

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.

Since you are the holy people of God,
be holy—just as your God is holy.

Be separate—consecrated to his service as a holy priesthood.

As the chapter concludes,

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.

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 in its covenantal identity as the theocratic kingdom,
as the national/religious entity that God has chosen for himself.

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

The first section 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.

The first three have to do with the first table of the law, most of which end, “I am the LORD:

1) Holiness demands that you fear your mother and father, and observe the Sabbath (v3)

2) Holiness also demands that you not turn to any idol (v4)

And 3) Holiness requires that you offer your sacrifices properly (v5-8).

Hugh pointed out to me last week that there is a parallel between flesh and blood.
God told Israel not to eat blood –

because the life is in the blood – so you don’t want to partake of *death* –

but Jesus says that we *must* drink his blood –

because he is not dead!

Well, the same principle is found in the rule for the peace offering:

you can partake of the peace offering for two days –
not on the third day.

Why? Because they lack refrigeration?!

NO!

Because Jesus rose on the third day.

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.

- 1) Holiness requires leaving a portion of your harvest for the poor (v9-10).
- 2) Holiness also requires us not to steal, either by act of theft, or by word of deceit (v11-12).
- 3) Holiness also requires us not to defraud or cheat our neighbors in any way (v13-14)
- 4) Holiness requires that we defend the good name of others (v15-16).
- 5) 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)

Love for God and neighbor is the essence of holiness.

If you just think of holiness in terms of “being separate”
then this makes little sense.

All of these exhortations to holiness emphasize the importance of engaging well,
loving well, seeking relationship – seeking connection.

Think about the two chapters in between the Day of Atonement and here:

chapter 17 on eating – the sustaining of life

(and how it connects to worship – the peace offering);

chapter 18 on sexual relations – the reproduction of life

(and how it connects to worship – the high priest entering the most holy place)

God’s holiness is *not* about him being far off and distant.

God’s holiness is what impels him to draw near –
and to create a way for us to draw near to him.

What am I doing spending so much time working in historic preservation?

Seeking to create a way for people to draw near to God.

If someone would never dream of darkening the door of a church,
how do you show them Jesus?

God then sets forth nine more statutes that illuminate holiness for us.

1. Love the LORD Your God with All Your Heart (v1-8)
2. Love Your Neighbor As Yourself (v9-18)
3. Holiness in Daily Life (v19-37)
 - a. Remaining Unmixed (v19)

¹⁹ *“You shall keep my statutes. You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind. You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor shall you wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of material.*

Do not mix your cattle, your crops, or your garments (v19)

Those who are holy must not get mixed up with those which are unholy.

Holiness requires separation from evil *because* we are separated *to and for* God!

He made us for himself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in him.

The statutes in the second half of Leviticus 19 describe a pattern of life that expresses our union and communion with him!

The particulars may not be identical today –

but what are the statutes that distinguish the Christian church from the world around us?

The Amish provide one approach:

if you want to be part of their community,
then you must follow a very strict code of conduct.

They don't claim a “thus saith the Lord” for it –
they simply say that this community will do this.

We do this in very small ways!

We say that Sunday school is at 9 a.m.

There is no “thus saith the Lord” for that.

But we need to have a common practice –
otherwise no one would know when to show up!

b. The Guilt of Sexual Assault (v20-22)

²⁰ *“If a man lies sexually with a woman who is a slave, assigned to another man and not yet ransomed or given her freedom, a distinction shall be made. They shall not be put to death, because she was not free; ²¹ but he shall bring his compensation to the LORD, to the entrance of the tent of meeting, a ram for a guilt offering. ²² And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before the LORD for his sin that he has committed, and he shall be forgiven for the sin that he has committed.*

It gets more serious in verses 20-22.

God says, do not execute a man who sleeps with another man's slave woman (v20-22).

If she had been set free (Ex 21:7-11), then they would both be executed.

We'll see in the next chapter how the death penalty was applied to adultery.

But if she is another man's slave then neither she nor her lover shall be executed.
If you don't understand the context,
then you might think this is some horrible double standard
that allows for the mistreatment of slave women.

It actually provides for the protection of slave women.
Since she is not free, she is not guilty of adultery.
This is an indication that slavery is not considered something good.

