

Sermon Summary: Be Holy for I Am Holy

Leviticus 19:1–18, 33–37

Overview

Leviticus 19 takes God's command, “Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy,” and shows what holiness looks like in ordinary life. Holiness is not merely inward or ceremonial. It becomes visible in how God's people worship him, treat authority, use their possessions, speak about others, administer justice, handle conflict and care for those in need.

The many commands in the chapter expand the Ten Commandments, which themselves can be summarised by the two great commands: love God and love your neighbour.

1. Holiness Means Becoming Like God

God speaks to Israel as his people and calls them to reflect his character. Like children resembling their father, God's people are to be holy because he is holy.

Holiness therefore is not vague spirituality. It is tangible: it can be seen in what we do, how we act and how we treat other people.

2. Loving God Includes Respecting His Authority

Leviticus places honouring father and mother alongside keeping God's Sabbaths. The sermon argues that honouring parents reflects the broader biblical principle of respecting authorities God has placed over us in the family, church and civil government. Submission to legitimate authority is part of our submission to God.

Some apparently strange commands also fit this principle. Mixed fabrics distinguished ordinary Israelites from priests, while commands about hairstyles, cutting the body and tattoos addressed pagan religious practices. The continuing principle is not a ban on polyester-cotton shirts or modern tattoos, but faithfulness and exclusivity in worshipping God.

3. God Wants Our Best, Not Our Leftovers

Israel was commanded not to eat fruit from newly planted trees for three years. The fourth year's crop was offered to God, and only afterwards could they enjoy the harvest themselves.

The principle is that God receives the first and the best, rather than whatever remains after we have satisfied ourselves. Generosity towards God also guards our hearts from making money, comfort and security into gods.

4. Holiness Means Loving Our Neighbour

Leviticus 19:18 gives the great summary: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” The sermon describes this love through three areas: our possessions, our words, and the intentions of our hearts.

Love is not merely feeling kindly towards somebody. As quoted in the sermon, “Love is holiness lived out for the good of others.”

5. Love Others With Our Possessions

Israelites were commanded not to harvest every last piece of grain or fruit. Some was deliberately left for the poor and the foreigner. Fellowship offerings also had to be eaten within a limited time, encouraging people to share rather than hoard.

So “do not steal” means considerably more than simply not taking another person's property. God's people should hold their possessions generously, allow what they have to bless others, pay workers promptly and never defraud their neighbour.

6. Love Others With Our Words and Actions

God's law protects vulnerable people. The commands concerning the deaf and blind illustrate the broader principle that we must never exploit another person's weakness or use our position of power against them.

Justice must be impartial. God's people must neither favour the powerful nor distort justice simply because someone is poor. This applies beyond a courtroom to how we speak about people, judge them and protect their reputation.

7. Love Others Even in Our Hearts

The most demanding commands reach beyond outward behaviour: “Do not hate your brother in your heart.” God is concerned not only with physical harm but also bitterness, hatred, grudges and revenge.

Leviticus connects this with frankly rebuking our neighbour. When someone has wronged us, the godly response is not to let resentment fester or discuss the person with everybody except them. We should go to them and speak graciously and honestly, treating them as we would want to be treated.

8. God's Law Exposes Our Need

Taken seriously, Leviticus 19 is confronting. Its requirements reach our generosity, motives, thoughts, grudges, relationships and love. Nobody can work through the list and honestly claim complete success.

The command to “be holy” therefore exposes how far short of God's holiness we fall. The answer is not simply to try harder or punish ourselves for failing.

9. The Gospel Produces Holiness

God reminds Israel, “I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt.” Their obedience follows God's rescue: he saves them first and then calls them to live as his people.

The same pattern reaches its fulfilment in Christ. Christians grow in holiness by coming to Jesus, acknowledging their unworthiness and reflecting on what he has done for them. Jesus lived in perfect holiness and gave himself on the cross in love.

As John puts it, “We love because he first loved us.” The more deeply Christians grasp Christ's love for them, the more that love transforms how they love God and other people.

Big Idea

To be holy is to reflect God's character by loving God and loving others.

God's law shows what that love looks like in practical life, but it also exposes our inability to produce true holiness ourselves. We become holy through the gospel: knowing the love God has first shown us in Jesus Christ, and allowing that love to transform how we live.