

Over the last two weeks we have looked at the general principles of food and sex.

In other words, we have looked at how sustaining life – and reproducing life – are connected to our relationship to God.

In our day we have tended to isolate our “spiritual life” from our biological life. That’s not helpful.

When God called Israel to draw near to him, he used the two most bodily functions as the two central themes: eating and sex.

When you eat an animal, the life (the blood) of the animal is given for you.

So don’t eat the blood of an animal that died so that you might live!

(that would be to partake of death).

And this is why we *do* partake of the blood of Christ –

because while Christ died for us, he is also now resurrected!

He is alive!

And so you do not merely partake of the blood of a dead Christ –

you partake of the blood of the Christ who died *and lives* for you!

But as we saw in chapter 17, the apostles decided at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 that Gentiles should still abstain from blood

(since that prohibition goes back to Noah, and applies to all humanity).

Likewise, sexual relations are designed to reproduce the image of God.

When the high priest entered the Most Holy Place (in chapter 16), he becomes the “image” of God.

There is no carved image of God in the Most Holy Place!

But once a year, there is an image in the sanctuary –

as the son of man – the high priest – enters the Most Holy Place.

And our sexual relations are designed to point to that.

Male and female coming together –

as the “high priest” enters the “most holy place.”

This is why scripture so regularly connects the themes of adultery and idolatry!

Don’t go into the wrong holy place!

As we turn to chapter 19, it may appear at first to be a strange combination of laws, blending civil, moral, and ceremonial matters.

The reason is because the law itself is one.

The moral law – as found in the 10 Commandments –
is the heart and soul of the law.

The ceremonial law –

the sacrificial system and the related code regarding clean and unclean –
prefigured Christ.

It is still very useful for us to think about what it means to follow Jesus,
and the NT uses it that way! –

but we are not bound to the ceremonies.

Likewise the civil law applies the moral law to the particular situation of OT Israel.

The principles are still important.

The applications may vary from time to time and place to place.

Tonight we are largely looking at the Ten Commandments –

though as we'll see, the Ten Commandments as applied to Israel's pursuit of *holiness*.

The organizing principle, around which the whole chapter is built,

is verse 2: "You shall be holy, for I Yahweh your God am holy."

There are two basic sections:

the call to love God and neighbor in verses 3-18,
and the call to keep God's statutes in verses 19-37.

The phrase, "I am Yahweh" appears 16 times in this chapter

The rationale for Israel's holiness is found not in themselves, but in their God.

God is holy.

What does it mean for God to be holy?

We often talk about holiness in terms of "separation" –
and that is true.

God is holy – he is set apart, unique, and distinct!

But if God is set apart, unique, and distinct –

what does it mean to "be holy as I am holy"?

Sometimes, I fear, we think that it *just* means that we are to be "set apart" from the nations.

It does mean that.

We *are* to be unique and distinct – a *holy* people!

But as we have seen throughout Leviticus,

the heart of the book is that we might ascend the hill of the Lord!

The heart of God's holiness is to draw his people into his presence,
so that we might *share* in his holiness!

If your idea of God's holiness has no place for the incarnation,

when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us –
then your idea of holiness is too small!

God is holy!

And his holiness *must not* be profaned!
But we are unclean.

How can a people of unclean lips draw near a holy God?

The first 16 chapters focused on how we can draw near!

Now we will look at what that holiness should look like in our lives.

As the chapter concludes (and as we'll see next week),
Israel's holiness is rooted in their redemption from Egypt.
They are not delivered from bondage because *they* were holy,
they are *holy* because they were delivered from bondage.

1. Love the LORD Your God with All Your Heart (v1-8)

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

Verses 1-2 set forth the basic context of these commands.

"Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel."

Israel is addressed here as the people that God has chosen for himself.

Because of your covenant relation to a holy God,
all of life must be sanctified for his glory.

While we have seen in previous chapters the importance of ritual purity and ceremonial holiness, chapters 18-20 make it clear that ethical holiness is equally important.

Ethical demands are "placed on anyone who would have fellowship with the Holy One."
[Noordtzij, 192]

a. Revere Your Father and Mother (v3a)

³ *Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father,*

The first half of the chapter is very closely related to the 10 Commandments
(Though not in the same order).

Since Moses is setting forth the basic ethical holiness that God requires,
it is not surprising that his first eight commands
are rooted in the fundamental covenant law.

First, holiness demands that you fear your mother and father, and observe the Sabbath (v3)

The fifth commandment says to honor your father and mother,
while the fourth commandments says to remember the Sabbath.
While the fifth commandment is often grouped with love toward neighbor,
its placement here suggests that we are to fear our parents
in an analogous way to how we fear God.
The one who does not respect his parents does not respect God.

It's important to say here that the command to revere your mother and father
never expires.

If you think back to the previous chapter,
sexual ethics are important!
You are only here because this woman bore you in her womb for nine months!
And while your father had considerably less to do with it,
he is still necessary to your existence!!

