

Letter to Dr Laura Schlesinger on Leviticus

From the Conference on Homosexuality in the Bible

lead by Dr Kieran O'Mahony OSA

All Hallows College, June 15th 2013.

Dear Dr. Laura,

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind them that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination... End of debate.

I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some other elements of God's Laws and how to follow them.

1. Leviticus 25:44 states that I may possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighboring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own Canadians?

2. I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

3. I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness - Lev.15: 19-24. The problem is how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.

4. When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord - Lev.1:9. The problem is, my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?

5. I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2. clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself, or should I ask the police to do it?

6. A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination - Lev. 11:10, it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this? Are there 'degrees' of abomination?

7. Lev. 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle - room here?

8. Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev. 19:27. How should they die?

9. I know from Lev. 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?

10. My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev.19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? Lev.24:10-16.

Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair, like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Lev. 20:14)

I know you have studied these things extensively and thus enjoy considerable expertise in such matters, so I am confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

Your adoring fan,

Homer Simpson-Caldwell

Commentary:

This gives you a sense of the complexities involved in trying to use Biblical texts to come to some moral stance on any issue.

Dr O'Mahony reminded us that the word 'homosexual' itself is a modern term and a full understanding of what it means today can only be reached by the use of science and psychology. Therefore to search the Bible for an understanding of a modern concept is not very helpful or constructive. Thus he chose the title for the day 'Homosexuality *and* the Bible' rather than 'Homosexuality *in* the Bible'. He stated that our moral reading of the Bible on issues such as women and slavery has changed greatly and wondered why the same hasn't happened around the issue of homosexuality. It is not a great idea to build contemporary morality on a culture bound past.

As regards the Sodom story in Genesis biblical scholars are in agreement that the story concerns the gross violation of the sacred duty of hospitality and not issues around sex and sexuality. The key to understanding the Leviticus texts is to realise that they were to establish separation from the surrounding cultures, listing what was clearly unacceptable. There is no moral rationale given for the prohibitions. The law written in Leviticus may not have been a record of how people behaved but more of an instruction on how things could be done, because it would seem difficult to put into practice. As regards the use of the term 'abomination' for these prohibitions Dr O'Mahony repeated a number of times that there are no degrees of 'abomination'. The practice of Jesus himself was to break with these prohibitions.

As regards Romans and the typical Jewish listing Paul uses, they are again prohibitions without rationale. It is not a basis on which to build a moral understanding of what we term 'homosexuality' today. Dr O'Mahony gave a list of different translations for the passages in Timothy and Corinthians and how none of the translations adequately translate the meaning of the Greek.

He particularly recommended the Pontifical Biblical Commission's book **THE BIBLE AND MORALITY, BIBLICAL ROOTS OF CHRISTIAN CONDUCT** which may be found on his website along his PowerPoint notes from the day - www.tarsus.ie