

‘Nuclear’ family, neighbour love or, The difference between ‘nice’, ‘normal’ – and holy

You shall be holy, because I Yahweh your God am holy.

— LEVITICUS 19:2

Analysis

A. (18:1-30) Sexual boundaries

[18-20] Hitherto, the divine injunctions have had to do with physical uncleanness; now follows, naturally, God's commands against various forms of moral impurity. This is the theme of chapters 18 to 20, which form a distinct section. [Thomas 126]

[18-20] Kaiser notes [1124] that the formula *I am YHWH your God* appears nearly 50 times in these 3 chapters. He also marks the singular emphasis upon the sanctity and centrality of marriage and family in these same chapters, which institutions are given their social as well as their sacred importance by the constant repetition of the covenant formula and foundation *I am YHWH your God*.

[18:2] It deserves to be noticed that in this phrase, which recurs with such frequency in this "Law of Holiness," the original, with evident allusion to Exod. iii. 15; vi. 2-4, always has the covenant name of God, commonly anglicised "Jehovah." The retention of the term "Lord" here, as in many other places, is much to be regretted, as seriously weakening and obscuring the sense to the ordinary reader. [Kellogg 379]

[18:2,3] What He is must govern what we do. Its negative corollary, 'You shall not do as they do' (v 3), has its Christian equivalent everywhere in the epistles: e.g. Rom 12:2; 1 Cor 6:9-11 ... [Kidner 124]

[18:6-18] The explicit nature of the passage reflects the unselfconscious attitude of the Hebrews, and indeed of all ancient Near Eastern peoples, towards sexual activity. [Harrison 186]

[18:6-18] Wenham remarks that although some forms of incest, bestiality and homosexuality were forbidden or discouraged among the Egyptians, Hittites and Canaanites, the law of Moses was far more severe and restricting regarding these sexual sins. [see Wenham 251-252]

“... the unselfconscious attitude of the Hebrews ...
towards sexual activity”

[18:7,8] May we not here, from the fact that in this instance human law and feeling among heathens coincided with the Divine, derive light as to the other commandments? If the law of God be thus recognised by the human conscience in such cases as these, is it not plain that the same conscience will yet testify to all other parts of this holy law in like manner? There is sufficient to prove that the law was once there, and sufficient also to prove that it was displaced. The fragments testify that it was there; yet, being only fragments, they also testify that it was effaced. [Bonar 331]

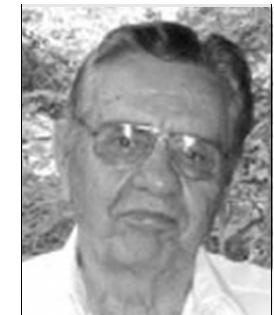
[18:9-11] All this was fitted to set up in families a system of pure domestic peace; intercourse where no impure principles had sway; affection flowing out in a clear stream of disinterested kindness. Families on earth should bear resemblance to the heavenly family, who walk in holy intercourse, receiving from the Father himself, through the Son, an overflowing love. [Bonar 332]

[18:15] Sexual connection with a daughter-in-law, a son's wife, is called [detestable] in Leviticus 20:12, and threatened with death to both the parties concerned. [This Heb term] signifies a sinful mixing up or confusing of the divine ordinances by unnatural unchastity, like the lying of a woman with a beast, which is the only other connection in which the word occurs (Leviticus 18:23). [Keil ii 415]

[18:17,18] The Lord has a regard even to the personal feelings of the individuals, and to the probable results that might ensue in regard to domestic peace. While he does not in this place positively forbid polygamy, he guards it against one special evil that might be introduced by it, viz. the marrying of two sisters. That the Lord permitted polygamy at all, seems to have been with a typical design. It was branded as a state of imperfection, and merely tolerated. Our Lord says of it, in Matt. 19:8, that it was permitted "because of the hardness of their hearts." This language implies that it was acknowledged to be an imperfection. As such, it was permitted to remain in Israel, in order to keep them in expectation of a higher and better order of things, resembling far more nearly the order of unfallen Paradise, where there was union between one man and one woman – a shadow of Christ and his Church. The Church's unholy alliances with the world, its mixed holiness, its imperfections, its inconsistencies, were to be set forth by the one husband with many wives. But, at all events, there was an intended imperfection in the system, pointing forward to the coming of the true Spouse and Bridegroom – Christ and his catholic yet one united Church. [Bonar 335-336]

[18:6-18] Had the marriage of close relatives been permitted, Harrison points out [189], land and property would have quickly been concentrated in the hands of a few families, bringing about effective serfdom and social inequality antithetical to the OT vision of the covenant community.

