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BE YE HOLY

“It is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.” (1 Peter 1:16, quoting Lev 11:44-45)

Peter wrote this to reiterate a principle laid down in the Law of Moses. Our holiness, or attempts thereto, are a direct result of God’s holiness.

Some people misquote the verse, saying, “Be ye holy, as I am holy.” There is a big difference between “as” and “for.” To be holy, *as* God is holy, is an impossible task. God created man with the ability to make choices. Along with that ability comes the ability to sin. Perhaps we even have a propensity to sin, since none of us has ever been able to live free of sin, except Jesus. God’s holiness is intrinsic. It is built into his nature. He cannot be anything but holy and remain God. Therefore, it is impossible for us to be holy in the same way that (as) God is holy. Even in the best of our holiness we may not do what we want to do. (Rom 7) We cannot be as holy as God. We can be, and Christians are, holy because God has given us his holiness. He has wiped our unholiness clean, and continues to do that. Nevertheless, we still are not holy, as he is holy.

What the verses in Leviticus and 1 Peter say, however, is that we are to be holy for/because God is holy. One might say this holiness is on two levels. We have the holiness he gives us because of forgiveness of sin through the Christ. Then we have our own attempts at holiness because we want to do our best to be like God. Because we are dead to sin, we work at holiness. (Rom 6) Even so, we cannot attain any personal holiness by ourselves, even after our death, burial, and resurrection. We are people, and we live with people.

God’s holiness is not affected by his living among his people. He is so holy as not to be affected living among sinners. The glory of God dwelt in the Tabernacle, and the Temple. Did that make the people holy? No. Did that make God unholy? Not at all.

We on the other hand must avoid living among sinners because we don’t have that kind of holiness. When Peter quoted the passage in Leviticus, it was in the context of changing one’s life away from the former lusts. Later Peter says that this involved leaving former acquaintances.

For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in

lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you. (1 Pet 4:3-4)

Paul said, “Do not be deceived, “Bad company corrupts good morals.” (1 Cor 15:33) He did not say it was only a possibility; he said not to be deceived into thinking it was not a possibility. Because we live among people, we cannot maintain perfect holiness. We can, however, do our part to purge out the leaven of sin when it comes among us in the church.

I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. (1 Cor 5:9-13)

We can be holy, not just have holiness imputed to us. It must be possible, because God commands it. We will not be perfect in it, but we must try. Why? God gave the reason. “Be ye holy, for I am holy.” We maintain what holiness we can because we want to be like God. We were made in his image, and we want to continue in his image. Because God is love, we love. Because God is forgiving, we forgive. Because God is holy, we maintain our holiness.

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COMMANDMENTS: 6-10

In the third month after leaving Egypt, the Israelites came to Sinai. Tradition says it was fifty days after the Passover that the Law was given there. That is a reason for the holiday of *Shavuos* (Pentecost). It is a day traditionally given over to the study of the Law. *Shavuos* falls on May 15, 2013, so it is appropriate that we finish a series of articles about the Ten Commandments in this month.

The first three commandments established who God is and what the Jewish response to that should be. The fourth command established a period of rest for the Jewish people, and especially for their slaves, servants, and animals. The fifth commandment legislated familial relationships. The remaining five commandments, most of which existed long before the Ten Commandments were given, and have been incorporated into laws of other nations since, establish one's responsibilities in the society of the Jewish nation and generally extend beyond the physical/societal boundaries of Jewishness.

One of the reasons for the Ten Commandments was to set the Jewish people apart from the rest of the world. If so, one might think that these final five commandments are superfluous. Did not everyone accept these as law? While most societies, just to exist as a

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civilization, included these laws, sometimes they only applied to the lower classes. The real innovation of the Ten Commandments was that they applied across the board. King David could be as guilty of murder as the third-undershepherd.

