


The Relationship of the Old Testament Law to the Christian

 The Bible and Homosexuality

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Last week we worked with Leviticus 18:22, the prohibition of a male lying with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination and 20:13 which repeats that prohibition and adds that “they shall surely be put to death.” SSRA within evangelical Christian circles are arguing that when these passages are correctly interpreted they are not directly applicable to modern loving, committed, monogamous SSR. Their first argument is that these prohibitions are in the context of Israel avoiding idolatry in cultic worship settings in order to keep them distinct from the practices of other nations. We showed that the prohibitions in Lev 18 are a list of Canaanite practices that are not textually linked together. It is true that homosexuality and bestiality occurred in an idolatrous cult setting but they are not prohibited only in that setting. They are prohibited in all settings in order to avoid incurring God’s anger and being exiled from the land. Their second argument comes out of the egalitarian view that during the OT God endorsed patriarchy and male honor and therefore God was protecting the honor of the passive partner in homosexual relations. We showed that God did not endorse patriarchy in the OT by pointing out that if the chapter protects anyone’s honor it is female honor. In short, Lev 18 and 20 simply cite prohibited sexual behaviors of the Canaanites in ascending order of deviation beginning with incest, moving to homosexuality and finally to bestiality. The mention of giving children over to Molech in cultic worship is included because deviant sexual behaviors often occurred in that context. However, they were not limited to that context. The third argument builds on the second in that it also comes out of the egalitarian view that the God of the OT was endorsing a lower ethic of patriarchy and now that Christ has fulfilled the Law God has raised the ethic to male and female equality and so the OT Law does not apply to the Christian. Brownson states this by saying, “The overall agenda established by the book of Leviticus concerning purity was radically transformed by the gospel of Christ. It is simply inadequate, from a Christian perspective, to attempt to build an ethic based on the prohibitions of Leviticus alone.”¹ Of course, we are not building a Christian ethic based on the prohibitions of Leviticus alone. We are also building it on the basis of the overarching theme of Scripture as well as NT texts such as Matt 19:4-6, Romans 1:18-32, 1 Cor 6:9-11 and 1 Tim 1:8-11. However, all these passages are also rejected as having any direct application to the issue at hand and so must also be evaluated. When he says the “overall agenda” of the Book of Leviticus concerns “purity” he is interpreting the word “abomination” in Leviticus as meaning something contrary to ritual purity rather than the lexical meaning of something “degrading” and

“vile.” By interpreting the “abominations” of Leviticus as behaviors contrary to ritual purity and then concluding that the ritual laws were fulfilled by Christ and transformed by the gospel he ends up disconnecting the prohibition of a male lying with a male as with a female from the NT Christian. Matthew Vines spends much more space making the argument that the Law has little to no relevance to the Christian. His argument is that after the Church began the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 decided that there were only four OT Laws that Gentiles should obey; abstaining from food sacrificed to idols, abstaining from blood, abstaining from meat of strangled animals and abstaining from sexual immorality. Vines’ explanation of abstention from “sexual immorality” is abstention from the common practice of pederasty in Greco-Roman culture. Pederasty is where one male, usually older, takes the active role in homosexual sex, and another male, usually younger, takes the passive role. What all SSRA argue is that Leviticus and the NT condemns the male who takes the passive role for allowing himself to be feminized, treated like a woman. Their reasoning is unconvincing because it is foreign to the text. Leviticus does not only condemn the man in the passive role but both men and sentences both to the death penalty. The final argument is that the OT Law does not apply to the Christian because Christ is the end of the Law. Vines quotes many verses such as Rom 10:4, “Christ is the end of the law” and Heb 8:13, “By calling this covenant ‘new,’ he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear.” In this way the OT is completely disconnected from having any relationship to the Christian’s life.

