

Why Christians don't live like anyone else

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Preacher: Brady Owens

[0 : 00] If you open your Bibles to Leviticus chapter 19, while you're turning there, we've been on a journey through Leviticus and this is the end.

We have chapter 17 through 27 to do, but we won't do all of those this morning. Instead what we're going to do is much of what you find in 17 through 27, it's called The Holiness Code and what we're going to do is take chapter 19 as like a test case, like a case study and we're going to kind of walk through how do we read the law.

How as a Christian can I read this and in the process I'm hoping that we'll understand why is it that we don't live like everybody else? We don't live like everybody else because we seek to obey what God has commanded.

And so hopefully as we walk through this, you will have, because that's been my purpose, right? My purpose has been that you have some handles that when you go back and read Leviticus starting at the beginning of the year and you start to get bogged down next time because it's so hard to read through when you do your year through the reading thing, you'll have some handles that help you so that you're not afraid to go read it.

You'll know what you're getting into. And so I think that this will help with the rest of the book as well. So we'll just read verse one and two this morning and then we'll pray and we'll get going.

[1 : 33] Verse one of Leviticus 19 says this, and the Lord spoke to Moses saying, speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, you shall be holy for I, the Lord, your God am holy.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word and we do pray that you would help us to grasp and understand what is here. You would help us to have tools to know how to handle and to read your word in the future and that you would use it to convict us of our sin, to challenge us about where we are and how we live, but also father, that you would convict sinners that without you, they're lost and they would turn their heart and their life towards you.

And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen. So there's a lot of different attitudes towards the law of God. And when I say law of God, I mean it in kind of the broadest sense of the term.

There are many who would tell us that we need to shun it or we just need to ignore it. We're New Testament Christians. Why are we reading the Old Testament? Why are we reading the law? We don't really need the law.

And to some degree, there's kind of a good reason that some people say that, right? Because there is a sense in which you can take the law the wrong way and become legalistic.

[2 : 57] And there's even this verse from Paul the Apostle in Romans chapter 6 verse 14, where he says, For sin will have no dominion over you, since you're not under law but under grace.

Now my sermon is not to explain this, but this doesn't mean what you think it means. But a lot of people will read this and then say to themselves, See, we don't need to have the law of God in our lives at all.

But that is not what Paul means because in the very next chapter, Paul writes this in chapter 7. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous, and good.

So obviously, Paul doesn't think that the law is something to be jettisoned, thrown away, and never looked at as a Christian. It is something that we should be aware of.

And I think for us to really grasp and have a distinctive life from the world, in order for us to have a grasp and understand how to use God's law, we need to understand three things about it.

[3 : 55] We need to understand the basis of the law, we need to understand the nature of the law, and we need to understand the purpose of the law. Let's talk about the basis of the laws.

I want you to understand that the basis of the law is relationship. The basis of the law is relationship. God does not give these laws to Israel in order to set them free from Egypt. As a matter of fact, in this chapter, chapter 19, he uses the term, I am the Lord, capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D.

I am Yahweh. He uses that 15 times in the chapter. And what he's doing is he's helping them remember that he is the covenant-keeping God.

He is the covenant-keeping God who made covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and that they are people still under covenant, and he has a relationship with them.

[4 : 54] But he doesn't just stop with 15 times, I am the Lord. Ten times in this chapter, he refers to himself as your God.

Not only am I the Lord, but I am your God. I am the Lord, your God. And so he brings in this personal relationship that he has with these people that they ought to obey these commandments because of the personal relationship that he has with them.

But he says more than that. In verse 36 of this chapter, he says this, You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hen.

I am the Lord, your God. Who brought you out of the land of Egypt? Bringing them out of the land of Egypt was a redemptive act.

He brought them out of Egypt as he destroyed the enemy and covered them with the blood and rescued them from that slavery. That is the redemptive act.

[6 : 02] The cross of Christ is the ultimate redemptive act, but it follows the pattern because we look to Christ whose blood covers us so that the death angel passes over us, right?

