

4. Holiness Code and Christian Family Love

Introduction.

The OT holiness code opens a door to Christian family love. How that works becomes clear by a discussion of the fall, restoration, and consummation.

A. In the fall, sexual immorality including homosexuality transgresses the bonds of family love.

It should be obvious that the sins of Lev 18 are not just sins of individuals who transgress the boundaries of marital intimacy set in place at creation. The sins against God's design for marriage are also sins against the product of marital intimacy, which is the family. Leviticus teaches that sexual holiness is required by the Lord for all the relationships of the family. These relationships reach beyond individual family units of father, mother, and children to extended family (aunts, uncles, and so forth) and to the Israelite nation as a people and therefore as a family of brothers and sisters. Called to be a holy people, fathers and mothers from different households are brothers and sisters in the national family. Husband and wife are brother and sister in the Lord. Mothers, wives and daughters are sisters in the Lord. Family holiness includes a bond of love for the neighbor, the near one, and for God. Accordingly, holy love of father to father, mother to mother, brother to sister, brother to brother, sister to sister, men to women generally (beyond the bond of marriage), men to men, women to women, and so forth is preserved and advanced by sexual purity. In this context, homosexuality is a sin against God's command of marriage, but it is also a sin against His design for family love. All the relationships of the family that emerge from marital intimacy are to prosper without sexual intimacy, without sexual overtones, without erotic-sexual-genital-orgiastic overtones. Israel, in contrast to the nations, is to be a holy people and thus to be a testimony to what the human family is supposed to be in a bond of love for one another and for God (as a godly seed descending from Adam, Mal 2.15). However, the Canaanites transgressed the God appointed boundaries of marriage and family. Their sins ripened, rotted, became full (Gen 15.16) defiled the very land which was made sick and vomited them out for a cleansing of itself (Lev 18.24-30): this is figurative of God's judgment on the sins of that people and His judgment on them and all who follow in their steps, including old Israel.

B. Through restoration, the new Israel is also to be a holy family

The NT grounds Christian conduct in the Leviticus call to holiness: **Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.**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 Pet 1.13-16) ...Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul (1 Pet 2.11)...love the brotherhood (2.17)... Above all, keep loving one another earnestly (1 Pet 4.8). The passions of the flesh (1 Pet 2.11) and of our former ignorance (1.14) contradict the holiness God requires in Leviticus (18-20): **You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.**³ **Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God...**(19.2-3)...**Consecrate yourselves, therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God.**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...If a man commits adultery...death.**¹¹ **If a man lies with his father's wife...death...If a man lies with his daughter-in-law...death...**¹³ **If a man lies with a male as with a woman...death...**¹⁵ **If a man lies with an animal...death...**¹⁶ **If a woman approaches any animal and lies with it...death (20.7-16).****

Notably, all fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, men, women, etc. are children in God's new Israelite family. Called to be a holy people (a holy nation, 1 Pet 2.9), they are not to be conformed to the passions of the flesh that contradict holiness defined in Lev 18-20 per the quote in 1.16. Homosexuality (Lev 18.22) is therefore not only a sin against God's standard for marriage but it is also a sin against God's standard for love in the human family generally and in the restored family of God, the church specifically. Other NT family passages contain the same idea:

Ephesians: as loved children, you walk in love by sexual purity (as the new holy people of Leviticus): **Be imitators of God [holy as God is holy], therefore, as dearly loved children² and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**³ **But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people (Eph 5.1-3 NIV).** Thus, per the tie with Leviticus (God's holy and pure people), homosexuality is contrary to sexual purity and more deeply, it is contrary to family love.

Thessalonians: you please God as a Leviticus-like holy family by sexual purity

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God...³ **For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;**⁴ **that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor,**⁵ **not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God;**⁶ **that no one transgress and wrong his brother [or sister] in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.**⁷ **For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness [as Leviticus defines holiness in contrast to sexual immorality and impurity].**⁸ **Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you (1 Thess 4.1-8).**

C. In the consummation, heaven will be a place of holy family love without marriage

The church's sexual purity in all relationships (men to men, women to women, men to women) that emerge from marital intimacy (i.e. family) is to be a foretaste, anticipation, and embodiment of the glory to come where sexual intimacy will have passed away in ultimate fulfillment (Mat 22.30).

If we cultivate brotherly and sisterly love that respects the boundaries of marriage, then we anticipate the glory of heaven where there will be no marrying or giving in marriage. We then have a goal for the present rooted in what is coming: "an inconceivably pure, sweet, and fervent love between the saints in glory" (Edwards, *Charity*, 202) because heaven is a world of love where "this glorious fountain forever flows forth in streams, yea, in rivers of love and delight, and these rivers swell, as it were, to an ocean of love, in which the souls of the ransomed may bathe with the sweetest enjoyment, and their hearts, as it were, be deluged with love!" (*Charity*, 196)

Thus, being bound for perfect holiness that has no sexual overtones, we are called to holiness in all relationships that emerge from the blessing of sexual intimacy here on earth. Love between women is exemplified in the love between Ruth and Naomi. Love between men ought to grow in this life toward the love shared, for example, between Jonathan and David: **As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.**² **And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house.**³ **Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul.**⁴ **And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt** (1 Sam 18.1-4). Growth is the operative word granting that men are often too reserved, too proud, too emotionally fragile (fearing rejection) to develop close affectional bonds with other men.

In context of this study, Helminiak suggests that David and Jonathan had a homosexual relationship. To 18.1-4, he adds 1 Sam 20.30: **Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan, and he said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman, do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness?"** (1 Sam 20.30). Regarding 20.30, Helminiak misses the clear point that, for Saul, Jonathan shames himself and his mother by giving up his claim to be the next King. In Saul's view, he dishonors his mother who conceived him (to the shame of her nakedness) and he dishonors himself as rightful heir (to your shame) by forfeiting his title to David. Therefore, Helminiak (driven by an erotocentric mindset) also misses the loving self-sacrifice of Jonathan per 18.1-4. He misses the example of a man loving another man, as he loves himself, as the great love command teaches: love God with all your strength and your neighbor as yourself.

Looking again to glory, the fact that marriage discontinues is evidence that in male to female relationships sexuality (desire for and engagement in sex) is not central, necessary, or essential to being human and bearing God's image. It is the voice of sexual desire run amuck that speaks when sexual pleasure is viewed as the core of being human and a key to the biblical texts about human love. The core in marriage is the covenant of companionship in knowing each other in knowing God. That is to spill over to all relationships of a holy people in companionship and fellowship with the triune God.

The precious bond that we are to cultivate in the Christian church family is a wholesome deep affectional and emotional bond of brother to brother and sister to sister, sister to brother and brother to sister that is not sex drive driven. By this love, we anticipate the love that abides in heaven.

The eschatological perspective shows that, though a source of wonderful delight, sexuality is not ultimate; full humanness will be attained in glory without it. This outlook helps us maintain a balanced view of the great delight of marital intimacy by checking exaggeration and preserving holiness. These insights help us put sin to death in our members by putting love, marriage, and marital intimacy into a rich biblical perspective.