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PARTICIPATING IN GODLINESS: A STUDY OF THE LAWS  
CONCERNING THE SOCIALLY MARGINALIZED IN THE TORAH

Jamie Hussain  
McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, ON

How does the average twenty-first century Christian seeking out the compassion of God relate to a God who decreed that widows and orphans be invited to dinner at the end of every third year (Deut 14:29)? How does a law that prescribed two turtledoves as an offering to atone for a new mother's uncleanness (Lev 12:8) comfort a new Christian mother trying to make the next month's rent? Does an understanding of God's laws regarding the fair treatment of one's slave (Exod 21) give the Christian any relevant direction regarding ethical conduct in a country where slavery is no longer legal?

God is often perceived by Christians to be dichotomous, a view that distinguishes between the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New. Such an erroneous concept has a negative impact on the practice of Christians and their pastors. The New Testament is read and reread, preached and re-preached, while the Old Testament is left on the shelf. Neither is then understood as they potentially could be. Yet a careful reading of the Old Testament reveals that the One who delivered the Sermon on the Mount is the same One who delivered the Ten Commandments from Mount Sinai.

The following study will entail a canonical approach to the laws of the Torah that govern Israel's treatment towards their most vulnerable population, the socially marginalized. Through these laws, the compassion of God becomes vivid.<sup>1</sup> God is

1. While I acknowledge that the whole of Scripture is comprised of texts written in different times, places, and cultures, the goal of this study is not to

revealed through Mosaic Law, that portion of the Old Testament that Christians turn to the least and find most irrelevant, as a God who is concerned for and involved in human affairs. The social justice laws in the Torah function as a revelation of God's compassion, a godly characteristic that not only was to be reflected through the practical behavior of ancient Israel, but also by all his people in covenant with him, regardless of the culture or century in which they live.<sup>2</sup>

This study will also reveal three primary themes arising from the laws about the socially marginalized. Arising from each law is the practical theme of provision, protection, or inclusion. As the Israelites obeyed these laws they would have found themselves providing these vulnerable ones with the basic necessities of life such as food and clothing. Obedience to these laws also meant that the Israelites would protect them from injustice in the courts and ensure they were included in the annual feasts and times of worship. In so doing, the Israelites were working out practically the compassion that God has for the socially marginalized in society. As the Bible is the revelation of God, so these laws concerning the socially marginalized are a revelation of God's compassion.

After outlining the varying socially marginalized groups as named in the Torah, I will present a summary of the laws concerning them within the context of the law code in which they are found, giving particular attention to the theological motivations behind the laws. The summaries will also include the functional themes that arise from each law, citing samples from each law code. The study will conclude with some observations about how this material relates to New Testament teaching and to Christian life today.

propose historical human sources from which the laws arose. It focuses on the laws in their final form, which attest that the Lord is their source.

2. Hamilton, *Social Justice and Deuteronomy*, 157.

*The Socially Marginalized in the Torah*

Israel's socially marginalized people are the ones who would not have belonged to one of the "primary units in the ancient Israelite social organization."<sup>3</sup> This *beth 'av* ("house of the father") unit was the basic community unit and was headed by the father. The extended family that was included in this *beth 'av* "was made up of as many sets of childbearing adults and their dependants as was necessary for the entire group to feed and protect itself."<sup>4</sup> To be outside, or marginalized from, this basic social support unit of provision and protection was to be at risk. The identities of "socially marginalized people" are given in the laws as the orphan, widow, foreigner, and slave, and collectively as the poor.

Not every orphan and widow (Exod 22:22–24; Deut 10:18; 14:29; 16:11; 24:17–21; 26:12–13; 27:19) was poor, however. In early Israelite society women and children needed "the protection and economic support of an adult male."<sup>5</sup> If, due to war or disease or some other mortal fate, a family lost the male providing that support, a widow and her now fatherless child, or orphan, could turn to the deceased's family or the widow's family for that protection and economic support. Subsequently, despite being widowed or orphaned, they could end up being well provided for. Otherwise a widow and orphan "were destitute if they had no household to provide them support and nurture,"<sup>6</sup> and thus would be in real danger of being taken advantage of or even abused by others, and of starvation.

This was the case for the foreigner (Exod 22:21; 23:9, 12; Num 9:14; 15:14–16; 35:15; Lev 17:8–9, 15–16; 18:26; 19:9–10, 33–34; 20:2; 22:18–19; 23:22; 24:16, 22; 25:6, 23; Deut 1:16; 10:17b–19; 14:21, 29; 24:17–18; 27:19; 28:43; 31:12) as well. While it was possible for a foreigner to prosper in Israel, this was the exception, not the rule. Whether non-Hebrews were passing through or living in Israel, they were at risk of being exploited as

3. McNutt, *Reconstructing the Society*, 216.
4. Mathews and Benjamin, *Social World*, 7.
5. Malchow, "Social Justice in the Israelite Law Codes," 301.
6. Perdue, "The Israelite and Early Jewish Family," 194.

was any foreigner in a strange land. Not only would there always be the potential for ethnically motivated abuse, they could never permanently own land. “Without inherited land, a sojourner could not sit among the elders and may not have been allowed to institute suits before the court and thus was vulnerable to exploitation, fraud, and social ostracism.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, most non-Hebrews living in Israel served as “hired laborers”<sup>8</sup> of the *beth 'av* unit, and were dependant on their daily wage for survival.

It was not only the foreigner, but the Israelite as well, who had the potential of falling into a life of slavery in Israel (Exod 21:2–11, 20–21, 26–27; 23:12; Lev 25:6, 35–55; Deut 23:15–16). While both foreign and Israelite bondservants are called “slaves” in the law, there is a type of slavery to which the foreigner was subjected that the Israelite was not. It is likely that the foreigner either became a slave by being purchased as such or became one by being taken captive in war. As such, the foreigner’s form of slavery was “a genuine slavery.”<sup>9</sup> If, however, Israelites fell into slavery, it was most likely due to financial indebtedness. To pay off the debt parents could sell one of their children into “temporary debt servitude and slavery.”<sup>10</sup> They could also sell themselves into slavery. In this case the arrangement was as follows: “instead of signing a mortgage on his property he turned it over to the creditor . . . and by farming it himself gradually worked out of his indebtedness.”<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the Israelite slave was to be treated less harshly than the foreign slave.

All those people who identified themselves as widow, orphan, foreigner, or slave, were not part of the typical landowning familial social structure that sustained and secured a person’s life necessities. Since “wealth came from the land”<sup>12</sup> and they did not own land, they were dependant upon those *beth 'av* land-

7. Patrick, *Old Testament Law*, 86.

8. Perdue, “The Israelite and Early Jewish Family,” 198.

9. North, *Sociology*, 2.

10. Perdue, “The Israelite and Early Jewish Family,” 195–6.

11. North, *Sociology*, 2.

12. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 72.

owning units for their survival. These socially marginalized people without a landowning family to take them in would remain continually at risk of being exploited and oppressed in their poverty-stricken state, and dependent on the generosity of others to ease that oppression. The disenfranchised widow, orphan, foreigner, and slave were all poor (Exod 22:25–27; 23:3, 6, 10–11; Lev 14:21–22; 19:15; 25:23–55; Deut 15:4–11; 24:12–15) and, therefore, depended on their neighbors daily for their survival. To ensure that these socially marginalized people were cared for, God included in the Torah laws that were specifically concerned with their well-being.

