



E-Read



The General Conference of the New Church **Articles and Letters**

About Us

To find out more about The General Conference of the New Church, including the locations of our Churches, visit our web site at:
www.generalconference.org.uk

Contributions

If you would like to contribute a letter or article to future issues of E-Read, please send it via email to:
paul.crone@generalconference.org.uk

Please note that publication is at the discretion of our spiritual leadership.

Share E-Read

Feel free to print and share this publication.

Sign up

Sign up for E-Read and E-News email notifications at:
www.generalconference.org.uk/signup/

Local News

View local Church newsletters at:
www.generalconference.org.uk/resources/newsletters/

Home Worship

To download the latest Home Worship material please visit:
www.generalconference.org.uk/resources/home-worship/

To subscribe via email, please sign up:
www.generalconference.org.uk/hwsignup

Donations

E-Read and E-News are provided completely free of charge.

If you would like to donate to support this ongoing resource, please do so here:

<https://www.generalconference.org.uk/resources/donations>

Rise and Shine Radio Show

Revd Jack Dunion broadcasts his own online radio show every Sunday at 9am on Lomond Radio (formerly River Radio):
<https://lomondradio.co.uk/shows/rise-and-shine>

The link below allows you to catchup Rise & Shine programs:
<https://www.mixcloud.com/RevJack/>



Why I struggle to believe that Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 is the Word of the LORD

Revd Brian Talbot writes:

Summary of this article:

1. Some of the laws and rituals commanded by the LORD of the Israelites were actually not commanded but allowed. They were permitted, because he refuses to break the human traditions or beliefs, or ours.

2. Some Old Testament laws, are to be followed, some can be followed if we choose, or we can reject others, as having been abolished. (*Secrets of Heaven* §9349:2-3)
3. We need to sift what teachings given to the Israelites are relevant today and which aren't. We may come up with different answers!
4. When the Old Testament is patriarchal or misogynistic or nationalistic or violent, we can view it as reflecting the character of the Israelites, which is not the Word of God for today. (*Secrets of Heaven* §10453:3-4)
5. For those who want to believe that the laws relating to homosexual sexual acts, are not applicable today, please read on.

“You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination” (Leviticus 18:22)

“If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them.” (Leviticus 20:13)

As a heterosexual male I have no inclination to lie with other men. However, I cannot impose these verses on those of a homosexual inclination. As Swedenborg says, “the deeper contents of the Old Testament Word so rarely disclose themselves in the literal meaning”. I think of “the true outward sense” or “the genuine external sense”, or the “face and hands” of the Word ¹ as being the laws that are applicable for the twenty first century. Without the inner meaning of the Bible “scarcely anything is intelligible”. “For the Word in its literal sense seems to a worldly man, whose mind is not raised above the sensual sphere, to be so simple, that hardly anything could be simpler. But still Divine truth, such as is in the heavens, and from which angels derive their wisdom, lies concealed therein as in its sanctuary.” ²

I would suggest the Old Testament is patriarchal, in other words, men are in charge and control all situations, and women have to do as they're told, or are victims of this system. For example,

- If an unmarried woman is raped, she has to marry her attacker! She doesn't get a choice. There is no equivalent law for a man seduced by a woman! (Deuteronomy 22:28-29)
- Childless widows had to marry one of their brothers-in-law. (Deuteronomy 25:5-10) There was no equivalent for childless widowers!
- That a husband can annul his wife's vow to the LORD, as a father can do for a daughter. (Numbers 30) Wives cannot annul their husbands' vows, nor mothers their sons' vows!
- If a jealous husband believes that his wife “under his authority” has been unfaithful, he can put her through ‘the ordeal of the bitter water’. (Numbers 5) It reminds me of the trials used in the medieval period to determine whether a woman is a witch. The

¹ *Secrets of Heaven* §3373:2; cf. *Spiritual Experiences* §4759ae; *Secrets of Heaven* §10461; *Apocalypse Explained* §778:6; *Sacred Scripture* 51; 55; *True Christianity* §229

² *Secrets of Heaven* §6438; *Apocalypse Explained* §1067:3

odds are stacked against the woman. You guessed it! There is no equivalent for a wife suspecting her husband of adultery!

