

## October 11, 2020

### ***Love Your Neighbor As Yourself***

### **Leviticus 19-23**

#### BIBLE IN A YEAR READING PLAN

Oct 4	Matthew 7-8	Oct 8	Matthew 15-17
Oct 5	Matthew 9-10	Oct 9	Matthew 18-19
Oct 6	Matthew 11-12	Oct 10	Matthew 20-21
Oct 7	Matthew 13-14	Oct 11	Matthew 22-23

#### **Overview of Leviticus 19-23**

**Leviticus 19** How to Treat Your Neighbor

**Leviticus 20** Punishments for Immoral Behavior

##### **Key Passage: Lev 20:22-26**

*22 'You are therefore to keep all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them, so that the land to which I am bringing you to live will not spew you out. 23 Moreover, you shall not follow the customs of the nation which I will drive out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I have abhorred them. 24 Hence I have said to you, "You are to possess their land, and I Myself will give it to you to possess it, a land flowing with milk and honey." I am the Lord your God, who has separated you from the peoples. 25 You are therefore to make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean; and you shall not make yourselves detestable by animal or by bird or by anything that creeps on the ground, which I have separated for you as unclean. 26 Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine.*

**Leviticus 21-22** Rules and Regulations for Priests

##### **Key Passage: Lev 22:31-33**

*31 So you shall keep My commandments, and do them; I am the Lord. 32 "You shall not profane My holy name, but I will be sanctified among the sons of Israel; I am the Lord who sanctifies you, 33 who brought you out from the land of Egypt, to be your God; I am the Lord."*

**Leviticus 23** God's Prescribed Religious Holy-Days

- Weekly Sabbaths (v 3)
- Passover (v 4-5)
- Feast of Unleavened Bread (v 6-7)
- First Fruits (v 9-14)
- Pentecost (v 15-22)
- Feast of Trumpets (v 23-25)
- Day of Atonement (v 26-32)
- Feast of Booths or Tabernacles (v 33-36)

**Lesson Idea:** God's rules and regulations for treatment of others are based on His lordship and love.

**Cross References:** Matthew 5:43-48; 7:12; 22:37-40; Mark 12:31; Luke 6:31; 10:25-28; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8;

**Background:** Christopher Wright in the *New World Commentary on Leviticus* calls Leviticus 19 "Israel's Social Charter." He says:

This great chapter stands among the richest seams of OT ethics, along with passages like Dt. 23-25; Ps. 15; Am. 5; Mi. 6:6-8; Jb. 31; Ezk. 18; and Is. 58. It will richly reward close study using a cross-reference Bible, since many of its laws are expanded further in Deuteronomy and echoed in the Psalms, Proverbs and Prophets. It includes and expands all of the Ten Commandments in one way or another, and also condenses them into what Jesus called the second great commandment in the law and Paul regarded as its very essence: *Love your neighbour as yourself* (18:cf. Mt. 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8-10). With its definitive opening (2), sweeping conclusion (37) and pithy, memorable style, it probably functioned as an easily taught and learned catechism of familial and social responsibilities. It is a chapter which strongly influenced the moral priorities of Jesus' teaching and also lies behind some of the letter of James.

We will look at this lesson in three parts:

1. **Leviticus 19:1-7 A Call to Be Holy Like our Lord**
2. **Leviticus 19:8-18 A Call to Love Like our Lord**
3. **Leviticus 19:32-37 A Call to Honor the Marginalized**

#### **Leviticus 19:1-7 A Call to Be Holy Like our Lord**

**1 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying:**

*2 "Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, '**You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.** 3 Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father, and you shall keep My sabbaths; **I am the Lord your God.** 4 Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods; **I am the Lord your God.***

*5 'Now when you offer a sacrifice of peace offerings to the Lord, **you shall offer it so that you may be accepted.** 6 It shall be eaten the same day you offer it, and the next day; but what remains until the third day shall be burned with fire. 7 **So if it is eaten at all on the third day, it is an offense; it will not be accepted.** 8 **Everyone who eats it will bear his iniquity, for he has profaned the holy thing***

