

O HOW LOVE I THY LAW



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O HOW I LOVE YOUR LAW!

[The following article written by Norm Edwards is a composite of a five article series that he wrote in Servants News that covers all the statutes covered in Exodus 20 to 23 and Leviticus 19 and 20]

The title of this article was taken from Psalm 119:97. The next four verses give us more insight into what David was thinking:

”Oh how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day. You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts. I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word.”

David saw great wisdom and understanding by studying and doing the ways of the Eternal. What law was he talking about? The ten commandments? Or more?

David spoke, read, and wrote Hebrew, the language of most of the Old Testament scriptures. The only complete books of scriptures that existed were the first five books of Moses, Joshua, Judges. and probably the book of Job. The books of Samuel and Psalms written during his life. The word David used for law in his Psalm was torah, meaning “teaching” or “instruction” though it is usually translated as “law”. Proverbs 1:8 provides an example: "My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law[torah] of your mother." The RSV and other translations use “teaching” instead of “law.”

Torah is first found in Genesis 26:5 "because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws [torah]." Before the writings of Moses, Abraham must have known the teachings of the Eternal and obeyed them. We do not know if Abraham had a written law of some type or if he simply had oral teaching.

Several times in the book of Joshua we find the expression 'book of the law[torah],' an obvious reference to the five books of Moses (Josh 1:8, 8:31, 23:6, 24:26). There are numerous other Old Testament references to the written "law [torah] of Moses." From these scriptures, the unmodified word torah signifies the first five books of Moses. These were certainly the major written record of the Eternal's law available to David.

If we look back at Psalm 119:98 we see that David gained great wisdom from the "commandments". Were these the "ten commandments". Actually, the phrase "Ten commandments" never occurs in a literal translation of the scriptures. The expression appears three times in most English translations (Ex 34:28, Deut 4:13,10:4), but the Hebrew word is dabar meaning “word” or “saying.” The Moffatt translation accurately renders the phrase "ten sayings" in Deuteronomy. David wrote the Hebrew mitzvah for commandment. Mitzvah is the word most commonly translated -- commandments and describes the hundreds of different commandments that the Eternal gave to His people. The "ten sayings" are a very important part of these commandments.

David did not meditate only on "10 commandments," but on the entirety of the Scripture that was available to him. David continues on in Psalm 119 to refer to the Eternal's "testimonies," "precepts" and "word"—each word reflects a different aspect of His instruction to us. David would have followed the instructions for a king: 'Also it shall be, when he [the king] sits on

the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes”(Deut 17:18-19).

What can we conclude from this? Are we to offer animal sacrifices and carry out the death sentences prescribed in the books of Moses. No! We have an Eternal Sacrifice in the form of our Savior, the Messiah. Also, we are not in charge of the civil government at this time. Yet there is a great number of the laws given by the Eternal that we can put into practice, and we can learn important lessons from the rest. There are essentially three categories of laws:

(1) Principles governing how we should love the Eternal and our neighbor. These principles are timeless and represent the Eternal's love in action (John 14:15, 1 John 5:3). We can use most of them directly in our lives.

(2) National laws and punishments for disobedience. We should learn these principles as we will be responsible for administering them in the Millennium (Isa 2:3). We can use laws now when brethren have difficulties with each other and submit to other brethren for judgement rather than going to this world's systems(1 Cor 6:1-6).

(3) Ceremonial laws. Many of the laws of the temple service, sacrifices, ceremonial uncleanness, etc. have no direct application today. Nevertheless, they are well worth our study time as they teach us the about the Eternal's nature, the evil of sin, etc.

Most of us understand our purpose to be Kings and Priests in the Millennium (Rev 1:6, 5:10). Most of us understand that "for out of Zion shall go forth the law [Hebrew torah]"(Isa 2:3). Indeed the scripture indicates the legal system in the Millennium will be very similar to the system under the judges "Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves; everyone loves bribes, and follows after rewards....I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning..." (Isa 1:23,26).

Why, then, is there so little study of the laws that we will be administering in the Millennium, the laws that define righteousness? (Psalm 119:172). Many of our readers may not be aware that Ambassador College never taught a class in the "law of God." An Old Testament Survey course, and a couple of courses in the prophets were the closest things available. Rather than speculate about the reasons for this lack of study, let us begin our study now.

Law Given at Sinai

The words that the Eternal spoke directly to the millions of Israelites are recorded in Exodus 20. Here we find the "10 sayings," commonly known as the "10 commandments." The people asked the Eternal to stop speaking to them (v 19) so Moses delivered the rest of that covenant to them. The covenant was not ratified until Exodus 24:7-8. These three intervening chapters of Exodus (21, 22 & 23) contain a wealth of useful, practical laws. We will cover these chapters verse by verse. Some of these laws seem strange compared with modern day . They should! Our modern day laws have made a large contribution to the destruction of our societies. The Eternal's laws were designed to be simple enough that all could learn them, but complex enough to handle a wide variety of human situations. They were designed to maximize justice, and minimize the misuse of the law.

Five Principles of Good Law

Many laws contain a specific penalty or restitution (restoring money or other goods to a person that was wronged) that was to be administered by other humans. There are five

principles that appear to be followed in nearly all of these laws—principles ignored by many man-made laws. Understanding these principles before we begin our study will help us understand the design of many laws. The five principles are:

#1 A just punishment must be given to the offender, stiff enough that he does not want to repeat the offence, yet not so hard that it needlessly destroys him as a useful citizen.

Many Western countries do not follow this principle at all. A person that pretends to be armed and steals a few hundred dollars can easily be sentenced to 10 years in jail. A white-collar criminal can steal millions of dollars from people, restore none of it, and receive a sentence of a year or two. Worse yet, some white-collar crimes are controlled by antiquated laws with low maximum fines: the convicted criminal may have to pay a fine that is a fraction of the amount stolen!

#2 The offended must receive a just restitution.

Victims should be compensated by the offender. Again, most Western-nation law specifies fines paid to the government, not restitution to victims. Civil law does compensate its victims, sometimes hundreds of times more than their actual losses.

#3 Laws must make it difficult to obtain restitution falsely.

There are numerous scams in the United States where individuals routinely walk onto the property of others and pretend to be injured—then collect multiple thousands of dollars.

#4 Laws must be designed to greatly reduce the chance of administering a wrongful punishment— especially a death penalty.

Most Western nations do a reasonable job in this area. Most human laws require a reasonable amount of proof before a conviction can be obtained. There are some notable exceptions, however: a person can easily spend ten years in jail if someone "plants" a significant quantity of drugs in his coat, luggage or vehicle. Also, children can go through the terrifying experience of being taken away from their parents by the state—all based on unconfirmed reports of "child abuse."

#5 Laws must not produce a harmful effect on society.

The purpose of law is to give each family a chance to work and enjoy the fruits of their labor. The law is to prevent people from interfering with the rights of others and to provide for punishment or restitution when that happens. The law was never intended to protect families from their own mismanagement—they were to reap the consequences of their own mistakes and to learn from them.

A classic case of ignoring this principle is the United States "Aid to Dependent Children" program. The well-meaning people that set up the program wanted to give the most help to families in the most need. So, they set up formulas to increase benefits for each additional child present and decrease benefits if an able-bodied but unemployed father was present. The long term effect of this program? America now has millions of poor families with lots of children and no fathers. Laws should provide relief to people in difficult situations, but should not make the difficult situations so desirable that people act into them on purpose. Another classic case of ignoring this principle is welfare systems that put more money in a person's pocket than they would have if they worked at minimum wage.

We will see these five principles in action as we go through many of the laws in the Bible. We will start in Exodus 21 and go through other related chapters.

Now these are the judgments which you shall set before them: (Ex 20:1).

Moses was commanded to give these judgments to everyone, there were no secret laws.

Servants and Masters

If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing (Ex 20:2).

Many people will look back on the system of servants or slaves in the Bible and say it was cruel and restrictive. However, if you would compare that system with the prison systems found in today's societies, you would find the prisons far more evil. As we see in the above verse, a servant could serve a maximum of six years. How many years do some people spend in prison? A servant was living with a family—in society—not isolated. He was continually doing productive work, and learning to work to earn his living; not learning about how to commit crimes from a group of hardened criminals.

Were servants sometimes mistreated by their masters? Probably no more so than prisoners are treated today. Investigations into prison life have revealed a great many prisoners abused by their guards and fellow prisoners. In most cases there is nothing the prisoner can do. The Eternal instructed his people not to automatically return a slave that had escaped his master, but to keep the slave with him (Deut 23:15-16). If the slave was being kept illegally (longer than six years in spite of an offer for his redemption, etc.) then the slave would have a chance to tell his story to the people he escaped to and to obtain justice. (On the other hand, if the slave ran away unjustly, his master would certainly be able to pursue him, show that he was rightfully his, and take him back and punish him.)

Further, we find in Deuteronomy 15:12-15 that a slave should be given enough possessions when he is let go so that he can earn his own living.

Today, when prisoners are released, they are not usually given enough money to pay a month's rent in a cheap apartment and they usually have no job. Returning to a life of crime is often the only apparent alternative.

If he comes in by himself, he shall go out by himself; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. If his master has given him a wife, and she has borne him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out by himself. But if the servant plainly says, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out freed then his master shall bring him to the judges. He shall also bring him to the door, or to the doorpost, and his master shall pierce his ear with an awl; and he shall serve him forever (Ex 20:3-6).

At first reading, this law may sound terrible: Separating a man from his family and children? Why would the Eternal do this? This is an example of law principle #5 in action. It would be best if a man not marry while he is a servant. He should obtain his freedom, get his means of income in order, then plan for a wife and children. If a servant is so emotionally or sexually desirous of a wife that he cannot wait, then he can marry, knowing that he may not be able to take his wife and children with him (though he could possibly purchase them in the future). This law protects the wife and children—they live with the master, a man that is a known provider.

