



Sunday, November 20, 2022: "Obedience Among Neighbors"
Commentary (The UGP Curriculum)

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Lesson Text: Leviticus 19:9-18, 33-37; **Time of Action:** about 1445 B.C.; **Place of Action:** Mount Sinai

Golden Text: "Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19:18).

I. INTRODUCTION. Treating neighbors with love despite their behavior towards us is a noble sentiment. However, the question is, how do we do it? In this week's lesson, God gives us some commands to obey that will help us treat our neighbors fairly and with compassion. We may ask who is my neighbor? The answer is simple. A neighbor is more than the person who lives in your neighborhood. It is anyone we may meet at any time and any place.

II. THE LESSON BACKGROUND. Three months after the children of Israel left Egypt, they arrived at Mount Sinai (see Exodus 19:1-2). They were there about a year (see Numbers 1:1) receiving instructions for the tabernacle, the priests, and the various laws from God that we have in Exodus and Leviticus. Included in the laws God gave to Moses to give to His people included laws governing how we relate to others,



especially, the poor and strangers. This week's lesson deals with some of those laws.

III. SHOWING CONCERN FOR NEIGHBORS (Leviticus 19:9-14)

A. Help for the needy (Leviticus 19:9-10).

1. (vs. 9). Our first verse says **"And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest."** Israel's law recognized that there would always be poor and needy persons in the land (see Deuteronomy 15:11; Matthew 26:11; Mark 14:7; John 12:8), and it provided the means for their survival. Through Moses, God said **"And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field."** The owners of the grain **"fields"** were commanded not to **"reap"** or gather any grain that fell in the **"corners"** or edges of their **"fields."** In addition, the owners of the **"fields"** were commanded not to **"gather the gleanings of thy harvest"** which refers to scattered or fragments of the grain left by a reaper. The reapers could not go back and gather any grain that had been left behind after harvesting. When reaping or gathering the grain, it was bundled into sheaves and even if some of these sheaves were mistakenly left behind, they were not to be collected later (see Deuteronomy 24:19).



2. (vs. 10). This verse says **"And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God."** The owners of **"vineyards"** were also obligated to allow remnants of their crops to remain for **"the poor."** Moses continued to say **"And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard."** Some fruit from the **"grape"** vines was always to be left **"for the poor and stranger"** as well as *"for the fatherless, and for the widows"* (see Deuteronomy 24:21). Although olive trees are not mentioned here, they were included in this regulation. Deuteronomy 24:20 prohibits an owner from going back over the boughs of olive trees a second time after previously having shaken them for fruit. In addition, it was permissible to go into a neighbor's field or **"vineyard"** before the harvest and pick enough to satisfy one's hunger. But it was not permissible to carry away any fruit in a container or cut off any grain with a sickle (see Deuteronomy 23:24-25). In the last part of this verse, God said, **"I am the LORD your God."** This reminded Israel that not only did the LORD demand this of them but also that compassion is consistent with His own nature.

B. Integrity in deeds and words (Leviticus 19:11-13).

1. (vs. 11). This verse says **"Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another."** This verse and verse 13 forbid fraud against one's neighbor both in word and deed. Here God first said **"Ye shall not steal"**



from one's neighbor which repeats and applies the Eighth Commandment (see Exodus 20:15). It also added "**neither deal falsely**" with one's neighbor. Deceitful dealings are intended to take advantage of a person, getting from him or her some material or psychological benefit which they are not entitled to. This is stealing whether it is done overtly or indirectly. Another prohibition given here is "**neither lie one to another.**" This applies the Ninth Commandment which forbids bearing false witness (see Exodus 20:16). Lying is a means of defrauding a neighbor of their property or reputation. Stealing, dealing "**falsely**" and lying go hand in hand, for all three are forms of deceit.

2. (vs. 12). This verse says "**And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.**" This is a reminder of the Third Commandment (Exodus 20:7) which forbids taking God's "**name**" in vain. Many people are not above using God's "**name**" in an evil way—in this case, using it to cheat one's neighbor. **Note: When Jacob deceived Isaac in order to steal Esau's blessing, he resorted to profaning the LORD's "name."** When he brought in the savory meat for his father, with some suspicion, Isaac asked him how he had gotten it so quickly. Jacob answered, "**Because the LORD thy God brought it to me**" (see Genesis 27:20). Of course, Jacob not only lied about where he got the meat, he also "**profaned**" God's "**name**" when he lied. Although a lie may be sanctified by an oath, the LORD's holy "**name**" is "**profaned**" by it. We need to be aware of those who constantly claim that God "**led**" them to do certain things. To be God's



will, those things must be consistent with His Word. To attach God's "name" to sin and falsehood is the worst form of profanity. Again, in the last part of this verse, God reminded his people that **"I am the LORD."** Therefore, He will not overlook the guilt of anyone who takes His **"name"** in vain nor **"profane"** it (see Exodus 20:7).

