

Leviticus 18:19-30

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God continues to forbid practices that are not in His people's best interest. Rather, God promotes His ways which lead to harmony with God and others.

God commands His people *also you shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness during her menstrual impurity*. This command prohibits sexual intimacy including intercourse with any woman during her menstrual cycle. Rather than being a moral prohibition this commandment speaks to ritual *impurity* in approaching *God* at the Tabernacle or Temple.

Leviticus 15 combines the purification of a man with a seminal discharge and a *woman* with a *menstrual* discharge into one discussion. Semen and blood are both life giving/sustaining fluids that 21st century biochemistry has yet to fully understand. God created these bodily fluids for the propagation and sustainability of all life. Leviticus 15:24 says, "if a man actually lies with her so that her *menstrual impurity* is on him, he shall be unclean seven days, and every bed on which he lies shall be unclean." Leviticus 15:31 gives us God's reasoning in this command by saying, "thus you shall keep the sons of Israel separated from their uncleanness, so that they will not die in their uncleanness by their defiling My tabernacle that is among them."

The Bible says that there is life in the blood (Genesis 9:4, Leviticus 17:14). Because life is in the blood it is also the only thing God accepts as a covering for sins (Leviticus 17:11, Hebrews 9:22). The laws of separation concerning a woman during menstruation might be viewed from the perspective of a society that holds blood as having sacred spiritual and physical properties.

God then repeats the sixth of the Ten Commandments, "You shall not commit adultery." He says here in Leviticus 18:19, *You shall not have intercourse with your neighbor's wife, to be defiled with her*. Here the text uses *intercourse* (literally "to seed") rather than *uncover her nakedness*. Leviticus 18:18 shows that the terms are synonymous, since "uncover nakedness" is equated with marriage to a wife's sister.

God may switch terms here as a prelude to prohibitions outside of family relations, and even outside of human relationships. In addition to familial harmony, the communities in Israel are to seek neighborly harmony. Honoring marriage and family are key ways to accomplish this. A child born out of an unknown adulterous affair might be raised as a child of the true husband, which could lead to the child eventually marrying a sibling or other forbidden relative later in adulthood, being unaware of their true familial connections.

King David attempted to have Uriah sleep with his wife in order to hide the fact that she was pregnant by adultery (2 Samuel 11:8-13). The Ten Commandments culminate with a prohibition from envy, which can be viewed as a catch-all, since so much evil stems from envy. Adultery could be considered a subset of envy, being dissatisfied with one's own wife, and seeking intimacy with another's.

God now addresses the sanctity of children. Children are to be honored and protected, not exploited. God commands *You shall not give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God*. The Canaanites worshipped Molech and would perform child sacrifices to this false god. We know from ancient Phoenician (Canaanite) writings that a pagan couple who could not have children would pray to Molech to receive a child. If the woman indeed conceived, they would at a certain point be obligated to return the child back to Molech.

We find two ways the Canaanites would return the child to Molech. The first was to make the child pass through the fire to Molech (Deuteronomy 18:10, 2 Kings 23:10, Jeremiah 32:35). The Talmud records a first century understanding of how this was done; "They lit two large pyres one opposite the other and made the child to pass on foot between the two pyres" (Sanhedrin 64b). This first way preserved the child's life.

The second method was a complete child sacrifice. A large, hollowed, bronze idol would have a fire burning in it and the child would be placed on the outstretched hands of the burning idol as a sacrifice. In Carthage, a city in north Africa founded by Canaanites who were called Phoenicians, archaeologists have uncovered hundreds of these sacrificial centers next to large child cemeteries.

In Israel, these child sacrifices were held near Jerusalem in the valley of the son of Hinnom (Gehenna in the New Testament, and currently called "the Hinnom Valley") (2 Kings 23:10). By the 1st century, Jewish tradition adopted Gehenna (Hinnom Valley, also called Tophet in Isaiah 30:33) as an allegory for fiery judgement. The word "toph" in Hebrew means drums and there is evidence of drums being used in these horrific ceremonies to drown out the cries of death, which is probably where the name Tophet comes from. Unfortunately, we find that the Israelites at certain times embraced these forbidden practices of child sacrifice (Psalm 106:35-39).

