

The Privilege and Responsibility of God's People

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Date: 10 October 2021

Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] Thank you.

Thank you.

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And then, thank you.

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[28 : 03] Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. living our Jesus. Thank you. Thank you.
Thank you.

Thank you. Though the storms may rage, He is strong to save. He's the King forever, Jesus.
When I plead His case, I will sing my praise to the King forever, Jesus.

[29 : 43] All my sorrows past, I am home at last with my King forever, Jesus.

With my King forever, Jesus. With my King forever, Jesus.

So as we've joined our voices in praise, let's now unite our hearts in prayer. Let us pray. Our Father in Heaven, we thank You that we have much cause to give You praise and to give You thanks. We thank You that You are great and good. We thank You that You are mighty and powerful. We thank You that You look upon us with grace and favor. We ask that You would guide us tonight as we read Your Word, as we consider its truth.

We ask that You would remind us that as Your people, we have great and precious privileges. We have this open access to Your throne of grace. We are Your witnesses, Your ambassadors.

[30 : 55] We are those that represent You here on earth. So help us, Lord, to represent You well with our character, with our words, with our actions. We pray that we would be signposts like John the Baptist.

Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We thank You that You have placed us here in this church, in this community, in this city.

We thank You that there are many people in this city who call upon Your name. And we thank You that You do not leave Yourself without a witness. We pray that You would strengthen Your work, Your church here in Edinburgh.

And we thank You that there are many pulpits from which the good news of Jesus sounds forth. So we pray that You would strengthen that work and that You would extend that work. That there would be many churches that would soon be planted.

And many new people who would come in contact with the gospel. We pray for the work of chaplaincy, whether in prisons or in hospitals, in schools, in the armed forces.

[31 : 57] We thank You that You place Your people in these key strategic places. We thank You for organizations like Gideon's who give away thousands of thousands of copies of Your word.

And who supply schools and prisons and the armed forces with copies of the scriptures. And we thank You that there are many of Your people who have come to faith through the reading of Your word.

And through the circumstances that place them in difficult settings. Heavenly Father, we pray that You would bless Your word now as we read it. That You would speak to our hearts.

That You would encourage us. That You would strengthen us. That You would correct us. That You would renew us and restore us. Lord, You know each of one of our stories. You know each of our circumstances.

You know the burdens that weigh us down. You know the joys that bring us smiles. You know the hope that leads us forward. And You know at times that sense of sadness or sorrow or despair that can so easily entangle us and bring us down.

[33 : 03] So Lord, whatever is needed, we pray that You would amply provide. And now as we turn to Your word, we thank You that the Holy Spirit promises to accompany the reading of Your word with Your power.

With Your presence. And You tell us that Your word can never go out and return to You without effect. So we commit ourselves to You this evening. In the name of Jesus.

Amen. Well there are two passages I'm going to read to us. The first comes from Exodus chapter 19. And the second from Leviticus. Again in my prison work I try to explain the Bible to people.

And to say most of the books of the Bible either have the name is where it was written to or who wrote it. Of course that doesn't hold for books like Exodus and Leviticus or Numbers.

But you know you quickly get corrected if you say something that is not completely true. Exodus chapter 19 verses 1 down to 8.

[34 : 02] In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt. On the very day they came to the desert of Sinai. And after they set out from Rephidim. They entered the desert of Sinai.

And Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain. Then Moses went up to God. And the Lord called to him from the mountain and said. This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob.

And what you are to tell the people of Israel. You yourselves have seen what I did in Egypt. And how I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to myself.

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant. Then out of all the nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine. You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites. So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people. And set before them all the words that the Lord had commanded him to speak.

[35 : 03] The people responded together. We will do everything the Lord has said. So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord. And if you move forward a few pages.

We'll pick up in Leviticus chapter 19. Leviticus 19 and we'll read from verses 1 down to 18. The heading is various laws and Leviticus means the law or laws.

The Lord said to Moses speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them. Be holy because I the Lord your God am holy. Each of you must respect his mother and father.

And you must observe my Sabbath. My Sabbaths I am the Lord your God. Do not turn to idols or make gods of cast metal for yourselves. I am the Lord your God.

When you sacrifice a fellowship offering to the Lord. Sacrifice it in such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf. It shall be eaten on the day you sacrifice it or on the next day.

[36 : 10] Anything left over until the third day must be burned up. If any of it is eaten on the third day it is impure and will not be accepted. Whoever eats it will be held responsible because he has desecrated what is holy to the Lord.