If the man is willing to give up his freedom forever, to be a servant forever rather than the

head of his own household, then he may have a permanent mark made on him and live with his master forever. This was indeed a sign of disgrace—the man has chosen the comforts of a good master rather than be the master of his own house. Rather than choosing to serve the Eternal directly, he has chosen to serve another man. Nevertheless, there have always been people that would rather others do their thinking for them, so the Eternal made this provision: the man could elect to live with his family forever, but as servants. This is far better than today's systems where such families are encouraged to break up by welfare laws or where parents and children may be forcibly separated by jail sentences or government social workers.

And if a man sells his daughter to be a female slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. If she does not please her master, who has betrothed her to himself, then he shall let her be redeemed. He shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people, since he has dealt deceitfully with her. And if he has betrothed her to his son, he shall deal with her according to the custom of daughters. If he takes another wife, he shall not diminish her food, her clothing, and her marriage rights. And if he does not do these three for her, then she shall go out free, without paying money (Ex 21:7-11).

A man selling his daughter? Why would he do that? Again, this was a consequence of someone who had mismanaged his resources and had few options left—if the man had to sell himself as a servant, his daughter would probably become a servant anyway. By selling his daughter, the man had a chance to continue working and to redeem her (buy her back).

The rest of the law provides protection for a young woman who's father put him in such a situation. She should not have to do the hard work that the men do. Also, there are certain conditions specified if the master "betrothed her to himself." If the man betrothed her for a while, but changed his mind before the marriage, he "owes her something" as he has kept other potential husbands from seeking to marry her. The final sentences deal with fairness in multi-wife situations. A discussion of the reasons for polygamy in the Bible exceeds the scope of this article, but it is clear that the Eternal insisted on fairness even in these situations.

We will pose a question more relevant to today's readers: Why did the Eternal start this section of law with laws governing servants? Probably because that was the most common result when people transgressed against their neighbor. Most punishments were economic in nature and if a person did not have the money, he became a servant (Ex 22:3).

Capital Crimes

He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. However, if he did not lie in was, but God delivered him into his hand [killed by accident] then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee. But if a man acts with premeditation against his neighbor, to kill him by treachery, you shall take him from My altar, that he may die (Ex 21:12-14).

The Bible continues the law with the method for handling murder cases. Thousands of books and movies are produced about cases where a person is found dead and there are no witnesses: Who did it? Was it accidental or planned? Does the evidence point to the real murderer or was someone else "set up?" The Eternal brilliantly prescribes a system to eliminate most of these problems, yet almost no nation uses it!

Numbers 35:11-29 and Deuteronomy 19:2-13 give the rest of the details about this verse. Anyone who killed someone by accident was to flee to one of several "cities of refuge" and remain there until the death of the high priest. While this was a hardship to the people that accidentally caused another's death, it encouraged people to observe safety precautions.

The person was not “in jail”, they could have a job in the city of refuge; their family could visit them or even arrange to move there.

To see how well this law works, let us look at it from the point of view of a potential murderer plotting a crime. He must decide whether he is going to flee to the city of refuge or not. If he tries to make the murder look like an accident and flees, then he is going to be stuck in the city of refuge for an unknown number of years. This would be completely unacceptable to a "professional killer"—he would be out of a job. Furthermore, the act of fleeing admits he did the killing and there would certainly be an investigation. He will have to answer hard questions. If he is known to hate the man or if some witnesses saw the killing, he will certainly be condemned to death.

If the murderer decides not to flee—to pretend like he did not do it, he is taking a big risk. If he is ever suspected of the crime, he is in big legal trouble. All that witnesses will have to establish to convict him is that he was at the scene during the crime. He will not be able to claim that the murder was an accident or that it was done in the heat of anger—if those things were true, he should have fled. Or he claims to have been there but did not do it, then he should have reported it to the judges. If a man does not flee (openly admitting that he killed the person), there will be no court arguments about whether it was intentional or not; if you are found guilty and you did not flee, you will receive the death penalty.

And he who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. And he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. (Ex 21:15,17).

This is the Eternal's statement on elder-abuse. It is simple and straightforward.

He who kidnaps a man and sells him, or if he is found in his hand, shall surely be put to death (Ex 21:16).

In the cases above, there is no question as to the guilt. Kidnappings are almost always premeditated. The Eternal commands swift justice in these situations.

Damages or Injuries

If men contend with each other, and one strikes the other with a stone or with his fist, and he does not die but is confined to his bed, if he rises again and walks about outside with his staff, then he who struck him shall be acquitted. He shall only pay for the loss of his time and shall provide for him to be thoroughly healed (Ex 21:18-19).

Again we see the strong economic basis in the Eternal's law. The man who injures another must pay for the loss of the injured's time (value of his day's away from his work), and pay the expenses of his healing. He does not go to jail with other criminals, he stays in his job and pays. If he cannot pay, he becomes a servant.

And if a man beats his male or female servant with a rod, so that he dies under his hand, he shall surely be punished. Notwithstanding, if he remains alive a day or two, he shall not be punished; for he is his property (Ex 21:20-21).

The master was expected to understand his purpose to teach the servant to work and make him into a productive citizen. Killing him or causing him permanent injury was not an option (see verses 26-27). Yet, if a servant was extremely difficult, the master had to punish him. Supposing the servant became a servant because he had a terrible temper and injured others. If he continued injuring others while a servant, he has already sold himself and has no way to pay for the injury. The master must pay the debt, and punish the servant so

severely that he does not repeat the problem. Judgments are prepared for scoffers, and beatings for the backs of fools" (Prov 19:29).

If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman's husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine (Ex 21:22).

Some issues are complex enough that methods similar to those used in today's courts are necessary: The offended party asks for an award and the judges determine if it is reasonable. In the above case, there are many variables: Did the woman intentionally join the fight? How near due was she? Did she have a tendency to miscarry anyway?

But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn wound for wound, stripe for stripe. If a man strikes the eye of his male or female servant, and destroys it, he shall let him go free for the sake of his eye. And if he knocks out the tooth of his male or female servant, he shall let him go free for the sake of his tooth. (Ex 21:23-27).

Do these verses (and parallel ones in Lev 24:20 and Deut 19:20) require the same injury to be inflicted upon a person that inflicted the original injury? The first thing we must understand is that this is also a limitation of liability as much as a punishment. The manifold avenging often required by powerful carnal people (for example, "he cut off my finger, I will take his hand") was not allowed. A just recompense for each injury must be made based on the injury, not based on the community standing of the injured.

Most maimings were unintentional, but the law does not distinguish between someone who deliberately attacked or someone that was foolishly brandishing a weapon. Why is the penalty the same? An eye is no easier to live without whether caused by an attacker or a joker. These scriptures show that the person causing the maiming deserves to have the same thing done to them. This greatly discourages carelessness! Nevertheless, the injured person is usually interested in compensation for his loss, not in infliction of the same injury to another. In the verses above, the master inflicting the injury on the servant did not receive a similar injury, he let the servant go free.

The principle of compensation instead of corporal punishment is found elsewhere in scripture. (See Exodus 21:30 in the next few paragraphs.) Some penalties, such as those for killing a person, specifically could not be ransomed (Num. 35:31-32), giving the understanding that most other punishments could be.

Responsibility for Safety

If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, then the ox shall surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be acquitted. But if the ox tended to thrust with its horn in times past, and it has been made known to his owner, and he has not kept it confined, so that it has killed a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned and its owner also shall be put to death (Ex 21:28-29).

While these verses are talking about oxen, the principles apply to many things we have today, such as automobiles, power tools, etc. If an animal or machine kills a person you get rid of it so it cannot happen again. (In the case of a machine, it may be possible simply to replace the failing part—if the brakes fail on a truck and it hits and kills someone, the failing part(s) of the brake system would be replaced, not the entire truck.) If the owner already knew about the unsafe condition and did nothing, then he is responsible for the death and can be put to death himself.

If there is imposed on him a sum of money, then he shall pay to redeem his life, whatever is imposed on him. Whether it has gored a son or gored a daughter, according to this judgment it shall be done to him (Ex 21:30-31).

The mercy of the family that lost the member was important here. Was the owner planning to slaughter the ox the next day? Did one of his children let the ox out by accident? Or did the owner routinely scorn others that told him about the dangers of his ox?

It may seem unfair that a wealthy man may make such a mistake and live because he can pay a ransom where a poor man that makes the same error may have to die because he cannot pay a ransom. The scriptures says: "The ransom of a man's life is his riches..." (Prov 13:8). There are situations where a man's riches will preserve his life. (But greed for riches often cause a man's death—Prov 1:19).

If the ox gores a male or female servant, he shall give to their master thirty shekels of silver, and the ox shall be stoned (Ex 21:32).

Thirty shekels of silver was a typical price for a slave of the time. Why could a family demand any price for the death of one of their children, but only a certain amount for the death of a servant? Law principles #3 and #5 are working here: If a master could demand a much larger amount for the death of a servant, then servants would be worth more dead than alive. Evil masters would be tempted to send servants to places where they knew there were dangerous situations and "warned" owners. The Eternal wisely designed his law so that a servant would be most valuable to his owner when he is alive well, and healthy.

And if a man opens a pit, or if a man digs a pit and does not cover it, and an ox or a donkey falls in it, the owner of the pit shall make it good; he shall give money to their owner, but the dead animal shall be his(Ex 21:33-34).

The example is an ox, but the principle applies to many kinds of property. If a man creates an unsafe condition that injures another's property, he is responsible for restoring the property, but no more. He is allowed to keep the salvage value of the other's damaged property (the ox, above, could be used to make leather, soap, chicken-food, etc.) If the offended party were allowed to receive replacement property and salvage the damaged property, they might find it profitable to deliberately look for such unsafe conditions and send their property into them (see law principles #3 and #4).

