

INTRODUCTION TO LEVITICUS CHAPTER 27

The last verse of the foregoing chapter seemed to close up the statute book; yet this chapter is added as an appendix. Having given laws concerning instituted services, here he directs concerning vows and voluntary services, the freewill offerings of their mouth. Perhaps some devout serious people among them might be so affected with what Moses had delivered to them in the foregoing chapter as in a pang of zeal to consecrate themselves, or their children, or estates to him: this, because honestly meant, God would accept; but, because men are apt to repent of such vows, he leaves room for the redemption of what had been so consecrated, at a certain rate. Here is,

I. The law concerning what was sanctified to God, persons (#Le 27:2-8), cattle, clean or unclean (#Le 27:9-13), houses and lands (#Le 27:15-25), with an exception of firstlings, #Le 27:26,27.

II. Concerning what was devoted, #Le 27:28,29.

III. Concerning tithes, #Le 27:30-34.

Ver. 1. thru Ver. 13.

This is part of the law concerning singular vows, extraordinary ones, which though God did not expressly insist on, yet, if they were consistent with and conformable to the general precepts, he would be well pleased with. Note, We should not only ask, What must we do, but, What may we do, for the glory and honour of God? As the *liberal devises liberal things* (#Isa 32:8), so the pious devises pious things, and the enlarged heart would willingly do something extraordinary in the service of so good a Master as God is. When we receive or expect some singular mercy it is good to honour God with some singular vow.

I. The case is here put of persons vowed to God by a singular vow, #Le 27:2. If a man consecrated himself, or a child, to the service of the tabernacle, to be employed there in some inferior office, as sweeping the floor, carrying out ashes, running of errands, or the like, *the person so consecrated shall be for the Lord*, that is,

"God will graciously accept the good-will."

Thou didst well that it was in thy heart, #2Ch 6:8. But forasmuch as he had no occasion to use their service about the tabernacle, a whole tribe being appropriated to the use of it, those that were thus vowed were to be redeemed, and the money paid for their redemption was employed for the repair of the sanctuary, or other uses of it, as appears by #2Ki 12:14, where it is called, in the margin, *the money of the souls of his estimation*. A book of rates is accordingly provided, by which the priests were to go in their estimation. Here is,

1. The rate of the middle-aged, between twenty and threescore, these were valued highest, because most serviceable; a male fifty shekels, and a female thirty, #Le 27:3,4. The females were then less esteemed, but not so in Christ; for in *Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female*, #Ga 3:28. Note, Those that are in the prime of their time must look upon themselves as obliged to do more in the service of God and their generation than can be expected either from minors, that have not yet arrived to their usefulness, or from the aged, that have survived it.

2. The rate of the youth between five years old and twenty was less, because they were then less capable of doing service, #Le 27:5.

3. Infants under five years old were capable of being vowed to God by their parents, even before they were born, as Samuel was, but not to be presented and redeemed till a month old, that, as one sabbath passed over them before they were circumcised, so one new moon might pass over them before they were estimated; and their valuation was but small, **#Le 27:6**. Samuel, who was thus vowed to God, was not redeemed, because he was a Levite, and a particular favourite, and therefore was employed in his childhood in the service of the tabernacle.
4. The aged are valued less than youth, but more than children, **#Le 27:7**. And the Hebrews observe that the rate of an aged woman is two parts of three to that of an aged man, so that in that age the female came nearest to the value of the male, which occasioned (as bishop Patrick quotes it here) this saying among them, *That an old woman in a house is a treasure in a house*. Paul sets a great value upon the aged women, when he makes them *teachers of good things*, **#Tit 2:3**.
5. The poor shall be valued according to their ability, **#Le 27:8**. Something they must pay, that they might learn not to be rash in vowing to God, for *he hath no pleasure in fools*, **#Ec 5:4**. Yet not more than their ability, but *secundum tenementum--according to their possessions*, that they might not ruin themselves and their families by their zeal. Note, God expects and requires from men according to what they have, and not according to what they have not, **#Lu 21:4**.

II. The case is put of beasts vowed to God,

1. If it was a clean beast, such as was offered in sacrifice, it must not be redeemed, nor any equivalent given for it: *It shall be holy*, **#Le 27:9,10**. After it was vowed, it was not to be put to any common use, nor changed upon second thoughts; but it must be either offered upon the altar, or, if through any blemish it was not meet to be offered, he that vowed it should not take advantage of that, but the priests should have it for their own use (for they were God's receivers), or it should be sold for the service of the sanctuary. This teaches caution in making vows and constancy in keeping them when they are made; for *it is a snare to a man to devour that which is holy, and after vows to make enquiry*, **#Pr 20:25**. And to this that rule of charity seems to allude (**#2Co 9:7**), *Every man, according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give*.
2. If it was an unclean beast, it should go to the use of the priest at such a value; but he that vowed it, upon paying that value in money, and adding a fifth part more to it, might redeem it if he pleased, **#Le 27:11-13**. It was fit that men should smart for their inconstancy. God has let us know his mind concerning his service, and he is not pleased if we do not know our own. God expects that those that deal with him should be at a point, and way what they will stand to.

