

The Law . . . is, according to its widest extent, partly general and applicable at all times, and partly given for a certain period and under certain circumstances. The former is called the moral Law, inasmuch as it contains the precepts of God relating to our moral conduct, which remain unchanged at all times, and concern all rational creatures. The latter is called the ceremonial and forensic Law, inasmuch as it contains the ceremonial and civil precepts which were given to the Jews during the period of the Jewish theocracy.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 19, sections 3 and 4, states:

Beside this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel, . . . 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. . . .

To them also, as a body politic, he gave sundry judicial laws .

The Second Helvetic Confession (written by Henry Bullinger of Zurich in A.D. 1566), Chapter 12, states:

We teach that the will of God is set down unto us in the Law of God; to wit, what he would have us to do, or not to do, what is good and just, or what is evil and unjust. We therefore confess that "The law is good, and holy" (Rom. 7:12); and that this law is, by the finger of God, either "written in the hearts of men" (Rom. 2:15), and so is called the law of nature, or engraven in the two tables of stone, and more largely expounded in the Books of Moses (Exod. 2:1-17; Deut. 5:22). For plainness' sake we divide it into the moral law, which is contained in the commandments, or the two tables expounded in the books of Moses; into the ceremonial, which does appoint ceremonies and the worship of God; and into the judicial law, which is occupied about political and domestic affairs.

If these distinctions in the Mosaic Law are viewed, not as divisions or separate units, but as three aspects or facets of the one Law, how are they to be defined? The following are proposed working definitions:

The moral aspect of the Mosaic Law is concerned with the moral obligations that an individual, considered as a private person, owes to God and to his fellow human beings.

The civil aspect of the Mosaic Law is concerned with the civic obligations that an individual, considered as a citizen of the theocracy, Israel, owes to God, to the duly constituted authorities of the theocracy, and to his fellow citizens; and is also concerned with the judicial penalties prescribed for nonfulfillment of these obligations.

The ceremonial aspect of the Mosaic Law is concerned with the ceremonial obligations which an individual, considered as a member of the religious community, the covenant congregation of Israel, owes to God, both in terms of the prescribed manner of worship of God and the prescribed means of confessing transgression -- primarily transgression