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148

Box
52

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202

The Greatest Chapter in the Bible, 1924.

"THE GREATEST CHAPTER IN THE BIBLE."

A Discussion of Leviticus XIX: 1-18.

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER.

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JOSEPH T. KRAUS
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I have called this Chapter XIX, of the Book of Leviticus, the third book of the Bible, the greatest chapter in the Bible because it contains, in the form of a legal code, all that is essential in religion and ethics. There is nothing that can be added to this chapter which is not already, by patent inference, implied in one or the other of the great faiths. There is nothing which can be subtracted from it which would not be a lamentable loss, unless it be the few ritualistic bits of legislation which are now antiquated, which undoubtedly came from older codes, and which need not concern us today.

I wonder whether you noticed, in your reading of this chapter, that it is in reality a restatement and an elaboration of the Ten Commandments, of which we spoke last week. In place of the first three commandments, which speak of God, of his unity, of the prohibition to make images, and of the prohibition to take the name of the Lord in vain, this chapter XIX has the following: "Ye shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy." "Turn ye not unto idols, nor make yourself molton gods." "And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, so that thou profane the name of thy God." -- a restatement, we shall see in a moment, a vast elaboration on the commandments.

For the fourth commandment our code has: "Each man shall keep my Sabbaths"; and again in verse 30: "Ye shall

keep my Sabbaths." For the fifth commandment our code has: "Ye shall reverence every man, his father and his mother." Whenever in the Bible the word "fear" is used in connection with an ethical ideal, it must not be taken in the present day sense of the word "fear." It must be taken in the meaning of the Hebrew " --which means to revere; reverence. For the sixth commandment: "Thou shalt not kill," our code has: "Ye shall not stand idly by the blood of thy neighbor." For the seventh commandment our code has a general law concerning the spread of nudeness and immorality in the land. For the eighth commandment our code has: "Ye shall not steal"--the plural form of "Thou shalt not steal." And for the ninth commandment our code has: "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people." The commandments read: "Ye shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor." For the tenth commandment, prohibiting coveteousness, our code goes a step far beyond that and prohibits not only coveteousness but hate, which is perhaps the cause, or the result of coveteousness. "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart."

And so we see that our code is a restatement, though not, of course, in the order of the earlier ten commandments. But we ought to remember that this Chapter XIX, which is part of what is known as the Holiness Code, was written in the sixth century, perhaps three or four hundred years or more after the ten commandments. And between these two periods something very tremendous and very revolutionary

occurred in Jewish life. Between the tenth or the eleventh century and the sixth century the great prophetic movement occurred. Titan souls arose--an Amos, an Isaiah, a Micah, a Jeremiah--colossal spirits who fashioned and remolded the religious and moral thought of their people. So that it would be passing strange if this code of laws, written at the close of this great prophetic era, would not show a stamp, an imprint of the work of these prophets. And it does. It shows unmistakable evidences of religious progress and advance over the ten commandments.

Let us, for example, take the first verse. "Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy." The ten commandments do not speak of God as holy--kadesh. Just what does the Bible understand by the word "kadesh"--holy? The word "kadesh", like so many other critical words, passed through various stages of development and meaning. Originally kadesh meant a something which is taboo, a something which is unapproachable. God was a consuming fire, and man could not approach his presence or his dwelling place without fear of consequences. In the course of time, and mostly through the preaching of the prophets, the word "kadesh" assumed another meaning. It meant the absence of corporeality and sexuality as applied to God. To us it is quite a commonplace to speak of God as spirit, but it was not so to primitive man. To the primitive man a creator was a physical progenitor, and when he spoke of God as creator, he spoke of him not as in a spiritual sense but in a physical

sense, even as the Greeks spoke of their deities, or the Babylonians or the Egyptians or the Romans spoke of their gods.

The prophets of Israel labored to impress upon the minds of the people that God is spirit, and that acts of creation are spiritual emanations altogether removed from the realm of the physical. In primitive times the worship of a deity was inevitably accompanied by gross immorality and licentiousness, because of this concept of physical procreation. The prophets uprooted that notion in religion. And so when they spoke of God as "kadesh"--holy, they spoke of him as absolute spirit, and from that it was quite inevitable that the word "kadesh" would come to assume, in the course of time, the meaning of purity, the meaning of the highest ethical ideal, and, ultimately, the word "kadesh" in Rabbinic literature and in Medieval literature came to mean the saints, a martyr, a man whose life was exemplary, an ascetic, a man of perfection, of sainthood and purity.