If you are keeping a woman as a sexual slave –
then she is free to do whatever she wants –
and there is nothing you can do about it!

We keep seeing in Leviticus that Moses is addressing all sorts of “real life” situations.
He's not saying, “this is a good thing.”
There is a recognition here that things are not the way they should be.

Only the man is punished (the word translated “make a distinction” in verse 20
has to do with an enquiry – the investigation focuses entirely on him.)

The slave woman bears no responsibility.
He is publicly rebuked for his sin.
But she was not free – as a slave, she is – by definition – coerced.

The guilt offering – as we saw back in chapter 5 –
was to be brought when someone was guilty regarding the LORD's holy things.
So sexual relations with a slave girl
is considered guilt with regard to the LORD's holy things.

That shouldn't surprise us – considering what we have seen
about how God treats sexual relations in the book of Leviticus!
And a ram is a rather expensive offering (only an ox would be more expensive).

c. The Fruit of the Fourth Year as an Offering of Praise (v23-25)

²³ “When you come into the land and plant any kind of tree for food, then you shall regard its fruit as forbidden.^[b] Three years it shall be forbidden to you; it must not be eaten. ²⁴ And in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to the LORD. ²⁵ But in the fifth year you may eat of its fruit, to increase its yield for you: I am the LORD your God.

In verses 23-25, we are told that you shall not eat the fruit of a newly planted tree for three years;
the fourth year its fruit is holy – an offering of praise to the LORD
(and thus given to the priests)

and the fifth year you may eat it.

The word “forbidden” is related to the word “uncircumcised.”

God demands that Israel recognize that all of the fruit of the land comes from him.

And just as the firstborn of every animal was to be offered to Yahweh,
so also the first harvest of every tree.

By the fourth year there would be a good harvest,
and so the first good harvest would go to God.

d. Blood, Omens, Beards, and Tattoos (v26-28)

²⁶ *“You shall not eat any flesh with the blood in it. You shall not interpret omens or tell fortunes.*

²⁷ *You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard. ²⁸ You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the LORD.*

Verse 26 provides the fourth prohibition of eating blood in Leviticus! (v26-28)

This, together with fortune telling, divination, and other pagan practices, is condemned.

The one who is holy—consecrated to Yahweh’s service—
has no business engaging in pagan practices.

The particular practices that God condemns were particular to that time and place.

But remember what we saw about the shaving of the hair of the leper for his cleansing?

When he is shaved, he is – as it were – returned to the status of an infant.

As Jesus said, “you must be born again”!

And when Jesus said that, Nicodemus was confused –

but Jesus seemed to think that a teacher of Israel should understand this!

What’s the root principle here?

Not eating flesh with the blood in it.

What’s that about?

Well, the animal died so that you might live.

You can eat the flesh – but do not eat the blood!

The life is in the blood – and the animal gave its life (its blood)
so that you might live.

Fortune telling and interpreting omens, and cutting hair or body in certain ways
were all involved in ancient rituals involving ways to try to avoid death.

But by grounding these things in the principle of not eating blood,

God shows us that we must recognize

that our rituals and practices need to be oriented around his holy temple –
not around the death-practices of our culture.

The question for us is how can we *embody* the practice of drawing near to God!

It's not enough to say "oh, just don't do this list of bad things!"
We need to recognize that the significance of these laws
"is borne in the body and fulfilled more and more
as we become one body with God's body in Jesus." (Radner 218)

What does that look like today?
Well, keep reading!

e. Profaning Your Daughter; Keeping My Sabbaths (v29-30)

²⁹ "Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute, lest the land fall into prostitution and the land become full of depravity. ³⁰ You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.

You shall not make your daughter a prostitute—but you shall keep my Sabbaths (v29-30)

This is an interesting juxtaposition.

Religious prostitution was nearly universal in the ancient world.

Cult prostitutes were called qedesah,

which is derived from the same root as qadosh—the Hebrew word for holy.

Cult prostitutes were called holy women.

And there was good money in it – and prestige for the family!

But God declares that such prostitution is far from holy—it is depravity.

It profanes your daughter!

And again – remember the connection that chapters 12, 15, and 18 have made
between the sanctuary and sexual relations.

It makes more sense than it may have appeared.

Proper sexual relations between husband and wife

are designed to depict the high priest entering the most holy place.

