

# The Abominations of Leviticus

 The Bible and Homosexuality

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What we're trying to accomplish in this series is to gain the ability to speak with both grace and truth as exemplified by Jesus when the woman was caught in adultery. We started with the outlook of conversational evangelism and how important it is to form friendships with people of the world if we want to influence them. Evangelism in a postmodern world takes a lot of effort on our part. Authenticity is premised on genuine interest and friendship. Both take time to develop. If we aren't willing to befriend people of the world and show genuine inquisitiveness by asking questions and buying the next round of coffee then we will not be in a position to influence them for Christ.

We then narrowed our focus to seeking doctrinal harmony with other Christians who are SSRA (Same-Sex Relationship Advocates) or at least open to that view as a viable Christian outlook. Here we are seeking unity in the truth by looking at the Text. Despite our doctrinal differences all Christians are positionally seated together in Christ. Paul says in Eph 4:1-3, "Therefore I...implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The way we are to walk is with humility, gentleness and patience, the practical expression of this is putting up with one another in love and being zealous to preserve unity.<sup>1</sup> This means we need to be familiar with the text and the arguments that are being made by Christians who are promoting SSR as a viable Christian lifestyle. Once we understand them we need to be able to gently correct those in opposition. 2 Tim 2:25 exhorts us to "gently correct those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will." Christians can go out of their senses on issues. We should understand that if we gently correct them God may use that to bring them to repentance so that they know the truth and escape being used by the devil to do his will in the world. Finally we should understand that if we engage in this we are doing something that is very valuable before God. As James says in 5:19-20, "My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins." The one who restores a brother from error is to know that he has been

instrumental in phase two salvation of the brother from the death dealing consequences of sin. So it is a very important endeavor we are training for. Even if we don't use the material for the SSR issue it can be used for any issue of doctrinal disagreement among Christians.

The basic approach of SSRA is to limit the discussion to six or seven passages and interpret them so as to disconnect them from any direct relevance to modern, committed SSR. This, I contend, commits the error of reductionism. Reductionism is the practice of analyzing a complex phenomenon in simpler terms and concluding that it is sufficient to provide an adequate explanation. I submit that it does not give adequate explanation of the overall theme of Scripture which is always approving of one man-one woman marital relationship, a relationship that undergirds the metaphor of the Christ-Church relationship and reflective of the unity and diversity of the Godhead.

As far as the six or seven passages, first we looked at Genesis 1-2, the Creation Narrative. For SSRA marriage is primarily designed for companionship and is not tied to gender or procreation but merely to the formation of a kinship bond. By this form of argumentation they disconnect Gen 1-2 from modern loving, committed SSR. This view is unconvincing because in the Genesis text marriage is designed not primarily for companionship but for efficiency in the task of keeping and cultivating the garden, a task that necessarily required the gender distinction of opposite but corresponding to in order to procreate and spread man's dominion over the face of the whole earth. Though the first man and woman failed to keep this mandate the original mandate still remains and the means of subduing still requires one man and one woman forming new family units.

The second passages we looked at was Gen 18-19, Ezek 16 and Jude; Sodom, Gomorrah and the surrounding cities. SSRA argue that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was inhospitality and going after strange angel flesh in order to violently gang rape. By arguing this way they disconnect Gen 18-19, Ezek 16 and Jude from modern, loving, committed SSR. This disconnect is unconvincing because in Gen 18-19 it is clear that the men of Sodom thought that the angels were men. Further, there is no evidence that angels went to any city besides Sodom and yet they all suffered the same judgment. We can agree that inhospitality was a sin of Sodom and that the desire to violently gang rape is also sinful. However, it is more convincing to understand that there were a long list of sins in Sodom, Gomorrah and the surrounding cities. These sins begin with arrogance and when coupled with wealth resulted in a life of careless ease and selfishness which lead to boredom and time spent imagining lustful encounters followed by gratifying those lusts with the OS(opposite sex), at first consensually and later forcefully and finally with the SS, at first consensually and later forcefully. Sodom and Gomorrah forever stands as the example of a society that decays to the point that God eliminates them from the world, a Gotham city, so to speak.

Tonight we will look at the third passage in Lev 18 and 20. The text of Lev 18:22 says, "You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination." The text of Lev 20:13 adds the penalty of execution for the same offense saying, "If there is a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have

committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their blood guiltiness is upon them." SSRA argue that the injunctions are in the context of avoiding idolatry in Temple worship in order to keep the nation Israel separate from the practices of other nations, that the condemnation is concerned with the preservation of male honor and that the law given to Israel is no longer applicable since it is fulfilled in Christ. For example, Brownson says, "...we can say with reasonable confidence that the activity envisioned in the Levitical prohibitions is assumed to be consensual, and that it is probably envisioned to take place in cultic contexts, with clear linkages to idolatry and other religious practices foreign to the nation of Israel. As such, the prohibition of these practices is part of Israel's call to be both separate from other nations and holy to the Lord."<sup>2</sup> "...in addition to a concern with cultic practices, the Levitical prohibitions would be read in light of assumptions regarding honor and shame that were shared throughout the ancient world."<sup>3</sup> And finally, "The overall agenda established by the book of Leviticus concerning purity was radically transformed by the gospel of Christ."<sup>4</sup> By these arguments they disconnect these texts from having any application to modern, loving, monogamous, committed SSR. The arguments are interesting and need to be addressed.

