

PERSPECTIVE

JULY 2016

**WHAT'S  
LAW  
GOT TO DO  
WITH IT?**

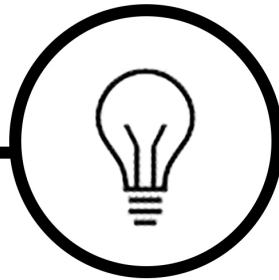
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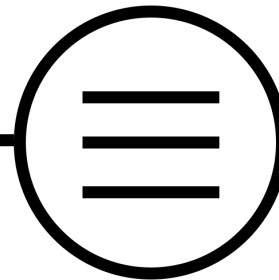


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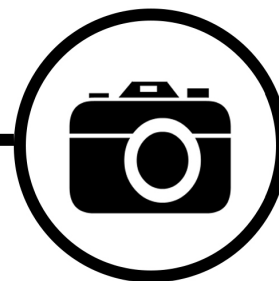
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## What's Law Got to Do With It?

*This article is adapted from a sermon originally preached on June 5, 2016. You can find the audio at [www.mvbchurch.org/resources](http://www.mvbchurch.org/resources).*

Just over a year ago, *Newsweek* came out with a cover article attacking the Christian stance on homosexuality. The author, Kurt Eichenwald, argued it stemmed from a misunderstanding of the Bible:

There are plenty of fundamentalist Christians who have no idea where references to homosexuality are in the New Testament, much less what the surrounding verses say. And so they always fall back on Leviticus...about it being an abomination for a man to lie with a man as he does with a woman. And every time they make that argument, they demonstrate that they know next to nothing about the New Testament.

After dismissing New Testament passages related to homosexuality as either misinterpreted or unreliable, Eichenwald attacks the Christian use of Leviticus. Since we are saved by faith in Christ and not the Law of Moses, he argues, Leviticus has no place in the believer's life:

In other words, Orthodox Jews who follow Mosaic Law can use Leviticus to condemn homosexuality without being hypocrites. But fundamentalist Christians must choose. They can either follow the Mosaic Law by keeping kosher, being circumcised, never wearing clothes made of two types of thread and the like. Or they can accept that finding salvation in the resurrection of Christ means Leviticus is off the table.<sup>i</sup>

This article is not about homosexuality, though I will address it and Eichenwald's critique of the Christian use of the Old Testament. But first, ask yourself this question: have you taken Leviticus off the table? Many Christians treat this book of the Bible like that Christmas present you don't want but can't give away because it might offend Aunt Sally! We know we have to keep it, but we hide it in the closet most of the year.

It shouldn't be that way. God gave us 66 books, and each of them is divinely inspired and uniquely designed to equip us for life. 10,000 Ph.Ds don't have the wisdom we

find in any one book of the Bible. We need it all, including Leviticus.

### SUMMARY OF LEVITICUS

Leviticus is the third book of the Old Testament. God gave these words to a people traveling from Egypt to the Promised Land. He gave them his Law, which included the instructions for building the Tabernacle—the tent where God would dwell with his people. In Leviticus we see how the people could actually approach God in the Tabernacle.

Chapters 1-7 detail the sacrifices offered so sins could be forgiven and God's people welcomed into God's presence. Chapters 8-10 explain that only priests can offer sacrifices. They are the mediators who represented God to man and man to God. Chapters 11-15 show how unclean the people are. In a fallen world, sin is everywhere, but God provided a way to be clean. Then, in chapter 16, we have the climax of Leviticus: God made a way to enter the Holy of Holies—the most sacred space in all the cosmos. This happened once a year on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur.

So far Leviticus has been about the tabernacle and sacrificial system. But in chapters 17-20, the chapters I want to focus on now, God turns our attention to the camp, where the people live. The LORD instructs them how to be holy in the nitty-gritty details of everyday life. These chapters are often called the Holiness Code.

### LEVITICUS TO CHRIST

These chapters in Leviticus find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. We know the blood of bulls and goats could never save anyone (Heb 10:4). They simply brought God's forgiveness for a season, not for eternity. But all those sacrifices point forward to the greater and final sacrifice, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The people of Israel couldn't approach God haphazardly. They had to pursue holiness. A saved people must live holy lives. This, of course, is true today. Having been saved by the Lord, we are to live for him.

