

CHAPTER 20

The laws which before were made are in this chapter repeated and penalties annexed to them, that those who would not be deterred from sin by the fear of God might be deterred from it by the fear of punishment. If we will not avoid such and such practices because the law has made them sin (and it is most acceptable when we go on that principle of religion), surely we shall avoid them when the law has made them death, from a principle of self-preservation. In this chapter we have,

- I. Many particular crimes that are made capital.
- I. Giving their children to Moloch (v. 1-5).
 2. Consulting witches (v. 6, 27).
 3. Cursing parents (v. 9).
 4. Adultery (v. 10).
 5. Incest (v. 11, 12, 14, 17, 19-21).
 6. Unnatural lusts (v. 13, 15, 16, 18).
- II. General commands given to be holy (v. 7, 8, 22-26).


◀BIB▶ LEVITICUS 20:1-9

MORAL LAWS

Moses is here directed to say that again to the children of Israel which he had in effect said before, v. 2. We are sure it was no vain repetition, but very necessary, that they might *give the more earnest heed to the things that were spoken*, and might believe them to be of great consequence, being so often inculcated. *God speaketh once, yea, twice*, and what he orders to be said again we must be willing to hear again, because *for us it is safe*, ▶BIB▶Philippians 3:1.

- I. Three sins are in these verses threatened with death: —
 1. Parents abusing their children, by sacrificing them to Moloch, v. 2, 3. There is the grossest absurdity that can be in all the rites of idolatry, and they are all a great reproach to men's reason; but none trampled upon all

the honours of human nature as this did, the burning of children in the fire to the honour of a dunghill-god. It was a plain evidence that their gods were devils, who desired and delighted in the misery and ruin of mankind, and that the worshippers were worse than the beasts that perish, perfectly stripped, not only of reason, but of natural affection. Abraham's offering Isaac could not give countenance, much less could it give rise to this barbarous practice, since, though that was commanded, it was immediately countermanded. Yet such was the power of the god of this world over the children of disobedience that this monstrous piece of inhumanity was generally practised; and even the Israelites were in danger of being drawn into it, which made it necessary that this severe law should be made against it. It was not enough to tell them they might spare their children (the fruit of their body should never be accepted for the sin of their soul), but they must be told,

(1.) That the criminal himself should be put to death as a murderer: *The people of the land shall stone him with stones* (v. 2), which was looked upon as the worst of capital punishments among the Jews. If the children were sacrificed to the malice of the devil, the parents must be sacrificed to the justice of God. And, if either the fact could not be proved or the magistrates did not do their duty, God would take the work into his own hands: *I will cut him off*, v. 3. Note, Those that escape punishment from men, yet shall not escape the righteous judgments of God; so wretchedly do those deceive themselves that promise themselves impunity in sin. How can those escape against whom God sets his face, that is, whom he frowns upon, meets as an enemy, and fights against? The heinousness of the crime is here set forth to justify the doom: it *defiles the sanctuary*, and *profanes the holy name* of God, for the honour of both which he is jealous. Observe, The malignity of the sin is laid upon that in it which was peculiar to Israel. When the Gentiles sacrificed their children they were guilty of murder and idolatry; but, if the Israelites did it, they incurred the additional guilt of defiling the sanctuary (which they attended upon even when they lay under this guilt, as if there might be an agreement between the temple of God and idols), and of *profaning the holy name of God*, by which they were called, as if he allowed his worshippers to do such things,  Romans 2:23, 24.

(2.) That all his aiders and abettors should be cut off likewise by the righteous hand of God. If his neighbours concealed him, and would not come in as witnesses against him, — if the magistrates connived at him,

and would not pass sentence upon him, rather pitying his folly than hating his impiety, — God himself would reckon with them, v. 4, 5. Misprision of idolatry is a crime cognizable in the court of heaven, and which shall not go unpunished: *I will set my face against that man* (that magistrate, ^{ART}Jeremiah 5:1) *and against his family*. Note,

[1.] The wickedness of the master of a family often brings ruin upon a family; and he that should be the house-keeper proves the house-breaker.

[2.] If magistrates will not do justice upon offenders, God will do justice upon them, because there is danger that many will *go a whoring after those* who do but countenance sin by winking at it. And, if the sins of leaders be leading sins, it is fit that their punishments should be exemplary punishments.

