

March 27, 2022

“Holy Sexuality”
Leviticus 18:1-30

FCF: Confusion as to why we are here

PROPOSITION: (anchor) The Lord has called us to be a kingdom of priests.
(magnet) This has implications for every area of our lives.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

Hail Mary is Andrew Weir’s third novel. It’s the story of Ryland Grace and his voyage through outer space, confronted with an impossible task - to both solve a scientific mystery and conquer an extinction-level threat to life on planet Earth. And as though that’s not daunting enough, he has awoken from a coma and cannot remember his own name, let alone the nature of his assignment and how to complete it. Ryland Grace is struggling to know why he is there.

Many of us can identify with something of this, a confusion as to why we are here. It’s not just a problem in the wider culture. It’s a problem in the church as well. Which brings us to our text - Leviticus 18. Before we read it, let me give you a few trail markers. In vv.1-5, we have a call to heed God’s commands and not imitate the surrounding culture. In vv.6-23, we read descriptions of illicit sexual behavior. And in vv.24-30, we hear a repeated call to heed the Lord.

SCRIPTURE READING: [Leviticus 18:1-30](#)

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

On my trip to Israel a few years ago, we toured the Dead Sea area and visited the remains of the Qumran community. This is where the Essenes settled, a Jewish group around the time of Jesus’ ministry. The Essenes were offended by the corruption of the priests in Jerusalem and so settled in this wilderness. They were committed to moral purity, true community, the study and preservation of sacred texts – all good things. It’s why we have the Dead Sea Scrolls. But these self-proclaimed “sons of light” did nothing to let that light shine. They hid themselves away.

Which brings us to Leviticus 18. Up to this point, most of the laws we have examined are focused on matters directly related to the tabernacle. Chapters 18-20 turn to matters more broadly tied to taking to heart this repeated command ([READ Leviticus 19:2b](#)). Put another way, they were to live as a “kingdom of priests, a holy nation.” They were to be a priestly royalty - called to mediate the presence and blessing of the Lord to the nations around them. All of this still holds for God’s people today. That’s the theme of this chapter. The Lord has called us to holiness, to be a kingdom of priests. This has implications for every area of life - including the most personal. And that touches upon questions about sexual intimacy and homosexuality.

We’re going to approach this slowly, starting first with the deep undercurrents of the text. Second, we’ll consider the particular boundaries. And then finally, some specific concerns.

I. DEEP UNDERCURRENTS

First, the deep undercurrents. What did the people know of themselves? What had been revealed? If we had read Genesis and Exodus before Leviticus, what would be on our mind?

A) Origin

We would know something of our origin, of our beginning, of where we came from.

1. Creation

It starts with creation. God's purpose in this was born of His pleasure, the sharing of Himself and our flourishing. Which tells us something about His commands, what they are really for.

2. Exodus

We move to the exodus. After 400 years of slavery in Egypt, the Lord freed His people. (**READ Leviticus 18:1-5**) Note the emphasis - "I am the LORD your God." The law was given to guide us that we would know how to respond to His love. Which, again, tells us about His commands.

B) Mission

So we would know something of our origin. But also our mission, why we were here.

1. What it meant

We've already alluded to this. Again, put yourself there. We have been called out from the nations for the nations to be "holy." That is, we have been set apart for God's good purposes.

2. How it would be

And how would His purposes come about? By obedience to His commands (**READ Leviticus 18:5**). Following the Lord's paths brings life, the enjoyment of His favor and blessing (**Sklar**):

His commands are like the borders of his kingdom, and those who stay within those borders proclaim their allegiance to him as King and remain within the sphere of his blessing.

And as we live in that sphere, others would be attracted and drawn towards this community.

These then are some of the deep undercurrents of the text, the things we would know.

Application:

Jesus speaks to this mission in the Sermon on the Mount. After the Beatitudes where He describes the character of His followers, Jesus makes clear the effect (**READ Matthew 5:13-16**). This is an astonishing calling with obvious conditions. We are to be salt, coming alongside to hinder decay. We are to be light, living amidst to dispel darkness. But this assumes we are not falling into moral compromise or giving into what Francis Schaeffer used to call an idolatrous love of personal peace and affluence. It's an astonishing calling with obvious conditions.

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II. PARTICULAR BOUNDARIES

Which then brings us to the particular boundaries, the prohibitions of certain practices. And we get a sense of the seriousness involved as we look at the bookends in vv.1-5 and 24-30.

A) The Prohibitions

Consider the prohibitions themselves. Let me start by highlighting a few things.

1. Euphemism

You may have noticed the command to not "uncover the nakedness" was repeated several times. This is not merely voyeurism. This is an ancient Hebrew euphemism for sexual intercourse.

2. Listings

And that expresses itself in several ways in this chapter - incest, adultery, child sacrifice, homosexuality, and bestiality. This is defining the boundaries of sexual intimacy - including the mention of child sacrifice since children are often the result of human heterosexual intercourse.

B) The Rationale

But why these prohibitions? What is the rationale? What is the purpose behind it?

1. To warn

Two things. First, to warn. To warn of inevitable consequences - being cut off or vomited out of the land. To warn of the surrounding influences. Such practices were common where the people had come from (in Egypt) and were common where they were going (to Canaan). So, to warn.

