

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

LEV. 19:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying,

2 Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God *am* holy.

3 Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father, and keep my sabbaths: I *am* the LORD your God.

4 Turn ye not unto idols, nor make to yourselves molten gods: I *am* the LORD your God.

9 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.

10 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.

11 Ye shall not steal, neither deal falsely, neither lie one to another.

12 And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I *am* the LORD.

13 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.

14 Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumblingblock before the blind, but shalt fear thy God: I *am* the LORD.

15 Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: *but* in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour.

16 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.

17 Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.

18 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.

NOTES

Holy as I Am Holy

Lesson Text: Leviticus 19:1-4, 9-18

Related Scriptures: Matthew 5:21-48; James 2:1-13;
1 John 2:7-11; 2 Corinthians 6:14—7:1; Romans 13:8-10

TIME: 1446 B.C.

PLACE: Sinai wilderness

GOLDEN TEXT—“Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2).

Lesson Exposition

In the Old Testament, people followed the laws of Leviticus to demonstrate their desire to be holy as God is holy. Leviticus 19 instructed the Old Testament Israelites about God’s holy regulations. In doing so, the chapter alludes to most, if not all, the Ten Commandments. It is helpful to think of the Ten Commandments as universal decrees of God’s will while the remaining laws in the Pentateuch apply those universal decrees to specific situations of ancient life.

SHOW RESPECT OR HONOR— Lev. 19:1-4

Speak to the congregation (Lev. 19:1-2). God instructed Moses to share the laws outlined in Leviticus 19 with the entire community of Israel (vs. 2). God cared about every single person in the congregation, not just the leaders and priests. Everyone was expected to live a holy life before God. Every aspect of a person’s life was meant to reflect God’s holy standards.

In Leviticus 19, we see a wide range of topics addressed, including how we handle our emotions (cf. vss. 17-18). God desires to shape holiness deep within us, touching every part of our be-

ing. Holiness is not about putting on a good external show or hiding your true self from others. It is about fearing God in such a way that He transforms us in our innermost thoughts and feelings.

Respect parents (Lev. 19:3). Reflecting God’s holiness starts with how we handle basic relationships. God’s first instruction to the Israelites in Leviticus 19 was for everyone to fear or show respect to their parents. The verb translated as “fear” is the same Hebrew word used when people are commanded to fear the Lord in other parts of the Bible (1 Sam. 12:24; Ps. 34:10). That is different from other instructions to children, where the word “honour” is used instead of “fear” (cf. Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16).

For young people, fearing or showing respect to their parents teaches them to fear God. In many ways, parents act as representatives of God in their children’s lives. They teach their children about God’s ways and are responsible for guiding them in the right direction (Deut. 6:7).

Right after the command to honor one’s parents, Leviticus 19 commands the Israelites to keep the Sabbath Days holy. Honoring one’s parents and observing times of rest

were both ways God called His people to live holy lives.

Leviticus 19:3 ends with the phrase “I am the Lord your God.” That expression and similar ones (such as “I am the Lord,” “I the Lord your God am holy,” and “I am the Lord your God, which brought you out of the land of Egypt”) show up sixteen times throughout this chapter.

It is interesting to note that these statements often follow commands that people could easily break without anyone else noticing or laws that could not be judged in a court. Even when nobody is around to see or enforce the rules, God is still present, making sure His laws are respected.

Avoid idolatry (Lev. 19:4). One of the regulations that could be broken in secret is the foundational aspect of the Ten Commandments, which prohibited worshipping other gods and making idols. The Lord could not be represented by any man-made image because that image would inevitably distort His people’s view of Him.

CARE FOR THE POOR—Lev. 19:9-10

God called the ancient Israelites to reflect His holy character by attending to the social matter of caring for the poor. Reflecting God’s just and holy character, the ancient Israelites were to leave the corners of their fields and parts of their vineyards unharvested. That allowed the needy to gather food. We should not forget that these laws in chapter 19, indeed in the whole book of Leviticus, taught God’s people how to properly live in God’s holy presence. Unholy living resulted in death, or worse, the loss of God’s presence—the very reality that made God’s people holy or separate from other nations.

BE HONEST—Lev. 19:11-14

Avoid deceit (Lev. 19:11-12). Treating others justly and honestly reflects God’s holy will for His people. Verses

11-12 forbid God’s people from acting sly toward others. Stealing, lying, and deceiving are out-of-bounds. Even trickery that is not outright lying goes against the holy justice of God. Invoking God’s name in deceitful contexts desecrates His holy name. The text aptly follows that crime with “I am the Lord.” It is God who avenges in these circumstances.

Avoid defrauding (Lev. 19:13). Verse 13 concerns crimes witnessed by the victim. Defrauding and robbery are known crimes that likely refer to similar actions. The same Hebrew words that describe defrauding and robbery in Leviticus 19:13 are used in Leviticus 6:4 to describe keeping someone’s belongings for oneself. Thus, Leviticus 19:13 likely refers to oppression by unlawfully seizing or withholding another’s possessions. The stealing mentioned in verse 11 likely refers to taking something without the owner’s knowledge.

