

Chapters 19-20 are all built on chapter 19, verse 2:

“You shall be holy, for I Yahweh your God am holy.”

This theme returns at the end of chapter 20, verse 26,

“You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy
and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.”

What does it mean to be holy?

To be set apart – to be separate – yes!

But just as much – *that you should be mine!*

God’s holiness is not just his distinctness –

it is also what impels him to draw near to us,

and to draw us near to himself –

so that we might share in his holiness!

Otherwise what does it mean “you shall be holy *to me*, for I the LORD am holy.”

God’s purpose in our sanctification is that we might share in his holiness.

We saw last time in chapter 19 how we are to love the LORD our God

with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength –

and we are to love our neighbor as ourself.

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 the exhortations to holiness emphasize the importance of engaging well,

loving well, seeking relationship – seeking connection.

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.

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.

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!

Chapter 20 is closely related to the previous chapters.

It sets forth some of the penalties for certain sins in chapters 18-19,
and it concludes the section on the holiness of Israel from 17-20.

Chapters 11-15 set forth the distinctions between clean and unclean,
now chapters 17-20 have set forth the distinctions between profane and holy.

The following chapters will turn to the holiness of the priests.

God has called Israel “my son, my firstborn” (Ex 4).

And God has promised Israel the land of Canaan as their inheritance.

Israel needs to understand that their continued inheritance
depends upon the maintenance of holiness.

Life in the promised land is contingent upon being holy even as God is holy.

And the apostle Peter tells us that this is the same command that comes to us as Christians:

¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:14-16)

There are three basic sections to this chapter:

the importance of holiness in loving God (v1-9),
the importance of holiness in sexual relations (v10-21),
and how holiness is related to the inheritance (22-27).

1. Holiness in Loving God (v1-9)

a. Do Not Give Your Children to Molech (v1-5)

The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² “Say to the people of Israel, Any one of the people of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones.

First, we see that death is the penalty for idolatry.

The examples used here include giving a child to Molech (2-5),
and turning to mediums or wizards (6, 27).

18:21 has already condemned giving children to Molech.

Here we see the penalty for that crime.

The standard interpretation is that this refers to child sacrifice –
but it is worth noting that the text does not say that explicitly.
It is also possible that giving your child to Molech
meant to dedicate the child to Molech's service
(like Samuel was dedicated to Yahweh's service).
This was a common view among ancient Jewish commentators.

To offer your child to Molech – in any way – is to contradict the holiness of God.
Your child belongs to God.
So, obviously, don't kill your child!
But also, don't encourage your child toward idolatry!
Do not devote your child to foreign gods.
Do not encourage them to worship the gods of the nations.

The one who offers his child to Molech is to be stoned to death.
It does not matter whether the person is an Israelite or a stranger.
If you live in the holy land, then you may not worship another god.
Verse 3 speaks also of what God will do (read).

³ I myself will set my face against that man and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given one of his children to Molech, to make my sanctuary unclean and to profane my holy name.

Certainly Israel is supposed to do what God says –
but the LORD says that when a man gives his child to Molech,
that pollutes the sanctuary and profanes God's holy name!
And so the LORD himself will act.

⁴ And if the people of the land do at all close their eyes to that man when he gives one of his children to Molech, and do not put him to death, ⁵ then I will set my face against that man and against his clan and will cut them off from among their people, him and all who follow him in whoring after Molech.

Verses 4-5 point out that if the people fail to remove the evil from among them,
then God himself will avenge his holy name,
by destroying the families of the leaders of Israel.
There is no place in the holy people for one who worships false gods.

The wages of sin is death.
That's not just saying that the wages of sin *should be* death.
But that the wages of sin *is* death.

Any time we sin, we are creating a disconnect between ourselves and reality.

Sin, by its very nature, is dis-integrating.
We become less whole, less connected.

What is death?

Death is the dis-integration of the self.
Death is the natural consequence of sin.
A life of sin ends in death.

b. Connection with the Dead vs. Consecration to God (v6-7, 27)

⁶ “If a person turns to mediums and necromancers, whoring after them, I will set my face against that person and will cut him off from among his people. ⁷ Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God.

19:31 condemned consulting mediums and wizards.

