

Following God Means Living Godly Lives [Slide 1] Leviticus 19-22

In Matthew 5:48 Jesus makes an astounding statement about what God expects from us in terms of our morality. Jesus said, “Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” It is an impossible standard to meet, as Jesus himself knew. We all fall short of that standard. That is why we need Jesus to be our Savior. Nevertheless, if you want to know what God expects from us as his people, it is that we be morally perfect as he is morally perfect.

The good news is that, through the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit making us like Jesus, some day we will be morally perfect like God. The Apostle John writes in 1 John 3:2, “Read.” The author of Hebrews in chapter 10 verse 14 writes, “Read.” The apostle Paul promises us in Philippians 1:6, “Read.” What God demands will be ultimately fulfilled in us.

In this life we seek to come as close to a God honoring, morally perfect life as we can. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus calls us on to hunger and thirst for righteousness with the promise that ultimately we shall be satisfied by acquiring it. (Matthew 5:6). Having the righteousness of Christ will bring satisfaction, fulfillment and even happiness. Although the Law cannot help you acquire that righteousness, it does describe what it looks like. That is what the moral law in Leviticus 19-22 does. It fleshes out what righteousness looks like. These laws are signposts pointing the way to a righteous or godly life.

I invite you to turn in your Bible to Leviticus 19. Leviticus is the third book in the Bible. Leviticus 19.

I’m going to treat Leviticus 19-22 in summary form. We are not going to read all four chapters. Instead I have generalized these laws into five broad categories that flesh out what it means to live a godly life in the presence of a holy God.

[Slide 2] Category 1: Living a godly life in God’s presence means honoring your parents and the elderly. Leviticus 19:3 says, “Read.” This is a repeat of the Fourth and Fifth Commandments. Leviticus 19:32 says, “Read.” So, it’s not just our own parents we are to honor, we are also to show respect and honor to the elderly. Finally, God decrees the death penalty for anyone who curses his own parents. Read Leviticus 20:9. That’s pretty tough.

The American culture tends to value and esteem youth and see the elderly as a burden. Those American values are the exact opposite of God’s values. God’s love is constant. It doesn’t vary according to our age. He loves the very young as much as he does the very old, but the young have not yet had the chance to earn much respect. The old have. They have raised children. They have been productive citizens of their country. And they need more help as they grow older, but help that is given out of appreciation for them and not out of grudging obligation.

Truly you can measure the quality of a person’s heart and the genuineness of their faith by how they treat the very old and the very young, those who can do nothing for them. The very young at least have the potential in the future of paying back the kindness shown to them. Those who honor and serve the very old do so for the reward that God will give them.

[Slide 3] Category 2 is the largest category in this list. I the category: promote social justice, doing right to your neighbor or loving your neighbor as yourself as Leviticus 19:18 says. Leviticus 19:9-10 addresses the needs of the poor. Read. The Israelites were to leave the corners of their fields unreaped, because the poor were allowed to reap the corners to provide food for themselves. Farmers were to leave the gleanings in the field. Whenever you harvest, usually some plants have not produced all their fruit and typically you miss harvesting some of

the ripe fruit. Once the farmer went through once, he was to leave the leftovers for the poor to harvest.

The beauty of this system was that it made provision for the poor but required them to work to gain the food. This provided a sense of dignity for the poor but also maintained the value that work is God's gift to mankind and everyone is expected to work if they are physically able to do so. Also this system minimized dependency because the poor still worked and were not entitled to get food without any effort on their part.

Leviticus 19:13 says that you are not to financially oppress your neighbor, particularly the poor. Read verse 13. In that culture the hired man worked and got paid at the end of the day, then used that pay to purchase food for his family for that night and the next day. If you did not pay him at the end of the day, his family might go without supper. You were not to take advantage of those in dire straits.

Don't mistreat the disabled. Read Leviticus 19:14. Notice that revering or honoring God is linked to how we treat others, particularly those who are at some kind of disadvantage.

Judge impartially. Leviticus 19:15 says, "Read." Judges should judge on the basis of the law and the facts of the case, not on the basis of who is a party to the dispute. Justice should be blind to the wealth or the poverty of those involved, yet it is so easy to be swayed in one direction or the other. You may not be government appointed judge, but when you are called on to resolve disputes or to mediate conflicts, you must do so impartially. God is a just judge, so we must also be just in our judgments.

Leviticus 19:16 warns against slander. Read. Our words can cause as much and sometimes more damage than our actions. Speak truth and speak it in love.

You are to treat foreigners with the same respect and kindness as natives. Read Leviticus 19:33-34. Regardless of whether they are a legal or illegal alien we are to treat foreigners with the same kindness and respect as anyone else. What the government should do in terms of immigration legislation is a different issue, but these are our marching orders on a personal level.

Finally, you are to practice honesty in business and in all your financial transactions. Leviticus 19:35-36 says, "Read." In an agricultural economy most of your financial transactions are going to include amounts of wheat or barley, grapes or figs, dates or pomegranates, etc. The weights and containers used to measure the quantity of produce needed to be accurate so that people would not be cheated. The principle applies to all transactions. Be honest and accurate in all your financial dealings.

