

Leviticus

Chapters 17:10-16

Blood And Food

18.09.2005

Leviticus 17:10 *If anyone of the house of Israel or of the aliens who reside among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood, and will cut that person off from the people.*

By now you have probably found a pattern in the preaching on Leviticus. We listen to all the awful stuff in Leviticus, then Rob tells us why we do not have to do it anymore because of Jesus. Is that not right?

But this one is a bit different. It is not different because of the very different interpretation that the Jehovah's Witnesses placed on this. For up until World War 1, the Witnesses were allowed to have transfusions. However, sometime in that war, their leadership decided that it was not OK to have a transfusion. They based it on passages such as this one, where the people of Israel were forbidden to eat animal's blood.

Instead of drawing a straw man by saying something like God never said do not eat human blood, and that there is a difference between eating and intravenous injections, we need to see that they base their reasons also on the reasons given in Leviticus 17.

Verse 11 says *For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you for making atonement for your lives on the altar; for, as life, it is the blood that makes atonement.*

From this they deduce that the life of the animal is its blood. So to eat it is wrong, and by accepting a transfusion, we take someone else's life.

However, the passage said that God had set aside the blood of the animals to be the process by which the people of Israel would be forgiven and have their relationship with God restored.

By shedding the blood, the life was taken, and God wanted to make this a very very special event, therefore they were not to treat the blood as something they could consume one day, and use to restore their holiness another. It had to remain special.

Now, fitting with the pattern, Jesus blood was shed for us, as the ultimate atonement. No more animal sacrifices are needed. Therefore animal blood is no longer required for atonement, and as the food laws were dispensed with, so was the blood law.

It all seems so simple, does it not? So stop there Rob and let us get on with the service... but wait... there is something a bit different in the New Testament. It is in Acts 15:28-29. It is part of a letter that the apostles wrote to Gentile Christians when they were considering exactly how Jewish the Gentile Christians should behave.

For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: that you abstain from food sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

Do you abstain from sexual immorality? Yes? Then you do well!

Do you abstain from food sacrificed to idols? Yes? Then you do well!

Do you abstain from the meat of strangled animals? Yes? Then you do well!

Do you abstain from blood? But what do you mean? Do you mean transfusions? Do you mean black puddings? Do you mean no sucking of cut fingers?

If all we had was that letter, then we would be in confusion. For it seems to place 4 laws above the rest as being requirements that we must follow as Gentile Christians. But we know that many times, including 1 Corinthians 6, that we are told to flee from sexual immorality. That one is of no doubt, and no different way of thinking about it is in the New Testament.

Yet when it comes to food sacrificed to idols there are several passages, including 1 Corinthians 10, that allow us the freedom to eat

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meat offered to idols as long as it does not affect our own conscience or that of others. It appears that although there is no question about whether sexual immorality is OK or not, there is a question over food sacrificed to idols.

So what about blood and strangled meat?

In Acts 15 we have the story of how the letter was written to the Gentile Christians, and a reason is given for the 4 laws to be obeyed. In verses 19-21, the apostle Peter says *Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood. For in every city, for generations past, Moses has had those who proclaim him, for he has been read aloud every sabbath in the synagogues.*

There is the reason. Do not do them because by doing them you will offend the Jews, who lived in their cities and who made up the bulk of the Christian church at that stage.

For the Jews, blood was sacrosanct. You could not eat it, whether directly, or if it had been left in the meat and not drained out.

To prevent Jewish Christians from stumbling, Gentile Christians had to abstain from eating blood.

Nowadays, we live in a society with very few Jewish Christians. However, if we lived in an area where Jewish Christians were very sensitive to eating blood, then it would be very wise for us to be careful not to make them stumble.

I personally cannot stand black pudding. Being trained as a veterinarian, medically I know not to eat meat that has not been drained of blood, because that is where the bad bacteria will grow the most. But I know I am theologically free to eat it as long as it does not make someone stumble.

This is the last sermon in this series on

Leviticus. However there is so much more in the book than what I have dealt with.

At the outset I suggested that going through Leviticus was rather like the adventurous sailors setting out to explore unknown lands beyond the horizon.

Some of Leviticus may not have been our cup of tea (and remember that tea became much more popular when ships did the exploration and were able to return with it). Yet, as you read and think about Leviticus, it forms a great basis for understanding more of the depth of what Jesus has done for us.

Keep reading your Bibles.