After all, mediums and wizards claim connection with the dead.
And the dead are unclean.

Scripture never worries over whether such persons *actually* have contact with the dead.
They *claim* such a connection.
By their words you shall judge them.

And the LORD says that he will set his face against those
who consult mediums and necromancers.
He will cut off such persons from their people.
Verse 27 requires the execution of mediums and wizards.

²⁷ “A man or a woman who is a medium or a necromancer shall surely be put to death. They shall be stoned with stones; their blood shall be upon them.”

It is possible that verse 27 was originally after verse 6,
and that a careless copyist omitted it, and after realizing his mistake,
simply put it at the end of the chapter (a common practice).

Notice the way verse 6 describes this action: “whoring after them.”

Again we see a connection between adultery and idolatry.
Illicit sexual activity and illicit religious activity are woven together.

Christians should take heed to these warnings.

It is inconsistent with your identity as the people of God to turn to idols.
You cannot be a Christian and seek out fortune tellers, and their ilk.
And those who do will be cut off from the people of God.

“Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God.” (v7)
Israel was called to be a holy people.

They were called to be different from the nations around them.

They were supposed to resemble their God,
as a son resembles his father.

As one commentator says,

“Israel was to be fully conscious of the absolute antithesis
between the service of the Lord
and that of other gods and spirits,
for it had to make a choice between these two.

If the people chose for the holy Yahweh,
they were to know that they had to conduct themselves as a holy nation
by scrupulously observing his decrees,
for these were nothing less than a blueprint for the manner of life
that was appropriate to such a holy people.” (Noordtzi, 210)

Do you see how God viewed Israel?

Because of what the high priest did on the Day of Atonement (chapter 16),
Israel was holy.

They were positionally holy.

They were set apart for the service of Yahweh.

Now they were called to live according to that holy standard.

Ethical holiness is the result of positional holiness.

Or to put it another way: progressive sanctification
is the result of definitive sanctification.

Or, as our shorter catechism puts it,

“sanctification is the work of God’s free grace, wherein we are renewed in the whole man
after the image of God” (notice that is a definitive work – we *are renewed*) “and are enabled
more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.” (Q35)

Verse 8 expresses this idea that the “more and more” is rooted in the work of God himself:

c. Cursing Your Parents Is Condemning Yourself (v8-9)

⁸ *Keep my statutes and do them; I am the LORD who sanctifies you.* ⁹ *For anyone who curses his
father or his mother shall surely be put to death; he has cursed his father or his mother; his
blood is upon him.*

Why is cursing father and mother included here?

I would suggest that it is because of the importance of the seed that we saw in chapter 18.
Chapter 19 associated honoring father and mother with the condemnation of idolatry.

Chapter 20 places it as the transition from idolatry to adultery.

Cursing your parents is not some minor matter.

We saw this morning that the spoken word matters!

To curse a deaf man is a great evil,

because he cannot defend himself from such a curse–

any more than a blind man can defend himself from a stumbling block (19:14).

Qillel (to curse) means to speak of something as worthless,
and is the opposite of honor (which carries the idea of weight).
To curse your parents is to take them lightly.
God declares that those who curse their parents “shall surely be put to death.”

Why is it such an awful sin to curse your parents?
The logic of a curse is to say “I wish you didn’t exist!”
“I wish you were dead.”
Well, if you wish that your parents didn’t exist...
then you are functionally wishing that you didn’t exist!
As one woman wrote, “hating our mothers means hating ourselves.”

Verses 10-21 then turn to holiness in sexual relations –
and how the wages of sin is death there as well!

2. Holiness in Sexual Relations (v10-21)

a. Adulterers and the Incestuous Shall Be Put to Death (v10-12)

¹⁰ “If a man commits adultery with the wife of^a his neighbor, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death. ¹¹ If a man lies with his father's wife, he has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them. ¹² If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death; they have committed perversion; their blood is upon them.

In verse 10, both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death.
These penalties deal with the sins of chapter 18.
Incest and adultery are forbidden upon pain of death.

In several places the phrase is used,
“Their blood is upon them.” (Verses 9, 11-13, 16, 27)
This means that the community is guiltless for putting them to death.

By engaging in an activity that is worthy of death,
they have forfeited their right to life.