Remember God's blessing to Adam and Eve –
“be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”
Revere your mother and your father.

It doesn't mean that they are always right.
Once you are an adult, it doesn't mean that you have to do everything they want.
But we honor and revere our parents
because Yahweh is our God (note the end of verse 3)

b. Keep My Sabbaths (v3b)

and you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God.

The LORD weaves Sabbath-keeping together with honoring our parents.
God has given us six days each week for our own employments and recreations.
He calls us to give one day to him.

And when we do, we find refreshment and rest!

In our day we have largely abandoned both parts of verse 3.
We tell children to ignore their parents.
And instead, be busy, busy, busy – running after stuff and status!

The Sabbath is a reminder that the LORD is our God.
He made us and we are his.
We are not here for stuff and status.
We are here to be his.
Yes, we were blessed by God to be fruitful and multiply,
to fill the earth and subdue it!

But just as the God who made the heavens and the earth rested on the 7th day,
so also must we!

We are his!

He made us for himself –

and our hearts are restless, until they find their rest in him!

c. Do Not Turn to Idols (v4)

⁴*Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves any gods of cast metal: I am the LORD your God.*

In verse 4, holiness demands that you not turn to any idol.

Idolatry and holiness are fundamentally incompatible.

This includes both the condemnation of idols per se,

as well as the condemnation of worshiping Yahweh by any image.

If you remember, when Aaron made the golden calf,
he said that this was an image of Yahweh!

This reflects the first and second commandments –

We are to have no other god but God.

And we should not make any image of God.

God is the one who made an image – when he made Adam and Eve.

And we saw in chapter 16, that when Aaron went into the Most Holy Place
there was an image in the Holy of Holies!

Aaron – the high priest – was the image in the temple!

So don't make images to worship.

I know that some think that because of the incarnation,
therefore now it's okay to have pictures of Jesus.

Why didn't God tell us this?

Instead, what God told us is that *he* – Jesus – is the image of the invisible God.

Jesus is the icon of God who sits at the right hand of the Father.

There is an image in the heavenly holy of holies!

But the only image that *we are commanded to see*
is one another.

When I see you, my fellow human being, I see an image of the God whom I love.

When I see you, my fellow Christian, I see one who is renewed in the image of Christ!

d. Offer Right Sacrifices (v5-8)

⁵ “When you offer a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD, you shall offer it so that you may be accepted. ⁶ It shall be eaten the same day you offer it or on the day after, and anything left over until the third day shall be burned up with fire. ⁷ If it is eaten at all on the third day, it is tainted; it will not be accepted, ⁸ and everyone who eats it shall bear his iniquity, because he has profaned what is holy to the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from his people.

And holiness requires that you offer your sacrifices properly (v5-8).

This might seem out of place.

God already set forth this regulation in chapter 7:15-18.

But now it reappears in a section that is focused on ethical holiness.

This is designed to teach Israel that God’s liturgical commands
are as much a part of ethical holiness as his ethical commands.
How you worship is a part of your moral duty.

This is part of why a hard and fast distinction
between moral, ceremonial, and civil is not always easy to make.

As those who are in Christ we recognize these distinctions.

That which is moral remains binding.

That which is ceremonial was pointing to Christ, and is abrogated.

That which is civil expired with Israel and is no longer binding.

But the Israelites themselves would not have seen those distinctions in the law.
They understood their ceremonial laws as a part of the civil law of the land,
and as a part of the moral duty that God required.

When you consider the fact that the peace offering
was the one offering that the priests had little control over,
it makes more sense that it was included here.

Once the priest gives the meat to the worshiper,
it is entirely up to the worshiper to follow the proper liturgical rules
and consume the meat within the next two days.

You can take the meat home!

So remember to love the LORD your God at home – not just at the tabernacle!

We need to see that true love for God,
proper worship, can only be demonstrated by faithful obedience.

As Jesus put it,

Why do you call me, Lord, Lord, when you don’t do what I say?!

And love for God must be put into practice through love for our neighbor:

2. Love Your Neighbor As Yourself (v9-18)

a. Leave the Gleanings for the Poor (v9-10)

⁹ “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. ¹⁰ And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.

Verses 9-18 then provide five expressions of love toward neighbor.

The refrain, “I am Yahweh,” reminds Israel that God is their judge.

If they fail to exhibit holiness in their relations with one another,
they will one day stand before God.

His character must be the standard for their lives.

Holiness requires leaving a portion of your harvest for the poor (v9-10).

If your God is Yahweh, then you must care for the poor.

“Your” harvest isn’t really yours.

We must teach our children that *they* are to care for those in need.

Which also means that we must teach them to accept help from others.

We must learn to be generous in giving, and gracious in receiving.

The gleanings principle is important for two reasons:

First, it reminds us that while the harvest is *mine*.

I belong to God.