[18:6-18] But in these days, when there is such a manifest inclination in Christendom, as especially in the United States and in France, to ignore the law of God in regard to marriage and divorce, and regulate these instead by a majority vote, it assuredly becomes peculiarly imperative that, as Christians, we exercise a



R.K. HARRISON
Preventing the
accumulation of land
among the few in
Israel

holy jealousy for the honour of God and the sanctity of the family, and ever refuse to allow a majority vote any authority in these matters, where it contravenes the law of God. While we must observe caution that in these things we lay no burden on the conscience of any, which God has not first placed there, we must insist – all the more strenuously because of the universal tendency to license – upon the strict observance of all that is either explicitly taught or by necessary implication involved in the teachings of God's Word upon this question. Nothing more fundamentally concerns the well-being of society than the relation of the man and the woman in the constitution of the family; and while, unfortunately, in our modern democratic communities, the Church may not be able always to control and determine the civil law in these matters, she can at least utterly refuse any compromise where the civil law ignores what God has spoken; and with unwavering firmness deny her sanction, in any way, to any connection between a man and a woman which is not according to the revealed will of God, as set before us in this most holy, good, and beneficent law. [Kellogg 384]

Shall the laws of God on family be subject to a democratic referendum?

Abomination and the 'enormities' of the Canaanites

[18:21] Children handed over to Molech, Kidner reminds us, were not all burned as sacrifices. The context here makes it very likely that reference is to cultic prostitution. [Kidner 125]

[18:22] Abomination ... is used 5 times in this chapter (vv 22,26,27,29,30) ... It comes from a root meaning "to hate" or "abhor." [Wenham 259]

"... public consent is in vain alleged in defense of vice."

habits by no means avail as an excuse; nay, that public consent is in vain alleged in defense of vice. But the better to deter them from imitating them, He sets before their eyes the vengeance He is about to take. It is true, indeed, that the nations of Canaan were destroyed for other reasons, but it is not without cause that He sets forth this amongst the rest, for undoubtedly God was offended by such pollutions. [Calvin iii 73]

[18:24-30] Israel is told (vv. 25, 28) that it was because the Canaanites practised these enormities that God was about to scourge them out of their land – a judicial reason which, one would think, should have some weight with those whose sympathies are so drawn out with commiseration for the Canaanites, that they find it impossible to believe that it can be true, as we are told in the Pentateuch, that God ordered their extermination. Rather, in the light of the facts, would we raise the opposite question: whether, if God

Extermination – was there no other way?

indeed be a holy and righteous Governor among the nations, He could do anything else either in justice toward the Canaanites, or in mercy toward those whom their horrible example would certainly in like manner corrupt, than, in one way or another, effect the extermination of such a people? [Kellogg 389]

B. (19:1-18) Recognition of God's holiness must lead to love of neighbour

[19] In American Reform Judaism it is one of the most quoted and most often read chapters, especially since it is assigned as the Torah reading for Yom Kippur afternoon in that tradition. ... So formative was Leviticus 19 in the life of the early church that some have convincingly argued that the book of James in the NT is a sermon or series of abstracts from sermons based on Lev 19:12-18. Most have seen that Jas 2:8 uses the "royal law" found in Lev 19:18: "Love your neighbor as yourself. [Kaiser 1131,1136]

[19] Kidner calls this chapter a "miniature Pentateuch". The substance of 6 of the 10 commandments (vv 3,4,11,12), the laws of sacrifice (vv 5-8), and compassion for the lowly (vv 9,10,13,14) sum up the message of Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Emphasis on the inward disposition (vv 17,18,34) points forward to the essence of the New Covenant.

