

# Be Holy

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[ 0 : 00 ] Love your neighbor as yourself? Yeah, that sounds about right. That sounds like for things to be as they should be in the world, people should love one another.! Do not mate different types of animals?

That's a bit trickier. Through this section of Leviticus, there's these collections of different laws. Last week in chapter 18, the laws covered a whole range of sexual relations.

What's going on with this chapter? Because it looks somewhat random. There's a lot of stuff. It doesn't make sense just by reading it, how they all fit together. Why is this thing included and not that thing included? And also, what in the world are we supposed to do with some of these commands?

I think the first thing to recognize is that what we see here is that our God is the God of all things, all of the time, for all people.

Lots of cultures have had different ways of splitting life up into different compartments. Lots of religious traditions have a whole big variety of gods. There's a God for this and a God for that. There's a God of the sea and a God of the land.

[ 1 : 11 ] There's a God of fertility. There's a God of the hearth. And you can see how that might make things tricky, because you need to know which God or goddess you're dealing with for each particular thing. And you need to have a sense of what to do in each one.

We do this in our own lives as well. We have the way we are with our family, the way we are by ourselves when no one's looking, the way we are at work to make sure we can get ahead or whatever it is.

There's lots of different ways that humans cut their life into different sorts of pieces and say, well, this bit's like that and the other bit's much different. And one of the messages I think that we get looking at Leviticus 19 and this picture of what God thinks things should look like amongst his people is this idea that God is the God of all things, all at once, all of the time, and for all people. Just look through again the chapter, scan your way through it, all the different topics and areas of life that get covered here. Because a key part of the message is, like I was saying, we split our lives up, you can think of it like a pie chart, right?

Where each section covers a different part. When you look at the pie chart, when God colors in the pie chart of our lives, he only needs one crayon. It's all the same color. It all belongs to him.

[ 2 : 33 ] So obviously in this chapter there's lots of things about religion, religion and rituals. Keep the Sabbath set aside to worship me. God says, Don't make idols and worship them.

Don't swear falsely in my name. Here's how to make this particular kind of sacrifice. Do not go after divination or omens. Honor my sanctuary. There's commandments here about home and family. Respect your father and your mother. There's commands in here about food. With this particular sacrifice, only eat the leftovers for two days. Do not eat meat that still has blood in it.

There are laws about agriculture and business. Don't clear your fields out completely or your gardens all the way. Don't hold back wages of someone who works for you just for that day. Again, don't make different kinds of animals. Don't plant two kinds of seeds. Wait a few years before you eat the fruit off newly planted trees. Don't cheat with weights and measures. Most of the laws here are in the category of community.

[ 3 : 36 ] How to live together. Don't steal. Don't lie. Or deceive or defraud. Or take advantage of those with a disability. Don't slander. Don't endanger other people. Don't hold a grudge or seek revenge.

Respect the elderly. Care for the foreigners. There's also the judicial system is tied in here as a whole other category. Do not show partiality to anyone. There's even clothing and appearance.

Do not wear fabric of two different types of material. Do not cut the sides of your hair or your beard. Do not cut your body in grief. Do not have tattoo marks. There is some structure.

If you look closely at the chapter, there's a set of four commands, followed by another section of four, followed by another section of eight. There's a few repeated items which tie the bits together about loving someone as yourself, about keeping the Sabbath, about fearing God.

And if you pay attention, the Ten Commandments are hovering below the surface the entire way through the chapter as well. But I think part of what's happening with this collection is we're just supposed to see that everything's covered.

[ 4 : 44 ] Again, if God is coloring in the pie chart of our lives, he only needs one crayon. It's all the same color. It all comes under his sovereignty and his goodness and his good laws for us.

Notice how it does this. Some of the laws are really general. Don't rob. And yet also there are laws which are really specific but are related, like don't withhold wages from a day worker overnight.

A really general one like do not make idols and a more specific one about here's how you handle food from this one particular type of sacrifice. Whatever it is, the message is.

Big things, small things. Broad principles or the individual minutia of each situation. They all come under the umbrella of God's commands.

God is the God of all things, all the time, for all people. It opens by speaking to the entire assembly. The Lord said to Moses, speak to the entire assembly of Israel.

[ 5 : 50 ] This is for everyone, the whole group. This wasn't for a select few. Because God is the God of all things, all the time, for all the people, all at once.

And it even goes beyond actions. It isn't just, don't do this action, do this kind of action. The commands extend internally as well. Do not hate your brother or hold a grudge.

