

Holiness in Everything

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 April 2024

Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] We'd be grateful that you could turn back in your Bibles to chapter 19 of Leviticus, page 118. There's also an outline in your bulletins, which we'll need later on.

Well, once King Charles was crowned, there were portraits and pictures of him done. Some represented him better than others. This one was a little bit mean. He's got big shoes to fill with his mother.

I think he fills the weight of that one. But it represents him better than the next one where it was given as a children's activity. And now that's supposed to be King Charles.

Does it look anything like him? It doesn't, does it? It doesn't represent him at all. Of course, there are some official portraits of him that were presented to the world, like this painting. Now, this is a more accurate representation of him, isn't it?

Well, today's chapter begins with a command to be holy as God is holy. In other words, where to be a living portrait of God reflects his likeness to the world.

[1 : 13] And this command is at the center of chapters 18 to 20. As I said, we should be up to chapter 18. And when you look at it, it's got a phrase that keeps going over.

Do not have sexual relations with it. I'm not skipping over it. I'll come back to it next week. But because of the structure, which is actually this, these chapters all talk about living holy lives. But chapters 18 and 20 are similar. It says, by not following the nations, lest you be vomited out of the land. And it's the same idea in chapter 20. The one difference is chapter 20 adds some punishments as well.

Whereas chapter 19 has by following. So it doesn't have just do not do this. It also have commands to do things, to follow God's commandments. And this structure kind of highlights this chapter as the central one.

And that's because it has the central command for all these chapters, which is point one, verse one, be holy in all you do.

[2 : 20] This has stopped working for a reason. So can you just go to the next slide? Thanks. So verse one, 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.

And notice here God adds the word entire assembly. Unlike chapters 18 and 20, if you look at the beginning of those chapters, it just says say to the Israelites. But here he says say to the entire assembly of the Israelites.

It's as though he wants to make sure that every single person hears this central command, which is to be holy. In fact, the way it's written in the Hebrew, the original Hebrew is a bit like Yoda from Star Wars.

You know how Yoda speaks in Star Wars? It's literally holy. You shall be for holy. I am. It puts the word holy at the beginning of each phrase for emphasis.

Because this is the overarching command for all three chapters. Be holy. Why? Well, it says in verse two, doesn't it?

[3 : 32] Because God is holy. Israel was to reflect God's holiness. You see, be a living portrait of God and represent him to the world.

And so what I want to do now is there's so many laws here. We're not going to work through them one by one. I want to give you the big picture and then we'll work through a couple by way of examples.

And so firstly, the idea of representing God's character to the world was always God's purpose. And when God created people, he made them on the next slide from Genesis 1 in his own image, his own likeness.

So even from creation, people were to represent his character, his loving rule in this case, to the world. And then when he saved Israel from Egypt, it was for the same purpose.

So, yep, next slide on Exodus 19. God rescues them, carries them on eagle's wings from Egypt to himself. And then says in verse six, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

[4 : 45] And a priest, of course, is someone who is represented people to God and helped people come to God, enjoy life with God. In Leviticus, the priests did this by performing all those sacrifices we saw last year.

And there was lots of them, weren't there? Or even like the Day of Atonement last week. But here the whole nation are priests. And the way they are to represent people, help the nations come to God and enjoy life with God was by being a holy nation.

That's why those two phrases go together. The way they are a kingdom of priests is by being a holy nation. Because they will reflect God's holy, good character to the world.

The world would see it and be attracted to it and come to God and enjoy life with God. I think I might have told you before that we've had a family. I think this was just before COVID.

We had a family who were from another religion, but they moved here to Doncaster and they came to our church just to see what it was like. And they noticed the way that we treated each other in a warm and loving way.

[5 : 54] We reflected God's love for each other. And so they stayed and they were attracted. They heard more about the gospel and became Christians. The whole family was baptized.

You see, the purpose of being holy is to reflect God's character to the world. That they might be attracted to God, come to God and enjoy life with God.

And this helps us to see the focus of holiness here. You see, the basic meaning, as it says on the screen, holy means being set apart, distinct or different from all others.

That's the basic broad meaning of holiness. And it can apply to not just people and places, but even things like books.

So the word Bible means book. That's what it actually means, book. But if you look at your pew Bibles, what word is in front of the word Bible? Holy.