If one man's ox hurts another's, so that it dies, then they shall sell the live ox and divide the money from it; and the dead ox they shall also divide. Or if it was known that the ox tended to thrust in time past, and its owner has not kept it confined, he shall surely pay ox for ox, and the dead animal shall be his own (Exod 21:35-36).

Again, this can be applied to many types of property. In the first example, we cannot tell who is "at fault" (we do not know which ox started the fight or why) so the owners simply split the cost of the loss and split the salvage value of the house and tree. Similarly, if one man's rotten tree falls into another man's house, neither having ever warned the other of the danger, they should split the cost of the house repairs.

If someone is aware of a dangerous situation and fails to take action, then they are responsible to restore damage done, but no more. If the house owner warned the tree owner that the tree was rotten and soon ready to fall, then the tree owner would be responsible to pay the entire house repair, but he would get to keep any salvage from the operation.

We've now covered the laws found in Exodus 21. We will continue our study with Exodus 22.

Stopping the Business of Stealing

If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and slaughters it or sells it, he shall restore five oxen for an ox and four sheep for a sheep.... If the theft is certainly found alive in his hand, whether it is an ox or donkey or sheep, he shall restore double(Ex. 22:1,4).

While this scripture is about animals, it certainly applies to all types of property. There are two obvious lessons here that we must not overlook: 1) Property is privately owned; animals and things are assumed to have owners. 2) The penalty for theft of property is not a jail sentence or a fine paid to the state, but restitution to the owner.

Why the different amounts of restoration: 5, 4 or 2 times the value? There is a very good reason! If the thief is selling what he steals, he is making theft a business—he is getting rid of the evidence in order not to be caught. He did not take an ox or a plow or an ax because he needed one, he took it because he wanted to get money. There is a fivefold restoration for stealing the animals or tools that a person needs to do his regular work. An ox was a trained animal that was used for pulling wagons, plowing, etc. A sheep did not do daily work, but was used for wool once a year, or eaten (once in its lifetime).

If the person steals something and keeps it, it is usually done out of lust, weakness or maybe even by mistake. (A person that has stolen dozens of things and kept them all would eventually be identified by one of the rightful owners.) If a person needs an ax and steals one from his neighbor's shed because the neighbor has four axes and might not miss one, he should still restore double, but not four or five times.

Also, a person may sometimes make an honest mistake and take his neighbors animals or tools thinking they are his own. If the offended person recognises the mistake, he may decline the need for double restitution. On the other hand, if a theft victim cannot understand why his neighbor has kept four of his sheep with his brand in his pasture for three weeks without noticing it, then he is entitled to double restitution. The person with the extra sheep should be more "diligent to know the state of your flocks" (Prov 27:23).

Nevertheless, the penalty for someone that "accidentally" acquires another's property or "borrows it without asking" is only a two-fold restoration, not four or five.

One other scripture that applies to this subject: "People do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy himself when he is starving. Yet when he is found, he must restore sevenfold; he may have to give up all the substance of his house" (Prov 6:30-31). Why this highest of all restorations for a crime that men do not despise? Because he could have had food without committing the crime: "If there is among you a poor man of your brethren, within any of the gates in your land which the LORD your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart nor shut your hand from your poor brother, but you shall open your hand wide to him and willingly lend him sufficient for his need, whatever he needs" (Deut 15:7-8). A man should not steal what he is allowed to ask for.

People Safe In Their Own Home

If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed. If the sun has risen on him, there shall be guilt for his bloodshed... (Ex 22:2-3).

There have been numerous cases where thieves have broken into houses and were injured or killed by the owners. Months of trials and thousands of pages of testimony have been

generated as a result. Some thieves have collected big awards because of injuries they received. Did the thief threaten the owner? Did the owner have sufficient cause to believe his life was in danger? Could the owner have fled? Did the owner use more force than necessary?

The Bible makes the issue very simple. As a person who decides to fight an angry bull takes the risk of being killed, so does a person who breaks into a house. A person at home does not need to be a law professor to know what to do when someone breaks in. He may defend himself by any available means. Accidental deaths are extremely rare when everyone knows this simple law. Just as children (and adults) must learn not to play at the edge of cliffs or at the feet of large animals, so must they learn not to enter another's house uninvited and unannounced.

Big Thieves Become Servants

...He should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft (Ex 22:3).

This law would revolutionise our criminal justice system. Today, many thefts are committed by minors—they are rarely required to make restitution and are usually put back on the street in a few weeks. White collar criminals often hide their booty in trusts or secret accounts—they rarely make restitution and serve short sentences. If either of these two groups knew that they would have to work hard for six years (no plea bargaining or reduced sentences) if they could not make a four-fold restitution, they would think again before stealing. We explained before how it is better for people to remain in society and become servants for a maximum of six years than it is for them to go to a prison and learn to be an expert criminal.

Responsibility for Property

If a man causes a field or vineyard to be grazed, and lets loose his animal, and it feeds in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field and the best of his own vineyard. If fire breaks out and catches in thorns, so that stacked grain, standing grain, or the field is consumed, he who kindled the fire shall surely make restitution (Ex 22:5-6).

People are responsible for the damage they cause as well as the damage caused by their animals or other property. A person who improperly parks his car or docks his boat is responsible if it strays into another's property and damages it. In these damage cases (not thefts), the victim is compensated equally or better, but certainly not double. Why? The person responsible for the trouble is punished enough: they must make restitution and receive nothing in return. On the other hand, if a person received double when the neighbor's cow ate his crops, he might be tempted to secretly leave gates open and encourage the neighbor's cow to eat his crops!

If a man delivers to his neighbor money or articles to keep, and it is stolen out of the man's house, if the thief is found, he shall pay double. If the thief is not found, then the master of the house shall be brought to the judges to see whether he has put his hand into his neighbor's goods. For any kind of trespass, whether it concerns an ox, a donkey, a sheep, or clothing, or for any kind of lost thing which another claims to be his, the cause of both parties shall come before the judges; and whomever the judges condemn shall pay double to his neighbor (Ex 22:7-9).

There are always situations like this one: Tom agrees to let Mike borrow his chain saw and Mike lets Tom borrow his portable TV. The engine on the chain saw blows out in a few days and Tom tells Mike "not to worry about it"—he knew it was worn out. A few months later, Mike sells the blade of the chain-saw to a friend and throws the rest away. Six months go by

and Mike asks for his portable TV back. Tom says he left it on the back porch so Mike could pick it up a couple of months ago but cannot remember exactly when it disappeared. Mike remembers no such arrangement. But Tom wants his chain saw back, or at least some kind of compensation for it—he told Mike, "don't worry about it," but he did not give it to him.

This is a case where judges are necessary: people cannot agree on the facts and/or the meaning of the facts. The judges will ask questions. They may talk to witnesses. They will attempt to determine if someone is lying—if his or her story does not fit all of the known facts. Why the double restoration? To encourage people to be truthful in their dealings with their neighbors and avoid the judges if possible. For example, supposing Tom had accidentally left the TV at a beach party and never gave it back to Mike. If he is honest and confesses to him, then he owes him one TV. But if he lies or conveniently forgets what really happened and goes to the judges and tries to get out of payment, then, if found out, he will have to restore two TV's.

If a man delivers to his neighbor a donkey, an ox, a sheep, or any animal to keep, and it dies, is hurt, or driven away, no one seeing it, then an oath of the LORD shall be between them both, that he has not put his hand into his neighbor's goods; and the owner of it shall accept that, and he shall not make it good. But if, in fact, it is stolen from him, he shall make restitution to the owner of it. If it is torn to pieces by a beast, then he shall bring it as evidence, and he shall not make good what was torn (Ex 22:10-13).

These verses cover situations where the judges cannot determine exactly what happened. It is important to note that this situation regards articles that a man gives to his neighbor to keep, not that his neighbor asks to borrow from him (those situations are covered in the next section).

If there is determination of fault, the owner of the lost goods must accept the oath of the other. If it can be proven that the missing goods were stolen, but the thief is not caught, the man who kept them must make restitution, though not double. Why? Someone must bear the loss, and it makes the most sense to assign it to the person most capable of preventing the theft.

Also, this law nearly eliminates "inside job" thefts. If the person keeping the goods is responsible for making restitution for anything stolen, he has no motivation to steal them himself or let a friend steal them: If he is not caught: he must restore them, if he is caught, he must restore at least double. Would the owner then be tempted to steal his own goods from his neighbor's house in order to both keep them and have a like restitution? If he is not caught, he will double the value of his goods. If he is caught, he will have to restore at least four-fold, and he might be killed during the break-in.

It Was Borrowed and Then Broken, Who Fixes It?

And if a man borrows anything from his neighbor, and it becomes injured or dies, the owner of it not being with it, he shall surely make it good. If its owner was with it, he shall not make it good; if it was hired, it came for its hire (Ex 22:14-15).

If everyone knew and practiced this principle, it would save thousands of fights and court cases every day. We may derive the following principles:

- 1) If you borrow something, you must be prepared to fix or replace it if it breaks.
- 2) Do not borrow something that you do not know how to use and might break.

- 3) Do not borrow something that is in poor repair and likely to have a major breakdown.
- 4) If you desperately need to borrow something (such as a car or truck in our day), but one or more of the above three rules are telling you not to do it, ask the owner to come with you to help you use it.
- 5) If you are lending something, make sure the borrower understands the possible costs of repairing or replacing the item.
- 6) If the owner stays with the borrower to use the item, the owner must keep a careful watch and make sure it is used correctly.
- 7) If you rent things out for a price, your customers are not automatically responsible to fix whatever goes wrong. Either be prepared to take responsibility for all problems, or write out each party's responsibilities before the transaction takes place.