#### *The Book of the Covenant*

The first of the law codes in the Torah is the Book of the Covenant or Covenant Code. While these terms refer to Exod 20:22–23:33, they imply that at least part of the text “was a portion of an independent legal collection or law code before being incorporated into the Bible.”<sup>13</sup> While there may be laws in the Book of the Covenant that had a pre-Sinai existence as well as counterparts in other foreign legal texts, the present shape of Exodus identifies Sinai as the place where God first gave his covenant people the laws that determined how they were to live before their God. Regardless of the source theories, in the end, the Book of the Covenant exists as a legal body of text within the canonical Torah.

Prior to the giving of the Sinai law, the Lord invited Moses and Aaron to ascend the mountain. However Moses warned, “do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, or he will break forth upon them” (Exod 19:24). Then, after the law was given to the people and accepted by them, there was a sacrificial ceremony that concluded with Moses and Aaron once again going up before the Lord. This time, however, they went up with Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu and seventy of Israel’s elders, and on the mountain “they saw the God of Israel; . . . Yet he did not stretch out his hand against the nobles of the

13. Sprinkle, *Book of the Covenant*, 27.

sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank” (Exod 24:9–11). The laws of Sinai had become binding on the two covenant parties, God and Israel, and thus they shared a new relationship based on the laws that determined the expected behavior of each.

Some of those behavioral expectations placed on the Israelites involved their treatment of the socially marginalized. It is here in the material that lies between the Decalogue in ch. 20 and the ceremony in ch. 24 that this Book of the Covenant addresses socially marginalized persons: the slave, foreigner, widow, orphan, and the poor.

#### *Theological Motivations*

When God began to give Israel the law, he did so without any mediator, speaking directly to the nation of Israel from Sinai. His first words were, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Exod 20:2). Thus, as Israel listens to God they are first reminded “of the state of grace in which they stand.”<sup>14</sup> The authority of the laws that follow then is based on God’s self-identity as the Lord, and his act of grace, liberating Israel from the oppression of Egypt. Patrick explains this thought well when he writes:

His deed demonstrated that he is worthy of the benefactors’ allegiance. He is a God to whom they can entrust their fate. His commandments can be trusted to be an expression of his gracious will toward his people. The people can be expected to obey out of trust in the goodness of what he commands and out of gratitude for all his saving benefits.<sup>15</sup>

The motivation for Israel to obey these laws, then, is the relationship that God initiated with Israel, and not simply the law itself. Not only is Israel’s past experience of God’s grace in delivering them from oppression an overarching motivation for

14. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 91.

15. Patrick, *Old Testament Law*, 42.

all the laws, but also certain laws draw on Israel's past experience that becomes a motivation for present practice.

For example, Exod 22:21 and 23:9 are two laws that prohibit the oppression of foreigners. In both cases it is Israel's past as oppressed foreigners themselves that is the stated reason they are not to oppress the foreigners in their land. The latter verse, however, adds the motivation "since you know the life of the foreigner" (23:9). The appeal here is to Israel's exodus experience and they are thus exhorted to "pity the deprived because in Egypt the Israelites learned how the needy feel."<sup>16</sup> In addition to reminding Israel of their past and appealing to a sense of empathy, Israel is pressed here to "care for the weak out of gratitude for God's deliverance."<sup>17</sup> Having been oppressed foreigners themselves and thus knowing the suffering that is inherent in such a life, Israel is to behave toward the foreigners under their rule as God did with them. Israel's exodus experience and God's involvement therein is therefore used as grounds for having such a law.

In the chart below, each law about the socially marginalized is listed in the order it appears in the text, as well as by the specific socially marginalized group that is named in that law. The "X" represents the resulting primary theme that results in the practical application of that particular law.

16. Malchow, *Social Justice*, 28.

17. *Ibid.*

Text of Law Exodus	Socially Marginalized Addressed	Primary Themes		
		Protection	Provision	Inclusion
21:2–6	Slave	X		
21:7–11	Slave	X		
21:16	Slave	X		
21:20–21	Slave	X		
21:26–27	Slave	X		
22:21	Foreigner	X		
22:22–24	Widow/ Orphan	X		
22:25–27	Poor	X		
23:3	Poor	X		
23:6	Poor	X		
23:9	Foreigner	X		
23:10–11	Poor		X	
23:12	Slave/ Foreigner			X

### *Functional Themes*

The laws in the Book of the Covenant that govern Israel's treatment of the socially marginalized serve the socially marginalized in three ways. They protect them from harm or injustices, provide for their basic life necessities, or include them in community. Here in the Book of the Covenant the dominant recurring theme is of *protection* from abuse. The theme of protection arises from all the laws listed here, except the last two that have as their themes *provision* of food and *inclusion* in society. While one, two, or all three themes may arise from more than one of these laws, there is usually one primary theme or function the law serves on behalf of the marginalized individuals with which the law is concerned. For example, the first law concerns slaves who are to be freed after six years of servitude. Thus the slaves are protected from a lifetime of slavery. Upon the slave's release, the status of full citizen is restored and thus the former slave is included back into society. The last law, Exod 23:12, provides another example. Here every seventh day is declared a day of rest for everyone, including slaves. Thus, the slave has been included with the rest of the household and is thereby protected from being overworked; the slave is treated the same as everyone else.



An example of the intense concern and advocacy God has for the vulnerable is made clear in Exod 22:22–27. This text contains two laws that recall Israel’s cry to God out of their oppression and his personal intervention of grace. The law’s explicit concern is for the protection of the widow, orphan, and poor person. The first law prohibits the exploitation of a widow or orphan (vv. 22–24). If they are caused to suffer further at the hand of others, they may give out a “cry of distress”<sup>18</sup> to God, causing him to advocate on their behalf. Such a cry arouses the anger of God against the offending party, to whom God says, “then I will kill you with the sword so your wives will be widows and your sons will be orphans” (Exod 22:24). The second law also protects, as it prohibits a person’s cloak, used as collateral for a loan, from being kept past evening (vv. 25–27). If someone must spend the night without a warm covering because of another, God will also hear that person’s cry.

