

Leviticus 19:5-18

Aaron Eime, Christ Church Jerusalem, 2022

There are many sacrifices in Leviticus, and yet Moses singles out the peace offering (*shlamim*) to be included in the pivotal chapter of the book. The peace offering is written in the plural and hints to multiple levels of peace being made and offered. On one level it reflects a personal and relational peace with God and the worshipper. The *shlamim* are freewill offering and thus we see that God does not want a forced fellowship but one that is intimately free. On another level, peace is also made for the entire world. Hence we also have a part to play in bringing peace into the world and not just with ourselves. "Blessed are the peacemakers," says the Lord. So how do we bring peace to those around us? Obviously, one way is to share the good news of the Prince of Peace. Another is to act out our faith in obedience to be a holy people. Holiness as reflected in the book of Leviticus affects the world around us in a positive way. Lastly, we also seek peace in the heavenly realms. The Jewish prayer '*Oseh Shalom bim 'Romav*' -- which translates as 'May there be peace in the highest (heaven)' -- is reflected in the Lord's prayer when we pray: May Your will be done on earth and in heaven. Yes, the actual word in Greek is *kai* which means 'and' but is translated as 'as it is' by the King James Translators based on their worldview at the time. The peace offering had to be consumed on the same day as it was offered. The Lord does not seem to delight in stale relationships. By the third day, the offering was no longer accepted by God. Any consumption of the offering by the third day was considered profaning something that was holy. How does something that was sacred become profane or common? By not eating the peace offering the worshipper demonstrates personal spite against something declared holy by God. On a spiritual level, Jesus is the peace offering to the world. Should we withhold this message of peace, then we demonstrate spite, disdain and essentially unbelief in the resurrection and salvific work of God through the Messiah.

God's call to holiness is now practically revealed in the instructions through Moses. Let's all remember that the Holy Spirit is a participant in this 'God-Breathed Scripture'. Lord Rabbi Sacks, of blessed memory, noted that the laws in this chapter could be categorized into three groups. Verses 9-16 are the social codes of how we should relate to each other; verses 17-18 are the moral codes that should affect our morality toward each other; and verses 19 and beyond contain rules relating to the separation between things and people for beneficial reasons. While separated into groups, they all affect each other and relate through practical expression of obedience by the holy people of God.

The first instruction involves an open public assistance program for Israel. Providing for the welfare of the poor and the sojourner displays holiness according to the Lord. True religion is defined as taking care of widows and orphans. Farmers are commanded to not completely harvest their fields. Grapes are left on the vine, corners of fields remain unharvested, and what fell to the earth during the harvest is also left for the gleaners. This beautifully sets up the redemptive story of Ruth and Boaz. Here we see the heart of God. Who really owns the vineyard or the field? God delights to bless the farmer with good sunlight and abundant rainfall. God is not against the rich and wealthy, but the Lord also cares equally for those who do not own fields or farms. God is generous, and He expects those who have been blessed to be generous in turn. Thus the farmer will allow complete strangers, including Gentiles, to come onto his lands and take his stuff. Stewardship can be quite challenging for all of us. What is the correct balance between giving everything away and working to have enough to share? Note that the gleaner actually has to work for their food too. Grace is not opposed to effort!

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Stealing, the 8th Commandment, is paired with dealing falsely with a brother and lying to each other, the 9th Commandment. Dishonesty in human relationships is forbidden and disregards the holiness of God. Our attitudes and actions towards our fellow human beings either profane the Name of God or keep His name holy. This request to keep God's Name holy has been taught to us by Jesus and is linked to our behaviour. God's holiness permeates every aspect of our lives and includes the workplace. We are encouraged to treat workers and fellow staff with respect and dignity. We are instructed to pay them fairly and on time. We are not allowed to oppress those who work for and with us. And we are not allowed to oppress those with physical disabilities. The Torah uses expressions that focus on their weaknesses. Do not curse the deaf, they can't hear what you say but those with hearing can. Putting a stumbling block before the blind is cruel. Generosity and kindness are aspects of holiness in our dealings and attitudes toward the weak members of our societies. You can judge a society by how it treats its most vulnerable members. In the Kingdom of Heaven God shows us how He loves the handicapped as the Messiah comes to heal, open the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf. God treats everyone equally and goes out of His way to find the lost and heal the weak, then as reflections of the Messiah, we should behave in the same way. Other commandments in this chapter end with the statement: 'I am the Lord'. In relation to the poor, there is an added injunction to 'fear the Lord'. Deliberately going against the heart of the living God in caring for the vulnerable demonstrates a heart that does not revere nor stand in awe of the Lord. It is a very dangerous place to be indeed. This does not mean that we should overly favour the poor in preference to the wealthy in matters of justice. Justice should be blind and all treated equally before the law. The New Testament would encourage us not to go to court at all if possible, but rather to settle our disputes in fellowship and love. As Jesus says in Luke 17:3-4, we are to rebuke our brothers and forgive their sins when they repent.

The last of the social codes involves the taming of the tongue, a stipulation that continued into the new Jesus movement. Gossip and slander should be far from our lips, yet we find it so easy in taking pleasure to speak negatively of others. One aspect of holiness is to encourage each other with our words and build up our common life. We are commanded to love each other. Love is a choice and not an uncontrolled emotion. The opposite of love is hate, and here we are commanded to not hate our brother in our heart. Love and hate are also actions. Action and the heart are always linked together. God desires a change in our hearts to follow our actions of love and honour towards each other as being expressed in this holiness code. Instead of holding hatred in our hearts towards others, we are to reason frankly together and rebuke in love. The instruction is followed by a warning, lest you incur sin because of him. There has been a long discussion on the culpability and reproach we hold when correcting or failing to correct a brother. Modern liturgical confessions include the sin of omission, which is when we fail to do the good we knew should do. Doing nothing, keeping silent in the face of obvious sin is not an option in reflecting the holiness of God. God deals with sin, and we should too.

The last instruction in the moral code is well known to us all. Loving your neighbour as yourself has been joined together in the Jewish daily oath of loyalty known as the *Sh'ma*. It is on the lips of Jesus and at the core of holiness. Loving your neighbour is not a statement in isolation. We cannot enact this instruction if we flee from society. And no one can see our light shine to reveal our good deeds except those deeds be truly done and witnessed by others in the community. Loving one's neighbour is a fundamental principle of the Torah and is called the

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‘royal law’ by James. The question still remained as to ‘who was my neighbour?’. In the literal context of Leviticus, it is the Israelite as well as the stranger to whom these instructions bid us enact God’s holiness. Jesus teaching on the Good Samaritan highlights this point. It takes an effort of will to love beyond ourselves, our families, our communities and even towards our enemies. Love is a choice. This is not something we do alone. We have the Holy Spirit to empower us towards holiness with the Torah clearly written on our hearts.