It is worth noting that both Jesus and Paul deal with cases that are directly related to these verses.
When Jesus is faced with the woman caught in adultery,
his response makes clear that he sees the problem:
if she was caught in adultery, *where is the man?*
Moses had said that *both* should be put to death!
If she was *caught*, where is *he*?

Moses didn’t have a double standard!

But then, in 1 Corinthians Paul faces a situation where a man was sleeping with his father’s wife,

precisely the situation that verse 11 addresses.

And Paul insists upon a *spiritual* death penalty – not a physical one.

Listen to how Paul says it in 1 Corinthians 5:4-8

⁴ When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, ⁵ you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.^[a]

⁶ Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?

⁷ Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

So Paul connects the idea of the OT death penalty with the NT idea of excommunication, and ties it explicitly to how Christ fulfills the Passover, becoming the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

And then, Paul continues:

⁹ I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— ¹⁰ not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. ¹¹ But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. ¹² For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church^[b] whom you are to judge? ¹³ God judges^[c] those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”

The language that Moses had used to refer to the death penalty is now applied to church discipline.

The penal code of Leviticus is seen less as a handbook for civil government, and more as a “book of church order” – that directs us to the spiritual interpretation of these things.

And that may help us make sense of verses 13-16:

b. Abomination and Depravity Leads to Death (v13-16)

¹³ If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them. ¹⁴ If a man takes a woman and her mother also, it is depravity; he and they shall be burned with fire, that there may be no depravity among you. ¹⁵ If a man lies with an animal, he shall surely be put to death, and you shall kill the animal. ¹⁶ If a woman approaches any animal and lies with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal;

they shall surely be put to death; their blood is upon them.

I prefer not to use the term “homosexual” –

because that is not really a biblical way of talking
(and it borrows heavily from Freudian psychology).

So if a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination –
both the one who penetrates, and the one who is penetrated.

If you think about our discussion of chapters 12, 15, and 18,
the woman’s womb is portrayed as a picture of the holy place.

If you have two men, there is no holy place.
So there is no place for your priest to go!

This is also why a man may not take a woman and her mother.
That woman was once in her mother’s holy place.
So that’s messed up. That’s depravity.

And doing stuff with animals?!
(Chapter 18 referred to that as perversion!)
NO!!

Don’t go there!
It’s mixing things that should not be mixed!

c. Lesser Punishments for Lesser Crimes (v17-21)

¹⁷ *“If a man takes his sister, a daughter of his father or a daughter of his mother, and sees her nakedness, and she sees his nakedness, it is a disgrace, and they shall be cut off in the sight of the children of their people. He has uncovered his sister's nakedness, and he shall bear his iniquity. ¹⁸ If a man lies with a woman during her menstrual period and uncovers her nakedness, he has made naked her fountain, and she has uncovered the fountain of her blood. Both of them shall be cut off from among their people. ¹⁹ You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister or of your father's sister, for that is to make naked one's relative; they shall bear their iniquity. ²⁰ If a man lies with his uncle's wife, he has uncovered his uncle's nakedness; they shall bear their sin; they shall die childless. ²¹ If a man takes his brother's wife, it is impurity. ^[b] He has uncovered his brother's nakedness; they shall be childless.*

So far, it seems like *everything* winds up getting the death penalty.
But in verses 17-21, the language changes.

Verse 18 returns to the theme of the woman’s menstrual period as “the fountain of her blood.”
We have seen before the idea of the womb as a wellspring –
potentially of *life* – through childbirth –
but also of death/blood – through discharges.

The normal menstrual cycle is a reminder of the precariousness of this.
Every time a woman starts bleeding, it is a reminder that she is not pregnant.
If the bleeding continues indefinitely, she will never bear children!
But thanks be to God, the bleeding usually stops after a few days,
and so the potential for life returns!

I hope, my dear sisters, that you never think of your period the same again!
God made your body – and your reproductive system –
to reflect something beautiful about his purposes for coming to dwell with us.

And so husbands, respect your wife!
When her “holy place” is a bloody mess, humble yourself.
Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus!