Those are things we do on the inside. God's commands extend to every area of our lives, all corners of the pie chart. They extend to every person among us.

And they extend even into our thoughts and our attitudes and the postures that we take towards each other. Another way to say this after Jesus has come is, whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Whatever it is, a spoken word, an action, a thought. So first we see again that God is the God of all things, all the time, for all people. But we should also just flip that around and see it the other way.

[ 6 : 57 ] Take that coin and look at the other side. Because what we also see here is that everything we do relates to God. Some of them are more obvious to us.

God says, do not swear falsely in my name. That is obviously a command that is directly about us in our relationship to God. Do not make idols and turn to them and worship them.

That's obviously about our relationship with God and our connection to God. Some are less obvious, but it's also true of them that they are about our relationship to God.

Do we decide to cut corners? Right? It says have just weights and measurements. Do we decide to hold a little back? To cheat just a little bit?

To take just a little more because we know no one's looking and maybe no one will be harmed, right? It's just an insurance company or some big conglomerate they won't even notice. Well, that's also about our relationship to God.

[ 7 : 55 ] It matters whether we, in verse 14, it says curse the deaf. I mean, there's two commands. Do not lay a stumbling block in front of the blind or curse someone who can't hear you.

In both instances, the whole point is that nobody sees you doing it. And yet both of those, it also says, instead of doing that, fear the Lord your God. These things are about our relationship to God as well.

The clothes that we choose to wear, the haircut that we decide to have. One of the key structures that goes through the entire chapter is the repetition, and I meant to tell you to listen for it, but you probably didn't miss it.

The repetition of, I am the Lord or I am the Lord your God. And that's crucial to see what's going on, that God doesn't just give his people, hey, here's what life should look like.

Just do this stuff and don't do that stuff. The whole way through, it is, I call you to these things because I am the Lord your God. The reason, the ground and the motive behind all of it is, I am the Lord your God.

[ 9 : 02 ] Not just because things will be better and you'll live a happier life. Or not just because people will be better taken care of. Do it because I am the Lord. Lord, I am the Lord your God.

I've often thought about this in relation to an old playground taunt. I don't know if you guys grew up with that here on this island, but where I grew up, you would call someone, you know, some kind of insulting name.

You smell like a pig. And the other person would say, well, I'm rubber and you're glue. Everything you say bounces off me and sticks to you. No, that's not here at all? Wow, okay.

Well, anyway, it's, don't start. For the young ones in the room, don't take that back to the playground. But I've often thought about this in relation to that little taunt.

Because there's a very real sense in which everything is rubber and God is the glue. That no matter what we do in this life, whether anyone can see what we're doing, whether we get away with it or not, whether it's technically legal or not, everything is rubber and God is the glue.

[10:05] And all of these things and all of our actions are done in relation and therefore in relationship to God, in direct obedience to him or disobedience to him.

That's part of what we see. First, God is the God of all things all the time for all people. And also everything that we do in our lives is about God. It's not just, again, that we are to do these things and not do these things.

Woven the whole way through is this repetition. I am the Lord your God. Because we don't just do things, we do them. The call is do them because I am the Lord your God.

So it isn't enough to say, well, I'm not going to lie because God told, or I'm not going to lie. It is to go further. I'm not going to lie because God has called me to live in truth, which is a different thing.

You can accidentally walk into a lamppost, but you cannot accidentally obey these commands.

Because to obey them means to say, I do this because God has called me to it.

[11:08] I do this because it is the way that God has pulled me and commands me to live. So the pie chart is all one color and you can't do it accidentally because it is all to be done in this conscious relationship to God.

And again, we can reflect on do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus. Not just go to church, act Christianly, tell people about Jesus.

It is do them in Jesus' name, consciously saying, I belong to Jesus, therefore, I follow Jesus as well.

What we see in Leviticus 19, God is the God of all things all the time for all people.

Everything relates to God and most clearly of all, what we see is that God calls us to be holy. It is the first word and the summary. Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them, be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.

And you could just stop there. Leviticus 19 could have been a very short chapter because after that sentence, it doesn't say anything really different than that. everything that follows is saying, be holy for I am holy.

[12:27] All of these laws are continually saying, be holy for I am holy. I started by reminding you of a song, so let me bring up another one.

Some of you will know the refrain from Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. Dun, dun, dun, dun. Right?

And then what comes after that? Well, it's the same thing. And then, dun, dun, dun, dun, dun, dun, dun, dun, dun, and it just on and on.

