



## What God has made clean...if we can eat prawns, why is gay sex wrong?"

by John Richardson • 2003

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**I**N THIS SLIM VOLUME Rev. John Richardson tries to explain to his fellow evangelical Christians why they follow the book of Leviticus in condemning homosexuality but not in respect of the laws on food, etc.

He expects his book to be used as a study aid – he asks questions in the margins to lead his reader on to further thought. He uses mostly simple language but that does not mean his book is easy to understand. His closely argued reasoning is extremely complicated. One good point is that he tries to summarise his ideas in some of his marginal notes – but even these are hard to follow at times!

Interestingly, he rejects the idea that the story of Sodom & Gomorrah condemns homosexuality. He then goes into a history of 'The Law'. He says it was divided into three: -

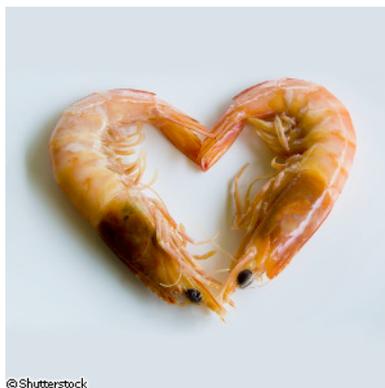
Moral Law: the Ten Commandments;  
Cultic, or ceremonial Law – these were to do with worship;

Cultural Laws: these marked out the ancient Hebrews as a nation, separating them from others, like wearing a uniform. The restrictions on diet, clothing, etc were included in these.

However, these laws were only temporary. It was right for the Children of Israel to obey them, but if we were to do so we'd become Jewish, he says. The coming of Christ did away with these laws.

He claims that Jesus's support for the law in the Sermon on the Mount condemned homosexuality by implication, by saying that the law should be kept down to the last detail. Jesus changed the Cultural laws, disposing of the idea of ritually unclean food in Mark 7:18-19 when he says that what enters a man from outside does not make him unclean.

Christians have died for the law and don't live under it; but Richardson warns of antinomianism, in which some Christians think they do not have to obey the Moral Law. They are not lawless; they uphold the law. Nevertheless, Christians are not under the law; but under Grace? Confused? Well, I certainly am.



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He goes into a hair-splitting distinction between Thomas Aquinas's view of abrogation of the cultural and cultic laws but not of the moral; and Martin Luther's slightly different interpretation. Richardson comes down on Luther's side in this matter but recognises that not all Christians do.

It seems that because there is law, there is more "opportunity to sin"! Sin leads to death, so St Paul blames Moses for promulgating deadly ideas. Paul seems to be going round in circles here, and Richardson is following him round!

Different laws are affected by Christ's coming in different ways, as Richardson accepts a hierarchy of laws. Parts of the Bible have to be used to interpret other parts, supposedly. It is not surprising then that he gets bogged down, especially when he talks about his 'Law as Scripture' and the 'sinfulness of sin'.

He goes back to the Greek to make some points. Much of his argument seems to hinge upon a word in 1 Corinthians 6. This is *arsenokoitai*, a word that Richardson thinks Paul made up himself, but its meaning would have been obvious to his readers. The NIV translates this as 'homosexual offenders', but Richardson prefers 'bedders of men' as a more appropriate translation in today's terms.

Another crucial factor seems to be that both the New and Old Testaments condemn homosexual behaviour, but the food laws are only in the Old.

In his conclusions, Richardson claims that the New Testament supports married heterosexuality, without mention-

ing the fact that Jesus was unmarried. Nor does he refer to St Paul recommending that Christians should not get married.

He overlooks the fact that in the passage he quotes from Romans 1 about God giving people over to 'shameful lusts' and 'indecent acts with other men', this is supposed to be a punishment for turning away from the truth about God. If God decreed that penalty, then gay people are hardly going against God's will by taking their punishment! They therefore cannot be said to be committing sin by carrying out these acts. Richardson is not unique in failing to spot this, all the same.

In addition, he fails to mention that bestial sexuality is treated similarly to homosexuality by both Leviticus and St Paul. Even that is clearly God's will under certain circumstances! Female homosexuality (lesbianism) does not seem to be mentioned in the Bible, except by implication in these passages.

Richardson has researched his subject extremely well, but does not seem to appreciate that great differences can be made by an accumulation of subtle shades of meaning. This means that liberal Christians like Rowan Williams, whom he criticises, have an equally valid point of view.

This book is baffling and opaque largely because its subject-matter is. That is not Richardson's fault. However, if you feel you have to treat a rag-bag of conflicting opinions and garbled ideas as ultimate truth and a perfect guide for living, no wonder you end up with impenetrable complexity. □



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