God continues setting boundaries for sexual norms, and states, *you shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination*. The literal interpretation of this command continued into the first century with Paul saying in Romans 1:26-27:

"For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error."

This is consistent with 1 Corinthians 6, which explains that sexual sin is a sin against one's own body (1 Corinthians 6:18-20).

In all these instances, God does not address desire. The implication seems to be that God acknowledges that humans will have various sexual urges; otherwise there would be no reason for the prohibition. That means that any point in time, a man might be sexually attracted to their mother, sister, daughter, or male or female neighbor. In these prohibitions, God only addresses actions. God does not say "It is a sin to have an impure thought." We know Satan can suggest impure thoughts (Ephesians 6:16; Matthew 16:23). The emphasis is upon knowing and meditating upon what is true, and best for us, and choosing to walk in those ways. God focuses upon actions rather than feelings or emotions. This can be done by following Paul's advice in 2 Corinthians 10:5, "We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we *are* taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ."

Next *God* forbids bestiality by saying, *you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion.* This would suggest that sex between animals and humans was an accepted part of the ancient cultures in Egypt and Canaan. Presumably the act of a *woman* who would *stand before an animal* would be part of some sort of sexual exploitation of the *woman*, perhaps for the entertainment of the males. None of this was allowed in Israel. The men were to be content with having sexual release with their wife (or wives). They were not to exploit or abuse their children or the women in their care. And they were not to envy their neighbors and disrupt their marriages through adultery. By exercising such self-control, the men would bring harmony to Israel, and set the stage for the promised blessing, much of which would be a natural byproduct of their obedience.

God wants His covenant people to be holy (set apart) from the rest of the world saying, *Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled.* The pagan *nations* had industrialized sexual exploitation and made it a common occurrence in those lands, even incorporating it into the worship of their pagan gods. It was as a result of their wickedness *God* was judging them and casting them out (Leviticus 18:25; Deuteronomy 9:5). The Promised Land, Israel, formerly the *land* of Canaan, was special to *God* because He promised it as an inheritance to Abraham (Genesis 12:7). It was due to the wickedness of the Canaanites that He was dispossessing them of the land (Deuteronomy 9:5-6).

At this point in time the Canaanites occupied the land, and *God* said, *the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants.* In the Bible, only the land of Israel *spews out its inhabitants* when they embrace wickedness. *God* will tell Israel prior to entering the land that if they follow in the ways of the Canaanites, they too will be *spewed* out of the land (Deuteronomy 28:63).

This principle appears to only apply to the Promised Land. The Egyptians were never *spewed* out of their *land*, though they behaved just like the Canaanites. However, any people group that embraces sexual immorality will see their society become an

exploitative one, and that society will become a miserable place to live, and ultimately and inevitably decline.

God wants his covenant people to have an abundant life, flowing with bounty, and encourages them to *keep My statutes and My judgments*. To walk in God's *statutes and judgments* is the path to gaining the greatest benefit available in this life. God knows the path to the best blessings and sets forth that path that we might gain those blessings. But this is a binary choice. One cannot obey God while also following the world, and its lusts. Accordingly, God pairs with the command to *keep my statutes and My judgments* the statement *and shall not do any of these abominations*. To obey God is to walk in His ways and avoid the pagan ways.

This admonition applies to all inhabitants of Israel. No one is exempt. These abhorrent pagan practices are allowed to *neither the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you*. God adds a note: (*for the men of the land who have been before you have done all these abominations, and the land has become defiled*). This appears to be emphasis by way of repetition, since God stated this same thing two verses earlier, in Leviticus 18:25, that the land was full of wickedness. The point is "Don't do what you see all around you."