(And that was the path to life!)

Our culture profanes daughters by sexualizing them.

And not surprisingly the land has become full of depravity.

Beauty is important!

Beauty is a good thing!

But as 1 Peter 3:3-4 says,

Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—⁴ but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.

That imperishable beauty – that adorning of the hidden person of the heart –

notice that it is *imperishable* – it doesn't fade – it doesn't wither!

It grows more and more over time – and is truly visible as well!
It cannot be attained by external adornment!
There is nothing you can do with a mirror to make it happen!

The way that you cultivate this beauty is through your character –
through your conduct – as you love God and love neighbor!

And not surprisingly, God connects sexual holiness with keeping Sabbath
and reverencing the sanctuary.

The practices and patterns that we follow in daily life –
how we keep Sabbath,
how we reverence the sanctuary,
will protect and guard us from going off the rails.

Why do we have two services on the Lord's Day?

To help us keep Sabbath!
Churches that have dropped down to one service
often have difficulty avoiding the encroachment of the other six days!
Sunday afternoon soon slips into just another day for doing all the things...

But when we reverence God's sanctuary – when we come to him
at the beginning – and at the end – of the Lord's Day,
we remember that this Day is *his day*.

f. The Uncleaness of Necromancy (v31)

³¹ *“Do not turn to mediums or necromancers; do not seek them out, and so make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God.*

Verse 31 then says that you shall not seek out wizards or mediums –
because they would make you unclean.

Why?

Because they deal with the dead.
Nowhere are they called fakes, quacks, or pretenders.
It is assumed that they do indeed have some contact with the dead,
and thus they are unclean, and they would render you unclean.
The living have no business with the dead.

I am the LORD your God!

Instead,

g. Honoring Grey Heads and Fearing God (v32)

³² *“You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear*

your God: I am the LORD.

In the context of all the discussion of worship and holiness,
this is quite interesting.

As we saw at the beginning of the chapter, we are to revere our mother and father.
Respect for the aged is not optional.

Why?

Because we fear God.

And because we fear God,
we honor the face of an old man.

Here is a man – here is a woman – whom God has blessed with long life.
And so we honor you.

Likewise,

h. The Sojourner Should Remind You That You Were Strangers in Egypt (v33-34)

³³ “When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. ³⁴ You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.

love the stranger among you (v33-34)

You were strangers in Egypt –
did you like how you were treated?

Israel is to be a hospitable people.
You are to treat the sojourner as one of yourselves.

You shall love him as yourself!

In verse 18 we were told to love your neighbor as yourself.
Now we are told that the stranger is *also* your neighbor!

When Jesus is asked “who is my neighbor?”
He could have just quoted Leviticus 19:34.
Instead, he told a story that illustrates Lev 19:34!

How do you treat sojourners?

How do you treat visitors?

Moses says that we should treat them as another neighbor!

Remember what it’s like to be the new person!

Remember what it’s like to feel alone.

Treat them like you wish others would treat you.

i. Justice in Weights and Measures (v35-37)

³⁵ “You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity. ³⁶ You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin:^[c] I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. ³⁷ And you shall observe all my statutes and all my rules, and do them: I am the LORD.”

Then in verses 35-36, God says that you are to use just and fair weights and measures.

In other words, your economic relations are to be governed by God’s holy character.

He is the one who brought you out of Egypt,
therefore you must act with the same even-handed justice that he does.

One of the most common deceptive practices in the ancient world
was for merchants to have two different sets of weights –
one that they used when they were buying,
and another that they used when they were selling!

But such practices lead to death.

If you think about it, Leviticus has been teaching Israel to think two ways –
the way of life and the way of death.

We’ve been learning to make distinctions:

between the holy and the common –
and within the common, between the clean and the unclean –
and within the unclean, there is also depravity and abomination.

Things that are moving in the direction of the unclean – and worse –
are moving toward death.

Things that clean – and moving towards the holy –
are moving toward life!

This is why John says:

⁴ In him was life,^[a] and the life was the light of men. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

⁹ The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. ¹⁰ He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. ¹¹ He came to his own,^[b] and his own people^[c] did not receive him. ¹² But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, ¹³ who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

“And you shall observe all my statutes and all my rules, and do them: I am Yahweh.” (v37)