That person must be cut off from his people. When you reap the harvest of your land. Do not reap to the very edges of your field. Or gather the gleanings of your harvest.

Do not go over your vineyard a second time. Or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the Lord your God. Do not steal.

Do not lie. Do not deceive one another. Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord. Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him.

Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight. Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind. But fear your God.

[37 : 14] I am the Lord. Do not pervert justice. Do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great. But judge your neighbor fairly.

Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the Lord. Do not hate your brother in your heart.

Rebuke your neighbor frankly so that you will not share in his guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people. But love your neighbor as yourself.

I am the Lord. Amen. And may God add his blessing to these readings from his own word. Let's pray together before we turn back.

Father God, we do again thank you for your word. We ask once again that you would speak to us from it. That you enable us to hear and to store up in our heart.

[38 : 49] And to put into practice those things that you have for us. Amen. So we are continuing to think about the mission of God's people. Thinking about this reality, as we mentioned at the beginning, that we are called to represent God to the world.

Often when we hear the word represent, representation, maybe we think in terms of the privileges that that involves. In certain cases, in certain cases, other times responsibility. For those of us who were paying attention to football yesterday, World Cup qualifying was on again.

And you'll notice whenever somebody is called up to represent their national team for the very first time. They'll always, without fail, talk about the honor that they have in representing their country.

Of course, that also brings with it a certain measure of responsibility. And Scottish players have that responsibility to make sure it's not another 20 years before we have a major championship. So there's privilege, there's responsibility.

Closer to home, perhaps we have been asked to represent our school, our university, or our company in some way or another. Giving a talk, perhaps.

[40 : 03] Launching a new product. And there, while there is privilege, perhaps the emphasis there falls on responsibility. For that time, you become the face of your school or your business and industry.

So these are the ideas that we're going to focus on together. That sense of the privilege of being chosen by God's grace. We've seen that week after week as we've been in Genesis and Exodus. But also the responsibility. The responsibility to represent God well in the world for His glory and on His mission. So again, as with our usual pattern tonight, we'll look at the Old Testament to see this theme.

In our community groups and student and young workers group, we'll look at the New Testament. So we'll turn first of all to Exodus 19. Where we'll see privileges and responsibilities as the people are called into covenant with their God.

So we're told at the beginning, the setting. So this is the first day of the third month after the Israelites left Egypt. So three months ago, they were enslaved.

[41 : 14] But now, by God's grace, by God's power, they've been set free. And they're meeting God at Mount Sinai. They're about to get the Ten Commandments. This covenant relationship is about to be established where God will say to them, You will be my people and I will be your God.

It's a covenant of grace, as we've seen all the way through for the last few weeks. And that's crucial to understanding the place of the law for the people.

It's crucial to understand how they are to live in the promised land and for their mission. Exodus 19 is crucial for the people of God in helping them to understand, And indeed, by extension, helping us to understand who are we?

And what are we here for as God's church? And this chapter helps us to do that by looking at these privileges and responsibilities within the covenant.

So let's begin thinking about the privilege. Verse 3, So Jacob, Israel, here are reminders for them that God has already spoken promises to their forefathers.

[42 : 39] This is recalling for us that original promise made in Genesis 12 that then gets passed down the generations. And it's a reminder that God has been faithful to his promises and will continue to be faithful when it comes to the covenant.

And then in verse 4, Again, the privilege of God working for his people and working for his intended goal.

Why does he set them free? Why does he bring salvation? That they might know God. That they might enjoy relationship and life with God. That's always the goal of salvation, to know and enjoy our God.

The privilege continues in verse 5, the second part. If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession.

Boys and girls, when we think of treasure, probably we think something like pirate gold. Might be our first connection. Perhaps if you've read *The Hobbit*, you'll think of Gollum and my precious.

[44 : 01] But it can be anything that we have and hold on to dearly. And what God is saying to the people here is that God has a special Father's love for his church.

He looks at his people and considers them to be precious, treasured in his sight. Who are we as the people of God?

Exodus 19 says we are a people who've been saved by grace. We are a people who've been saved by God's power. The New Testament reminds us we've been saved at great cost.

The cost of the blood of the Lord Jesus. Saved from slavery to enjoy freedom. For us, again, that's slavery to sin leading to death.

Freedom to know forgiveness and life with God. And who are we as the people of God? We are precious to him. We are loved by him. And as Christians and as the church, we need to feel that sense of privilege.

