

Lesson 11: Grammatical Interpretation (part 6)

GUIDELINES FOR INTERPRETING LAW

I. Guideline 1: Be Mindful of the **Original** Audience.

- A. When we encounter a command in the Bible, we must determine to whom and for what purpose it was given.
1. Some commands are clearly for specific people for a limited time
 - a. For instance, God's instruction about not eating from the tree was specifically given to Adam and Eve. **Gen 2:16-17.**
 - b. God's instructions to Noah to build an ark were exclusive to him. **Gen. 6:14ff.**
 2. All laws are given to specific people, but sometimes later generations must keep them, too.
 - a. The command to fill the earth it was given to Adam but also to Noah. **Gen 1:27; 9:7**
 - b. The command to **disciple** the nations was given to the 12, but Christ's presence in the mission extends to the end of the age. **Matt 28:19-20**
 - c. Obedience to Moses' Law is more complicated because in the NT it is both partly repeated but also repealed in some sense. **Rom. 6:14**
- B. The Law of Moses was Given Specifically to **Israel**. **Ex. 20:1**
1. Only Israel was present at Sinai when God revealed the Law, God's special revelation to His covenant people.

2. The Law was not revealed to the whole world.
 - a. There were God-fearing persons elsewhere in the world who did not live under the Law. **2 Kgs 5:17-18. Cf. Gen 14:18-20**
 - b. When Israel's prophets denounced Gentiles, it isn't about not keeping the Law but disregarding basic morality. **Amos 1:3ff**

C. The Law of Moses is the Governing Code of God's Old **Covenant** with Israel. **Exod. 19:1-8**

1. God's covenant with Israel is an **intensification** of the covenant he made with their ancestor Abraham. **Gen 15**
2. Because Israel is sinful, the Law provides a means of governing this intensified relationship.
 - (1) It explains how Israel is to interact with God and what the nation should expect in return.
 - (2) It provides a means of restoration when the Law is not perfectly kept. It is not about gaining salvation.

II. Guideline 2: Understand the Structure of the Mosaic Law Code

A. The **Priority** of the Ten Commandments

1. The 10 Commandments are the cornerstone of the entire Law of Moses.
2. All of the many case laws in the Law of Moses are somehow connected to 1 or more of those 10 laws.

3. They either provide direct **applications** of those laws or provide symbolic illustrations of those laws
 - a. Law of Application: Specifying penalties for murder and manslaughter)
 - b. Law of Illustration: the mixing of fibers as an example of adulterating things, cf. **Lev 19:19**
4. The grammatical structure of the 10 Words is different from the other laws. The Ten use a negative form that indicates categorical prohibition, but the many case laws use more situation-sensitive prohibitions.

B. The **Variety of Mosaic Laws.**

1. It has often been noted that the laws may be divided into 3 categories: moral, civil, & ceremonial. Many theologians argue that while the civil & ceremonial laws are no longer in effect, the moral laws are.
2. While it is true that most laws can be categorized into these slots, the Bible itself never does so. The laws themselves are not arranged in this way. In Jewish thinking, the Law is a whole, and violation of it in one part breaks it all. **Jam 2:10**

III. Guideline 3: Correlate the Code of Moses with the Code of **Christ**

A. God's Eternal Law: Timeless Principles thru All Ages.

1. A survey of Scripture indicates God has certain laws & principles which transcend time.
2. Examples: the worship of God alone, the sanctity of human life, the sanctity of marriage & family, honesty & integrity.

B. The Administration of God's Law: Varying Codes for Different Times and Peoples

1. The Code of **Adam** (Gen. 1-2): Reflect God's image in governance, work, & procreation; Submit to God's authority.
2. The Code of **Noah** (Gen 9): Continuation of the Code of Adam; Respect Life
3. The Code of Moses (Exod – Deut): Governing Principles of the Covenant with Israel
4. The Code of **Christ**: The Governing Principles of Christ's Relationship with His People.
 - a. The OT prophesied a change in Law with the new covenant. **Jer. 31-34; Ezk. 40-48.**
 - b. The New Covenant has been partially realized & will be fully enacted at Christ's 2nd coming.
 - c. The NT contains commands for believers to follow today. Some of these commands include 9 of the 10 Commandments, but many others go far beyond it.
 - d. Believers today do not live in a covenant governed by the Law of Moses but governed by the Law of Christ. **1 Cor 9:21; Gal 6:2**