

Immerse Day 47 :: April 6

In today's reading, we get to the part of Leviticus that most people think of when they think of God's Law. It consists of list of rules to follow. And while we see those rules as "legalism", at the time they were important. God's people had been slaves for centuries and had no idea how to run a government, a nation, a people. They needed rules just like the Founding Fathers of the United States needed a constitution. And not being political leaders themselves, they needed the rules as detailed as possible. Just a few weeks ago we were wondering why the bible kept repeating the detailed instructions for building the tabernacle. Could they have been preserved to prepare us for these detailed instructions for building a nation?

Yet today, we are not building a nation. Rather, we are trying to live as Christians in an already-established nation. We are "strangers in a strange land" in terms of our faith heritage, and so we have to ask how these rules apply to us.

On the one hand, these are scriptures and so must apply to our lives. Because, as many are quick to point out, if one rule can be deemed unnecessary, then so can others, and ultimately so can they all. It's often called "the slippery slope problem" and is one reason people refuse to toss out a single rule. Unfortunately we all toss out some of these rules (who reading this stand every time you're in the presence of someone older than you as page 183 says?), and so the only safe way to hold to this literalist reading is to simply ignore the rules that do not apply. Rules about hairstyles, gossip, and unfortunately care for the poor and foreigner are simply ignored.

On the other hand, those willing to face reality know we dismiss some rules as situational, antiquated, or culturally bound. Rules like kicking a woman out of the city every month for a week, like paying everyone every day for that day's labor, and like not trimming our beards are clearly not applicable (or at least not applied) in our culture today.

So the question becomes how to discern which is which. Because we quickly move into some very gray areas. While this is clearly a polygamous society, which of the sexuality laws still apply? And what of the laws governing our care for the poor? Why do we hold some laws so legalistically that we split families over them while others are ignored completely because they are too inconvenient? How do we choose?

I am very thankful that our youngest son has passed through the "Why?" stage. Children seem to all go through this stage, a time when they ask "why" of everything in the world. And often our answer to them is, "because I said so," however unsatisfying we know that answer to be. But I feel like this is a good question for us in looking at which laws to obey and which to set aside. To ask "why" of every law seems like a good idea, because God gives us a pretty clear answer. "Because the nations in the land to which I am leading you have ignored these laws and defiled themselves and their land." Why obey God? Because we must not imitate the culture around us. We must be different, special, Holy.

Imagine if we were to live the way God wanted us to all the time, to be a people who were considered "odd" because we did things differently than the culture around us. And then, imagine the witness when we were blessed because of it! Like Daniel eating only vegetables and growing stronger than all his schoolmates, try following God's will, especially when it makes you stand out among your co-workers and neighbors. And see what kind of blessing God might have in store!