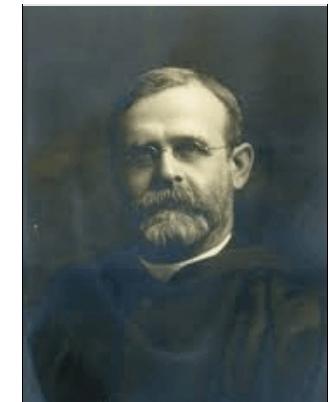
[19] Thomas reminds us that this chapter has been well called "the OT counterpart of the Sermon on the Mount". And too, he notes, the connection of this section with the 10 commandments, the second section headed by honour to parents, just as the first section is headed by sole worship to God. "Through the former we learn the latter, as in our earliest days our parents are God's representatives." [Thomas 127]

[19:1] And the Lord spake. This is the object of the exhortation: first, that they should not measure the service of God by their own conceits, but rather by His nature; and secondly, that they should begin by studying to be holy. For nothing is harder than for men to divest themselves of their carnal affections to prepare for imitating God. Besides, they willingly lie slumbering in their own filthiness, and seek to cloak it by the outward appearance of religion. Here, then, they are recalled to the imitation of God, who, in adopting them, desired that they should bear His image, just as good and undegenerate children resemble their father. [Calvin i 422]

[19:2] The primary and fundamental idea [of holiness] is separateness. In God this implies His transcendence, His remoteness from everything earthly and wrong. In us it means separation in the sense of consecration to God. [Thomas 127]

[19:2] Holiness is one result of implicit obedience to God's will. It should be noted that obedience is stressed repeatedly in Leviticus, and not man's love for God, which is not mentioned in the book ... [Harrison 196]

[19:3] Keil calls attention [ii 419] to the placing together of the 4th & 5th



W.H. GRIFFITH THOMAS

We best learn the Fatherhood of God through father and mother

commandments with you must be holy, calling the commandments "the two leading pillars of the moral government, and of social well-being.

[19:3] According to Kaiser[1132], the Sabbath law is repeated 15 times in Exodus, 24 times in Leviticus, 3 times each in Numbers and Deuteronomy, and 61 times more in the rest of the OT. Kaiser adds, "But when the law of sabbath worship and rest came into conflict with humanity's love for gain, pleasure, recognition, and haste to become wealthy, a form of idolatry was immediately introduced. Unfortunately, an insatiable greed has generally stamped out the designation of regular times to be set aside in reverence for God (cf. Amos 8:5)." [Kaiser 1132]

[19:3] The principle of reverence toward God is inculcated, not here by direct precept, but by three injunctions, obedience to which presupposes the fear of God in the heart.

These are, first (ver. 3), the keeping of the sabbaths; the possessive, "My sabbaths," reminding us tersely of God's claim upon the seventh part of all our time as His time. Then is commanded the avoidance of idolatry (ver. 4); and, lastly (vv. 5-8), a charge as to the observance of the law of the peace-offering. One reason seems to have determined the selection of each of these three injunctions, namely, that Israel would be more liable to fail in obedience to these than perhaps any other duties of the law. [Kellogg 393]

Elilim versus *Elohim*

fullness stands in aural as well as theological contrast to the emptiness of idolatry.

[19:4] ... the nature of idolatry did not reside simply in erecting a physical icon and in offering worship to that icon; instead, it was to be found in making any goal, person, institution, or allegiance equal to, or above, one's commitment to the living God. In that sense the danger of idolatry is still rampant today. [Kaiser 1132]

[19:9-18] Kaiser points out [1133] that this section on social ethics and practical holiness is structured in 5 precepts in 5 paragraphs, all 5 pentads closed by the refrain *I am Yahweh*.

[19:10] God tried them to see if they would really act as stewards for him. And when he sends the poor and the stranger to Boaz, he blesses the rich man who had the desire to act as the Lord commanded. Besides, Israel were thus taught, that though they got the best of the substance, yet there were strangers who were to share in their blessings. [Bonar 346]

[19:10] Holiness begins with one's treatment of poor people; but grasping, covetous, and stingy personalities are not holy persons. [Kaiser 1133]

[19:9,10] If the law is not in force as to the letter, let us not forget that it is of full

"... insatiable greed has generally stamped out the designation of regular times to be set aside in reverence for God ..."

