

II. THE SEARCH FOR A BIBLICAL STANDARD OF MORAL CONDUCT

A. The Standard of the Mosaic Law (especially the Decalogue)

1. The Mosaic Law in general as a standard of moral conduct

In John 1:17 the Mosaic Law is referred to: "For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

In John 7:19 Jesus said: "Has not Moses given you the law? Yet not one of you keeps the law. Why are you trying to kill me?" And in verse 23 He said: "Now if a child can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing the whole man on the Sabbath?"

a. Aspects of the Mosaic Law

A number of interpreters refuse to acknowledge distinctions between aspects of the Mosaic Law. Since they see all of it as abrogated for the New Testament believer, it is all of one piece, and no distinctions should be made, even those based on internal considerations.

However, the Mosaic Law is frequently distinguished in three aspects: moral, civil (or civic or judicial), and ceremonial.

For example, the New Scofield Reference Bible, in its footnote 2 on Exodus 19:5, distinguishes three "divisions" of the Mosaic Covenant:

Commandments -- Exodus 20:1-26
 Judgments ----- Exodus 21:1-24:11
 Ordinances ----- Exodus 24:12-31:18

This work goes on to say that the first division expressed the righteous will of God; the second division governed the social life of Israel; and the third division governed the religious life of Israel.

Bernard Haring, in The Law of Christ, states:

The Old Testament forms a coherent unit of three diverse kinds of law: 1) the cultal law, 2) the judiciary law, 3) the moral law. It is of the very essence of the Old Testament theocracy that religion (cult), morality, and law be bound together in the greatest possible intimacy.

The law of cult or ceremonial regulates the divine worship established by God . . .

The 'judicial' law (civil law) had as its task . . . to unify the Chosen People and to segregate them from the Gentiles . . .

The moral law of the Old Testament as the clear revelation of the natural law is without doubt more specific and precise in its determinations and enjoys a loftier sanction because of the loving alliance between God and His people. The moral norms of the Old Testament are summed up in the decalog and in the great commandment.

Heinrich Schmid in The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Third Edition, revised (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1899) p. 509, states: