

The Second Greatest Commandment (Leviticus 19:1-19)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Leviticus

I. Review and Introduction to This Lesson

- a. The primary focus of most of **Leviticus 1-17** was the priesthood, the sacrificial system, and religious regulations pertaining to those things.
 - i. In **Leviticus 1-7**, we discussed the rules and regulations regarding five different types of sacrificial offerings that the priests would make.
 - ii. In **Leviticus 8-10**, we learned about the ordination of the priests, and how they are to conduct themselves.
 - iii. **Leviticus 11** explained the rules regarding clean animals (which people were allowed to eat) vs. the unclean animals (which they were forbidden to eat).
 - iv. **Leviticus 12-15** dealt with things how the priests can serve to make people spiritually clean again after certain events (childbirth, outbreaks of leprosy/mildew, discharges from the body).
 - v. **Leviticus 16** explained what the High Priest was to do on the Day of Atonement
 - vi. **Leviticus 17** addressed significance of blood: the prohibition of eating blood, and more rules for the priests in connection with sacrifices offered.
- b. **Leviticus 18-20** address a number of *moral and ethical laws*.
 - i. The immediate prior lesson in this series (on **Leviticus 18**) was on some rather disturbing subjects:
 - 1. Incest (prohibitions on marriage and intimate sexual relations with close relatives).
 - 2. Bestiality (people having sexual relations with animals).
 - 3. Homosexuality (an explosive issue today, including in more and more 'Christian' communities).
 - ii. **Leviticus 19** features what Jesus called the Second Greatest Commandment of the entire Law of Moses: "love your neighbor as yourself" (**Leviticus 19:18**).

- iii. **Leviticus 19** gets to *the very heart* of the Old Testament.
 - 1. It's like doing heart surgery: you first have to go through layers of flesh, tissue and bone before you finally reach the beating heart!
- iv. These chapters also teach us foundational principles that are carried forward in the New Testament, including:
 - 1. Sacrificing to meet the needs of the poor and needy
 - 2. Living holy lives
 - 3. Not conforming to the worldly influences that surround us; being separate from the world
- c. Timeframe for **Leviticus**, the second of the **Five Books of Moses** (sometimes referred to as "the Law" or "the Law of Moses").
 - i. **Genesis** covers from the creation through the death of Joseph, which brings the Israelites (Jacob, his 12 sons and their descendants) to Egypt.
 - 1. Recall that in **Genesis 15** the Lord told Abraham that his descendants would inherit the land of Canaan, but only after they spent 400 years of affliction serving in another land. They would return when the sins of the Amorites, who lived in Canaan, were "filled up".
 - ii. **Exodus** picks up the story of Israel near the end of the 400 years in Egypt, with Moses leading them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea and to Mount Sinai, where he received the 10 Commandments and additional instructions from the Lord.
 - 1. The time from departing Egypt (crossing the Red Sea) until arriving at Mount Sinai was about 6 weeks.
 - iii. The book of **Leviticus** contains additional instructions given to Moses while the people were still encamped at Mount Sinai.
 - 1. The time encamped at Mount Sinai was about 10 months.
 - iv. The book of **Numbers** begins with a census of the people taken before they break camp at Mount Sinai. It covers most of the remainder of the 40 years of Wandering in the Wilderness.
 - 1. From the time Israel broke camp at Mount Sinai until the encampment at Kadesh Barnea (near the boundary of Canaan) and failure of the exploratory trip of the 12 spies was about 6 months.

2. The remainder of the **Numbers** takes us to the end of the 39th year in the Wilderness, at which time they have the final encampment with Moses across the Jordan River from Canaan.
- v. The book of **Deuteronomy** is final exhortations from Moses, given in the last year of the 40 years in the Wilderness, while the people are in their final encampment. It includes the death of Moses, and the leadership handoff to Joshua.
 1. Therefore in the second half of **Exodus** and throughout **Leviticus** we find laws given by God at the beginning of the 40 years in the Wilderness. In **Deuteronomy**, at the end of the 40 years, we have Moses retelling (in summary) those laws and giving some final admonitions.
 2. Joshua will be the one to lead people into the Promised Land, covered in the book of **Joshua**.

II. Many Struggle with 'the God of the Old Testament'

- a. Many who have (in my opinion) a superficial knowledge of the Old Testament see in this part of **Leviticus** and similar passages in **Deuteronomy** an indication that the God of the Old Testament is harsh and judgmental.
 - i. Classic examples that people often point to include:
 1. The instructions for the Jews to wipe out all the people from the other tribes, who occupied Canaan.
 2. The requirement to stone to death anyone involved in homosexual intimate relations.
 - ii. Many unbelievers who reject the Bible, thereby rejecting both the Jewish and Christian faiths, have concluded:
 1. The God of the Bible must be a genocidal, intolerant, unloving God.
 2. Therefore, the God of the Bible is *not good*.
 - a. Either this God does not exist (and was the figment of ancient Middle Eastern culture with its biases and discriminations); OR
 - b. If this God really does exist, He is not good, not loving, not enlightened. Therefore, He is *not worthy of us following or serving Him!*

iii. On the other hand, many Christians in an attempt to resolve this 'apparent problem' have concluded:

1. God was harsh, mean and judgmental in the Old Testament; but in the New Testament He became much more loving, merciful and non-judgmental.
2. People had to fear God in the Old Testament; however, we only need to love Him (and no longer fear Him) under the New Testament.
3. The Old Testament was filled with rules that were impossible to follow. In contrast, through the blood of Jesus we are saved by grace. We no longer need to follow any laws or rules to be saved.

iv. However, God is from eternity and He does not change.

1. God's nature does not change. He is always the same. God cannot become wiser or kinder or more loving or more compassionate than He always has been.
 - a. Therefore, we can't dismiss the God of the Old Testament!
 - b. As we will see, **Leviticus 19** reveals much about the nature and character of God.
2. While God does not change, God can change *His response* to people.
 - a. God can change *His plan*. Also, He can change *His laws* and bring in a new covenant.
 - b. Example of God changing His *plan* include:
 - i. When He decided to heed Hezekiah's prayer and extend his life, in **2 Kings 20** (designated **4 Kingdoms** in the LXX).
 - ii. When He held back on the destruction of Nineveh after the people repented, in **Jonah 3**.
 - iii. "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective", even bringing drought or rain in the case of Elijah's prayers! (**James 5:16-18**)
- b. Many Christians struggle with a related issue/question: "What do we do with the *Laws of Moses*?"

- i. Are any of these laws still in effect?
- ii. Do they serve any purpose for us?
- iii. Why should we bother *reading* those laws, today?
- iv. **Question:** Was there any *good purpose* to the Law of Moses, other than (as many claim) to show us that we are failures at following laws?
 1. Paul wrote: “Therefore the law was *our tutor to bring us to Christ*, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor.” (**Galatians 3:24–25**, NKJV)
 - a. A tutor is useful only up to a certain point in the life of a child. After the tutor has helped the child reach a certain level of proficiency or instruction, the tutor is no longer needed.
 - b. A similar parallel can be seen in the Exodus journey. Moses led the nation of Israel to a certain point in the Wilderness. However, Joshua (in Greek, = Jesus) finished the job and led them the rest of the way to the Promised Land.
 - i. To verify that Joshua = Jesus (Ἰησοῦς in Greek), see the book of **Joshua** in the LXX (Greek Old Testament), or **Hebrews 4:8** and **Acts 7:45** in an interlinear Greek New Testament.
 2. Clement of Alexandria made the case that the Law introduced man to many foundational ethical and moral principles and called men to restrain the sinful urges of their own flesh. (Source: Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*, book 2, chapter 18; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, pp. 365-368)
 - a. The commandments teach us self-restraint. We are called to curb our passions and appetites of the flesh.
 - i. For example, in **Leviticus 18** and elsewhere in Leviticus we see the Lord putting restraints on our sexual impulses (prohibiting adultery, bestiality, incest, fornication, homosexual intimate relations, etc.).
 - ii. Later, Jesus will take it further by restoring the original “one flesh” concept, with restoring

permanence of marriage (until death), banning polygamy, severely restricting divorce, and even prohibiting lusting after others in our hearts.

iii. We see this in the Sermon of the Mount, where Jesus says “Moses said ‘X’, *but I tell you this....*”

b. The ethical and moral teachings point to the good nature of God.

III. Ethical Laws and Rules from the Lord

- a. As we read these, let us ask the question: “Does this reveal anything about the nature or character of God?”
- b. Read **Leviticus 19:1-8**.
 - i. This discussion on moral laws began in **Leviticus 18:1**. After explaining that the people must not copy the corrupt practices of the people of Canaan when they enter that land, and addressing sexual sins first, the Lord continues to the next set of concerns.
 - ii. In **Leviticus 19**, the Lord restates some of the 10 Commandments, plus some of the requirements involving when to eat the peace offering (from **Leviticus 7**).
 - iii. He begins by saying “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” (**Leviticus 19:2**).
 1. This is a statement that occurs several places in Leviticus. God is a holy God (set apart), and He calls us to be like Him.
 2. Holy means: *set apart for a special purpose*.
 - a. An practical illustration of the meaning of this word ‘*holy*’ can be seen in the instructions regarding the special oil and incense in **Exodus 30**. There, it was explained that since this oil and incense were *holy*, they could not be used for common purposes.
 3. We will discuss this important phrase in more detail in a future lesson, when it appears again in **Leviticus 20**.
 - iv. The first specific command is to honor our parents.
 1. To me, this indicates how God cares about the family.