Thus we see that Leviticus in general and the Holiness Code in particular prepares us to see how salvation by Christ produces stunning holiness in Christ. God saved a people to be holy, to be different from their neighbors. That's why he saved them. But in the end, Israel failed because only the gospel of Jesus Christ can make us holy. The Law can't do that. As Augustine famously wrote, "The law was given to accuse you; that accused you might



fear; that fearing you might beg for forgiveness, and that you might not presume upon your own strength.”

A careful study of Leviticus will lead us to rely upon the strength of Christ to make us holy. As we unpack chapters 17-20 we begin to see that, even in the Old Testament, grace came before holiness. God saved them from slavery in Egypt and then called them to holiness through the Law. But as we dig into the Law itself we find something that may surprise you, the beauty of holiness. Grace and beauty are both seen in the book of Leviticus!

### GRACE BEFORE HOLINESS

“Grace” probably isn’t the first word you think of when you hear “Leviticus.” But God’s grace is woven throughout these chapters. Remember what the Israelites were like. They had become worshippers of false gods! In Leviticus 17:1-6 God orders the people to slaughter animals only at the Tabernacle. They were not to offer sacrifices outside the camp. Why is this? Apparently they had developed habits of worshipping false gods, of making sacrifices to them. So God tells the people to repent, “they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to goat demons, after whom they whored” (Lev 17:7). God didn’t mince words! They whored after goat demons. Therefore, his instructions are very clear. The people are only to make sacrifices “in front of the tabernacle of the LORD” (Lev 17:4).

#### *Despite their sin, God loved them*

It shouldn’t surprise us to find Israel whored after false gods. They complained the moment God saved them from Egypt. They begged Aaron to make them idols the moment Moses turned his back. They were a sinful people.

Yet despite their sin, God loved them. He treated them kindly. He lavished grace on them. Chapters 18-20 of Leviticus are a patchwork quilt of various laws and penalties. But the thread binding all these laws on holiness is the grace that came before holiness. Chapter 18 begins with the reminder that the people currently under the Law are the people God previously saved:

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in

them. I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord. (Lev 18:1-5)

God saved them from Egypt. He promised Canaan. He made them his people. He gave himself to them saying again and again, “I am the LORD your God.” His rules float in an ocean of grace. We get a reminder of God’s grace at the start of chapter 19, too:

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, you shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the Lord your God. Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves any gods of cast metal: I am the Lord your God. (Lev 19:1-4)

Obviously God gives them Law here; they must honor their parents, keep the Sabbaths, and spurn idols. But did you see the grace? Verse 2, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.” The command is more than a command; it’s an invitation to share God’s character, to be like God. And God promises to deliver:

“You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them, that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them. But I have said to you, ‘You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ I am the Lord your God, who has separated you from the peoples. You shall therefore separate the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not make yourselves detestable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. You shall be holy to me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine. (Lev 20:22-26)

We see here that God had been at work in their lives and he will be at work in their lives. He’ll bring them to a land flowing with milk and honey. And why is God so gracious? We don’t know. All we know is what we read in verse 24, “I am the LORD your God” and verse 26, “You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples that you should be mine.”

The past few years my family and I have been involved in foster care. One of the things I've learned is that children who bond with every adult they meet, kids who show the same degree of affection toward everyone, are usually kids who have been hurt. They feel they belong to no one and so they try to belong to everyone. They have lacked someone to tell them, "You are mine, and I am yours."

But God tells his people they are his and he is theirs. He gives himself. Christianity is very personal, and it's very humbling. You have to come to God as a child. It doesn't mean you have to check your brain at the door, but you do have to check your pride. You've got to be willing to give up ownership of your life by saying, "Lord, I belong to you."

In Leviticus God bends down to a stiff-necked people, picks them up in his strong arms, and whispers in their ear, "I am the LORD your God, and you are mine." He floods their lives with grace before he calls them to lives of holiness. Grace before holiness.

#### *Israel failed, proving our need for the cross*

But Israel failed. They didn't obey God's Law. He eventually vomited them out of the land. All this to teach them they need more than the Law, they need the gospel. The blood of bulls and goats can't make them holy; they need the blood of Christ.