[6 : 56] Because this particular book is set apart. It's distinct from every other book or novel or history guide or whatever it is.

Because this book is God's book. It's God's word. That's why we put holy in front of it. It's set apart as distinct from all other books. Holy means to be set apart, distinct, different from all others.

And it can be applied to things or places or people. And of course, to God. God is holy in every aspect of his character. He is set apart from all others.

There is none like him. He is in a class of his own. But at this point, Israel particularly saw his distinctness, his holiness, in terms of his power.

There was no other God that could perform those plagues in Egypt. The Egyptian magicians tried, you might remember, but they just couldn't keep up. No other God could part the Red Sea.

[7 : 59] He was distinct, set apart from all other gods in power. But also, on the next slide, in purity. They were starting to see just how morally pure and good God is.

How sinless he is. It's why they needed so many sacrifices, wasn't it? Because they were sinful and he was so pure, so good.

And so, so far, Israel is beginning to see God's holiness in terms of his power and purity, his greatness and goodness. That there's no one quite like him.

He's set apart from all others in these aspects. And these laws here in chapters 18 to 20, not only taught them to be holy in general terms, that is, to be set apart, distinct, different from all the nations.

But also in moral terms. To be pure and good like God. It's why we often associate holiness with purity and goodness.

[9 : 03] If you ask someone on the street down Doncaster Road or something what holy means, most people would say, if they knew anything, would say, oh, it means to be good or pure, something like that.

And the reason we often associate it with that is because that's the aspect that God particularly wants Israel to reflect to the world. His goodness and purity that the world might see God's good character come to God and enjoy life with God.

And the motivation to be holy is because God has saved them and made them holy. So as we saw in Exodus 19 on the next slide, God saved them from Egypt.

You might remember by the blood of a Passover lamb and then he carried them to himself. They did nothing except complain, actually. And then he made them holy in terms of setting them apart as his treasured possession.

Distinct from all other nations. Only they were his treasured possession, his special people. Here is a privileged position.

[10:15] And it came with a special relationship, a covenant relationship, where they got to enjoy God's blessings and even call God by name.

Yahweh. Which in your Bibles is represented by Lord in capitals. In fact, I don't know if you picked it up when I was reading, but the phrase, I am the Lord, or I am the Lord your God, is repeated throughout the chapter.

In fact, 16 times it's repeated. And at the end of verse 36, right at the end of the chapter, God adds, I am the Lord who brought you out of Egypt.

You see, the fact that he saved them from Egypt, the fact that he is the Lord their God, they can call him by name, Yahweh. They have a privileged position. He's meant to motivate them to live holy lives.

That's why the phrase is repeated throughout the chapter. It's a constant reminder of their special relationship with God, that it might motivate them to live holy lives.

[11:25] Our church is in the electorate of Menzies. And not long ago, we got a new liberal MP. And he says he recognizes how he was elected and it's a privileged position to be in and it motivates him to serve our electorate.

Even it has on his promo material, I will give my all to be your representative. Now, I'm not trying to spruik the liberal party. OK, we can get that off the side now. The point is, like him, Israel, which remember how God had elected them and given them the privileged position of being his treasured people.

And motivate them to give God their all in being his representative to the world, reflecting his holiness to the world.

And this holiness was not just to be on Sundays or part of life. It was to be every day and all of life, point two. And so what follows in verses 3 to 37 are all sorts of commands which help them to be holy.

To live good lives. But the commands are a bit all over the place. That is, there doesn't seem to be much structure to the chapter. Instead, they jump from topic to topic.

[12:47] And even have a mix of the vertical, you know, how to treat God, and the horizontal, how to treat each other. So, for example, look at verse 3. Here God starts to reiterate some of the Ten Commandments.

And he says, respect your mother and father. So this is the topic of family, the horizontal thing. And then adds, same verse, and you must observe my Sabbath.

So this is the topic of worship and the vertical aspect, isn't it? And then the same for verse 4, kind of mentions more vertical, about not turning to idols or making images.

I am the Lord your God. And it goes on throughout the whole chapter with this mix, mix of topics, with a mix of the vertical and the horizontal.

And so verse 5 to 8 speak about what to do with the fellowship offering. You sacrifice to God, vertical. But then verse 9 to 10 jumps to the horizontal relation.

