

Leviticus 18 and 20 :: The Holiness Code

“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (Lev. 19.2)

A broad survey of the passages (see handout)

Leviticus 18.22 :: The key prohibition against homosexuality

Leviticus 20.13 :: The key consequence for homosexual acts

Why the Bible matters more than “the text”

Liberals and Conservatives: Strange Bed-Fellows

History is Important: Our Historical Faith

The Bible’s Truth *Does* Depend on the Historical Nature of its Writings

The Holiness Code: Regulations enforcing a lifestyle that distinguishes Israel from its neighbors.

Note: 18.1/20.26

Worship Practices were to set them apart

They were not to mix with non-Jews or adopt their practices

Hundreds of acts/practices are prohibited, some we practice today without qualms

An assortment of prohibitions in Leviticus 17-26:

Eating rare meat, bestiality, harvesting all the grain in a field or all the grapes in a vineyard, stealing, lying, cheating, trimming one’s forelocks, shaving, wearing tattoos, planting two kinds of seed together, wearing two kinds of fiber in your clothing, touching the skin of a pig

Some are called “abominations” (also translated “detestable”) i.e. disgusting, defiling, abhorrent, offensive--something the Gentiles do that you are not to do, i.e. contrary to the community’s values/identity.

- 7.18 (eating “left overs”),
 - 11.13 (certain “fowl” are *fowl*),
 - 18.22** (homosexual acts),
 - 19.7 (“left overs” *again*),
 - 20.13** (homosexual acts *again*),
 - 20.25 (“Shopping guidelines”)
 - 18.26 (are all these prohibitions “abominations”?)
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The Holiness Code and Leviticus is designed for a particular historical purpose:

Nation building

Constituting a covenant community in opposition to the surrounding culture (Gen 12.3)

The difficulty for biblical serious believers: which must we follow/forget?

Dr. Laura vs. Homer Simpson-Caldwell

Questions/Observations:

1. What's the difference between forming Israel and forming the Church? Does 1 Peter seek to achieve the same thing but with different means?
2. How do we understand the mission of Jesus Christ and the churches Great Commission--i.e. what changes in Jesus Christ, what does not?
3. What happens as the Church moves out into the world? The Incarnation is about God condescending/accommodating to human human nature/culture to save us (John Calvin).
4. Why are we not Jews today? If we were required to become Jews, would we even *exist* today?
5. How does St. Paul dance between the Law and the Gospel, improvising on the Law for the sake of the salvation of all? This is an important invitation to the teachings of St. Paul next week.
6. The Jerusalem Council seems to disregard most of the Holiness Code in its message to the Gentiles (Acts 15). What gives them freedom to do so, and why do they keep what they keep?
7. How do we know what carries forward and what does not? How do we sort out which laws to follow today and which we do not? Some of those decisions seem arbitrary, maybe self-serving (e.g tithing and sabbath practice).
8. We must certainly look backward to the orders of creation, but we must also look forward to the new creation in Christ where women, eunuchs, and Gentiles are included. How and why is such inclusion possible and does that extend further toward gays and lesbians also? If not how do we know where to set the limits and why?
9. How do we know which are universal moral commands and which are cultural and temporary?
10. Marion Soards (opposes same-sex relations) concedes about Leviticus: "A statement made in Leviticus does not automatically apply to Christians" (p. 17).
11. Moses (Deuteronomy) and Jesus are clear in their prohibition of divorce and remarriage. What enables us today to demand celibacy for gays and lesbians but not for the divorced?
12. Is it possible we have become too permissive in our evangelization? If so, how will we know how to return to greater moral strictness but not become legalists and opponents of the gospel? (cf. our Lord's bracing rebuke: "Woe to you Lawyers! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, but you yourselves do not lift one finger to help them" (Luke 11.46).)

Two opposing visions from two Bible-obeying Christians (presented alphabetically):

Robert Gagnon

Lewis Smedes

Sources: *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Via and Gagnon); *Scripture and Homosexuality: Biblical Authority and the Church Today* (Soards); *Jesus, the Bible, and Homosexuality* (Rogers); *Love is an Orientation: Elevating the Conversation with the Gay Community* (Marin); *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Gagnon); *Leviticus* (Hartley); *Leviticus* (Balentine)