2. To protect

But, secondly, to protect. To protect the most vulnerable in the community from unwelcome advances. To protect the integrity of the family unit. And, as was alluded to already, to protect individual and communal life and all its flourishing. This is what lies behind the prohibitions.

These are the necessary and particular boundaries given by the Lord to His people.

Application:

Again, there is a rationale behind the prohibitions. The Christian sexual ethic is more than “no.” There’s a vision to which we want to say “yes” and that is what leads to the “no.”

But what is that vision? From a biblical standpoint, sex is clearly intended to take place between a man and a woman who are married to one another. And that is significant. Reflecting on Paul’s words to husbands and wives in Ephesians 5, Rebecca McLaughlin writes ([READ](#)):

The point of human marriage *from the very start* was to give us a picture of Jesus’ love. This signpost to Christ is why marriage is male and female, and why husbands and wives are called to different roles. Like Christ and the church, it’s love across difference. Like Christ and the church, it’s love built on sacrifice. Like Christ and the church, it’s a flesh-uniting, life-creating, never-ending, exclusive love. Marriage is meant to point us to Christ.

That is a distinct and glorious vision well worth our saying “yes” to. Let me ask you something. How did you grow up hearing about sex? If you have children, how are you talking to them?

We are to be a kingdom of priests. This has implications in every area - including this.

III. SPECIFIC CONCERNS

Which then brings us to some specific concerns ([READ Leviticus 18:22](#)). A whole series of messages could be done on this. But I’m only going to be able to speak to this particular text.

A) The Command

Let’s start with the command that we might be clear on what is being said.

1. What is being spoken of

This is a prohibition against all male homosexual activity (which implies the female as well). It is described as an abomination, something repulsive and detestable in God’s sight - as are all the other things listed in this chapter. That becomes clear as you read the conclusion of the chapter.

2. Why it is being spoken of in this way

Why is it spoken of in this way? Because, as with these others, homosexuality is at odds with God's design. Note the allusion to Genesis 2 in the words. It brings loss to a life of flourishing.

B) The Questions

So that's the command. That said, there are questions asked that are worth answering.

1. No qualifications

Some will say there are qualifications to this prohibition. That is, this is said to be tied to pagan temple rituals and possibly non-consensual sex. Let's be clear. There is no evidence here of that.

2. Still relevant

Then there is the question of relevancy. Some will say there are many other laws in Leviticus that are no longer binding. Perhaps this is as well. If that were true, we'd have to say this about the rest of the prohibitions here. And again, this is tied to creational design. Also, this command is repeated in the New Testament in the writings of the Apostle Paul. So it is still binding on us.

I could say more. But that's a brief attempt to speak to the specific concerns.

Application:

That said, I want to press in on some personal application. And I want to do so with both truth and love. We need to own that the church has often been woefully short on the side of love here. The church should be a safe place for everyone - no matter their struggle. Think with me. The last thing we want is to force a choice, to have someone think, "I need companionship. But the church will shun me if I open up about this. So I guess I'll have to go elsewhere." Forced to choose between rotten food and starvation, a hungry man or woman will take the rotten food.

How does this happen? When we fail to listen. Based on our assumptions, we jump to our conclusions and hammer people for terms they use and doubts they raise. Which is toxic.

A few questions to think about. What is our greatest need? It is not to be straight. It is to give our lives to Jesus. And He is more than able and patient to sort out all the rest from there.

What do I do about these feelings? Feelings can deceive us on a wide range of issues, including this. Don't look to them. And don't rely on the crowd. Look to Jesus and His Word.

What about these desires that seem to run so deep? We have to say that some of our desires are sinful. And we all struggle with so many of various kinds. All of us. And, as disciples of Jesus, we are to deny those desires and to look to Him in faith, hope, and obedience.

What about my thoughts, the flashes of temptations that come? Flee them. But do not let yourself be burdened simply because they flashed unwillingly into your mind. ([Martin Luther](#)):

Temptations, of course, cannot be avoided, but because we cannot prevent the birds from flying over our heads, there is no need that we should let them nest in our hair.

We cannot help being tempted. Jesus was tempted. The issue is what we do when tempted.

I cannot stress this enough. This calling to holiness is for us all, whether we are other or same sex attracted. We would all do well to pray through the old hymn "Jesus, I My Cross Have

Taken.” And, as we heed this call to holiness, we need to be the church for each other. And we need to be the church for the sake of the world that they might see that there is another way.

We are to be a kingdom of priests. This has implications in every area - including this.

CONCLUSION:

Taking a step back, we’ve been looking at what it is God’s people are to do. But let’s think about who it is that has received this calling. There’s an old story worth telling (**READ**):

When Jesus ascended into heaven, He gathered the angels around and explained what He would do next. He said He would take the weak, sinful, frail, and filthy people that He saved and use them as living stones to build the foundation of His kingdom on earth. These would be the ones to change the world! The news was welcomed with an overwhelming silence. Then, after a long agonizing pause, the angel Gabriel broke the silence by asking, “*What’s plan B?*”

There is no plan B, for God’s plan has always been to use people like us – weak, sinful, frail, and filthy – to show the wonders of His grace, the one hope for this world. And that’s good news.

You know why? Because it means your struggles, temptations, doubts, and fears do not disqualify you from God’s purposes. That’s good news for us all. Despite our collective flaws and failures, the Lord has said we are to be the salt. We are to be the light. There is no Plan B.

He has called us to be a kingdom of priests. That has implications for every area of life.

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