[13:49] It's about caring for the poor or the foreigners by not harvesting everything in your field, but leaving some for them. Then in verse 11 to 12, it talks about not defrauding others who have equal power to you by, you know, stealing or lying or deceiving or swearing falsely, you know, to get from them.

And then in verse 13 to 14, it's not defrauding others who have less power than you, like your workers or the deaf, the blind.

But notice even in verse 14 at the end, it goes from the horizontal, how to treat others, to fear your God, to the vertical. And on it goes.

Why are all these things so mixed up? Why is there not a more logical or ordered progression to these topics? Well, I think to make the point that we're not meant to compartmentalize holiness.

Rather, we're to be holy in all of life. And not just on Sundays in worship here at church, but all days out in the world where we worship God by how we live.

[15:02] Not just part of life, but all of life. In our modern day language, we're not meant to be Sunday Christians, but everyday Christians. That's the point. Yet what does it look like for us as Christians?

I mean, if you look at verse 19, just scan down a bit further. He says, keep my decrees. And then he has some interesting ones like not mating two different kinds of animals, not planting field with two kinds of seed and not wearing two kinds of woven material.

Or across the top right hand side of the page, verse 27. Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard. I had a shave this morning.

I cut my sideburns. What do we do with this? Well, point three. We need to understand, and I'm going to make you work a bit here.

So I hope you can stay with me. We need to understand that Christ has changed how the Old Testament law applies to us. And I've given you a handout on the back of your outline.

[16:12] So please turn to it now if you can. So let me just walk you through what the Bible does with the Old Testament law.

So number one, Christ has fulfilled the Old Testament law, both for salvation and for living. And there's some references there, which means point two, we're no longer under the law in terms of for salvation or even for living.

In fact, on the next slide, Paul says in Romans 7, we have been released from the law so that we serve or live in the new way of the spirit and not the old way of the written code.

But it still helps us to better see, this is number three on your sheets, God's character like his holiness. Helps us to better see our character like we are image bearers and have worth, yet we're also thorough sinners.

We kind of get that from Leviticus, don't we? It also helps us better see Christ's work as our high priest and sacrifice like we saw last week. What's more, point four, it teaches us still how to live good and loving lives.

[17:26] In fact, one of those references there says that everything written in the past was written for us, for our instruction. And so it still has something to teach us.

Which means, point five, we're still to read the Old Testament law and even practice it in some way. As Jesus himself said, I've come not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it.

But his fulfillment of it does change it for us. And so we need to ask, how are we to practice this law? To what extent? And the method I'm suggesting are those four questions.

So let me give you some examples with some application to help you see it in practice. So have your sheet with you on one side and your Bibles in front of you and have a look in verses 9 to 10. So verse 9 and 10 is again about how Israel is not to harvest to the edge of the field, but to leave some for the poor and foreigners.

[18:36] And so question one, who did this help Israel love, God or others? Others, right? Okay, good. Question two, how did it help Israel love others?

Well, by providing for the poor, right? Gotcha. But the question is, what if we don't have a field? What do we do there?

I mean, do you have a field? I don't have a field. Well, that's why the third question is so important. Does the New Testament, does Christ, in other words, reiterate it, the command, replace it or reapply it?

And if we look through the New Testament, we'll see that it reapplies this command. So on the next slide, we read from 1 Timothy that we are to provide for our relatives in need, especially our own household.

If we don't, we're worse than an unbeliever, it says. Or James chapter 2, if we see a brother or sister, a fellow Christian in need for food and clothes, but don't do anything about it, then that's no good either.

[19:45] In other words, it takes this principle of providing for the poor with a field and makes it more general. And having seen what the New Testament does, then question four, what might it look like for us today?

Well, I know people who have helped out their adult children in need, whether through money for rent or food or something like that.

I know children who have helped out their parents in need. Because they don't have much super, for example. I know of other people at church who have given to our benevolent fund to help church family in need.

And I know others who give to Barnabas Aid or who sponsor children around the world who are in need. This is how we're to practice this law under Christ or through Christ.

And so be holy as God is holy. That's how it works, do you see? Let me just give you one more example. Let's go to the weird and wonderful verse 19 I mentioned before.