***of the Lord; and that person shall be cut off from his people.***

**NOTES:**

One of the prevailing themes in Leviticus has been God's call for His people to be holy, because He is holy (v 2). Through the use of the sacrificial system and the laws and statutes, God defined how that holiness should look. Throughout the chapter, after giving an instruction on how to treat others, each statement will end with the phrase: **"I am the Lord"** (v 10, 11, 14, 16, 18, 25, 28, 30, 31, 32, 34, 36, 37). God's people are to obey His instructions, because He is the Lord. One could also maintain that God gives the instructions, because they teach us how to follow the heart and holiness of the Lord. Wright explains:

The chapter is headed with the motto of this half of Leviticus: *Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy*. The rest of the chapter dispels any idea that holiness in the OT was merely a matter of ritual purity. It was to be displayed in every corner of practical life—from the corners of your beard to the corners of your fields. Holiness, therefore, was not something that you pursued by retreating from everyday life into some religious sanctum. Holiness meant transforming everyday life by the quality of behaviour that was utterly different from the surrounding ways of the world. (Wright, *Leviticus*)

God reiterates in v. 3-4 some of what was laid out in the Ten Commandments about honoring parents and the Sabbath and God Himself (by not turning to idolatry). By emphasizing the fifth, fourth, and second commandments, God prioritized the family structure as a guardian of holiness and reverence and worship. The responsibility for teaching respect and faith fell on the shoulders of the parents as they were obedient to God's instructions. This needs to be stressed again in our time, because of the tendency of so many parents today to let children choose their own way in all things. But children are not designed nor equipped to do so. Holiness is something God desires to be modeled and taught at home by parents (see Deut 6:4-9, especially v 7 "...impress them upon your children...").

In verses 5-8, God also gave strict instructions on how offerings could be acceptable in His sight. In previous chapters (Lev 1-7) God had already described how the offerings and sacrifices were to be performed (for peace offerings see Lev 4). In Leviticus 19 God adds more details by saying that a peace offering had to be eaten within two days or it would be considered "profane." God's purpose in this restriction could have been to preserve

their health, because there could be some serious health concerns with leftover meat with no refrigeration. Wright, however, believes that the context of this command would relate it to family and social concerns as well:

The reason, however, for its repetition here in the midst of a chapter primarily devoted to social concerns is probably that the *fellowship offering* was the most social of all the sacrifices. The meat had to be eaten within two days, and so would have been shared with family, friends and neighbours. It thus inculcated a spirit of generous sharing in the community which matches the immediately following law. (Wright, *Leviticus*)

God desires His people to live in community with one another. Some of the practices and instructions are given to help people build better relationships with one another; while other commands and "thou shalt nots" in this chapter are designed to help us keep from destroying our relationships with our neighbors. Our obedience is based on the holy standards of God, but our actions need to reflect His love.

**Leviticus 19:9-18 A Call to Be Loving Like our Lord**

***9 'Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the Lord your God.***

***11 'You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. 12 You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the Lord.***

***13 'You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning. 14 You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the Lord.***

***15 'You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. 16 You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the Lord.***

***17 'You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. 18 You shall not take***

vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but **you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.**

#### **NOTES:**

The command in v 9-10 is given to help the poor. According to Wright:

Gleaning rights (*cf.* 23:22; Dt. 24:19-22) were part of Israel's system of welfare provision for the poor (*i.e.* those who lacked the normal security of a family, *e.g.* widows and orphans) and those who had no land and so had to live by selling their labour or skills (aliens, Levites, hired workmen). . . As well as this annual help, they had the benefit of the triennial tithe on produce, which was stored as a food reserve for distribution to the needy (Dt. 14:28-29), and the free use of the produce of the land in the sabbatical (seventh) year (Ex. 23:10-11).

The relief of poverty in Israel, therefore, was built into economic and legal structures, not left as a matter of private charity. This law, typically of OT law, addresses the issue not from the angle of **rights** but of **responsibilities**. That is, it assumes the right of gleaning, but commands the landowner to make sure there is something to be gleaned. Boaz was a model of this in practice (Ru. 2).

Those who possessed land (and other productive resources) may not have been responsible **for** the plight of the poor (though the prophets keenly observed that their greed and exploitation may have contributed to it), but they were responsible **to** God to alleviate it. This law thus sets possession of resources in a framework of duty to God and others, and rejects the idea that private property is an absolute right, giving one freedom to extract every last drop of income or profit from one's assets. . . Its point is that, whatever the economic system, there must be adequate provision for the poor. **Ownership confers responsibilities, not just privileges. And this is the practical meaning of holiness.** (Wright, *Leviticus*)

Verses 11-16 stress proper treatment of others, both those who are part of the community and those who are vulnerable to it. God expounds further on some of the Ten Commandments as He instructs His people not to steal, conceal truth, lie, or swear falsely by God's name. He teaches His people to honor His name always. God also demands that they treat their neighbor fairly (v 15), and that they not let decisions be unjust nor slanderous.

