

Leviticus 19: Just Be Holy

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[0 : 00] This morning in Leviticus chapter 19 simply this just be holy just be holy!

It's cited as one of the most memorable most successful advertisement campaigns in sports marketing history.

It's centered around just three words. Be like Mike. The Mike, of course, was NBA superstar legend Michael Jordan.

It was actually a Gatorade commercial whose ultimate goal was to get you to drink Gatorade because Michael Jordan drank Gatorade.

Various people in the commercial from all walks of life would come on and sing Sometimes I dream that he is me.

[1 : 10] You've got to see that's how I dream to be. I dream I move. I dream I groove like Mike. If I could be like Mike.

Part of the reason for the commercials success was because certainly at that time though there's some debate now with the younger generation, not with me.

But certainly at that time there was no doubt, no debate that Michael Jordan was the greatest basketball player of all time. Maybe the greatest athlete of all time.

So, it was an easy premise to promote because Mike's credentials, resume and accomplishments were unquestioned and unrivaled.

Who could not possibly want to be like Mike? Here in Leviticus chapter 19, there is one whose credentials, resume and accomplishments far exceed those of Michael Jordan.

[2 : 20] One whose qualifications and skill sets are unquestioned and unrivaled.

But here we find no pitch or campaign to drink Gatorade. No, here we find an appeal that will both govern and alter the course of one's life forever.

It's an appeal that would dictate how we live, how we walk and how we exist in this world.

It's found here in verse 2. Let me go ahead and give it to you right up front because it's the main idea of this entire text. You shall be holy for I, the Lord your God, am holy.

Let me break it down like this. I, the Lord your God, the greatest of all time, am holy. Be like me.

[3 : 22] Just be holy. Let me go. As Pastor Helm so powerfully and poignantly brought to our attention last week, these three chapters, 18, 19 and 20, really go together.

Pastor Helm discussed the bookends of chapters 18 and 20 last week, dealing with sexual immorality, its prohibitions and its punishments.

And what's placed in the middle of all that here today is chapter 19. And as with any great sandwich, regardless of the type of bread you use, whether it be white, wheat, rye, sourdough, it's really what's in the middle that brings it all together and gives the sandwich its identity.

It determines what that sandwich is all about and just how great that sandwich will be. I submit to you that on either side of today's chapter, you see the behavior of surrounding nations, Canaan and Egypt, and God warning Israel how not to live.

Don't live like this. Don't be like those nations. Then comes the meat in the middle of the sandwich.

[4 : 49] This is how I want you to live. You are to be different. You are to be set apart. This is about my holiness and my call and my command for you to be like me.

You can say it with me. Just be holy. Now when we think of holiness, we tend to think of moral purity and perfection.

And yes, I get that. But here in scripture, to be holy, more specifically means to be cut off, set apart, separate from everything else.

It means to be in a class of your own, distinct from anything that has ever existed or ever will exist. As it is applied to God, it describes God's apartness.

It puts him in a category all his own. He is the epitome, the very definition of holiness.

[5 : 59] He's so distinct. He's so different. He's so set apart from all his creation. Nothing compares to God.

Isaiah chapter 40 verse 25. To whom will you compare me or who is my equal, says the Holy One. Holy is the defining attribute of God.

And the most fundamental aspect of his character. Isaiah chapter six declares it. Revelations chapter four proclaims that holy, holy, holy.

In the English vernacular, exclamation points are used to emphasize the importance of something. In the Jewish vernacular, repetition is used. The best example may be when when Jesus would say truly, truly or verily, verily to drive his points home.

So if a repetition of two is equivalent to an exclamation point, then a repetition, repetition of three is equivalent to someone waving their arms and screaming at you.

[7 : 11] Of all God's attributes. Of all God's attributes. There's only one in the Bible where the repetition of three is used. Holy, holy, holy.

God is holy in every action. He's holy in justice. He's holy in love, grace and mercy.

He's holy in power. He's holy in wisdom. He's even holy in anger. God doesn't merely say I do holy. He says I am holy.

I'm going to let up off of this, but I need to make sure you get it and that his resume and credentials are clear. God is so holy that everything that is even connected to him is holy.

He is holy. His house was called a holy temple. His mountains, called a holy hill. His mercy seat was in a chamber, called the holy of holies, where he met with man, was called holy ground.

[8 : 16] His commands were called holy statutes. When the church got together, they were called holy assemblies. His book is called the Holy Scriptures and his people are called to be a holy nation.

I am the Lord your God. I am holy. Be like me. Just be holy. Our passage contains two primary commands.

Verse 2 and verse 18, both of which are taken up in the New Testament. It's essential that we understand these commands if we're to grasp the full force, this text.

We can do this by focusing our attention on just two major points. First is the necessity of holiness. And secondly is the nature of holiness.

The necessity and the nature. The necessity of holiness is found in the first primary commandment we've already been talking about. You shall be holy for I the Lord your God am holy.