Writing after Christ died for the sins of everyone who would ever repent and believe, Peter exhorted the church to holiness. Israel failed, but the church will be victorious. Not because the church is great, but because gospel is powerful: "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy'" (1 Pet 1:14-16).

Do you see the grace? Peter is writing to God's children. They have been adopted into God's family. They belong to him. They don't need to follow their former passions. And now, having been adopted into God's family, Peter calls them to be holy, using the same language we find in Leviticus, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."

But the only way to be holy is to remember what the Lord did through Jesus Christ:

And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, knowing that you were ransomed from the

futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. (1 Pet 1:17-19)

How do we walk in the fear of the Lord? How can we live lives of holiness? By remembering we've been "ransomed...with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot." There is only one way to be holy. Run to the cross where God's grace overflows. Admit you need Jesus to take away your sins. Admit all the ways you've failed, and acknowledge Jesus never failed. He is the Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world. After dying on the cross in our place, he rose from the dead for all who would ever turn and trust in him. This is grace.

Attacking holiness without grace is like going hunting without a gun. Grace changes everything. When God adopts you and calls you by name, when he shows you the depth of his love for you, you want to obey him. Christian, the next time you struggle to obey, there is only one thing to do: revisit the cross and drink from the fountain of grace. He is your Father, he calls you his own, and he will make you holy.

#### **THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS**

Now that we've seen how God has always rooted the call to holiness in the context of his grace, we need to return to Leviticus and see what it meant to pursue holiness in ancient Israel. Chapter 18 is devoted to sexual ethics: incest, adultery, homosexual sex, and bestiality are all prohibited. "Uncovering nakedness" is the euphemism used for sexual activity: "None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the Lord" (Lev 18:6).

Take a few moments and read through chapter 18. As you do, you notice lots of laws against certain forms of sexual activity. Homosexual behavior is clearly prohibited in verse 22. But there is nothing in the text about inclination or temptation. Men and women have struggled since the Fall with same-sex attraction. That's not the issue here. The issue is giving in.

#### *The blueprint of Genesis 1 and 2*

Don't miss the big picture. In all these laws, God is promoting a vision of sexual morality that involves faithfulness in marriage. A man and a woman marrying and being faithful to each other, as long as they both shall live.

Though it's not explicit, Leviticus 18 stands in the shadow of Genesis 1 and 2 where God declares the pattern of marriage. In Leviticus 18 God critiques the world's standards by his the light of his Word. His people are to follow his pattern. Sexual immorality, intimacy between relatives, marrying more than one member of a family, incest among different ages, sex within genders, and bestiality are all outside the blueprint of Genesis 1 and 2.

### *Pointing away from false worship*

Embedded in Leviticus 18 is a law against sacrificing children to Molech, "You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God." It seems kind of strange that in the middle of a whole host of laws having to do with sexual immorality, God would throw in a law about child sacrifice.

And yet we know God didn't randomly pick out things he simply didn't want Israel to do. There is a clear method in God's commands. In all of them he is pointing Israel away from the false worship of their neighbors. From adultery to child sacrifice—these were the ways of the pagan nations. God's people were to be different.

You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God. (Lev 18:3-4)

From the days of ancient Israel to our day, going against the crowd is hard. Most of us don't want to be different; we want to fit in. But God said, in no uncertain terms, that to follow him means you can't fit in. You must stand out, and all these laws in the Holiness Code make this point.

### *It's not all about sex*

Chapter 19 has a long section about compassion and justice:

"When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the Lord your God.

"You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.

"You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. (Lev 9:9-14)

One way Israel stood out from their unbelieving neighbors was by being generous to the poor and the immigrants in their midst. They were to be honest. They were to care for the needy. But it's not just about acts of compassion. It's about the heart, too:

"You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord. (Lev 19:17-18)

If this sounds familiar it's because Jesus quoted from this passage (Mark 12:30-32). Jesus referred to love of neighbor as being the second greatest commandment.

Chapter 19 ends with various laws of separation. There are laws against breeding different kinds of animals and making clothes with more than one kind of material—verse 19. There are laws against tattoos—verse 28. There are laws against turning to wizards—verse 31. Verse 26 is the command to keep kosher.

All these laws had one thing in common: they visibly separated Israel from the false worship of their neighbors. The connection between tattoos and false worship might not be obvious, but verse 28 is. The LORD prohibits a father from prostituting his daughter—this was a religious custom of Ancient Near Eastern peoples.