Now, this notion of God as pure spirit and as the source of ethical perfection is expressed in our code. It is not yet found in the Ten Commandments. Notice what this sentence does: "Ye shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." That is a marvelous phrase. That phrase exalts not alone God but man; that phrase definitely places God in the realm of absolute spirit, but at the same time raises man from the dust in telling him that the child of dust is able to imitate divinity. Heretofore only the angels

were said to be Godlike. Man was a miserable creature of mud and clay and dust controlled by divine omnipotence. The relation of man to God was the relation of tyrant and subject, of master and slave, of omnipotence and omniscience, of absolute power and absolute weakness. This verse established an altogether new and revolutionary and exalting relationship between God and man. God and man are bound by the same law of holiness. God is the source of holiness. At the same time he is the archetype of holiness. Man can reach up to Divinity; man can be Godlike--not, of course, in His infinity or in His eternal qualities, or in His omniscience or omnipotence, but in his aspirations he can be like unto God. A soul that seeks after beauty is to that degree beautiful, and a soul which seeks after God is to that degree Godlike. And so that phrase, "Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy," is one of the most revolutionary conceptions in religious thought.

The Psalmist says: "I have set the Lord always before me." The Rabbis have a beautiful little homily. They said: "The Bible declares ye shall walk after the Lord your God. How can a man walk after God? Has it not been said God is a consuming fire?" "Ah," said the Rabbis, "walk ye after the ways of God. Just as God clothed the naked, as it is said he made for Adam and Eve garments of skins, so do ye clothe the naked; just as God visited the sick, as it is written that God appeared unto Abraham at Mount when he was ill, so do ye visit the sick; just as God comforts

the mourner, as it is written after the death of Abraham God blessed Isaac, so do ye comfort the mourner."

And so this ideal of the Imitatio Dei--the Imitation of God--is not only a sublime conception as representing a man's pursuit of the ideal and the unobtainable which is ours--the crown and the crest of mortal man, the ceaseless upreaching for the things which ceaselessly elude us, but at the same time that ideal is quite practical and helpful and useful in this sense in which the Rabbis take it. Just as God is merciful, so be ye merciful. Just as God is just, so be ye just.

In connection with this ideal of "kadesh", of holy, you listen to two rather strange verses in this chapter. "Ye shall not eat with the blood. Neither shall ye practice divination or soothsaying. Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor imprint any marks upon you: I am the Lord." These practices are no longer common in the race today, but in the ancient days they were very common. Self-mutilation and self-castigation were practices common in the worship of the deity and in the funereal rites for the departed dead. The spirit of Israel revolted against this ~~sub~~botry. God is spirit and God can be worshipped only in spirit and in holiness. The soul is of God and the body is of God, and the body must not be desecrated and mutilated in the service of the soul.

That, too, was a novel and revolutionary ideal. And so was the prohibition which I read to you: "Turn ye not

unto ghosts or unto familiar spirits." Do not practice divination or soothsaying. In ancient days every people practiced divination. They sought the will of God by means of trees and rocks and caves, and the flight of birds and the entrails of animals, and of the consulting the dead. Every object was the dwelling place of some deity, and in order to learn the will of that deity they consulted that object,-- either the movement of the branches in the tree tops, or the sounds in the cave, or the appearances on the surface of the water, of the flight of birds in a certain area of the sky, of the sign which appears in the entrails of a sacrificed animal. All these practices were quite common in the ancient times and in ancient Israel, and the prophets who taught a religion of spirit and a religion of morality were determined to uproot that heathenish, idolatrous superstition. Were they alive today they would be just as firm and insistent as to those who turn unto ghosts and unto familiar spirits, as they were in the ancient days.

There are today in our land and in our cities hundreds of witches of Endor who bring up the ghosts of the departed to satisfy the morbid curiosity of foolish, disturbed men and women. Spiritualism is but a recurrence and a revival of that form of divination by means of consulting the dead which Israel prohibited thousands of years ago. The dead are with God. It is well with them, and we must not, like inquisitive children, try to pry into the unknown and into the unknowable. The dead, too, must be revered.

"Honor thy father and thy mother" likewise received a great elaboration, ethically speaking here. Honor not only thy father and thy mother, not only the parents of others, but honor each one, honor old age, revere the hoary head; and honor the face of the old man. You know in ancient days they did not honor the face of the old man; the old man was exposed upon the mountain tops to perish, because he was a cumbrance, he was a dependent, and the people, the community, did not wish to be burdened with the care of dependent old men and women. And when our code lays down the law, Thou shalt not only support old age but honor it, revere it, it is introducing again a new note into ethical ideals.

