

Basic Objections

While some objections to the faith focus on broader aspects of Christian belief, others go beyond the basics and home in on moral application. In other words, people usually get beyond questioning what Christianity *is* and start questioning what it *does*. In fact, conversations often start with the moral implications of Christian belief. This is partly because pragmatism is so prevalent in our culture. Most people don't care to know the *why*; they just want to get straight to the *what*.

In fact, I cannot remember the last time I had a conversation with a skeptic that fell exclusively into the classical apologetics category. Even at the highest level, atheists like Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and Christopher Hitchens argue more against the morality of Christianity than against its theology. The "New Atheism" is as much an attack on Christians and Christian ethics as it is an attack on Christian theology.

Today's atheists are greeted with rock-star status. Their books are far from being obscure titles assigned to graduate students in philosophy and apologetics, or relegated to the dustiest shelves of academic libraries; they have instead dominated best-sellers' lists.

As a result, we must be prepared to go beyond the questions that classical apologists faced in the past and to go where the rubber meets the road. Of course, classical questions are not somehow inferior or irrelevant. Most of us, however, will not be dealing with high-level philosophical thinkers and scholars. We will more likely find ourselves face-to-face with the person who wants to know why Christians have a problem with abortion or same-sex "marriage." And this will require us to be familiar with the moral law.

"WHY DO YOU KEEP SOME LAWS BUT NOT OTHERS?"

The best-known verse in the Bible used to be John 3:16. Rollen Stewart, the ubiquitous, "Rainbow Man" who wore John 3:16 signs at sporting events across the country "says he drove about 60,000 miles a year to attend events, and he got more TV face time than the network announcers who sometimes left him tickets."¹ More recently, University of Florida quarterback Tim Tebow championed the verse. In the same year that Tebow won the Heisman Trophy and led the Gators to a National Championship, he also revitalized the relationship between John 3:16 and the sports world.

However, as popular as John 3:16 was in the 1970s and '80s with the Rainbow Man, or the 2000s with Tim Tebow, it is still not the best-known verse in the conscience of the American culture. That distinction belongs to Matthew 7:1. Any Christian who has been in a discussion with an unbeliever about a controversial moral issue has more than likely been hit with the ever-so-popular "judge not lest ye be

judged” line. Never mind that Jesus goes on to teach believers *how* to judge in verse 5, then again in verses 15–20. That is absolutely lost on those who rely on this “clobber verse.”²

The good thing about Matthew 7:1 is that most Christians know how to deal with it. Or at least they catch on if you just walk them through the rest of the passage. There is, however, another verse that has grown in popularity in the world of cultural apologetics. Like Matthew 7:1, people use this verse in spite of the fact that they don’t know where it is in the Bible. But unlike Matthew 7:1, people use this only as a passing reference to what “the Bible says somewhere.” Moreover, this verse is not even a single verse; there are two of them! I know it sounds confusing, so allow me to explain.

When “don’t judge me” is not enough, and it’s time to pull out the big guns, opponents of biblical morality will often point to what they have been told is the hermeneutical inconsistency of adhering to part of the Old Testament law and leaving the rest. The “verse” that has come to represent this idea is not a verse at all; it is a sort of paraphrase that goes something like “shellfish is an abomination.” Of course, this phrase does not occur in the Bible, but it is a reference to Leviticus 11:9–12 (cf. Deut. 14:10). And since it is difficult to deal with a verse that is not a verse, I’ll handle this idea by using another verse that is an actual verse (and it’s used almost as frequently): “You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard” (Lev. 19:27).

Again, people who refer to this verse rarely know where it is or what it actually says. However, our desire to be gracious with people requires us to go beyond nitpicking their inability

to quote texts that we, quite frankly, couldn’t quote ourselves. We know what they’re talking about, and we should be prepared to respond. This is especially true when their argument has traction in the broader culture.

THE ARGUMENT GOES MAINSTREAM

In the second season of the TV show *The West Wing*, President Bartlet, played by Martin Sheen, obliterates a famous radio talk show host who insists on calling homosexuality an abomination. The woman (based on radio’s Dr. Laura) stands there speechless while the president exposes her hypocrisy in what many on the left view as a classic example of prohomosexual “clobber passages” at work:

“I’m interested in selling my youngest daughter into slavery as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. She’s a Georgetown sophomore, speaks fluent Italian, always cleaned the table when it was her turn. What would a good price for her be?”

“My chief of staff, Leo McGarry, insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly says he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself or is it okay to call the police?”