### *God says, "No!"*

Israel was surrounded by cultures that had no sense of the family unit. Incestuous marriages, adultery, and even prostituting children was part of the warp and woof of daily life. But God says, "No!" Chapter 20 details the penalties for the most egregious sins listed in chapters 18 and 19. The focus is on child sacrifice and sexual sins. More often than not, the punishment is death.

“If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. If a man lies with his father’s wife, he has uncovered his father’s nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them. If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death; they have committed perversion; their blood is upon them. (Lev 20:10-12)

There can be no doubt the penalty is steep. In the Old Testament, such high-handed sins were considered capital crimes. Most twenty-first century readers find such punishments appalling. One might even wonder how I could refer to this section of Leviticus as “the beauty of holiness.” What’s so beautiful about laws against tattoos, Ouija boards, and polyester? What’s so beautiful about applying the death penalty to bedroom crimes?

Perhaps the problem is we don’t appreciate just how wicked a world that rejects God’s ways is.

#### *Pointing away from false worship*

*The Hunger Games* movies are based on novels by Suzanne Collins. She described a nation called Panem, led by a merciless dictator. In this society children are stolen from their families and forced to fight one another to the death. This kind of story is called a dystopia, the opposite of utopia, a dark, dismal, and wicked world.

Now pretend you’re an ancient Israelite, and someone just read to you Leviticus 18-20. You start thinking about a society where all of God’s law is disobeyed. What would you see when you closed your eyes?

- Travelers looking for a safe place to rest being mugged in their sleep.
- A young girl dropped off at a temple and forced into prostitution.
- The poor growing thinner and thinner, willing to work but with no one to provide even a low-paying job.
- Men pursuing daughters-in-law and grandfathers plotting to be with their granddaughters.
- People sentenced to death because a neighbor with a grudge lied under oath.
- Your grandson offered up in sacrifice to Molech because your wicked son thought it might end the drought.
- Cults forming with people who see bestiality as a way of worship.

- And, yes, though nothing could be less acceptable to say today, a world where gender differences are ignored.

This isn’t a dystopia for a Hollywood screenplay. It was the rulebook for Israel’s neighbors. God looked at it all, then he turned to his people and said:

I want you to be different. I want you to see husbands loving their wives and protecting their children. I want you to see family members as a web of financial, emotional and spiritual support and not as potential marriage partners. I want the hungry to be fed, the immigrant welcomed, and the elderly honored. I want business transactions to be entered into with integrity, and I want my Name exalted. In all of this, I want you to be separate from the world around you. I want you to know, and the world to see, I am holy.

In a nutshell, that’s what these chapters are saying. God saved them; and having saved them, he expects them to walk in his ways. God has saved Israel, and that means not walking in the customs of the nations around them.

#### WHAT TO DO WITH LEVITICUS TODAY

When you read through Leviticus 17-20 with a twentieth-century mentality, some of God’s laws sound really good—like caring for the poor. Some of these laws sound really random—like not mixing materials in fabric. And some of these laws just aren’t politically correct—like not practicing homosexuality.

But how is the modern Christian to make sense of the fact that he’s not under the Law, but under God’s grace? How are we to understand Leviticus today?

To answer that question, I need to make five statements:

#### *First, God’s people are no longer a political nation*

In the days of Moses, Israel was a nation—with God as their king and the priests as their governors. The Tabernacle was the city square where they dealt with the most important business—their sin.

Their status as a nation was visible in a number of ways. Their bodies were different—boys received circumcision. Their clothes were different—no mixed fabrics. Their diet was different—no blood and no unclean foods. All these differences, when put together, were like a passport proving their identity as the people of Israel and, thus, as the people of God.



But the cross changed that. When Christ died he presented himself as the final sacrifice. The curtain of the temple was torn into two. Entrance to the holy of holies is now for anyone, from any nation, who put his faith in Christ. From now on the passport of God's people would not be visible in the food they ate or the clothes they wore, but in the Christ they professed. Instead of being a people who made up one, political nation, we are now church of people from all nations.

Because the God's people are no longer a political nation, those laws which physically identified them as a nation are fulfilled through faith in Christ. Leviticus tells us we must be different, but not all the ways we are different still apply. Those laws that physically marked Israel off as a separate nation are no longer in effect.

