

*NMOPPC Bible study background notes for "Holiness is Still Required" teaching. This part (2) study is a very small explanation of New Testament holiness elements express within the Old Testament law. Not exhaustive by any means.*

### The Role of Law in Israel and the Bible

The Old Testament laws are not our laws, but it would be a mistake to conclude that the law is no longer a valuable part of the Bible (2 Tim 3:16). The law functions in the history of our salvation as a tutor that leads us to Christ (Gal 3:24) and helps us understand what it meant for Israel and any other people to be God's people (Ex 29:45; 2 Cor. 6:16). Nowhere in the Old Testament is it suggested that anyone was saved by keeping the law; rather the law was God's gift to Israel. God's way of setting them apart from their pagan neighbors and teaching them that love for God and love for each other were paramount. In the law, God provided for them the means of forgiveness and atonement.

Israel's problem was not in their inability to keep the law; it was with **their choosing not to do so**. As for that matter, obedience to God seems at times, to be a problem for the Christian today. The Old Testament story of Israel is one of disobedience, constant flirtation with and attraction to the gods of their neighbors. Isaiah saw that the people became like the gods they worship (Isa. 6:9-10). Instead of being Yahweh's people, a people who exemplified his character of justice and mercy, caring for the needy of the land, etc., they were full of greed, fickleness, and sexual immorality, like the Baals of the Canaanites.

The role of the law in Israel is especially important for us to know well, because here we see examples of God's own character being expressed in the laws he gave to Israel as they worshiped Him and lived in loving relationship with one another. It is also here we understand why there had to be a new covenant utilizing the gift of the Spirit (Ezek. 36:25-27; 2 Cor. 3:6), so that God's people would bear his likeness by being conformed to the image of his Son (Rom 8:29).

Thus, in a sense, the law stands as a paradigm (model). It presents examples or samples of what it means to be loyal to God. Let us consider the following scriptures;

### **Apodictic Laws**

*Le 19:9 And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest.*

*10 And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God.*

*11 Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another.*

*12 And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.*

*13 Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.*

*14 Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD.*

Three times repeated “I am the LORD”, therefore displaying how tied these laws are to Yahweh’s own character. Commands like these that are “do” or “do not” are called apodictic laws. They are direct commands, generally applicable, telling the Israelites the things they are to do to fulfil their part of the covenant. These laws are not exhaustive. For example, the harvesting welfare laws with which the series begins (vv. 9, 10). Note that only field crops (wheat, barley, etc.) and grapes are actually mentioned. Does this mean that if you raised sheep or harvested figs or olives, you were under no obligation to share your abundance with the poor and resident foreigner? Would others bear the burden of making the Old Testament divinely commanded welfare system operate while you are exempt? Definitely not; the law is paradigmatic, it sets a standard by an example rather than by mentioning every possible circumstance. But at the same time it is universally applicable to all who own land and raise cattle or crops.

Now consider the final two commands (vv. 13b, 14). The point of these statements is to prohibit holding up payment to day workers, and abusing people with disabilities. Say you held up payment to a worker almost all night but then gave it to him just before dawn? The teachers of the law and Pharisees of Jesus’ day might have argued that your actions were justified since the law plainly says “overnight.” But narrow, selfish legalism of this sort is, in fact, a distortion of the law. The statements in the law were intended as a reliable guide with general applicability, not a technical description of all possible conditions one could imagine. Likewise, if you harmed a person who is mute, or one who is lame or has mental disabilities, would you still have kept the final command in the list? Certainly not. The “deaf” and the “blind” are merely selected examples (equal ear and eye; thus sight and sound) of all persons whose physical weaknesses demand that they be respected and aided rather than disregarded or despised.

In this discussion, I am expressing that the Old Testament apodictic (general, unqualified) laws are paradigmatic (examples rather than exhaustive). They are limited in wording, but comprehensive in spirit. A person intending to keep the spirit of the Old Testament law would eventually fail due to no human being having the ability to please God consistently to the level of these high comprehensive standards (cf. Rom 8:1-11). Therefore the law shows us how impossible it is to please God on our own (Rom 3:20). Thank God for grace and truth given to the New Testament believer through faith in Christ by the new covenant!

### **Casuistic Laws**

A counterpart to apodictic law is casuistic (case-by-case) law. Casuistic laws, usually involving third person descriptions, give examples of what may be the case or what may happen, and what ought to be done if it does. In contrast to apodictic laws which prescribe what must always be done by everyone in all situations.

