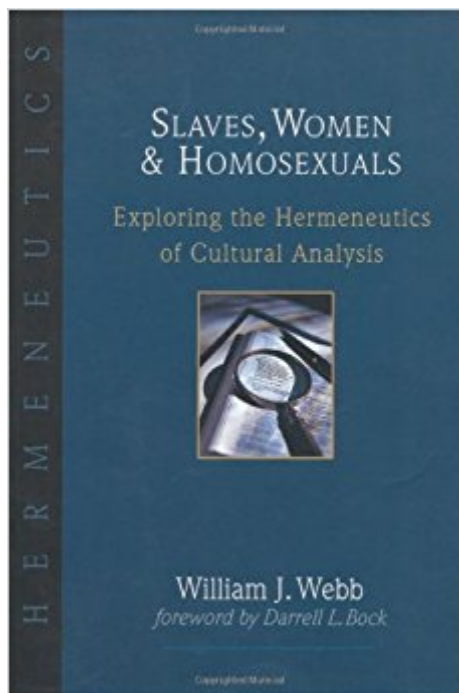




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# **Slaves, Women & Homosexuals: Exploring The Hermeneutics Of Cultural Analysis**



## Synopsis

In *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals* William J. Webb tackles some of the most complex and controversial issues that have challenged the Christian church--and still do. He leads you through the maze of interpretation that has historically surrounded understanding of slaves, women and homosexuals, and he evaluates various approaches to these and other biblical-ethical teachings. Throughout, Webb attempts to "work out the hermeneutics involved in distinguishing that which is merely cultural in Scripture from that which is timeless" (Craig A. Evans). By the conclusion, Webb has introduced and developed a "redemptive hermeneutic" that can be applied to many issues that cause similar dilemmas. Darrel L. Bock writes in the foreword to Webb's work, "His goal is not only to discuss how these groups are to be seen in light of Scriptures but to make a case for a specific hermeneutical approach to reading these texts. . . . This book not only advances a discussion of the topics, but it also takes a markedly new direction toward establishing common ground where possible, potentially breaking down certain walls of hostility within the evangelical community."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Teaching hermeneutics will never be quite the same after one reads this thought-provoking book. The ethical issues it explores raise even deeper questions of how to apply 'cultural background' in interpreting the Bible. Even those who differ on some details will find most of the book's arguments persuasive and helpful, and no one can afford to ignore the issues it raises." (Craig Keener, professor of New Testament, Eastern Seminary)"Webb has tackled some of the most difficult and

controversial issues that have faced the Christian church. Some of these issues, such as the role of women in the church and the question of homosexuality, are especially hot topics today. What makes Webb's book special is that it attempts to work out the hermeneutics involved in distinguishing that which is merely cultural in Scripture from that which is timeless. In my estimation, Webb's insights constitute major, positive progress. This book is must reading." (Craig A. Evans, professor and director of the graduate program in biblical studies, Trinity Western University (Langley, British Columbia)) "This book successfully walks the reader through the hermeneutical maze that accompanies the treatment of each of these areas. The goal is not only to discuss how these groups are to be seen in light of Scripture but to make a case for a specific hermeneutical approach to reading these texts. *Slaves, Women & Homosexuals* not only advances a discussion of the topics beyond current literature, it takes a markedly new direction toward establishing common ground where possible, potentially breaking down certain walls of hostility within the evangelical community." (Darrell L. Bock, research professor of New Testament studies, Dallas Theological Seminary (from the foreword)) "The book is well focused, thoroughly researched, carefully argued, meticulously fair to differing views and profoundly biblical. I find it very persuasive." (Stephen R. Spencer, professor of systematic theology, Dallas Theological Seminary)

William Webb is an adjunct professor of New Testament/Biblical Studies at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto, Ontario. He has also written *Returning Home: New Covenant and Second Exodus as the Context for 2 Corinthians 6:14--7:1* (Sheffield) and *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals* (InterVarsity Press). Darrell L. Bock (Ph.D., Aberdeen) is research professor of New Testament studies and professor of spiritual development and culture at Dallas Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas. He has written the monograph *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism and the Final Examination of Jesus* and volumes on Luke in both the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament and the IVP New Testament Commentary Series. Bock is a past president of the Evangelical Theological Society. He serves as a corresponding editor for *Christianity Today*, and he has published articles in *Los Angeles Times* and the *Dallas Morning News*.