[19:4] The Hebrew word for idols, Harrison remarks [196], is *elilim*, literally "things of nothingness" or "non-entities". Because it is similar in sound to the common word for "God" (*elohim*), the contrast between the true God's

fullness stands in aural as well as theological contrast to the emptiness of idolatry.

[19:4] ... the nature of idolatry did not reside simply in erecting a physical icon and in offering worship to that icon; instead, it was to be found in making any goal, person, institution, or allegiance equal to, or above, one's commitment to the living God. In that sense the danger of idolatry is still rampant today. [Kaiser 1132]

Holiness begins with how we imitate God's treatment of the poor

validity as to its spirit. God is still the God of the poor and needy; and we are still every one, as truly as the Hebrew in those days, the stewards of God. And the poor we have with us always; perhaps never more than in these days, in which so great masses of helpless humanity are crowded together in our immense cities, did the cry of the poor and needy so ascend to heaven. And that the Apostles, acting under Divine direction, and abolishing the letter of the theocratic law, yet steadily maintained the spirit and intention of that law in care for the poor, is testified with abundant fulness in the New Testament. One of the firstfruits of Pentecost in the lives of believers was just this, that "all that believed ... had all things common" (Acts ii. 44, 45), so that, going even beyond the letter of the old law, "they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, according as any man had need." And the one only charge which the Apostles at Jerusalem gave unto Paul is reported by him in these words (Gal. ii. 10): "Only they would that we should remember the poor; which very thing I was also zealous to do." Let the believer then remember this who has plenty: the corners of his fields are to be kept for the poor, and the gleanings of his vineyards; and let the believer also take the peculiar comfort from this law, if he is poor, that God, his heavenly Father, has a kindly care, not merely for his spiritual wants, but also for his temporal necessities. [Kellogg 396]

[19:13] The sum is, that humanity is so to be cultivated that none should be oppressed, or suffer loss from default of payment. [Calvin iii 113]

[19:13] A sin this is, of the rich especially, and, most of all, of rich corporations, with which the sense of personal responsibility to God is too often reduced to a minimum. Yet it is often, no doubt, committed through sheer thoughtlessness. Men who are themselves blessed with such abundance that they are not seriously incommoded by a delay in receiving some small sum, too often forget how a great part of the poor live, as the saying is, "from hand to mouth," so that the failure to get what is due to them at the exact time appointed is frequently a sore trial; and, moreover, by forcing them to buy on credit instead of for cash, of necessity increases the expense of their living, and so really robs them of that which is their own. [Kellogg 398]

C. (19:19-37) **Recognition of God's holiness must lead to higher standards than the world – we must be as visibly separate as Israel was visibly out of Egypt!**

(v 37) Note the emphatic *all my statutes ... all my rules*. A church which emphasizes grace while minimizing holiness waters down Christ's last command, *teaching them to observe ALL the things I command you!* – Matt 28:20

[19:19-32] The words, "Ye shall keep My statutes," open the second series of

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commandments, which make it a duty on the part of the people of God to keep the physical and moral order of the world sacred. This series begins in Leviticus 19:19 with the commandment not to mix the things which are separated in the creation of God. [Keil ii 421]

[19:19] They are to abstain from every action that seemed to exhibit a mingling and confusing of opposite things. Being a people familiar with types and emblems, it was natural (as in the case, chap. xi.) to teach them, by common occurrences, spiritual truths that must always be attended to. [Bonar 349]

[19:23-25] Was this precept not a memorial of the Forbidden Tree of Paradise? Every fruit-tree here was to stand unused for three years, as a test of their obedience. Every stranger saw, in Israel's orchards and vineyards, proofs of their obedience to their supreme Lord – a witness for him. And what a solemn shadow they cast over the fallen sons of Adam there, reminding them of the first father's sin. Is it from this, too, that the parable of the barren fig-tree is taken? [Bonar 351]