[9 : 28] The necessity of holiness is seen by the fact that the entire nation of Israel is commanded to be holy. This necessity for holiness is picked up again in the New Testament in 1 Peter chapter 1, 15 and 16, quoting this same verse.

But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct. Since it is written, verse 2, you shall be holy for I am holy.

Thus, holiness for Israel, for you and for me is not an option but an imperative. Indeed, the call to holiness is not some optional incentive program mentioned in the very fine print at the bottom of the last page of your discipleship contract.

Rather, it's highlighted in bold print on the front page. Hear me, church. Hear me, church. Get this. Holiness is to spiritual life what health is to physical life.

Holiness speaks to the identity of every single believer. Why? Because if we are his children, then there are certain genetic traits, certain markers that should be on display.

[11 : 05] There are certain characteristics that should set us apart from everyone else. There are standards by which we should be living that lets the world know that we are his and we belong to him.

First Peter 2.9, but you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

Let me relate it this way. Young people growing up, especially as a teenager, and as I got older, there were seven words I used to hate to hear as I grew up.

Boy, you look just like your daddy. I hated it.

Used to dress different, talk different, act different. If he liked it, I hated it. I wanted to be my own man and have my own identity.

[12 : 25] I would say things like, I'll never treat my kids the way you treat me. And by the way, when I grow up, I'm never going to work every day at some church.

I get here to the office around 9 a.m. If anyone needs to reach out to me. Why did I spend so much time fighting for an identity that was never me in the first place?

Instead of just embracing who I was and who I was called to be. If you are a born again believer, then holy is not just who you're called to be.

It's who you are. Now your conduct just has to change to fit your identity. It's like marriage.

We were just talking about the workshop coming up. In a wedding ceremony, you become a husband or a wife. But the essence of the ceremony is your promise to be day by day what you become on the wedding day.

[13 : 40] You don't leave the ceremony and go back to living the way you did before you got married. You leave the ceremony vowing to be faithful to your spouse for better or worse.

For richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, forsaking all others until death do you part.

Likewise, when you accepted Christ, it was the beginning of a new relationship with God.

So you can't receive Christ, get baptized, join the church, and then go back to living the way you did before. You leave the waters of baptism vowing to be faithful to God for better or worse.

So God says that your necessary first and foremost response to his gracious gift of salvation is to live a holy life.

No, he didn't call you to be perfect in the world. But he did call you to be distinct from the world. Just be holy.

[14 : 56] Let me pull aside for a moment here and say that holiness only results from a right relationship with God. It's by believing in Jesus Christ the Savior and accepting his gift of eternal life.

You can, if you haven't, make that decision today. It's really, really good news. And I'm grateful because we are not called to change ourselves to become holy.

That would be an impossibility. But God changes us through the cross of Jesus Christ in order to grant to us the very righteous standing that his holiness requires.

Let me also caution you, Hebrews chapter 12 says, without it, without holiness, no one will see the Lord. When you think about it, this holiness manifesto in Leviticus chapter 19 sits at the center of the grand narrative of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Without the holiness of God, there would be no moral law to which every human being is responsible. Without the holiness of God, there would be no divine anger with sin.

[16 : 15] And there would be no perfect son sent as an acceptable sacrifice for sin. Without the holiness of God, there would be no vindication of the resurrection.

Without the holiness of God, there would be no hope of a new heaven and earth where holiness will reign over us forever. Yes, it really is true that the biblical story would not be the biblical story if it were not written and controlled at every point by the one who is holy all the time and in every way. It's the necessity of holiness. What I love about God is that he doesn't just command us to be holy, live holy, and then leave us by ourselves to figure it out.

He leaves blueprints throughout the rest of this chapter and indeed the rest of scripture as to what it's going to take, what is to be required, and what holiness looks like.

It leads us to the nature of holiness. As we look at these requirements, I initially need you to observe how he keeps the ultimate standard in front of them.

[17 : 42] Sixteen times in this passage, yes, I count it. He says, I am the Lord your God. I'm the reason and the why.

I'm the greatest of all time. I am the standard by which all things are measured. And if you start to lose your way, I'm your north star to help you find your way back.

As we look further at the nature of holiness, let me first say that to be holy requires obedience. Obedience.

Obedience to his commands. He begins by reiterating some of what they already know. In verses 3, 4, and 11, he reminds them to honor your mother and father.

Lord, if I had a dollar for every time I had to quote that commandment. He tells them to keep the Sabbath. Don't turn to idols. Don't steal.

[18 : 48] Don't deal falsely or lie to one another. Don't swear by my name falsely. All classic chart-topping hits from Moses and the Ten Commandments. In Exodus chapter 20.

This repetition, however, continues in verses 5 through 8. With the ceremonial law pertaining to peace offerings that was prescribed earlier back in Leviticus chapter 7.