We no longer observe the Sabbath day because Christ is our Sabbath rest. We no longer offer sacrifices at the temple because Christ is the final sacrifice. We no longer divide food by clean and unclean because faith makes all clean. We no longer wear different clothes because we wear the righteousness of Christ.

Since we are a people of many nations, we must warmly welcome everyone who comes through our doors. The church is the Ellis Island of humanity. We are not a male church or female church, a black church or a white church, a rich church or a poor church, an American church or an international church—we are a church of sinners redeemed by the blood of Christ. It's not that our differences don't matter. You can be proud of your history. But what matters more than the history that divides us is the gospel that unites us.

### *Second, God's people find wisdom in Leviticus*

It's very interesting that Jesus declared in Matthew 5:17, "Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." Jesus didn't do away with Leviticus; he is the end, the purpose, and the point of Leviticus. We are not under Leviticus; Leviticus points us to Christ.

At one level this is easy to grasp, Leviticus shows us our sin and our need for a Savior. Jesus obeyed Leviticus, showing what it looks like to honor the Father.

And we can learn things about honoring the Father here, too. We have to be careful since God's people are not a political nation, but we shouldn't ignore Leviticus. I like how pastor Tim Keller put it, "The coming of Christ

changed how we worship but not how we live. The moral law is an outline of God's own character—his integrity, love, and faithfulness."<sup>ii</sup>

I think the key to seeing the wisdom of Leviticus is looking at how Jesus used the Old Testament. One day a group of Pharisees tried to trip up Jesus on the topic of divorce. They quoted the Law. Jesus answered by citing Genesis 1 and 2. Jesus said this in Mark 10:6:

From the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate.

I wrote above that the levitical laws on sexual ethics are simply fleshing out the blueprint of Genesis 1-2. Here is Jesus doing the same thing! The reason adultery is wrong, Jesus says, is because it's a violation of Genesis 1-2.

All sexual sin, from adultery to homosexuality to pornography, is simply a perversion of God's good design laid out for us in Genesis 1 and 2, fleshed out in Leviticus and other Old Testament passages, and applied by Jesus and the Apostles.

We are no longer under the law, but we still keep the laws about sexual ethics since they are God's wisdom affirmed throughout the whole of Scripture. Listen to Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor."

We are living in a world that has made a 400-foot idol out of sex. It advocates for sexual liberty unconstrained by any moral standard. The Bible offers a better way—a consistent sexual ethic from Genesis to Leviticus to Jesus to Paul. There is wisdom in all of it for us today.

### *Third, God's People should only judge the church*

This is a point clearly stated by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5. He addressed a case of incest that reared its ugly head in the church, "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for man has his father's wife" (1 Cor 5:1). This is the very thing prohibited in Leviticus 18. The punishment, according to Leviticus 20, was death.



But there is no mention of capital punishment here. Of course not! The church is not a political nation with the power of the sword. Paul doesn't want this man killed, just the opposite, he wants him saved.

Paul's plan is outlined in verses 4-5, "When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord."

Handing the sinner "over to Satan" is a way of saying he should no longer be a member of the church. Sometimes we call this excommunication or church discipline. This man was to be removed from the membership and not allowed to take the Lord's Supper.

The point is clear, God's people are to be holy. Old Testament Israel had to separate themselves from the world, but the New Testament Christian is not to do that. She is called to be in the world but not of the world. In the church, however, Christians are to separate from those who claim Christ as Lord but refuse to follow his commands. That is Paul's point here, and that is how he applies the Holiness Code to the church.

I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people—not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. "Purge the evil person from among you." (1 Cor 5:9-13)

In short, it's not our job to judge those outside the church. We have no authority over those who are not part of the church. We have no expectation those outside the church will live as Christians. It's with those inside the church we are to be concerned about. Our holiness is our business. Church discipline is not for anyone who sins; it's for those who see their sin but refuse to stop.

I hope this makes you want to be part of a church. We aren't a social club. We are a gathering of God's people who need one another to pursue purity. Holiness is a

community project. Who is in your life gently, lovingly, and regularly encouraging you to live a holy life?

#### *Fourth, God's people advocate for God's values*

I often get asked why Christians should care about Christian morality being the law of the land. Should we work to see rules we find in Scripture made laws in Washington, DC or Atlanta, GA?