[20 : 54] Verse 19. We might skip a couple of slides. We don't have time for all the examples, I don't think. So verse 19 says, Keep my decrees, do not mate two kinds of animals and so on.

First thing we need to realise is it's not talking about breeding two different species, like a cat with a dog. So you get a cog? I don't know. Cats and dogs cannot reproduce.

It's physically impossible, right? This law assumes that animals can, so it must be talking about two kinds within a species, like a horse and a donkey, which gives you a mule.

And people have been doing that for thousands of years. Or breeding a cross between a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel and a poodle to get a cavoodle. They're very cute dogs.

But Israel is to keep each kind distinct, set apart. Just like keeping the seeds distinct or set apart, and even the people in terms of their roles.

[21 : 57] Because the priests did actually wear two kinds of woven material in their garments. They wore linen and wool. But the people are to be distinct in their role.

They're not to pretend to be a priest. And so by not wearing two kinds of woven material, they were distinct in their role from the priests, you see. This repetition of not mixing two kinds, but keeping them distinct and set apart kinds, was to remind them that they were to be a distinct and set apart people.

And so who did this help Israel love, being separate from the world? Well, God, didn't it? To reflect his holy character. How?

Well, by reflecting that set apartness through their agriculture and clothes. Does the New Testament reiterate, replace, reapply?

Well, it kind of replaces and then reapplies. That is, it replaces agriculture and clothes with our behaviour. And then reapplies, being distinct from the world by our behaviour.

[23 : 05] So on the next slide, from 1 Peter chapter 1, we heard Peter say, Just as he called you as holy, so be holy in all you do. Your conduct, your behaviour, your way of life.

That's how we are to be distinct. As the old saying goes, we're to be in the world, but not of the world. And so what might this look like for us?

Well, being different to the world when it comes to our behaviour. It's all sorts of things, isn't it? When they get drunk, we don't. When they tear down in gossip, we build up in love. When they seek revenge, we forgive.

And so on. This is how we're to practice this law under Christ. And so be morally holy as God is holy. However the individual commandments change for us, the central one stays the same.

We're still called to be holy for the same reason, same purpose, with the same focus. As Peter goes on to say on the next slide, he even quotes and reiterates the command in our chapter, doesn't he?

[24 : 12] In verse 16, he's quoting Leviticus. For it is written, be holy because I am holy. It reiterates the command. It remains unchanged.

And it's for the same reason, because God is holy. And it has the same focus and purpose. So a bit later on in Peter, on the next slide, Peter again uses the same language God used of Israel for us. He says we are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession. He is our privileged position. That you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

And not only declare God's praises, but also live good lives. And so Peter goes on to say on the next slide, you know, You see, the focus is still to be morally holy, good and pure in all the ways we've just seen.

And the purpose is still to reflect God's good character to the world that people might see it.

Provoke a conversation about it. Believe in Jesus and glorify God.

[25 : 39] But we have an even greater motivation than Israel. For it costs God a whole lot more to save us and make us his holy people, didn't it?

He saved Israel from slavery to Egypt. But he saved us from slavery to sin. And for Israel, it was through the blood of a Passover lamb.

But as Peter said, for us, it's through the precious blood of Christ. The perfect lamb. And so are we seeking, therefore, to live holy lives in response?

Live lives that reflect God's good character to the world. That they might see and come and find out more. And eventually enjoy life with God themselves.

Do we live holy lives when it comes to caring for the needy? For living in the world, but not of the world? When people look at you, me, do they see God's good character?

[26 : 51] Perhaps the best portrait painting I've seen of King Charles is this one. It's pretty good, actually, isn't it? A pretty good painted portrait. Accurately reflects his likeness, his character.

Well, we are to be a good living portrait of God's good character. That we might represent him to the world and they might glorify him in response.

Let's pray for God's help to do that. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the precious blood of Christ, which saved us and made us your holy people, set apart as your special people, treasured possession in the world.

I thank you that we no longer serve you in the old way of the written code, but in the new way of the spirit. Yet we thank you that the Old Testament law can still teach us how to live as your holy people.

And so by your spirit, we pray that you would help us to practice those laws in a way that Christ has changed them, that we may be holy as you are holy.

[28 : 04] Help us to be a living portrait of your goodness, that others may see and glorify you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.