“Here’s one that’s really important cause we’ve got a lot of sports fans in this town: touching the skin of a dead pig makes one unclean (Lev. 11:7). If they promise to wear gloves can the Washington Redskins still play football? Can Notre Dame? Can West Point?”

“Does the whole town really have to be together to stone my brother, John, for planting different crops side by

side? Can I burn my mother in a small family gathering for wearing garments made from two different threads?

“Think about those questions, would you?”³

The episode was a hit. Homosexual groups lauded its brilliance. Reliance on the “why do you pick and choose” attack gained traction.

Later, in 2008, California was considering controversial Proposition 8, which eventually passed, banning same-sex unions. Among the many efforts to rally people in favor of homosexual unions, several Hollywood stars, led by Jack Black, performed *Prop 8: The Musical*. In this short satirical piece, Black played the part of Jesus, and, once again, the “hypocritical use of the Levitical law” was the primary target:

JESUS, *spoken*. Well the Bible says a lot of things, y’know.

EVERYONE, *shouts*. Jesus Christ!

JESUS, *spoken*. Hey, how’s it goin’?

LEAD PROP 8 PROPONENT, *spoken*. Jesus, doesn’t the Bible say these people are an abomination?

BLACK PROP 8 PROPONENT, *spoken*. Obamanation?

JESUS, *spoken*. Yeah but you know it says the exact same thing about this shrimp cocktail . . .

PROP 8 PROPONENTS, *spoken*. Mmm! Shrimp cocktail!

JESUS, *spoken*. Leviticus says shellfish is an abomination.

BLACK PROP 8 PROPONENT, *spoken*. Obamanation!

WOMAN WEARING PEACE SIGN, *spoken*. What else does the Bible say, Jesus?

JESUS, *spoken*. The Bible says a lot of interesting things.

JESUS, *sung*. Like you can stone your wife or sell your daughter into slavery.

LEAD PROP 8 PROPONENT, *spoken*. Well, we ignore those verses.

JESUS, *sung*. Well then friend it seems to me you pick and choose.

PROP 8 PROPONENTS, *sung*. We pick and choose!

JESUS, *sung*. Well, please choose love instead of hate, besides your nation was built on separation of church and state!

JESUS, *spoken*. See you later sinners!

Examples like this are myriad. I could list dozens. However, I share these two because of how strategic they are. The first was an episode in a long-running hit television series (the show ran for seven seasons). The second was an ad campaign in what was arguably the most strategic legal battle in the history of the fight for marriage. These are far from obscure cultural references. Nor were they debates in academic or political arenas. This is ground zero—the front lines in the battle in the marketplace of ideas. This is the perceived seat of power in the battle for hearts and minds. As such, there are at least three advantages to addressing these objections.

First, the fact that these arguments against biblical truth were so public demonstrates the amount of credence people gave them. Television shows are fiercely competitive and woe-fully unoriginal. Before something makes it to the air, it has usually been tested, studied, polled, evaluated, and reevaluated in an effort to score points with the target audience. The goal is not to alienate but to captivate the audience. Hence, we know that these are arguments in which people believe.

Second, the public and consistent nature of these attacks means that they work. The fact that Jack Black’s character

uses some of the exact same arguments that scored points on *The West Wing* eight years earlier indicates that these arguments are considered effective. Moreover, the latter was used in an effort to influence a public vote. And if the arguments work, they will show up in other arenas, and eventually they will become common fare among those striving to score points in this and other debates.

Third, if we can answer these objections, we will be prepared to deal with one of the most common obstacles facing modern apologists. Like a challenger who takes the champ's best shot early in a heavyweight fight and keeps coming forward, those who are able to withstand what the culture sees as a knockout blow to Bible-thumping Christians, and do so with poise and relative ease, will cause their assailants to pause and think twice before they throw another punch.

However, many Christians are stumped by this approach. The fact of the matter is that most Christians think the same thing when *they* read the Old Testament! We usually don't stress about it because we know we "are not under law but under grace" (Rom. 6:14). However, when we are dealing with issues like incest or bestiality, we find ourselves at a loss when people use these verses against us. On the one hand, we *know* such things are wrong and that the Bible makes that clear. On the other hand, we feel trapped because we also know (1) we are not under law, and (2) that's the only defense we have concerning the wrongness or sinfulness of these actions. It appears we're missing a step . . . or two.

