

What are the types of laws in the Old Testament?

1. **Casuistic Law:** case law that uses an "if...then" condition-response structure and is written in the third-person
2. **Apodictic Law:** absolute law written in unconditional, categorical directives such as commands and prohibitions

Foundational Principles

1. Relationships always precede rules.
2. Context is as important as content.
3. Holiness remains the destination and obedience the duty.

Five Lenses for Interpreting the Law

1. **Class:** Is this casuistic or apodictic law?
2. **Context:** What is the narrative setting in which the law is given?
3. **Culture:** What are the cultural elements within the law and behind the law? How does law compare with other cultures of the Ancient Near East (ANE)?
4. **Covenant:** What role does this law play in the development of the old covenant? How is this law renewed, realized, or repurposed in the new covenant?
5. **Christ:** How does the keeping of this law conform us to the image of Christ?

Deuteronomistic Code Example: Deuteronomy 22:13-21

If any man takes a wife and goes in to her and then hates her and accuses her of misconduct and brings a bad name upon her, saying, 'I took this woman, and when I came near her, I did not find in her evidence of virginity,' then the father of the young woman and her mother shall take and bring out the evidence of her virginity to the elders of the city in the gate. And the father of the young woman shall say to the elders, 'I gave my daughter to this man to marry, and he hates her; and behold, he has accused her of misconduct, saying, "I did not find in your daughter evidence of virginity." And yet this is the evidence of my daughter's virginity.' And they shall spread the cloak before the elders of the city. Then the elders of that city shall take the man and whip him, and they shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver and give them to the father of the young woman, because he has brought a bad name upon a virgin of Israel. And she shall be his wife. He may not divorce her all his days. But if the thing is true, that evidence of virginity was not found in the young woman, then they shall bring out the young woman to the door of her father's house, and the men of her city shall stone her to death with stones, because she has done an outrageous thing in Israel by whoring in her father's house. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.

1. Class

Casuistic (If/Then)

2. Context

- **Deuteronomy 10:4** God wrote on new tablets of stone the Ten Commandments that he had spoken to the nation of Israel on the mountain of Sinai when he spoke out of the midst of the fire on the day of assembly and Moses put the tablets in the ark which was to be carried before the people into the land God swore to their fathers
- **Deuteronomy 10:16** God called Israel to circumcise their heart and be no longer stubborn - God wanted them to love him, serve him, and keep his commandments
- **Deuteronomy 11:1-7** God reminded Israel of all the things he did for them in bringing them out of Egypt - the charge to keep his commandments was not out of line - it was reasonable for them to obey God given that God had proved his commitment to them as a nation
- **Deuteronomy 11:22-23** Love for God and obedience to his commands were essential to God's provision for Israel in the land - if they were obedient to him he would drive out all the nations before them and they would have victory over nations much more powerful than them.
- **Deuteronomy 12:1ff** God through Moses expounded/applied the core commandments to the lives of his people - this was the code by which they were to live
- **Deuteronomy 22:13-21** comes at the beginning of a section on laws concerning sexual immorality

3. Culture

Context is the purging of evil from the midst of the assembly, which of course demands our remembrance of Israel's chosen nation status (22:21) - the issue here is what happens to a newly wed woman unfairly accused by her husband of being unfaithful, particularly in the time of their betrothal, simply because he hates her — if the woman is proven to be faithful, by virtue of her parents presenting bloodstained garments proving that she had menstruated throughout the betrothal and had not become pregnant through an adulterous relationship - then the husband was to pay a fine to her father for bringing shame upon him, was to be disciplined, presumably by being beaten with rods or flogged, and was not permitted to divorce her, which was a provision in their culture for her honor and her livelihood.

Whether the woman has had sexual intercourse before being betrothed to the husband is not nearly so important as her conduct after the time she is promised in marriage and still in the care of her parents. This would be the reason the parents are incensed that their reputation is being ruined by insidious rumor.

The spiteful husband is apparently spreading rumors that the woman's first child is not his own, a case that would be particularly difficult if the birth of the first child were near to the time of a full gestation from the time the marriage was consummated.

In the event the woman is proved to have been unfaithful, she was to be stoned to death at the door of her father's house as both a witness against her for bringing such shame on the nation (*outrageous thing in Israel*) and against her father's house for not properly controlling his child and ensuring her right way of living.

4. Covenant

Nine times in the Deuteronomic code (13:5, 17:7, 17:12, 19:19, 21:21, 22:21, 22:22, 22:24, 24:7) do we have the phrase *purge the evil from* your midst/among you/Israel. These laws were given specifically to the nation of Israel in order to demonstrate the demand of holiness. They were heading into a land occupied by pagans. God was intent on giving them this land because the pagans were intent on worshiping false gods. What glory did God receive if he removed a pagan people from the land only to supplant them by another pagan people? His people must be holy. The Deuteronomic code is the exhortation of the prophet Moses to the people Israel for them to consider beforehand how they shall live so that from the beginning they might walk rightly before the Lord and not have the struggle of paganism in their midst.