This cry is the same “cry of distress”<sup>19</sup> with which Israel called out to God when enslaved in Egypt. God heard their outcry and told Moses, “(I) have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings. So I have come down to deliver them from the power of the Egyptians” (Exod 3:7–8). In addition to the widows and orphans, this direct appeal to God is also afforded to the “indebted neighbor” who must sleep without his pledged cloak (Exod 22:26–27), the “poor brother” who is refused a loan (Deut 15:9), and the “hired servant” whose wages are not paid to him at the end of the day (Deut 24:15). In all four cases the direct appeals to God are afforded only to socially marginalized people who suffer at the hands of others and therefore are in need of protection. While the cry in Exod 22:26–27 results in the assurance of being heard by God, the two cries to God in Deuteronomy result in the offense being counted as sin against the offender. In Exod 22:24, however, such a cry results in the aroused anger of God. The only other law that, when broken, results in the anger of God is the law against idolatry (Deut 6:14–15). In both of these cases,

18. Brown et al., *Hebrew Lexicon*, 858.

19. *Ibid.*

God's anger ultimately results in the death of the offender. Since the penalty of death is prescribed here for causing a widow or orphan to cry out, the surrounding community members would be highly motivated to afford sufficient benevolence. In the entire Book of the Covenant this is the only place where the Lord says, "I will kill" (Exod 22:24). Israel is thus urged to be compassionate to those who need compassion because the God with whom they are in covenant relationship is compassionate and was compassionate to them.<sup>20</sup>

Such laws are however "only illustrative"<sup>21</sup> and are to be extended out "into every sphere of life where injustice might be encountered."<sup>22</sup> The same is true not only for the rest of the Book of the Covenant but also for the Decalogue, the call of which is to "translate faith into action."<sup>23</sup> Such action is the prescribed behavior outlined by the laws of the Sinai covenant, mandated by the authority of God, self-binding upon Israel through their voluntary acceptance of the covenant, reflective of the character of God, and exemplified by the Exodus, which "became the model for God's willingness to save suffering people."<sup>24</sup>

Having now established a relationship with God, Israel was expected to obey the law through which that covenant relationship was established. Embedded in the law itself are reminders of their past oppression and the grace and compassion of God of which they were recipients when he delivered them from that oppression. God's covenant people were motivated to obey the law of God not only out of thankfulness to God for acting compassionately and graciously to them. As a people bound in covenant to God, their behavior ought to portray the characteristics of that God they served. As Israel obeyed the laws their behavior would in fact portray God's behavior. As demonstrated above,

20. Malchow, *Social Justice*, 28.

21. Fretheim, *God and World*, 248.

22. *Ibid.*

23. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 91.

24. Malchow, *Social Justice*, 6.

those who obeyed the laws about the socially marginalized would demonstrate God's compassion and grace in practical ways. Depending on the law being obeyed, they would be attending to the vulnerable among them by protecting them, providing for them, or including them in mainstream society. These three themes demonstrate the practical ways God behaves towards his people, and subsequently, how those who call themselves his people ought to behave, based on their covenant relationship to God and the compassion God has shown them.

*The Priestly Code Part I*  
(excluding *The Holiness Code, Leviticus 17–27*)

Having established the covenant relationship with Israel (Exod 20–24), the Lord provides the laws and instructions in preparation for his dwelling among his people. These laws govern the building of the tabernacle, the making of sacrifices, the installation of the priesthood, cleanness within the camp, the organization of the camp, and responsibilities for the Levites. Within these laws, which begin in Exodus 25 and continue through Leviticus and into Numbers, are the laws that address the socially marginalized.

*Theological Motivations*

God provided ethical examples of how to reflect the behavior of God toward the socially marginalized, which was a requirement for his people: "For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy" (Lev 11:44). This call to the people of Israel to be godly in their behavior is also connected in the following verse with his deliverance of Israel from Egypt. "For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God; thus you shall be holy, for I am holy" (Lev 11:45). For Won W. Lee, the Priestly Code has Sinai as its origin<sup>25</sup> and is thus theologically motivated, as the Book of the Covenant is, by God's first words to the nation: "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out

25. Lee, *Punishment and Forgiveness*, 99

of the house of slavery” (Exod 20:2). Even as God’s first words spoken directly to the people at Sinai tied together God’s self-identity with the people’s deliverance from Egypt, so too here in Lev 11:44–45, the authority of God is linked to “the relationship that exists between God and the Israelites.”<sup>26</sup> Thus the Lord’s gracious act of delivering Israel from the oppression of Egypt continues to be the theological motivation behind the laws.

Here among the Priestly laws, excluding the Holiness Code, God made laws that specifically sought to include those who would have otherwise remained excluded. If God who is holy makes provisions for the socially marginalized, then most certainly his covenant people, who are called to behave according to his holiness, ought to likewise concern themselves with the socially marginalized. If God’s covenant people were going to live according to the law of God and reflect his holy character, they would have to afford the same grace to the socially marginalized as God did for them when he liberated them from slavery.

As with the Book of the Covenant, the laws that involve the socially marginalized have a recurring theme. While the main theme of the laws about the socially marginalized in the Book of the Covenant is protection, here it is primarily inclusion. Again, as with the Book of the Covenant, these laws are subject to secondary or tertiary themes of protection or provision. In the chart below, “X” represents the primary theme or function the law serves for the marginalized.

26. Malchow, *Social Justice*, 27.

Text of Law	Socially Marginalized Addressed	Primary Themes		
		Protection	Provision	Inclusion
Leviticus				
5:7, 11	Poor			X
12:8	Poor			X
14:21–22, 32	Poor			X
Numbers				
9:14	Foreigner			X
15:14–16	Foreigner			X
15:26–31	Foreigner			X
35:15	Foreigner			X

### *Functional Themes*

If any of the Israelites became unclean, they were prohibited from fully participating in the community of worship. The stipulations one must follow to become clean again are mandated here in the Priestly Code by God. God provided a way for his people to once again be considered clean and therefore fully eligible members of the worship community. Yet, there were those who were in danger of forever remaining outside the worship community because they were too poor to meet the requirements that would make them clean.

Examples of God's concern for the inclusion of poor are the laws of Lev 5:7, 11. Here the law ensured that the poor and the poorest of the poor were not excluded from the community of worship because of their economic plight. It involved a "guilt offering" for the guilt incurred through the actions listed in vv. 1–4. They include refusing to testify, becoming unclean by touching an unclean thing or person, and making oaths thoughtlessly. The consequence of these actions is one of guilt. The guilty party has committed a sin and the process of forgiveness begins in v. 5. The guilty must confess (v. 5), and then make an offering of a female lamb or goat (v. 6).

The law of v. 7 is for those people who are poor and therefore do not own or are not able to obtain the required offering. Here a provision is made allowing for a substitute offering of two turtle-doves or two sons of a dove. The priests then do their part as

instructed in vv. 8–10, and the sin is forgiven (v. 10). In this way the poor are not excluded from being forgiven.

The law of v. 11 is for those people who are poor in the extreme, so much so that they do not have or cannot obtain the permitted substitute offering. The law also provides for them a further substitute offering of flour equal to one day's bread for one person.<sup>27</sup> From the richest in the land to the very poorest, no one was excluded from the opportunity to be forgiven for one of the four infractions above. Exceptions were made with regard to the required guilt offerings, ensuring that the poor also were included with everyone else in having atonement made for their sins. In doing so they were protected from remaining guilty and being ostracized.

God made sure the laws did not exclude people from coming to worship him. Likewise, through the law, God also ensured that resident foreigners and even lepers (14:21–22, 32) were not excluded from coming to worship him. These laws that make concessions for the poor, or specify the inclusion of the resident non-Hebrew, are examples of God's attitude, and how God's covenant people may practically reflect that attitude toward the socially marginalized in society.