Ver. 14. thru Ver. 25.

Here is the law concerning real estates dedicated to the service of God by a singular vow.

I. Suppose a man, in his zeal for the honour of God, should *sanctify his house to God* (**#Le 27:14**), the house must be valued by the priest, and the money got by the sale of it was to be converted to the use of the sanctuary, which by degrees came to be greatly enriched with *dedicated things*, **#1Ki 15:15**. But, if the owner be inclined to redeem it himself, he must not have it so cheap as another, but must add a fifth part to the price, for he should have considered before he had vowed it, **#Le 27:15**. To him that was

necessitous God would abate the estimation (#Le 27:8); but to him that was fickle and humoursome, and whose second thoughts inclined more to the world and his secular interest than his first, God would rise in the price. Blessed be God, there is a way of sanctifying our houses to be holy unto the Lord, without either selling them or buying them. If we and our houses serve the Lord, if religion rule in them, and we put away iniquity far from them, and have a church in our house, holiness to the Lord is written upon it, it is his, and he will dwell with us in it.

II. Suppose a man should sanctify some part of his land to the Lord, giving it to pious uses, then a difference must be made between land that came to the donor by descent and that which came by purchase, and accordingly the case altered.

1. If it was the inheritance of his fathers, here called the *field of his possession*, which pertained to his family from the first division of Canaan, he might not give it all, no, not to the sanctuary; God would not admit such a degree of zeal as ruined a man's family. But he might sanctify or dedicate only some part of it, #Le 27:16. And in that case,

(1.) The land was to be valued (as our countrymen commonly compute land) by so many measures' sowing of barley. So much land as would take a *homer*, or *chomer*, of barley, which contained ten ephahs, #Eze 45:11 (not, as some have here mistaken it, an *omer*, which was but a tenth part of an ephah, #Ex 16:36), was valued at fifty shekels, a moderate price (#Le 27:16), and that if it were sanctified immediately from the year of jubilee, #Le 27:17. But, if some years after, there was to be a discount accordingly, even of that price, #Le 27:18. And,

(2.) When the value was fixed, the donor might, if he pleased, redeem it for sixty shekels the homer's sowing, which was with the addition of a fifth part: the money then went to the sanctuary, and the land reverted to him that had sanctified it, #Le 27:19. But if he would not redeem it, and the priest sold it to another, then at the year of jubilee, beyond which the sale could not go, the land came to the priests, and was theirs for ever, #Le 27:20,21. Note, What is given to the Lord ought not to be given with a power of revocation; what is devoted to the Lord must be his for ever, by a perpetual covenant.

2. If the land was his own purchase, and came not to him from his ancestors, then not the land itself, but the value of it was to be given to the priests for pious uses, #Le 27:22,24. It was supposed that those who, by the blessing of God, had grown so rich as to become purchasers would think themselves obliged in gratitude to sanctify some part of their purchase, at least (and here they are not limited, but they might, if they pleased, sanctify the whole), to the service of God. For we ought to give as God prospers us, #1Co 16:2. Purchasers are in a special manner bound to be charitable. Now, forasmuch as purchased lands were by a former law to return at the year of jubilee to the family from which they were purchased, God would not have that law and the intentions of it defeated by making the lands *corban*, a *gift*, #Mr 7:11. But it was to be computed how much the land was worth for so many years as were from the vow to the jubilee; for only so long it was his own, and God *hates robbery for burnt-offerings*. We can never acceptably serve God with that of which we have wronged our neighbour. And so much money he was to give for the present, and keep the land in his own hands till the year of jubilee, when it was to return free of all encumbrances, even that of its being dedicated to him of whom it was bought. The value of the shekel by which all these estimations were to be made is here ascertained (#Le 27:25); it shall be twenty gerahs, and every gerah was sixteen barley-corns. This was fixed before (#Ex 30:13); and, whereas there had been some alterations, it is again fixed in the laws of Ezekiel's visionary temple (#Eze 45:12), to

denote that the gospel should reduce things to their ancient standard.

Ver. 26. thru Ver. 34.