Deuteronomy 15:12-17

<sup>12</sup> *And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee.* <sup>13</sup> *And when*

*thou sendest him out free from thee, thou shalt not let him go away empty: <sup>14</sup> Thou shalt furnish him liberally out of thy flock, and out of thy floor, and out of thy winepress: of that wherewith the Lord thy God hath blessed thee thou shalt give unto him. <sup>15</sup> And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee: therefore I command thee this thing to day. <sup>16</sup> And it shall be, if he say unto thee, I will not go away from thee; because he loveth thee and thine house, because he is well with thee; <sup>17</sup> Then thou shalt take an aul, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever. And also unto thy maidservant thou shalt do likewise.*

The elements of a law like this one are conditional; describing certain conditions that may prevail in certain types of situations involving certain types of people, but not necessarily in every situation involving every person. The law cited here in (Deut. 15:12-17), applies only in the case that (1) you, an Israelite, have at least one servant, or (2) you, an Israelite, have a servant who does or does not wish to remain as your servant voluntarily after the mandatory minimum term of service has passed. If you are not an Israelite or do not have servants, the law does not apply to you. If you yourself are a servant, this law, because it is directed to your boss, applies only indirectly to you in that it protects your rights. But the law does not pertain to everyone. It is conditional - based on a long term special labor contract (somewhat like a multiyear military enlistment in modern times).

In gathering interpretive meaning from information such as this we can see:

1. God's provision for long-term service under the old covenant was hardly a brutal, harsh regulation. We could scarcely justify the sort of slavery practiced in most of the world's history, including American history- from such a law. That God let servants go free after only six years of service, and with enough resources to start a new life, provided a major limitation on the practice of contractual servitude, so that the practice could not be abused beyond reasonable limits.
2. God loves both servants and slaves. Since scripture makes clear that the only condition apart from crime in which a Hebrew man might legitimately be reduced to slavery is in connection with debt. It appears there is a purpose in slavery to train irresponsible men into productive covenant members. Strong safeguards are built into this law. It is for the wife's protection that she not be sent out with an apparently irresponsible man, who might soon be back in serious debt. She has the joys of marriage, and also the protection of the master (Ex. 21:3). If her husband has genuinely profited from his period of slave-apprenticeship, he will be able to save up money, and soon purchase her freedom. This is fair to all, since the master recovers the money he paid for the woman he provided the slave (Ex. 21:4). Deuteronomy 15, verses 14 and 15 demand generousities shown toward the servants, inasmuch as their God had shown generosity toward Israel, a group of former slaves.
3. In verse 17 there is the circumcision of the ear (cf. Ex. 21:6). Since the slave is joining his master's household permanently, it is at the doorpost of the master's dwelling that his ear is

bored. There is no indication anywhere in Scripture that the piercing of the ear is a sign of humiliation. Thus, the circumcision of the ear is a sign of adoption and binding the servant unto his master. This means that the slave's ear is open to receive the word of the master and to obey him (Jer.6:10; Acts 7:51).

A brief comment on circumcision of the ear. In the Bible, one of several meanings of circumcision is the removal of a block or hindrance. The man who cannot speak well has uncircumcised lips (Ex. 6:12, 30), and this hindrance needs to be removed. In Genesis the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter, when Abram and Sarai find they cannot have children, it is as if they were both uncircumcised. Once Abraham has been circumcised, and the hindrance of the flesh (the foreskin) removed, they were able to have their promised son, Isaac.

The Bible speaks more specifically concerning the ear. The ears of sinful men are ethically stopped up (Is. 48:8), so they have to be opened (Is. 42:20), and God then speaks His Word into the ear of His servants (Dt. 5:1; 31:28, 30; and many other passages). Opening the ear is literally "uncovering" the ear, using the same word for uncovering ("show," "reveal," lit., "denude": 1 Sam. 20:2, 12, 13; 22:8, 17; "uncover": Ruth 3:4). The man whose ear has been opened not only hears God's Word; he also obeys it (Is. 50:5; Job 33:16; 36:10, 15). The man whose ear is opened, or uncovered, is the true servant of God (2 Sam. 7:27; 1Chron. 17:25).

