Leviticus 19:18 in the New Testament

1 Introduction

This chapter will consider the six citations of Lev 19:18 in the Greek New Testament. In addition to the triply attested Double Love Command tradition in the Gospels, Lev 19:18 is cited in Gal 5:15, Rom 13:8–10, and Jas 2:8. Naturally, a study of reception history should examine the texts in chronological order, starting from the oldest to the youngest. The problem is, of course, that for some of the New Testament texts, the date of composition does not correspond to the earliness or lateness of the traditions preserved in them. For instance, while Galatians may have been the first to be written down, the Double Love Command tradition preserved in the Gospels (i.e., the texts that were composed later than Galatians) seems in fact to predate Galatians. Whether or not and precisely how much of the traditions that each writer knew correspond to the earlier traditions recorded in the Gospels are difficult to ascertain, but some literary-traditional influence is observable. Yet, each writer makes a unique use of Lev 19:18, and it is these differences that provide us the opportunity to examine the diverging reception of Lev 19:18 in the New Testament.

This chapter is in no way exhaustive. While the comprehensive analysis of the theology of the love of neighbour and its reception in each New Testament book would be ideal, such an undertaking would be far beyond the scope of this book. It would involve examining each of the Gospels and the Epistles in

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1 On the question of whether or not the Double Love Command goes back to Jesus, Davies and Allison cautiously answer in the affirmative: "(i) the tendency of early Christian catechesis was to quote the commandment to love the neighbour without referring to loving God; (ii) unlike the passages in Aristeas and Philo, neither the pre-Markan nor non-Markan tradition we postulate reflects Stoic terminology; (iii) the double commandment coheres with Jesus’ words and deeds ..." W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr, Commentary on Matthew XIX–XXVIII, vol. 3 of A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to Saint Matthew, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 238. Tomson also contends, "First and foremost we must consider the gospel tradition, which Paul as a trained Pharisee undoubtedly knew in oral form; incidental paraphrastic reference to logia of Jesus seem to confirm this." Peter J. Tomson, Paul and the Jewish Law: Halakha in the Letters of the Apostle to the Gentiles, CRINT Section III: Jewish Traditions in Early Christian Literature 1 (Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1993), 265–266.
its entirety to see how the overall shape of the book and each of the authors’ theology of neighbourly love contributed to their reception of Lev 19:18. Fortunately, a number of monograph-length works have already undertaken this task (see chapter 1), and this chapter will draw on some of these studies.

In his influential work on the love command in the New Testament, Furnish stresses the importance of the “full context” in understanding each writer’s philosophy of neighbourly love. Furnish himself focusses on “the love ethic, the love command, what the New Testament teaches and otherwise reflects about earliest Christianity’s view of loving one’s brother, neighbor, and one’s enemy” (italics Furnish’s).\(^2\) The love of neighbour, or the idea of loving each other, finds a much fuller expression in various sections of the New Testament, especially when set side by side with earlier Jewish writings. For example, even on a cursory reading, the Gospel of John or Ephesians evidences a highly developed understanding of neighbourly love. One could consider the repeated command to “love one another” in the Fourth Gospel (13:34–35; cf. 15:12–17) and First John (4:7–21; cf. 2:10; 3:10–14, 18–23) as the Evangelist’s thoughtful application of the Double Love Command tradition.\(^3\) Or, one could study the call for mutual love between spouses in Eph 5:25–33 as a theological extension of the love of neighbour. While these are certainly intriguing instances of interpersonal love broadly defined, a thorough treatment of these passages alone would require another book. As such, while many other New Testament texts could be taken up as one probes the reception of Lev 19:18, the focus of this chapter will be quite specific, even more so than that of Spicq’s.\(^4\) This chapter will only consider the citations of Lev 19:18. Again, even though a full-fledged investigation of the concept of love in the New Testament and its rich, theological implications would be ideal, the aim here is much more modest. This chapter seeks neither to study comprehensively the love of God nor even the theology of the love of neighbour but how the New Testament writers received and cited Lev 19:18. In order to navigate successfully through a vast ocean of literature, our enquiry

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3 Ibid., 196–197.

4 Furnish points out that Spicq’s work “focuses his attention so exclusively on passages where the word ‘love’ occurs, that he constantly ignores many other texts which reflect just as much, or even more, about a given writer’s view of the meaning and requirements of love in the Christian life. In this regard it must be stressed that the ‘full context’ of the love command in any given source must include the way it is theologically grounded and construed, the way it is illustrated and applied, and its place in relation to other ethical commands and norms.” Furnish, *The Love Command*, 20.