[45 : 11] That amazing grace, as it were, would be the song of our heart. Amazing grace. How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me. That we understand how desperate our situation was

because of sin.

And to understand God's grace in saving us and opening blind eyes. We need to feel it. We also need to believe it.

We need to be telling ourselves the truth of the gospel. We need to learn to listen to the right voice. Because we have in the devil an accuser.

Who would be very glad to pull away any sense of security and joy we might have from knowing God by pointing to our sin and taking our eyes off our Savior.

We need to let the privilege of the gospel shape our identity. Individually as Christians and together as a church. That our unity comes from being united to the Lord Jesus.

[46 : 12] Our whole Christian life then is to be built on this. To recognize it is an honor to represent our Savior God. So, so much for privilege.

What does Exodus 19 tell us about responsibilities for the people of God? Verse 5 speaks of responsibility.

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you'll be my treasured possession. God has acted in saving grace. The people, God's people, are to respond with obedience.

We've said it before, but the order is vital. In chapter 19 we have, You have been saved by grace, therefore obey. Ten commandments begins with that reminder of rescue, redemption from Egypt, therefore obey.

The law was, never, is, never, will, never be God's way for people to be right with Him. Rather, the law as it gives us God's perfect standards show just how far short we fall of that and how much we need a Savior.

[47 : 24] We need the saving work of God first. Because when that happens, we're given a new heart. We're given a new will to obey.

And we're given the Spirit, so we have a new power to help us to obey. So we don't use the law as a way to earn God's favor, to earn God's salvation.

Following this, in verse 6, there are two pictures of God's people, two ways to think about the reality, how do we represent God, and they're very much connected.

First of all, in verse 6, there's the idea of being a kingdom of priests. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests.

Now, to help us to understand that, we need to think about, well, what did a priest do that God is then saying to the people of God collectively, we are then to do? Well, we know that one of the key jobs of a priest was to teach the law.

[48 : 33] The law of God was brought to the people. And we also know that the priests had the responsibility to offer sacrifices, offer the right sacrifices, so that the people's sin could be atoned for, it could be forgiven, it could be cleansed.

And the priests also had a responsibility to speak God's blessing over God's people. Ed Welch has written a whole book, little book on this topic called Created to Draw Near, what it means for the church to be royal priests.

And in that book, he emphasizes holiness for the sake of relationship. God calls us to be holy so that we might be near to our holy God and that we might serve our holy God because we are in a living fellowship, relationship of love with him.

When we think about the task of representing our school or representing our job, we are saying, you know, these are our values. This is the product.

These are the skills we offer. What are we saying as we represent God as a kingdom of priests? What's the mission of God's people?

[49 : 59] We're saying we represent not ourselves, we represent the one true and living God. And we are saying these are his ways in the way that we live, in our obedience, in our ethics.

And we'll think about that in a few moments. And as we say, this is the way to be right with him as we speak of Jesus and salvation through his work on the cross.

We are to be that kingdom of priests representing our holy God. And for the nation of Israel to do that, for the church today to do that, what must we be? And the answer is there in verse six.

We must be holy. You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. And again, it's important for us to recognize here that the whole nation is in view.

Their shared life together is what is being referenced here. God understands and wants the people to understand from the beginning the power of Christian community to make God's truth and to make worship credible and attractive.

[51 : 23] that our shared life and worship is to draw attention to our God.

I was thinking about this in terms of baptizing people. Like over the years, thinking about people who've come for baptism. People from very different countries, very different backgrounds often. But one common feature of their stories, especially if they didn't have any Christian background at all, was coming around a church or coming around a group of Christian friends and receiving a welcome and seeing a different kind of love in operation and enjoying hospitality from people who were strangers just moments before.

And all of those things serving to give that sense of intrigue and a compelling quality then to the Bible that we read and spoke about, the Jesus that we spoke of as Savior.

There is something compelling about the shared life of God's people when we live God's way. And so he calls on his people to be a holy nation.

[52 : 43] Now recognize that that in one case is a fact. You will be a holy nation. New Testament letters speak of Christians as being saints, not something that happens when we die and we go up to heaven.

Saints today set apart from the world to belong to God in our relationship of love and response. That's fact. That's who we are as Christians.

It's fundamental to our identity, but it's also, at one and the same time, our mission. We're called to live out who we truly are. In a sense, verse 8 is the ideal.

Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded and the people responded, we will do everything the Lord has said. That's the ideal.

We know that Israel falls short. We know that we fall short, but the ideal is that we seek to live in joyful obedience so that others might see something of God in us, something of Christ in us.

