

# Understanding the Law

## Chapter 6 – Good Boundaries, Good Neighbors: The Law

---

- Some laws are strange – we wonder about them
  - *Ex 34:26 The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the Lord your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.*
  - *Lev 19:19 You shall keep my statutes. You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind. You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor shall you wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of material.*
  - *Lev 13:40 If a man's hair falls out from his head, he is bald; he is clean.*
- Some laws we don't follow
  - *Lev 19:32 You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.*
  - *Deut 14:8 And the pig, because it parts the hoof but does not chew the cud, is unclean for you. Their flesh you shall not eat, and their carcasses you shall not touch.*
- Some laws we believe we should obey
  - *Lev 19:18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.*
  - *Ex 20:13-14 You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery.*
- Some laws we mistakenly claim
  - *Deut 28:2-4 And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God. 3 Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. 4 Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock.*

How do we know what to do with the various laws?

### General Information About the Old Testament Law



**A. Understand the historical context – Israel had just come out of slavery.**

**B. The OT law was a gift from God to His people.**

**C. The OT law in the Bible . . .**

- In the plural, laws refers to the over 600 individual commands! (Ex 18:20)
- In the singular, all the commands put together were called the law. (Matt 5:18)
- Sometimes, the law refers to the first 5 books of the Old Testament – The Pentateuch.

**D. The OT law is a covenant.**

**E. The OT law is not our Testament Law.**

- Mosaic Law was a covenant with the nation of Israel, not the church.
  
- The general rule:
  - Unless an OT law is somehow restated or reinforced in the NT, it is no longer directly binding on God's people.
  
- Laws that ARE NOT reinforced:
  - The Israelite civil laws.
  
  - The Israelite ritual laws.
  
- Laws that ARE reinforced:
  - Parts of the ethical portion of the law
  - The two great commands:

*Matt 22:37-39* And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment.

<sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Compare with Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18.
  - The 10 commandments – Exodus 20 compared with sermon on the mount in Matt 5, Sabbath discussion in John 7:23 and other places, and Eph 6:2-3 for instance.

**F. All of the OT law is still the Word of God for us even though it is not still the command of God to us.**

*Deut 22:8* When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring the guilt of blood upon your house, if anyone should fall from it.

While the law is not **regulatory** for us as a binding covenant with God, it is still **revelatory** for us in a bonding relationship with God. (Russell)

- The law reveals the character of the lawgiver - His mind, personality, qualities, attitudes, priorities, values, concerns, likes and dislikes and standards.
  - Reveals who God is, what holiness is, and what sin is like
- Teaches us how God views sin and how sin affects our relationship with Him.

## Practical Process For Reading The Law



- We cannot apply OT law directly to our lives. That line must go through the empty tomb of Jesus and what is revealed in the NT.

### A. Observation – What do I see?

- Look at the laws carefully according to two basic forms of law.
  1. General commands – Apodictic Law – absolute law.
    - States a command or prohibition in a categorical, unconditional manner.
    - What must always be done.
    - 10 commandments
    - Gives direct understanding of God’s heart and holiness.
    - Reliable guide with general principles. Not every case was covered.  
*Lev 19:13 The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning.*
    - Very comprehensive in spirit, but not letter.
      - Not possible to fully keep them. We need something else to please God.
  2. Specific cases - Casuistic Law –
    - Case law. – what should be done in a specific situation.  
If A then B.  
Ex 21:22-25
      - These are not specifically renewed in the new covenant.
- Look at the laws in their context.

### B. Interpretation – What does it mean?

- Understand the law as God’s inspired Word for you, not God’s direct command to you.
- Look at the laws collectively.
- Look for how God relates with people in a covenantal relationship and how sin was reconciled (through sacrifice pointing to Christ in OT)
- What do you think God’s purpose was for these laws?
  - Commentaries very helpful here.
  - Food laws.  
*Lev 11:7 And the pig, because it parts the hoof and is cloven-footed but does not chew the cud, is unclean to you.*

- Laws about sacrifices

*Ex 29:10-12*

- Unusual Prohibitions

*Deut 14:21 You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.*

- Laws giving blessing to those who keep them

*Deut 14:28-29*

- What specific areas of life does God expect holiness and transformation within His people?
- What does this passage tell us about the character of God in the law, including His justice, holiness, mercy, and love? Remember Revelatory, not regulatory!
- Understand the law as a gift, not as a limitation.
  - How would these laws be a gift for Israel?
- Understand the law as a basis for the old covenant and Israel's history and not binding in the new covenant unless renewed in the NT.
- Is the essence of the law that repeated in the New Testament? What parts are renewed?
- For each law and series of laws, write down in one or two sentences the answer to the overall question: What do these laws mean?

### **C. Application – How does it relate and what do I do?**

- What can you learn from the illustrations of godly responses to life's situations?
- Identify the theological principle in the OT.
- Filter that principle through the NT.
  - Does the NT add to / modify the principle?
- What timeless truth(s) are present?
- How can you apply these truths today?
  - Who shall I be?
  - How should I think?
  - What should I do?
  - Who will I teach?

## Putting It Into Practice – The Law



*Deut 22:1-4 You shall not see your brother's ox or his sheep going astray and ignore them. You shall take them back to your brother. <sup>2</sup> And if he does not live near you and you do not know who he is, you shall bring it home to your house, and it shall stay with you until your brother seeks it. Then you shall restore it to him. <sup>3</sup> And you shall do the same with his donkey or with his garment, or with any lost thing of your brother's, which he loses and you find; you may not ignore it. <sup>4</sup> You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and ignore them. You shall help him to lift them up again.*

Have someone start with prayer asking the Holy Spirit to reveal truth from His Word.

A. Observation – What do I see?

- What do you see in the text?
  
- Are these general commands (apodictic law) or specific cases (casuistic law)?
  
- Are these laws dealing with Israel's relationship with God, each other, or outsiders?

B. Interpretation – What does it mean?

- What do you think God's purpose was for these laws?
  - Are these laws only for livestock?
  
- What specific areas of life does God expect holiness and transformation within His people?
  
- Revelatory, not regulatory – What does this passage tell us about the character of God in the law, including His justice, holiness, mercy, and love.

- How would these laws be a gift for Israel?
  
- Is the essence of these laws repeated / renewed in the New Testament? Where?
  
- What do these laws mean?

C. Application – How does it relate and what do I do?

- Identify the theological principle in the OT.
  
- Filter that principle through the NT
  - Does the NT add to / modify the principle?
  
- What timeless truth(s) are present?
  
- How can you apply these truths today?
  - Who shall I be?
  - How should I think?
  - What should I do?
  - Who will I teach?

**Pray** for God to help us apply His Word.