Let me say first of all that it's my contention that there is a much bigger scriptural story here that is not being addressed by SSRA. There is no doubt that it is true that the law was given to keep Israel separate from other nations and that in many cases this directly related to idolatrous practices. With this we can agree wholeheartedly with SSRA.

We will now build on this by turning to Lev 18. Virtually everyone agrees that Leviticus is about the holiness of God and the nation Israel's injunction to "be ye holy as I am holy," a command that is repeated for the NT Christian (cf Lev 11:45 and 1 Pet 1:15-16), although understood in a different sense. Lev 1-16 addresses holiness in public worship and Lev 17-27 addresses holiness in private worship. Lev 18 fits within the portion of the book that deals with practical holiness in private worship and relationships and in particular with proper sexual unions. As God's people they would need to follow God's laws for sexual unions and not fall into the sexual perversions of the Egyptians and the Canaanites. If they did not avoid these sexual perversions then they would be spewed out of the land just as God spewed the Canaanites out of the land.

In Lev 18:1-5 we find basic instruction that reminds Israel what the Lord did for them saving them from Egypt and that having now enjoyed salvation they need to separate from the sinful practices of the Egyptians and the Canaanites in order to enjoy life in the land. In verse 1 "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>2</sup>"Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'I am the LORD your God.'" The expression "I am the LORD your God" is reminiscent of the words the LORD uttered at the giving of the Ten Commandments at Mt Sinai. It reminds them who had redeemed them from Egypt. In verse 3, "You shall not do what is done in the land of Egypt where you lived, nor are you to do what is done in the land of Canaan where I am bringing you; you shall not walk in their statutes." Both the Egyptians and Canaanites had statutes or laws but Israel was not to follow their laws. Instead, verse 4, "You are to perform My judgments and keep My statutes, to live in accord with them; I am the LORD your God.

<sup>5</sup>So you shall keep My statutes and My judgments, by which a man may live if he does them; I am the LORD." To follow the Lord's statutes and judgments would result in enjoyment of life in the land. Therefore, at the outset, they are reminded of who the Lord is and what He had done for them and that because of who He is there are particular sexual unions which are to be avoided. Ross points out that "The things to be avoided are enumerated in this section in ascending order from the sin of incest to the perversion of bestiality."<sup>5</sup> All of them were practiced by the Egyptians and the Canaanites. "All of them, though, are violations of the plan of God for life."<sup>6</sup> For Israel to enjoy a full life in the land they would need to avoid these sexual sins.

In Lev 18:6-23 we find the list of sexual perversions practiced by the Egyptians and Canaanites. In verse 6 we observe an important expression, "None of you shall approach any blood relative of his to uncover nakedness; I am the LORD." Basically it's a prohibition of incest. However, it may remind you of the event after the Flood when Noah planted a vineyard, got drunk on the wine and uncovered himself. His youngest son Ham then went into the tent, saw his father's nakedness and went out and told his brothers. These passages are linguistically related so it may help to look at it. Turn to Gen 9:21. Ham, as you might recall, was the father of the Canaanites and the Canaanites were known for their sexual perversions as Lev 18 clearly states. What I'm suggesting is that whatever happened in Gen 9 between Ham and his father is viewed in hindsight as a foreshadowing of Canaanite sexual perversion. In 9:20 we read, "Then Noah began farming and planted a vineyard." We might point out that there is nothing wrong with planting a vineyard or drinking wine. Jesus drank wine and wine is associated with joyous occasions like weddings and Passover. Jesus even turned water into wine. What is wrong is not wine but drinking too much wine and what happens when you drink too much wine. And what happened in verse 21? "He drank of the wine and became drunk, and uncovered himself inside his tent." The word "uncovered" here is the same word used in Lev 18:6 and so that's why people make a connection and sometimes think something sexual happened. Verse 22 "Ham, the father of Canaan," note how the text introduces Canaan at this time. Why does it do that? To draw attention to the Canaanites who descended from Ham and followed in his sexual perversions. "Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside." What happened? All we know from this text is that he "saw the nakedness of his father" and publicized this information. We don't know more. Note the contrast in verse 23, "But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it upon both their shoulders and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were turned away, so that they did not see their father's nakedness." What seems to be the emphasis? That Ham looked upon him whereas Shem and Japheth did not look upon him. That's all we really know for sure. Some suggest that seeing nakedness is the same as uncovering nakedness and since uncovering nakedness in Leviticus always refers to "having intercourse" then that is what happened here. However, it is somewhat speculative to come to that conclusion. Yet in verse 24 some ambiguity is introduced into whatever happened. "When Noah awoke from his wine, he knew what his youngest son had done to him." What had his son Ham done to him? Is this implying that had had homosexual intercourse with his father? Renald Showers thinks so. He thinks this is part of the larger tactic of Satan to destroy the seed line. He says, "...Satan decided to pervert the