2. Recently I had a conversation with a Christian neighbor from Viet Nam, in which he commented, "Children today don't want to listen to what their parents say."
 - a. Generally, this is more of a problem in Western societies (like the US and Western Europe) than in Eastern cultures (for example, in Asia).
 3. This command is not just limited to calling small children to obey their parents.
 4. Jesus applied this to grown children honoring their elderly parents. God sees taking care of the elderly as primarily the responsibility of their children (not the government).
 5. Read **Matthew 15:1-9**.
 - a. The problem: religious Jews were neglecting their parents. Putting their money into the temple rather than showing honor to their mothers and fathers who were in need.
 - b. Jesus blasted them for being hypocrites.
 - c. As a zealous but immature Christian in my late twenties, I fell into a similar hypocritical pattern (neglecting the needs of my widowed mother in favor of various church-related activities). However, I repented and changed as I became more spiritually mature and aware.
 - d. We can't use our religious practices as an excuse to neglect our parents.
 - i. As Christians, may we never be found guilty of this. If you are, repent!
 - ii. Children caring for their parents is extremely important to God and something Jesus taught strongly about.
 - e. Read **1 Timothy 5:3-8**. Perhaps the greatest curse in the Bible directed at Christians who neglect their elderly relatives. Paul said any Christian who does that is, "...*worse than* an unbeliever!"
- c. Read **Leviticus 19:9-10**.

- i. Don't harvest every last sheaf of grain, every last grape. Leave some for those who are struggling (the poor and resident aliens).
- ii. Read **Deuteronomy 10:12-19**.
- iii. **Question:** What does this indicate about the character of God?
 1. He is concerned about how the poor would be treated in the future, after the Israelites entered the Promised Land.
 2. He loves the resident aliens, not just the Jews. He feeds and cares for them.
 3. He shows no partiality. He does not discriminate.
 4. He wants his people to have the same concern. Don't forget that they too were once resident aliens (in Egypt).
- iv. The subject of immigration is extremely divisive in the U.S., especially related to the situation at the southern border. Regardless of what policy the government should have regarding who to let into the country and under what conditions, all Christians need to have a *heart of compassion* toward those who are poor, those in need, and resident aliens.
- v. It is interesting to me that he tells the Israelites to leave grain and fruit behind for the poor to pick for themselves. The Lord does not tell the Jews to pick the grain and fruit for the others, and to set it out on silver platters! I notice that those among the poor who are able are called to work, too.
 1. I think of the story of Ruth, a poor foreigner (Moabite) who lived among the Jews and worshiped their God. She worked all day long in the fields of Boaz. It says "She came and continued from morning until evening, not stopping to rest in the field, not even a little." (**Ruth 2:7**)
 - a. Read **2 Thessalonians 3:6-12**.
 - b. The same apostle who wrote the famous passage on the supremacy of love (in **1 Corinthians 13**) issued this challenging statement, as well!
 - c. In helping those in need, if they are able to work they need to do so.
 - i. Paul worked to support himself, even though he as an apostle had the right to financial support. He did this to provide an example of being a hard

worker. (**Acts 20:34-35, 2 Thessalonians 3:8-9**)

2. True Christian faith involves turning away from sin as well as helping those in need.
 - a. Read **James 1:21-27**.
 - b. Read **James 2:14-17**.
3. **Challenge:** What are you doing to help those in need?
 - a. Christians are called to have the heart of God: loving the poor and those not like us. Doing what we are able, out of love (not under compulsion, not due to peer pressure, not under a 'guilt-trip').
 - b. Be generous and help those in need, yet call everyone to be working and helping others.
 - c. One way that some Christian ministries put these principles into practice is through micro-lending (helping the poor who are willing and able to work, via small loans at no or very low interest, to help them get set up in small business enterprises).
- d. Read **Leviticus 19:11-18**.
 - i. Do not steal, do not lie.
 1. God is always truthful and honest. He wants us to be the same.
 - ii. God is concerned for the laborers.
 1. Literally, don't go to bed with the money you owe others who have worked for you.
 - iii. The Lord is especially concerned for the deaf and blind: those who are easy for others to exploit.
 - iv. God is impartial. He does not want us to unfairly favor *either* the poor *or* the rich.
 1. Some tend to favor the *wealthy and influential* (out of admiration; or considering what they might be able to do for us in the future).
 2. Others will tend to favor the *poor* (those they more closely identify with).