A key to this view of the progress in ethics and one may even say progress or development in God is understanding their pre-commitment to feminism. A. Duane Liptin defines feminism as the worldview that attempts “to eliminate all gender based roles in society, up to and often including roles that are purely biological in nature.”² With this pre-commitment they set out to interpret the OT ethic as patriarchal and lower than the NT ethic. This is quite in line with the evolutionary concept of progress. Jesus becomes the highest evolved human because He radically altered the lower ethics of patriarchy to the higher ethics of egalitarianism. The banner verse of evangelical feminism is Gal 3:28, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Making this the *locus classicus* by which all other NT statements about male and female are interpreted they eliminate all gender based roles in society, up to and often including roles that are purely biological in nature, such as SSR. Therefore, on the basis of their concept of progress in ethics from OT to the NT, borrowed from social evolution and read back into the Bible, the OT is now outdated and has no relevance to the Christian. Therefore Leviticus 18 and 20 have no application to modern, loving, committed, SSR.

It becomes necessary to consider the Law and it’s relation to the NT Christian. Allen Ross, in his commentary on Leviticus, says, “No one has it all figured out because the debates continue, as they have since the early church.”³ There are four views we want to briefly evaluate and then we will look at what the Bible has to say about the OT Law and the Christian and we will make a proposal.

View 1: The Ten Commandments Binding

The first view is that the Ten Commandments are binding upon the Christian. This view often adds as applicable certain laws that meet the need of the moment, such as tithing when a new building project is on the table or funds are low. This view is almost accepted without question in the United States because of the rich Judeo-Christian heritage and the posting of the Ten Commandments at historical sites and in courts of law. It has now been enshrined as the basis for all morality. It is also true that nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the NT for the Christian and so it does seem reasonable to conclude that while the rest of the Law was done away with the Ten Commandments continue.

The weakness of this view are several. First, the fourth commandment, keeping Sabbath, is non-literally interpreted as referring to Sunday whereas all the other commandments are interpreted literally.⁴ This is inconsistent. Second, the Scriptures picture the Law as a unit. For example, James 2:10 says, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all." It was not possible to sever the Ten Commandments away from the rest of the Law. The Ten Commandments were directly connected to the rest of the Law in that they served as the basis for the rest of the Law. For example, the prohibition of kidnapping is not one of the Ten Commandments but it is directly prohibited as an extension of several of the Ten Commandments. For example, kidnapping is a form of theft because it is stealing a person from their rightful owners, the parents. It is also a form of murder because it is taking away the enjoyment of life from the people involved. It is clear that God viewed the Law as a unit and that the Ten Commandments were the basis of the other commandments. Therefore the breaking of one point of the Law incurred the guilt of breaking it all. Gal 5:3 also supports the unity of the Law. Here Paul says, "And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law." Paul's point is that circumcision is what put one under the yoke of the Mosaic Covenant and so if a Christian submitted to circumcision he also had to submit to the whole Law. Paul did not view the Law as "in parts" that could be dissected away from one another. He viewed the Law as a unit and one was either under the whole Law or under none of it. Third, Orthodox Judaism did not divide the Ten Commandments away from the rest of the Law. What they did do was count the laws. The rabbi's counted 613 laws and concluded that 611 were given by Moses and two by God Himself. They then divided the 613 laws into 248 affirmative laws and 365 negative laws. However, they did not separate the Ten Commandments away from the other laws. Roy Aldrich points out that "Moses Margoliouth...published a catalog of the 613 commandments in English in 1743. In this list the Ten Commandments are not placed first and there is no indication of special emphasis or importance above the others. In fact, the usual Ten Commandments are expanded into thirteen laws. This is done by dividing Exodus 20:4-5 into three separate injunctions against idolatry and making two laws out of the fourth commandment concerning the Sabbath...There is no attempt to separate or classify different kinds of laws....All of this shows that orthodox Judaism believes the Mosaic laws constitute a unified system and that all the laws are equally binding."⁵

So while it is tempting and popular to separate the Ten Commandments away from the rest of the Law and consider them binding on the Christian, it violates the Scriptural teaching that the Law is a unity and the Law's unity has forever been the view of Orthodox Judaism. Still, it is instructive because we must give an account for why nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the NT as binding for the Christian. This will be dealt with as part of our later proposal.