So what I'm saying is this, is that the law was never, the law has never, the law will never be able to earn us salvation, and God did not intend for his people to earn something, salvation, from him by obedience to the law.

He gave them the law because they were his children already. They were his children already. We are to do the things that God has commanded, not in order to earn our salvation, but in gratitude for our salvation.

I was trying to think about this and coming up with a way to help us understand this distinction between the law and the gospel. Right?

And it sounds like a simple thing to think about, but the problem is this, is that we understand gospel kind of by itself, but when the law comes in, many people get confused about what do we do with this thing?

[7 : 19] What do we do with this thing called the law? So I just wanted to see if I could give an analogy, and I just have to say up front, the analogy might break down, so don't press it too hard. Just sort of get my point, and let's go from there, right?

And I want you just to imagine that the difference between the law and the gospel is the difference between a river and a raft. Between a river and a raft.

If the river that you see, it's one that you must get to the end of it because it leads you to the pleasing of God's city, right? I'm borrowing from Bunyan some weird idea here, but the river leads you to the city of pleasing God, but if this river is so deep, it is so fast, it's so moving, that as you walk up to it, you can even see in your own reflection that you can't get into this river and survive. If you get into this river to try to get to the city, it's going to kill you. So what you need is a raft, and when you get on the raft, then you can go down this river, but the thing is is that getting in the raft does not all of a sudden make the river disappear.

It's not as though you get into a raft in the middle of the desert. You get in the raft on the river so that you can make it to where you need to go. You see, the law is not intended to help us get to God, but it's intended to help us see that we're in danger and we need to be rescued by Christ, who then, because He rescues us, still helps us to get where we were supposed to go all along, and that is a perfect law righteousness being in the presence of God, being able to say with the psalmist, who can ascend the hill of the Lord, only those with clean hands?

[9 : 06] Well, now I have clean hands because I'm in Christ, and I'm still supposed to get down the river to where He wants me to go. Now, I don't know if that will help you or not, but for me, that's a helpful analogy because it's not as though once the gospel comes, the river dries up, and there's therefore no law anymore.

We are still supposed to obey God, and I understand the people who say, well, I don't like to say we must obey God or we have to obey God. I like to say that we get to obey God, and I get the heart behind that, but there is no way to sugarcoat this.

These are commandments from God, and He expects His children to obey. It would be much like your own children, saying, you know, listen, children, you get to obey me. And are they happy about that, little sinners that they are?

No, they want to do their own thing. But yet, does that mean then that you don't require them to obey that? No, you do require them to obey that. But did they have to obey that to become your children?

No, they obey it because they are your children. They obey it because they are. Well, that's the basis of the law. The basis of the law is the relationship we have, the redemption relationship we have with God.

[10:29] Let's talk about the nature of the laws, and this will probably take us longer than all three points. You know, this is the longest point of all three of them. So let's talk about the nature of the laws written in the Old Testament.

There are three kinds of laws in the Old Testament. Theologians have talked about this for years. There is ceremonial, judicial, and moral.

Ceremonial, judicial, and moral. And let me define each one of these for you, and then we'll go back and talk about each one. A ceremonial law is always pertaining to the worship that Israel has.

It's their worship of God. It involves the tabernacle, the sacrifices, the priest, several other things, right? The feast days, on and on. That's the ceremonial law.

It's about Israel's worship. The judicial law were laws that pertain to Israel as a theocratic state. They were a governing authority.

[11:33] God was their king. They needed to know how to live as God, as direct king in their nation, and therefore they had judicial laws that told them how society should function, punishments for people who committed crimes, as well as what daily life ought to look like in that society.

Then there are moral laws. Moral laws are, for all people of all times, at all places, they're universal. Universal laws for all people of all times, of all cultures, no matter what.

The moral laws are always applicable. Now those are the three categories, okay? And one of the things you'll find about the categories as you read through the Old Testament is that sometimes one law will be spoken and it actually has bits and pieces of a ceremonial and judicial because maybe you break some sort of ceremony and therefore you're cast out from the people.

