

Leviticus 19:19-25

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Human beings are no strangers to categorization, and we formulate things into categories in all aspects of our lives: in the physical and social sciences, in politics of left-wing and right-wing and in religion. Christian worldview is likewise shaped by categories, such as distinguishing between secular and religious music, art, literature and movies. In the calling to holiness, the people of Israel have been instructed to ‘make a distinction between the sacred and the profane, the clean and the unclean’ (Leviticus 10vs10). Sometimes trying to understand why some things are categorized as they are in the Bible is not immediately clear. Many of these declarations are included in the ‘*Hokim*’ or the Laws, often translated as decrees or statutes. Many times these are laws that are stated with no apparent or obvious reason given. Interestingly, current Western culture seeks diversity at the same time as demanding we no longer distinguish such things as race and gender, that we appreciate diversity at the same time as denying diversity. Confusion is not a hallmark of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Following the social codes and moral laws, Leviticus now details the laws of separation. We should understand that making a distinction is not the same thing as making a judgment. We also do not need to understand why a distinction is made before it is made, but perhaps understanding will come to us through obedience. As the Israelites declared at Sinai, ‘we will do and we will understand’.

Israel is instructed against mixing different livestock, seeds and fabrics. Some commentaries seek to justify (or understand) the reasons behind these commands by appealing to ancient customs of other pagan nations. Israel was not to be like them, but to be different and thus Israel was to have no association with pagan customs. It's possible that this is the reason. Based on the Jewish exegetical tradition of PRDS we should always seek to look for practical and spiritual opportunities to learn from any part of the Word of God. For example; the command not to sow a field with two different seed types may have practical benefits. Different seed types require different environmental conditions for mature growth. Why make two seeds compete with each other for the same resources? Thus on a spiritual level (using the exegetical tradition of *Kal Va Homer* - the lighter to the heavier), we can note that if God cares for agricultural seeds enough to forbid us from making them compete with each other, how much more does God care for human seeds? Hence this verse can be used to argue against abortion.

Israel is also commanded to distinguish between slave and free in regards to sexual activity between males and females. Normally sleeping with someone else's fiancée would be classified as adultery and the death penalty would be enacted. In verse 20, we encounter a situation where the sin involves a female slave. Some sort of punishment is due for the sin, but which? The Hebrew root *bakar* carries the meaning of *enquire* and *search* and implies an enquiry is made concerning the social standing of the participants. A distinction between slave and free occurs. We may feel uncomfortable with such a distinction, as this may now clash with present-day theology, especially regarding the status of slaves. The Word of the Lord does not depend on our comfort zones and it would be hubris to think so. It should be noted that only the male incurs sin requiring a sacrifice of a lamb for forgiveness. The female incurs no blame in this situation.

Next, the Lord reminds the people of their ultimate destination, the promised land. When they arrive into Canaan, they must distinguish between the old established agriculture of the

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Canaanites and the new plantings of the people of Israel. Fruit from new plantings can only be harvested and consumed in the fifth year. The previous fourth year's fruit belongs to the Lord and should be brought to the Lord as an offering of praise. The reason for this law, like the others, is not stated, but it does reinforce the concept that the land belongs to the Lord first and foremost. Another distinction being made here is in maturity. Can we distinguish maturity not only in agriculture but also in theology and spiritual maturity? To bear good fruit we need spiritual maturity, thus we do need the ability to recognise maturity in ourselves and others, particularly if we wish to receive teaching from them. Paul urges us to pursue meat and not remain with the milk.