The Eternal does command us to lend to our brothers and help them when they need it. It is always good to discuss and remind our brother of these righteous principles before we lend to them.

Sex Before Marriage

If a man entices a virgin who is not betrothed, and lies with her, he shall surely pay the bride-price for her to be his wife. If her father utterly refuses to give her to him, he shall pay money according to the bride-price of virgins (Ex 22:16-17).

Deuteronomy 22:29 adds: "he shall not be permitted to divorce her all his days." Many people in Western societies would find this completely unacceptable: Just because a couple gets excited and has a sexual experience should they be required to stay married for the rest of their life? Would not that be a disaster for parents as well as any children? Why should the man pay money? Why should the woman's father be allowed to decide whether the marriage takes place?

Before we answer these questions, we must look at how poorly the methods of our Western societies are working. While birth-control methods abound, the tens of millions of unplanned conceptions attest to the fact that they are not always used or effective. Millions of these children are killed before birth. Millions more raised by only one parent. Far too many are raised by people that are neither financially or emotionally ready to take care of them.

Our societies make little effort to teach people that they are responsible for their sexual behavior and the little lives that they might create. Billions of dollars are spent trying to reduce the effects of this irresponsible behavior. The standard government solution to the problem is spending billions more on similar programs: sex education, welfare and day-care for single mothers, institutions for unwanted children, venereal disease research, free medical care, and other programs that encourage more sex, irresponsibility and unwanted babies. Even if these programs miraculously became 90% effective, would it be acceptable to still have hundreds of thousands of aborted and unwanted children each year?

Let us compare the Eternal's system with the present-day approach.

Today, sex among unmarried people is socially acceptable. In the heat of passion, babies, diseases and birth control are too often forgotten—until one of the "lovers" finds themselves with a baby or a disease—or both. The Eternal wants happiness for the parents and the children to be born. He commanded us to marry before we do anything that might bring a

child into the world. If an unplanned child is conceived within a marriage, it may be a financial hardship for the family, but at least the child will have a caring father and mother—an irreplaceable blessing.

The “bride price” mentioned here assured that the groom was capable of earning money before he married, and it compensated the parents of a daughter—a son would inherit their land and take care of them when they are older, but a daughter should live on her husband's land and would not be responsible for helping her aged parents.

Now look at the Eternal's law from the perspective of a man thinking about enticing a woman. If he just wants a good time now, the woman could tell her father about him later and he could be stuck with her for the rest of his life—a fearful thought. On the other hand, if he thinks he does love her and wants to marry her, the woman's father could always say no. He would still have to pay the brideprice, he would have a bad name, and he would not have a wife. If he does not have the bride-price, he could become a servant. It would seem much better to wait and to ask to marry the woman, rather than entice her.

The situation is equally bad from the woman's perspective. If she just wants a fun time now, her father may demand that she settle down and marry the man. Yet if she is trying to “catch” the husband of her dreams, he could be denied to her. In any case, if she loses her virginity, she has greatly decreased the chances of her marrying at all. The problem will stay with her whether anyone finds out about the affair or not.

If the Eternal's law were practiced, sex outside of marriage would be understood to be the disastrous practice that it really is.

Various Capital Offenses

You shall not permit a sorceress to live. Whoever lies with an animal shall surely be put to death. He who sacrifices to any god, except to the LORD only, he shall be utterly destroyed (Ex 22:18-20).

Most of these laws are self explanatory. All of them deal with people that are perverted and practising things harmful to others around them. Several kings of Israel led their people into destruction because they listened to sorceresses or others influenced by demons. Modern research has shown that AIDS and other diseases are a direct result of bestiality.

It is important to realize that the death penalty was only carried out at the testimony of two or three witnesses that had seen the crime (Deut 17:6).

Fair Treatment for the Disadvantaged

You shall neither mistreat a stranger nor oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child. If you affect them in any way, and they cry at all to Me, I will surely hear their cry; and My wrath will become hot, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless (Ex 22:22-24).

The society described in the Bible is certainly one based on families with their own home and land and a father leading the way. These verses are a warning to those that would take advantage of people that are less fortunate. Also, it is a promise to hear the oppressed if “they cry at all to Me”. The Eternal does not require righteousness, obedience, or any other specific conditions; the afflicted person need only cry to Him for deliverance. People that are afflicted should take the Eternal at His word on this.

If you lend money to any of My people who are poor among you, you shall not be like a moneylender to him; you shall not charge him interest (Ex 22:25).

Interest should never be charged to someone that borrows money because he is poor or in need. However, a person that has money to invest, can certainly lend it at interest to someone that will use it. (Matt 25:27). This principle is greatly violated in our society in that banks, credit card companies, and other lenders often try to induce poor and less-educated people to buy more than they can afford on credit, and then they charge them very high interest rates for years to come.

If you ever take your neighbor's garment as a pledge, you shall return it to him before the sun goes down. For that is his only covering, it is his garment for his skin. What will he sleep in? And it will be that when he cries to Me, I will hear, for I am gracious (Ex 22:26-27).

Another caution to those that would oppress others, and a promise to those that are oppressed.

Remember These Things That Are Easy to Forget

You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people (Ex 22:28).

It is easy to forget and vainly use the Eternal's name. Also, even though the Eternal never designated a person as coming between a man and his God, He does expect us to speak truthfully, and if possible, positively about our leaders.

You shall not delay to offer the first of your ripe produce and your juices. The firstborn of your sons you shall give to Me. (Ex 22:29).

Again, these are things that are easy to forget. The beginning of Deuteronomy 26 contains instructions for offering the firstfruits. The latter part of this verse has nothing to do with sacrificing humans, but refers to the instructions in Exodus 13:2,11-13. The human firstborn were never sacrificed, but were redeemed.

Likewise you shall do with your oxen and your sheep. It shall be with its mother seven days; on the eighth day you shall give it to Me (Ex 22:30).

These same instructions for allowing animals to be with their mothers for their first seven days are repeated in Lev. 22:27. While no direct explanation is given for this action in the scriptures, it is probably similar to the circumcising of new-born male humans on the eighth day: it provides both a physical health benefit and teaches a spiritual lesson. What do the seven days represent? Probably the Eternal's "seven thousand year plan." Just as a new-born cannot be accepted by God until after the seventh day, so we cannot really be with God in the New Heavens and the New Earth until the first seven thousand years are up.

And you shall be holy men to Me: you shall not eat meat torn by beasts in the field; you shall throw it to the dogs (Ex 22:31).

Like the previous verse, a physical principle of avoiding meat that is likely to be spoiled or carrying disease, and a spiritual principle of staying away from that which is unclean.

We now continue our exposition of God's laws with Exodus 23 and part of 24.

Righteousness When Others Sin

You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice(Ex 23:1-2).

The initial reaction to these commandments is often: "I do not do that— I do not go around telling lies or join mobs in a riot." It is good that we do not do those things, but the application of this law is bigger than that. Who are the wicked we are not to follow? Are they people with torn jeans and blank t-shirts that say "WICKED" Or could they be nicely dressed people that are leaders in our congregation or civil government? Could they be TV commentators?

The Hebrew word for wicked is *rasha*¹. It is used over 200 times in the Old Testament, usually in a general sense to denote undesirable people. A few times we find specific sins defined as "wicked" or specific people that are called "wicked." Murderers are called wicked (Num 35:31 and 2 Sam 5:12, Pslm 37:14,32, Prov 12:6). People that do not repay loans are called wicked (Psalm 37:21) But the most frequent mention of wickedness is the perversion of justice—those that are wealthy or in authority using their power to do evil (Jer 5:26-28, Psalm 10:2, 11:2, 28:3, 17:9, 37:12,16, 55:3). In Proverbs 17:23 we find that bribery, offering money to pervert justice, is wicked. The elders that tried to lift themselves up over a righteous man, Moses, were also called wicked(Num 16:13,15,25-26).

Proverbs 29:12(KJV), is particularly interesting: "If a ruler hearkens to lies, all his servants are wicked." A servant of a ruler that is listening to lies has the duty to tell that ruler the truth, and keep telling him until the ruler believes the truth. Of course, the ruler may depose the troublesome servant—but it is better to be deposed than wicked. It can be particularly difficult to tell the truth when an erroneous viewpoint is popular with the "boss" and most of our friends, but that is what the law requires.

This writer must confess to sitting in congregations and talking about how "John and Jane Exmember" must be bad because they were "disfellowshipped." No sins of the Exmembers were publicly mentioned nor was I personally knowledgeable of any difficulties. Yet I followed the rest of the multitude in shunning and speaking evil of them.

This same problem can occur in secular society. A person can be arrested as a suspect for a well-known crime, and then be vilified, physically injured or even killed by angry people that have no evidence against the person except his arrest.

When we read Exodus 23:1-2, we nicest realize that we must avoid joining a crowd to do evil, even if the crowd is respectable. Our father is no respecter of persons (Rom 2:11).

You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute (Ex 23:3).

If a poor man takes something from a rich man—something so small that he will not miss it, should the poor man go unpunished? What if the rich man gained his wealth from oppressing the poor man to begin with? Our all-wise Lawgiver knew that the approach of "I cheat a little so you can cheat a little" will only lead to evil. The poor man must be punished for stealing so he can learn to work for his living rather than stealing. If he has been oppressed by a rich man, then the rich man must be punished—in most cases by restoring double of what he has taken from others.

If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it (Ex 23:4-5).

This is a true test of what kind of heart we have. When someone that has caused us trouble is suffering, do we conclude that they are suffering a judgment from the Eternal and rejoice in their suffering? Or will we help them in their suffering? (The person may refuse your help, but it is at least your duty to offer.)

You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute (Ex 23:6).

