

19 The LORD spoke to Moses: ²“Speak to the entire Israelite community and tell them: Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.

⁹“When you reap the harvest of your land, you are not to reap to the very edge of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰Do not strip your vineyard bare or gather its fallen grapes. Leave them for the poor and the resident alien; I am the LORD your God.

¹¹“Do not steal. Do not act deceptively or lie to one another. ¹²Do not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God; I am the LORD.

¹³“Do not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages due a hired worker must not remain with you until morning. ¹⁴Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but you are to fear your God; I am the LORD.

¹⁵“Do not act unjustly when deciding a case. Do not be partial to the poor or give preference to the rich; judge your neighbor fairly. ¹⁶Do not go about spreading slander among your people; do not jeopardize^[a] your neighbor’s life; I am the LORD.

¹⁷“Do not harbor hatred against your brother.^[b] Rebuke your neighbor directly, and you will not incur guilt because of him. ¹⁸Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

³⁵“Do not be unfair in measurements of length, weight, or volume. ³⁶You are to have honest balances, honest weights, an honest dry measure,^[i] and an honest liquid measure;^[i] I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. ³⁷Keep all my statutes and all my ordinances and do them; I am the LORD.”

I am the Lord

If you’ve heard me speak about the Ten Commandments before, you know I’m not quite happy with the way they’re divided, or how they’re memorized, or even the name most common to them: The Ten Commandments. The reason I’m not satisfied with the name is because the word, “command” doesn’t ever appear in the commandments. Rather they are simply the Ten Words. I don’t want anyone going home saying, “Pastor doesn’t like the Ten Commandments. He thinks there is something wrong with them.” They are a unique summary of God’s law but as they are commonly regarded, no matter the counting... something is missing. There are indeed ten words but we miss the first word. It’s not “*You shall have no other gods before me.*” Although that is listed as the first commandment; that is not the first word given at this time. Exodus 20:1 reads, “*I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the place of slavery.*” That is the framework for what comes next. That is the frame work for all of the words that follow. This is the understanding as to why they should follow what comes next.

That’s simply right theology that puts works in their proper place behind what God has done first for us. And if that is how Exodus works, we shouldn’t be surprised when we find the same theology in Leviticus. This book is one of the most overlooked and intentionally avoided books of the Old Testament. It’s not popular by any means. And yet it’s is one of the most important. In Judaic poetry the important juicy little tidbits are in the middle. This little morsel is found in the middle of the Pentateuch and in the middle of Leviticus is the Day of Atonement. The first part of Leviticus, the first 16 chapters, deals with How God makes you holy. These are means of sacrifice and priesthood graciously given by him. The things God is using to make a holy people. The second part deals with how to live as God’s holy people.

Part I: tells us how much God has done for us culminating with the Day of Atonement, the climactic hinge at the center, followed by, “Now what?” This is how you live a holy life. We are in part two of this book. We’ve already been told who we are and how that happened. At this point we arrive at the, “Now what?” section and even though we are here we still find peppered throughout these little reminders of whose we are, “*I am the Lord your God,*” or simply, “*I am the Lord.*” These take us back to Exodus 20:1. These take us back to the first 16 chapters of Leviticus.

Today as we look over these laws, let's see them first with a proper understanding of Jesus and his work, justification and sanctification. God has provided the way for sinful, unholy people to have fellowship with a holy God and to live holy lives.

But who starts in the middle of a chapter. Chapter 19 is a discourse given by God to Moses to speak to the people. This is the only time where God commissions Moses to speak directly to the congregation. Verse 2 reads, "*tell them: Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.*" God alone is holy. Israel's holiness derives from God's holiness. Be holy because I am holy. This isn't a something that they can do on their own. This isn't a command that can be fulfilled. If they are to be holy it is because their God is holy and has made them such.

This is what God has done for his people. On their own they proved themselves to be no different than the surrounding nations. Time and again they did not trust God. They brought God's name down with their own treating it as a common object: profane. Though they are sinners who stand defiled before their God an animal is killed, blood is shed, through the means of sacrifices and priests God has made his people holy. It would do a great disservice to scripture to say, "They earned or merited forgiveness because of the sacrifice they offered." God in his grace provided a way.

God also calls you to be holy. In the New Testament we find the same repeated refrain. "*Be perfect, therefore, as your Father in heaven is perfect.*" (Matthew 5:48) and again in 1 Peter 1:16, "*Be holy, because I am holy.*" We can take that as a demand by God asking us to make ourselves holy but other words of scripture won't allow it, "*For we conclude that a person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.*" (Romans 3:28). This isn't something we can do.