But before we look at those missing steps, let's examine just why understanding the nature of the biblical law is so

important to expository apologetics. Most obviously, this is important because expository apologetics is based on using Scripture as our primary and authoritative source for answering objections. And today that most certainly means responding to moral and ethical issues. Hence, it is inevitable that we will find ourselves referencing some of the verses in question.

Additionally, we must be aware that many people will view the mere fact that we are using the Bible at all as questionable. In other words, we are assuming that the Bible is the authority in a debate about whether such an authority exists. Some suggest that the best course of action is to abandon the Bible, at least for a time, until we can establish common ground. I say this is disastrous. Doing so would be an admission of defeat. Our interlocutors are allowed to keep their presuppositions regardless of where the conversation goes. If we abandon ours, we have conceded the most crucial point. We must do no such thing!

Instead of laying down our arms, we must show others that we are as armed as they are. Moreover, we must show them that their weapons look like ours in some very striking ways. We must show them that they, in fact, are using the very Bible they demand we lay down. And one way we can do this is by educating them in the law of God. Now back to those missing steps.

THREE TYPES OF LAW

We are indeed missing a few steps in the "you're picking and choosing" debate. First, we are missing a clear understanding of what is referred to commonly as the *threefold division of the*

law. This is the idea that there is not just one type of law in the Old Testament; there are three. Nor is this something forced on the text. As you will see, these three types of law are obvious to anyone who will look at the Bible honestly and carefully.

Second, we are missing a basic grasp of God's law; we simply don't know it. Because we have been so steeped in ideas that undermine the concept of the perpetuity of the moral law, we have neglected to treat those laws as matters of first importance. Instead, we have opted for pragmatism and emotionalism. We soak in sermons that give us "Five Ways to Avoid Temptation," but haven't a clue as to what constitutes sin. Moreover, we shun such doctrinal/theological subjects and consider them impractical and downright boring. The result is a brand of Christianity that looks almost nothing like that practiced by our forefathers.

For instance, the earliest Christian confessions and catechisms emphasized at least three things: (1) the basic meta-narrative of creation-fall-redemption-consummation; (2) the Ten Commandments; and (3) the Lord's Prayer. In fact, two hundred years ago, one would have been hard-pressed to find someone running the streets of Europe or America who was unaware of these basic ideas. Today it's a different story.

Third, we are missing the hermeneutic that teaches that, as believers who are *not* under the law, we are to use the law in a lawful way, since "we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully" (1 Tim. 1:8). Again, this is of utmost importance if we believe, as I have argued, that the law is a useful and necessary tool in cultural apologetics. How shall we engage a cul-

ture that rejects the law of God if we don't believe in it ourselves, or know how to use it?

The Moral Law

The first and most significant kind of law is the transcendent, unchanging, ever-binding moral law. The moral law encompasses laws that have been and always will be the same for all people in all places and for all times. These laws reflect the very character of God. The Second London Confession states:

The moral Law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator; who gave it: Neither doth Christ in the Gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.

These statements are worth examining closely.

First, "the moral law doth for ever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof." As Philip Ross states, the moral law reveals "the demands of God upon all people, not just those in ancient Israel."⁴ This, according to Ross, is due to the fact that "from the beginning they were the basis upon which God judged mankind. The coming of Christ and the incorporation of the Gentiles into the church did not nullify the [moral law]; it remains binding upon Christians and non-Christians alike."⁵ Thus, Christian, non-Christian . . . it does not matter. The moral law is binding; it always has

been, and it always will be. We will all stand before God and be judged for our deeds.

This is why God judges even pagan nations for violating his law:

Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. (Lev. 18:24–25)

Unfortunately, I have had to explain and defend the fact that the moral law applies to everyone to Christians more than unbelievers. It's as if someone has poisoned the well and started an epidemic that has Christians believing that God requires righteousness *only* of believers. I get questions such as, "Why are we surprised at the sinfulness of sinners?" and, "Why do we judge the behavior of those outside the church?" The idea behind these statements is that God has one standard of righteousness for Christians but another for the heathen. Leviticus 18 makes it clear that this is *not* the case! There is but one standard of righteousness, and all people and nations will be judged by that standard. This is also the message of Revelation 20:12–13:

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who

were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.

Notice that it does not say that they are judged merely for rejecting Christ. They are judged for their deeds, and whether those deeds were righteous. Of course, there are no righteous deeds apart from Christ, thus everyone will miss the mark apart from him (Rom. 3:23). Nevertheless, we have a duty to call sinners to repent of their sin. As the prophet writes, "If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand" (Ezek. 3:18; cf. 33:8, 14).