3. (vs. 13). This verse says **"Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning."** Here, God repeated the command not to deal falsely or steal from one's neighbor (see verse 11) when He said, **"Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him."** The word **"defraud"** means *"to deprive someone of something by deceit."* Then God turned to the treatment of a hired worker. He said **"the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning."** In biblical times, day workers were hired for a variety of tasks. They could be both native Israelites and foreigners, and were usually poor. It was common practice to pay them each day at the end of the day (see Matthew 20:8). This commandment prohibited withholding or keeping **"the wages"** of a **"hired"** worker even **"until the next morning."** Deuteronomy 24:14-15 emphasizes the hired laborer's poverty and need. It also emphasizes that it made no difference if the worker was an Israelite or a foreigner. To withhold **"wages"** due a worker is a sin that God takes note of; yet it was a sin that many in Israel took too lightly (see Jeremiah 22:13-17; Malachi 3:5) and many people still do today.



C. Respect for the disabled (Leviticus 19:14). This verse says **"Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I am the LORD."** Israel's law also condemned those who dishonored those who were disabled. First, the LORD said **"Thou shalt not curse the deaf."** This focused on a cowardly act since those who are **"deaf"** cannot hear the **"curse"** and respond to it. The appearance and behavior of the handicapped and disabled may seem strange to some, but making fun of them reveals a callous or hard heart. **"God"** also said, **"nor put a stumbling block before the blind."** This probably should be taken literally as placing an obstacle in front of a **"blind"** person to make him or her stumble and fall. It's hard to imagine a more heartless act. A person would only do it for their own self-centered amusement. The law also condemned anyone who caused *"the blind to wander out of the way"* or to go in the wrong direction (see Deuteronomy 27:18). To dishonor those who are disabled is to take lightly the **"God"** who created them (see Exodus 4:11). Instead of dishonoring the disabled, God said **"but (you) shalt fear thy God"** which means to reverence and respect Him. Again, the LORD ends the command in this verse with the reminder (see verses 10 and 12) **"I am the LORD."** So, the ultimate issue is not how we treat the disabled but our attitude toward the **"God"** who made them.

IV. DEMONSTRATING RIGHT ATTITUDES TOWARD NEIGHBORS (Leviticus 19:15-18)



A. Showing equity in judgment (Leviticus 19:15).

This verse says **"Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour."** Here, God's command begins with **"Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment."** This applies especially to judges and other officials, but it also included anyone who would bring a lawsuit. **"Unrighteousness"** here refers to showing partiality or favoritism in those lawsuits. The LORD went on to say **"thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty."** In other words, unearned preference or favoritism should not be shown to **"poor"** people or to powerful people. Instead, God said **"but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour."** The point is that the economic status of an individual should have no bearing on the outcome of any case. Each case should be decided on its own merits. James 2:8 points out that when we fulfill the *"royal law"* of loving our **"neighbor"** as ourselves, we are doing well. It should make no difference whether that **"neighbor"** is rich or **"poor."** But if we let love lead us to showing favoritism, we have gone too far and have transgressed the law (see James 2:9). The key to justice is judging our **"neighbor...in righteousness"** or rightly, and with fairness.

B. Showing restraint in speaking (Leviticus 19:16).

This verse says, **"Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people: neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour; I am the LORD."** The next commandment or prohibition God



gave to His people was **"Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people."** The word **"talebearer"** should probably be understood here as *"slanderer."* There is nothing more harmful to a peaceful society than circulating unfounded rumors and charges (see Psalms 15:3; 31:13; 101:5; Jeremiah 6:28; Ezekiel 22:9). It destroys trust and raises suspicions about everything that is said (see Jeremiah 9:3-4). God then said **"neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbour."** With false accusation and false witness one can actually endanger another person's life, for if a false charge is upheld, the accused person may be executed. God's reminder, **"I am the LORD"** again declares that such behavior completely contradicts His nature, therefore He will not put up with it.

C. Showing love for neighbors (Leviticus 19:17-18).

1. (vs. 17). This verse says **"Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him."** So far our lesson text has forbidden certain external practices that are inconsistent with God's nature. But now we learn that the root problem of these acts is internal and until this is corrected, the sinful practices will continue. Therefore, God commanded Israel saying **"Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart."** Until hatred is removed, all kinds of injustices will continue and flourish (see I John 3:15). Both good and evil originate in the **"heart"** (see Matthew 12:35; 15:18-19), so it needs to be cleansed. This does not mean overlooking a brother or sister's faults because God



also said **"thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him."** Rebuking someone for **"sin"** is actually doing them a favor, for it may save them from God's judgment. We must also realize that remaining silent about the brother or sister's **"sin"** makes us partakers in it.