You get this punishment. So there is a bit of overlap. So this is not a clean, precise way of saying it, but this is the way theologians have talked about it for hundreds of years. So let's just use this in order to help you as you read through this to navigate reading the Old Testament.

Let's talk about these ceremonial laws, for example. A ceremonial law was then, again, about the worship of Israel, the tabernacle, the sacrifices, the feast days. Here in Leviticus 19, you could turn to verse 5 and 8 and you could talk about the peace offering.

[13:08] You could look at 21 and 22 and talk about the ram offering. You could look at verse 3 and verse 30 and see that the Sabbath is brought up because on one hand, the Sabbath is a moral law and on the other hand, the Sabbath is also a ceremonial law.

See, it's a little bit messy, okay? But that's all right. You'll be fine. Trust me, okay? But those are examples of ceremonial laws. And the thing about ceremonial laws is that ceremonial laws have been fulfilled.

They have been fulfilled. Ceremonial laws were shadow that pointed to substance. They were prophecies that predicted a future. They were promises that looked towards something to come. That's why as we've preached through Leviticus and we've talked about the sacrifices, we end up pointing to Christ. And when we talk about the priest, we point to Christ because these things are shadow and Christ is the substance.

As a matter of fact, we know that this is the case because the entire book of Hebrews in the New Testament tells us this. Go read Hebrews if you want to really start to understand this concept.

[14:18] But also in Matthew's gospel, Mark's gospel, the veil of the temple was torn from top to bottom there in that temple helping us understand that the ceremonial laws have now been fulfilled and are no longer applicable for us to obey as written.

I said that as carefully as I could. We'll come back to that in a second. Another place that you see it is in the book of Acts where Peter has a dream of all these unclean animals dropped down from a sheet that told him it was okay for you to not only eat these unclean things but also to be with these Gentiles, these unclean Gentiles and fellowship with them now.

Right? And so what you have then is you have the ceremonial laws as written for Israel in their context are no longer things that we have to obey or that we're even supposed to obey because they point forward to Christ.

Does it mean we don't have a sacrifice? No, we have a sacrifice. Who is that sacrifice? Christ Jesus. That's right. We don't have a priest anymore, right? No, we do have a priest.

Who's our priest? Christ Jesus. We don't have feast days anymore. Who is our feast day? Jesus Christ. Do you see what I'm saying? So here's then a couple of things for you.

[15:46] If you're reading along in the Bible and you say to yourself, oh, ceremonial law, but what am I supposed to do with this? Let me give you four questions to ask about this passage so that you can learn how to read this for yourself.

Okay? This is what's on the handout. So if you didn't get a handout, nana nana boo boo. Okay? All right, here we go. If you come across ceremonial law, then what should you do?

Well, here's the questions you need to ask. Number one, what exactly was Israel commanded to do? What exactly was Israel commanded to do? And sometimes that means you don't just read the one passage that you're in, but you need to go look at parallel passages to see what they were commanded to do.

Question number two, what lessons were Israel supposed to learn? What lessons was Israel supposed to learn? There were lessons that that activity was supposed to teach them, and they were supposed to learn these lessons.

You need to figure out what those lessons are. This is not lessons you're supposed to learn just yet. This is about Israel. Don't put yourself into it just yet. The third question is, how does Jesus Christ fulfill those lessons?

[17:02] How does he fulfill those lessons? And sometimes you're going to find passages of Scripture in the New Testament that tell you precisely the connection, and sometimes there's going to be passages in the New Testament that hint at what that relationship is, but you want to know what they had to do, what the lessons were, how Jesus fulfilled that, and the final thing is this.

When it's not clear, even after looking at these questions, don't worry about it. What? I'm saying don't worry about it.

Not everything in the Word of God is equally clear to all people, and it could be that at the moment that you're reading that, it's not meant to be clear to you in that moment because God in His providence is overruling it, and it's just not clear to you in that moment.

Don't fret. Put it over here in the box that says, I don't understand yet, and just keep at it, and in time, God will reveal to you as you need that because here's the thing.

