

Leviticus 19:1-4

Aaron Eime, Christ Church Jerusalem, 2022

Holiness is as much social as it is sacrificial in the Biblical mind. Holiness is a part of everyday life and covers every facet of our lives, from worship to respect for the earth and treatment of strangers. To be like God in His holiness is a Biblical priority. It matters to the Lord how we live! To say otherwise demonstrates ignorance of Scripture. And this is profound, God wants us to be holy like Him. He wants to share His holiness with us. Chapter 19 is the chiasmic centre of the holiness code. This is what Leviticus has been pointing to. Many of the commandments in this chapter are repetitions of the Ten Commandments and is something of a 'mini Torah'.

God begins telling Moses to speak to the whole assembly of Israel. Holiness is not the sole purvey of the priestly class. Aaron and his sons are not singled out to be holy, we all are. The reason for being holy is surprisingly simple ... because God is! There is no negotiation, no debate, being holy is not optional. The statement that confirms this is often repeated 'I am the Lord your God'. The idea behind the word holy is separate or apart. This describes God's apartness and His uniqueness. He is separate and different from everything else. His mercy is unlike the mercy of others, His judgments, His grace, His forgiveness, His wrath. Leviticus is a calling and we are called into this holiness too. This begs the question; can we as humans possibly attain the holiness required by the Lord? The task would be impossible if not that holiness, like covenant, is participatory with two partners, us and the Lord. In Leviticus 20vs8 God tells us that it is He who makes us holy. The walk of holiness is strengthened by the Lord Himself. We are passive in the process of holiness, we have to make choices and acknowledge our obligation to walk humbly with our God.

The first instruction following the command to be holy is to respect our parents, which is the 5th Commandment in Exodus 20. In Exodus and Deuteronomy, the order is honour father and mother, here in Leviticus the word order is reversed with mother first before father. The reason for the reversal is unclear. Parents were creators, in that they produced new life, mothers especially and the act of creating new life was given a high place in Jewish thought. So much so that Paul would reflect that women could be saved through childbirth. The responsibility to teach the instructions (Torah) of God fell to the family. Proverbs describes the role of the noble wife to include 'faithful instruction is on her tongue' and shows the high place the woman has in the Jewish family unit. The actual verb used is to fear our parents, not in the sense of being afraid to be around them, but one of reverential awe that is attractive and healthy. Honouring parents is the command that contains a positive blessing associated to its observance, of living long in the Land.

The command to respect parents is followed by the command to observe or guard the Sabbath, which is the 4th Commandment. The Sabbath is the first thing that God called holy. The Sabbath likewise reflects the idea of partnership. God made the Sabbath holy, therefore it is holy, and now we keep it holy by observing it. The Sabbath was made for man and thus somewhat the Sabbath itself aids in our walk of holiness. The Sabbath also took on a role in messianic theology. Messiah would usher in a millennial Sabbath rest for all creation, as referenced in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The third instruction is like the 2nd Commandment, to turn from idolatry. Israel had significant trouble with literal idolatry in the Hebrew Bible. In honesty our culture continues to be plagued with modern-day idols. The word for idol is אֱלִיל and means 'nothing, good for nothing and worthless'. While our modern-day idols may not be metallic constructions, the value they represent remains worthless and nothing. Idols of financial success, pleasure and popularity so quickly replace the Lord for our attention. And in

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light of the perspective of eternity, they are all worthless. Oddly enough after the Babylonian captivity, Israel moved away from idols of metal, stone and wood to the much more insidious and dangerous idols of wealth and greed. Wealth can be a blessing from the Lord, but it can also be an all-consuming desire and idol. We have to take all our blessings and walk them out in humility, generosity and holiness.