Through the law of Leviticus, God continued to motivate Israel by reminding them of their past oppression and their personal experience of God's compassionate and gracious act of deliverance. God did so by explicitly stating, "For I am the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt to be your God," and then directed them, "thus you shall be holy, for I am holy" (Lev 11:45). Again, out of thankfulness to God, and because he had entered a covenant with them, Israel was to be like him. God's people were to behave in a "godly" manner. One way to do so was through obedience to the laws. As they obeyed the laws concerning the socially marginalized, Israel would bestow the same compassion upon others as God had bestowed on them as a nation. God included them unto himself through a covenant relationship, and by obeying the law in Leviticus Israel would

27. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 306.

ensure that the poor were included with the rest of the nation in the worship of God. As God included others unto himself in covenant, so also his covenant people ought to ensure that they were not only not excluding, but actively including, those who are at risk of being left out of the wider worship community. Thus they, like God, would be applying godliness in practical ways shown forth through provision, protection, and inclusion of others.

*The Priestly Code Part II:  
The Holiness Code: Leviticus 17–27*

The Holiness Code is so named for its main theme of holiness. It appears in Leviticus 17–26, and throughout God repeats to the Israelites the phrases, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (19:2), and “I am the LORD who sanctifies you” (20:8). “This idea, rarely encountered in the rest of Leviticus, is here stated repeatedly and emphatically,” notes Levine.<sup>28</sup> Not only is there a distinctive theme to the Holiness Code but, in comparison to chs. 1–16, it differs in structure, vocabulary, style, and theology.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, despite its distinctive qualities the Holiness Code remains a work within the Priestly Code.<sup>30</sup>

The laws in the Holiness Code concerned specifically with the socially marginalized do not name the widow and orphan, as they do in the Book of the Covenant. The ones that are named in the Holiness Code are the resident foreigner, the slave, the poor, and the afflicted. The descriptions of “poor” and “afflicted,” however, probably included the “widow and orphan,” since they most certainly would have been among the most poor and afflicted in society.

*Theological Motivations*

There are two key theological motivations found in the Holiness Code. Those motivations are related to God as the one who

28. Levine, *Leviticus*, 111.

29. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1319.

30. Knohl, *Sanctuary of Silence*, 1.

delivered Israel out of their oppression in Egypt and God's command to be holy.

The Holiness Code links reference to Israel's experience in Egypt to God's identity as the one who delivered them from their oppression. When the statement "I am the LORD your God" (Lev 18:2, 4, 30; 19:3, 4, 10, 25, 31, 34; 20:24; 23:22, 43; 24:22; 25:17; 26:1) is found by itself, it usually occurs as the concluding statement of a particular law or list of laws. The significance of this is found in the call of Moses where God announces himself to Moses as "YHWH" (Exod 3:13–14). Whether the name literally means "I am who I am," "I will be who I will be," or "I create what I create,"<sup>31</sup> when God gave to Moses his name "the deity had given himself to the worshippers concerned in commitment and trust."<sup>32</sup> Further, Dumbrell suggests that the name and character of God given to Moses will be revealed "by his future acts, particularly from the now imminent liberation. Moses is thus commissioned to go back to Egypt with this name which is now understood to be an indication of Yahweh's intention."<sup>33</sup> Thus, when a law or laws are attached to the statement "I am the LORD" it carries the authority and the mark of the one who heard Israel's cry in Egypt (Exod 3:7), initiated their rescue through Moses, and identified himself as "the LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob" (Exod 3:15).

While some of the laws about the socially marginalized have "I am the LORD your God" as a motivation embedded directly in the law, it is an overarching motivation of the entire Holiness Code. It begins in ch. 17 with "speak to Aaron and to his sons and to all the sons of Israel and say to them, 'This is what the LORD has commanded, saying,'" (v. 2), and ends in 26:46 with "These are the statutes and ordinances and laws which the LORD established between himself and the sons of Israel through

31. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 83.

32. *Ibid.*, 82.

33. *Ibid.*, 84.



Moses at Mount Sinai.” The source of Leviticus 17–26 is identified, at its beginning and at its end, as Yahweh.

Throughout the Holiness Code, varying forms of the words, “I am the LORD your God” (Lev 19:36; 22:33; 23:43; 25:38, 42, 55; 26:13, 45), are attached to varying forms of “who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God” (Lev 25:38). When God identifies himself by name “his authority stands behind the promises or commands.”<sup>34</sup> When he adds to this self-identity his act of freeing Israel from Egyptian oppression he “establishes the basis on which he expects them to accept his authority.”<sup>35</sup>

Looking back now from Sinai, God had delivered Israel just as he told Moses he would, and thus, as Jansen says, “the one God who has revealed himself under the name Yahweh (Exod 3:13–16; 6:2–7) has filled that name with meaning as he redeemed Israel (Exod 20:2).”<sup>36</sup> Whether God’s name “the LORD” is found in the text coupled with his act of rescuing Israel, or it is found by itself, “these laws are not self-contained or self-interpreting, but are covered by the story that fills the name Yahweh with content.”<sup>37</sup>

In addition to “I am the LORD your God” as an overarching motivation for the laws of the Holiness Code, one finds the phrase: “be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (19:1; 20:7, 26; 21:8). Even though much of “being holy” concerned the specifics involved when approaching to worship God, “justice and compassion, too, were a dimension of holiness.”<sup>38</sup> The ethical laws in the Holiness Code emphasize that ethical living, which involves the treatment of the socially marginalized, is “inextricably wedded”<sup>39</sup> to the rituals of holy worship. Thus every time a law concerning the socially marginalized appears in a law code, as it does in each law code, the ethical and moral

34. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 63.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics*, 97.

37. *Ibid.*, 68.

38. Levine, *Leviticus*, xi.

39. Balentine, *Leviticus*, 142.

dimension of God’s holiness is presented. Thus the repeated proclamation “be holy for I am holy” became possible only “through observance of the cultic laws along with practice of just ways of love of neighbor and the stranger.”<sup>40</sup>

As with the Book of the Covenant and the rest of the Priestly Code, the laws that involve these socially marginalized people in the Holiness Code have a recurring theme. While the main theme of the laws about the socially marginalized in the Book of the Covenant is *protection*, these laws in the Holiness Code continue with the main theme of *inclusion* that was begun in the previous portion of the Priestly Code. Again, as with the previous laws, each of these that thus far show themes of *protection*, *provision*, or *inclusion*, have one theme that primarily serves the socially marginalized, but also may reflect secondary or tertiary themes.

Text of Law Leviticus	Socially Marginalized Addressed	Primary Themes		
		Protection	Provision	Inclusion
17:8–9	Foreigner			X
17:10–14	Foreigner			X
17:15–16	Foreigner			X
18:26	Foreigner			X
19:9–10	Foreigner/Poor		X	
19:15	Poor	X		
19:33–34	Foreigner	X		
20:2	Foreigner			X
22:18–19	Foreigner			X
23:22	Foreigner/Poor		X	
24:16	Foreigner			X
24:22	Foreigner	X		
25:6	Foreigner/Poor		X	
25:24–55	Foreigner/Poor/ Slave	X		

#### *Functional Themes*

The primary theme or function served, running through the laws about the socially marginalized in the Priestly Code is *inclusion*.