Here is my answer: in a society where Christians are citizens with a political voice, we should do our best to advocate for God's values, even outside the church. One way we love our neighbor is by encouraging them to embrace values we think are good for society as a whole.

- Compassion for the poor is a value we see in Leviticus. It's reaffirmed throughout the New Testament. Though Christians will disagree on the best way to show compassion for the poor, it's good for us to advocate for compassion not only in our personal lives, but at the local, state, and federal government level.
- The dignity of life is a value we see in Leviticus. Honoring the elderly and protecting children are recurring themes. So when we advocate against abortion and euthanasia, when we advocate for foster care and adoption, we are speaking out of a biblical worldview informed by Leviticus.
- The sanctity of marriage is another value we see in Leviticus. We don't expect non-Christians to hold our views, even if many have for centuries. We know many outside the church oppose our views. But because we know marriage between one man and one woman is God's good design for humanity, we talk about it, advocate for it, and vote our conscience on it.

All of our advocacy should be done in love, and with a heart to see people won not to our social views, but to our Savior, Jesus Christ. We want them to see the beauty of holiness, and that means introducing them to the Holy One himself.

#### *Fifth, God's people must always display God's Character*

This is certainly the point of The Holiness Code. They were to be holy, because God is holy. People were to look at Israel and see something of the character of God. Even if you don't like the commands yourself, you can appreciate this is what the commands were for. Their behavior said something to the world about their God.

This is a fact of Leviticus, but it's a fact of today, too. God's people are to display God's character—in Leviticus and in the Church. This is why Peter, writing to Christians in the first century, could cite Leviticus when he wrote: "You shall be holy, for I am holy." This is Leviticus language, but it's an enduring truth. Leviticus and Peter both teach that holiness must follow grace. It's not that holiness saves us, but holiness is the evidence we have been saved. I love how pastor JC Ryle put it:

The only safe evidence that we are one with Christ, and Christ in us, is holy life. They who live unto the Lord are generally the only people who die in the Lord. If would die the death of the righteous, let us not rest in slothful desires only; let us seek to live His life.<sup>iii</sup>

And that is where we end, with what we care about the most. In our churches and in our homes and in our private lives, we want our neighbors to see the character of God. Grace before holiness: have you run to the cross and found forgiveness in Christ, the final sacrifice?

The beauty of holiness: are you striving to live a holy life?

~Aaron Menikoff

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<sup>i</sup> <http://www.newsweek.com/2015/01/02/thats-not-what-bible-says.html>

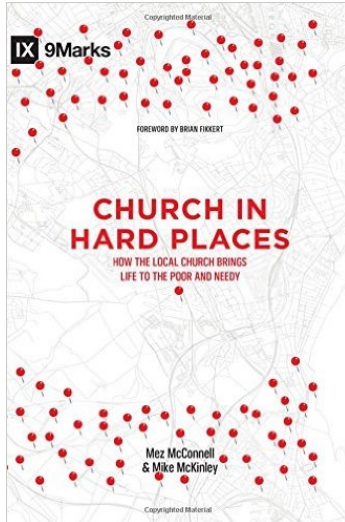
<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/making-sense-of-scriptures-inconsistency>

<sup>iii</sup> J.C. Ryle, *Holiness* (Moody, 2010), 92.

## ***Church in Hard Places: How the Local Church Brings Life to the Poor and Needy***

Written by Mez McConnell and Mike McKinley

Bookstall Price \$11



Over the course of our lives, many of us will serve God through the local church in relatively easy places. But the truth is, God may call some of us to the harder places; to the poverty stricken, unpopular areas of our own city, or maybe to a poor country that is known for having hard soil. If we sense that God may be calling us to plant or lock arms with a local church in one of these areas, we must understand what the key components are for fruitful ministry. Mez McConnell and Mike McKinley, the authors of *Church in Hard Places*, have planted churches among the poor in

the slums of Scotland and an immigrant town in Virginia. The authors explain that in order for the poor to be saved, ministry in hard places must be done through the local church, with the gospel at its core and a realistic understanding that it will not be easy. In one of the final chapters on “Mercy Ministry,” the authors argue that churches must be prepared to meet tangible needs of the poor, but cannot neglect to also feed spiritually hungry souls. In addition to a warm bowl of soup or a bag of clothes, the lost in every poor community must be offered the greatest gift of all, the saving message of Jesus Christ.