- The Old Testament applies the death penalty to women who engage in premarital sex, but it doesn't penalise men who do the same. (see Deuteronomy 22:13-21)
- Male slaves are freed after 6 years, while female slaves are never freed (Leviticus 27:1-8)
- Females "are not allowed to inherit property if they have a living male sibling. (see Deuteronomy 21:15-17)
- Men are granted the exclusive right to initiate divorce. (see Deuteronomy 22:13-29; 24:1-4)
- Men who disappoint or fail at something are called women. (Isaiah 19:16; Jeremiah 50:37; 51:30) The same thing happens on sports fields around the world, whether amateur or professional!
- Just because the Leviticus verses stand within verses about not sleeping consensually or non-consensually with females in the family, which I do take as true in any situation, doesn't mean I have to take these couple of verses as being literally true, unless these verses actually talk about raping men! In examining Exodus 20-23 Swedenborg identifies laws that have been abrogated, laws that we can obey if we want, and those that we have to obey. (*Secrets of Heaven* §9349:3-4) As I said earlier I obey Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13, but I don't believe it is the Word of God for homosexuals.

It needs to be pointed out that apparent male dominance symbolises that we should allow out mind and principles to dictate how we should live.³ But there are times when we find our heart needs to dictate what our mind think. You could say this is sometimes a more celestial or heavenly approach to life.⁴ There are celestial or heavenly males who think and act from the heart, and females who think from their minds.⁵ Could their deeper levels of masculinity and femininity have been opened up?⁶

If men have all the power, half of the population is not contributing as much as it might. If men possess women as property (Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21) or commodities, such as a father could sell his daughter into slavery (Exodus 21:7; Nehemiah 5:5) A widow's children might be sold into slavery to pay their late father's debts. (2 Kings 4:1) During war men were slain and women, and sometimes children, became concubines or sex slaves. (Deuteronomy 20:14; 21:10-14)

Some might suggest that the following examples are toxic masculinity! Jacob wanted to marry Rachel but was given her older sister Leah, whom he hated or didn't love, instead, but nevertheless he slept with her and had children by her. (Genesis 29:23, 29, 31-35) David abused and manipulated Bathsheba by sending her husband Uriah to his death and

³ cf. *Secrets of Heaven* §§266; 568:2; *Love in Marriage* §91

⁴ *Secrets of Heaven* §§ 4434:9; 4823:2; 8337:1; 9942:3

⁵ e.g. *Secrets of Heaven* §§ 2069:5; 2088:2

⁶ cf. *Love in Marriage* §32; *Secrets of Heaven* §1495:2; *Apocalypse Explained* §918:11; *Divine Love and Wisdom* §§237-238; 248; 345; *Divine Providence* §§34e; 37; *Spiritual Experiences* §5851

taking her as a wife. (2 Samuel 11) Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar but refused to marry her, and was not punished by his father, David. His brother Absalom murdered Amnon, without restoring his sister's dignity and spiritual wholeness. (2 Samuel 13) (What Should Christians Know about Toxic Masculinity?) The sons of Eli the priest were "scoundrels", who stole meat from worshippers, treated the sacrifices "with contempt" and raped the serving women. (1 Samuel 2:12-17, 22-25)

If on the highly improbable scenario of men banging on my door and wanting to sexually assault my guests, angelic or not, I'm not going to send out my daughters, as Lot did. (Genesis 19) (There is the problem of me not having daughters!) If I come home from a victory against the Ammonites, I am not going to make a foolish vow about killing the first person who comes out of my house like Jephthah, who ends up killing his only daughter. (Judges 11)

In the New Church we rarely take the literal sense or surface meaning of the Bible as being applicable to the twenty first century. Yes, we believe in the Ten Commandments, the Two Great Commandments, the Golden Rule, loving our enemies, the Beatitudes, and so on.

My Biblical heroes are a bit of a morally dubious lot. Moses married an Egyptian, Samson married a Philistine. Samson murdered thirty Philistines for their clothes and festal clothes. (He was provoked!) He also slept with a prostitute. "Among his [Solomon's] wives were seven hundred princesses and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart." (1 Kings 11:3) I'm beginning to feel like a 'fault-finder' or Biblical troll. I'd rather spend more time looking for a positive message, but sometimes for that we have to go beyond the surface meaning of the Bible.

According to Swedenborg, the Israelites represented a degenerate, degraded and superficial Ancient Church,⁷ who had no interest in spirituality, or life after death, or the Lord's heavenly kingdom. They were not interested in "deep concepts" like being "reborn in order to enter life"; "discarding our old self, or self-love and materialism "with their cravings"; putting "on a new self, or love for our neighbour and God" and that "those who have been reborn have heaven inside them". With the Israelites "all Divine truth perished". They were obsessed with rituals so much, they believed, for example, that ritual washings did cleanse their souls. They "wiped out the truth they possessed from the ancients. In the process they destroyed any trace of religion. Their "hearts absolutely opposed neighbourly love" or charity. They "were prone to idolatry", and the church did not exist amongst these polygamists. They "were immersed in the cravings of self-love and materialism and in resulting falsities". They were polytheists who believed that Yahweh was more powerful than other gods. They "had been completely vastated