Avoid belittling others (Lev. 19:14). Taking advantage of others’ disabilities is the theme addressed in Leviticus 19:14. It is a heinous thing to ridicule others for sport—especially those with no recourse to correct the problem. That is why these prohibitions are followed by the command to fear the Lord. One should fear Him because He executes justice for the disadvantaged. Fittingly, verse 14 ends with “I am the Lord,” for the crimes addressed could go unpunished due to the victim’s unawareness of his or her perpetrators.

BE JUST—Lev. 19:15-16

Being holy involves making just decisions on behalf of others. In ancient Israel, both financial and judicial business were conducted at the city gates. The elders of the community were involved in these decisions (cf. Ruth 4:1-10), providing the op-

portunity for many Israelites to have experience in judicial arbitration. That opportunity could come with the desire to show partiality by either unjustly siding with the poor to bolster their income or siding against them due to bribery.

Verse 16 instructs God's people to avoid harming the reputation or endangering another's life. As repeatedly stated in Leviticus 19, God sees the areas that could go unnoticed. The Creator of life forbids His followers from being unresponsive in life-threatening situations. Fittingly, the verse ends with "I am the Lord."

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR— Lev. 19:17-18

Leviticus 19:18 covers what is often called the golden rule: the command to love others as oneself. The verse is typically understood to mean that God calls His people to act kindly toward others. When one compares verses 17 and 18, however, the Lord may be calling His people to a much higher ethic than that.

Verse 17 prohibited the ancient Israelite from hating another in his or her heart. That is an inner attitude or disposition, not an action done to another. The action follows later in the verse, commanding the Israelite to rebuke the one against whom he or she harbored a grievance. By doing that, one avoided incurring sin for hating a fellow Israelite.

Verse 18 deals with both actions and attitudes. The Lord prohibited taking vengeance and bearing a grudge. After these statements, the golden rule commands God's people to love their neighbor as themselves. When seen in conjunction with the attitudes and actions found in verse 17 and the first half of verse 18, the Lord is likely commanding not just kind actions but the change of one's inner disposition toward others.

Throughout chapter 19 the Lord said that He is the avenger of secret actions and sins that the law could not prosecute. As a blind person cannot tell who put a stumbling block before him and a deaf person cannot tell who cursed him, so those who are the object of hatred in another's heart are unaware of their perpetrators. But the Lord is aware of all actions and attitudes.

—James Frohlich

QUESTIONS

1. Why did the people of God follow the laws in the Old Testament?
2. How do the Ten Commandments relate to the other laws in the Old Testament?
3. Why did God instruct Moses to speak to the entire congregation of Israel?
4. How else is the word for "fear" in Leviticus 19:3 used in the Bible?
5. Why was it forbidden to make an image of God?
6. What was the result of unholy living in the Old Testament?
7. What is the difference between stealing in verse 11 and robbing in verse 13?
8. Why is it important to act in kindness toward the disadvantaged?
9. In Leviticus 19:18, are God's people commanded merely to act kindly toward their neighbor or to change their heart attitude toward their neighbor?
10. Why is it important for God's people not to hate others?

—James Frohlich

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. The Lord cares about the holiness of every individual person, not just leaders (Lev. 19:1-2).
2. Holiness is demonstrated by treating family members with proper respect (vs. 3).
3. When we turn away from God to pursue other ambitions, God is aware (vs. 4).
4. God cares about how we treat the needy (vss. 9-10).
5. One cannot be holy while mistreating others (vss. 11-14).
6. Showing favoritism by being partial toward or against the needy is wrong (vss. 15-16).
7. God commands us to love others in our hearts, not just in our actions (vss. 17-18).

—James Frohlich

Golden Text Illuminated

“Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy” (Leviticus 19:2).

Leviticus 19:2 contains a meaningful call from God to His people that emphasizes the importance of holiness in their lives. The word for “holy” indicates separation and consecration, signifying being set apart for a sacred purpose. It encompasses moral purity, righteousness, and an unwavering commitment to living according to God’s standards. As God has set Himself apart because of His holiness, He also models for us how we can set ourselves apart for holiness as well.

First, we should embrace God’s standard of holiness. This involves surrendering our lives to Him and aligning ourselves with His perfect will.

Second, we should remember that holiness is a journey. Embracing holiness is a lifelong process that involves yielding to the Holy Spirit’s work within us, which shapes us into the image of Christ. The journey is through God’s grace at work in our lives, not our own good deeds or merits.

Third, we should pursue holiness as a countercultural witness. The Israelites were called to live in a manner that contrasted with the practices of the pagan nations. Similarly, in today’s world, embracing holiness sets us apart as a witness to the transforming power of Christ.

Leviticus 19:2 reminds us of God’s holy character. This verse challenges us to consider the following questions: Will we respond to God’s call to be holy? Will our lives reflect His love, righteousness, and compassion?

—Page Brooks

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How does neglecting the needy contradict God’s character (Lev. 19:9-11)?
2. What is an example of how one can profane God’s holy name today (vs. 12)?
3. Based on the context of verse 14, what should the fear of the Lord cause us to avoid? Have you ever witnessed someone taking advantage of a disabled person?
4. What is an example of someone showing partiality toward the weak or poor today (cf. vs. 15)?
5. Why is God concerned with our inner thoughts and attitudes (cf. vss. 17-18)? Is there a connection between thoughts and actions?

—James Frohlich