

Gane, Roy E. *Old Testament Law for Christians: Original Context and Enduring Application*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017. 464 pp. Paperback. USD 38.00.

I am pleased to give a positive review of this book by my friend and colleague Roy Gane. There is much to applaud in this book. He breaks his discussion up into four main parts. In the first part, he discusses “getting into the Old Testament Law,” starting with its relevance for New Covenant Christians, focusing on the approach to the Law that Jesus and Paul took in their lives and ministries, and, accordingly, introducing its relevance to us today. He continues with a basic introduction to the Law in the Old Testament, its nature, and its authority as a source of divine principles and values. He ends this part with the purposes of the Law, which he proposes to be: a revelation of God’s character, the terms for accepting God’s grace, the wisdom for living our lives well, and a model for a society that can be a light for the nations.

The second part of the book takes a good look at the Law itself, beginning with where it is to be found in the Hebrew Bible, and the various kinds of laws that are found in it. From there he moves into how it inculcates values into the lives of people, positive and negative formulations of the Law, motivational elements, and how the legal historical culture of ancient Israel in its ancient Near Eastern cultural context illuminates the Law. The third part of the book comes directly to the issue of how the Law does and does not apply to the Christian life. He reviews various approaches to continuity and discontinuity and makes a good attempt at adjudicating between them. He focuses his attention on the side of continuity, of course, but also recognizes some of the discontinuities along the way (see his helpful summary on 161). I especially appreciate his view of the way the Law functioned in the Sinaitic covenant. Indeed, we do not find the law cited in court cases in the Hebrew Bible, as is also true for other law collections from elsewhere in the Ancient Near East, such as the laws of Hammurabi. It is also true that the law is not a complete law that covers everything, but no such set of laws exists even up to today. Nevertheless, according to Deut 17:18–20, when the king came to the throne he was to write his copy of the law under the supervision of the Levitical priests, who were the custodians of the law, and learn from it to revere the Lord and to live and rule according to the laws and decrees.

Similarly, in 1 Kgs 2:1–4, David reiterated this on his death bed in his charge to his son and successor, Solomon. Yes, this belongs to the category of “wisdom” to rule as we see from the next chapter where Solomon prays and is granted such wisdom. Thus, when the two women come with only one live baby, he knows how to discern the truth of the situation. Again, in Josh 1:8, Joshua was to meditate on the Law of Moses day and night so he would know how to rule well. See the same also in Ps 1:2 as a charge to all

the Israelites in the way they live their life day by day. Based on examples such as these, Gane proposes a model of “progressive moral wisdom” (ch 9, 197–218).

He expounds an example (219–235) of this progressive moral wisdom from Exod 23:4, “If you come across your enemy’s ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it” (NIV). He fleshes out the story behind such a law. He shows that it is a natural extension from the eighth commandment, “You shall not steal” (Exod 20:15), and how its reinforcement of moral wisdom applies even when it has to do with one’s enemy. He shows how some similar concerns appear also in extra-biblical Ancient Near Eastern laws, but they do not consider it from the point of how one treats their enemy. The New Testament applies the principle in terms of learning to love even one’s enemy and overcoming evil with good.

The fourth part of the book goes on to deal in some detail with the moral values found in the Law and shows how they are relevant to our lives today. Gane devotes two full chapters to a very helpful treatment of the Ten Commandments and the principles of life that they call us to. He brings other laws from elsewhere into a relationship with these Ten Commandments, showing how the Ten are the basic principles of Law in the Torah. He then moves on to issues of social justice, how we should handle laws that seem overly severe, and laws that do not seem to apply to us today. He then turns to the ritual law in one chapter, and suggests some values for current readers in the realm of the liturgy (how we should approach God in worship), personal spirituality (place God at the center of our lives), and notions of salvation (how sin is removed, assurance of reconciliation, and the call to become holy). See more on this below.

In his conclusion to the book, Gane emphasizes the importance of obedience to God. He starts with the point that freedom in Christ is freedom from slavery to sin, not freedom to just go ahead and live sinfully. In his view, the New Testament teaching of freedom in Christ is found in living in obedience to God’s law of love. This has been an important point of emphasis throughout the book, and rightly so. He has captured it well. One could quibble with certain details of his argument, but he helpfully keeps obedience to the Law connected with the law of love. As for the “law of Christ” in the New Testament, in my view, this refers to the way Jesus mediates the law to believers in Him as Christ. It begins with the Sermon on the Mount, the two great commandments, and goes on from there into all sorts of matters of the Christian life.

I have objections to some of the ways Gane brings some of the laws through into the New Testament. For example, he takes the regulations in the Acts 15:20–21, 28–29 (cf. 21:25) letter to the gentile churches, which includes not eating meat with the blood in it as a witness to the Jews, and uses it to argue that, ideally, we should not eat meat because Gen 1 ends with a plant-based diet (180–181, 350–358). He has a certain point here, and one

expects him to reflect his Seventh-day Adventist commitments in his discussion. The text in Acts, however, does not prohibit the eating of meat, and the law itself regulates the eating of meat, as Gane himself explains. The regulations of Leviticus 11 show that the issue of eating meat had to do primarily with not eating the meat of animals that eat meat, e.g., limiting eating to pastoral animals that have a split hoof and chew the cud, and therefore, such animals that eat only fodder. Similarly, the scavenger birds are eliminated from the diet, and so on.