Jeremiah 6:10 and Acts 7:51 speak of those false servants whose ears are uncircumcised, so that they neither listen to the voice of the Lord, nor obey Him. God prefers obedience (the bored ear) to sacrifice (Psalm 40:6). This seems to even more correlate with the narrative in Genesis 35 where Jacob is experiencing a call to worship from God and is commanded to instruct his household to remove the strange (foreign) gods from their hands and *uncover* their ears from the earrings (Gen 35:1-5). The principle of the ear being uncircumcised seems to place the wearing of earrings (any item that would block the opening of the bored ear) as a negative "type", thus relating the practice as contributing to the hindrance in obeying our heavenly Father.

In conclusion this law provides us with a perspective on the holiness of God, his desired ideal for Israelite society, and his relationship to his people. This legal passage is still the word of God for us even though it is not a command from God to us.

*2Ti 3:16 All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:*

Theologians have spoken of the equity of the law. This means that a given law can apply to more cases than the one it particularly addresses. This is because there is always a general principal in any particular law. The Old Testament commands that we must not muzzle the ox who treads out the corn (Dt. 25:4). The New Testament applies this to Church leaders and their salaries (1 Tim. 5:17, 18). This is because of the general principle that the laborer is worthy of his hire. Similarly, we do not put rails on our sloped roofs, but we do put them on our balconies, because of the general principle that we are responsible for any hazardous condition on our property. [Note 1]

Holiness (laws of forbidden mixtures)

Holiness is one of God's basic characteristics. In reference to Him, the word denotes absolute perfection and purity. Only God is holy in Himself. When the word is applied to persons or objects it refers to that which has been separated or set apart unto God. For the Old Testament Hebrews, holiness included both the negative concept of "separation" and the positive concept of "dedication." For born again Christians it specifically means separation from sin and the world and dedication to God.

*Deuteronomy 14:21* Ye shall not eat of anything that dieth of itself: thou shalt give it unto the stranger that is in thy gates, that he may eat it; or thou mayest sell it unto an alien: for thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not see the a kid in his mother's milk.

*1 Corinthians 10:21* Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.

God is the Source of life, and His blessing is life, not the curse of death. To belong to God, then, is to live in life, not death. Israel was to be pervasive in avoiding death. Thus, certain symbolic laws were given to the old covenant community to teach them this. They were not to eat anything that had not been properly slaughtered (Deut 12:23-25). Dead meat found on the ground was "dirt," returning to the dust, and thus a sign of the curse and death (Gen. 3:19). It could be sold to "dogs" (unbelievers, Deut. 14:21).

The prohibition on mixing life and death is the theme of Deuteronomy 14. The text, forbids boiling a kid in its own mother's milk. The reason is that life and death must not be mixed. That milk which had been a source of life to the kid may not be used in its death. Calum Carmichael explains,

"Certain biblical laws can be satisfactorily explained only on the basis of their concern to avoid a blurring of the two opposites, life and death. The famous prohibition against boiling a kid in its mother's milk (Exod. 23:19; 34:26; Deut. 14:21b) is to be explained in this way. In cases where the mother's milk was so used, an ancient observer must have noted that the milk that is naturally associated with the life of the animal was given a reverse role and was now applied to the dead animal. The law represents a reaction against the uncomfortable position of having to juxtapose the natural state of life before death with the unnatural state of "life" after death." [1]

*Deuteronomy 22:5* The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the LORD thy God"

This scripture in Deuteronomy introduces another important concept to God— separation of the sexes. Not only are there biological differences between the sexes, but there are mental and emotional differences as well. In addition, God has established certain social methods for maintaining the distinction between male and female; namely, dress and hair length. This separation is important to God because He has designed different roles in

life for the male and the female. Also, it is an important guard against homosexuality which God hates. The principle of sex distinction in dress is violated by unisex clothing, by men dressing in a feminine way, and by women dressing in a masculine way.

Many argue that this Old Testament scripture is not applicable today in that it is part of the law given to Israel and does not concern us as Christians. However, we have already explained that the law is the word of God for us. People have noted that today we do not literally obey verses nine, ten, and eleven of the same chapter. These verses prohibit mixing seed when sowing, plowing an ox and an ass together, and wearing wool and linen together in one garment. To answer this, we must rightly divide the Word of God by looking at what these verses are intended to teach us. Verse five teaches separation of the sexes which is a moral law. It was not given just to the Jews but is still in force today. Verses nine through eleven teach separation from sin and the world in typology. We do not have to obey their ceremonial aspects, but we do fulfill them in typology.