[53 : 48] So when it comes to representing God, we have this wonderful privilege, but we also have responsibilities. Now, perhaps we're asking the question, well, what does it look like to be a holy nation?

We might understand that as concept, but how do we see it on the ground? That's why we need to turn to Leviticus 19. So turn with me in your Bible or your device to Leviticus 19, and let's see very briefly what representing God in all of life looks like according to this chapter.

It's a wonderful chapter and we read half of it, Bob read for us, half of it and it's a wonderful chapter because it's so remarkably diverse in its laws and we'll think about that in a moment, but it's governed by one great reality which is there in verse 1.

Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them, Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy. And that's then repeated in shorthand and perhaps as you read you noticed the number of times the verse would end, I am the Lord your God.

See it there in verse 3, each of you must respect your mother and father, you must observe my Sabbaths, I am the Lord your God. But then you can go to verse 4, verse 10, verse 12, verse 14, it's all the way through.

[55 : 14] What's the point? God is saying, keep these laws, do these things to reflect me. He's saying to his people, let my holiness shape your, our whole of life, holiness.

How can we go wrong when we think about the idea of holiness? holiness? Two ways I think we can easily go wrong is we can think holiness is for special Christians, some kind of special category, but not for a, might be for a monk, or it might be for a minister, but not me.

You might be tempted to think that. Holiness is for special people. Or we might think holiness is for special occasions. Well, we know Sunday is the Lord's day, that's a holy day, but maybe sometimes we struggle to think, well, how does that holiness work through Monday to Friday?

How does it work through my nine to five or life at school or university or in the family? How does holiness apply there? That's why Leviticus 19 is so important, because as we look at the details very briefly, we're going to notice that holiness isn't just for some people, for a special category, it's for every one of God's people.

Holiness is for every Christian, and holiness isn't just for Sunday. Holiness is for all of life. As Chris Wright puts it in his book, Old Testament Ethics for the People of God, holiness is thoroughly

practical, social, and very down to earth.

[56 : 58] Holiness was a community ethic with a wide range of implications. So what we're going to do is we're going to very briefly survey just how wide this idea of holiness goes in this chapter.

So let's think about how these various laws, and these aren't all the laws by any stretch, but these are various laws, how do they impact on society in the first place?

We could go to verse 11. Do not steal, do not lie, do not deceive one another. There is to be truth-telling within the community.

Verse 14, do not curse the deaf, or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. There is to be care and compassion for those with disabilities.

Verse 17, do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly, so that you will not share in their guilt. There is to be love within the community, a love that sometimes says hard things in order to draw a person back from sin.

[58 : 13] Verse 32, stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly, and revere your God. respect within society, respect for our elders is there.

Verse 34, the foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself. In light of the gospel, in light of God's saving grace, love those who come from other countries.

So when you see how wide-ranging this is, holiness applies to so many levels of society. Let's take a couple of examples as it applies to family.

Verse 3 gives us that command that heads up the second table of the law. Each of you must respect your mother and father.

Essential, family essential to society, and essential to good family living is respect and honor. But there's also reference to family in verse 29, a very different way.

[59 : 26] Do not degrade your daughter by making her a prostitute, or the land will turn to prostitution and be filled with wickedness. So God's people are to follow God's sexual ethic, not that of the surrounding countries.

There are laws about agriculture in here. Verse 9, When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field.

Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. As they went about their essential business, they were to be concerned for the weakest and the most vulnerable within society and to make provision for them.

Justice is mentioned in verse 15. Do not pervert justice, do not show partiality to the poor, or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

The idea that justice is to be blind. Now, we don't show favoritism on either side. What about business? Verse 35, do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight, or quantity.

[60 : 47] Use honest scales and honest weight. Integrity in business practices. Religion is in here as well.

Verse 3, you must observe my Sabbaths. Verse 4, do not turn to idols or make metal gods for yourselves. Verse 30, observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary.

So, religious life matters because God is holy, but so too does family life and business life and agriculture and life in society. All of life matters to God.

All of life is an opportunity to represent God. Holiness represents a morally consistent and good God.

God. So, in these values, we see honesty, we see compassion, we see truth-telling, justice for all, respect, generosity, care for the weak, racial equality, all of these reflecting the character of our God and all of them matter to God, all of these and more.

[61 : 55] and in that way then, we have so many opportunities in day-to-day life to bear witness to the character of God, to live for the glory of God, to recognize what a gift it would be to our workplace, to our school, to our family, to our community if we were to live out these holy lives as recognized here in Leviticus 19 and throughout God's Word.