That phrase in different octaves, starting on different notes, different parts of the scale, on and on it goes in this big, wonderful celebration. That's Leviticus 19. But instead of dun, dun, dun, dun, it is be holy for I am holy.

What does it mean to love your neighbor as yourself? It's another way of saying be holy for I am holy. What does it mean to say look after the foreigner among you? It means be holy for I am holy.

What did it mean for Israel to be called to not cut the sides of their hair or the sides of their beard? It was be holy for I am holy. The message is the same thing the whole way through.

[13:34] And so again, recognize God isn't looking to form a people who do a list of stuff. The point isn't that we fulfill the list and tick the boxes. The point is that we take on the character of God himself and become a holy people.

Which again reminds us how connected our lives are to God and how completely. It isn't just have I done the things and ticked the boxes. It is am I becoming holy?

Does my life radiate the beauty of holiness? And we should pause here for a second to acknowledge the fact that there's we don't do all this.

Especially like as Christians there's a lot of laws in here that we actually just don't do. Believe it or not I have cut the sides of my beard and the sides of my hair.

I'm very confident that my clothing has more than two types of fabric in it. Definitely my socks and probably more. There's a lot of this that we just don't obey anymore.

[14:35] So why are we reading this and how does it hit us and how does it land for us? We need to recognize that Jesus said when he was here I did not come to abolish the law or the prophets but I came to fulfill them.

And he's talking about this. He's talking about a lot more but he is including this. And so as Christians it's not that we're saying this stuff just doesn't matter anymore. Jesus didn't come to abolish it to sort of rip the pages out of the Bible or the columns in the scroll and throw them behind. He said I came to fulfill them. So we don't ignore them but we do recognize that a change has been made. These laws were given to the people of Israel specifically in their role which God had given them which was to become a blessing to the whole world.

You remember that God called Abraham and said I'll make you a family which will become a nation which will become a blessing to the whole world. And these laws were given to them so that they could do that.

And what we find as the story continues is that the true way that Israel becomes a blessing to the world is because it is from Israel that the Messiah Jesus the Christ comes to us.

[15:53] And when Jesus comes he says I have come to fulfill the law. one of the images that the Bible uses to help us understand this is that the law is like a guardian.

As in the law is someone who looks after like young children who need looking after. But that with the coming of Jesus God's people have come to maturity and don't need the guardian to chase them and don't need the guardian to say you don't touch that because it's too hot.

And so there has been a change that is made. Christ it says was born under the law to redeem those who were under the law. We still look to chapters like Leviticus 19 because they give us a picture of the life that God thinks is beautiful.

They tell us the things that God cares about. They show us the contours of holiness but for us in Jesus it's sort of like looking at a silhouette rather than a full portrait.

We look at this and we see the outlines of holiness rather than the details. of holiness for us because this law has been fulfilled in Christ. Holiness is about orderliness which is not constraint.

[17:07] Which is to say it's not holiness isn't like a ball and chain that you have to drag behind you. It's more like learning the steps so that you can dance. You know it's not like a fence that just barely fits your shoulders that you sort of have to wobble your way through.

It's like learning the rules of the game so you can run freely on the field and play the thing. Holiness is about orderliness and living straight up front rather than double kinds of lives.

And so the first commands here, each of you must respect your mother and father and you must observe my sabbaths. I am the Lord your God. These are the things that help create order and straightforwardness.

I remember being in a restaurant in Cambridge and there were some young people, early teens, who came in the building and were running up the stairs and then the owner came and had to chase them out and told us that there's a group of young people who sit outside this restaurant regularly trying to push their way into the kitchen to go cause havoc.

When children aren't raised to honor their parents, they make a mess of things. They make people around them miserable. They destroy, they cheat, and they don't care.

[18:22] God says, be holy as I am holy, which means you should respect your mother and your father. This is what creates a life that is good to live. The sabbaths as well, that one day of the week we set aside from work on this regular rotation so that we're constantly being drawn back to God.

We don't let busyness and we don't let what we think needs to be done take over. We let God order our lives. Holiness is about integrity and wholeness.

Do not tell lies. Do not say one thing to gain an advantage. It is about being sure that everyone around us is being properly cared for. It is about recognizing that God made the world good and that he built diversity into the world.

And I think that's what these commands about do not mate two types of animals, plant two types of seed. Those were ways to recognize God put diversity in the world. which we shouldn't try to blur.

