

Old Testament Laws

The following extract from the Writings comes at the beginning of Swedenborg's exposition of Exodus 21.

AC8972[2]

The laws which the Lord delivered to the children of Israel and commanded them to keep were divided into commandments, judgements, and statutes. The term 'commandments' was given to those which were laws of life, 'judgements' to those which were laws of the civic state, and 'statutes' to those which were laws of worship. As regards judgements specifically, they are the kinds of laws that are contained in the present chapter and also some that follow. They served as laws in a Church in which inner realities, those of heaven and of the Church, were represented by outward things; but they do not serve as laws in a Church in which inner realities are no longer represented by outward things, as in the Christian Church. The reason for this is that inner realities have been revealed to people of this Church, and therefore inner realities are the channel through which contact is made with heaven, not outward things, as had been the situation before the Christian Church. Here is the reason why members of the Christian Church are not bound to adhere to the outward requirements of the laws called judgements and statutes, only to the inward ones. Holiness still remains within them because they hold holy truths within them, as also does every single command in the Word regarding the sacrifices. Although these are no longer prescriptive laws they remain holy constituents of the Word because of the Divine realities which they hold within themselves and which they represented. For when they are read by a Christian the Divine realities which are held within them and which were represented by them are discerned in heaven. They fill the angels with holiness, and at the same time the reader too through influx from the angels, especially if the reader himself is thinking at the same time about the Divine realities within them. From this it is evident that even the Old Testament Word is extremely holy.

Later in relation to Exodus 22:25-27 he writes:

AC9211[2] These are the more internal things from which the law among the Israelite and Jewish nation about lending things at interest comes down. When therefore a person is acquainted with those more internal things that law comes to an end along with the others like it which were referred to as judgements. For the Israelite and Jewish nation was confined to the outward forms that represented internal things. Consequently that law was binding on that nation then, but it is not binding on Christians, to whom the more internal things have been revealed by the Lord. Those who belong to the Church at the present day see this to be so, and this is why laws that have to do with charging interest are altogether different at the present day. Even so, the holiness of that law does not therefore come to an end, as though this part of the Word has been abrogated; for its holiness remains by virtue of the more internal things it holds within it. These more internal holy things continue to stir angels' affections when this part of the Word is read. But let people beware of thinking that the laws of life such as are contained in the Ten Commandments

and elsewhere throughout the Old Testament have been abrogated; for those laws have been firmly established in an inward as well as an outward form, because the two are inseparable.

These two passages show that according to Swedenborg there is a significant difference between the laws recorded in the Old Testament that are:

- a) commandments [laws of life]
- b) judgments [civic laws]
- c) statutes [laws of worship]

And he states that - *members of the Christian Church are not bound to adhere to the outward requirements of the laws called judgements and statutes, only to the inward ones.*

So we seem to have clear guidance here which we can apply to any law we read in the Old Testament if we know whether it is type a, b or c.

So if we look at Leviticus 18:22 we need to ask ourselves whether it is a law of life, a civic law or a law of worship.

Hebrew Text

The Hebrew words associated with commandments, judgments and statutes are as follows [see for example Deuteronomy 6:1]:

commandments	mitzvah
judgments	mishpat
statutes	choq

In the book of Leviticus the word mitzvah occurs in Lev 4:2, 4:13, 4:22, 4:27, 5:17 and then 22:31, 26:3, 26:14, 26:15 and 27:34.

Whereas the word mishpat occurs in Lev 18:4, 18:5, 18:26, 19:37, 20:22, 25:18, 26:15, 26:43 and 26:46.

But the word choq occurs in Lev 10:11, 18:5, 18:26, 19:19, 19:37, 20:8, 20:22, 25:18, 26:3, 26:15, 26:43 and 26:46.

Chapter 18 of Leviticus is often headed “Unlawful Sexual Relations” and as can be seen from the above **does not** include the Hebrew word ‘mitzvah’ but does include ‘mishpat’ and ‘choq’. In particular the chapter opens with an emphasis (depending on the translation) on statutes and judgments. For example the ESV has the following:

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the LORD your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.
(Leviticus 18:1-5 ESV)

So the text of Leviticus 18:22 occurs in a chapter where there is no mention of commandments (mitzvah) but a strong mention of statutes (choq) and judgments (mishpat).

The main content of Leviticus 18:22 is repeated in Leviticus 20:13 and again mitzvah is not used in this chapter whereas choq is in Lev 20:8 –
Keep my statutes and do them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you.

It does seem to me that there is a case for applying what Swedenborg says about judgments and statutes to the laws given in Leviticus 18, that is: *members of the Christian Church are not bound to adhere to the outward requirements of the laws called judgements and statutes, only to the inward ones.*

Alan Misson