

# Seventh Sunday after Epiphany

## WHOLLY SET APART

Leviticus 19:1-2, 9-18

Seventh Sunday after Epiphany

Analysis by Timothy J. Hoyer

The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 2Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them: You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy. 9When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God.

11You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; and you shall not lie to one another. 12And you shall not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God: I am the Lord. 13You shall not defraud your neighbor; you shall not steal; and you shall not keep for yourself the wages of a laborer until morning. 14You shall not revile the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind; you shall fear your God: I am the Lord. 15You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. 16You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor: I am the Lord. 17You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself. 18You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

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## DIAGNOSIS: Set Up

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) :** *Set Up?*

The people of Israel were a people amongst many other peoples (e.g. Canaanites, Gibeonites, Moabites, Amorites, Philistines). Those many other peoples, long established on their lands, had their own cultures and their own way of governing and their own way of ordering their society—their own set of laws and their own gods. The Israelites were new. Their way of life as slaves in Egypt would not work in this new place, nor would their experience of wandering in the wilderness dependent upon God to provide them with food and water. So the LORD prepared his people for how they would live in their new land as people of the LORD. The people of Israel were to be set apart, different, with their own way of caring for one another as described and demanded by God. Just as God was set apart and different than all the other gods (“What other gods are like me?”), so were the people of God to be set apart.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) :** *Wholly Unholy*

The list of “to do” and “not to do,” like all laws, are there because people did those things that hurt each other. People think they are holy, set apart from others, more special than others, more important than others, and so should have more, have what others have. Thus, they stole from each other; they profaned the name of God; they defrauded each other, and more. They, like all people, were so concerned about making sure they had enough to protect and preserve their own life that they took from others what they were using to provide and protect their life. It was the same as telling God that God was not protecting and providing for their life in a way that was good enough for them. To steal from others was to take from them what God had given them. Even worse, to steal from others was to say that

they did not trust God to protect and provide for them. That lack of trust in God was why all these laws, these instructions for how to care for one another—especially the poor and the deaf and the blind who were not able to do enough work to protect and provide for their lives—were given. As Paul put it, “Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions” (Galatians 3:19).

### **Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : Set Apart from God**

In the very setting down of the law, in that word “shall,” there is also the law measuring how we fulfilled the “shall.” Did we leave enough of an edge on our harvest? When harvesting the grapes, if we dropped a bunch, did we pick it up or leave it for the poor and the alien? All the measuring is about, “Did we treat God as holy for us?” The measuring pronounces Yes or No on whether we treated God as holy. If Yes, there is a reward; if No, then there is punishment, including death, for not treating God as holy or one’s neighbors as holy. As God gave the “shalls,” God is the one we have to answer to. It is God’s Yes or No. It is God’s blessing of us or God’s death of us. The prophets tell us again and again how God’s people did not treat God as holy by taking from the poor and the orphan and the widows.

## **PROGNOSIS: Set Apart**

### **Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : Set Apart by God’s Son**

However, those laws were given four hundred years after God made a promise to his people, the promise to “bless them.” Yes, the law was given through Moses, but grace came through Christ Jesus (John 1:17). Jesus was God’s promise to us, and all the “shalls” were there to keep us safe until Jesus came. Jesus changed who did the “shalls.” The law demands we do them; Jesus says he has done everything for us. His death and rising are how God now

makes us holy—a righteousness that comes apart from the law and all its “shalls.” We are now holy to God for Christ’s sake. That is God’s promise.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (External Solution) : *Made Holy***

God’s promise to holy us for Jesus’ sake happens when we have faith in God’s promise. But even here, faith is given to us by the Holy-ing Spirit, who works through offering Jesus’ death and rising to people. Jesus is offered through words, through speaking his promise, through proclaiming his forgiveness, through baptizing people into his death and rising, feeding people Jesus’ promise his Supper, and through our conversation and consolation with one another.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *Set Apart for***

Faith in Jesus sets us free from the “shalls” so that we can live using Jesus’ love (“Love one another, as I have loved you,” which is quite different than loving our neighbors as we love ourselves.). The Spirit fills us with love and peace and patience and kindness and goodness and generosity—against such there are no laws. We have faith that when we are poor, we are blessed by Jesus; when we mourn, we are blessed with comfort; when we give mercy, we are given mercy (Matthew 5). Jesus and his love and his mercy—his kingdom—are how we get to protect and preserve the lives of one another. Instead of eating our supper, we give our supper to others so they can eat. We love our enemies. We bless those who curse us. In giving Jesus’ love, all those “shalls” are kept, and even more is done.