If you are not currently ministering in a difficult area, you may wonder what benefit there would be to reading this book. First, I would encourage you to read it so that you will know how to pray more effectively for churches in hard places. Our brothers and sisters in these areas are doing ministry among extremely broken people, and they need our prayers. Secondly, this book provides great insight and practical application for those who may eventually be called to serve God through a local church in a difficult area. Like Mez and Mike, may we all strive to make the message of the gospel known to all people, especially those in hard places.

– RECOMMENDED BY GRIFFIN JAMES

### Excerpts from the Book

## 1

“It’s not enough to demonstrate the love of Jesus to a community in need. It’s not enough to work hard to see social structures renewed and repaired. We must speak the actual truths of the gospel, or we only bring glory to ourselves and leave them in their sin and guilt.”

–Does Doctrine Matter? p. 67

## 2

“The church is right at the heart of God’s plan for mission. This is why, when the apostle Paul sent men like Titus and Timothy to encourage believers, he did so in order to build up the local congregations, not to establish independent parachurch organizations. In fact, pretty much all of the New Testament epistles were written (and are still applicable) to specific churches. In short, God has chosen the local church, and no other human organization, to be his kingdom representative to the world.”

–The Local Church Solution, p. 88

## 3

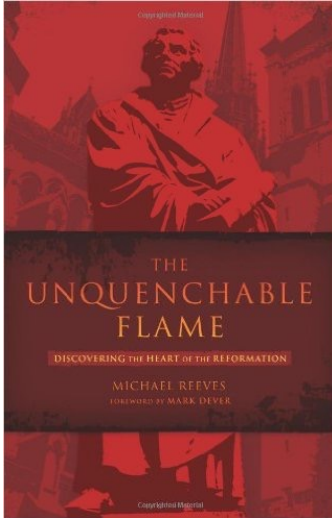
“The hard places in your world do not need you to be their savior; God has already provided them with one. God does not send his people into ministry situations because he is unable to do the work himself. Rather, he has generously chosen to bless us by giving us the opportunity to do ministry among the poor. We have the privilege of participating in the work that God is doing in the world.”

–Conclusion, p. 187-188

## *The Unquenchable Flame: Discovering the Heart of the Reformation*

Written by Michael Reeves

Bookstall Price \$14



As a little girl, I remember sitting in my 7<sup>th</sup> grade history class listening to stories about the Black Plague and the invention of the printing press, with little care for its implications for Christians today. In *The Unquenchable Flame*, Michael Reeves outlines Reformation history, using fascinating narrative about key figures. Reeves emphasizes that the Lord of history is worthy of our worship. Even in the darkest persecution, God is at work. None of it surprises him. That should lead us to worship! With this in mind, Reeves paints pictures of the men God used to bring about clearer

understanding of the gospel in the midst of a power-hungry empire. He recounts the crucial steps that took place: the printing press, which led to commoners having access to a Bible in their own language for the first time, a new understanding of going to God directly through Jesus as Mediator rather than a Catholic priest, and a new wave of students being taught God's Word and preaching in local churches.

I recommend this book because of how it reminds us of our great God, his love for his church, his enduring plan over all history, and how he uses suffering to build up his people and glorify his name in all the earth. The stories in this book of devotion to God's Word are beautiful. To read about people who were given grace to believe in the midst of such a spiritually confusing time highlights the providence of God to preserve his people and his Word. A particularly amazing story is of Thomas Cranmer, a martyr burned during Bloody Mary's reign. Cranmer, under much duress, recanted his beliefs. He later repented and was burned at the stake. On the day of his execution, "as the fires were lit, he held out the hand that had signed his recantation so that it might burn first" (138). By the grace of God, he died a humble and repentant believer of Christ. This book is full of similar stories that show how incredibly God lined up man after man, detail after detail, to bring the advancement of the gospel. He used weak, even sinful and theologically confused people, for his good purpose. More than the stories of man, this book lifts our eyes to our faithful God, King Jesus, who is sovereignly working in the church for our good and his glory.