This one thing you don't understand right there, there's about 99% of other things that's super clear, and don't get caught up on something you can't understand, and forget about all the stuff that you can't understand.

[18:16] Do you understand what I'm saying? Because, you know, you get locked in going like, what are the ashes of a red heifer, and what are the ashes of a red heifer, and you just keep asking this question over and over again, and I'm just going to look at you and say, yeah, love your neighbor as yourself.

Go there because I'm not sure anybody knows what the ashes of a red heifer do. Do you understand? All right. That's ceremonial laws. Let's talk about judicial laws.

Judicial laws, sometimes called civil laws, are for Israel as a theocratic state in matters of government, daily living, the structure of society as ruled by God himself.

In chapter 19, there's several examples. You were supposed to not glean all of your crops, but leave the edges in verses 9 and 10, the wages for a hired person couldn't stay in your possession all night long, verse 13.

You're not supposed to show partiality in court cases to either the poor or the rich, verse 15. You're not supposed to interbreed your cattle, verse 19. There was no death penalty for certain sex acts, verse 20 and 21.

[19:30] You were to stay away from witchcraft, verse 26 and 31, and you're to honor older people, verse 32. Just examples of how life was supposed to be lived as a theocratic state.

So, what do we as Christians do with these judicial laws? Because we do not live in a theocracy. We just don't.

Does that mean that we don't have to listen to any of these things? No. There is good for us here. But because the theocratic state of Israel no longer exists, then these laws cannot be obeyed precisely as written.

So, we've got to understand how do we read them? And let me give you a couple of questions. Number one. I think my questions are different from the handout.

This is the newest version. Those are old. Is this really a judicial law? Right? So, you just need to kind of look at it because there are some laws that are a little kind of like, well, I don't know.

[20 : 37] Is this ceremonial? Because there's some confusion there. So, just make sure it's a judicial law. That's the first thing. Second thing. Which of the Ten Commandments does it trace back to? So, for example, I gave you this example a while ago.

Leave some of the crops for the poor to gather. Right? Verse 9 and 10. What is that? What is this idea of this leaving the crops there?

What Ten Commandments would that trace back to? I can think of two possibilities. Number one, it could be that of not stealing. And number two, it could be that of do not murder.

Okay? So, trace it back to a Ten Commandment. Look for the Ten Commandment that it seems to trace to. Then, understand the heart of this commandment. What is the heart of the commandment of not gleaning all of your crops?

It's so, when those who are either sojourning or poor, who have no ability to provide for themselves, they can come along your field and they can pick up what's left and they can be fed.

[21 : 36] In other words, it's a way for you to give to those who are in need. That's the heart of that command. Well, now all of a sudden, you can kind of trace it again back to both the stealing as well as the murder commandment because the murder commandment is all about protecting life.

The stealing commandment, you can go to Ephesians chapter 4 and find out that we're not supposed to steal, but instead, we're supposed to work with our hands so that we have something to give to others. So, when you look at that judicial command, you can get something out of it by understanding the Ten Commandment that it goes to and the heart of that particular commandment and then looking at the modern day parallel, how would we glean our fields because I'm not sure that most of us have fields that if we gleaned them, anybody would want to eat anything off of it. And so, what do we do? Well, we have ways that we can give just like with the Hurricane Helena Fund, right? That's a way that we can give. And I'm sure you could come up with a hundred different ways right here in the local area where you could give and meet the requirement of that. So, that's the judicial law. The final one is the moral law. The moral law. Moral laws are laws that are true at all times and all places for all people without qualification.

These are things we must obey. I'll give you a couple of examples out of chapter 19. Verse 3, you're to revere your father and your mother. There's not a qualification on that.

[23 : 14] You're to revere them. Verse 4, do not turn to idols or make for yourself gods. Verse 13, you shall not oppress your neighbor or rob from him. Verse 15, you're not supposed to pervert justice in the court system.