And think about this as well. Think about what a difference it would make to your Monday morning if you were to get out of bed or to go out of the door recognizing I go as one of God's representatives. I have been called to be part of that kingdom of priests, to go to our work, to go into our day, to go onto our university campus saying I want to be a blessing to others and to be on the lookout for how that might happen.

I want to be able to speak God's Word to others just as the priest used to, to encourage a fellow Christian or to perhaps share with a non-Christian friend something that we've read in the Bible or something we were thinking about on Sunday.

Imagine what difference it would make if we went out praying day by day. I want to bring the hope of God's saving grace to someone. I want to have the chance to tell someone about the good news of Jesus.

[63 : 39] Can you imagine what difference it would make to our sense of purpose and mission, our sense of dependence on God, our prayerfulness, if we were to recognize that we're called to be that kind of ambassadors, to be those kingdom of priests, to be that holy nation.

So as we close, let me, I'm not a teacher so I'm going to invite you to do a homework assignment. Teachers don't usually invite you to do it. But imagine, go home tonight or find some time in the next few days by yourself, in your family, with a friend, read through Leviticus 19, ask yourself, what is the principle being taught here?

And how would this law apply to my 21st century context? Bearing in mind that holiness matters, and representing God well matters, how can I take these laws that reflect the heart of God to understand them in our context and then to prayerfully seek to live them out?

Why do that? Why take the time to do what would seem like a homework exercise? Because of our privilege. God's because it's a privilege to represent our holy God who saved us through Jesus. It's a privilege to be part of God's holy priesthood. But it's also a responsibility, a responsibility we want to do well for the honour of our God and for the sake of those around us.

[65 : 31] God says, be holy because I, the Lord, your God, am holy. Let's pray together. Lord, our God, we thank you for these passages that we have read and that reminder that you are a God who entered into covenant with your people, a covenant with grace.

And we thank you for the new covenant in the body and blood of Jesus given for us. Thank you for your saving and eternal commitment to love your church and to save your church.

And Lord, as you have called us, we ask that you would enable us to be that royal priesthood and that holy nation, that you would give us that sense of privilege and wonder, a joy in the gospel day by day.

But you'd also give to us that sense of responsibility, that we would be aware of our mission, of our calling, so that we would want to think about how to live holy lives for you, recognizing that we all have different families and friendship groups and different workplaces and different levels of responsibility.

responsibility. Lord, may you make each one of us wise to make the best use of our time and to be aware of you at work in the people around us and to see how you might use us for your kingdom and for your glory.

[67 : 16] And please help us together to endeavor to live those holy lives as we recognize that we are saved by your grace, we are united to the Lord Jesus and united to one another through faith.

We pray in his name. Amen. Now, we will close singing Psalm, the first nine verses of Psalm 105 together, and then we will sing by way of response, Speak, O Lord, and we'll stand together to sing. Give thanks to the Lord God and call on his name, his wonderful deeds to the nations proclaim, sing praises to him and his exploits record.

Let all those who seek him rejoice in the Lord. You chosen ones, look to the Lord and his might, seek ever his face and his wonders recite.

his miracles too, and his judgments divine. You children of Abraham, Jacob's own line.

[69 : 10] The Lord is our God, and he rules all the earth, remembering his covenant, the word he set forth.

He vowed for the ages to come to make good, his promise to Abraham, to Isaac, renewed.

faith and he and thy them come to you to receive the food of your holy word. Take your truth, plant it deep in us, shape and fashion us in your likeness, that the light of Christ might be seen today in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.

Speak, O Lord, and fulfill in us all your purposes for your glory.

Teach us, Lord, full obedience, holy reverence, true humility.

[71 : 18] Test our thoughts and our attitudes in the radiance of your purity.

Cause our faith to rise, cause Christ to see your majestic love and authority.

Words of power that can never fail, let their truth prevail over odd belief.

Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds. Help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.
Truths are changed from the dawn of time that will echo down through eternity.
[72 : 36] And by grace we'll stand on your promises. And by faith we'll walk as you walked with us.
Speak, O Lord, till your church is built and the earth is filled with your glory.
Say, O Lord, till your church is built and the earth is filled with your glory. Let's close with that
wonderful blessing from Aaron.
Amen. This is how you are to bless the Israelites. Say to them, the Lord bless you and keep you.
The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.
The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
[73 : 50] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.