2. (vs. 18). This verse says **"Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD."** The first part of this verse forbids seeking vengeance against someone who may have offended us. God said **"Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people."** Vengeance is the action taken because of a **"grudge"** in the heart and both are forbidden. Vengeance belongs to God alone (see Deuteronomy 32:35; Romans 12:19; Hebrews 10:30), and we should never assume that we have the right to seek it for ourselves. Instead, we must deal with the **"grudges"** that cause us to seek revenge or vengeance (see Ephesians 4:31; James 5:9). God then gives the positive counterpart to the prohibition against grudges, saying **"but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."** This means bestowing on someone else the same care and concern a person has for themselves. This command is quoted several times in the New Testament, and Jesus called it the second great commandment (see Matthew 22:37-39; Mark 12:30-31). This is understandable because it sums up all other commands regarding our relationship to our neighbor (see Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14). In addition, God put His authority on it when once again He said in the last part of this verse **"I am**



the LORD."

V. DEMONSTRATING COMPASSION IN PERSONAL DEALINGS (Leviticus 19:33-37)

A. Showing fairness to strangers (Leviticus 19:33-34).

1. (vs. 33). This verse says **"And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him."** In verses 19-32 which are not part of our printed text, the LORD gave Israel commands regarding how they were to remain holy once they entered the Promised Land. Then in this verse, God told His people how they were to treat **"strangers"** or foreigners who lived within Israel. He said **"And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him."** To **"sojourn"** means to reside or live somewhere temporarily. Many such people lived in Israel, and there was always the tendency of God's people to discriminate against them and mistreat them. But God's law here specifically forbade Israelites to **"vex"** them, that is to do them wrong.

2. (vs. 34). This verse says **"But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God."** Instead of vexing or mistreating **"strangers"** who **"dwelt"** or lived among them, God commanded His



people to treat them **"as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself."** Earlier in this text, God gave this same command regarding *"the children of thy people"* (see verse 18) or fellow Israelites; but here the command includes other peoples as well. In other words, the same care and concern shown to fellow Israelites was to be shown to **"strangers"** or foreigners. Then God gave the reason why the Israelites were to love foreigners. He said it was **"for (or because) ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God."** These Israelites who had been released from slavery **"in the land of Egypt"** knew what it was like to be **"strangers"** in another land and how they were mistreated. Since their nation was formed in a foreign land (see Exodus 19:1-8), God expected them to sympathize with sojourners and show His **"love"** to them. And once again, in the last part of this verse, the LORD sealed this command with His stamp of authority saying **"I am the LORD your God."**

B. Showing fairness in business (Leviticus 19:35-36).

1. (vs. 35). This verse says **"Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure."** Unjust dealings are nowhere more common than in business transactions and this would be the case when the people settled in Canaan. Therefore, God commanded saying **"Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure."** The term **"meteyard"** refers to a measuring stick or measurement of length while the term **"measure"** refers to



capacity. Therefore, God's law commanded integrity when using measurements of length, "**weight**" and capacity when conducting business in the marketplaces.

2. (vs. 36). This verse says "**Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have: I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.**" As a sign of integrity and honesty of the merchants, God said "**Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin, shall ye have.**" An "**ephah**" was a dry measure nearly equal to our bushel. A "**hin**" was a liquid measure approximately equal to our gallon. Deuteronomy 25:13-15 prohibited the deceitful practice of using two different sets of "**weights**" to suit the circumstances (see Proverbs 16:11; 20:10). Israel's merchants were expected to use the same "**balances**" or scales and the same "**weights**" for every person regardless of their economic condition or where they were from. The LORD's reason for these just and fair standards was again His own nature and authority for He said "**I am the LORD your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt.**" The message here is that in bringing Israel out of "**Egypt**," the LORD intended to set apart a people who would be distinguished by their likeness to Him and not conformed to the unjust and unfair practices of surrounding peoples.

C. The rationale for showing compassion (Leviticus 19:37). Our final verse says "**Therefore shall ye observe all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them: I am the LORD.**" The Israelites were to understand God's laws and carry them out in daily life. So God



commanded them saying **"Therefore shall ye observe all my statutes, and all my judgments, and do them."** Of course, the phrases **"all my statutes, and all my judgments"** refer to all of God's laws and commands. In giving His people His **"statutes"** and **"judgments"** God commanded them to **"do them"** or practice them. A just and fair society must **"observe"** or adhere to its laws in order to exist. The laws of Israel came from God Himself who once again revealed His authority with the words **"I am the LORD."**

VI. Conclusion. All of the precepts, God's **"statutes"** and **"judgments"** presented in this week's lesson, are supported by the powerful statement that God repeated several times in this text, *"I am the LORD"* (see verses 16, 18, 36-37). Our God's laws direct us to thinking about others. God commanded the Israelites to observe and obey all of His revealed commands and regulations. It's true that a society without proper laws that treats people unfairly will crumble under its own weight. Unfortunately, today Christianity is getting a bad rap because of those who don't show compassion and love for their fellow man. Our compassion flows from God's compassion. Our concern, love, and empathy for others come from our experience with a merciful God, who deserves our obedience.



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