Verse 16, you shall not go around as a slanderer. Verse 17, you shall not hate your brother in your heart. I just want to pause there for a second and just, just what an amazing statement out of the law.

don't hate your brother in your heart. It's not talking about an external thing. It's talking about an internal thing because Old Testament religion is heart religion.

You just got to remember that. Verse 18, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Does that ring a bell? That's the second great commandment, Jesus says.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself. This is the moral law. The moral law of God is summarized in the Ten Commandments. And the reason that we say that the Ten Commandments are special, the reason we say the Ten Commandments are a summary of the law, the reason that we hold up the Ten Commandments as something wonderful and great is because of all the things that are written in the law of God, these are the only ten things written by the very finger of God himself.

[24 : 37] These are the only commandments written by God included in the Ark of the Covenant. These Ten Commandments repeated completely in the New Testament, these are the summary of the moral law.

And as the moral law, it represents the nature of God, right? We're to have no other gods before him because he's a jealous God. We should not murder because he's the God of life. We should not bear false witness because he's the God of truth.

We should not have any form of adultery because he's a faithful God. We should not be stealing because he is a God who provides.

The moral law represents the very nature of God and the moral law is what is written on the heart of believers when you become a Christian.

In Jeremiah chapter 31 verse 33, God speaking through the prophet Jeremiah predicts the new covenant to come when he says, For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord.

[25 : 47] I will put my law within them and I will write it on their hearts. You see, in the old covenant, he wrote the law on stone tablets.

That law is not different because it goes from stone to heart. It's the same law. And when we come to the Lord's table and when we take the cup, that cup is the blood of the covenant.

It's the cup of the new covenant meaning that by the blood of Christ, he purchased for us the promise that God makes to write the law on our heart so that we might be able to obey him.

So then, what do we do with this moral law as Christians? When we come across it and particularly in the Ten Commandments, let me just suggest three things to you and then we'll move on. One, you need to use the moral law, the Ten Commandments as a light.

As a light. And as a light, it sheds light on the nature and character of God. It helps you understand who he is. It helps you understand what he loves so that you can love what he loves.

[27 : 05] Secondly, we need to use it as a map. And as a map, it guides us and tells us how we ought to live and walk in this world so that we can please him. And third, we need to use it as a mirror.

And as a mirror, we look in the law of God and we see ourselves and we should have conviction of sin because we see that we are not doing as we ought to and that then ought to drive us back to the cross, back to Christ.

So there you have the nature of the laws and the final thing is the purpose of the laws. And the purpose of the laws, there's two purposes here in Leviticus chapter 19. In verse 2, you see the purpose of being holy.

Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, you shall be holy for I the Lord your God am holy. Now that is not something that's just for Israel. Peter, in his first epistle, which we'll be looking at beginning next week, he says, he quotes this verse and says, as Christians, we ought to be holy because God is holy.

This holiness is supposed to pervade every area of the life of the Israelite. If they're to obey God in order to be holy, then this touches everything in their life.

[28 : 26] There are laws about sex, laws about slaves, laws about your garden, laws about your feelings, laws about the sojourner, laws about all kinds of things. And so every area of life is to be holy before the Lord.

So you and I as a Christian, there's not a single area of your life that is to be holy and another one not holy. It's not as though Sunday is the holy day, but now you've got Monday through Saturday to do what you want to.

There's an old hymn book. It's called The Heavenly Highway Hymns. It has a song in it called Ain't It a Shame? And that song, Ain't It a Shame, says, Ain't it a shame to work on Sunday when you've got Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday.

Then the second verse says, Ain't it a shame to joyride on Sunday? I'm not so sure what's wrong with joyriding, but somebody had a problem with it. When you've got Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. And then it goes on to say, Ain't it a shame to lie on Sunday?

Ain't it a shame to gossip on Sunday? When you've got Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday. And the truth of the matter is, is that most of us believe that's the way it is.

[29 : 42] And the way I know that most of us believe that is because anytime somebody gets around the pastor and they let something slip, they're always apologizing. It's like, Listen, I'm nothing. I'm just another sinner like you.