Old age is a claim upon our solicitude, not only because it is dependent and weaker than youth, but also because with old age there may come an insight, a wisdom, a compassion and an understanding which the accumulation of experiences alone can give. And so the Bible declares old age is a crown of glory; it is the glorious consummation of life. That is a beautiful ideal, even in our own day.

But none of the commandments receive such vast elaboration and perfection as the eighth one: "Thou shalt not steal." "Ye shall not steal; neither shall ye tell falsely, nor lie one to another." A lie is a form of theft, because the prevaricator hopes to gain something by means of his lie which otherwise he would not have. Notice the definiteness and the sharpness with which this commandment is defined. "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judg-

ment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have." Absolute justice in our dealing with our fellowmen, in our commerce with our fellowmen.

"Thou shalt not oppress thy neighbor." For there are some forms of oppression which, though they legally may not be accounted theft, morally they are equally as culpable and equally as detestable. The man who oppresses his neighbor, the man who exploits his neighbor, the man who deprives him or denies him his just due, the man who robs him through exploitation, through manipulation, through stock gambling, the man who grows rich through child labor, of sweated labor, of underpaid labor, the man who denies opportunities of growth and expression to the children of God through his niggardliness of compensation and recompense for honest labor,--that man is a thief in the sight of God, even if he is not so accounted in the sight of man.

"Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment. Thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor favor the person of the mighty, but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor." There is no vapid sentimentalism here. This is the bed rock upon which civilization is built. Absolute, impartial, unyielding, uncompromising justice--justice which knows neither rich nor poor, strong or weak; justice which knows neither home born nor stranger. Above all and first of all must justice be established. The truth must be made known; the man's culpability must be revealed. Then mercy

and compassion may step in and temper the penalty; but there can be no tempering with right or wrong. There shall be no unrighteousness in judgment. And notice this applies not only to the Jew, to the home born. That justice knows no national or racial lines of demarcation, "And if a stranger sojourneth in your land, ye shall do him no wrong. The stranger that sojourneth with you shall be unto you as the homeborn, and thou shalt love him as thyself."

People speak of the Jew as clannish; people speak of him as tribal. The anti-Semites claim that all these magnificent laws were made for the Jews or his brothers but not for the foreigner or the stranger. Ah, no. The Jew could never stoop to do the things which his traducers and maligners would do or are doing. It is they, then and now, who called the Jew stranger and therefore unwelcome. The Jew never spoke of the stranger in terms of racial inferiority. The Jew never had immigration laws. "Like the home born, so shall the stranger be." The Jew naturalized every human being who came to seek the shelter and the protection of the Jewish people, because the Jew had this sensitized, highly developed notion of eternal justice. And justice to the Jew was much more than merely revealing guilt and punishing the sinner, and retribution or restitution or correction. There was a higher justice known to the Jew twenty-five hundred years ago. "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart. Thou shalt not bear a grudge against a brother of thy people. Thou shalt not take vengeance.

Thou shalt not hate even if the object of thy hate is deserving of hate. Thou shalt not bear a grudge even if the object of thy grudge has sinned against you. Thou shalt not take vengeance even if the object of your vengeance is deserving of punishment and retribution." For hate destroys him who hates even more than the object that is hated; and vengeance devastates the soul of him who seeks vengeance even more than it would harm him whose hurt is being sought. A festering hate, an ingrown and cankerous grudge, a blinding passion for vengeance completely destroys the soul of the human being.

And so justice to oneself, justice to the highest possibilities of human possibility, demands that a man purge his soul and cleanse his heart of these things which defile and desecrate and pollute. That, too, is found in our code. Justice, too, expresses itself in charity. What a marvelous provision that was for the poor. "When ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather the full effort of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the Lord."

There was a Community Chest in ancient Israel, provided for by law. When God has blessed you with the harvest, do not be niggardly and take in everything that your eyes behold, but leave a corner of thy field for some unfortunate one. Leave thy gleaning lay. Let the widow and the

orphan and the stranger come in and eat and bless God and bless you. Charity here is not a matter of almsgiving; it is not a matter of sentiment; it is not a matter of indulgence in a warm but self-gratifying emotion. It is a law of justice. Immediately following that law comes the phrase: "Ye shall not steal." For he who does not share his abundance with the needy steals. Back of this law is a fundamental thought, namely, the commonalty of life; our mutual indebtedness, one to another, the rich to the poor, the poor to the rich. Everything we have and everything we enjoy, we have and enjoy because others have contributed to them. No man can live his life alone and live it fully and richly. The businessman who engages in business uses capital which represents the accumulated labor of other men; the workman who works in a shop is enabled to work because of capital invested in that work, which in turn represents the labor and the work of other men.