View 2: The Moral Law Binding

The second view is that the Law should be divided into three classifications; moral, civil and religious. The civil and religious laws are no longer applicable but the moral laws are binding on the Christian. This is probably the most common view. The moral laws are primarily found in the Ten Commandments but are not limited to them. They continue to abide because they are rooted in the eternal character of God. The civil laws relate to Jewish society and regulate slaves, injury to others, property rights, money lending, etc... The religious laws govern Jewish worship and regulate the tabernacle, the clothing of the priests, the function of the priests, the sacrifices and the offerings and these have all been fulfilled by Christ. Therefore, it seems natural to divide the law into these three divisions and conclude that only the moral laws are binding on the Christian because only they are rooted in the eternal character of God.

This view is tempting but it also has problems. First, the Scriptures portray the Law as a unit. To divide the Law into moral, civil and religious laws may seem natural to the modern mind but the Scriptures never make such a division. As mentioned before James 2:10 and Gal 5:3 do not permit the law to be broken into parts. Second, it is not always clear which laws are moral, civil and religious. Of course, sometimes it is clear. But often it is difficult to decide and people have classified them differently. This shows that such divisions are not clear. Further, the laws are not grouped together into moral, civil and religious divisions but all mixed up. Sometimes a clearly religious law is right next to a moral law. If God intended them to be divided into these three classifications we might expect them to be grouped together clearly and not all mixed up. Finally, Paul teaches in 2 Tim 3:16-17 that all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. In context the "man of God" is the NT Christian and the Scriptures primarily in view are those which Timothy had been raised on since childhood. Timothy had been raised on the entire OT (cf 2 Tim 3:15). Thus, Paul is saying that the entire OT is highly valuable for the NT Christian and part of what equips him for every good work. How then can only the arbitrary division of the moral law be binding?

So while it seems natural to divide the law into the three divisions of moral, civil and religious, and conclude that only the moral laws are binding on the Christian because only they are rooted in the eternal character of God, it violates the Scriptures portrayal of the Law as a unit, it is not always clear which laws are moral, civil or religious,

they are not divided into these categories and it still leaves the lingering question of the stated NT profitability of the entire OT, including the entire Law.

View 3: The Principles of the Law Binding

The third view is that the principles of all the laws are binding on the Christian today while the specific application of those principles to the situations in the OT may not be. In other words, our society may not be just like Jewish society and so the specific application may not apply, but the underlying principle surely does apply. Gordon Wenham states this view when he says, "I would argue that it is the underlying principles that should bind the Christian, not the specific applications found in the OT."⁶

Wenham gives several helpful examples showing the importance of the Christian finding the underlying principle. For example, Deut 22:8 gives a home building regulation, "When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, so that you will not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone falls from it." This regulation specifically applies to homes that are built with a flat roof where people in the ancient world gathered. To not put a parapet or fence around the roof it endangered the lives of those on the roof. While we do not build houses with flat roofs to congregate the underlying principle is clear; when we build a house we should keep in mind safety features that will prevent people from getting killed. Taking this basic safety precaution is binding on the Christian. Another example might be the religious laws of purity. Lev 11:29 gives regulations for touching swarming things. "Now these are to you the unclean among the swarming things which swarm on the earth: the mole, and the mouse, and the great lizard in its kinds, and the gecko, and the crocodile, and the lizard, and the sand reptile, and the chameleon. These are to you the unclean among all the swarming things; whoever touches them when they are dead becomes unclean until evening." These prohibitions related to Israel's being distinct from all the other nations and warned them about how easily defilement was picked up by touching dead things. While this doesn't have any specific application to our touching these creatures alive, the underlying principle is still clear; we should remember how easy it is to pick up sinful impurities from the world, that they are a cause of death. God is still a holy God and we should keep a healthy distance between ourselves and the world's practices or else the world will end up contaminating us.