– RECOMMENDED BY JAYNIE CHANDLER

### Excerpts from the Book

## 1

"By the 1480s printing shops were springing up across Europe. Books could now be produced in greater numbers and faster than ever before. Knowledge could now spread rapidly. It was significant that the first book to be printed was Gutenberg's Latin Bible: it was time for the age of the word."

–Going Medieval on Religion, p. 35

## 2

"Now he [Luther] saw that forgiveness is not dependent on how certain the sinner is that he has been truly contrite; forgiveness comes simply by receiving the promises of God. Thus the sinner's hope is found, not in himself, but outside himself, in God's word of promise."

–God's Volcano: Martin Luther, p. 47

## 3

"To be able to read God's words, and to see in them such good news that God saves sinners, not on the basis of how well they repent but entirely by his own grace, was like a burst of Mediterranean sunshine into the grey world of religious guilt. It was almost intoxicatingly attractive and alluring."

–Reforming the Reformation: The Puritans, p. 153





<sup>11</sup> Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

-Romans 12:11-13

In these verses, Paul is continuing to unpack the phrase with which he began this paragraph of Romans: "Let love be genuine" (12:8). Genuine love is part of what it means to present oneself as a living sacrifice to God in response to the glorious gospel of grace (12:1). We love because he first loved us (1 John 4:19).

But, genuinely loving others, even other Christians, isn't easy. It is a tiresome task that requires an incredible amount of effort and self-sacrifice. When people are hard to love (which, let's be honest, we all are), it can sap our joy and cause us to hesitate to show love to others, or worse to give up trying to love some people altogether. The Lord is well aware of our struggles to love, and he inspired Paul to write these words encouraging believers to persevere in showing genuine love to one another.

Zealous love is the focus of verse 11. Slothful love is half-hearted love at best. Genuine love is zealous and fervent. So how do we keep from sloth and kindle the kind of zeal that should mark Christian love? The answer is to remember who it is we serve. We serve the Lord. The moment we take our eyes off of the Lord and his zealous, fervent love for us, we lose any hope of maintaining the kind of zeal and fervor that mark genuine love.

Patient love is the focus of verse 12. When we genuinely love others in this fallen world, heartache and pain are inevitable, even in the church. So what are we to do when brothers and sisters break our hearts? The answer is to look to our hope, to the Lord who is making all things new. We don't retreat from a sister who is hard to love or grow impatient with a brother who repeatedly says hurtful things. Instead we persevere in love and rejoice in the hope that our patient, prayerful, loving pursuit of him or her will end in both our sanctification and theirs.

Generous love is the focus of verse 13. True love is costly. It doesn't just require our energy and our patience, it requires generosity. So where do we find the motivation to consistently open up our wallets, calendars, and homes to the saints? The answer is implied by what has come before. Just as zeal and patience come when we fix our eyes on the Lord, so does generosity. We can gladly contribute our time, talents, and treasures to the needs of others because God gave his Son for us. And we can joyfully welcome others into our homes because through Christ's death we've been welcomed into the household of God.

May we zealously, patiently, and generously persevere in genuine love by fixing our eyes on him.

– DUSTIN BUTTS

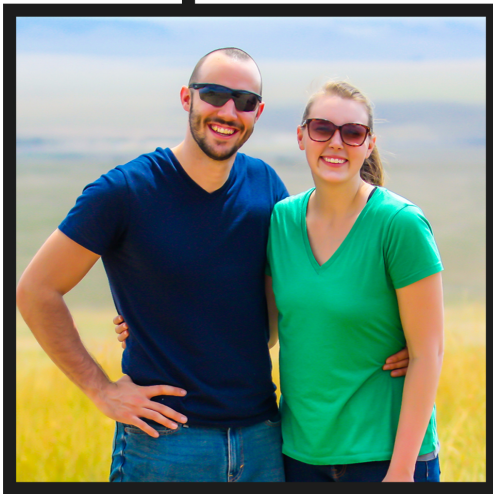
Graphic courtesy of The Verses Project. For more devotional material and memorization tools, visit [www.theversesproject.com](http://www.theversesproject.com).

# NEW MEMBERS

Alex and Erin Basurto



Karon Green



Alex and Liz Freemon



John and Holley Johnson

By this all people will know that you are my disciples,  
if you have love for one another. John 13:35





*Mount Vernon*  
BAPTIST CHURCH