The reason to apply these prohibitions to all the inhabitants is *so that the land will not spew you out, should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you* (See Leviticus 20:22-24 and Psalm 106:40-41). The Canaanites were *spewed out* by death at the hands of the Israelites under the command of Joshua. It is clear that if Israel follows in these pagan ways, they too will be *spewed out* of the land.

Exile was the way the *land spewed out its Israelite inhabitants*. But because God's covenant with the Jewish people is irrevocable (Romans 11:29), He always provides them a path to return after the exile has served its purpose. The prophet Jeremiah declared that the Babylonian exile would last 70 years so the *land* could enjoy its sabbaths (2 Chronicles 36:21). Because God established Israel to be a light to the nations, He also includes *the native, and the alien who sojourns among you* which shows that this was to apply to Israelites and non-Israelites. Anyone who resided within the boundaries of Israel.

God states that *whoever does any of these sexual abominations, those persons who do so shall be cut off from among their people*. Jewish tradition interprets being *cut off* (Hebrew "kareth") *from among their people* to mean a death or separation that is enacted or meted out by God rather than a human court. This tradition says that being *cut off from among their people* could happen in two ways. The first way this was understood to be enacted was in this life, with the guilty party experiencing an early physical death, or die without offspring. As an example, Genesis 9:11 uses "kareth" to describe those who died from God's judgment in the flood of Noah.

The next way draws upon verses like Genesis 25:8, which says that Abraham died and was "gathered unto his *people*." This leads to the second interpretation which is spiritual separation or death in the afterlife, being *cut off* from one's *people* in the next age. The implication of Abraham being "gathered unto his *people*" infers that there are relatives in

the next life, so perhaps someone could *be cut off from among their people* in the next life.

The Hebrew for “*persons*” in the phrase *those persons who do so shall be cut off* is the plural form of “*nephesh*” which means “souls” and indicates that both men and women are subject to being *cut off* for these sins.

God concludes with *thus, you are to keep My charge, that you do not practice any of the abominable customs which have been practiced before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them; I am the LORD your God.*

This chapter is a *charge* from God. The *charge* is to avoid copying the behavior the Israelites see surrounding them. God forbids Israel to copy the *abominable customs* of pagan perversity, including child sacrifice. If they practice these things, Israel will *defile* themselves in doing so.

By concluding this admonition for the people to obey His commands with the statement, *I am the LORD your God*, or literally, “I am Yahweh your mighty One,” God is telling His people two things:

1. I am the One who will correct you when you go astray as a father chastises his son (Hebrews 12:6), and if you rebelliously continue to *live* in sin, I will give you over to your sin nature (Romans 1:24).
2. I am the One who will reward you greatly for your obedience to My instructions. In this life and in the world to come (Hebrews 11:6).

Biblical Text

¹⁹ ‘Also you shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness during her menstrual impurity. ²⁰ You shall not have intercourse with your neighbor’s wife, to be defiled with her. ²¹ You shall not give any of your offspring to offer them to Molech, nor shall you profane the name of your God; I am the LORD. ²² You shall not lie with a male as one lies with a female; it is an abomination. ²³ Also you shall not have intercourse with any animal to be defiled with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it; it is a perversion. ²⁴ ‘Do not defile yourselves by any of these things; for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have become defiled. ²⁵ For the land has become defiled, therefore I have brought its punishment upon it, so the land has spewed out its inhabitants. ²⁶ But as for you, you are to keep My statutes and My judgments and shall not do any of these abominations, *neither* the native, nor the alien who sojourns among you ²⁷ (for the men of the land who have been before you have done all these abominations, and the land has become defiled); ²⁸ so that the land will not spew you out, should you defile it, as it has spewed out the nation which has been before you. ²⁹ For whoever does any of these abominations, those persons who do *so* shall be cut off from among their people. ³⁰ Thus you are to keep My charge, that you do not practice any of the

abominable customs which have been practiced before you, so as not to defile yourselves with them; I am the LORD your God.”