This view goes a long way in solving some of the problems of the other views. First, it keeps the Scriptural unity of the law intact. It seeks with each law to find the underlying principle and make modern application to our situation. Second, it respects the teaching of 2 Tim 3:16-17 that all Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. By meeting these demands it goes a long way in helping us understand the relationship of the Christian to the law. Thus, the view that the principles of the law are binding sheds some light on the discussion.

View 4: The Law No Longer Binding

The fourth view is that the Law is no longer binding in any sense on the Christian today. This view holds that the God of the OT and its Laws endorsed patriarchal culture that have been radically transformed by the gospel of Christ. It's scriptural support comes from statements like Rom 10:4 that, "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness" and the contrast of the new covenant with the old covenant as in Heb 8:13, "By calling this covenant 'new,' he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and outdated will soon disappear."

This extreme cutting off is problematic. First, the God of the OT is not different than the God of the NT. The God of the OT did not teach an outdated or sub-ethic as contrasted with that of the God of the NT. The God of the OT and the NT is the same God and the ethics are consistent from one testament to the other. Second, if the OT ethic has been radically transformed by the gospel of Christ then Paul's statement that all Scripture is God breathed and profitable, especially with the OT in view, is not true. In reality we ought to devote ourselves purely to the higher ethics of the NT. But to do so would contradict Paul. This point is also supported by 1 Cor 10:11 where Paul says of OT Israel that these things "happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction..." There really is nothing to learn from them if the NT has a much higher ethic and instruction.

This view is the view of SSRA and is the most problematic of all because it puts into question the nature of God and the sufficiency and profitability of all Scripture.

General Observations about the OT Law

Now we will turn our attention to making some generalizations about the OT Law and generate a uniquely dispensational view of the OT Law and the spiritual life during the Church age.

First, the Law was given to the nation Israel as a redeemed people. The nation had been in captivity to Egypt and God had redeemed them through faith when they put blood on the doorposts of their homes in Egypt. This may or may not have indicated that all the Israelites were believers, but the nation was viewed as redeemed. God then led the redeemed nation through the wilderness to Mt Sinai where He gave them His Law. The Law was not given to them in order to redeem them but to them as already redeemed. This is very important to grasp because many people think that during the OT redemption was by keeping the law and now in the NT redemption is by faith. This is not true. No one has ever been redeemed by keeping the law. Redemption has always and will always be by grace through faith. The Law simply served to help the nation mature in their faith. It therefore served in the sphere of sanctification.

Second, those who were believers in Israel loved the law and sought to follow it with all their heart. Ps 119:10-11, "With all my heart I have sought You; Do not let me wander from Your commandments. Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You." Ps 119:14-516, "I have rejoiced in the way of Your

testimonies, As much as in all riches. ¹⁵I will meditate on Your precepts And regard Your ways. ¹⁶I shall delight in Your statutes; I shall not forget Your word." Ps 119:34-35, "Give me understanding, that I may observe Your law And keep it with all *my* heart. ³⁵Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, For I delight in it." This testimony of love for the law and desire to follow it and its good precepts is repeated in the NT. Paul says in Romans 7:14, "For we know that the Law is spiritual, but I am of flesh, sold into bondage to sin. ¹⁵For what I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I *would* like to *do*, but I am doing the very thing I hate. ¹⁶But if I do the very thing I do not want to *do*, I agree with the Law, *confessing* that the Law is good." So the law was given to the nation Israel as a redeemed people. It was given for sanctification and loved by believers even though it was a burden to those who were unbelievers.

Third, the Law was the national constitution of Israel. It distinguished Israel from every other nation on earth. Other nations had laws generated from human conscience but the laws of Israel were generated by a holy God. They were thus more righteous than the laws of the other nations (Deut 4:8). The people committed to follow this Law when Moses sprinkled the blood of the covenant on them in Deut 24. If Israel followed the Law they would become God's unique possession, a holy nation and a kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6). Annually they would gather as a people to hear the constitution read so that they would know the Law and obey the Law and give evidence that they were God's covenant people.