40. Knohl, *Sanctuary of Silence*, 216.

While in the first portion of the Priestly Code it is exclusively *inclusion*, here in the Holiness Code it is predominantly so, occupying half the relevant laws. The other themes of *provision* and *protection* occupy the remainder.

What is unique to the laws about the socially marginalized in the Holiness Code is their focus on one segment of the socially marginalized population. Of the fourteen laws, thirteen name the foreigner as the object of the primary theme. The main concern of the Holiness Code, with regards to Israel's socially marginalized, is the foreigner. Whether the law primarily stipulates Israel's *provision*, *protection*, or *inclusion*, its primary object here is the foreigner. An example of each theme is provided below.

Leviticus 19:9–10 has, as its primary theme, *provision*. This law stipulates that when the field or vineyard is harvested it is not to be completely harvested. Some is to remain. This is another version of the law found in Exod 23:10–11 as part of the Book of the Covenant. Here, however, the law applies to any time a harvest takes place rather than only during the seventh year. Also, in addition to the poor, this law includes the foreigner as one of those towards whom this law will encourage provision. This law occurs within a list of a variety of laws that comprise ch. 19. The Lord introduces these laws with “speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy’” (v. 2) (the exhortation for which the Holiness Code is named). Embedded within this specific law itself is the phrase “I am the LORD your God.” The implication of this for Milgrom is that “YHWH is the protector of the defenseless, and only those who follow his lead can achieve holiness.”<sup>41</sup> Providing the poor and the foreigner the opportunity to gather their own food is to act in accordance with, and on behalf of, the heart of God. Finally, the list of laws of which Lev 19:9–10 is a part concludes with the “covenant formula,”<sup>42</sup> “I am the LORD your God” in 19:36.

41. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1624.

42. Wenham, *Leviticus*, 251.

Leviticus 19:33–34 is an example of a law prescribing *protection*. Here the Israelites were to treat the foreigner as they would one of their own citizens.<sup>43</sup> They were not only to withhold their hand from oppressing the foreigner, but were to reach out their hand to the foreigner with love. This is similar to a law just prior, “you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD” (Lev 19:18). This law follows “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev 19:2), and concludes with “for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt” (Lev 19:34). For Israel, the Exodus experience became “the foundation of Israel’s faith. It was the basis for knowing who Yahweh was and who they were. Yahweh was a God who delivered from oppression, and Israel was Yahweh’s people.”<sup>44</sup> This “love” for the foreigner could then involve showing the same love that they had been shown by God.<sup>45</sup> Since love “must be expressed in one’s behaviour,”<sup>46</sup> this is a much greater command to obey than its counterpart in 23:9 in the Book of the Covenant, which only forbids oppression.

Leviticus 22:18–19 is a law prescribing the *inclusion* of the non-Hebrew. Chapter 22 is comprised of laws about eating sacred food (vv. 1–16), and laws governing the animals that are acceptable for sacrifice (vv. 17–33).<sup>47</sup> In danger of being overlooked are vv. 18–19 that address the socially marginalized. The address begins: “Any man of the house of Israel or of the aliens in Israel who presents his offering . . .” Here the foreigner that lived in Israel was invited by the Lord to “worship Yahweh as his God.”<sup>48</sup> The resident foreigner was not only included in the social community but the worship community as well. Ensuring

43. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1704.

44. Malchow, *Social Justice*, 6.

45. Examples of God’s love toward Israel that Israel could show to the foreigner include such things as protecting them from oppression, providing food (Exod 16:12) and water (Exod 15:25) when they had none, and visiting with them (Exod 19:18).

46. Milgrom, *Leviticus 17–22*, 1706.

47. Hartley, *Leviticus*, 352–63.

48. *Ibid.*, 361.

the inclusion of all into the worship community regardless of ethnicity was of paramount importance to God, as evidenced by this law.

In addition to the command to be holy, Israel's past also continued to be a motivation for obeying the laws. Israel was suffering under Egyptian oppression and God acted on their behalf. Before God had offered to make a covenant with Israel, before Israel had become his covenant people, before they knew him, God was gracious to them. "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan and to be your God" (Lev 19:36; 22:33; 23:43; 25:38, 42, 55; 26:13, 45). Further to just rescuing them, God chose to offer himself to them. Then, in a covenant relationship, God would continue to be gracious to Israel, not only by giving them the land of Canaan, but also by blessing them with his presence and with prosperity. It is not surprising, then, that the strangers/foreigners of the land, including those who may have even been considered an enemy race, were to be recipients of Israel's care and blessing. Just as God advocated for Israel before a relationship was established, Israel also was not to allow a lack of relationship to prevent them from extending the same godly care to others. Further reinforcing obedience to the laws about the socially marginalized was the command to be holy. As Israel obeyed the laws that directed them to behave with care for the foreigners in their midst, they would be obeying the command to be holy, as "justice and compassion, too, were a dimension of holiness."<sup>49</sup> This dimension of holiness would be manifest through *provision*, *protection*, or *inclusion* when Israel obeyed the laws. God's covenant people were to care for the strangers in their land even if they were considered enemies of Israel. As they did, they too were blessed in return by being participants in, or envoys of, God's holiness.

49. Levine, *Leviticus*, xi.

*Deuteronomic Code*

While the covenant made at Sinai was a historical event for these people listening to the words of Moses (Deut 1:1), it was not to remain only as such. The covenant at Sinai inaugurated the relationship between Israel and their God (Exod 19–Num 10), and its renewal in the land of Moab (Deut 1:5) would recall that event.<sup>50</sup> The purpose of this covenant renewal was not “because God changed, but because each generation had to recommit itself regularly in love and obedience to the Lord of the covenant.”<sup>51</sup> While Deuteronomy is an expounding (1:5) or explaining by Moses of all that the Lord had commanded (1:3), it does more than repeat laws of the previous codes. Not only does Deuteronomy include additional laws, “but here the law is to be explained and applied by Moses to a particular situation of the Israelites.”<sup>52</sup> Upon their entrance into the Promised Land, the law of Sinai needed to be more than a past event. For this generation hearing Moses, Deuteronomy was not only a renewal of the covenant and a reflection on Sinai, but also a renewal that prepared them for their imminent entrance into the Promised Land.

*Theological Motivations*

In the Deuteronomic Code the primary motivation for obedience to the laws continues to be God’s historic and gracious election and redemption of undeserving Israel. The nation is continually reminded throughout the book that God made an oath with their ancestors to give them the land (1:8, 35; 6:10, 18, 23; 7:13; 8:1; 9:5; 10:11; 11:9, 21; 19:8; 26:3, 15; 27:3; 28:11; 30:20; 31:5, 20; 34:3). God chose them, not because they were deserving in any way (7:7), but because he “set his affection to love them and he chose their descendants after them, even you, above all peoples,

50. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 37.