Yes, it is called “your field” and “your harvest” (v9),

but God says that you *shall* leave the edges and the gleanings
for the poor and for the sojourner.

This is not optional.

The poor and the sojourner have a *right* – a God given right – to your harvest!

If you keep your whole income, and give nothing to the poor,
then you are a thief.

I will say that again:

If you keep your whole income, and give nothing to the poor,
then you are a thief.

And to be clear – just putting money in the diaconal offering is not quite the same thing!
(I love what our deacons do – so please keep giving to the deacons!)

But my point is that the principle of gleanings puts a much more direct connection
between *you* and the *poor*.

Think of Ruth who gleaned in the fields of Boaz.

There was a connection! (in every sense of the term!)

The challenge is how to give to the poor in a similar way today.
Because the other aspect of gleanings is that the poor had to work to get it!
There is food available in every Israelite town.
but you have to go get it.

Like Ruth, you have to join the other gleaners to go and find it.
And gleaning is harder work than harvesting –
because it's the scraps and the edges.

It's why I don't give cash when I am asked (probably at least once a week).
I've got a liquor store a block away –
so I get asked a lot!
If someone wants food, I'll give them food –
if they want to work, I'll think about it
(though I struggle with the idea that I'm just giving them liquor money)

But the two principles here are
One, part of my income *belongs* to the poor;
And Two, their labor is what makes it theirs.

I am the LORD.

b. Do Not Steal or Swear Falsely (v11-12)

¹¹ *“You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. ¹² You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.*

Holiness also requires us not to steal, either by act of theft, or by word of deceit (v11-12).
God condemns all sleight of hand or tongue.
To put it positively,
we should be able to entrust both our goods and our names to one another.

If your agenda is to get what you want from others,
then your agenda is crooked and perverse.

And particularly, God says,
“you shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God.”

God's name is holy.
When you take God's holy name on your lips –
but you use it selfishly and falsely –
then you profane the holy name of your God.

I should point out that the “one another” here took on a life of its own.

It is here that Israel developed the idea that they were to love their neighbors,
but hate their enemies.

Jesus says that they misunderstood the law.

And when you read through the OT carefully,
you start to realize that love for the stranger and the sojourner
had always been required by the law.

Who is my neighbor?

Moses understood that it was whoever happened to be in the neighborhood!

I am the LORD.

(read v13)

c. Do Not Oppress Your Neighbor (v13-14)

¹³ “*You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning.* ¹⁴ *You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.*”

Holiness also requires us not to defraud or cheat our neighbors in any way (v13-14)

The simple way to say this is that

“no one who fears God may take advantage
of another person’s ignorance or helplessness.” (Noordtzi, 197)

The day laborer is in view in verse 13.

In an agricultural society, there was no guarantee that a day laborer
would return to the same employer the next day
(recall Jesus’ parable of the man who went out to look for workers)

If you don’t pay him today, you might not see him tomorrow.

Just imagine how an unscrupulous employer might use this to his advantage!

To curse the deaf and to put a stumbling block before the blind is considered equivalent.

Just as a blessing has real power, so also a curse.

The deaf man would be unaware of the curse, and so could not counteract it
(recall all the movies with a Jewish grandmother

who immediately speaks up every time someone says something gloomy)

The power of the spoken word is here upheld.

To curse a deaf man is as wicked as it is to trip a blind man.

Word and deed are woven together.

I am the LORD.

d. Do Justice in Your Courts (v15-16)

¹⁵ “*You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.* ¹⁶ *You shall not go around as a slanderer*”

among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life^[a] of your neighbor: I am the LORD.

Holiness requires that we defend the good name of others (v15-16).

Those whose God is Yahweh must not show partiality to rich or poor,
but must judge righteously.

And if you know something that could save the innocent,
you must stand up and defend them.

I am the LORD.

e. Love Your Neighbor as Yourself (v17-18)

¹⁷ “You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. ¹⁸ You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

All of this comes down to one basic principle:

“Do not hate your brother in your heart....but love your neighbor as yourself.
I am Yahweh.” (v17-18)

But notice what else is included in this.

You shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him.

In other words, don't hate him – rather, confront him, reason with him –
as Jesus will later say, “show him his fault.”

You are to rebuke your neighbor—lest you share in his guilt.

The church of Jesus Christ is *one*.

And when we live the way that Jesus calls us to live,
it is *better* than when we don't.

Don't take vengeance.

It's not that vengeance is bad – it's that we are bad at vengeance!

Let God do it – he's much better at it!

And don't bear grudges.

Holiness is not a half-baked passivity.

You must be active in your love for your neighbor.

And remember what Jesus has done for the definition of neighbor!

It is not enough for you to love all of us here at MCPC.

It is not enough for you to love all Christians.

You must love all those with whom you come in contact.

Who is your neighbor?

It's the drug dealer down the street.

Love for God and neighbor is the essence of holiness.

Because when we love God with all our heart – and our neighbor as ourselves –
we become more like the God who *is love*.