Fourth, the Law governed every sphere of Israel's national life. The law gave specific details regarding God's desires in terms of sanitation, hygiene, diet, money, debt, marriage, sex, property, worship, sacrifices, priests, prophets, kings, family, et. al. The Law was viewed as a self-contained unit that governed all of life in relation to God and community.

Fifth, the Law revealed that God was holy and sovereign over every area of life. He was the standard for what is good and holy and righteous and just. The people would need to conform their lives to His law in every area in order to lead lives that were good and holy and righteous and just. This was God's standard. As such He said, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." Interestingly, Peter in the NT quotes Leviticus and says the same thing for the Church.

Sixth, the law revealed that they were sinners. It made people aware that in everyday life they did not live lives that were good and holy and righteous and just. Instead they picked up impurities, were subject to disease and death, etc... This only made their sinfulness more glaring when compared with God's holiness. Ultimately this pointed to the fact that they needed the Messiah to come and fulfill the Law and make atonement for their sin. Until the Messiah came and made atonement once for all the tabernacle/Temple worship system was installed to point to the Messiah and the nature of His atoning work. The priests had to be cleansed before they could function as priests, the sacrifices had to be unblemished, innocent and undefiled, the clothing had to be spotless, the blood had to be shed, et. al. Everything pointed to Christ and the nature of the atonement that He would provide. By the gracious tabernacle/Temple worship system, though the people were sinners, they still had access to God. Yet in every way they saw that in every day common life their lives fell short of the glory of

God. They would need to look for one to complete the sacrificial system and provide eternal atonement for their sin.

Seventh, the Law was a pedagogue or child trainer that pointed to Christ. Ross agrees saying, "...the law was a pedagogue—a tutor or child trainer...The Israelites were already the people of God; the law was given to guide them to maturity in the faith and to the fulfillment of the promises" in their Messiah. In other words, when the Messiah came they were to have matured to the point of recognizing Him as the one who came to fulfill the Law and provide a once for all atonement. Jesus said in Matt 5:17, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophet; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill." Jesus uttered these words to prepare His disciples for the contrast He made between His interpretation of the Law and that of the scribes and Pharisees. They taught that to keep the Law and be experientially righteous before God one had to obey the letter of the Law, that is, the external demands of the Law. Jesus taught that to keep the Law and be experientially righteous before God one had to obey the spirit of the Law that is the internal intent of the Law which gets to the true heart of the matter. Jesus came to fulfill the spirit of the Law, its true internal intent, perfectly, and so qualify to meet the demands of the holy God revealed by the Law. If the nation had been successfully learning to live by faith under the Law and taking opportunity to alleviate their shortcomings by proper Temple worship and the sacrifices then they would have been prepared to recognize the Christ as the fulfillment of the Law and the Temple. If they believed in Him and His atonement they would be set free from the Law and the new covenant would be fulfilled in which He would pour out His Spirit on them so that by dependence upon the Spirit Christ's life would now be lived through them in perfect obedience to God. Of course, they did not believe in Him as a nation, only individuals did, both Jew and Gentile.

Ross sums up the Law this way, "The law was thus both regulatory and revelatory. The regulatory aspects of the law—kinds of animals, composition of incense, handling of blood, and all the other ritual acts—were bound up in the culture and experience of ancient Israel. The revelatory aspects of the laws—holiness of God, nature of sin, access to God, forgiveness of sin, removal of impurity, and all the many theological meanings of the acts—taught the abiding truths of the person and work of the LORD as they were unfolding in Scripture. When Christ came and inaugurated the new covenant, the regulatory aspects of the law came to an end: there was no longer a temple, sacrifices, or a functioning priesthood based on the Sinai covenant. But what all these laws revealed about the nature and will of God did not come to an end. For they are binding revelation."