Leviticus 20:22–26 adds another important application of the clean and unclean animal regulations when it applies them to keep the Israelites separate from the nations around them so that they do not fall into their sinful practices. Through Jesus Christ, in the New Testament God has broken down the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2), so we cannot enforce such dietary regulations in the church (Gal 2). On the one hand, Paul regards these kinds of restrictions as reflections of weak faith (Rom 14:1–9, v.2 “eats only vegetables”; cf. Col 2:16–17). On the other hand, in the same context, he is concerned that no one coerces or influence such a person to violate their conscience, which would be for them to sin against the Lord in their conscience. I am concerned, however, that such kinds of restrictions only build up another wall between believers in the church, undermining our unity as believers in Christ. Nevertheless, one must respect those with a weak conscience, and I do.

I would apply the same to other issues such as the Sabbath (248–255). Gane has a wonderful section detailing the regulations of the fourth commandment and rightly ties it back to Gen 2. His Seventh-day Adventist commitments, of course, cause him to suggest that we must worship on the seventh day of the week, Saturday, rather than on Sunday, which others call “the Lord’s Day” because it was the day of Jesus’s resurrection from the grave. In this and other regards, I am surprised that Gane does not do more with “the Law written on the heart” in the New Covenant (Jer 31:33, briefly on 170 and in a few other places). In my view, Jesus brought the Sabbath to bear on the heart of the New Covenant believer in the passage of Matt 11:28–29 (Richard E. Averbeck, “A Rest for the Soul,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 11.1 [2018]: 5–22). It is significant that right after that, at the beginning of Matt 12, we come to the Sabbath controversy. Jesus summarily refutes the way some Jews were trying to apply the Sabbath regulations, making it burdensome. The point of the move from Matt 11 to 12 is that in Christ we have a Sabbath rest all day every day, a “rest for the soul.” This is the writing of the Sabbath on the heart of the believer, which is so important to how the new covenant brings the Law into our walk with the Lord today, as noted above.

In my view, it is difficult to understand how the Law of the Old Covenant applies to believers in Jesus without engaging more fully with the relationship

between the Law and the Spirit. Gane mentions the Holy Spirit along the way, in passing, as the powerful force behind the life of the believer, but says little of substance about it. He deals only very briefly with the key passage in Rom 7–8 (401–403). The Law has always been and still is good, holy, and even spiritual, but it is also weak because it cannot take control of my “flesh.” The Holy Spirit can! The power for the Christian life comes from the Holy Spirit, who himself enables us to live according to the principles and patterns in the Law, which he inspired (Rom 8:5–8). The Holy Spirit is on both ends of the process: he inspired the writing of it in the first place, and he is dwelling and working within us to bring it to bear in New Covenant ways.

I am also concerned about the limitations Gane puts on the so-called “ceremonial (or ‘ritual’) law.” The division between moral, civil, and ceremonial law in the Mosaic Law does not work well in the Hebrew Bible and it is certainly not the way the New Testament writers talk about the application of the Law in their present. The fact of that matter is that the New Testament writers put a lot of emphasis on how the tabernacle/temple and sacrificial regulations are mediated to us as believers in Jesus Christ. According to Paul, we are the temple of the Holy Spirit, individually and corporately, as the body of Christ (e.g. Eph 2:19–22; 1 Cor 6:18–20). Similarly, Peter names us as the stones in the temple and as the priests who offer sacrifices (1 Pet 2:4–5), and he even applies Isa 53 to the life of the believer (1 Pet 2:18–25). If we are going to be like Christ, we need to be willing to suffer silently as he did too. Much more could and should be said about this. Despite these misgivings, I believe Roy Gane has developed in this book a very good survey of the Old Testament Law overall and some helpful patterns and examples for bringing the Law over into the New Testament for the life of the church and the believer. I learned a lot from this book and will continue to use it in my teaching and writing on this very topic. I congratulate him for a work well done.

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Grafius, Brandon R. *Reading the Bible with Horror*. Lanham, MD: Fortress Academic, 2020. xi + 175 pp. Hardcover. USD 90.00.

Brandon R. Grafius, assistant professor of biblical studies at Ecumenical Theological Seminary, with his PhD in Bible, culture, and hermeneutics, has delved into the topic of horror and the Bible before. Building on previous works he produces this book where the movie genre of horror is used as a template to examine the biblical narratives. The book addresses the Bible’s ability to speak to humanity’s craving to be artificially made afraid by its stories. The purpose of the book, as stated by Grafius, is to look “at biblical texts and horror films and ... to see what can be gained from reading these two texts together” (16).