This is a great example of how the old covenant does not actually bring liberation, but bondage. The stoning of an adulteress woman or the flogging of a lying man did not actually atone for their sins. Only Jesus Christ could do that. The law doesn't persist in the same way. In fact, by the time of Jesus it was not commonly practiced to stone an adulterer. It's one of the things that makes the story of Jesus' earthly parents so interesting and one of the things that makes story of the woman caught in adultery in John 8 so startling.

Jesus has borne the stoning for all lying men and all adulteress women, and for all those guilty of other sexual perversions. And he calls those who would trust in him to be pure. In fact, he demands sexual purity for his people and insists that when gross sexual immorality is tolerated by the church the church is unfaithful to him. That is why in 1 Corinthians 5:13 Paul insisted that the church was responsible for judging itself and should purge the evil person from among them, in that case the evil person being one who had an incestuous relationship.

5. Christ

We keep this law by pursuing sexual purity. That means if we are married, we keep the marriage bed inviolable. If we are not married, we do not engage in sexual relationships. We recognize that our culture is just as pagan as the cultures around ancient Israel and that as God's people we are to be holy, different, set apart, sanctified. As we seek to be sexually pure, we live into the holiness that Christ has imputed to us (credited to our account) by faith.

Holiness Code Example: Leviticus 19:26-28

You shall not eat any flesh with the blood in it. You shall not interpret omens or tell fortunes. You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard. You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the Lord.

1. Class

Apodictic - *you shall not*

2. Context

This law comes in the midst of the holiness code (Leviticus 17-26).

The Lord was speaking to Moses showing him how the Ten Commandments applied to the daily living of his people.

Recall Exodus 19:5-6 - God's people are to be a particular possession unto the Lord - they are to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Leviticus is all about how this holiness is demonstrated. Holiness is the separated status of God's people. It's the set of distinguishing values that mark them out from the nations of earth.

In the chapter some of the things that make demonstrate their separateness are: their revering of their parents (Leviticus 19:3), their rejection of idols (Leviticus 19:4), their adherence to laws about peace offerings (Leviticus 19:5-8), their leaving some of the harvest for the poor and the sojourner (Leviticus 19:9-10), their equity in business (Leviticus 19:13), their dignity toward the disabled (Leviticus 19:14), their justice in judgement (Leviticus 19:15-16), their rejection of hatred (Leviticus 19:17-18), their distinct agricultural practices (no breeding of cows to other animals or mixing of seed) and of manufacturing goods (no weaving of two materials together into a common cloth) (Leviticus 19:19), and reserving the fruit of a new tree for the Lord (Leviticus 19:23-25).

3. Culture

See covenant

4. Covenant

Abstaining from blood did two things. First, it recognized and respected the life of the animal being eaten because the life was in the blood. Second, it honored the blood as a holy thing unto the Lord because blood was the means of atonement. If man was to be forgiven and ransomed it had to be through blood sacrifice. So by abstaining from blood the Israelites were saying we know the value that blood has and we know the weight our sin carries.

Abstaining from omens and fortunes was a way of the Israelites to recognize their dependence on God. The pagans sought to divine the spirits because they served vain idols that possessed no life. Israel served the living God, the God who wrote the rules for his people with his own hand, the God gave discernment to the high priest through the Urim and Thummim (Exodus 28:30), the God who led his people in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Exodus 13:21). God had proven his ability to communicate with his people. His people demonstrated their dependence on his word in his time by doing what he commanded until he commanded them otherwise. They did not need to divine the spirits in order to know what to do.

Abstaining from signs of grief in one's body that left significant and even permanent damage (cutting the aerie on the temples, marring the beard, cutting the skin or tattooing oneself) was a way of demonstrating that they recognized the sacredness of their bodies as having been made in the image of God. This was not about denying grief. It wasn't even about not grieving demonstrably. After all, God's people regularly tore their garments and sat in ashes to express their

grief over loss or over sin. The issue was that they would not profane God's creation even in the midst of their grief, but would recognize the goodness of God's creation and would recognize God's sovereignty even over death.

5. Christ

How do we keep these laws as New Testament believers?

The first precept is easy. We look at Acts 15 and the result of the Jerusalem council and see that the NT renews this law: believers, whether Jew or Gentile, abstain from blood.

The second precept is also easy. Consider Paul's delivering of the slave girl who had a spirit of divination and told fortunes in Acts 16:16. Consider the declaration of sorcery as sin in Galatians 5:20 and Revelation 9:21. Believers abstain from all forms of contact with the spirit-world except genuine worship (i.e. Scripture reading, preaching, prayer, and singing) in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The third precept is trickier. The law seems to be repurposed, though not explicitly. Though the law is not quoted, 1 Thessalonians 4:13 does insist that there is to be distinction between the way Christians grieve, namely with hope, and the way unbelievers grieve, namely without hope. However, there is nothing in 1 Thessalonians 4 (or elsewhere in the new covenant) to insist that a blanket prohibition is made against tattoos or particular hair styles. I believe the right application of the law then is to say Christians keep this law by not grieving like the world does. In Christian hope of the resurrection of the dead, we honor our bodies by not engaging in destructive practices because of our grief. Provided that it is not done as a symbol of grief or as an act of pagan worship, there seems to be no prohibition against a tattoo or a particular hair style.