This addresses an opposite problem to the one in verse 3. Judges shall not respect the person of the rich and decide in his favor, figuring that the poor man will not have any recourse. Unfortunately, this has nearly become a standard practice in our society by at least two methods: Laws are so technical and complex that it is often the man that can afford an expensive lawyer that gets his way—not the one with the righteous cause. Also, criminal sentencing studies show that a janitor who walks off with a few thousand in cash from a bank is likely to serve a much longer sentence than a white-collar employee that embezzles millions.

Importance of Justice & Fairness

Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked. And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous(Ex 23:7).

Nearly our entire marketing and business world is based on false claims and bribes. Advertisers admit that they are not selling cars to the public; they are selling prestige and self confidence. They are not selling soap or make-up, but beauty and youth. Advertising claims are often as deceptive as possible—as long as they are not technically illegal. Popular books on "personal success" instruct readers to buy flowers or other little gifts for the boss to get a promotion later on. Bribery is often a way of life in obtaining big-business or government contracts.

Killing the innocent? Does anyone do that? Over a million babies are killed every year by people that did not adequately plan before their conception. Whether governments support or prosecute this killing is not as important as changing the attitude of parents that are willing to kill their children because they are inconvenient.

Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt (Ex 23:9).

While this scripture certainly refers to the policies of civil governments, it also refers to the way we treat others. When many of us began keeping the Sabbath, we became "strangers" to our friends and relatives—some of which stopped associating with our "strange" and unusual customs. What do we do now when someone begins to attend a religious group that has doctrines different than our own? Do we oppress the strangers

Times for Resting

Six years you shall sow your land and gather in its produce, but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave, the beasts of the field may eat. In like manner you shall do with your vineyard and your olive grove(Ex 23:10-11).

We do not have the space to adequately discuss the land rest scriptures in this article. There is much more information in Leviticus 25. It is important to note that it is very difficult to fulfill

the intent of this scripture in that the seven year cycle may have been lost and most poor people tend to live far away from farms and would have no idea when or how to gather from the resting land.

Six days you shall do your work, and on the seventh day you shall rest, that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female servant and the stranger may be refreshed (Ex 23:12).

In contrast to the land rest, we do know when the weekly Sabbath is. Of the hundreds of languages throughout the world, about half of them derive their name for the seventh day of the week from "Sabbath." The New Testament Scriptures record numerous confrontations between our Saviour and the leaders of his day over what could be done on the Sabbath—there was no argument about which day was the Sabbath. Romans, exiled Jews, and other peoples have maintained calendars from the first century until now. There is no disagreement on which is the first and which is the last day of the week.

Something some of us may wish to think about is whether or not we are letting our servants rest on the Sabbath or not. If we pay someone to cook and serve us food are they not our servant? Shouldn't we prepare food on Friday, so we do not have to hire someone else to work for us on the Sabbath? It is true that most restaurant workers will certainly be at their jobs whether or not we patronize their business. However, the commandment to us is to give our servants the Sabbath off, not to give everyone else's servants the Sabbath off.

Look Only To Our Father In Heaven

And in all that I have said to you, be circumspect and make no mention of the name of other gods[Hebrew Eloyhim], nor let it be heard from your mouth (Ex 23:13).

Some have taken this scripture to mean that we should never pronounce the names of other would-be deities—we should even avoid saying the days of the week or the names of the planets because most of them are derived from names of Greek and Roman deities. This understanding cannot be correct in that we are commanded to read the scriptures and they contain names of numerous pagan deities: Baal, Dagon, Chemosh, etc. Furthermore, there are places in Israel named after Baal, and these names are used in the scriptures (Judges 20:33, 2 Sam 5:20, 13:23, 1 Kings 9:18). The intention here is that we should never invoke their names in a manner dignifying them as "gods." Isaiah 45:5 makes it clear that there is "no God [Eloyhim] beside Me."

Three times you shall keep a feast to Me in the year: You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread (you shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month of Abib, for in it you came out of Egypt; none shall appear before Me empty); and the Feast of Harvest, the firstfruits of your labors which you have sown in the field; and the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruit of your labors from the field.

Three times in the year all your males shall appear before the Lord God. You shall not offer the blood of My sacrifice with leavened bread; nor shall the fat of My sacrifice remain until morning. The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God. You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk(Ex 23:14-19).

These scriptures give us important information about the Holy Days and some of the offerings required of the people. We will discuss them in detail in future papers on the Holy Days.

The admonition not to 'boil a young goat in its mother's milk' occurs two other places in scripture (Ex 34:26, Deut. 14:21). All of these places are talking about commands that produce prosperity and blessings. Adam Clarke and other commentators point out that there was an ancient ritual of boiling a young goat in its mother's milk to assure a prosperous year. This is a clear command not to be a part of such false "prosperity rituals." The traditional Jewish interpretation of these scriptures—avoiding the eating of milk and the meat of any clean animal at the same meal is very questionable. All verses specifically describe the ritual of boiling a young goat in its mother's milk. There is never a reference to other clean animals or any mention of eating anything together. In Genesis 18:8, we find Abraham serving his guests milk, butter and meat together.

Behold, I send an Angel [Hebrew mal'ak—messenger] before you to keep you in the way and to bring you into the place which I have prepared. Beware of Him and obey His voice; do not provoke Him, for He will not pardon your transgressions; for My name is in Him (Ex 23:20-21).

The Hebrew mal'ak appears in the old testament 195 times, about half the time it is translated "messenger", a few times "ambassador" and the rest of the time "angel". The Hebrew means "messenger" but does not indicate whether the messenger is heavenly or human. The Bible translators attempted to determine which messengers were divine and wrote "angel" when they found it appropriate. That leaves us to ask: "Who was this special messenger with 'My name...in Him'? Was it Moses? Joshua? A special angel? Melchizedek? YHVH? These are good questions to which we are still searching for answers.

Blessings for Obedience

If you indeed obey His voice and do all that I speak, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries. For My Angel will go before you and bring you in to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizites and the Canaanites and the Hivites and the Jebusites; and I will cut them off. You shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works; but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillars. So you shall serve the Lord your God, and He will bless your bread and your water. And I will take sickness away from the midst of you. No one shall suffer miscarriage or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days (Ex 23:22-26).

This is a simple promise of physical blessing for seeking the Eternal and obeying His way. It is interesting to note that as most Western nations are glamorizing and accepting more non-Biblical religious practices (New Age, occult, Roman, Greek, Hindu, etc, the very curses described in these verses are coming upon us: devitalized bread, polluted water, massive health-care expenses, a more than 10% infertility rate among couples that want babies, and a rising death rate among young people.

I will send My fear before you, I will cause confusion among all the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite from before you. I will not drive them out from before you in one year, lest the land become desolate and the beast of the field become too numerous for you. Little by little I will drive them out from before you, until you have increased, and you inherit the land (Ex 23:27-30).

These are promises that the Eternal made to his people that many have forgotten. These promises were made before Israel sinned in the matter of the golden calf, and before they lacked the faith to enter into the promised land at their first attempt. The Eternal promised to drive out the inhabitants himself—Israel would not have to fight! It was only later, after their lack of faith, that the Eternal had them go to war. Even when they did fight wars, if they obeyed the Eternal they had no or few casualties (see the books of Joshua and Judges).

The more they disobeyed, the more casualties they had—eventually being defeated by the same people that the Eternal would have driven out if they had only obeyed.

We can learn a great spiritual lesson from this. Rather than wearing ourselves out fighting each of the many injustices that infringe upon us in this world, we might be better off to concentrate more on obeying those commands that our Father has clearly given us, and asking the Eternal to fight our battles for us.

And I will set your bounds from the Red Sea to the sea, Philistia, and from the desert to the River. For I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you shall drive them out before you. You shall make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in your land, lest they make you sin against Me. For if you serve their gods, it will surely be a snare to you (Ex 23:31-33)

In verse 9 we were told not to "oppress a stranger", but here we are told he is not to dwell with us? How can we reconcile these scriptures? The answer is right here! The problems the Eternal brought out were "lest they make you sin against Me" and "serving their gods." If "strangers" are openly practicing their religion and customs in sufficient numbers that Israelites are seeking to be like them, then it is a problem. Our Loving Father realized that celebrations and practices of other cultures would eventually draw His people away from Him. While it is not the job of His congregation to try to change the immigration policy of today, we can understand why so many Western nations are having immigration problems.

Spiritually, we can learn a lesson about attendance at our worship services. Strangers can attend and should be treated fairly, but they should conform to the existing service. If they continually attempt to teach or practice doctrines that are clearly unbiblical, they should be asked to leave.

Covenant Ratified

So Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the LORD has said we will do. And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD.... Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient." And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words" (Ex 20:34, 7-8).

After their initial agreement of obedience in Exodus 19:1-8, these verses record the major covenant between the Eternal and his people. While the "ten commandments" are special because the Eternal spoke them directly, there is no separate covenant recorded in relationship to them. When we think about the Sinai covenant, we must include all of these principles in Exodus 20-23.

Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgements. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse(Malachi 4:4-6).

The above passage is clearly set in the time of the end—"the great and dreadful day of the Lord." We are to remember the laws that the Eternal gave to Moses. While our Savior fulfilled the sacrificial portions of this law, the need for us to understand the wonderful principles involved is greater than ever. We have dealt with the laws found in Exodus 20 through 23. This article will now examine the principles in Leviticus 19.

If people believe that the Old Testament law contains only "do's and don'ts", and says nothing about attitudes, they need to read this chapter. The law is holy (Rom 7:12). It was the "stony heart" of the people that prevented them from keeping the law and needed to be changed (Ezek 11:17-21).

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths: I am the Lord your God. Do not turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molded gods: I am the Lord your God' (Lev 19:14).