Our separation today is not between kinds of seeds, animals, and fibers but between holy and unholy, spiritual and carnal. The difference in the two types of law, moral and ceremonial, can be clearly shown in this instance because the word “abomination” is used in verse five but not in the other verses. Specifically, verse five says that it is an abomination **unto God** for a person to wear clothes pertaining to the opposite sex. An abomination is something God hates.

In expressing God’s attitude toward sin, James Jordan states,

“Again, let me reiterate that the law, including its penal aspect, does not essentially change. Applications can change, when circumstances differ. The point is that adultery today is no different from adultery in the ancient world, and the penalty God set forth for it then is still our standard today.” [2]

God does not change in His likes and dislikes because He has declared, “I am the LORD, I change not” (Malachi 3:6). God has repented or changed His mind about whether to execute judgment or not depending on people’s actions, but His basic character does not change. He is absolute in holiness and in His hatred of sin. God’s people of all ages must shun what is an abomination to Him. The ceremonial law did not relate to something God hated, but only to specific methods of worship and of separation from the world. In many cases, God designated things that were to be an abomination to the Jews, that is, something the Jews were supposed to hate, but refrained from calling them abominations unto Him. As an example, God told Israel that certain animals were abominations to them and unclean to them (Leviticus 11). They were not called abominations to God or to us today. Wearing clothes of the opposite sex is an abomination to God, so it automatically becomes an abomination both to the Jews and to Christians. No abomination will enter the New Jerusalem, but will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 21:8, 27).

*De 22:10 Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together.*

*2 Corinthians 6:14 Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?*

When God was laying out prescriptions for the conduct of His people, He gave them a lot of prescriptions that on the surface are not particularly spiritual; they had to do with the uniqueness of Israel's life. The Apostle Paul, through use of an analogy, builds upon the "letter" of the Old Testament to reveal the "law of the Spirit of life with Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:2) in New Testament doctrine. God's nature is one that is holy. In order to be in relationship with God we must be holy as well (1 Peter 1:16). A New Testament holiness principle is being expanded on through the foundation given by the law. Some principles spelled out by the Old Testament scripture;

1. The ox is designated as a clean animal by God and the ass falls into the category of an unclean animal, primarily due to the fact, that it does not chew the cud (Lev. 11:26; cf. 2 Kings 6:25). There is a prohibition to put a difference between clean and unclean (Lev 10:10). One item of contamination in a glass of water contaminates the glass of water as a whole. The pure and the polluted ultimately share nothing in common.
2. The principle reveals that just as an animal is directed by its nature, so is a person's purpose and direction governed by their nature (sheep and wolves; cf. Matt 7:15; 10:16). The nature, instincts, gait, disposition, and strength of the ox and ass are different and in the concept presented follow the principle of agreement/non-agreement (Amos 3:3). These animals cannot coincide dynamically. Thus a believer and an unbeliever would have extreme disharmony in many areas.
3. These two animals could not be yoked together and then plow a complete straight furrow. This brings a result in loss of ability to cultivate food. The punishment for violating this principle is in the consequences of the action (See Samson e.g., Judges 14:2-3; 16:4-5, 21; Solomon e.g., 1 Kings 11:4-8).

To be yoked means to be joined together or closely united. In its original usage, the word describes animals such as oxen that are paired and fastened together for work. *Webster's Dictionary* gives the following examples of relationships which are analogous to yoking: bondage, servitude, brotherhood, and marriage. The dictionary defines a yokefellow as a companion, partner, associate, husband, or wife. The yoke relationship refers to a close, intimate union in which one person can drastically affect or influence another, in which one person can speak or act for another, and in which there is a sharing of responsibility.

As believers we cannot be bound with unbelievers in any of these ways. The question then arises, what are the biblical definitions of a believer and an unbeliever? A believer is not just one who merely confesses or mentally assents. The biblical proof of belief is obedience to the Word of God (1 John 2:3; 5:1-3). Romans 10:16 tells us that a lack of belief is due to a lack of belief. According to John 7:38-39, a true believer of the

Scriptures will receive the Holy Spirit. According to Mark 16:16-18, a believer will be baptized, and one of the signs that will follow is speaking in tongues. Cornelius and his household received the Holy Ghost as evidenced by speaking in tongues when they believed (Acts 10:44-48; 11:17). The Philippian jailer was baptized around midnight after Paul told him to believe (Acts 16:31-33).

