

Interpreting Law

Many would argue that the “law” consists of four major collections of laws: the Covenant Code (Exodus 20:22-23:33), the Deuteronomic Code (Deuteronomy 12-26), the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17-26), and the Priestly Code (Exodus 25-31; 34:29-Leviticus 16; parts of Numbers)

Types of Old Testament Legal Material

- Casuistic Law-Case Law (protasis-apodasis; condition-penalty)
 - The “If” clause describes the case concerned. The “Then” clause describes the legal penalty for infractions.
 - Exodus 21:18-29 (Condition-penalty)
 - OT casuistic law primarily treats civil or criminal cases rather than religious ones.
- Apodictic Law-Absolute Law
 - Unconditional, categorical directives (no exceptions)
 - Prohibition-negative command (thou shalt not...)
 - Admonition-positive command (Do this...)
 - Participle law-participle describes the case while the main verb prescribes the penalty...Exodus 21:12
 - Law of retaliation-Exodus 21:23-25 (usually premeditated crimes involving bodily harm) think broadly of equivalence of injury and penalty more than a specific action
- Legal series
 - Ten Words-Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5 –apodictic lists
 - Topical groups for casuistic laws
 - Treatment of servants-Exodus 21:2-11
 - Bodily injuries-Exodus 21:18-21
 - Property losses-Exodus 22:1-15
- Legal Instruction
 - Priestly instruction-Leviticus 6-7 (offerings), 21 (priestly purity)
 - Ritual instruction-Leviticus 1-5 (instruction for the people about how to perform rituals properly)

Principles of Interpretation for Law

- Some initial thoughts
 - Legal codes and legalism
 - Comprehensive or Larger guide?

- Israel was being taught fundamental values, consistent with God's character and his expectation of their honoring him.
- Understand law within covenant framework
 - Personal demands of Israel's gracious and sovereign Lord
 - Interpret the law relationally
 - Ethical content of 10 Words worked out through the subsequent legal codes
- Chris Wright-An eye for and eye-5 types of OT law
 - Criminal law-defines offenses against God and the whole community
 - Civil law-treats private disputes between Israelite citizens
 - Family law-defines the judicial rule of the Israelite family (Deut 25:10)
 - Cultic law-regulates Israel's specific religious practices
 - Charitable law-includes various kinds of humanitarian legislation (Exod 22:21-27)
- How does the law apply to Christians today?
 - God intends for the law to serve as a paradigm of timeless ethical, moral and theological principles.
 - It plays a key role in Israel's priestly ministry as a "light to the nations." (Exodus 19:5-6; Isaiah 49:6)
 - To properly interpret the law, we should attempt to view the timeless truth beneath the cultural husk.
 - Do not murder; do not steal are easy reads
 - Instructions about equitable legal procedure make sense (Exod 23:1-8)
 - Others are more difficult
 - Matthew 5:17 principle: All of the Old Testament applies to Christians, but none of it applies apart from its fulfillment in Christ.
 - Contra Much of Covenant Theology-all of the OT applies except what the NT repeals
 - Contra Classic dispensationalism-none of the OT applies except what the NT repeats
 - Laws of sacrifice through entrusting ourselves to Christ as our once-for-all sacrifice (Hebrews 9:1-10:25)
 - Some kosher laws found in principle as we morally separate ourselves from sin? (2 Cor 6:17) even as Christ declared that all food is clean (Mark 7:19b)
 - What if NT does not address a specific law? Look for category of law
- Recap
 - Some laws retain literal validity for Christians
 - Some examples

- In some cases, the NT actually makes the OT law more strict
 - Some examples
- Some laws no longer have literal validity because of NT teachings (ie. Their fulfillment in Christ renders their literal practice obsolete)
 - Some examples
- Laws that are no longer literally valid still teach important timeless truths.
 - Some examples

Christopher Wright: Old Testament Ethics for the People of God

The descriptive question: What ethical behaviors characterized ancient Israel?

The canonical question: What do Old Testament texts tell us about how the Israelites should have behaved?

The normative question: What do Old Testament texts tell us about how we ought to behave?