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*, 92.

as it is this day” (10:15). Thus this sovereign election of God to love and make oaths with Israel should motivate a “loyalty owed by Israel in return.”<sup>53</sup>

God’s gracious act of redeeming Israel continues here to be a motivation behind the laws. When Moses recounts the Decalogue to the people he repeats God’s first words spoken directly to Israel: “I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (5:6). When God identifies himself by name, “his authority stands behind the promises or commands.”<sup>54</sup> When he adds to this self-identity his act of freeing Israel from Egyptian oppression he “establishes the basis on which he expects them to accept his authority.”<sup>55</sup> Thus this phrase (6:12; 8:13; 13:5, 10; 20:1; 24:17) conveys a “message of grace,”<sup>56</sup> reminding Israel that it was the Lord who rescued them from a life of slavery, and therefore they should respond with thankful obedience.

God’s act of delivering Israel from Egypt was not only to motivate the generation of Deuteronomy but also all future generations. After directing Israel to commit themselves to God with undivided loyalty (6:1–6), Moses commands a constant awareness of God’s teachings that was to be passed on to subsequent generations.

Moses directs Israel to “fear the LORD our God for our good always and for our survival, as it is today. It will be righteousness for us if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the LORD our God, just as he commanded us” (6:24–25). There is the intrinsic sense here that loving God with all one’s heart is reflected by obedience that comes from the heart. The laws were not meant to be obeyed strictly out of duty to the law, but out of love for God, the law’s source. This obedience subsequently prompts the blessings of God.

Thus, as with the previous law codes, the laws about the socially marginalized in Deuteronomy find their motivation in

53. Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 10.

54. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 63.

55. *Ibid.*

56. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1–21:9*, 114.

the Lord, the God who delivered the Israelites from Egypt and then made a covenant with them at Sinai. As at Sinai, in Moab this same Lord spoke through Moses once again, supplementing the terms of the Sinai Covenant with the laws of Deuteronomy.

As with the Book of the Covenant and the Priestly Code, the laws that involve these socially marginalized groups in Deuteronomy have a recurring theme. While the main theme of the laws about the socially marginalized in the Book of the Covenant is protection, and in the Priestly Code it is primarily inclusion, the dominant theme in the Deuteronomic Code is provision. Again, as with the previous groups of laws, themes of protection, provision, or inclusion are all present, but they have one theme that primarily serves the socially marginalized. As with the other charts, “X” represents the primary theme or function the law serves for the marginalized.

Text of Law Deuteronomy	Socially Marginalized Addressed	Primary Themes		
		Protection	Provision	Inclusion
1:16	Foreigner	X		
5:13–15	Foreigner/Slave			X
10:18–19	Foreigner/Widow/Orphan		X	
14:21	Foreigner		X	
14:29	Foreigner/Widow/Orphan		X	
15:4–11	Poor		X	
15:12–18	Slave		X	
16:9–15	Foreigner/Widow/Orphan/ Slave			X
23:15–16	Slave	X		
24:10–15	Foreigner/Poor	X		
24:17–18	Foreigner/Widow/Orphan	X		
24:19–22	Foreigner/Widow/Orphan		X	
26:11–13	Foreigner/Widow/Orphan		X	
27:19	Foreigner/Widow/Orphan	X		
28:43	Foreigner		X	
29:11	Foreigner			X
31:12	Foreigner			X



*Functional Themes*

With seventeen, the Deuteronomic Code has the greatest number of laws concerned with the treatment of Israel's socially marginalized population. It is the theme of provision that arises most often from these laws, almost twice as many times as the themes of protection and inclusion. While the foreigner does receive the most mention in these laws, he/she is often named alongside the widow and orphan, and rarely so with the slave and poor. There is no dominant group of people receiving attention in these laws, as they name each segment of the population, the foreigner, widow, orphan, slave, and poor, throughout. An example of each theme is provided below.

Deuteronomy 5:13–15 is an example of a law in which God's concern is inclusion of the socially marginalized. More specifically, the danger is that the working class will not be afforded a day of rest by their masters. Here in Deuteronomy 5 Moses recounts the Decalogue given to the people directly from God at Sinai. In doing so he repeats God's first words: "I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." Thus, reiterated at the outset is the motivation behind the Decalogue itself, that being the self-identity of the Lord as the God who rescued Israel from oppression and by his grace made Israel his own people.

This law of the Sabbath specifically stipulates that no one in the household, including the slave and the foreigner, is to do any work so that they "may rest as well as you" (v. 14). This law ensures that the slave and the foreigner are not forced to work every seven days out of seven by including them in the household when observing the Sabbath. "This one day a week the servant is treated as the master's equal."<sup>57</sup> This law concludes with the Decalogue's motivational statement repeated here: "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out of there by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to observe the sabbath day" (v. 15).

57. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, 69.

The law of Deut 14:29 prescribed the provision of food for the socially marginalized. The annual tithe is stipulated in vv. 22–27, followed by the tri-annual tithe in v. 28. The purpose is stated in v. 29. Within each seven-year period, on the third and sixth years, “the farmers shall not eat the tithe at the sanctuary but must deposit it in their hometowns to feed the Levites and the poor.”<sup>58</sup> While the Levites were not socially marginalized, God had stipulated that the tithe of the land was to be used for food for the Levites (Num 18:21–24). This law in v. 29 is not meant to include the Levite with the socially marginalized but rather “to put the annual tithe in that year to a different use.”<sup>59</sup> Thus the law here would seem to expand on the law in Numbers 18, to include the local foreigner, orphan, and widow as recipients of the tithe. The purpose was that the socially marginalized “within one’s town”<sup>60</sup> could “eat and be satisfied” (14:29).<sup>61</sup>

As the landowning farmers blessed the poor with the tithe of food from their harvest, the Lord in turn would bless the farmers in all their work. Thus, out of a desire for a good harvest for themselves, the farmers would be motivated to give this tithe. Through this “circle of generosity empowered by blessing”<sup>62</sup> those who were self-sufficient supported those who were not. Thus, both groups were “enabled to learn and understand their continual dependence upon God.”<sup>63</sup>

While Deut 24:19–22 carries the practical theme of provision, it is also another law directed at the farmers as the ones responsible for making such provision. This law primarily makes provision of food for the poor, but in doing so protects against starvation. The appeal to Israel to behave compassionately because

58. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1–21:9*, 144.

59. Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, 246.

60. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1–21:9*, 305.

61. This suggests that the food was either “stored for subsequent distribution when need arose, or else distributed immediately to the needy persons” (Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 234).

62. Nelson, *Deuteronomy*, 191.

63. Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, 234.

of their experience as slaves in Egypt is also the motivation for this law of the harvest (v. 22), in addition to the motive of God's blessing (v. 19). Like the laws in the Holiness Code (Lev 19:9–10; 23:22), this law forbids a farmer from going over the harvest field a second time. What was missed the first time was to be left in the field for the poor, named here as the foreigner, the orphan, and the widow. "The spirit of this legislation expresses clearly the awareness that was to exist within the covenant community for all classes of people."<sup>64</sup> This law not only provided food for the poor, but also protected their dignity as well. Rather than having to beg for food the poor were provided the opportunity to work for their own food like the farmer.<sup>65</sup> Such behavior by the farmer was not just an act of charity but also an expression of thankfulness to God for the harvest.<sup>66</sup>

If there is one text that best summarizes these themes it is Deut 15:4–11. The law of this text is directed toward those in Israelite society who are self-sufficient. "They are shown to have not only the capacity to affect the shape of social reality but also the capacity to bring upon the whole of society either curse or blessing."<sup>67</sup> This depends on how they act toward the poor.