Here is,

I. A caution given that no man should make such a jest of sanctifying things to the Lord as to sanctify any firstling to him, for that was his already by the law, **#Le 27:26**. Though the matter of a general vow be that which we were before obliged to, as of our sacramental covenant, yet a singular vow should be of that which we were not, in such circumstances and proportions, antecedently bound to. The law concerning the firstlings of unclean beasts (**#Le 27:27**) is the same with that before, **#Le 27:11,12**.

II. Things or persons devoted are here distinguished from things or persons that were only sanctified.

1. Devoted things were most holy to the Lord, and could neither revert nor be alienated, **#Le 27:28**. They were of the same nature with those sacrifices which were called most holy, which none might touch but only the priests themselves. The difference between these and other sanctified things arose from the different expression of the vow. If a man dedicated any thing to God, binding himself with a solemn curse never to alienate it to any other purpose, then it was a thing devoted.
2. Devoted persons were to be put to death, **#Le 27:29**. Not that it was in the power of any parent or master thus to devote a child or a servant to death; but it must be meant of the public enemies of Israel, who, either by the appointment of God or by the sentence of the congregation, were devoted, as the seven nations with which they must make no league. The city of Jericho in particular was thus devoted, **#Jos 6:17**. The inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead were put to death for violating the curse pronounced upon those who came not up to Mizpeh, **#Jud 21:9,10**. Some think it was for want of being rightly informed of the true intent and meaning of this law that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter as one devoted, who might not be redeemed.

III. A law concerning tithes, which were paid for the service of God before the law, as appears by Abraham's payment of them, (**#Ge 14:20**), and Jacob's promise of them, **#Ge 28:22**. It is here appointed,

1. That they should pay tithe of all their increase, their corn, trees, and cattle, **#Le 27:30,32**. Whatsoever productions they had the benefit of God must be honoured with the tithe of, if it were tithable. Thus they acknowledged God to be the owner of their land, the giver of its fruits, and themselves to be his tenants, and dependents upon him. Thus they gave him thanks for the plenty they enjoyed, and supplicated his favour in the continuance of it. And we are taught in general to *honour the Lord with our substance* (**#Pr 3:9**), and in particular to support and maintain his ministers, and to be *ready to communicate* to them, **#Ga 6:6; 1Co 9:11**. And how this may be done in a fitter and more equal proportion than that of the tenth, which God himself appointed of old, I cannot see.
2. That which was once marked for tithe should not be altered, no, not for a better (**#Le 27:33**), for Providence directed the rod that marked it. God would accept it though it were not the best, and they must not grudge it though it were, for it was what passed under the rod.
3. That it should not be redeemed, unless the owner would give a fifth part more for its

ransom, **#Le 27:31**. If men had the curiosity to prefer what was marked for tithe before any other part of their increase, it was fit that they should pay for their curiosity.

IV. The last verse seems to have reference to this whole book of which it is the conclusion: *These are the commandments which the Lord commanded Moses, for the children of Israel*. Many of these commandments are moral, and of perpetual obligation; others of them, which were ceremonial and peculiar to the Jewish economy, have notwithstanding a spiritual significance, and are instructive to us who are furnished with a key to let us into the mysteries contained in them; for unto us, by those institutions, *is the gospel preached as well as unto them*, **#Heb 4:2**. Upon the whole matter, we may see cause to bless God that *we have not come to mount Sinai*, **#Heb 12:18**.

1. That we are not under the *dark shadows* of the law, but enjoy the clear light of the gospel, which shows us *Christ the end of the law for righteousness*, **#Ro 10:4**. The doctrine of our reconciliation to God by a Mediator is not clouded with the smoke of burning sacrifices, but cleared by the knowledge of *Christ and him crucified*.
2. That we are not under the *heavy yoke* of the law, and the carnal ordinances of it (as the apostle calls them, **#Heb 9:10**), imposed till the time of reformation, a yoke which *neither they nor their fathers were able to bear* (**#Ac 15:10**), but under the sweet and easy institutions of the gospel, which pronounces those the *true worshippers that worship the Father in spirit and truth*, by Christ only, and in his name, who is our priest, temple, altar, sacrifice, purification, and all. Let us not therefore think that because we are not tied to the ceremonial cleansings, feasts, and oblations, a little care, time, and expense, will serve to honour God with. No, but rather have our hearts more enlarge with free-will offerings to his praise, more inflamed with holy love and joy, and more engaged in seriousness of thought and sincerity of intention. *Having boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, let us draw near with a true heart, and full assurance of faith*, worshipping God with so much the more cheerfulness and humble confidence, still saying, *Blessed be God for Jesus Christ!*