

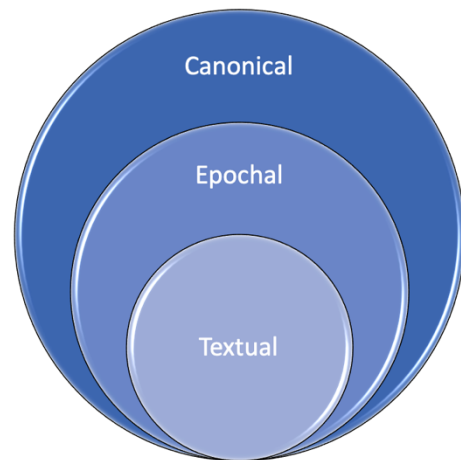
A “Whole Bible” Approach: Interpretation Exercises

Lesson Outline

Covenant Heads

1. Creation (Adam)
2. Noah
3. Abraham
4. Israel (Moses)
5. David
6. Jesus

“In these covenant heads, Adam’s role continues, and each one anticipates Christ, who by his obedience secures our redemption.”¹



Understanding God’s moral will through a “whole Bible” approach to interpretation

“We need to begin in creation and then think through how sin has distorted God’s order, walk through the covenants, and discover how God’s redemptive promise will restore and transform the created order—a reality that has now been realized in Christ. At every stage in redemptive history, the covenants reflect God’s moral demands, thus explaining why we expect and find a continuity of moral demands across the canon. But earlier covenants on their own do not provide a complete and binding guide for Christian morality...Due to Christ’s work, *as covenants*, they have been fulfilled. *As Scripture*, all the covenants...are instructive for us...But applying specific ethical instruction must be done by a “whole Bible” reading viewed in Christ...”²

- All of the covenants are fulfilled in Christ. Christ has also inaugurated a new covenant, under which all Christians are bound. Therefore, we must view Scripture through Christ and the new covenant.
- We can follow this basic pattern³
 1. Look to creation as our starting point.
 2. Determine what the Law and the Prophets teach us about God’s original plan and purpose for his creation and people.
 3. Examine how the Law and the Prophets show us how sin has corrupted and fractured God’s original plan and purpose.
 4. Ask how Christ and the new covenant have shown us a glimpse of what the redeemed creation will look like.
 5. All of the above leads us to discern what is right and good according to the will and character of God.

¹ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd edition (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 151.

² Gentry and Wellum, 945.

³ Adapted from Michael Hill, *The How and Why of Love: An Introduction to Evangelical Ethics* (Kingsford, N.S.W.: Matthias Media, 2002), 78 as cited in Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 955.

Practice Exercises

1. Is bestiality a sin? Exod. 22:19 says “Whoever lies with an animal shall be put to death.” If it is a sin, why don’t we put to death those who commit bestiality? Also, why do we sow our fields with two different seeds? Or, why do we wear clothes made from two kinds of material? Lev. 19:19 forbids both of these. If we follow the commands about bestiality, why don’t we follow the commands of about seeds and clothing?

Apply our process:⁴

- Begin in creation.
- Consider how sin has corrupted God’s design.
- Walk through the covenants.
- Determine how God’s promise to restore and transform creation through Christ.

We learn God’s plan for human sexuality in creation (Gen. 1:26-30; 2:15-25).⁵ By creating humans as male and female, God designed human sexuality to function within the permanent, covenant relationship of heterosexual marriage (Matt. 19:4-9). Therefore, all misuse and corruption of human sexuality—including bestiality—are distortions of God’s intent for his creation. After the fall (Gen. 3), all sexual corruptions are introduced. It is true that in earlier stages of redemptive history, a non-standard/non-normative behavior is occasionally permitted (e.g., polygamy). When we view this issue against God’s creation order and in light of the Christ-Church relationship, however (as well through the teaching of Jesus Christ himself (Matt. 19:4-9)), polygamy is never seen as God’s standard or as normative. That is why in the inauguration of the new covenant, polygamy is no longer acceptable. God’s creation standard is reaffirmed and must be lived out in the church.

While the Mosaic law explicitly forbids specific sexual distortions (Lev. 18:1-30), all its prohibitions simply unpack the “one flesh” ideal of creation. Additionally, since the law-covenant is prophetic, it anticipates a greater righteousness to come. That is why the ethical demand of the new covenant is greater. The prophets also speak of a day when God will transform his people so that his new covenant people will become covenant keepers, not breakers (Jer. 31:-31-34; Ezek. 36:25-27). This is what Jesus addresses in his teaching on kingdom in his sermon on the mount. In Christ’s coming and work, the new covenant has arrived. By the regenerating work of the Spirit, those who enter God’s kingdom are united to Christ and thus freed from Adam and the old era. In Christ, individuals and the church are the “new creation” (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 2:8-10, 11-21). This is why we live out what it means to be God’s new creation even though we still live between the time of the first creation and the consummation of the new heavens and earth. Therefore, the New Testament calls the church to proper use of sexuality by grounding it both in creation and in who we

⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 945.

⁵ This paragraph and the following one are directly dependent on Gentry and Wellum, 946–47. Not all quoted material appears in quotations.

are in Christ. This is also why God's moral demand on us today is greater—greater in restoring us to what we were created to be in the first place and in calling us to live now as God's new-creation people.

2. Apply our hermeneutical process to respond to the question, "Why is homosexuality a sin?" The verses mentioned in question #1 will help you. Also read Eph. 5:28-33.
3. Apply our hermeneutical process to answer the questions, "Is abortion permissible? What about infanticide and euthanasia/assisted suicide?"

We are created as God's image bearers (Gen. 1:26-28). Therefore, human life is precious (cf. Gen. 9:6).⁶ Sinful, inhumane treatment of others is a result of the fall. The law-covenant forbids and punishes strife, anger, murder, and other behaviors, but these rules are the outworking of who we are as God's created beings. Jesus teaches us that God's intent from the beginning was for his image bearers to love God and their neighbors, which is what all of Scripture emphasizes (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 6:5; Matt. 22:34-40). In the new covenant age, the full intent of how we are to love as God's people is realized in a greater way. This is why Jesus stresses that it is not merely murder, adultery, or lying that are forbidden but our very hateful, self-gratifying heart and attitude toward each other (Matt. 5:21-48).

God demands that his people love him and one another. The law-covenant demanded this, but it also anticipated something more. In Christ, what the old covenant anticipated is now here. This is what led Paul to say that love *fulfills* the law (Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14). A love that is governed by God's will and our renewal in Christ through the Spirit fulfills the law. We can now apply this understanding of humans and love to ethical issues such as abortion, infanticide, and euthanasia. While each issue involves other matters, a sanctity-of-life ethic is foundational to a Christian ethic and is consistent in *all of Scripture*.

⁶ The following is directly dependent on Gentry and Wellum, 947–48. Not all quoted material appears in quotations.

Works Cited

- Gentry, Peter J., and Stephen J. Wellum. *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*. 2nd edition. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018.
- Hill, Michael. *The How and Why of Love: An Introduction to Evangelical Ethics*. Kingsford, N.S.W.: Matthias Media, 2002.