God however has provided a way for us to be with him a way for us to be holy as he is. God has provided a way for sinful people to have a relationship with him. In the Old Testament there are means of forgiveness: the sacrificial system, the priest, the tabernacle. In the New Testament God has given us his Word and Sacrament. He has given us his church, pastors who are called to forgive sin, baptize, and dispense his body and blood for the forgiveness of sin. As with the Israelites we are made holy by him, We are holy because God is holy.

So now what? We are to live holy lives. Here we see what God has called his people to be. Here we see a unique exposition of the Ten Commandments. Here we see them as a guide for godly living.

And it all starts with God as the source and giver of all things. Since the Promised Land was the Lord's, so also was its harvest. Verses 9-10 God sets up a welfare system based on abundance. There will be more than enough. Leave a margin. Don't harvest the edges of your field. That usually meant the end row. *Don't strip your vineyard bare or harvest its fallen grapes. They are for the poor and the resident alien.* Notice also that God doesn't command his people to plant, harvest, process, cook, chew, and spit such food into mouths of hungry people. Support them but do not aid and encourage an idle life. But to not leave any margin to life means I don't trust God to provide enough. It means we operate with a scarcity mindset rather than one of abundance. And I have to tell you that on more than one occasion I wonder, "Will we have enough?" And we always do. But when I look at the garden I wonder, "How much will this support?" And more often than not I end up throwing away food rather than giving it away. A scarcity mindset focuses on what we don't have rather than on all we do have. It creates stress because if I don't have enough then I have to find my own way.

That way is usually through theft. Socialism steals from others and redistributes. It's a godless religion in which the government is god. It looks to government rather than to god to supply all that is needed. Such theft although legal... is covered up by denial, deception, and even slander. When you think, "There isn't enough," not only stealing from God is on the table but also stealing from the poor by withholding wages from the poorest of the land. A day laborer needed to be paid at the end of the day. If they returned home from work empty handed they and their family would go hungry. There isn't much the poor can do in order to defend themselves in court. There

isn't anything the deaf or blind can do in order to seek retaliation or restitution. They don't even know that they've been wronged in most cases. Those who exploit the poor and needy shouldn't be afraid of those they take advantage of but they should fear God

They should fear God because he doesn't look at status. When it comes to casting judgment he judges justly. There will be justice. Verse 16 ties in with 17 and 18. Slander can destroy one's livelihood. That may be how the world works but that is not how God's people live and act. When wronged you shouldn't harbor hatred but you are called to rebuke the one who wronged you. If you don't rebuke the one who wronged you, you will incur guilt because of him. You will give him no chance to admit he was wrong and do what is right. Instead you'll harbor hate in your heart and participate in his sin. You may seek vengeance and the one who wronged you won't even know why you're upset.

These commands culminate in love. Love your neighbor as yourself. This is the lesson that even the lawyer in our gospel understood. Holy living involves loving my neighbor but that circle is much bigger than what the lawyer wants to define as neighbor. Verse 10 includes the resident alien and those without land. Verse 13 includes the hired worker and the poorest of the land. Verse 14 includes the deaf and blind those considered cursed by God. Your neighbor includes your brothers, those just like you as well as those very different and far removed from you. But what are we to do?

Love? Love isn't an emotional attitude. Love is action. It's benevolence. It's a matter of the will. Here the Lord commands his people to act in a loving way toward their neighbors and care for them as they care for themselves. God calls us to trust him to provide. He never promises life will be without struggle but he does promise we will have what we need.

That takes us back to the beginning, the middle, and the end. *"Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy."* I say it's the beginning middle and end because that is who we are. And since I've turned the commandments upside down with the idea that command doesn't appear in them and the words are disorganized let's take a look at that passage. We've heard it in Matthew 5:48. But it's not a command either. It's not in the Imperative form. In the Greek it's future. You will be holy. That can be taken as a command but it can also be seen as a promise or even a statement of fact. If it is a promise then the promise is, "You will be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy." If it is a statement of fact then it reads, "You are holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy." This is your new status before God. Since God share his holiness with his people he now calls us to obey him because we are holy.

You have been made holy in baptism. You have been made perfect by Christ's body and blood. you have been made perfect by his sacrifice on the cross. This is what the Day of Atonement pointed ahead to. It was fulfilled in Christ our Great Samaritan. You've been forgiven but the slate isn't moved back to zero. All of Christ's good works have been added to your balance sheet. You are perfect just as your father in heaven is perfect because Christ has made you perfect. God has delivered you not from Egypt but from sin, death, and the power of the devil. he has brought you into his kingdom not on account of your merit or holiness but because of his great mercy.