Right now would be a great place for me to remind you and reiterate something Pastor Helm said last week. That is the difference between these ceremonial laws, some of which reflected the culture at the time, now done away with because they are fulfilled in Christ Jesus, and moral laws that are ongoing, perpetual, universal, and are yet relevant today.

That being said, even for some of those ceremonial cultural laws, we must not miss the foundational principles underlying them that still speak to us today.

We find that, for instance, in verses 9 and 10, where farmers were told not to completely harvest their fields so that the poor and needy could come and glean the remains for themselves.

[20 : 17] This was one of the public assistance programs in Israel, and it's exactly what Ruth was doing when Boaz noticed her. Though most of us are not farmers gleaning in the fields, the underlying principle is about compassion for the poor and making provision for those who are in need.

It's part of what our deacons fund here at Christ Church is all about, and it is a reflection of holiness. There are quickly more examples of this you'll see in this passage, from not mixing cattle breeds in verse 19, to not eating meat with blood in it in verse 26, to not giving yourself a fade haircut in verse 27, to no cuts or tattoos on your body in verse 28, and please, please do not call the psychic network for advice in verse 31.

The underlying principle was and is about God wanting his people to be different than the culture. He wanted them to be separate, to be distinct.

Hear me, church. The imprint of the culture shouldn't be on the church. The imprint of the church should be on the culture.

That's the nature of holiness. To be set apart by God's grace for God's purpose, following God's commands.

[21 : 54] To be holy requires obedience. However, secondly, and most emphatically, in verse 18, we see that holiness is practiced by loving one's neighbor as one's self.

I mentioned earlier that there were two primary commands here in chapter 19. One, the command to be holy, and the other here, often called the golden rule, to love your neighbor as yourself. So critical is this command that the Gospel of Matthew quotes it directly in chapter 22, verse 39, when he calls it one of the two great commandments upon which depends all the law and the prophets.

The holiness of God is demonstrated by his people as they love their neighbors. Well, who is my neighbor?

I'm so glad you asked. I believe you see the answer beautifully interwoven throughout this very chapter. It's the poor and the traveler in verse 10.

[23 : 05] It's your fellow brother and sister in verses 11 through 13 and 15 through 16. It's the weak and the vulnerable in verse 14. It's your enemy in verses 17 through 18.

It's the oppressed in verse 20. It's the senior saint and the older person in verse 32. It's the stranger in verse 33. It's the business person you do business with every day.

In verse 35. One's neighbor is not necessarily the person who looks like you. It's not the person who shares your background or the person you are most comfortable being around.

You do not find your neighbor by looking in the mirror. You find your neighbor by looking out the window.

And God has called us to holiness by being a reflection of his love to all those we meet along our path.

[24 : 08] The phrase as yourself is really a presupposition. We do love ourselves.

Yes, we do. We love ourselves enough to get up in the morning, find us some food, find provision for us to take care of ourselves in every way to meet our needs.

If we get sick, we're doing whatever we can to figure out how to get better. We're just naturally wired to care for ourselves. Brother Doug, famous former NFL wide receiver Terrell Owens used to say in all his post-game interviews, I love me some me.

Well, the revolutionary command of God here is that you need to love you some neighbors just like that. Let me be clear.

This doesn't mean that we must love ourselves before we can love anyone else. This is not about self-worth or self-esteem or self-identity.

[25 : 17] What it means is that in the same way we care for ourselves and are concerned about our own interests, we should take care and have concern about the interests of others.

Now that's the nature of holiness. Church, despite all these commands, laws, admonitions, the message of Leviticus 19 is really one of hope.

It's really a positive one, not a negative one. For you see, the holiness of God decimates our autonomy and self-sufficiency and drives us to the Savior who alone is able by his life and death to unite unholy people to a holy God.

God reveals his holiness to us, not as a warning that we should run from him, but as a welcome for us to run to him, where weak and failing sinners always find grace that lasts forever.

My friends, that's good news. I said, that's good news. So let me encourage you today to just be holy.

[26 : 51] Not because we're desperately trying to get to heaven, but because we are filled with delight over the fact that we're already on our way to heaven. Just be holy because we are born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

Just be holy because we have an imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance that is kept for us in heaven.

Just be holy because we love Jesus even though we haven't even seen him. Just be holy because we enjoy the grace of God that even the angels long to understand.

I, the Lord your God, am holy. Be like me. Just be holy.

Let's pray together. Holy, holy, holy are you. Lord God Almighty, thank you for being our standard bearer.

[27 : 58] Thank you for being our example. God continue to cover us, equip us as we strive to be more like you, as we strive to be holy.

May in everything we do, we bear the mark of Christ on us for all the world to see. May we follow your command to be holy.

May we follow your command to display that holiness by loving our neighbors as ourselves. Father, we thank you and we praise you.

Thank you for being our sacrifice. And thank you for your holiness. We give you praise in your son's name we pray.

Amen.