

LEVITICUS
Living As God's Just People
Lesson Text: Leviticus 19:9–18, 33–37

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **EVALUATE** what it means to love one's neighbor as one's self; **PERCEIVE** ways to act with compassion; and **PRAY** to live a life of justice and compassion.

In Focus

Our lesson today deals with loving and respecting people for whom God has made them, in His image, to be.

Keep In Mind

“But the stranger who 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.” **Leviticus 19:34 (NKJV)**

Lesson Text
Leviticus 19:9–18, 33–37NKJV

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 neighbor, neither rob him. The wages of him that is hired shall not remain with thee all night until the morning.

14 Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block 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 honor the person of the mighty, but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor.

16 Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people; neither shalt thou stand against the blood of thy neighbor: I am the Lord.

17 Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart. Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not let sin come upon him.

18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself: I am the Lord.

33 And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him.

34 But the stranger who 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.

35 Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in measuring length, weight, or number.

36 Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin (*an ancient Hebrew unit of liquid measure equal to about 1.5 U.S. gallons*) shall ye have: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

37 Therefore shall ye observe all My statutes and all My judgments, and do them: I am the Lord.””

The Lesson

The People, Places and Times

A Holy People: God’s people always had a special relationship with Him, based on God’s nature and character. When Israel agreed to be God’s people and to obey His covenant, following His miraculous deliverance of them from the Egyptians; they bound themselves to ethical and religious responsibilities. These were delivered to them in the form of legal codes (i.e., the Covenant Code and the Holiness Code), which included both positive and negative commands. The vertical relationship of God’s people was outlined in the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) and was simple and straightforward. Israel was to have no other gods, they were not to use the Lord’s name in vain, and they were to honor the Sabbath. The horizontal relationship was more complicated and came in the form of numerous specific commands, all provided as guiding examples and principles to govern themselves both at home and in the world.

Background

The Holiness Code of Leviticus 18:1–24:9 was given to the Israelites as a set of ethical and religious responsibilities, which includes both positive and negative injunctions. John Rogerson and Philip Davies write, “*The basis of the regulations in 19:11–18 about fair dealing with one’s neighbors is not so much social solidarity as mutual religious responsibility*” (145). A large part of Leviticus deals with priestly matters, while chapters 18 and 20 address sexual relations. Chapter 19, the focus of today’s lesson, deals primarily with Israel’s horizontal relationships with others, particularly addressing justice and fairness as examples of holiness.

In Depth

1. Social Justice: Treating Others Right (Leviticus 19:9-16) Jesus summarized the horizontal part of a proper relationship with God as “*love thy neighbor as thyself*” (see Matthew 22:38-39; Luke 10:27). Inherent in every aspect of God’s holy nature and His laws regarding holiness is His heart of love. Every injunction contained in the entire Sinai Tradition reflects God’s heart of love. Treating others right, or loving one’s neighbor, is the ultimate expression of social justice. Contained within this overriding principle are the following details:

Proper handling of the land (Leviticus 19:9–10). Inherent in treating others right is the matter of strangers (e.g., travelers), but also includes the ubiquitous poor and those who perhaps once were better off but have fallen on hard times. By generously leaving the corners of one’s fields or vines for those less fortunate, the Israelites demonstrated a godly attitude toward others. Today, one’s surplus can be shared with others in any number of ways.

Honesty with everyone (Leviticus 19:11–13). It might seem obvious at first, but the commands against committing perjury, stealing, and lying (which parallel the third, eighth, and ninth commandments respectively) are sometimes harder to obey when the boundaries are less clear. When the cases are obvious, the choices between right and wrong are clear. But often deception, deceit, and fraud can take very subtle and more easily justified forms. The godly person avoids all such acts, however minor, that dishonor God and harm others.

Not taking advantage of others (Leviticus 19:14–16). Much like the previous commands, these specify taking advantage of the disadvantaged. Singling out weak or easy “marks,” such as the handicapped or someone in a desperate situation, is injustice defined. The opposite type of person is also included, God’s holy people also are not to act dishonorably toward the privileged. An easy example would be filing unjust lawsuits against “deep pockets.” In all cases, embodying social justice excludes all forms of gossip, backstabbing, and slander, as these are harmful to others and dishonoring to God.

2. Social Justice: Starts in the Heart (Leviticus 19:17–18) Don't hate and don't seek revenge.

Jesus was very clear when He commanded in Matthew 5:43–44 to love even one's enemies, which would more than encompass these verses speaking primarily about "neighbors." Jesus knew murder started with hate and frequently originated with a grudge that morphed into vengeance. An injunction against this evil root would preclude much trouble, grief, and heartache, not to mention it would spare lives. God is fully capable of exercising vengeance, as eloquently captured in the prayer of Psalm 94:1, "*O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs; O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shew thyself.*" In verse 3, Psalm 94 asks the timeless question, "How long shall the wicked triumph?" The answer is that however long it is, their judgment belongs to God and God alone.

3. Social Justice: Cares for Strangers (vv. 33–34) Strangers are sojourners (travelers).

Strangers also may be newcomers or foreigners (aliens), and God's children are to treat them as they would be treated, again invoking the second greatest commandment. This clarifies beyond question the New Testament rhetorical question, "*Who is my neighbor?*" (Luke 10:29). The answer is abundantly clear, everyone! None are excluded from the injunction, as clarified by the various specific examples. Whether they are visitors just passing through, settlers from another culture, or foreign outsiders, all are to be treated like blood relatives and loved as one's self.

Israel once was a stranger in Egypt. Considering the great Exodus from Egypt had not happened very long before the time of these commands, the reminder should have been a very familiar example. Nothing drives a point home better than a personal example, especially a recent one. For Christians, the parallel is with their personal deliverance from the bondage of sin, which often is remembered with great fondness, no matter how many years transpire. Occasionally, however, some need to be reminded that they once had been delivered from oppression and bondage, and they should not even consider mistreating others or inflicting them with any kind of injustice.

4. Social Justice: Being Fair in Business and Law (vv. 35–37) Just scales, righteous dealings, and fairness toward all. Occasionally, some Old Testament laws translate perfectly into modern society without need for any kind of cultural filter. The injunction about unjust scales is preceded by a general command of not doing any unrighteousness in "judgment" or in weighing any matter, but specifically when scales determine values and deception is difficult to detect. This could find countless modern applications, such as gas stations not setting their pumps accurately; taxi drivers "running up the meter"; expense accounts or invoices being "padded"; accountants doing "creative" bookkeeping.

Obeying God's just ordinances is evidence for righteousness. Even where there is an unbridgeable cultural distance between the laws of the "Sinai Tradition" and today,

God's people are still called to a standard of holiness measured against God's own holiness. Nothing demonstrates personal righteousness more than being faithful to living in a way that honors God. Nothing more explicitly defines such a life as one that is committed to loving others through practical expressions of social justice.

Application for Activation

God's people are to be in the world but not of it. There is a higher calling to the kingdom of God and to holy living as defined by Scripture, which translates to a timeless command to treat others as we would be treated, to love others as we would be loved, and a determination to be just and fair in all one's human relationships. Surely, there are enough challenges in this one paragraph to last a lifetime.

Take Aways

Closing Prayer



Our Read-Ahead for: 17 Sep 2023

Leviticus Living As God's Just People

Monday: Genesis 43-45

Tuesday: Genesis 46-47

Wednesday: Genesis 48-50

Thursday: Exodus 1-3

Friday: Exodus 4-6

Saturday: Exodus 7-9

Sunday: Exodus 10-12