Many of us like to think of the Bible as the moral guidebook. Now to be sure, there are a lot of good moral lessons in the Bible. Hardly anyone would contend that "Love your neighbor as yourself" is a bad idea, but there are some ideas that we just don't do today. There are some matters explicitly commanded that we don't do today. There are some commands that we think are even not good for us to do today. How do we differentiate? William Webb's book is an excellent reference on this

looking at three issues as examples. First is slavery, which is pretty much agreed to that we do not practice. Next is women, and this is an area of some debate as there are complementarians and egalitarians. Finally there's homosexuality as most evangelicals today still condemn homosexual practice, although that number is starting to change. So what are we to do? Jesus told us to love our neighbor as ourselves, but he also told us to wash one another's feet. We are told in Exodus that we should not murder, but we are also told that we are to keep the Sabbath. Is this just random arbitrariness that is deciding what we do and do not follow? Naturally, I can't tell everything Webb says, but his book is a joy to read on this. Webb lays out eighteen different criteria on various themes. He also has what he calls a redemptive hermeneutic. This means that as the story of the Bible progresses, you start to see change. For instance, slavery (While never like Civil War slavery) was a staple at the time and could be called a necessary evil, much like God allowed divorce for the hardness of the peoples' hearts. They weren't ready for the advanced lessons yet. Still, even with slavery, the seeds of its destruction were planted early on. One example is the case of the runaway slave. If a slave ran away from his master, he was supposed to be given safety. He was not to be returned to his master. As we go through the story of the Bible, we see this progressing further with more and more freedom until we get to a book like Philemon where it's implied in a burning epistle (And yes, Paul is calling out Philemon incredibly in this epistle) that Philemon is to set Onesimus free. How about women? Women do seem to get a low regard in the Old Testament where they can often be seen as property, but again, the change is right there. You have dynamic women like Deborah, Ruth, Rahab, Huldah, and Esther showing up in the text. When you move to the New Testament, you see more women like the witnesses to the empty tomb who first saw Jesus, Junia, Phoebe, Priscilla, Lydia, and others. Now this is one part where I wasn't as forward as Webb is. I am still more of a complementarian, but I think Webb would likely not have much of a problem with my own style since I think that if a man is the king of his castle, his wife gets treated like a queen. Finally, you have homosexuals. In the Old Testament, the charges are pretty strict. Leviticus I think is a very clear statement. So is this changed in the New Testament? No. Paul in Romans 1 argues that homosexual practice is a shaming practice that is a horizontal example of what has already happened vertically. What does this tell us? Some practices move forward redemptively and so we are justified in our lifestyles in moving along that route. The Bible has set the standard for us in itself. Some are more negative, so we ought not switch them because the Bible is consistent throughout with how it deals with them. Unfortunately, I can't go into a lot of detail, but this is a book that's a joy to read to see how the author weaves his way through the texts and deals with challenges to his position. There's also a section at the end in humility where Webb answers "What

if I'm wrong?" This mainly centers on issues involving 1 Tim. 2 and the section dealing with women there. I think this book is an excellent read. There are issues on hermeneutics that are extremely necessary. If internet atheists would interact with a book like this, perhaps many of our debates could be better. Perhaps they could be even better still if more Christians interacted with it. In Christ, Nick Peters  
Deeper Waters Christian Ministries

I believe this book gives the best all around approach to really understanding the Bible that I have seen so far. It brings to the reader an excellent way of understanding how scripture was written and why it was written the way it was. It also explains why God would bring us as people along in stages to the redemptive point He always wanted us to be instead of just going to the end point in the first place. Great book!

Insightful and engaging well intentioned read that opens the discussion. Thoughtfully contrived for those that desire to give the subject matter due consideration. I was blessed by it.

This book takes the position that is available cannot be read as static words on the page. The biblical text provides a redemptive movement from the culture of the readers' and authors' culture. That movement gives us insight into the possible trajectory intended by God and how to interpret the biblical text today. The first chapter made me wonder whether the author was simply pushing an agenda, but while he has definite positions there seemed little agenda pushing through the book. The strategies he suggests are important and well-thought out. The illustrations were mostly convincing. Whether the reader agrees with the book's applications in every situation, the book and its criteria for determining the cultural or trans-cultural nature of the biblical text is well worth engaging.

A great book. Lots of helpful information in this one.

This is a great book for preachers and teachers who want to know which biblical rules should be applied today and which ones should not. Webb gives insight on how to reconcile morally difficult themes in Scripture. For example, he gives reasons why the Bible does not explicitly condemn the abuse of slaves, but makes a "redemptive-movement hermeneutic" towards a progressive liberation. He does this by comparing troubling practices in Israel with cruel practices from surrounding nations. For example, God told Israel to free slaves after a number of years, whereas

surrounding nations had no such legal laws. Such concessions by God did not condemn slavery but began a movement toward an ultimate ethic against it. Also, Israel gave few rights to wives which appear harsh by today's standards, but surrounding nations like Assyria and Babylon gave no rights to wives and husbands could mutilate, dismember, and drown them for simple neglect of the home. These concessions proved God to be extremely merciful in comparison to other ANE gods. Regarding slaves, women, and homosexuals (and many other topics), Webb shows which practices are on a biblical trajectory toward liberation and which ones are still prohibited. This helps us determine which biblical principles are universal and which ones were intended to be culturally bound to Israel. Many controversial topics are covered. It is very well researched, very insightful, and very helpful for today's cultural application of the Bible. I highly recommend it!

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