What he means that it is binding revelation is that "The law remains an authoritative part of holy Scripture." It must because 2 Tim 3:16-17 say that "All Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work." However, we must not think that we are to put ourselves under the regulations of the Law of Moses as if Jesus accomplished nothing. Christ fulfilled the Law and therefore "...now it must be read through the fulfillment in Christ." In other words, in the OT one had to approach God through animal sacrifice. We do not

need an animal sacrifice but we do need a sacrifice—the sacrifice to which all sacrifices pointed—Christ’s sacrifice. Also, in the OT one had to have a high priest to intercede for him. We do not need an earthly high priest to intercede for us but we do need a high priest—the high priest to which all high priests pointed—Jesus, our great high priest. Jesus is the fulfillment of all the law and therefore the law must be interpreted as pointing to Him. This is what Rom 10:4 means when it says, “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.” We cannot put ourselves back under the Law because we were called to be free from the Law. The Law was the pedagogue or child trainer and through faith we are set free from the Law. However, this freedom does not mean freedom to live by the flesh. Under the new covenant Christ has poured out His Spirit upon us to enable us to live a new kind of spiritual life. The new spiritual life is described as abiding in Him, being filled by the Spirit and walking by the Spirit. The Spirit is the key to living the new spiritual life. Gal 5:16 says that as we walk by the Spirit we do not fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Gal 5:16). As we do, Romans 8:4 says that the requirement of the Law is fulfilled in us. When we read that the requirement of the Law is fulfilled in us as we walk according to the Spirit we are to understand that the requirement of the Law in view is general, not specific. In general the requirement of the Law was always holiness, goodness, righteousness and justice. In Galatians Paul describes meeting the requirement as having the fruit of the Spirit, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.” Interestingly he adds, “against such things there is no law.” That is to say, when we live by the Spirit His fruit is consistent with the OT Law.

The reason this righteous requirement of the OT Law remains in the NT is because the God of the OT is the same as the God of the NT. He never changes. This is also the reason people observe that nine of the Ten Commandments in the OT are repeated in the NT. God never changes. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. We should therefore expect many of the same commandments. The only thing that has changed is that He has fulfilled the Law and how His righteous requirements are met through us in a different way. As an OT Israelite they were functioning under the old covenant Law which was a child trainer getting them ready for recognizing their Messiah. That covenant Law was fulfilled in Christ at the cross (Heb 7:12) and thus, as a rule of life it has come to an end. However, God’s requirement of righteousness continues. Now we are under the new covenant which He is administering from heaven (Heb 8:1-2). Under the new covenant we have the Spirit of God dwelling in us to lead us into all righteousness and enable us to bear fruit unto righteousness (Rom 8). Put another way, we have been set free from the Law in Christ and when we live by the Spirit Christ lives in us. This is how His righteous life is reproduced in us. And if we fail to live by the Spirit we have a way to be restored by confessing our sins and finding forgiveness based on the shed blood of Christ. Then we can continue to live by the Spirit and bear more righteous fruit.

What then is the relationship of the OT Law to the Christian? “...it is not as simple as saying that Christians are free from the law, for it remains the revelation of the standard of holiness for the people of God.” We are safe in saying that we are not under the Law as a rule of life since Christ has fulfilled the Law. However, the abiding righteous requirement of the Law is fulfilled in us as we live by the Spirit. Thus, the Law remains profitable to

study because we learn about God's holiness and sovereignty over every area of life; government, diet, money, hygiene, community relations, worship, purity, sex, just war, et. al. Thereby we uncover the underlying principles in the specific laws and we also discover sinful patterns and thoughts in our own lives that need to be addressed by repentance and/or confession.

¹ James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, p 273.

² Donald Campbell, *Walvoord: A Tribute*, p 335.

³ Allen Ross, *Holiness to the Lord*, p 58.

⁴ Charles Ryrie, "The End of the Law," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1996.

⁵ Roy Aldrich, "Has the Mosaic Law Been Abolished?" *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 1996.

⁶ Gordon Wenham, NICOT, *The Book of Leviticus*, p 36.