Let's take a closer look at another part of the statement from the Second London Confession: "and that not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator." In other words, God's moral law is not obeyed by accident. In order for an action to be righteous, it must be a right action, done the right way, for the right reason (the glory of God). Men owe God their obedience *and* their worship. A man who doesn't commit adultery simply because he fears the consequences or the social taboo has not obeyed God; he is not righteous. Righteousness is God's goodness.

Third, "neither doth Christ in the Gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation." This is exactly what Jesus does in the Sermon on the Mount when he repeats the statement, "You have heard it said, but I say . . ." (Matt 5:21,

27, 33, 38, 43). He went beyond mere adherence to the letter of the law to the heart of the matter. He raised the stakes, so-to-speak, on the law of Moses. Hence, Christians “strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb. 12:14).

Christians often disagree about the perpetuity of the moral law. It is not my intention to solve that disagreement here; I merely want to acknowledge it. I stand in the Reformed, confessional tradition and hold to the perpetuity of the moral law. However, one need not agree with me in order to see the benefit of the moral law in expository apologetics. One need only recognize the current cultural climate and the need for clarity on issues that are condemned in the Bible, and often only in the Old Testament.

For example, Leviticus 18:6–18 defines and condemns incest. Thus, if one wishes to make a biblical argument against the practice, it is important to refer to this passage. However, doing so without distinguishing between moral and civil laws (which we will examine shortly) is exactly what leads to the “why do you condemn *this* and not *that*” charge leveled so frequently against those of us who believe in the authority of God’s Word. And, lest you think this example of incest is a stretch, here are two headlines from recent stories out of the United Kingdom and Australia. The first headline reads: “Grandmother and Grandson to Have Child Together: A 72-Year-Old Grandmother Is to Have a Child with Her Grandson.”⁶ This story from the *Telegraph* continues:

Pearl Carter and Phil Bailey, 26, have paid a surrogate mother £20,000 to have Mr Bailey’s child, which the cou-

ple plan to bring up together.

Mrs Carter, from Indiana, met Mr Bailey four years ago after he tracked her down following the death of his mother, Lynette.

Mrs Carter fell pregnant with Lynette at 18, out of wedlock, and claims that she was forced to give her child up for adoption by her strict Catholic parents.

She went on to marry, but never had any more children.

The couple, who claim to be abused in public and could face prison for incest, say that they fell in love and became lovers soon after meeting.

Before you say, “That is just one sick, isolated incident,” ask yourself a question: on what basis do you consider it sick? On what basis would the culture at large be able to call it sick? To what moral standard would they appeal?

While this story is bizarre and disturbing, the story out of Australia is more concerning since it lays the groundwork for a sea change in the legal/moral landscape: “Australian Judge Says Incest May No Longer Be a Taboo.”⁷ The story continues:

Judge Garry Neilson, from the district court in the state of New South Wales, likened incest to homosexuality, which was once regarded as criminal and “unnatural” but is now widely accepted. . . . He said incest was now only a crime because it may lead to abnormalities in offspring but this rationale was increasingly irrelevant because of the availability of contraception and abortion.

There it is in black and white: a judge taking the argument for same-sex “marriage” to its logical and philosophical con-

clusion. If our standard of morality is based solely on negative consequences, and we can eliminate those consequences, then incest is no longer immoral. However, note that the judge begs a question. His assertion is based on the assumption that abortion is also no longer immoral! This is a real-life example of what happens when we assume the irrelevance of the moral law.

THE MORAL LAW AND THE DECALOGUE

Where, then, do we find the moral law? The idea that the moral law is summed up in the Ten Commandments is as old as the Bible, itself.⁸ Since the Reformation, this idea has been reiterated in virtually every Reformed confession and catechism. For example:

Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647):

Q. 40. What did God at first reveal to man for the rule of his obedience?

A. The rule which God at first revealed to man for his obedience was the moral law (Rom. 2:14–15; 5:13–14).

Q. 41. Where is the moral law summarily comprehended?

A. The moral law is summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments (Deut. 10:4; Matt. 19:17).

The Catechism for Babes, or Little Ones (1652) summarized the idea this way:

Q. What is sin?

A. Sin is any naughtiness against any of Gods ten commands.

Heidelberg Catechism (1563):

Q. 92. What is the law of God?

A. God spake all these words [Exodus 20:1–17 and Deuteronomy 5:6–21] . . .

Instructions for the Ignorant (Bunyan's Catechism, 1675):

Q. 36. What is sin?

A. It is a transgression of the law (1 John 3:4).

Q. 37. A transgression of what law?

A. Of the law of our nature, and of the law of the Ten Commandments as written in the holy Scriptures (Rom. 2:12–15; Exodus 20).