Murder

"Thou shalt not kill." (Ex 20:13) Ever since Cain slew Abel, murder has been on God's list of no-nos. Without this law, there can be no society or civilization. When people get together, disagreements happen. The difference between a man of God and a man of the flesh is that God's man will not take the disagreement to the extreme. Rabbi Yeshua said, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause

shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." (Matt 5:21-22) He brought the commandment down to the root cause: anger. Leopold and Loeb notwithstanding, the majority of murders by otherwise reasonable people are based in anger.

Because the King James Version uses the word "kill," many people have taken this command to another extreme. The commandment was clearly never meant to limit the killing of animals (or plants), because other laws specifically demanded blood sacrifices or limited what animals could be used for food. There are limitations within the Law of Moses to prevent cruelty to animals, even while killing them.

This commandment was also never intended to prohibit capital punishment. The legal execution of a criminal after due process of law is built into the Law of Moses. There are even provisions for preserving the life of the one guilty of manslaughter while still providing for the execution of a murderer. That is where the Law of Moses differs from many other laws at the time. Murder is not determined by the class of the one committing it, but the intent. Even a king was liable to trial and execution for murder.

Nor, clearly, was this a prohibition against killing in warfare. There were no provisions for conscientious objectors among the Jewish people, based on this law. One could get out of military service for various reasons, but not by claiming it was a violation of the Ten Commandments to kill another person.

Adultery

"Thou shalt not commit adultery." (Ex 20:14) The sanctity of marriage was inviolable. Whether one was married to one person or to many, taking another person's spouse was more than merely stealing. It was a violation of both parties to the marriage, even if one consented.

Other laws dealt with sexual relationships outside of marriage. This was a specific prohibition of sexual intimacy when one of the parties was married to someone else. From ancient times, marriage was held to be binding only within one's social class or below. The *Epic of Gilgamesh* documents a king's prerogative to ignore the marriage rights of a husband, particularly on the night of the wedding. In the Middle Ages some feudal lords demanded a marriage tax, supposedly in place of their right to violate the marriage bed.

God was here telling the Jewish people that *droit du seigneur* was not acceptable. The master had no such rights over a married slave. Furthermore, the wife could

expect the fidelity of the husband, and the husband of the wife. Polygamy was allowed, especially among the upper classes, but even then the husband was bound to his wives, and not allowed to go elsewhere.

The prophets often used adultery as a metaphor for the failed relationship between the Israelites and God. When the people worshipped other Gods, it was called adultery.

The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? she is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. (Jer 3:6-7)

Theft

“Thou shalt not steal.” (Ex 20:15) This is a prohibition against taking by stealth, such as theft. Technically, it is not a prohibition against robbery (forceful taking directly from a person), although most authorities would include that as falling under this law.

Outright robbery is serious, because of the threat of bodily harm along with the taking of property. Theft is perhaps considered more heinous because of the stealthy nature and the feeling of violation of one’s security. One may not be able to take precautions against a robber, but one tends to think that keeping valuables in a locked house is more secure. When a thief “digs through” an adobe wall to take something, it seems more of a violation. There was a greater expectation of safety. It seems even worse when another finds property and makes no attempt to find the owner.

When the rabbis begin a study of Torah with a new learner, the first thing studied is not the Ten Commandments. It is the laws about finding property (such as animals) and returning it to the rightful owner. Just as limitations on what happens during a disagreement are essential to civilization, so also is the concept of ownership. When one acts the child, thinking that “what I see is mine,” there is no civilization. The prohibition against theft, therefore, is really about living with others.

Perjury

“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.” (Ex 20:16) Many people have interpreted this commandment to prohibit lying in any form, but it is really only about perjury. This command is about justice.

God is just, and he demands justice of his people. One of the most scathing accusations in the prophets and the proverbs is that judges took bribes to cause them to decide in favor of the rich. Perjury, lying under oath in a court of law, perverts justice. Through perjury, many a person has been falsely convicted.