This is a very concise summary of what is required to be "holy." It is not emphasized in traditional Christian literature because it contains a reference to the Sabbaths. We see here a summary of three of the "ten commandments" (or "ten words" as it is in Hebrew). We are to love the Eternal (spiritual), to love our parents (physical), and to keep the Sabbath (take physical time to learn spiritual things). We should not start down the path to false religion; we should not make "molded gods"—even if we do not worship them.

And if you offer a sacrifice of peace offering to the Lord, you shall offer it of your own free will. It shall be eaten the same day you offer it, and on the next day. And if any remains until the third day, it shall be burned in the fire. And if it is eaten at all on the third day, it is an abomination. It shall not be accepted. Therefore everyone who eats it shall bear his iniquity, because he has profaned the hallowed offering of the LORD; and that person shall be cut off from his people. (Lev 19:5-8).

While we do not offer "peace offerings," we can learn a great deal about serving the Eternal from the old covenant peace offering (details are in Leviticus 3). The peace offering was to be completely voluntary—no one could command another to do it. The offering could be cattle, sheep or goats, and either male or female—whatever the offeror had or could afford. The priests assisted in removing and burning the inedible parts, but the offeror was free to eat of it on the first and second day. Before refrigeration, cooked meat would spoil after a few days and the Eternal did not want any upset stomachs or sickness associated with offerings to Him.

Similarly, when we serve the Eternal in some way today, we personally should make the decision to do it. We have a wide variety of services to pick from, but we should choose something that we can do and that fits within the constraints the Bible imposes. Finally, we should not make our service to the Eternal offensive—by doing something that would leave a "bad taste" in another's mouth.

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger I am the Lord your Gods (Lev 19:9-10).

Some people have mistakenly believed that the Old Testament system for taking care of the poor was handled through a third-tithe paid in the third year (Deut 14:28-29, 26:12). While this tithe was certainly intended to help the poor "get back on their feet" in the third year, it obviously could not be the main sustenance of the poor. If a person becomes poor in the "first year," does he get nothing to eat until the third year? The verses quoted above and others like them show that the poor were to be taken care of in ways other than through third tithe. They were invited to share in the harvest of the others by gathering the gleanings—those fruits that would require the most time to pick. It would be enough to feed the poor, but difficult enough that they would be motivated to not stay poor.

Our modern welfare and assistance systems tend to give cash to the poor with no work involved at all. This writer has often seen people buying expensive convenience foods with food stamps—foods that I could not afford to purchase for my family on a regular basis. If our modern assistance systems provided "gleanings" (food that was imperfect but edible) from supermarkets to the poor, we might find many more people desiring to get off of the welfare rolls.

You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another (Lev 19:11).

More of the "ten commandments" are stated here. We see a command to not "deal falsely" as well as to not lie. What is the difference between the two? For example, a man may say to his neighbor, "If you let me use your oxen to plow my field today, I'll give you an axe." If, after he finishes plowing, he says "I did not say when I would give you the axe—I will instruct my family to give it to you the day I die," he has not lied. He has "dealt falsely" and deceived his neighbor who thought he should receive the axe right away as payment.

And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD [I am YHVH]'(Lev 19:12).

Even though lying and false dealing are forbidden, a special curse is pronounced on those that swear falsely by His name (Zech 5:34). Our Savior taught that we should always tell the truth and not "swear" at all (Matt 5:33-37, James 5:12). But in the old covenant, largely unconverted Israelites were encouraged to swear truthfully by His name (Deut 6:13, 10:20; Jer 12:16). Also, there are numerous commands to "call upon" or praise His name (1 Chr 16:8; Psalm 99:6; 105:1; 113:1; 148:5,13; Isa.12:4; Joel 2:26; Rom 15:9; Rev 15:4). Seeing all these commands to say His name, the question arises, "What is His name?"

Leviticus 19:12 answers with "I am YHVH". The next question is how do we pronounce YHVH? In an effort to avoid the death penalty for blaspheming this name (Lev 24:16), the Jews have ceased pronouncing it. Since the original Hebrew manuscripts do not preserve all pronunciation, they do not give us a complete answer.

You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning (Lev 19:13, NRSV).

This is a broad spiritual principle far beyond "You shall not steal." It forbids profiting from one's neighbour by any deceitful or threatening practice. It is followed up by a specific example, if a man works for you, you pay him right away—you do not work out some elaborate scheme to pay him later and benefit from interest earned on "his money."

It is amazing how much of today's advertising is devoted into tricking or defrauding people into buying something that they do not need or that is worth much less than its apparent value.

You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the LORD [I am YHVH] (Lev 19:14).

This is a stern admonition to not take advantage of people's handicaps. The deaf would not know that he had been cursed and the blind would not know who put the stumbling block before him, but the Eternal would know and would take action. The same principle is found in Exodus 22:22-23 when He promises to hear the cry of the widows and fatherless.

You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person

of the mighty. But in righteousness you shall judge your neighbour(Lev 19:15).

People often say. "when I get a position of authority in the Kingdom. I'll certainly judge this way." But how many people when they have little amounts of authority now, really judge this way? If a wealthy family arrives late to a crowded service, will the ushers set up a new row of chairs just for them? But if a poor family had arrived instead, might they be told to sit in the scattered empty seats that are available? Problems of this nature certainly occurred in the first century(James 2:2-5).

Even worse, this writer has seen instances where wealthy people with doctrinal differences have been allowed to continue attending a congregation where poor people with the same doctrinal differences have been cast out. Similarly, wealthy men, divorcing and remarrying, seem to gain the blessing of their congregations' leadership much faster than men that contribute little.

Our national legal systems are also full of such problems. In many cases, the man that can afford the best lawyer wins. But the reverse also happens—10 men may all commit the same trespass, but only the ones that have money to pay damages will be taken to court.

'You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD(Lev 19:16 NKJV). "...You shall not profit by the blood of your neighbor..." (NRSV and Tanakh).

The first part of this verse is a command to not tell stories about others that we do not know are true. The subject here is justice. If ever one in a town has heard the false rumor, "John is a thief," it will be very difficult for him to get a fair trial if he is actually accused of the crime. Our modern nations face the same problem through televised coverage of crimes designed to attract a large viewing audience—not to tell the truth.

The last part of the verse condemns any contract or agreement where one party would profit by the death of someone. Our societies allow people to take out million dollar insurance policies on spouses and other relatives with themselves as beneficiaries. How many people have been slain so someone could collect?

How many businesses are built around profiting from the death of others? How many weapons manufacturers are not simply in business to help defend their country, but to also supply their instruments of human destruction to anyone in the world that will pay the price? Have large weapons manufacturers actually encouraged other nations to go to war?

Our great Father, in his wisdom, knew that if people were allowed to profit from the deaths of others, there would be a temptation to "encourage" those deaths. He therefore forbade agreements where a person would profit from another's death. Also, this scripture would seem to apply to profiting from the grief caused by a neighbor's death. How many undertakers grow rich convincing grieving people to spend much more than necessary on funerals? There are other businesses based on making money from the grieving. A friend once told me about a book he had read on getting rich from real estate. The book advocated reading obituary columns and offering to buy the property of the deceased. Since many older people own their homes outright and are not aware of increasing property values, they may agree to sell them in their time of grief for much less than their actual value. Such practices certainly violate the spirit of this law and the previous verses commanding that we not defraud our neighbors.

You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him" (Lev 19:17).

Yes, it is here! An Old Testament command of how to think—not merely how to act. The latter part of the verse is essentially the same as Matthew 18:15. If we have a disagreement against someone, we should go to them about it preventing ourselves from harboring anger and showing them their sin (if there is any).

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD [I am YHVH](Lev 19:18).

Yes, the "golden rule" is found in the Old Testament! It is later defined as "the second great commandment"(Matt. 22:38-39). It comes with a command not to take vengeance or bear grudges. This single command if obeyed with the right spirit, would bring peace to mankind.

You shall keep My statutes. You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Nor shall a garment of mixed linen and wool come upon you(Lev 19:19).

While whole books have been written on this and related verses our general understanding is that the Eternal's creation should be preserved. If all cattle were allowed to randomly interbreed, the different varieties that the Eternal created would all be lost. Farmers know that when an accidental cross-breed occurs, several generations of careful breeding are required to integrate the offspring of the "half-breed" back into the primal herds. The same is true for plants.

Does this verse apply to inter-racial marriages? That is a subject of much debate. This verse may seem to indicate to some that men should not intermarry to the point where the races that the Eternal created disappear. Historically, this has not been a major problem in that people lived primarily among others of the same race and travel was restricted to the speed of man and his animals. Today, the opportunity for interracial marriage has increased many times. If we reached the point where one third of the marriages in the world were between people of different races, the racial strains as we know them would be effectively gone in 200 years.

If a man has sexual relations with a woman who is a slave, designated for another man but not ransomed or given her freedom, an inquiry shall be held. They shall not be put to death, since she has not been free(Lev. 19:20 NRSV).

And he shall bring his trespass offering to the LORD, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, a ram as a trespass offering. The priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering before the LORD for his sin which he has committed. And the sin which he has committed shall be forgiven him(Lev 19:21-22).

To some this law may seem greatly unfair But when understood with the related laws (Exod. 21:7-11, 22:16-17, Deut 22:22-29), it all makes sense. When we compare it to what happens in sexually related cases in modern courtrooms, the Eternal's wisdom shines out like a bright light.

Sex with an unbetrothed woman who is a servant

Her master may take her to be his wife without anyone's consent. If he does, he must treat her as a full wife or let her go. If he does not take her, he must deal with her like a free daughter(Exod. 21:7-11). Since there was no one to protect the slave woman from the unrighteous sexual advances of her master the law emphasises his duty to treat her as his wife, not his whore.