2. Children's abusing their parents, by cursing them, v. 9. If children should speak ill of their parents, or wish ill to them, or carry it scornfully or spitefully towards them, it was an iniquity to be punished by the judges, who were employed as conservators both of God's honour and of the public peace, which were both attacked by this unnatural insolence. See ^{ART}Proverbs 30:17, *The eye that mocks at his father the ravens of the valley shall pick out*, which intimates that such wicked children were in a fair way to be not only hanged, but hanged in chains. This law of Moses Christ quotes and confirms (^{ART}Matthew 15:4), for it is as direct a breach of the fifth commandment as wilful murder is of the sixth. The same law which requires parents to be tender of their children requires children to be respectful to their parents. He that despitefully uses his parents, the instruments of his being, flies in the face of God himself, the author of his being, who will not see the paternal dignity and authority insulted and trampled upon.

3. Persons abusing themselves by consulting such as have *familiar spirits*, v. 6. By this, as much as any thing, a man diminishes, disparages, and deceives himself, and so abuses himself. What greater madness can there be than for a man to go to a liar for information, and to an enemy for advice? Those do so who turn after those that deal in the black art, and know the depths of Satan. This is spiritual adultery as much as idolatry is, giving that honour to the devil which is due to God only; and the jealous God will give a bill of divorce to those that thus *go a whoring from him*, and will *cut them off*; they having first cut themselves off from him.

II. In the midst of these particular laws comes in that general charge, v. 7, 8, where we have,

1. The duties required; and they are two: —

(1.) That in our principles, affections, and aims, we be holy: *Sanctify yourselves and be you holy.* We must cleanse ourselves from all the pollutions of sin, consecrate ourselves to the service and honour of God, and conform ourselves in every thing to his holy will and image: this is to *sanctify ourselves.*

(2.) That in all our actions, and in the whole course of our conversation, we be obedient to the laws of God: *You shall keep my statutes.* By this only can we make it to appear that we have sanctified ourselves and are holy, even by our keeping God's commandments; *the tree is known by its fruit.* Nor can we *keep God's statutes,* as we ought, unless we first sanctify ourselves, and be holy. Make the tree good, and the fruit will be good.

2. The reasons to enforce these duties.

(1.) *“I am the Lord your God; therefore be holy, that you may resemble him whose people you are, and may be pleasing to him. Holiness becomes his house and household.”*

(2.) *I am the Lord who sanctifieth you.* God sanctified them by peculiar privileges, laws, and favours, which distinguished them from all other nations, and dignified them as a people set apart for God. He gave them his word and ordinances to be means of their sanctification, and his good Spirit to instruct them; therefore they must be holy, else they received the grace of God herein in vain. Note,

[1.] God's people are, and must be, persons of distinction. God has distinguished them by his holy covenant, and therefore they ought to distinguish themselves by their holy conversation.

[2.] God's sanctifying us is a good reason why we should sanctify ourselves, that we may comply with the designs of his grace, and not walk contrary to them. If it be the Lord that sanctifies us, we may hope the work shall be done, though it be difficult: the manner of expression is like that, ~~2~~ *2 Corinthians 5:5, He that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God.* And his grace is so far from superseding our care and endeavour that

it most strongly engages and encourages them. *Work out your salvation, for it is God that worketh in you.*

~~<ORIG>~~ LEVITICUS 20:10-21

LAWS AGAINST ADULTERY AND INCEST

Sins against the seventh commandment are here ordered to be severely punished. These are sins which, of all others, fools are most apt to make a mock at; but God would teach those the heinousness of the guilt by the extremity of the punishment that would not otherwise be taught it.

I. Lying with another man's wife was made a capital crime. The adulterer and the adulteress that had joined in the sin must fall alike under the sentence: they shall both be *put to death*, v. 10. Long before this, even in Job's time, this was reputed a *heinous crime* and an *iniquity to be punished by the judges*, ~~<8911>~~ Job 31:11. It is a presumptuous contempt of an ordinance of God, and a violation of his covenant, ~~<1027>~~ Proverbs 2:17. It is an irreparable wrong to the injured husband, and debauches the mind and conscience of both the offenders as much as any thing. It is a sin which headstrong and unbridled lusts hurry men violently to, and therefore it needs such a powerful restraint as this. It is a sin which defiles a land and brings down God's judgments upon it, which disquiets families, and tends to the ruin of all virtue and religion, and therefore is fit to be animadverted upon by the conservators of the public peace: but see ~~<488>~~ John 8:3-11.

II. Incestuous connections, whether by marriage or not.

1. Some of them were to be punished with death, as a man's *lying with his father's wife*, v. 11. Reuben would have been put to death for his crime (~~<1652>~~ Genesis 35:22) if this law had been then made. It was the sin of the incestuous Corinthian, for which he was to be *delivered unto Satan*, ~~<461>~~ 1 Corinthians 5:1, 5. A man's debauching his daughter-in-law, or his mother-in-law, or his sister, was likewise to be punished with death, v. 12, 14, 17.