Benjamin Keach's Catechism (1693):

Q. 46. What did God at first reveal to man for the rule of his obedience?

A. The rule which God at first revealed to man for his obedience was the moral law (Rom. 2:14–15; 5:13–14).

Q. 47. Where is the moral law summarily comprehended?

A. The moral law is summarily comprehended in the Ten Commandments (Deut. 10:4; Matt. 19:17).

A Catechism for Girls and Boys (1789)

Q. 34. How many commandments did God give on Mt. Sinai?

A. Ten commandments (Ex. 20:1–17; Deut. 5:1–22).

Q. 35. What are the ten commandments sometimes called?

A. God's moral law (Luke 20:25–28; Rom. 2:14–15; 10:5).

The Baptist Catechism (1813)

Q. 40. What did God at first reveal to man for the rule of his obedience?

A. The rule which God at first revealed to man for his obedience, was the moral law (Rom. 2:14–15, and 10:5).

Q. 41. Where is the moral law summarily comprehended?

A. The moral law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments (Deut. 10:4; Matt. 19:17).

Time and space do not permit me to list every example of Reformed catechesis cementing this idea in the minds of believers throughout the centuries. However, this selected list serves two purposes. First, I want the reader to know that the distinction between moral, civil, and ceremonial law is far from a novel idea. Second, as I argued in the previous chapter, catechism is one of the chief tools of expository apologetics.

The Ceremonial Law

Leviticus 19:27 falls under the category of law frequently referred to as “ceremonial law.” In fact, this is true of many of the laws referenced by our detractors. Whether it is the law of not eating shellfish, not sowing two types of seed in a field, or

not using two types of thread in a garment, they all fall in the category of ceremonial law. These are the laws given to Israel for the express purpose of showing them what was holy in terms of worship. According to the Second London Baptist Confession:

God was pleased to give to the people of Israel Ceremonial Laws, containing several typical ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits; and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties, all which Ceremonial Laws being appointed only to the time of reformation, are by Jesus Christ the true Messiah and only Law-giver who was furnished with power from the Father, for that end, abrogated and taken away.⁹

These laws worked two ways. First, they told Israel what they must do to worship God and how to do it. Second, it told them what they were not to do in regard to worship. The law concerning the cutting of the beard in Leviticus 19:27 falls under the second category. As Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown observe:

It seems probable that this fashion had been learned by the Israelites in Egypt, for the ancient Egyptians had their dark locks cropped short or shaved with great nicety, so that what remained on the crown appeared in the form of a circle surrounding the head, while the beard was dressed into a square form. This kind of coiffure had a highly idolatrous meaning; and it was adopted, with some slight variations, by almost all idolaters in ancient times. (Jeremiah 9:25, 26;

25:23, where “in the utmost corners” means having the corners of their hair cut.) Frequently a lock or tuft of hair was left on the hinder part of the head, the rest being cut round in the form of a ring, as the Turks, Chinese, and Hindus do at the present day.¹⁰

Hence, this law was designed to teach Israel not to worship Yahweh in ways similar to the worship practices of those who surrounded them.

The connection to idolatry becomes increasingly clear in light of the next verse: “You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the LORD” (Lev. 19:28). Clearly this is a reference to pagan worship practices from which Israel was required to flee. Hence, these laws, and others like them, were not universal in their implementation. They are, however, based on the application of the moral law, which helps us interpret them. As a result, they are not completely useless to us as they do teach us about holiness and acceptable worship. And *that* is an idea that is not limited to the Old Covenant (see Rom. 12:1; Phil. 4:18; Heb. 12:28; 1 Pet. 2:5).

The Civil/Judicial Law

The third type of law God gave Israel was civil, or judicial, law. These are the laws that governed everyday life in the nation of Israel. Second London says of the civil law:

To them also he gave sundry judicial Laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any

now by virtue of that institution; their general equity only, being of moral use.

Hence it would be wrong to attempt to apply the civil law universally. Doing so would be like taking the laws that govern driving in England (where they drive on the left side of the road) and importing them directly to the United States. Certainly there are similarities and common underlying principles that govern driving in both places. However, there are significant differences that would make such an adaptation impossible.