For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together. And there arose certain, and bare false witness against him, saying, We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands. But neither so did their witness agree together. (Mk 14:56-59)

Perversions of justice generally favor the rich or powerful. The poor man usually has no recourse but the truth, which bears little weight against the privileged class. “But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?” (Jas 2:6) Just as the command of the sabbath was to show kindness to the poor, so the command against perjury holds the powerful accountable for the welfare of those under them.

Covetousness

“Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant,

When one acts the child, thinking that “what I see is mine,” there is no civilization.

nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.” (Ex 20:17) This is the only command that legislates what one thinks rather than what one does. The command not to steal does not limit a person from wanting to steal. The command not to commit murder does not mean the thought cannot pass through a person’s mind. Certainly if one dwells on it, the thought becomes the parent of the action. But most commands, as most laws anywhere, legislate actions. Here God says, “don’t even think it.”

Covetousness was the original sin. The same word used here to mean covet was used in Genesis to say that the tree of knowledge of good and evil was “desirable” and “pleasant.” Covetousness may be the root of all sin. There has never been a religious war; there have been many wars over desirable property that used religion as an excuse.

God knows what is best for his people; therefore, they need not desire. If it is good, he will give it. If it has to be coveted, it is probably not good for a person. “Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.” (Jas 4:3)

People have to live together. The last five of the Ten Commandments helped the Jewish people to live together. More, they applied across the board. They are designed so that all the people were equal before God’s law. Nobody was above the law.

Q-TIPS®

Just about everybody knows about Q-tips® cotton swabs. These little sticks with a puff of cotton on each end have many uses. Perhaps they are most famous for the one thing they should never be used for—cleaning out the ear canal. They do, however, have many other uses. They are good for applying makeup or nail polish. Some people use them to collect dust from small spaces, like parts of the computer, or for making crafts. Some people use the name in a slightly different way—as an acronym for “Quit taking it personally, stupid.” (Maybe the stupid part is a bit much, but there has to be something for the “s.”)

The idea is not new. Maybe Eve complained about being blamed for the forbidden fruit thing, and Adam was the first to say, “quit taking it personally.” (If so, it was probably the only time someone could say that there was no choice but to take it that way.) All joking aside, it is a biblical concept. God has repeatedly told his people not to take rejection personally.

First there was Moses. This man had led the children of Israel out of captivity in Egypt. He had parted the Red Sea. He had met God on Sinai. Even the most humble man on earth found it hard not to take rejection personally. When the people complained that they were starving in the wilderness, Moses took it personally.

And Moses said unto the LORD, Wherefore hast thou afflicted thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? (Num 11:11)

God replied, “Moses, Q-tips.” Actually he told Moses to take some men to help him bear the burden of Israel. One way to quit taking it personally is to share the load.

Then there was Samuel. He had been a prophet and judge in Israel for many years. Then one day the people say, “give us a king.” Can you blame Samuel for

feeling like he was being personally attacked? Yet God reminds him, “They have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.” (1 Sam 8:7) Sometimes when we take things personally, we are taking on what belongs to someone else. Samuel put himself in God’s place, and God quickly put him back in his own place.

Elijah was not normally a whiner. One time, though, he had to flee into the wilderness. When God asked him (twice) what he was doing there, Elijah replied, “I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.” (1 Kings 19:10, 14) Out in the middle of nowhere, Elijah throws a pity party. But does God buy it? Not at all. “Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel.” (1 Kings 19:18) Elijah had no right to take it personally, because he was not alone. Sometimes we need to take a step back and see if someone else is suffering the same things we are.

Jesus could have taken it personally. The week before, people had welcomed him in triumph to Jerusalem. But now he was hanging on a stake, with nails in his hands and feet. He had been beaten, spat upon, lied about, and now he was being executed like a criminal. Even the guys on death row with him were mocking him. He was about to bear the sins of the whole world. His response: “Father forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.” (Lk 23:34) Not long after this, Stephen showed he had learned the Q-tips® lesson. As he was being stoned, he said, “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” (Acts 7:60) The real lesson about not taking things personally is to give them to God. He will take care of matters, and take care of us.

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