

Leviticus 19:1-2 & 15-18

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.

You shall not render an unjust judgement; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbour. You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not profit by the blood of your neighbour: I am the Lord.

You shall not hate in your heart anyone of your kin; you shall reprove your neighbour, or you will incur guilt yourself. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord.

Sermon

The book of Leviticus is a book that is full of rules and regulations - guidelines and commandments.

And this is nothing new to the Israelites.

- They are used to being told what to do.
- They are used to living according to someone else's guidelines
- Following someone else's restrictions
- And obeying someone else's commands

You see, they had been slaves in Egypt. And that memory is still fresh. They have just been set free by this God that they are still learning to trust out there in the desert. And they're not sure what this God has set them free for.

Because, in Egypt, they called the Pharaoh a God. And he was the source of plenty of commandments too. Commands to serve him and do what he wanted. Those commandments to make bricks and give their work to him. To live where he told them. To eat what he gave them. He even mandated what would happen to their children and if they would be allowed to live - just so he could protect his own power and position.

So, it would be no surprise if the Israelites were a little wary of this new leader who was giving them commandments and rules to follow.

But, the God they found themselves following in the wilderness gave a different kind of command when he spoke out to them, saying:

“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.”

This is the great commandment of the book of Leviticus.

These words are repeated throughout the book of Leviticus like a chorus. They are the reason it was written, the purpose for all the rules and guidelines and instructions that you can find inside.

God calls His people to holiness, not because God needs them to protect or empower him, but because God Himself is Holy. And the people's holiness can draw them closer to Him and the good life that God hopes to share with them.

- Following these laws and commandments doesn't enrich the Pharaoh, but it enriches our relationship with God and our neighbor.
 - They help align us with God's way of thinking
 - They show us how to live God's kind of life

Because, unlike Pharaoh, when God gives commandments to God's people, they are never anything that God himself wouldn't do.

In fact, God gives commandments because they are exactly what God would do.

- Because you wouldn't see Pharaoh out there making bricks for Egypt
- And he didn't make laws concerning the Israelites' offspring because he wanted them to apply to himself.

But God says, “You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy.”

- You shall follow these commandments because I already do. And I have found that they are good.
- You shall seek true justice because I am fair to you.
- You shall protect the poor, because I am the one who feeds and protects them every day.
- You shall tell the truth, because I am the way and the truth and the life.
- You shall help those who do wrong, because I have forgiven you all of your sins.
- You shall love your neighbor, for my love for you will never end.

Pharaoh thought that he was greater than the law.

- But the God whose commandments we so gratefully receive - He came into this world, in the person of Jesus Christ, not to mandate from the top, to make us work for him, but to show us, from the lowliest places, that a life lived by God's command will serve us all. He came to embody the law, to show us what holiness looks like, and assure us that we might live one too.

So let us strive to be holy, like the holiness we have seen in Christ our Lord - the one who loved his neighbor as he loved himself.

- Who chose to be poor, rather than to make another poor
- Who would rather have others insult him and tell lies about him, rather than saying one false word about anyone else
- Who preferred to be killed on the cross than to do violence, even against an enemy.

And in this way, you too will be holy, before the Lord our God.

Amen.

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