said something like this, “Paul does not use the article here. This means we should translate the word *a* and not *the*.” Jehovah’s Witnesses do this with John 1:1. They translate the second instance of the Greek word for God as “a god.” Some may want to attempt this with the Greek word for “law” (*nomos*). The argument would go something like this. When the Greek New Testament uses the noun for “law” with the article it refers to a specific law but when the Greek New Testament uses the noun for “law” without the article it refers to law in general (i.e., no specific law in particular). Though this may sound like a legitimate rule of Greek grammar, a little work in the Greek text shows this not to be a rule at all. In fact, it finds no ground in the actual use of the noun “law” to be established as a rule. In effect, then, it is a “rule” still looking for a basis in the Greek New Testament. Our brief study below will show us that it is not true that the absence of the Greek article with the Greek noun for “law” (or any other noun) necessarily indicates that the author has shifted from “the law” to “a law.” Someone once said, “The only thing worse than knowing no Greek is knowing a little Greek.” When preachers know a little Greek, they can use language that may wow the hearer, but that does not mean they know what they are talking about.

Let’s look at a few examples in Paul’s writings where in the context of using the Greek word for “law” (*nomos*) he uses the article and then drops the article but the law he is referring to is the same law. We will see that Paul uses *nomos* (“law”) both with and without the article (i.e., “the”)-and in contexts which include the Decalogue-without shifting the meaning from “the” to “a law.” In other words, the presence and/or absence of the article does not necessarily change the referent of the word “law.” Paul can use the article or not use the article and be referring to the same law.

Commenting on Romans 2:14, John Murray says:

The omission of the definite article before νόμος (law) on three occasions in verse 14 is an interesting example of the omission when the subject is specific and definite. On the first two occasions the law in mind is the specially revealed law as exemplified in Scripture. That it is definite is shown by the expression τὰ τοῦ νόμου (the things of the law). For this reason we should most reasonably take νόμος (law) in the concluding clause as definite—the Gentiles are not simply *a* law to themselves but *the* law spoken of in the other clauses of the verse. This is confirmed by verse 15 where we have the expression τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου (the work of the law). The point is that it is not an entirely different law with which the Gentiles are confronted; the things of the law they do are not things of an entirely different law—it is essentially the same law. The difference resides in the different method of being confronted with it and, by implication, in the less detailed and perspicuous knowledge of its content.¹

¹ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1984), 74.

This law is mentioned in verses 12, 13, 14, and in several places in verses 17-27. In verses 21 and 22, Paul refers to commands contained in the Decalogue. Paul, therefore, is saying that the law the Jews possessed in verses 17ff. is the basic, fundamental law of the Old Covenant, the Decalogue.

In Romans 7:7, Paul asks the question: “Is the law [ὁ νόμος] sin?” He then says, “I would not have known sin except through the law [διὰ νόμου].” Notice the presence of the article with νόμος (*nomos*) and then its absence in the same verse. The second use of *nomos* has a preposition before it. *Nomos* (actually *nomou*) is the object of a preposition. He then concludes, “For I would not have known covetousness unless the law [ὁ νόμος] had said, “*You shall not covet.*”” Notice the use of the article in this instance. The law in this verse is the same throughout and contains a commandment that forbids coveting. Obviously, the commandment that forbids coveting is the 10th commandment of the Decalogue. The absence of the article, when referring to the law where the 10th commandment is contained, does not alter the identity of the law. “It is not necessary for a noun to have the article in order to be definite.”² It is also important to note that in verse 8-12 law is more inclusive than the 10th commandment. In verses 14 [ὁ νόμος (‘the law’)], 16 [τῷ νόμῳ (‘the law’)], and 22 [τῷ νόμῳ τοῦ θεοῦ (‘the law of God’)], law is used with the article (cf. also Rom. 8:4, 7) and in verse 25 [νόμῳ θεοῦ (‘the law of God’)] without it, yet all these refer to the same law throughout (i.e., the law of God, which has as one of its commandments, “You shall not covet.”).

In Romans 13:8-10, Paul uses νόμος (law) without the article and immediately references the Decalogue. Consider these two observations. *First*, Paul does not hesitate to illustrate what he means by νόμος (law) in verse 8 by quoting part of the Decalogue in verse 9. In verse 8, he uses the anarthrous (i.e., without an article) accusative (i.e., a type of ending used as the object of verbs), νόμον (*nomon*), because it is the object of the verb “has fulfilled.” In verse 10, he uses the anarthrous genitive (i.e., a type of ending used to modify nouns), νόμου (*nomou*), because it is modifying and explaining “fulfillment.” Both are anarthrous (i.e., without the article) in a context clearly referring to at least part of the Decalogue.

Lastly, consider 1 Timothy 1:8-9. In verse 8, Paul uses an article (ὁ) before the word νόμος (law). “But we know that *the* law is good” [Οἶδαμεν δέ ὅτι καλός ὁ νόμος]. This indicates that Paul is probably referring to a definite body of law, though depending on the context. The article ὁ (the), however, is not used before νόμος (law) in verse 9. From this some may claim that Paul is shifting his meaning from “the law” in particular to “a law” in general. But as referenced above, Daniel Wallace asserts that “it is not necessary for a noun to have the article in order to be definite.”³ He says elsewhere, “There are at least *ten ways* [emphasis added] in which a noun in Greek can be definite without the

² Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 243.

³ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 243.

article.”⁴ There is good reason to understand the anarthrous use of νόμος (law) in verse 9 as definite. This understanding is based on the presence of the article with νόμος (law) in verse 8 and on the fact that Paul references specific commands from the law of God (i.e., the Decalogue) in the rest of verses 9 and 10. In this case, the function of the article carries over from verse 8 to verse 9. We conclude, therefore, that Paul is not moving from “the law” in particular to “a law” in general. In a way that agrees with the rules of Greek syntax, he is referring to the same law in both verses. Henry Alford commented long ago:

Not, ‘a law’ in general, . . . nor does the omission of the article furnish any ground for such a rendering, in the presence of numerous instances where *nomos*, anarthrous, is undeniably ‘the Law’ of Moses.⁵

In conclusion, we are reminded that words take on their specific meaning based on the context in which they are used, with or without an article in the Greek text. Remember, context is king.

⁴ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 209. Emphasis added. Wallace references Givón’s *Syntax*, which says, “Speakers code a referential nominal as definite if they think that they are entitled to assume that the hearer can – by whatever means – assign it unique reference.” *Ibid.*, 245, n. 72.

⁵ Henry Alford, *Alford’s Greek Testament*, vol. 3, *Galatians–Philemon* (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Guardian Press, 1976), 306. He then lists several instances and adds, “to say nothing of the very many examples after prepositions.”