[19:28] It is well known that the priests of Cybele made gashes in their flesh with knives and razors, and covered themselves all over with wounds, for the sake of shewing their zeal. The same thing was also commonly practiced by others; inasmuch as the world is easily deceived by external ceremonies. But though this were a thing in itself indifferent, yet God would not allow His people to be at liberty to practice it, that, like children, they might learn from these slight rudiments, that they would not be acceptable with God, unless they were altogether different from uncircumcised foreigners, and as far as possible from following their examples ... [Calvin ii 51]

[19:26-28] The thoughtless desire of many, at any risk, to be "in the fashion," must be unwaveringly denied. The reason which is so often given by professing Christians for indulgence in such cases, that "all the world does so," may often be the strongest possible reason for declining to follow the fashion. No servant of God should ever be seen in any part of the livery of Satan's servants. That God does not think these "little things" always of trifling consequence, we are reminded by the repetition here, for the tenth time in this chapter, of the words, "I am the Lord!" [Kellogg 410]

[19:29] Parents are held responsible for the conduct of their daughters! So much influence have they, and so much blessing does God attach to proper training at the hands of parents, that neglect in using all these means is reckoned a conniving at, and participation in, the sin that follows. How heavily will wrath fall on those parents whose daughters are ruined for eternity by gaieties and fashions – their beauty and their natural qualities prostituted to the end of gaining a settlement in life, by drawing the attention of the rich and noble, and so matching them well for this life! [Bonar 353]

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[19:30] The exhortation now returns to the chief point, the observance of the Lord's Sabbaths and reverence for His sanctuary, which embrace the true method of divine worship as laid down in the ritual commandments. When the Lord's day is kept holy, and a holy reverence for the Lord's sanctuary lives in the heart, not only are many sins avoided, but social and domestic life is pervaded by the fear of God and characterized by chasteness and propriety. [Keil ii 425]

[19:31] The Hebrew word *yiddeoni*, translated "wizards", Harrison draws to our attention [202], is derived from the root "to know". Occult practitioners claimed knowledge of things not revealed even to God's people (see Deut 29:29).

[19:32] God teaches us that some sparks of His majesty shine forth in old men, whereby they approach to the honor of parents. It is not my purpose to gather quotations from profane authors in reference to the honor due to the old; let it suffice that what God here commands is dictated by nature itself. This appeared at Athens, when an old man had come into the theater, and found no place among his fellow-citizens; but, when at length he was admitted with honor by the Spartan ambassador, (because old age is greatly reverenced among the Lacedemonians,) applause was raised on all sides; and then the Lacedemonian exclaimed, that "the Athenians knew what was right, but would not do it." It was surely manifested by this universal consent of the people that it is a natural law in the hearts of all to reverence and honor old men. Many old men, indeed, either by their levity, or lewdness, or sloth, subvert their own dignity; yet, although gray hairs may not always be accompanied by courteous wisdom, still, in itself, age is venerable, according to God's command. [Calvin iii 18]

[19:33] Hence it appears that the name of neighbor is not confined to our kindred, or such other persons with whom we are nearly connected, but extends to the whole human race ... [Calvin iii 118]

[19:33-34] The Israelite was not only not to oppress the foreigner in his land (as had already been commanded in Exodus 22:20 and Exodus 23:9), but to treat him as a native, and love him as himself. [Keil ii 426]

[19:35,36] We perceive from the conclusion, that, not in this respect only, but in all our affairs, those trickeries are condemned, by which our neighbors are defrauded. For, after God has said that He abominates "all that do such things," He adds immediately by way of explanation, "all that do unrighteously." We see, then, that He sets Himself against all evil and illicit arts of gain. [Calvin iii 121]

[19:35-37] So also Micah ... represents the Lord as calling Judah to account for supposing that God, the Holy One, can be satisfied with burnt-offerings and guilt-offerings; indignantly asking (vi. 10, 11), "Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable?" But it is not Israel alone which has needed, and still needs, to hear iterated this command, for the sin is found in every people, even in every city, one might say in every town, in Christendom; and--we have to say it--often with men who make a certain profession of regard for religion. [Kellogg 415]

Who really is my neighbour?

"We see, then, that He sets Himself against all evil and illicit arts of gain." – John Calvin