There are a total of six emphatic uses of the infinitive absolute in vv. 4–11. All of them are related to *emphatic* giving to the poor that will result in God's *emphatic* blessing. In this text, God's blessing to make the nation of Israel prosperous is directly dependant upon their obedience to God's command to *abundantly* lend to the poor, thereby making provision for them.

The text is framed by the phrases "There will be no poor among you" (v. 4), and "For a poor one will not stop from the midst of the land" (v. 11). The sense of the text is that if Israel obeyed the laws concerning the poor, they would be so blessed by God that poverty would be abolished. But this was not to be the case, as indicated by v. 11. Perhaps that is why, when relating to the poor, Israel was warned against hard-heartedness

64. Ibid. 310.

65. Ibid.

66. Ibid.

67. Hamilton, *Social Justice*, 15.

(v. 7), a wicked heart (v. 9), and an evil heart (v. 10). Giving to the poor was not to be done grudgingly or dutifully, but from a generous heart. This may also be reflected by the “emphatic” giving encouraged throughout the text.

If the laws about the poor were to be obeyed only out of duty, the emphatic uses would not have been necessary; but perhaps it is obedience from the heart that God is encouraging through the emphatic uses. People can open their hands to the poor and lend, but if it is from the heart then the result is a hand that “*greatly* opens” and “*abundantly* lends” (v. 8). The same senses are repeated in vv. 10–11. Rather than requiring giving from an open hand, God again requires that Israel “*abundantly* give” and “*greatly* open your hand” (vv. 10–11). If that were the case then God would not only bless, but “*abundantly* bless” (v. 4). The text of Deut 15:4–11 best summarizes the laws about the socially marginalized in Deuteronomy, and perhaps the Torah as well.

The look back to God’s liberation of Israel from Egyptian slavery continues to be a primary motivation to obey the laws here in Deuteronomy. This look back was a necessary reminder of God’s advocacy on their behalf, in order to encourage this new generation of Israel for the challenges that faced them as they were about to enter the Promised Land. It is quite practical that at this time provision is the theme that arises most in the laws about the socially marginalized in Deuteronomy, and the foreigner, and then widow and orphan, are those most named. As Israel goes into the land to conquer those who are foreigners to them, their enemies, God stipulates that Israel treat those who survive and continue to dwell in the land with care. Emphasizing provision for the widows and orphans through their repeated mention is also timely as Israel, about to go to war, will lose many husbands and fathers.

### *Summary*

God has chosen to reveal himself to humanity in a variety of ways. Apart from direct experience of God, perhaps the most prominent mode of God’s self revelation is his written word.

Turn to any book in the Bible and some facet of God's character is revealed. This study has turned to the laws in the Torah concerning Israel's most vulnerable population, and there the compassion of God is revealed.

The socially marginalized in Israelite society included all those who were not part of the typical landowning familial social structure that sustained and secured a person's life necessities. In the laws they are the widow, orphan, foreigner, slave, and the poor. Throughout these laws Israel is given specific stipulations regarding how they ought to care for the socially marginalized. They range primarily from providing them food and clothing, to protecting them from being abused or exploited, to ensuring that their plight did not exclude them from the social or religious community.

Thus, as the charts in each section outline, the primary focus of all the laws concerning these disenfranchised members of the community can be summarized according to the three primary themes that arise from each law. Each law primarily served the socially marginalized group or groups it addressed by directing Israel to *provide for*, *protect*, or *include* them. Not only are these themes reflective of God's character in the law, but they are reflected in his actions as well. When God delivered Israel from Egypt he *protected* them from further harm (Exod 3:7-9; 7:1-5; 12:33-41), he *provided* them with food as they traveled towards the Promised Land (Exod 16:12-21; 17:1-7), and he *included* them unto himself in a covenantal relationship (Exod 19-24). Thus, those in covenant relationship with the Lord were expected to behave likewise toward the socially marginalized and, therefore, vulnerable in their midst.

Throughout the Torah, God is presented as the source of these laws and therefore, not only do the laws reflect his character, but they also carry his authority. God introduced the laws given at Sinai saying, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." By this, future generations of Israel came to know that it was the Lord who delivered them from their Egyptian bondage. As an act of grace God chose to rescue undeserving Israel and enter into a covenant relationship with them. Israel was told to "remember that you

were a slave in Egypt” (Deut 26:12), and obey because “the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I am commanding you to do this thing” (Deut 24:18, 22). They are told to “be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev 19:1; 20:7, 26; 21:5). Obedience to the laws would enable them to reflect God’s character. Among those laws were the laws that addressed the socially marginalized, and therefore vulnerable, population within Israel.

*Beyond the Old Testament: Christian Understanding*

From the heart of these laws about the socially marginalized arise these themes of protection, provision, and inclusion. While the twenty-first century Christian may find little relevance in a specific law, understanding that these themes reveal the compassion and nature of God’s character may provide a way towards understanding their specific relevance to us. While Christians are not Israelites, they are in covenant relationship with the same God who has revealed himself as compassionate when he rescued Israel from Egypt. He is the same God who prescribed laws motivating his covenant people to protect, provide for, and include those who needed to be protected and provided for, and were in danger of being isolated from mainstream society or from community of worship. While Christians are not bound to these laws, they are bound to the God of those laws through a different covenant, and as such, they too ought to show forth the characteristics of their God.

The Exodus event clearly demonstrated the love that God had for Israel and the extent to which he would involve himself in human affairs in order to show them that love. The Christian however, looks back to an event when that same God once again involved himself in human affairs in order to show the love he has, not only for his people, but for all people. In both cases, God’s love was made known through his practical actions on behalf of those under oppression. For the Israelites it was release from Egyptian oppression and for the Christian it is release from the oppression of sin. Again, in both cases, God blesses his

covenant people by working through them in order to continue to bring about his advocacy for the oppressed through their practical actions of protecting, providing, and including those marginalized people in their society.

For Christians, holiness is imparted to them upon entering into covenant relationship with God. They too, however, must choose to align their behavior with their covenant status. As they show forth the compassion of God through the practical means of protecting, providing for, or including those marginalized people in their society, as the law directed Israel to do, Christians will be participating in God's godliness or holiness. Again, Christians, as the Israelites were, are motivated to behave as their God would by remembering their God's past redeeming actions on their behalf.

Being God's people comes with the obligation of behaving in a "godly" way. This was accomplished by the Israelites through obedience to the laws, which would result in the compassionate treatment of Israel's socially marginalized population. In the culture in which the Christian exists today, godly behavior continues to be seen wherever compassionate treatment toward a socially marginalized person is extended. This godly compassion toward the poor is best demonstrated, not just by protecting, providing, or including the socially marginalized, but by doing these things extravagantly so. Since Christians have personally experienced the abundant compassion of God when he liberated them from sin and death to life, they too, as Israel was, are in a position to further extend that godly compassion to others.

