**Standards for the People**

Several years ago I heard about a church that had to admonish a home group not to serve alcohol during its Bible study meetings. While one might argue that there is no prohibition against drinking alcohol in the Bible (see 1st Tim. 5:23), I don’t think it has any place in a group study of God’s word (see 1st Cor. 8:9). Corporate worship in many churches has gone from the traditional morning and evening services on Sunday and Wednesday night to Sunday morning only supplemented by home groups. Many point to the early churches that met in homes (Act. 2:46, 20:20d, 1st Cor. 16:19) as justification. There were practical reasons for this as few public buildings were available and early Christians were often persecuted. If the house church of Priscilla and Aquila is an example of a home group, they were certainly well qualified to lead that based on their clear understanding of the Gospel and their time spent with Paul. It is incumbent on modern churches that promote home groups to thoroughly vet those who lead them to ensure that sound doctrine is presented. We are blessed to have a pastor who has a solid foundation provided by his training at a mainstream theological seminary. In chapter 17 of Leviticus God warns Moses about the danger of people offering sacrifices inconsistent with His requirements.

The chapter begins with God telling Moses to Aaron, his sons and all the Israelites that anyone who sacrificed (killed KJV) an animal at any place other than the tabernacle had to be cut off from the people. Such a person would be guilty of bloodshed. Sacrifices were to be made only at the tabernacle and only with the supervision and participation of the priest according to the specific regulations for sacrifices that God had given to Moses. Verse 7 refers to goat idols (devils KJV) which were imagined gods that wered used as objects of idol worship. Matthew Henry wrote that this practice came about when every man was his own priest with his own altar. He likened their prostituting themselves to those gods as an adulterous breach of their covenant with God.

In verse 10 God prohibits eating blood since blood represented the very life of an animal. Henry explained that the blood from a sacrifice used on the altar was given to God instead of the sinner’s life so consuming the blood of an animal was diverting its blood from the holy purpose of atonement. In verse 13 God required that the blood of any animal which was hunted had to be drained from the animal before the flesh was eaten. This may indicate that animals from their flocks and herds were to be considered sacrifices while other clean animals in the wild were not.

Chapter 18 is devoted God’s regulations about sexual relations. God prohibited incest, adultery, homosexuality and beastialitality and those prohibitions extend into the New Testament writings (see Mark 6:17-29, 1st Cor. 5:1-5, 6:418, Rom. 1:27 and 13:9). In verse 24 God told Moses that the nations they would drive out of Canaan had defiled themselves with those practices which even included sacrificing children to Molech.

Prior to the establishment of Mosaic law in Exodus and Leviticus, worship of God was not formalized. While there are examples of men like Enoch, Noah, Abraham and Jacob who each had a close relationship with God, they were the exceptions. Without supervision, people were bound to be led by false doctrine which devolved to idol worship. Without proper supervision, the modern church is vulnerable to false doctrine as well. Offshoot churches that rely on the charisma of one person to sustain their existence are particularly suspect. Spending time in prayer and reading the Bible word will help us to discern when God’s word is rightly divided (see 2nd Tim. 2:15).