The judgments in this section are considerably lesser than in the first part.
The language of being “cut off from among their people”
indicates something like a shunning or banishment.
Indeed, when God says in these verses that they shall “bear their iniquity”
it may even suggest that God alone would carry out the punishment,
especially in rendering the guilty childless in verses 20-21.
Verse 21, of course, assumes that the brother is still alive,
since Deuteronomy 25:5 speaks of the law of levirate marriage,
where a brother could be required to marry his deceased brother’s wife.

3. Holiness and the Land (v22-27)

a. The Land Vomits Out People Who Practice Depravity (v22-23)

²² “You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them, that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. ²³ And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them.

But why are these penalties to be enforced by Israel?

Verses 22-26.

If they do not enforce these penalties,
then the land itself will become defiled and will vomit them out.

The nations have committed these abominations and depravity,
and so God is driving them out before Israel.

He is bringing a foretaste of the final judgment upon the nations,
so that they might see what their sin deserves.

Israel is called to be holy.

And God has promised that they will inherit this land –
a land flowing with milk and honey.”

“I am Yahweh your God, who have separated you from the peoples.” (v24)

b. I Have Separated You from the Peoples, That You Should Be Mine” (v24-26)

²⁴ *But I have said to you, ‘You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.’ I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples.*

Because you are holy, God has given you an inheritance.

But therefore, you must live in accordance with this holy identity.

If are you no different than the nations,
then your inheritance will be forfeit.

“You shall be holy to me, for I, Yahweh, am holy
and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.”

Verse 25 suddenly turns our focus back to the distinctions between clean and unclean animals.

²⁵ *You shall therefore separate the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not make yourselves detestable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean.*

While this seems somewhat out of place,
it reminds us of the importance of maintaining the distinction
between clean and unclean, profane and holy.

Israel is my son – my firstborn; Israel is a holy people,
but their continued life as the heirs of God depends upon their covenant keeping.
They must walk in the holiness that God has given them.

²⁶ *You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.*

How do we as the New Testament people of God hear this?

Peter echoes the language of Leviticus in 1 Peter 1:14-16

¹⁴ *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, ¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, ¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:14-16)*

Just as Israel was called to be holy—so also are you called to be holy.

But there is also a difference –

because Jesus is the Son of God who brings us into the holy of holies! (1:17-21)

¹⁷ *And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, ¹⁸ knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. ²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last*

times for the sake of you ²¹ who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Peter says that you are ransomed
from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers.
The OT sacrificial system which was set up to convey the forgiveness of sins to Israel
is now seen in the light of Christ to be futile.
Jesus is the cornerstone of a new temple (2:4-8) which will endure
because Jesus is the one who was foreknown from the beginning,
and yet made manifest in the last days.
Therefore Peter says that you are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation,
a people for his own possession.” (2:9)

The obligation to be holy as God is holy remains the same.
But there is no longer the threat that the holy people will lose their inheritance.
Jesus is now seated at the right hand of the Father.
He has received the inheritance from the Father,
and therefore there is no way that the inheritance can be lost.
The heavenly kingdom will never vomit out those who belong to Jesus.

Therefore those who belong to Christ *will* be holy as he is holy.
And yes, the church of Jesus Christ is to be separate from the nations.
We are not to live like the Americans around us.
The customs of the nation around us are detestable to God.
Therefore Revelation 18:4-5 echoes the language of Isaiah and Jeremiah,
calling out “Come out of her my people, lest you take part in her sins,
lest you share in her plagues;
for her sins are heaped high as heaven,
and God has remembered her iniquities.”
We are called to come out of Babylon—to be different from the pagans around us—
and to live as the holy people of God.
Those who fall prey to Babylon—those who insist upon returning to their sins,
like dogs returning to their vomit—
they will indeed be spat out.
There is no place in the kingdom of heaven, as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10,
for the unholy.
“Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?
Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers,
nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards,
nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.”

Those who practice such things have no place in the inheritance of the saints.

But if you are guilty of such sins, do not lose hope.

For those who repent of their sins, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,
and are baptized will be saved, as Paul continues in verse 11:

“And such were some of you.

But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified
in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

Jesus came in our flesh – he was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary,
and born of her – yet without sin.

He suffered – he died – he rose again and sits at the right hand of the Father –
and he sent his Holy Spirit to join those who believe in him to himself –
that we might be his.

“That you should be mine” God says!