The same is true of Israel’s civil laws. One cannot simply take the laws of a theocratic nation in the ancient Near East and apply them to modern societies without some significant caveats. For example:

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. (Lev. 19:9–10)

The gleaning laws of ancient Israel were designed to care for the poor. These laws were designed with a culture in mind that was almost exclusively agrarian. It is obvious that applying such a law today would (1) fail to meet the needs of the poor and (2) put an undue burden on those whose livelihood consisted of farming. However, a number of principles in these laws can be applied

It would be wrong to merely throw out laws like the one above simply because they cannot be applied directly. God has not stopped caring for the poor. Nor should his people. Thus, it would be appropriate to refer to this law in an effort to determine how we should minister to the poor if we first examined the way it is used in the New Covenant (see 1 Timothy 5, for example). This is what the confession means by “their general equity only, being of moral use.”

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN THESE LAWS IS UNCLEAR AT TIMES

While “division” generally describes this framework for interpretation of the law, it need not be interpreted in the strongest terms. Whether the reference is to the law or to an army, “division” does not necessarily imply disunity. In some contexts, it merely highlights different categories and functions of the one thing.¹¹

Knowing the difference between laws that are civil, ceremonial, or moral is the key to handling the “you pick and choose” argument. That is not to say that people will lay down their arms and acknowledge defeat when you show them that picking and choosing is wise, necessary, consistent, and logical. On the contrary, only the gospel changes hearts, and that is not the gospel. However, it will go a long way toward forcing them to acknowledge their own picking and choosing, and cause them to come up with an explanation as to why it’s ok for them to do it and not us (more on this below). Two things will be helpful in moving such a conversation forward. First, it

will be helpful to look at the preface to the codes of Leviticus 18:

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.” (vv. 1–5)

Notice the emphasis on Israel’s separation from the pagans around them. The goal was that the Israelites would “not do as they do in the land of Egypt.” Nor were they to “do as they do in the land of Canaan.” In short, Israel was to be distinct—set apart in their worship of Yahweh. He ends the preface with the familiar refrain: “I am the LORD.” This is the foundation of Israel’s righteousness, and ours. It also goes a long way in explaining why certain laws in the Levitical Code make no sense outside the context of the ancient Near East. That is, unless they are interpreted in light of their intended purpose.

Second, it will be helpful to look at a section of the codes that contain elements with which our interlocutors will agree and disagree. This will create a situation where your challenger will be forced to relinquish his presumption of superiority. For example, let’s look at Leviticus 18:19–23:

You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in her menstrual uncleanness. And you shall not lie sexually with your neighbor's wife and so make yourself unclean with her. You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. And you shall not lie with any animal and so make yourself unclean with it, neither shall any woman give herself to an animal to lie with it: it is perversion.

This passage contains five prohibitions. Placing these prohibitions in order will help make the point:

1. No sex during menstruation (v. 19)
2. No adultery (v. 20)
3. No child sacrifice (v. 21)
4. No sodomy (v. 22)
5. No zoerasty/beastiality (v. 23)

When I ask people whether they would rather “pick and choose” from this list or live in a society where anything on it was fair game, they inevitably opt for the former as opposed to the latter. This, in turn, opens the discussion in fascinating and rewarding ways. No longer can our interlocutor view the discussion from the perspective of moral superiority due to what he perceives as our inconsistency and “picking and choosing.” Now the ground is level. Or, at least they think it is, until they realize that while you were making a conscientious choice based on a cogent hermeneutic, *they* were the

ones making arbitrary choices based on cultural whims and personal preferences.

As noted before, this is not enough to close the deal. This is merely another opening for the gospel, a chance to sprint to the cross. This is a moment where we can point to the fact that we do not trust ourselves to be the arbiter of truth. This is when we can point to our own sin and how it drove us to the Savior. Here is where we trust the Holy Spirit to reach into their chest and squeeze until they realize that they are arrogant, prideful, and idolatrous, and that they stand condemned before a holy and righteous God. Yes, this is the goal of the expository apologist! It is not enough to turn the tables and gloat over a “gotcha” moment. Our goal is the gospel. Our great joy is not in showing people their error, but in God showing them his mercy as they flee to Christ.

In this chapter we have explored the importance of having an answer to the “Why do you pick and choose?” argument. In the next chapter, we will examine specific ways we employ the law in expository apologetic encounters once we’ve established the appropriateness of viewing the law through the lens of the threefold division.