human race again. He began the perversion through an inclination to homosexuality in Ham, one of Noah's sons (Gen 9:18-23).<sup>7</sup> When Showers says "again" he means to remind us that Satan had tried to pervert the seed line before the flood by encouraging the intermarriage of the godly seed line of Seth with the ungodly line of Cain in Gen 5. In his view history is an unfolding of the conflict between the line of God through the seed and the line of Satan. It's tempting to look at the text this way. However, Wenham disagrees saying, "The elaborate efforts Shem and Japheth made to avoid looking at their father demonstrate that this was all Ham did in the tent."<sup>8</sup> In other words, the inordinate amount of time the author devotes in 9:23 to describing Shem and Japheth's actions reveal that all Ham did was look at his father's nakedness. In his view this was a violation of honoring one's father. This view is more persuasive in my opinion but does not detract from the idea that this narrative was recorded in order to serve as a foreshadowing and warning of the sexual perversions of the Canaanites. They descended from Ham and as Ham looked upon the nakedness of his father so they invented many sexually perverted practices. The Israelites should learn that sexual deviancy may begin with something relatively minor but advances rapidly like a cancer. As we return to Lev 18 there is no question in my mind that the Israelites were to connect Gen 9 with Lev 18. Ross says, "...the point of the oracle in Gen. 9 and the evidence of Lev. 18 is that the Hamites in general, and the Canaanites specifically, were characterized by the same moral abandonment that their ancestor exhibited." One may even argue persuasively that the reason God used a famine to send Israel out of the land and down to Egypt for 400 years was because the Egyptians were a separatist people, they loathed the Hebrews. The Canaanites, on the other hand, were an assimilationist people. Israel would have lost their identity before they even became a nation had they remained in the land (Gen 15:13ff).

Now that they were a viable national entity and God had brought them out of Egypt they were going to the land of the Canaanites. During the time in Egypt sexual perversions of the Canaanites had become full grown and God was sending Israel there to judge them for these sins. Lev 18:24-25 warns Israel strongly saying, "Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishments upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants." Verse 26, "But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments and shall not do any of these abominations, neither the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you (for the men of the land who have been before you have done all these abominations, and the land has become defiled); so that the land will not spew you out, should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you." This emphasis continues through the chapter and is what stands behind the war procedures at the Conquest. The Canaanites were a corrupt people, their sins had grown full and if they were allowed to remain they would corrupt the Israelites thereby endangering the seed promise as well as moving God to send them into exile. This is exactly what happened.

In this greater context we look at the individual abominations sandwiched in Lev 18:6-23. In verse 6 the expression "None of you shall approach any blood relative" is literally "any flesh of his flesh," that is to say, any close relative. The expression "uncover nakedness" is a euphemism for "sexual intercourse." Verses 6-18 deal

with sexual intercourse with a close relative. Since they are not our main interest we only note that they are sinful. Verse 19 mentions approaching a woman to have sexual intercourse with her during her menstrual cycle. This one seems strange but Leviticus has already spoken of it. Here it is mentioned mainly because to do so would be flagrant rebellion against God. Verse 20 mentions adultery, having intercourse with your neighbor's wife. Verse 21 mentions the offering of children to Molech, "You shall not give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God; I am the Lord." It is unclear whether the children were being sacrificed in the fire to Molech or devoted through a ritual to temple prostitution. Later child sacrifice in the fire to Molech is clearly attested but at this early time it is unclear what is being referred to. In any case, you should not give any of your offspring over to Molech. Verse 22 then is our main verse of interest. "You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination." Because verse 22 is close to verse 21 many SSRA argue that what is being condemned is homosexual intercourse in an idolatrous context and therefore modern, committed, loving SSR outside of a pagan cult are something entirely different. However, each of these verses is not connected to the previous verses. Each stand as an independent, individual injunction. And while they do happen to be close here in Lev 20:13 they are not close. Clearly homosexual intercourse was common in ancient fertility cults. However, the idea that that is what is in view here is not clear. As Ross says, "...even though we know they were connected to temple ritual, this passage does not mention any connection to pagan worship (and the passage has already included the prohibition against ordinary adultery." The text is merely pointing out Canaanite practices that must be avoided. One of those is dedicating your child to Molech and another is homosexuality. Every indication here is that the male-male intercourse is consensual and not forced. This is not at all like what was happening at Sodom. There they did want to use force. Here it's consensual. In Lev 20:13 God adds the death penalty. "If *there is* a man who lies with a male as those who lie with a woman, both of them have committed a detestable act; they shall surely be put to death. Their blood guiltiness is upon them." Clearly both parties are held responsible because both are put to death. My point is that neither Lev 18 or Lev 20 is tied by the Hebrew text to the cult setting. Brownson says there are "clear linkages to idolatry and other religious practices foreign to the nation of Israel." This is just not true. The prohibition of homosexual intercourse is not limited to a cult setting. It applies to any setting. Just like the prohibition of bestiality in verse 23 is not strictly limited to a cult setting. It applies to any setting. And even SSRA would claim that bestiality is sinful in any setting. So to try and get around this is just not convincing.