We should keep the different shades and colors that he gave us because he gave them to us because they are good.

Again, holiness is integrity and wholeness. It's about seeing that our bodies are a wonderful gift and we should live in gratitude for having them and care for them. Recognizing that God is sovereign. [ 19 : 38 ] We don't go looking for divination and omens because we know if God chose not to say it to us, we didn't need to hear it. And so I don't need to go to someone who can read fate or read the future because I trust in God's care.

Holiness is about going in a different direction than the world around us and walking in a different way. It's about saying I'm not going to try to scrape together as much as I possibly can from this world for myself.

I'm going to purposefully make sure there's enough for others around me. It is about looking in love to those who are around us. Recognizing that it doesn't necessarily, the line isn't can I get away with it and the line isn't is it actually technically legal or not.

The line is does it show love to my neighbor the way that I love myself. It's about being different from the world. The world around us and going a different direction than the world they're going. And that's what it seems like these laws about not cutting the sides of your hair and tattoos in this situation are about is that the other nations around them did these things in allegiance to other gods, false gods who were not true.

So that's no longer what cutting the side of your hair or cutting the side of your beard is about. And so that is one of the examples and one of the ways you can see why again we see here the silhouette of holiness rather than the details of the portrait for us.

[ 21 : 08 ] But in recognizing the call to be holy we think I live differently than the world around me and in no way is holiness a retreat from life and from the world.

Looking through this chapter it is in all the different areas of our life and it pushes us toward people and not away from them. God's call to us is to be holy and the last thing we should see in this chapter is that by calling us to holiness God moves us towards something immensely beautiful. It really is a picture of a wonderful world. There's strangeness in Leviticus 19 but when you understand why it's there and what it was doing in that setting you can start to get a real sense of how beautiful it really is.

God's commands will always make us strange in this life and peculiar in this world but that is because the world is shaped and stained by darkness and death.

Living this out means living free from corruption. It is living in forgiveness and mercy. It is living in the beauty of creation as it flourishes and joy in worship and love amongst one another.

[ 22 : 24 ] Recognize then that God does not collect people like trading cards, like bric-a-brac, right? The church is not a set of porcelain cats that he sets on the mantelpiece just to look at.

God collects people, calls people in order to make them like himself. He doesn't just scoop people up for the sake of scooping. He calls us and then calls us to be holy because he calls us to be close to him and those close to him must be holy as he is holy himself.

Holiness is of course an intimidating thing but it's also an immensely beautiful thing. If you remember Moses when he saw the burning bush he was astonished but he still walked closer to it. We know that this is what we should be like. There's an immense attraction to this holiness and it is a gift of God to call us into it. It is a beautiful thing.

Be encouraged that our God is not satisfied to leave you as he found you. That he is not satisfied to leave you as you are. And we who have come after Christ and follow Christ and are in Christ have something even more than what the people of Israel had with these chapters.

[ 23 : 41 ] In Israel you looked to stay clean. To obey the laws so that you could be clean because only in that state could you go into the temple. Which was where you especially met with God and worshipped him.

You worked to stay clean to avoid defilement so you can enter the temple. But in the New Testament Paul writing to one of the churches says you are God's temple and God's spirit dwells within you and among you.

We no longer think I need to stay clean to get in the gate. We recognize well it's us. The holiness God calls us to is so much more.

John the Baptist looking at Jesus coming said the one who is coming after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. We don't stand looking at the burning bush like Moses.

We recognize the fire is already within us. That God has given us his Holy Spirit to purify and sanctify us. So on the one hand we have so much more reason to be holy.

[ 24 : 49 ] And on the other we have so much more that enables us to be holy. Which means to be beautiful. To live a wonderful life.

To live a life that God truly created us to live. And so knowing this that we're called to holiness and that especially we in Christ have been given God's Holy Spirit I say to you I am confident of this. that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. Know as you go forward today that we are confident that God will continue the work of holiness he has begun in you.

To you in Christ I say remind you that you were once estranged from God and hostile to him in your mind. You were doing evil deeds but he has reconciled you through the death of Christ so he can present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him.

If you continue secure and steadfast in faith holding on to the hope promised you in the gospel. And I remind you that we have a wealth of promise in Christ and that since we have these promises let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit making holiness perfect in the fear of God.

[ 26 : 11 ] God says be holy as I am holy and God pours out his Holy Spirit upon us so that we can and will. I invite you to stand with me as we respond in song looking forward to God's work of sanctifying and purifying us.

Please join me. God bless you.