Like, you know, it's God that you need to talk to. You miss a Sunday and it's like, you know, okay, well, it's the Holy Day. I miss that. It's like, yeah, but you can come every Sunday all you want to, but if you, on Monday through Saturday, just live for yourself, you understand what I'm saying? This holiness is to pervade all of our lives and it is the goal of redemption. What is the Baptist verse? You know what the Baptist verse is?

Ephesians 2, 8 and 9. For by grace you've been saved through faith. And this, not of yourselves, is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast. Our salvation's not by our work whatsoever.

That's the Baptist verse. Praise God for the Baptist verse. But look at verse 10. For we are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus for good works, which he prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

[30 : 56] Beloved, good works are when we obey God. When we obey God. I don't get to decide what is a good work for you. A good work for you is not you wearing your Christian t-shirt, listening to your Christian music, driving your Christian car with your Christian gas, headed on a Christian road to some Christian event.

That's not a good work. God never commanded us to do that, but he has commanded me to love my wife the way Christ loved the church. He has commanded my wife to submit to her husband as unto the Lord.

He's commanded me to not provoke my children, but to raise them in the instruction and the admonition of the Lord. He's commanded me to not steal and to not be greedy. He's commanded me to not murder and to get angry and have this murderous anger about people.

He's commanded me to protect life in these ways. He's commanded me to be faithful to my marriage. He's commanded me, do you understand what I'm saying? That living out these commandments is the good work that God has prepared for us to do.

And we grow in holiness by actively obeying God's law. Look at Matthew 5, 19 and 20 and I'm almost done, I promise.

[32 : 10] Jesus is speaking. He says, whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven.

Now that's enough to help us understand that the law of God is important. If you denigrate these laws, you will be considered least in the kingdom of heaven.

He goes on, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. Verse 20, why? For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and the Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

You see, none of us will ever enter the kingdom of heaven unless we have a law-perfect righteousness of our own. And when you and I are, when we become Christians, right before we become Christians, this is our hard, black, hating God heart.

And when we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, He covers us with that law-perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. He declares that righteousness is ours.

[33 : 17] We have that righteousness we need to go and be in the kingdom of heaven with the Father right there in that moment. And the rest of my life is meant to be sanctified and conformed to the image of Christ.

And that image is going to be law-perfect righteousness. So I'm not obeying to get something. I'm obeying because I have something. And the more that we obey Him, the more we grow in holiness. Without obedience to Him and His word, we cannot grow in holiness. The second reason for the law is to be kind.

To be kind. Leviticus chapter 19, verse 18. And you shall not take vengeance or bear grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Your neighbor is anyone that you come in contact with starting with your family and working out in concentric circles. You should love your family and you should love your community in your church and you should love to the ends of the earth.

[34 : 43] And to love them means obeying the commandments. You know, the Ten Commandments have two tables. The first table of the law is our relationship with God. The second table of the law is our relationship with one another.

So I am loving my neighbor as myself when I honor my father and mother and I honor all authority. I'm loving my neighbor as myself when I protect life and promote the protection of life.

I'm loving my neighbor as myself when I promote the sanctity of marriage, when I act faithfully in my marriage, when I pursue faithfulness in your marriage and when we all pursue purity for all, we are loving our neighbor as ourself.

When we refuse to be greedy but recognize that God has blessed us with what he's blessed us in order for us to share the world's goods with them, we are loving our neighbor as ourself.

When we speak the truth about others and when we speak the truth in love, when we refuse to spread unsubstantiated Facebook posts, whoops, when we refuse to do that, then we are loving our neighbor as ourself.

[35 : 52] When we are satisfied and pleased with all that the Lord has given us and we don't become jealous of what someone else has, we are loving our neighbor as ourself.

And if you're not a Christian, you will never get to God by trying your best to do these things. Because trying your best to do these things is jumping in the river to your death. But because of Christ and what he's done, we rest in him as he takes us down the river, gives us that righteousness we need, and gets us all the way there as he conforms us to his image. May we love the law of God, may we use it properly, and may God be praised. Let's pray.