Sex with a betrothed servant woman by a man other than her fiancée

The man must offer a public offering. An inquiry was made with possible additional punishment, but there was no death penalty (Lev. 19:20-22). This prevents a woman from being put to death if her master forces her to be a prostitute. It discourages customers who would not want public offerings or inquiries. If slave women were exempt from death but men were not, men could be falsely condemned too easily.

Sex with a married woman

If a man and married woman (slave or free) are discovered committing adultery, both are put to death (Deut 22:22). Those discovering the act will hear the woman scream if she is resisting. If there are no witnesses, nothing is done. Married women will not have the physical evidence that a virgin would.

When you come into the land, and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. It shall not be eaten. But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, a praise to the LORD [shall be set apart for rejoicing in the Lord— NRSV]. And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase: I am the LORD [I am YHVH] your God' (Lev 19:23-25).

The first part of this law is simply good farming practice. Fruit trees produce little the first few years and many farmers remove any fruit that sets the first few years so the trees will make bigger trunks and roots. In the fourth year, the fruit was used to give thanks for the many profitable years to come.

You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor shall you practice divination or soothsaying. You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard. You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the LORD [I am YHVH](Lev 19:26-28).

All those things were practices of other people in Palestine. The Eternal did not want his people to seek any thing from false gods, nor did he want them to do those things just to "fit in."

Do not prostitute your daughter, to cause her to be a harlot, lest the land fall into harlotry, and the land become full of wickedness. (Lev 19:29).

If a man was too poor to take care of his family (or so evil that he would not take care of them), he could sell his children (Ex 21:7). Hopefully, the person that bought them would take better care of them. At least the daughters would not have to work as prostitutes—something that is all too common in the Orient. This writer read a rather disgusting article about some newly formed East European nations, lacking in industry and in need of western currency. They recruited their own young women and sent them to work as prostitutes in western nations. They need this law!

You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary: I am the LORD. (Lev 19:30).

What is this command doing in the middle of all of these prohibitions against false religion? If people would hear the law read every Sabbath and reverence the Eternal, they would not have all of the other problems described in this chapter!

Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I

am the LORD [I am YHVH] your God (Lev 19:31).

Today, our Western nations are full of astrologers, spiritualists, palm readers, psychics and many others claiming to be able to predict the world's or your personal future. This command to simply ignore them is the best advice a person could ever get about them.

You shall rise before the grey headed and honor the presence of an old man, and fear your God: I am the LORD [I am YHVH](Lev 19:32).

The practice of honoring older people has been lost in most Western nations.

This does not mean that all people must obey commands from anyone substantially older than they are, but it does mean we should honor and listen to people that have lived a great many more years than we have.

And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him. But the stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. I am the LORD [I am YHVH] your God' (Lev 19:33-34).

Another spiritual command! In verse 18, the Eternal asked us to love our neighbor (fellow Israelites) as ourselves, and here He has commanded us to love the stranger (Gentiles) as ourselves! These are commands that require the power and spirit of the Eternal to carry out.

You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume. You shall have honest scales, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin: (Lev 19:35--36).

Businesses should be honest about what they are selling and its price! This problem is still with us—and it has been automated! A 1995 investigation of stores with electronic checkout equipment found that nearly 10 percent of daily sale items were not being properly charged to customers. In almost all cases, the charged price was higher than the advertised sale price. When the error was pointed out to store management, corrections often took many days. We still need honest scales, weights, measures, and computers!

I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe all My statutes and all My judgments and perform them: I am the LORD [I am YHVH](Lev 19:36-37).

As the Eternal physically brought Israel out of the land of Egypt, so he desires to take each one of us out of our sins. Therefore we should study and observe all that he tells us.

If every human being had the perfect love of the Eternal in their hearts we would not need numerous laws and penalties to govern our affairs. We would all naturally take care of others every bit as well as we take care of ourselves (Mark 12:31; Phil 2:4). But we are all still human and do not yet behave perfectly(Rom 7:14-23. Phil 3:12).

For example, John, a poor man, wants to visit his mother so he borrows Mark's second car to make the trip (Both men believe they have the "love of God" in their hearts that will solve all human problems.) While on the trip the car brakes down and it will cost \$1 000 to fix it. John would like to pay to fix it but he does not have the money so he thinks Mark should show love and pay for it. Mark has enough money but he was saving it for new carpets for which his wife had been asking for two years. He would not be showing love to his wife to ignore his promise to her. Mark thinks he was showing a lot of love to loan John the car in the first place and that John should show love in return by honoring his promise to be

responsible for the car.

The Bible solution to this problem was covered earlier(Exod. 22:14-15). Had these men read and endeavored to live by the words of the Bible rather than to just have love they might have made different arrangements before the trip and they certainly would know who is responsible for fixing the car.

The Bible is clear that we need the Etemal's law to tell us what sin is (1 John 3:4). We can grow to have the love of God by doing things that define His righteousness(Psalm 119:172, 1 John 5:3).

Anyone that has raised children realizes that simply telling children what to do is not always enough. Ecclesiastes 8:11 states there is a need for a speedy sentence or punishment in order to help correct people that are doing things that our Creator told them not to do. Indeed, because neither man nor the Eternal has enforced the punishments given in the Scriptures there is an incredible amount of evil in the world today.

So what should be done? Should the Eternal or human governments begin to enforce the Biblical penalties without warning? Should parents who have let their children use profanity all their lives suddenly start spanking them? No. People punished for breaking laws of which they are not aware usually do not learn very well. They usually blame the "punisher." Our Father is more concerned about people disobeying laws that they do know compared to those laws they do not know (Rom 2:11-16: Luke 12:47-48). Nevertheless. people can be destroyed because of their ignorance of the Eternal's ways (Hos 4:6). What is necessary is to first teach the Eternal's laws, then to enforce them!

We have already covered Exodus 20-23 and Leviticus 19. We will continue in Leviticus 20. This chapter deals mostly with punishments. Many of them seem harsh—so harsh that they were often not carried out in the nation of Israel. Nevertheless if people knew these punishments all of their lives most of the sins described in this chapter would virtually never be committed—and punishment would be rare. The total amount of human suffering would. be infinitesimal compared to what happens today as a result of the sins.

Killing Babies for Personal Gain

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Again, you shall say to the children of Israel: 'Whoever of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell in Israel, who gives any of his descendants to Molech, he shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones. I will set My face against that man, and will cut him off from his people, because he has given some of his descendants to Molech, to defile My sanctuary and profane My holy name' (Lev 20:1-3).

While there is scholarly debate on the exact nature of Molech worship many scholars believe that some Israelites actually burnt their new-born children in the fire as a sacrifice to this false god. We learn in 2 Kings 23:10 that "he [Josiah] defiled Topheth which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech."(A thorough treatment of Molech may be found in "Molech - A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament" by John Day, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1989.)

We know for certain that Israelites did sacrifice their children to some false deity: "And they have built the high places of Tophet [probably the same place that Josiah destroyed above], which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire. which I did not command, nor did it come into my heart"(Jer.7:31). "They even sacrificed

their sons and daughters to demons, and shed innocent blood, even the blood of their daughters(Psalm 106:37-38).

Today, few people sacrifice their children directly to Molech but millions sacrifice their children on the altar of convenience—the convenience of sex without commitment. We live in a bizarre world indeed. A woman could walk into a hospital nursery, see her tiny newborn premature baby of only six months gestational age, open its incubator, cut him up and throw him away and receive the death penalty for her heinous crime. In an office next door, a woman can walk in with an unborn baby of exactly the same gestational age, let a professional doctor cut him up and throw him away and not be in violation of any of man's laws.

The ancient Israelites sacrificed their children believing the false gods would give them prosperity for doing it. They recognized it as a sacrifice. Today, most parent(s) kill their children simply because they do not want to be bothered by them. Which do you think is worse? It is interesting to note that Leviticus specified a double punishment for this sin. The offender was to be put to death by the people but in case they did not do their job the Eternal promised to cut the offender off from His people.

Is the solution for today to find every woman and doctor that has been involved in all abortion and put them to death? Some may have known what the Eternal said about it; others may really believe today's ideas and think that all they have done was remove a little extra "fetal tissue" The solution is to first teach the crime and its punishment—that will cause many that believe in the Bible to stop the sin. Implementing the punishment will have to wait until the millennium but then it will certainly stop nearly all of the senseless killing of innocent babies.

And if the people of the land should in any way hide their eyes from the man, when he gives some of his descendants to Molech, and they do not kill him, then I will set My face against that man and against his family; and I will cut him off from his people and all who prostitute themselves with him to commit harlotry with Molech(Lev 20:4-5).

It is interesting to see that the Eternal makes all of the people responsible, not just the leaders or a police force. People were not allowed to "cover up" this sin if they discovered it in others. Today, we are not responsible for administering the civil government but we are certainly responsible for teaching our children and those in our congregations the truth of this matter if someone in our congregation—even in our own family has one of their children murdered. We should put them out of our congregations. Are they barred from fellowship forever? Probably not. We will cover that in a few paragraphs.

Avoiding Spirits and Mediums

And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God. And you shall keep My statutes, and perform them: I am the LORD who sanctifies you.... A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones. Their blood shall be upon them(Lev 20:6-8,27).

The Eternal promises to punish people Himself for consulting with mediums. This sin would be too difficult for men to effectively prosecute since there is rarely any witnesses involved and two or three would be required to establish the guilt (Deut. 19:15) Without witnesses how can one prove that a "consultation" took place? By not specifying a penalty for those that consult with mediums it is much easier to get witnesses to come forward to testify

against the mediums. If two or three people that had consulted with a medium decide to testify against him or her the problem can be ended.

Clearly, the Eternal intends us to look to Him and His law to provide a happy and meaningful life. When people fear the future - especially if they are sinning—they often turn to mediums for guidance or assurance that “things will turn out all right.” As prostitutes give up their virginity--a part of themselves—for the temporary benefit of money, so people consult mediums give up their close relationship with their Father in heaven for the temporary benefit (if it is a benefit at all) of demonic advice. Our loving Father wants us to be sanctified set apart for His holy purpose.

