

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Hays Essay

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Old Testament Orientation I

by

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1. ***Reflect on Hays' article and assess his understanding of the how Christians should use the Old Testament law. Examine the strengths and weaknesses of his approach. Also, explain how the article contributed to your overall understanding of this issue.***

Hays' insights into Old Testament law were fascinating. He did a very thorough analysis of the rationales behind different approaches to distinguishing the different types of laws and which are still applicable today, in particular the tendency to separate them by moral, civil and ceremonial uses. He then went on to give a great rebuttal for why those traditional rationales are less valid than many may think at first glance. He did a great job of looking at the moral, civil and ceremonial separations of the law. By pointing out the laws vital connection to the Mosaic Covenant, which we are no longer under, and its connection to Israel's life in the promised land, which we do not live in, he demonstrated that that rationale does not convincingly explain why believers today should respond to the Old Testament law.

I found it fascinating, because while I did not use those particular classifications in my own studies of the Old Testament and its relevance for me today, I do tend to distinguish between laws connected to temple worship (ceremonial), ones that were culturally relevant but do not necessarily stand the test of time (what he would probably include in the civil category), and timeless principles that stand apart from the rest of the law and are confirmed in the New Testament (what he would probably include for the most part in the moral category). Consequently, his assertion that that thought process was based on a flawed rationale was fascinating to me.

His method, principlism, in some ways seemed similar to identifying the "moral" types of law, while at the same recognizing that the law was written under a different covenant, time and culture. But essentially, through identifying how the original audience would have interpreted the law, assessing the differences between that audience and us today, searching out the universal principles, finding supporting New Testament teachings, and applying the modified universal

principle to life today, I felt like he had done a much better job of thinking through and articulating what I had hoped to do in the past when I tended to see value in Old Testament laws that could be affirmed by New Testament scriptures. His method certainly takes a lot of the uncertainty out of the result and does provide a much better way for coming to a definitive conclusion.

2. *Explain how we reconcile the two New Testament teachings that the Old Testament law is eternal and will never pass away (Matthew 5:17) and that believers are no longer under the law (Romans 7:1 - 6; Galatians 3 - 4).*

We are able to reconcile these two seemingly contradictory ideas with a proper understanding of what the original speakers were referring to. Paul was referring to the Old Testament law itself, under the old Mosaic covenant, tied to the promised land. We are no longer under that covenant. It does not have a hold on us. For the Jewish Christian, who had grown up controlled by that law, and in fact by the laws created by the Jewish leaders in addition to the Old Testament law, this was most likely a hard concept to wrap their minds around. Generations of teaching, from God, now being changed. Paul had to come down hard to get it across that we are under a new covenant. The purpose of the law was to reveal our sin and need for a Savior; it had been revealed and the Savior provided –the need for the Old Testament law just is not there anymore.

However, in Matthew, what Jesus speaks of is different. We, in our culture and time, hear the word law and think of those specific 613 laws the Jews were given to follow. We hear Prophets and think of a handful of books that we now categorize as prophecy. However, for the Jewish believer, the phrase “Law and the Prophets” referred to the Old Testament in its entirety. Jesus was asserting that the Old Testament is still relevant, still important, and still critical to our understanding of God. Christ did not come to get rid of that, but to fulfill it – to be the Savior that it points to.

3. *Select one of the OT passages below and describe how you can apply the law to your own life, using Hays' approach of "principlism." Be as detailed and specific as possible.*

Leviticus 19:9-10 (NASB)

9 'Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the Lord your God.

Hays' five steps of principlism applied to the above passage:

- A. Identify what the particular law meant to the initial audience.

For the Jewish audience thousands of years ago, this law was their form of assistance for the needy. There were no formal government programs, instead, their law basically told the land owners and farmers to harvest the bulk of their crop, but leave the edges, and do not make a second pass to get what you missed. Once that was done, those in poverty could come and harvest the remaining bits to feed themselves and their family. This insured that as long as someone was willing to work, they would not go hungry. It was primarily a resource for widows, orphans, and women.

- B. Determine the differences between the initial audience and believers today.

The bulk of the initial audience would have been farmers of one sort or another who very much would have been subject to this type of law. Today, it would be very rare for a reader of the scripture to be a farmer as much of our society has moved in to other workplaces. It also means that for many scripture readers, this passage would take research to fully understand.

- C. Develop universal principles from the text.

The underlying principle is that those who God has blessed should use a percentage of what they have to benefit the poor. For the land owners thousands of years ago, it meant leaving a percentage of the crop behind for the poor to harvest. For us today, a similar

analogy would be for those blessed with an income to set aside a percentage of it for those who are in need.

D. Correlate the principle with New Testament Teaching.

Throughout the New Testament believers are challenged to care for the poor, hungry, homeless, etc. It is a critical part of what the church is supposed to be. James 1:27 sums up the challenge: *Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.*

E. Apply the modified universal principle to life today.

Believers should use a percentage of their income to help the poor, homeless and hungry.