2. Others of them God would punish with the curse of barrenness, as a man's defiling his aunt, or his brother's wife (v. 19-21): *They shall die childless*. Those that keep not within the divine rules of marriage forfeit

the blessings of marriage: *They shall commit whoredom, and shall not increase,* ^{<394>}Hosea 4:10. Nay it is said, *They shall bear their iniquity,* that is, though they be not immediately cut off by the hand either of God or man for this sin, yet the guilt of it shall lie upon them, to be reckoned for another day, and not be purged with sacrifice or offering.

III. The unnatural lusts of sodomy and bestiality (sins not to be mentioned without horror) were to be punished with death, as they are at this day by our law, v. 13, 15, 16. Even the beast that was thus abused was to be killed with the sinner, who was thereby openly put to the greater shame: and the villany was thus represented as in the highest degree execrable and abominable, all occasions of the remembrance or mention of it being to be taken away. Even the unseasonable use of the marriage, if presumptuous, and in contempt of the law, would expose the offenders to the just judgment of God: *they shall be cut off,* v. 18. For this is the will of God, that *every man should possess his vessel* (and the wife is called the weaker vessel) *in sanctification and honour,* as becomes saints.

<392>LEVITICUS 20:22-27

MORAL LAWS

The last verse is a particular law, which comes in after the general conclusion, as if omitted in its proper place: it is for the putting of those to death that dealt with familiar spirits, v. 27. It would be an affront to God and to his lively oracles, a scandal to the country, and a temptation to ignorant bad people, to consult them, if such were known and suffered to live among them. Those that are in league with the devil have in effect made a covenant with death and an agreement with hell, and so shall their doom be.

The rest of these verses repeat and inculcate what had been said before; for to that unthinking forgetful people it was requisite that there should be line upon line, and that general rules, with their reasons, should be frequently insisted on, for the enforcement of particular laws, and making them more effectual. Three things we are here reminded of: —

I. Their dignity.

1. They had the *Lord for their God*, v. 24. They were his, his care, his choice, his treasure, his jewels, his kingdom of priests (v. 26): *That you should be mine*. Happy the people, and truly great, that are in such a case.

2. Their God was a holy God (v. 26), infinitely advanced above all others. His holiness is his glory, and it was their honour to be related to him, while their neighbours were the infamous worshippers of impure and filthy spirits.

3. The great God had separated them from other people (v. 24), and again, v. 26. Other nations were the common; they were the enclosure, beautified and enriched with peculiar privileges, and designed for peculiar honours; let them therefore value themselves accordingly, preserve their honour, and not lay it in the dust, by walking in the way of the heathen.

II. Their duty; this is inferred from their dignity. God had done more for them than for others, and therefore expected more from them than from others. And what is it that the Lord their God requires, in consideration of the great things done and designed?

1. *You shall keep all my statutes* (v. 22); and there was all the reason in the world that they should, for the statutes were their honour, and obedience to them would be their lasting comfort.

2. *You shall not walk in the manners of nations*, v. 23. Being separated from them, they must not associate with them, nor learn their ways. The manners of the nations were bad enough in them, but would be much worse in God's people.

3. *You shall put a difference between clean and unclean*, v. 25. This is holiness, to discern between things that differ, not to live at large, as if we might say and do any thing, but to speak and act with caution.

4. *You shall not make your souls abominable*, v. 25. Our constant care must be to preserve the honour, by preserving the purity, of our own souls, and never to do any thing to make them abominable to God and to our own consciences.

III. Their danger.

1. They were going into an infected place (v. 24): *You shall inherit their land*, a land *flowing with milk and honey*, which they would have the

comfort of if they kept their integrity; but, withal, it was a land full of idols, idolatries, and superstitious usages, which they would be apt to fall in love with, having brought from Egypt with them a strange disposition to take that infection.

2. If they took the infection, it would be of pernicious consequence to them. The Canaanites were to be expelled for these very sins: *They committed all these things, therefore I abhorred them*, v. 23. See what an evil thing sin is; it provokes God to abhor his own creatures, whereas otherwise he delights in the work of his hands. And, if the Israelites trod in the steps of their impiety, they must expect that the land would spue them out (v. 22), as he had told them before, ~~CHRIS~~ Leviticus 18:28. If God spared not the natural branches, but broke them off, neither would he spare those who were grafted in, if they degenerated. Thus the rejection of the Jews stands for a warning to all Christian churches to take heed lest the kingdom of God be taken from them. Those that sin like others must expect to smart like them; and their profession of relation to God will be no security to them.