These commands are needed in our time, because doubts about the integrity of our judicial and political

systems have brought discord and disunity. We need as a people to remember to treat all others fairly and with dignity, because we have a Lord who is watching. Social media accounts should take into consider the meaning of the word "slander" and avoid it at all costs.

Verse 17 is another appropriate verse for our day. We cannot allow hate to take root in our hearts for anyone. It is okay to rebuke each other, but it must be done in a loving way without allowing animosity and grudges to develop. Consider some of the New Testament's teachings on the subject:

#### **Matthew 18:15**

*15 If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. 18 Truly I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.*

#### **Luke 17:3**

*Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.*

#### **Hebrews 12:14-15**

*<sup>14</sup> Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. <sup>15</sup> See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many.*

#### **1 John 2:9-11**

*<sup>9</sup> Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. <sup>10</sup> Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. <sup>11</sup> But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.*

#### **1 John 3:14-15**

*<sup>14</sup> We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. <sup>15</sup> Anyone who hates a brother or sister is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life residing in him.*

Verses 19-31 contain more commandments about holiness and purity and trust and faithfulness. Again the admonitions are concluded with the simple reason: **I am the Lord**. Instead of dealing with all of these, we will focus on verses 32-37 where God demands that His

people show honor and kindness to certain groups who are often disrespected.

**Leviticus 16:32-37 A Call to Honor the Marginalized**

32 *'You shall rise up before the grayheaded and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the Lord.*

33 *'When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. 34 The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and **you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.***

35 *'You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measurement of weight, or capacity. 36 You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin; I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from the land of Egypt. 37 You shall thus observe all My statutes and all My ordinances and do them; I am the Lord.'*

**NOTES:**

These commands speak up for those who often are neglected or marginalized. God tells His people to respect the "grayheaded." Many times, societies do not recognize the immense wisdom and fortitude that the elderly can render. Youth may have more energy, but it is often misdirected without the wisdom and prayers of the elders.

God also provides protection for the "stranger" within the society of His people. In fact, He commands them not just to protect them, but to **love** them. The motivation for that care is remembering what it was like to be a stranger in Egypt. God called them to realize that they would still be there if He had not cared for them and rescued them. God basically invented the idea of "paying it forward." An old hymn says:

*Because I have been given much I too must give  
Because of thy great bounty, Lord Each day I live  
I shall divide my gifts from thee  
With every brother that I see  
Who has the need of help from me*

Wright wrote his commentary several years ago, but his insights still ring true for our day:

*It is remarkable to find this explicit legal equality for aliens in the law of ancient Israel in view of its absence, until comparatively recently, in the legislation of modern countries. And even where legislation for racial equality does exist, the actual practice of society and officialdom can be very far short of it. This law has a powerful moral relevance to the pressing issues of*

*the rights and treatment of ethnic minorities, refugees, migrant labourers, asylum seekers etc. In fact, its moral force is on the same level as the second greatest commandment in the law, since the command to love the alien as yourself (34) is phrased almost identically to v 18. It comes with a similar sanction (I am the LORD) and the added motivation of Israel's own experience of oppression and deliverance. And this too is holiness. . .*

*The chapter is remarkable for its breadth and depth of moral insight. It touches on the thoughts of the heart and the actions of the body, private and public behaviour and almost every major area of social life in a community. The application of some of its legislation would transform the lives of millions in today's world. And the deeper one reflects on it, the more it seems that many Christians come nowhere near the standards it presented centuries before Christ (let alone Christ's own development of it in the Sermon on the Mount). (Wright, Leviticus)*

The last couple of verses in the chapter remind business owners not to cheat their customers. There are many ways that merchants can take advantage of those in need. We saw that recently when prices escalated for items which were much in demand during the onset of the pandemic.

This chapter is just one out of many in Leviticus that deal with the ethical demands God puts upon his people. His purpose was that they represent His holiness and demonstrate His love to the world. This will bring Him glory and draw men to Him. A second purpose was to enrich the life of His people within a community of loving brothers and sisters. He still desires that from His children today. John summed it up well in 1 John 4:7-12...

*7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.*