The second argument is that since Leviticus is part of the larger holiness code given to the nation Israel, and Christ fulfilled the Law, then the Law does not apply to the Church. The goal is to show that this situation doesn't apply to modern, loving, committed, SSR. In order to argue this Brownson argues that the concern of the author of Leviticus is to preserve the honor and dignity of a male in a patriarchal culture. He says "...from the perspective of Leviticus, to "lie with a male as with a woman" is to reduce a male to the status of a female, which inherently degrades him and fails to honor his divinely given status as a male...Sex between females is not mentioned simply because there is no degradation operative in these cases." Thus Brownson is arguing that the

real concern of the author of Leviticus is to preserve the honor and dignity of a male in a patriarchal culture. Part and parcel of this argument is that God endorsed the patriarchal culture of Israel and the giving of males to a higher status than females. He then argues that God changed all that in the NT through Christ so that now males and females are equal in Christ (e.g. a misuse of Gal 3:28).

Not only is God's endorsement of patriarchal culture completely foreign to the text (all the author is doing is citing Canaanite abominations that must be avoided by Israel), but if the text does anything it protects female honor. Throughout Lev 18 the message is that God is protecting females from males who try to sexually exploit them. Verse 7, "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, that is, the nakedness of your mother. She is your mother..." Verse 8, "You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife..." Verse 9, "the nakedness of your sister, either your father's daughter or your mother's daughter...their nakedness you shall not uncover." All these verses cite males as the aggressors and females as those who need to be protected. Not at any point does God endorse patriarchal culture and the giving of more honor to a male than a female. All that God is doing is citing Canaanite abominations that must be avoided by Israel if they wish to remain in the land. This argument by SSRA does not at all disconnect this text from modern loving, committed SSR. Their admission that the male-male sex is consensual is very telling. Creative exegesis must be appealed to in order to overturn the texts very clear concern. Under no circumstances should a man lie with another man as with a woman. It is an abomination. Under the law it was deserving of capital punishment because it signaled a departure from that which is natural.

But isn't the entire OT law to be set aside because Christ fulfilled the Law? Matt 5:17, "I did not come to abolish the Law but to fulfill it?" Doesn't this mean that the entire law has come to an end? Rom 10:4, "Christ is the end of the law for all who believe." How then can we argue that we don't have to follow some OT laws, such as dietary and clothing laws, but still have to follow others, such as avoiding homosexuality? We'll deal with this difficult theological problem next week.

In conclusion, in Lev 18 and 20 SSRA first argue that the condemnation of homosexuality is in the context of avoiding idolatry in Temple worship in order to keep the nation Israel separate from the practices of other nations. We showed that the text does not tie these issues together in a cultic setting. The condemnation applies to any setting. All that Lev 18 is doing is citing the abominations of the Canaanites that Israel must avoid if they wish to remain in the land. These abominations can be traced back to Ham's looking upon his father's nakedness in Gen 9. Second, SSRA argue that the condemnation is also concerned with the preservation of male honor in a patriarchal culture. However, we showed that the main concern of the text is again to simply cite the abominations of the Canaanites that led to their expulsion of the land in order to warn the Israelites against practicing them. Further, if the chapter protects anyone's honor it is protecting the females honor. Third, the SSRA argument that the law given to Israel is no longer applicable since it is fulfilled in Christ will have to be met next week.

The lesson that stands the test of time is that God's people should separate from worldly practices because they will corrupt us and result in divine discipline. That is a principle that is true for both Israel and the Church.

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians*, p 513.

<sup>2</sup> James V. Brownson, *Bible, Gender, Sexuality*, p 271.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Brownson, p 272.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, Brownson, p 273.

<sup>5</sup> Allen P. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord*, p 343.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, Ross, p 343.

<sup>7</sup> Renald Showers, *What On Earth is God Doing?*, p 26.

<sup>8</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, Genesis 1-15*, p 200.