As this category and the previous one show, a connection exists between how we treat people and our relationship with God. The quality of our relationship with God depends on how we treat those he has created, especially those who have no influence or in some way are disadvantaged. Jesus put it this way in one of his parables in the New Testament. "When you do it to the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me."

[Slide 4] The third category of laws I will characterize as laws requiring loyalty to God. We are not to worship idols. Leviticus 19:4 says, "Read." Any alternate god or religious system is an idol. Idols do not have to be religious in nature. Anything around which we center our life, to whatever we devote our most time and attention, anything that replaces God can function as an idol. It can be a person, an object, a hobby, or a cause. Whatever receives more loyalty and consideration than God receives is an idol to us.

God asks us to show loyalty to him by not using his name in vain ways. Leviticus 19:12 says, "Read." The swearing falsely here refers to the making of oaths in God's name. I'm not sure that this still happens in court cases where witnesses swear to tell the truth, "so help me God,"

but that would be an example. A marriage vow is a type of oath taken in God's name. Anytime you try to guarantee your word based on your relationship with God, say by guaranteeing your work because you are a Christian, you are swearing by God's name. So, any time you invoke God's name and then do not keep your word, you have sworn falsely by God's name. We are to keep our word anyway. It's doubly wrong when we make a promise and somehow bring God into it, and then fail to keep our promise.

A specialized form of idolatry is the occult. God forbids the seeking of any kind of supernatural guidance other than his. Leviticus 19:26 says, "Read." Divination and soothsaying are attempts to gain knowledge of the future or special knowledge of what to do apart from seeking God's counsel. God also forbids any attempts to communicate with the dead in Leviticus 19:31. Read. God warned that he would cut off from his people anyone who consults mediums or spiritists in Leviticus 20:6. Read. Those who acted as mediums or spiritists were to be put to death. Read Leviticus 20:27.

These commands would forbid séances, playing with Ouija boards, Tarot card readings, consulting witches or warlocks, following horoscopes, and psychic readings. The only supernatural information available other than God is demonic. Involvement with any of these occultic practices can expose you to demonic oppression.

Living a holy life means remaining loyal to God and only seeking supernatural guidance from him.

[Slide 5] A fourth category of living a godly life includes practicing sexual purity. Leviticus 19:29 warns against fathers making their daughters harlots. Leviticus 18 had already warned us against sexual immorality. Leviticus 20 lays down the punishment for those who practice child sacrifice, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, multiple marriage and other things mentioned in Leviticus 18. The punishment for most of these things was execution. Since I covered the need for sexual purity last week, I'm not going to say anything more about it this week.

[Slide 6] The fifth category of living a godly life was directed at the priests. Those who approach God must be without physical, relational or ceremonial defects in Leviticus chapters 21-22. Priests could not have physical defects of any kind. They could only marry virgins. They had to maintain their ceremonial purity by not touching or eating anything unclean. These regulations taught the idea that God's priests needed to be holy, set apart from anything that defiled them physically, relationally or ceremonially. Someone entering God's presence needs to be holy, free from all sin.

We have talked about the fact that what is inside of us is what makes us unholy, As Jesus explained in Mark 7:21, it is what comes out of a person that defiles them: evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. Since we are now a royal priesthood, a nation of priests, all followers of Jesus Christ are expected to live holy lives. Of course, we can never succeed in doing that. We will fall short, but we call upon the Holy Spirit to help us and we seek as best we can to live righteous lives.

Do not assume that we have exhausted what it means to live a holy life by looking at these four chapters. We've only looked at part of Leviticus and we haven't even touched Deuteronomy and Exodus which contain other laws. Also, don't make the mistake of assuming that holiness is only determined by behavior. That was the mistake the Pharisees made when they studied the OT Law. They saw that most of these laws either forbid or commanded certain behaviors. That's because when you go to enforce law, the only laws that are enforceable are laws that concern behavior. You can't enforce laws on attitudes, feelings, thoughts or prejudices

because you can't see into the human heart. So the Pharisees assumed righteousness only concerned their behaviors or lack of behaviors.

So, the Pharisees assumed that if they did not commit adultery they had kept the Law, but Jesus said, wait a minute, if you lust after a woman, even if no one knows about it, you have committed adultery in your heart. And even if you have not actually killed anyway, but you have been angry with your brother, you have committed murder. And you think you have loved your neighbor as yourself when you have done good to your fellow Israelites, but your neighbor is your fellow human being, including those you call your enemy, so you are to love your enemies. Understood this way, holiness far exceeds our human abilities.

So, I close with a question: Do you want to live a godly life? Don't try to do it in your own strength or determination. Ask the Holy Spirit to give you the desire and the power to live a righteous life. In Philippians 2:12-13, Paul tells the Philippians, "Read." We are not to work for our salvation but to work out our salvation. We already possess salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Now we must work out the full ramifications of that salvation in our lives. However, God is working within us to give us the will or desire to live godly lives and the ability to work for his good pleasure. God gives us the desire and power to live godly lives. We ask him for that desire and that power and trust him to provide it as we decide this is the way we want to live.

We live in this divine partnership. You have to choose to walk the path of holiness but it is God who enables you to continue to desire righteousness and he gives you the power to say no to self and yes to his will. What is the next step God is asking you to take? Take that step and he will then lead you to the next one. Let's pray.