3. God does not show favoritism. He is just toward all and wants us to have the same attitude.
 - a. At many courthouses, justice is portrayed as a figure holding a scale and wearing a blindfold. That is the goal, to judge based on the truth (as opposed to outward things).
 - b. The idea is to not discriminate based on outward appearances (wealth, influence, education, race, color, etc.).
 - c. Current problem in the U.S.: a concern that there are *two standards of justice* (conservatives unable to get fair trials in some jurisdictions, liberals unable to get fair trial in others).
 - d. In the past, discrimination in some areas of the U.S. was rampant, based on race or skin color. This continues to be a problem today, but sometimes in reverse from the past, swinging to the opposite extreme.
- v. If you see your neighbor doing something wrong (sinful), don't just resent him in your mind. Speak the truth; rebuke if necessary. Don't pretend everything is OK.
 1. In some cultures this is harder to do; goes against the grain of wanting to be "nice". But you end up hating the person on the inside!
 - a. My good friend David Adams, who grew up in Minnesota, comes from a land where people were "Minnesota nice", meaning they could be diplomatic and courteous to the point that they tended to avoid conflict and not say what they really thought (if it was negative).
 - b. On the other hand, I grew up in the New York / New Jersey area. There, the people are infamous for being brutally direct, to the point where outsiders tend to find us offensive and insulting!
 2. The goal is to *speak the truth* always, but to do so in love. **(Ephesians 4:15)**
 - a. Don't be a coward. Say what needs to be said.
 - b. Speak the truth to your neighbor, instead of hating him or her in your heart.

- c. If you speak the truth, you will not bear guilt because of your neighbor, even if he refuses to listen.
 - i. Consider the instructions to the watchman, in **Ezekiel 33:1-9**.
- vi. "Love your neighbor as yourself".
 - 1. James referred to this as "the royal Law".
 - a. "If you really fulfill *the royal law* according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well;" (**James 2:8**, NKJV)
 - 2. Paul said the whole law is essentially fulfilled in this one simple command.
 - a. "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (**Galatians 5:14**, NKJV)
 - b. "For the commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,' 'You shall not covet,' and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (**Romans 13:9**, NKJV)
 - i. **Questions:** Think about it. If you really loved your neighbor as yourself, would you commit adultery with that person, or with his or her spouse? Would you covet what they have, or lie to them, or steal from them?
 - 3. Jesus said this was the second greatest command in all of the Law of Moses. Also, He said that all of the Law and the Prophets (essentially the whole Old Testament Scriptures) hang on these first two commands.
 - a. Read **Matthew 22:34-40**.
- e. Read **Leviticus 19:19**.
 - i. **Question:** Why would the Lord care about animal breeding, mixing crops in a field, or hybrid garments (fabric woven from two different kinds of material)?
 - 1. Consider the discussion in **1 Corinthians 9:1-10**.

2. When Paul says that he had a right to material support from the Christians, he points to a passage in the Law of Moses (**Deuteronomy 25:4**) regarding oxen.
3. He then asks the rhetorical question. **Paul's Question:** "Is is *oxen* that God is concerned about?"
 - a. **Implied Answer:** Of course not. God's greater concern is about *humans*, rather than dumb animals!
 - b. God gives instructions regarding animals to teach us things regarding *how we humans should live*.
4. When Paul saw statements regarding animals in the Law of Moses, he saw these as pointing to spiritual truths that would be revealed in Christ.
5. If that is the case here, what might we learn from this statement in **Leviticus 19:19** about mixed breeding?

ii. Read **2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1**.

1. Paul apparently alludes to another Old Testament passage: "You shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together." (**Deuteronomy 22:10**, NKJV)
2. The point being made here is regarding separation from the world. He is teaching that God's people should not *mix with the world*!
 - a. This certainly would apply to marriage. Christians can only be "yoked together" in marriage with other Christians. Paul also addressed this directly in **1 Corinthians 7:39**.
 - b. However, the principle here is *not limited to* marriage relationships.
 - c. Peter refers to Christians as: "... a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people..." (**1 Peter 2:9**, NKJV)
 - i. We Christians have become part of a new nation, a new people. We are to be separate and distinct, a principle that has all kinds of ramifications in our lives and relationships.

IV. Conclusions

- a. Let us take a closer look at the Old Testament, to see the character of God and discover the spiritual gems to be found in the text.
- b. While there are many prohibitions (things that God forbids us to do for our own God and that we might be holy/set apart as His special people), the heart of God is love. His commands are an expression of his love for us, and the love He wants us to show others.
- c. May we demonstrate our love for our neighbors with action and in truth.