

## Break Every Chain!

On Sunday, we continued our study of the Old Testament book of Leviticus by exploring some of the odd rules found in the Holiness Code (chapters 18-20) and considering how we should decide which rules still apply.

1. Warm up question: One of the rules in the Holiness Code prohibits tattoos (Leviticus 19:28). If you have a tattoo, tell us about it – when and why did you get it? If you don't have a tattoo, but were going to get one, what would it be?
2. Some of the rules in the Holiness Code are beautiful and enduring – rules prohibiting vengeance, rules prohibiting discrimination against the poor, the deaf, and the blind, and the rule that says, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (Leviticus 19:18.) But other rules seem quaint – including rules against tattoos, against certain kinds of haircuts, against wearing clothes of blended fabrics, and against “men lying with men as with a woman.” (Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13.)
  - a. Why do you suppose so many preachers fulminate against “men lying with men,” but never preach against tattoos, haircuts, or blended fabrics?
  - b. Have you ever heard anyone try to explain which biblical rules still apply and which don't? What rationale was offered? Did it make sense to you?
3. Since the rule against “men lying with men” is such a point of controversy in churches today, Jeff invited us to focus on that as an example of how we should go about deciding which rules apply. He suggested a two-step process for analyzing biblical rules. **First, make sure you understand the context in which the original rule was spoken.**
  - a. Before we get to “men lying with men,” let's ponder a different example. Usury is flatly prohibited in the Mosaic Code. (Usury means making loans that carry an interest rate.) Ezekiel 18:10-13 says, “Suppose a man . . . lends at interest and takes a profit. Shall such a man live? He shall die! He has done abominable things; he shall surely die?” Today making loans with reasonable interest rates is considered a wonderful thing to do, especially for the poor and middle class. Why do you think it was regarded as an abomination in Bible times?
  - b. If you could afford to do so, would you have any moral qualms about making a loan to someone and charging interest? How would you justify this given the flat biblical prohibition?
4. Most of us intuitively understand that words derive their meaning from the context in which they were spoken. Therefore, words taken out of context can be badly misapplied. The Holiness Code states three different times that the purpose for the rules there was to keep the Israelites from engaging in certain behaviors popular among the Egyptians and Canaanites at the time (Leviticus 18:3, 18:24, 20:23). So

- that leads to an obvious question: What kind of homosexual practices were common in Egypt and Canaan at the time?
- a. Historians say that our modern paradigm of same-sex couples forming a household and openly living together as spouses was impossible in the pre-industrial, agriculturally-based cultures of early Egypt, Canaan, and Israel. What forces might have prevented that paradigm from developing back then?
  - b. Historians say that Egyptian and Canaanite culture did include two very visible forms of homosexual behavior: warrior rape and temple prostitution. Jeff said it would be unfair to take a prohibition against homosexuality articulated when those two paradigms were prevalent and apply it to the modern paradigm of loving, committed same-sex relationships. What do you think? Is that a persuasive argument? Why or why not?
5. Even if someone disagrees with the foregoing contextual argument, Jeff said there was a **second compelling reason why the “men shall not lie with men” command is not applicable to followers of Jesus. Jeff asserted that Christians are bound by the Spirit, not by biblical rules.** Let’s evaluate that assertion.
- a. Read Exodus 30:11-14, then Matthew 17:24-27. What do you think Jesus was trying to teach Peter in this passage? When Jesus says, “The children are free,” what does he mean?
  - b. Read Galatians 5:1-26. As best you understand, what’s the difference between being “led by the Spirit” verses being “subject to the law” (Galatians 5:18).
  - c. Read Matthew 22:34-40. When Jesus says, “On these two commandments hang all the law and prophets, what does he mean?”
  - d. Jeff suggested Jesus’ words in Matthew 22 give us a model for discerning when to comply with a biblical rule and when to disregard. Take a look at the model (next page), then talk through how you would apply the model to the following rules:
 

*Lev. 19:28: “You shall not tattoo any marks upon you.” Comply or disregard?*

*I Cor. 14:34. “Women should be silent in the churches.” Comply or disregard?*

*Lev. 11:7. “You shall not eat the pig.” Comply or disregard?*

*Prov. 23:31. “Do not look at wine when it sparkles in the cup.” Comply or disregard?*

*Lev. 18:22. “Men shall not lie with men.” Comply or disregard?*

Now that you’ve tried it, what do you like think of this model? Good or bad?

## How Christians Should Evaluate Biblical Rules?