Believing is a process that first begins with hearing of the Word of God and continues throughout a Christian's walk with God. When the Bible uses the term "believer," it is referring to someone who has experienced the full plan of salvation. (See Acts 2:38.) There are many instances where people have believed to some degree but have not believed to the extent of obeying God's plan of salvation. As a result, they cannot be called true believers. Here are some biblical examples: the devils (James 2:19), many people in Jerusalem (John 2:23-25), many religious leaders (John 12:42), many miracle workers (Matthew 7:21-23), Cornelius before Peter's sermon (Acts 10:1-6; 11:14), Simon the magician (Acts 8:13; 20-23), and the Samaritans before the arrival of Peter and John (Acts 8:12, 16). The point of these examples is to show that a person is not a believer just because he says he believes on Jesus Christ. He must have the correct foundation (Matthew 7:21-23). He must obey all of God's Word, and he must have the signs that follow a believer. We cannot yoke ourselves with so-called Christians if they do not have the right foundation (which includes basic doctrine), or if they are not living a holy life.

*Deuteronomy 22:9 Thou shalt not sow thy vineyard with divers seeds: lest the fruit of thy seed which thou hast sown, and the fruit of thy vineyard, be defiled.*

*11 Thou shalt not wear a garment of divers sorts, as of woollen and linen together.*

To shed some light, these scriptures and other similar prohibitions are designed to forbid the Israelites from engaging in the fertility cult practices of the Canaanites. They also brought covenant chastity, signified by not mixing things that differ symbolically. The ox is clean, and the ass unclean. Wool causes sweat, while linen does not (Ezek. 44:18; Gen. 3:19).

The Canaanites believed in what is called sympathetic magic, the idea that symbolic actions can influence the gods and nature. Mixing animal breeds, seeds, or materials was thought to "marry" them so as magically to produce "offspring" that is, agricultural bounty in the future. God would not neither could not bless his people if they practiced such nonsense. Knowing the intention of such laws, to keep Israelites from being led into the Canaanite religion that stood so utterly against God and His character, helps one see that they are not arbitrary but crucial and to the original recipients very beneficial.

Notes

Note 1: The Laws of God have multiple equity, in which means that each specific law implies God's law-system as a whole, and as a result, a given law will have applications in more than one area of life. Multiple equity means multiple applications and even multiple principles (Colossians 3:5, Amos 8:5, Proverbs1:19, 1 Timothy 6:10).

This means that more than one basic principle may underlie any particular command of the law. For this reason, some laws are repeated two or three times in the Torah, but in different contexts, showing that they pertain to different basic principles. For example, the prohibition on witchcraft occurs in Exodus 22:18, in connection with laws of adultery, since witchcraft is apostasy from the Divine Husband of Israel (Ezek.16; Hosea 2). In Deuteronomy 18:10, the same prohibition occurs in a section on submission to authority, since witchcraft is identified with rebellion (1 Sam. 15:23, as demonstrated by 1 Sam. 28:7). Again, witchcraft is forbidden in Leviticus 19:31 and 20:27, where the context is the separation of life and death – part of the so-called “ceremonial” law. Thus, the sin of witchcraft is related to the 8th Commandment, to the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment, and to the 3rd Commandment (to wear God's Name to good effect is illustrated by the laws commanding that life be preferred over death).

This is what is meant, then, by asserting that the laws of God have multiple equity. The anti-witchcraft legislation has equity in the areas of adultery, rebellion, and blasphemy (as well as others). This fact explains why it is that the law codes in the Bible may seem to be arranged in a haphazard manner. It may look as if unrelated laws are just thrown together, but in reality this is not the case at all. There is a definite order to the arrangement of the laws. The haphazard appearance is due to the fact that the particular laws are related in ways that we today would not immediately think of.

References

[1] Carmichael, Calum M. (1976). On Separating Life and Death: An Explanation of Some Biblical Laws. *Harvard Theological Review*, 69(1-2), 1-7. doi:10.1017/S0017816000017326

[2] Jordan, James B. *The Law Of The Covenant: An Exposition of Exodus 21-23*. Institute for Christian Economics. Tyler, Texas. 1984. Pg73