⁷ "Israel" symbolises "the spiritual church" or an approach to life that is mind-orientated. (AC 710; 1025:9; 3969:8) If Jacob is "the truth of the natural" (AC 3305:1) or "the external features" of the spiritual church, (AC 1025:9; 1232; 2781:5; 3441:2; 3654:4; 5581; 7090:2; 7091:1; AE 340:22) or "the external Ancient Church". (AC 4438; 4439; 4442:1; 4513; 4514)

internally, or else they would have rendered holy things profane”. They were not interested in the Two Great Commandments. Since they were so depraved they were “allowed” or permitted to ethnically cleanse Canaan, ⁸ or practise polygamy. ⁹

There are very detailed lists of things which the Israelites could eat and that which they couldn't: the kosher food laws. Thankfully Jesus said we Christians could eat anything! (Mark 7:19) Circumcision did not accomplish anything. Circumcision was unknown in the Most Ancient Church. ¹⁰ Sacrifices were permitted or allowed. They were commanded but not commanded. They were permitted to prevent the sacrifice of children. They were unacceptable in the heavens, ¹¹ except when understood symbolically.

I think we New-Church people need to be far more careful about what we take in the literal sense as applying to us today. The Jews represent us when we are so focussed on the rituals without what they symbolise. They were so superficial and reductionist that they turned everything holy into idolatry. This resulted in them making God out to be a punishing deity and in being afraid of him. With the Israelites the Word was separated “from the internal sense”. ¹² But like the Israelites of the Bible we can be cruel. ¹³ Like Jews we can be avaricious. We can crucify the Lord like the Jews. Denying the divinity of the Lord, made some Moravian spirits like Jews. ¹⁴ Those who are obsessed with rites and rituals without their inner meaning are like the Jews of the Old Testament, ¹⁵ “who explain the Word to suit their own loves”, and cannot appreciate higher, spiritual truths. ¹⁶

Another problem to get our heads around is that of examples of commandments, which were given, but not given. We have already mentioned that polygamy was a permission. Swedenborg teaches that “many” of the “Divine commands” to the Israelites were “of leave and permission”. (*Apocalypse Explained* §423) Circumcision is another example of a law that was commanded but not really commanded. Swedenborg explains that the LORD cannot break the traditions that people are brought up with, but bends them. ¹⁷ There are laws or rituals that the LORD wants or desires, those he accepts and those he tolerates. ¹⁸ In other words, just because a law or a ritual exists, doesn't mean we have to follow it. We need to remember that the Word would have been completely different, if it had been written in a different culture. (AC 2520:5; 10453; 10461) Study and discernment are

⁸ *Secrets of Heaven* 2722:4; 4904:2; AE 948:3; AC 3147:3; 4439e; 4644:4; 4904:2; 4552:3; 4837:2; 4847:1; 8788; 6592e; 9320:2

⁹ *Secrets of Heaven* 3246; 4387:2; 8809; *Love in Marriage* 340; 348; 465; 474

¹⁰ *Secrets of Heaven* §§2634; 4462:2-3

¹¹ Jeremiah 7:21-23; *Secrets of Heaven* §§1241e; 2180:6; 2818:2; 10079:2; *Apocalypse Explained* §391:32

¹² *Apocalypse Explained* §376:21e; *Secrets of Heaven* §§4288:4; 6071; 79373

¹³ AC 5057; cf. SE 2615; 2621-2624

¹⁴ LJ(P) 17; 229; 310

¹⁵ AC 1200; AE 376:21; cf. AC 1201:1; 3708:21e; 10040:2

¹⁶ AC 9391:12e; 9259e

¹⁷ *Secrets of Heaven* §2053:2; *Spiritual Experiences* §1236; 2393. For angels, compare *Secrets of Heaven* §§5992; 6205

¹⁸ *Secrets of Heaven* §1384e; 9940e; *Spiritual Experiences* §§2000; 2296

required. We need to be wary of supporting anti-homosexual beliefs or sentiments by appealing to the Israelite “disposition” or “character” rather than the written Word of God and the living, non-written one.

If New-Church people want to believe that Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are applicable today, then great. If they want to believe that it is a commandment for all time from our loving LORD, then wonderful. I believe that these verses apply to me as a heterosexual male. I don't believe that they apply to homosexuals, especially if non-consensual sex is involved. I believe that the ‘macho’ culture of the Israelites, is behind the hatred and victimisation of women in Old Testament laws, and ultimately is opposed to men who are not heterosexual. We New-Church people can interpret such laws as applying to us when we need our minds to dictate to our hearts, but in life there are times when our hearts have to dictate to our minds.