Today, one can look in the phone book of any major city and find psychics, card readers, palm readers and spiritual advisors of all types. Some of these people are charlatans: they possess no skill at all but take money for predictions and then move on before too many unhappy customers return. Others have great human skill to understand people and their feelings--they can discern things about people that they may not know about themselves. Still others, like the witch at Endor, are in contact with demons that may impersonate the dead or give advice in other ways (1 Sam.28:7). Finally, some people are completely demon possessed and have access to much knowledge in the spirit realm(Acts 16:16). None of these four types of advisors can guarantee that they are telling you the truth. Our Father has more knowledge than all of them, always tells the truth and is willing to share His wisdom with us if we are willing to do what is best for ourselves—to put away sin (Isa 59:1-2).

Sometimes people with Bible knowledge seek mediums anyway because they know they are sinning. They are afraid that the Eternal will not answer them while the mediums do not really care if people are sinning. This approach places us "deeper into trouble" rather than getting us out of it. If we know that we are sinning we must cry out to our Father and ask for forgiveness. Then He will hear and help us (2 Chr. 7:14. 1 John 1:3).

Do Not Curse Your Parents

For everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother. His blood shall be upon him (Lev 20:9).

Human babies are helpless when born. Without their parents or someone to care for them they would soon die. Many thousands of hours and dollars are needed to bring a child to adulthood. While many parents today are far from the ideal that the Eternal intended we are commanded not to curse those that made it possible for us to be alive.

The expression “curse” means a thought-out expression of long-lasting contempt. This does not mean that the child that argues with his parents or calls them a naughty name should be put to death. Nevertheless, a lot of cursing of parents occurs today. There is a great need for believers and everyone else to begin teaching and following this law.

Homosexuality and Bestiality

If a man lies with a male as he lies with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them. If a man mates with an animal, he shall surely be put to death and you shall kill the animal. If a woman approaches any animal and mates with it, you shall kill the woman and the animal. They shall surely be put to death. Their blood is upon them (Lev 20:13,15-16).

In today's society, the death penalty seems harsh for the above sins. After all, do these acts really hurt anyone as long as all parties are consenting? Are not some people simply born

homosexuals? Are not others conditioned to be so by dysfunctional relationships in their own family? There is no doubt that some people have much greater tendencies to be involved in homosexual activity and that it is family related. The penalty of sins is often passed down to the children (Ex 20:5, 34:7, Num 14:18, Deut 5:9). Children with violent or sexually promiscuous parents also tend to be the same way. So should we let a murderer or rapist go free in our society because their parents were the same?

Obviously the Creator that made us knows what kinds of sexual relationships are good for us and which ones are not. According to one theory, the AIDS virus was first introduced to humans when they were "lying with" monkeys. The virus was certainly spread by homosexuals. When people with these perverted sexual preferences are without a willing partner there is a great tendency to coerce or force a partner—sometimes children that cannot defend themselves. Animals that have partaken of relations with humans may try to repeat the behavior—with a human that does not want it.

In His love for all of His creation, the Eternal decreed that people and animals that have partaken of such deviant behavior should be killed in order to protect the rest of the population. The people that die are not lost forever but will have a chance to deal with their problems when they are raised from the dead and given the holy spirit (Ezek 37:13-14). Once these people learn that they have a sin to be overcome rather than just an "alternative lifestyle" there will be hope for them changing.

Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God (1Cor 6:9-10).

Various Sexual Sins Defined

The man who commits adultery with another man's wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death. The man who lies with his father's wife has uncovered his father's nakedness; both of them shall surely be put to death. Their blood shall be upon them. If a man lies with his daughter-in-law, both of them shall surely be put to death. They have committed perversion. Their blood shall be upon them (Lev 20:10-12).

If a man marries a woman and her mother, it is wickedness. They shall be burned with fire, both he and they, that there may be no wickedness among you" (Lev 20:14).

If a man takes his sister, his father's daughter or his mother's daughter, and sees her nakedness and she sees his nakedness, it is a wicked thing. And they shall be cut off in the sight of their people. He has uncovered his sister's nakedness. He shall bear his guilty (Lev 20:17).

You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister nor of your father's sister, for that would uncover his near of kin. They shall bear their guilt. If a man lies with his uncle's wife, he has uncovered his uncle's nakedness. They shall bear their sin; they shall die childless. If a man takes his brother's wife, it is an unclean thing. He has uncovered his brother's nakedness. They shall be childless (Lev 20:19-21).

Most of the above verses are quite specific and fairly self-explanatory. They start by prescribing the death penalty for adultery—something no longer recognized as a crime by most Western societies. Too much of our population does not see anything wrong with it; some psychologists actually claim it is beneficial to a marriage. All we can do today is teach the truth, put major sinners, even if they are high ranking out of our congregations that

engage in the practice.

How do we know that we should put people out of our congregations today? This section defines the very sin of marrying one's own mother that occurred in the Corinthian church (1 Cor 5:1-5). Leviticus specifies the death penalty but Paul instructed the congregation to put them out when they came together again. Later (some estimate about six months), Paul instructed them to welcome him back (2 Cor 2:6-7). If we can generalize from this example, a person who sins a sin worthy of death should be put out of his or her congregation. The whole congregation will know (just like they all knew when the death penalty was administered under Moses) But, if the sinning person remains out of the congregation for some time, appears repentant, and desires to return, then he or she should be allowed to return.

Why do even make a distinction between different types of sins'? After all, if a person is guilty of breaking any point of the law, is he not guilty of it all (Jam. 2:10)? In a spiritual sense any sin on our part brings on the death penalty: we can only obtain eternal life by our Savior's sacrifice (Rom 6:11, John 3:16). But we also have to deal with sin from the physical damage it causes. If a member of a congregation has a bad habit of stealing pens from the other members he can restore two pens for every one he took and continue in the congregation. He can repeat this problem several times and still remain there. However, if a congregation has a practicing murderer, adulterer or homosexual, the damage he or she would do to the congregation often cannot be undone. The congregation is to put him or her out for the protection and reputation of the congregation (Matt. 18:15-17, 1 Cor 5:1-5, 2 Thes.3:6, 1 Tim. 6:5).

We can further note that many of the above scriptures tend to deal with various forms of incest—a temptation that occurred more often when extended families lived in close proximity—sometimes in houses with very few rooms. The expression “uncover his/her nakedness” does not refer to the case where a person accidentally opens a door when someone else is dressing or bathing. These accidents do not bring the death penalty “Uncovering nakedness” refers to a prolonged exposure with the possibility some sexual act of which the writer would rather not give specific details. In Genesis 9:22-24 Ham “saw the nakedness” of Noah his father but when Noah awoke he “knew what his youngest son had done to him”. Obviously, Ham had done something more than just look at him, else Noah would have no way of knowing when he woke up.

If a man lies with a woman during her sickness and uncovers her nakedness, he has exposed her flow, and she has uncovered the flow of her blood. Both of them shall be cut off from their people (Lev 20:18).

The question of whether or not couples should have intercourse during menses has been debated by the medical community as well as the sexually active for many years. The Women's liberation thinking is that women are little different from men and should be able to do whatever they want whenever when they want. Other women (and some men) find the whole idea repulsive. Some medical research shows a greater chance of spreading disease during such intercourse. Other research refutes those claims.

Whatever men might say we have to realize that our Creator knows what is best for us. This command is repeated in Ezekiel 18:6 and 22:10. Furthermore there are many happily married couples that have practiced this principle for years. This writer knows of some cases where one spouse believed in it and the other did not. In no case was the practice of this principle ever considered a problem or a sore-point in the marriage.

Do Not Follow Other Nations

You shall therefore keep all My statutes and all My judgments and perform them that the land where I am bringing you to dwell may not vomit you out. And you shall not walk in the statutes of the nation which I am casting out before you; for they commit all these things and therefore I abhor them. But I have said to you 'You shall inherit their land and I will give it to you to possess a land flowing with milk and honey.' I am the LORD your God who has separated you from the peoples(Lev. 20:22-24).

This is a principle that applies to both nations and local congregations. We should not look to the customs and laws of other peoples or churches to decide how we will conduct our lives and worship our Father. We should look first to His instruction. We can learn physical things from other people: how to read, write, build buildings, etc. but we should never let those things replace the Bible instruction.

What is the punishment for following the customs of other nations? Being cast out of our land. This happened to ancient Israel and Judah on more than one occasion and could happen again. Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 indicate this is the ultimate end for disobeying the Eternal.

Eating Clean Food

You shall therefore distinguish between clean animals and unclean, between unclean birds and clean and you shall not make yourselves abominable by beast or by bird or by any kind of living thing that creeps on the ground which I have separated from you as unclean. And you shall be holy to Me for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples that you should be Mine(Lev. 20:25-26).

The difference between clean and unclean animals is explained in Leviticus 11. Some people look at the associated command to "be holy" above and use it as proof that unclean meats are part of a ceremonial law that was ended along with the animal sacrifices. However, the language in verse 26 is about the same as verse 7 where the subject is familiar spirits. Does anyone believe that the command to not seek mediums ended with the ending of the sacrifices?

The Bible shows us that the knowledge of clean animals existed long before Moses. Noah was told to take seven pairs of the clean animals but only one pair of the unclean (Gen 7:2). Isaiah 66 speaks of the millennium a time when our Savior will reign on earth. Verse 17 tells us that it will still be wrong to eat unclean foods at that time. Modern science has confirmed that many of the unclean animals do create an increased risk of disease. But we do not have to wait for science to discover all of the reasons why the Eternal's laws are good for us to follow. We can simply believe Him and obey Him now!