

DISPUTED ISSUES IN CHRISTIAN HISTORY: THEIR SCRIPTURAL AND HISTORICAL/CULTURAL SETTINGS

Harold Remus (Nov. 2011)

1. Slavery

- *Old Testament*: Exod. 21.1-11: regulations for Israelites who buy and own male Hebrew slaves and for selling one's daughter as a slave. Lev. 25.39-46: you are to treat other Israelites who sell themselves in servitude to you differently than you treat non-Israelites; these, along with their children, are your property and may be treated "as slaves."
- *New Testament*: Jesus' parables: slavery assumed, not condemned. *Paul*: 1 Cor.; Gal.: slaves as members of churches; 1 Cor. 7.21, don't be concerned about being a slave (with NRSV footnote: gain your freedom if you can; Philemon: Paul, following Roman law, returns a slave to the owner; he subtly urges the owner to free the slave--so he can serve Paul in prison.
- *New Testament*: visions of a new, distinction-less community: Gal. 3.28 (also 1 Cor. 12.13): neither Jew/Greek, slave/free, male/female. Mark 10.35-45, serving instead of dominating. John 15.15: Jesus' followers as "friends," not "slaves."
- Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery Sabbath War and Women: Case Issues in Biblical Interpretation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press 1983): Documented case studies of mid-nineteenth-century Americans fiercely defending and opposing slavery on the basis of the Bible.
- Ann Douglas, Introduction to Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life among the Lowly* (1852; New York et al.: Penguin Books, 1981), p. 9: "By June [of 1852, three months after publication it was selling ten thousand copies a week; men and steam presses worked twenty-four hours a day to meet the demand. By October American sales alone were one hundred and fifty thousand copies; by the year's end it was apparent that the little lady from Maine had written the best-seller of the nineteenth century." The book depicted slaves as people, rather than as chattel, and changed many minds about slavery and its injustice.

2. The Place and Role of Women in Church and Society

- *Women as modest, subordinate, submissive*: 1 Tim. 2.9: dress modestly, no braided hair, no gold, pearls, expensive clothes. 1 Pet 3.3-6: no braids, gold jewelry; follow Sarah's example, who "obeyed Abraham and called him lord." 1 Pet. 3.1 Eph. 5.22, Col. 3.18: wives, submit to your husbands.
- *Women as restricted in leadership or subordinate/silent in the church*: 1 Cor. 11.1-16: women may speak in a Christian assembly if they wear a covering on their heads. 1 Cor. 14.33b-35: "women should be silent in church. For they are not permitted to speak, but should be subordinate." Ask any questions of their husbands at home. "For it is shameful for a woman

to speak in church.” 1 Tim. 2.11-15: women, “learn in silence with full submission”; no woman/wife is “to teach or to have authority over a man [or: her husband]. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.” See William O. Walker, “The ‘Theology of Woman’s Place’ and the ‘Paulinist’ Tradition.” In Walker, ed., *In Honor of Guy Harvey Ranson*, pp. 131-52 (Trinity University Studies in Religion, vol. 11; San Antonio: Department of Religion, Trinity University, 1982).

- *Women as equal and/or as leaders in the church*: Gal. 3.28: “neither male nor female.” Rom. 16: Paul’s female co-workers are equal with his male co-workers, or more so. 16.7: Junia an apostle (see NRSV).

3. Eating, Clothing, Farming, and Sex

- Lev. 11.10: no shell-fish. Mark 7.1-19: all foods are clean. Lev. 19.19: don’t wear clothes made of two different fabrics, or sow a field with two different kinds of seed, or breed two animals of different species (mules?). Lev. 15.19-24: menstruating women are “unclean.” Lev. 18.19: no intercourse during menstruation.

4. Divorce

- Mark 10.10-12: divorcing and re-marrying is adultery; similarly Luke 16.18. Matt. 5.31-32, 19.9: divorcing and re-marrying except for unchastity is adultery. 1 Cor. 7: divorce initiated by a believer is wrong (7.10-15); celibacy is better than marriage (7.25-38); a widow is free to remarry but celibacy is better (7.39-40). Erwin Buck, *Studies on Homosexuality and the Church* (Winnipeg: Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada, 2001), p. 31, quoting a pronouncement by the Augustana Lutheran Church, 1925: “The Synod steadfastly adheres to the doctrine in the Bible . . . that marriage cannot be annulled or dissolved except by death, adultery, or . . . desertion” and “cautions its pastors against officiating at the marriage of divorced persons, except in the case of the innocent party, when legal divorce has been granted on the ground of adultery . . . or desertion. . . .” In practice this meant that “adulteries” were sometimes staged and a photograph of the “adulterous” couple in a motel/hotel bed was produced as evidence in court in order to obtain a divorce. Today: Divorced persons and divorced and remarried couples are common in our churches.