Just as Israel was motivated to be godly by God's gracious act of redeeming them from Egyptian bondage, Christians can also look back in their own personal history and recount the undeserved redemption that God graciously afforded them. God has *protected* Christians from eternal death and slavery to sin and *provided* them with fullness of life (temporal and eternal) and *included* them in the community of God as he has bound them to himself in a covenantal relationship through Jesus.

*New Testament Applications*

It is the life of Jesus that Christians often turn to when determining what godly living looks like, and there see how he protected, provided for, and included those at risk in his environment in practical ways. But Christians often fail to appreciate the significance of Jesus' words when he refers to the law: "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished" (Matt 5:17–18). Heaven and earth have not passed away and, therefore, neither has the law. Since the law is not abolished in Christ but fulfilled in Christ, to have a better understanding of the law is to have a better understanding of Jesus.

Through the works of Jesus the law is completed, but not nullified. Through the fulfillment of the law Jesus opened the way for a new covenant. God spoke of this new covenant through the prophet Jeremiah saying,

Behold, days are coming when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days: I will put my law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (Jer 31:31–33).

The law exists today in the heart of those with whom God has established this new covenant through Jesus. The law of God that was external and stipulated that compassionate things must be done for others is now internally written on the heart of Christians. God's desire for the advocacy of the socially marginalized has become the internal desires of his covenant people as well.

When Jesus was asked to name the greatest commandment in the law he answered, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.'



This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt 22:37–39). Neither of these laws is a New Testament idea. They are found first in the Torah: love of God in Deut 6:5 and love of neighbor in Lev 19:18. Jesus intended that these two laws be understood as intrinsically connected. This is how the apostle John understood them:

If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also” (1 John 4:20–21).

To express one’s love for a neighbor through practical helpful ways is to express to that person, not only the love of God, but one’s love for God as well.

Jesus then emphasized further the command “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Lev 19:18). He paraphrased the command by saying, “treat people the same way you want them to treat you” and then added, “for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 7:12). Jesus equates the law with showing love to one’s neighbor.

This command to love one’s neighbor, first found in the Torah and witnessed in the life of Jesus, also continues beyond the Gospels. As the church grew the Greek-speaking Christians complained that the widows among them were not receiving “the daily serving of food” (Acts 6:1). In order to ensure they were no longer neglected, the early church restructured itself, adding the office of the deacon.

Such service to those who were vulnerable was to be the hallmark of a person who was truly religious. “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their distress” (Jas 1:27). James also equated the law with love of neighbor saying, “If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you are doing well” (Jas 2:8).

On behalf of the poor, Paul urged the Corinthian Christians to set aside money on a weekly basis so when he came to them it

would be ready for him to collect (1 Cor 16:2). Later (2 Cor 8:15) Paul drew on Exod 16:18, reminding them that just as God provided food for Moses and Israel in the desert, they too could trust God to provide for them and therefore could give to the poor without fear. Paul too equates love of neighbor with the law. To the Galatians Christians he says, “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Gal 5:14). And then to the Christians in Rome he says,

he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For this, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:8–10).

From the Gospels to Acts to the Epistles, expressing love to a neighbor finds its roots in the Torah. To live according to the law “Love your neighbor as yourself” is to live according to the Torah.

#### *A Contemporary Application*

Among those in greatest need of this love manifested through practical compassion are people with developmental disabilities. Regardless of family status, religion, or ethnicity, people with developmental disabilities across the world have a history of being marginalized by mainstream society to such a degree that their very lives are at risk. “In darker times of human civilization, such as the city-states of ancient Greece or Hitler’s Nazi Germany, thousands and millions of people with some kind of disabling condition were killed in the belief that wiping out everyone with a specific disabled ‘gene,’ (the eugenic movement) would prevent future malformations in the human race.”<sup>68</sup> Treating any group of people this way today violates Article 16 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* as adopted and

68. Webb-Mitchell, *Unexpected Guests*, 50.

proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 10, 1948. Yet, even today, the argument is being made that human rights do not apply to some people because they are not fully human persons. This approach that ethicists such as Princeton's Peter Singer are taking today is called the *actuality principle*. This approach seeks to define human personhood as requiring a "developed capacity for conscious self-reflective intelligence."<sup>69</sup> Peter Singer questions the humanity of a person who has a severe intellectual disability when he says: "Infanticide (the killing of infants) should be permitted whenever it is clear that the baby will never function as a 'full' human being."<sup>70</sup> In other words, if a person does not have the required intellect to qualify as 'truly being human', then not only should that person's human rights be revoked but that person's right to life as well.

Regardless of people's developmental disabilities, and the degree to which a given society has, and will, marginalize this people group, they are the target of physical aggression, of being despised and treated as less than human, and of being isolated and neglected. In some cultures, people with disabilities are seen as a nuisance or drain on the economy, while in others they are despised as a curse or are subjected to abandonment and infanticide.

Fortunately there are those who recognize the intrinsic value of every person, and focus their resources toward ensuring that people with developmental disabilities are afforded the same rights, respect, and life opportunities that most take for granted.

What might obedience to God's laws about treatment of this group of marginalized people look like today? A practical example is the ministry of Christian Horizons.<sup>71</sup> Regardless of their abilities, status, religion, or race, all people who are served

69. Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, 221–22.

70. Thomas, "Deadly Compassion," 14–21.

71. Loney, "Together We Are Stronger," 4. Christian Horizons was founded in 1965 by Jim and Adrienne Reese, who were discontented with services available to help them with their son who has a developmental disability. Christian Horizons is currently the largest provider of services to people with these exceptional needs in Ontario.

in Christian Horizons, are *protected* from the various forms of abuse people with developmental disabilities often suffer, be they physical, sexual, emotional, financial, or relational. Christian Horizons also ensures that the supports are *provided* on an individual basis rather than on the older institutional model. In addition to such things as dignity, respect, and love, Christian Horizons also provides the freedom of choice, honoring the will of the individual. This support of individual choice ensures that each person's preferences, from choice of religion and place of worship to the choice of meals, room color, and daily schedule are provided. *Inclusion* in one's community is probably the greatest challenge that people with developmental disabilities face. From job and career opportunities, to places of worship, to extra-curricular school activities, to making friends, Christian Horizons strives to fully integrate a person into the community in which they live, advocating to overcome and remove the prejudicial barriers present in mainstream society that have prevented such inclusion.

In the twenty-first century, the need for practical compassion, which manifests itself through means of protecting, providing for and including the vulnerable in a society, is as pressing as ever. Among those most vulnerable are children, people with developmental disabilities, and single parent families, found both locally and globally. Without good advocacy on their behalf, fullness of life is not only difficult, but in many cases will cease altogether. The poverty stricken and vulnerable will always be a part of local and global societies (Matt 26:11; Mark 14:7; John 12:8) and therefore provide anyone seeking to walk in the ways of the Lord endless opportunities to be an expression of God's godly compassion. This is not just a compassion that is felt in the heart, but is worked out practically through the protection, provision for, and inclusion of society's vulnerable and socially marginalized peoples.

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