The book which I read and I enjoy is the labor of the soul and mind and sweating of another man; a beautiful picture or statue which I see, or a marvelous oratorio to which I listen represents the soul-groaning and labor and toil of mind, body and soul of other men. The institutions to which I give represent the sacrifices of millions of men. For all I have and all I am, my education, my opportunities, my social contacts, I am indebted to society; and when I give to those who have not of the things of life as abundantly as I have, I am merely paying back a pittance of my debt to

society. That is the Jewish conception of charity as expressed in this holy code.

And lastly, that marvelous phrase: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." -- the Golden Rule, the sentence which the great Hillel said was the whole of the law, the rest is just commentary. "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Mind you, it does not say, "Thou shalt love the Jew as thyself." It says thy neighbor--any man, every man. In another part of the book it says: "Thou shalt love the stranger, for there are strangers in the land of Egypt."

In his ethical ideals the Jew was never mean and small and self-centered. The ideal of love only a member of your own race seems to be the prerogative of modern western civilization. And notice, furthermore, that the phrase does not say: "Thou shalt love humanity as thyself." It says, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor." It is much more easy to love humanity in the abstract than to love your neighbor in the concrete. Any man can have a fine, lovely, transcendent, abstract ideal of the love of humanity, and yet be mean and cruel and ugly to that part of humanity which lives right next to him--his neighbor.

The Bible is concerned with the reality of life. It is essentially a guide for life and living, and the Bible commands you to love him who needs your love, who comes directly under your notice; not the man who is at home far from you, who is protected, who can well take care of himself.

but the stranger, who perhaps has no home, who comes to you to seek your protection and your love. Love him specifically, concretely, and by cultivating this love of your neighbor, of the people who come under your sphere of influence, you will ultimately develop a universal love for all mankind.

I am suspicious of people who prate all the time about the love of humanity. I always wonder how much of love they expend in their own homes or in their own business circle or in their own community. And notice, too, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." There seems to be, apparently, a paradox there. If a man loves himself selfishly, he will never love his neighbor. Just what does the Bible mean when it says "Love thy neighbor as thyself."? Hillel explained it. "What is hateful unto thyself, do not do unto thy neighbor." Love him as you love the best that is in you. A man never loves his appetites; a man never loves his passions; a man is never proud of his greed. He tolerates them. He may be enslaved by them, but he never loves them. What do we love in ourselves? Why, we love our goodness, our ideals, our aspirations, the fine things we aspire to be and to do.

Now, as you love that in you, as you revere the God in you, so love these things and revere the God who dwells in your neighbor. Love! The one thing that enables us to see our fellowmen really.

There is a beautiful story told by one of the sages of our people who lived a hundred years ago. A disciple

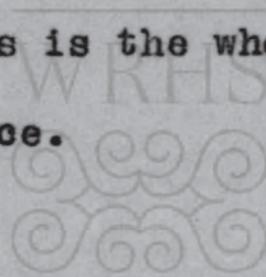
came to see the Rabbi, and the Rabbi knew that the disciple was miserly and unkind and uncharitable, and he wanted him to be improved and bettered by his instruction, and he took him by his arm and led him to the window of the room and said to him, "Look out through this window and tell me what you see." "Why," said the man, "I see men, women and children." "That is fine," said the Rabbi. "Come here." And he took him to a mirror, and he said, "Look in here. What do you see?" "Why," said he, "I see myself." "Ah," said the Rabbi, "look at the difference a little bit of silver makes. Here through this glass you are able to see men and women and children--humanity. Here, just because a little silver has been placed on the back of that glass, a little wealth, a little prosperity, you can no longer see men, women and children. All you can see is yourself."

Love thy neighbor and love will open your eyes to see clearly God's children all about you, like unto yourself, in their needs and in their aspirations, in their desire to be better and finer. The Rabbis say that a stringed instrument at a certain tension will begin to vibrate spontaneously as soon as another instrument near to it of the same tension will begin to vibrate. There is a spontaneous reaction there. And it is so with human souls, for our souls become attuned in love and kindness, and as they are set in motion vibrating to the beauty and the glory of the world, the souls of other men around us will similarly vibrate.

"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: for I am the Lord."

What a marvelous chapter is this. It sums up everything. God as spirit, God as holiness. Man, his ideal is the imitation of God. And who can imitate God only by reverencing life--the life of his neighbor, the parents, old age, through justice--justice in our dealings and our commerce with our fellowmen; justice in our contacts, justice in our thoughts, justice to the poor and to the rich, justice in forgiveness, justice in charity, and the supreme justice of all--Love.

This is the law of the prophets and the law of God. This is the whole of faith, of religion, in theory and in practice.



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