5. Banking: Lending at Interest

- Taking of interest from a fellow Israelite forbidden (Exod. 22.25; Lev. 25.36-37; Deut. 23.19); interest is allowed on loans to a foreigner (Deut. 23.20). Jer. 15.10: Though Jeremiah has not loaned or borrowed anything (that is, has not sinned in this way), yet as a form of slander his countrymen charge him with doing so. Ezek. 18.5-13: Taking of interest from anyone is one of the sins that will lead to death (along with idolatry, improper behaviour toward another man’s wife, approaching a woman during her period, robbery, withholding of bread and clothing from the poor—all these are designated as “abominable things” 18.12, Heb.: *toevoth*,

plural of Heb. *toevah*); similarly Ezek. 18.15-18; 22.6-12. Historically, taking of interest was forbidden, first to clergy by church councils beginning in 314 C.E., and then to all Christians by subsequent councils, on into the Middle Ages, with Luther and other reformers except for Calvin also condemning it. Christians now almost universally ignore the biblical prohibitions.

6. The Nature and Origin of the Universe and of Humans

- Gen. 1: During six 24-hour days God creates earth/heavens; light; a solid sky;* land/seas; vegetation; stars, sun, moon (“lights”/“lamps”); animals; humans. // Copernicus (1473-1543) and Galileo (1564-1642): the earth revolves around the sun rather than the reverse.
 *1.6-8, **Hebrew**: יַרְקֵי / *raqia*. **Greek trans.**: *stereōma*. **Vulgate**: “firmamentum.” **Luther Bibel** (1907 & 1973 eds.), **Zürcher Bibel** (1954): “eine Feste.” **KJV, The Complete Bible: An American Translation** (1923, 1927, 1939, 1948), **Gerhard von Rad, Das erste Buch Mose** (1953), **RSV**: “firmament.” **NRSV, Today’s English Version** (1976), **Contemporary English Version** (1995): “dome.” **NIV, New World Translation** (rev. ed. 1970), **Tanakh** (1985), **Everett Fox, The Five Books of Moses** (1995), E. A. Speiser, **Genesis (Anchor Bible, 1964)**: “expanse.” **Brown-Driver-Briggs, A Hebrew-English Lexikon of the Old Testament** (1955), s.v. יַרְקֵי (p. 956): “extended surface, (solid) expanse (as if beaten out; cf. Jb 37.16),” from יַרְקֵי / *raqa*, “beat, stamp, beat out, spread out” (as of gold or silver, Exod. 39.3, Num. 17.4, Isa. 40.19, Jer. 10.9). **Koehler-Baumgartner, Lexikon in Veteris Testamenti Libros** (1958): “the beaten-out, (iron-) plate, firmament, the solid vault of heaven.”
- Archbishop James Ussher, *Annales Veteris et Novi Testamenti* (1650-54), produced the dates sometimes printed in the margins of KJV Bibles: creation 4004 B.C. // Paleontology (fossils), geology, astronomy: the earth is millions/billions of years old.
- Gen. 1: creation of humans as the crown of creation in a single day of 24 hours. Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection: Or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859): humans descended from antecedent forms of life over long periods of time. (Herbert Spencer: “survival of the fittest.”)
- See Claus Westermann, *The Genesis Accounts of Creation*, trans. with an introduction by Norman E. Wagner (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964); Bert James Lowenberg, *Darwinism Comes to America* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969).

FROM THE INTERNET:

Dear Dr. Laura :

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's law. I have learned a great deal from you, and I try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind him that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate.

I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some of the other specific laws and how to best follow them..

- When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord (Lev. 1:9). The problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. How should I deal with this?
- I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as it suggests in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?
- I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness (Lev. 15:19-24). The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offense.
- Lev. 25:44 states that I may buy slaves from the nations that are around us. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans but not Canadians. Can you clarify?
- I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself?
- A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination (Lev. 11:10), it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this?
- Lev. 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?
- Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev.19:27. How should they die?
- I know from Lev. 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?
- My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev. 19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? (Lev.24:10-16) Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Lev. 20:14)