

May 15, 2022

“You Shall Be Holy”  
Leviticus 19:1-37

FCF: The question of meaning and purpose

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) The LORD is holy.

(magnet) And He is determined that we would be as well.

**SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

“The Parable of the Bricklayers” has been variously told but is rooted in history (**READ**):

After the great fire of 1666 that leveled London, the world’s most famous architect, Christopher Wren, was commissioned to rebuild St Paul’s Cathedral. One day in 1671, Wren observed three bricklayers on a scaffold, one crouched, one half-standing and one standing tall, working very hard and fast. To the first bricklayer, Christopher Wren asked the question, “What are you doing?” to which the bricklayer replied, “I’m a bricklayer. I’m working hard laying bricks to feed my family.” The second bricklayer, responded, “I’m a builder. I’m building a wall.” But the third brick layer, the most productive of the three and the future leader of the group, when asked the question, “What are you doing?” replied with a gleam in his eye, “I’m a cathedral builder. I’m building a great cathedral to The Almighty.”

Clarity of purpose changes the way you work. Indeed, your whole approach to life. Which is to say that it is vital to know your purpose, tremendously important to have meaning in life.

Do you know yours and that you can know it? Our text is Leviticus 19. Here are the trail markers. There are three - vv.1-10, 11-18, 19-37. Each section contains a series of commands. The second focuses on love to neighbor. But throughout, the theme is clear. “You shall be holy.”

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [Leviticus 19:1-37](#)

**PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Some weeks ago during a visit, my grandson asked me about our CO detector. I told him it could detect something in the air that we can’t see or smell. I left out the part about it being lethal. Anyway, as I said this, I realized he could answer by asking, “You can’t see it or smell it but it’s there? Oh, that’s like God. Can it see Him?” Thankfully, that’s not how things went.

Who is God? What is He like? What is it like to live in relationship with Him? That’s what Leviticus is getting at. It’s the Leviticus question - how can a holy God live amidst, in relationship with, an unholy people? And what does He want in this relationship? Not in terms of need but His desire for us. Think of this this way. Relationships impact the parties in them. Among equals - as between siblings, friends, spouses. And among non-equals, where one party has power and influence over the another - as between parents and children, kings and their subjects. Or between God and us. We are non-equals. Why is that worth knowing? Well, our text shows us. The LORD is holy. He is holy. And He is determined that we would be as well.

How do we see that in this passage? In three unfolding stages. First, in holiness through imitation. Second, in imitation through obedience. And, third, in obedience through all of life.

**I. HOLINESS THROUGH IMITATION**

Imitation. To imitate is to follow someone as a pattern, a model, or an example. God’s people are to live holy lives by imitating Him (**READ Leviticus 19:1-2**). So let’s talk holiness.

*A) God’s Holiness*

1. Confusion

First, God's holiness. There's a bit of confusion on this point just because of the multiple ways the terms are used. We hear of holy wars, holy men, holy land, holy water, and the Holy Grail.

## 2. Clarity

We need clarity. Holiness refers to the essential nature of God. It means to be "set be apart, unique, distinct." Applied to God, to say He is holy, is to say there is absolutely none like Him.

### *B) Our Holiness*

That's the holiness of God. What of our holiness? What then does that mean?

#### 1. Belonging to Him

It means we belong exclusively to Him. It means we have been set apart for service to Him. It means we have been separated from any other service but His. That's what our holiness entails.

#### 2. Becoming like Him

As a consequence of belonging to Him, we are to be like Him. Why? We see it here. "I am the LORD." If you go back and read the text, you'll see that 16 times this is explicitly given as the motive for a life of imitation. He is our Creator God. We are made in His image and likeness. He is our Redeemer King. He bought us not just out of bondage and slavery to Egypt but to sin.

So God has called His people to lives of holiness, holiness through imitation.

### *Illustration:*

I think back to playing soccer in high school. We ran nearly as much as the cross-country team at times. We scrimmaged. But we also drilled. And before we would work a new drill into a practice, our coach would demonstrate it. He would take the ball, show us what he wanted us to do, and have us do it - just as he had. We were following, imitating what we had seen him do.

### *Application:*

Here's something worth noting. This call to imitate the character of God is our one sure grounds for ethics. Look to any other basis and you're stuck in the fog of personal preferences. Think of the call here to care for the disadvantaged and marginalized - the poor, the day worker, the physically impaired, the slave, the elderly, the alien. We might well agree such things should be done. But we need a deep reason that will hold. And we have it here in the character of God.

The LORD is holy. And He calls us to a holiness through imitation.

## **II. IMITATION THROUGH OBEDIENCE**

Leaving nothing to chance, lest we wonder of the shape of this imitation, we see that God calls us to an imitation of His holiness by obedience to His commands (**READ Leviticus 19:37**).

### *A) How Expressed*

How are these commands expressed? In two ways - both negatively and positively.

#### 1. Negatively

Negatively, prohibitions of sinful behavior - ruling out things we might be inclined to do.

#### 2. Positively

Positively, commands to righteous behavior - putting forth things we need to be encouraged to do. We see a mix of both all through the chapter, with much reflecting the Ten Commandments.

### B) *Why Pursued*

Why are we called to pursue such obedience? What are to be the motivations to this?

#### 1. Not to merit God's salvation

We need to be clear on this. It was not and it is not to merit God's salvation. He is not - as the pagan gods were - able to be bought by minimizing our bad deeds and maximizing the good.

#### 2. But as a response to God's salvation

Remember where things already stood at this point. At this stage in the relationship, the LORD had already saved them. He was already their King and had already set them apart. So far from meriting His salvation, such lives of obedient imitation are to be a response to His salvation.

God has called His people to lives of imitation by obedience. And that's what this means.

### *Illustration:*

There is tremendous security here. This comes out in an interview I read ([READ](#)):

I know a family who adopted an older child from an unspeakably horrific orphanage in another country. When they brought her home one of the things they told her was that she was expected to clean her room every day. When she heard about that responsibility, she fixated on it and saw it as a way she would earn her family's love. In other words, she isolated the responsibility and applied it to her existing frame of thinking that was shaped by life in the orphanage. Thus, every morning when her parents came in her room, it was immaculate and she would sit on the bed and would say, "My room is clean. Can I stay? Do you still love me?" Her words broke her new parents' hearts.

Eventually, the girl learned to hear her parents' words as their unconditionally beloved child who would never be forsaken, not as a visitor trying to earn her place in the family. After she knew that she was an inseparable part of the family story, even correction and discipline did not cause her to question her family's love for her; she understood correction and discipline to be part of what it meant to be in the family.

### *Application:*

Because of the finished work of Christ - pictured all through Leviticus and accomplished at the cross - we can have that same security even when we speak of imitation by obedience. If we fail in either the things to we are to avoid or the things we are to do, we are still forever His.

The LORD is holy. He calls us to such a life. And we can rest even as we pursue it.

## **III. OBEDIENCE THROUGH ALL OF LIFE**

Which brings us to the last point. How far does this holiness, imitation, obedience go?

This is where vv.3-36 come in. Let me read you this quote from Christopher Wright ([READ](#)):

The chapter is headed with the motto of this half of Leviticus: *Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy*. The rest of the chapter dispels any idea that holiness in the OT was merely a matter of ritual purity. It was to be displayed in every corner of practical life—from the corners of your beard to the corners of your fields. Holiness, therefore, was not something that you pursued by retreating from everyday life into some religious sanctum. Holiness meant transforming everyday life by the quality of behaviour that was utterly different from the surrounding ways of the world.

### A) *The Relational Sphere*

#### 1. Not an abstract concept

Two observations. First, how much of this takes place in the relational sphere of life. Holiness is not meant to be an abstract concept - a topic for podcasts, seminars, studies, and books.

#### 2. But a lived reality

Holiness is meant to be a lived reality. It shows itself in relationships, in a different way of living that sets forth the hope of justice, mercy, and faithfulness. It is part of what it means for us to be a people set apart. To live this way in this world is to stand out. And we are to do it together.

*B) A Living Demonstration*

And as this is carried out, we then become a living demonstration of the kingdom of God.

1. A reminder

Again, God's people have been set apart - imitation by obedience. Salt and light, a city on a hill.

2. The purpose

And why? There was from the start a missional aim. Such lives will show forth God's character to the world. We - the church, the fellowship of believers, followers of Jesus - were from the start meant to be a community of people that embody the LORD's holy kingdom to the nations with the hope that the nations might taste and see that the LORD is good. Just as we have.

This is what it means to say this holiness, imitation, and obedience cover all of life.

*Application:*

To be holy is to be the LORD's - set apart, unique, and distinct. And to be so in the rough and tumble of life. As we live - especially as we do relationships in ways set apart, unique, and distinct - the world will notice. Let me put it this way. Justice, mercy, and faithfulness in our dealings with each other is not all there is to outreach. But it is part of it. It is part of it.

The LORD is holy. And He calls us to obedience in all of life. In every area of life.

**CONCLUSION:**

Let's talk about the egomaniac for a moment. This is someone who displays egomania, a tendency to refer to oneself excessively and boastfully. Here's a famous example ([READ](#)):

As the brains behind the Robie House, Fallingwater, Taliesin West, the Guggenheim, and countless other design benchmarks, Frank Lloyd Wright is arguably the genius of 20th-century architecture. And, boy, did he know it! Wright was notorious for believing he was superior to mere mortals. In fact, the architectural egomaniac frequently acted as though the rules -- even those of geography and climate -- did not apply to him. But when you're Wright, you're right. In 1935, department store magnate Stanley Marcus (of Neiman-Marcus fame) commissioned the architect to design his Dallas home, but the project quickly went sour. Wright's avant-garde floor plan included "sleeping porches" that required his client to sleep outdoors year-round. In addition, Marcus' small bedroom "cubicles" came equipped with almost no closet space. When Stanley respectfully explained that (a) temperatures during summer nights in Dallas often exceed 80 degrees and (b) a high-fashion tastemaker might need bigger closets, Wright threw a series of tantrums. Fortunately for the voyeur in us all, said tantrums usually took place in letter form. Preserved and occasionally displayed at the Dallas Museum of Art, they make for delicious reading.

So, here's the thing. The LORD is determined that we should be like Him. Is He an egomaniac?

No. The LORD is the one being who can rightly be settled upon all things being centered around Himself. He is the sun around which all the planets must orbit for things to work. With any other center, things would fly apart. So, yes, with anyone else it would be egomania. But not with Him. When He insists on this, it is not destructive but reconstructive. He is bringing us back to our original design, the place of flourishing. In fact, He is so devoted to this project that He died to make it happen. He died and was raised. And indwells us to make us like Himself.

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