

SS Initiative  
October 5, 2025

“. . . Because I, the LORD. . . , am Holy”  
Leviticus 19:2

*Introduction:*

For this last lesson from Leviticus in this series, we are in the second half of section of the book known as “Purity laws.” Leviticus 19 concentrates on God’s people living out God’s holiness in their daily lives. This part of Leviticus is often referred to as “the Holiness Code.” Here, ‘holiness’ is not depicted as a certain kind of spiritual piety with other-worldly emphases. No, it is all about everyday living. It was completely appropriate, for example, for Pastor Mark to refer to this chapter in his message last Sunday in response to Jesus’ parable about the rich man, in which Abraham says to the dead rich man, “they have Moses and the prophets; listen to them.” Pastor asked the question, “What did Moses say about social justice?” He answered by citing verses 9 and 10 of this chapter, which are included in our readings for today.

*I. Because I . . . am holy. **Leviticus 19:1-2***

As I was reading the biblical text (I almost always work my way through the biblical text before going to the lesson material), my first thought was to stop at the end of verse 2 and just work with that for a while. So, I was not surprised when I saw that the lesson writer did the same thing. Andrea Talley, the writer of the devotional thoughts for this past week, entitled Monday’s devotional, “Because I said so.” Here’s a beautiful example of what I talked about last week in class as I presented the idea of “performance criticism,” the change of significance in a text when the same words are read differently. In this case, for example, what difference does it make if I say, “because I SAID so” with the emphasis on “said,” than if I say “because ‘I’ said so” with the emphasis on “I”? (To our online participants: try to read the sentences out loud in the two different ways I’m suggesting, in particular with a de-emphasis on “I” the first time and “said” in the second reading. It should help you recognize the validity of the question.)

In verse 2 of this reading, we sometimes balk at the expectation of our being “holy,” and often do so by overlooking that the emphasis in this sentence is on “I, the LORD . . . am holy.”

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:**

1. What difference does the stress make on these two ways of saying “Because I said so”?
2. How should that difference of understanding affect our response to the command in v. 2 when we see that the emphasis is on “I, the LORD” rather than “be holy”?
3. To whom is God saying Moses is to speak this message, and what does that say about Christianity forcing any or all of God’s commands on the broader society?

NOTE in response to question #3 above: The Preamble to the current French constitution contains the “Universal rights of all human beings.” On the one hand, such an idea appears to be commendable, even without reference to any form of scripture. But I also have to ask, “By

what right does one human political unit have to think it can dictate to all other political units in the world how to treat all human beings?" In fact, the political situation in our own country is totally divided on the idea of which people have which rights. That same division is found in various forms of Christianity, as well.

Back to the lesson--

The basic meaning of "holy" is that of "being set apart," and as it relates to God, it carries two principal ideas. The first is that something which is holy is "set apart" from all other items like it for specific purposes, not to be confused with or used for any other purpose. We use the vocabulary of 'sacred' and 'secular' for this concept. The other idea is that of moral purity. All the other gods which people worshiped were gods that people created, gods that behaved like people do. On the other hand, Yahweh (the LORD) in this text, is the God that created human beings in *HIS* image, human beings who were set apart from all other creatures to have a unique relationship with God and serve the purpose of caring for the creation God made. Adam and Eve were thus created "holy," without sin and without a natural bent to sinning. But the first humans chose not to be holy in this way, but rather to be their own god and serve themselves rather than to be set apart for serving God. What that means is that we, as human beings, are still set apart from all other creatures, but at times sin causes us to behave like animals rather than like humans, and we use the language of animals to describe each other—dogs, rats, mice, pigs, snakes, worms, etc.

God calls for his people to be holy, instead: people who fulfill the purposes for which humans were created and who build a society based on love and patience. So, holiness has the two factors of our being cleansed from sin on the one hand (a spiritual experience), and, on the other hand, becoming more and more like Christ in our attitudes and behaviors (a life-long process). Olivet's new chaplain did a fabulous job in chapel Wednesday morning this past week of making those two things quite clear. That message is online on the Olivet website. Select "chapel" and the date, Oct. 1.

Illustration: When our younger son was in first grade, his teacher assigned the students to write a few short sentences every Monday morning with the title, "my thoughts for today." The thoughts could cover anything the students were thinking about. For each student, she would correct only one writing mistake per week, because, as she said, "they know they're making mistakes, but I don't want to discourage them from expressing themselves in writing." Then she would select words from their thoughts, words they knew and used but couldn't spell correctly, to create the spelling list for that week. For our son, English was his first spoken language, which gave him a pretty broad vocabulary. However, he learned to write in an Italian pre-school, with Italian phonetics, which, by the way, is one of the most phonetically perfect languages in the world. English, on the other hand, is a phonetic nightmare. All that to say, that he made a lot of spelling mistakes. All the students loved that teacher, as did the parents, because her approach encouraged the students to keep thinking and keep expressing themselves knowing that improvement was occurring at a satisfactory, and sometimes quite a phenomenal rate.

Leviticus 19 is dealing with a community of adults, not a group of 6- & 7-year olds. However, when it comes to holiness as a lifestyle, because God is who HE is, he knows where

we are, and that we are NOT Him. So, He's going to give us a basic, holiness "spelling" list, so to speak, with ideas taken from the thoughts and experiences of his people's daily lives. This list will be incomplete, because when we get these errors corrected, He will present other situations we need to consider. Let's look at the first things on the list.

## *II. Various commands part 1. Leviticus 19:3-5*

Verses 3 & 4 cover three of the 10 commandments, whereas vv. 5-8 present one of the sacrifices with instructions that need to be followed to the letter or persons could be excommunicated. (The meaning of "excommunicated" will be presented a little later.)

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. In what way do honoring one's parents (remember, the commandment is to adults to honor their aging parents) and observing the Sabbath express holiness?
2. How does God's repeated statement, "I am the LORD your God," shape the sense of the commands in v. 3 & 4?
3. Vv. 5-8 treat special regulations for the fellowship sacrifice, the one that the persons offering the sacrifice are allowed to eat. To us, these verses appear to be either trivial or pointless until we get to verse 8. I grew up in an environment where the idea of desecration had some importance. What does that word mean to you? What does the New Testament have to say about actions that might desecrate what is "holy to the LORD"?

Being a people "set apart" seems to be the promise of this text which calls us to live into that plan and promise of God. The punishment attached to disobedience regarding the fellowship sacrifice is that of being removed from the "set apart" people. Earlier, I used the word 'excommunicate,' which means removed from communion with other members of your group; and in church policy, literally means losing the right to participate in 'communion' or The Lord's Supper. The Apostle Paul, in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, told the church at Corinth to "hand over to Satan," that is, to remove him from the fellowship of the church, because of incest in the form of his cohabiting with his step-mother. Note, however, in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians, that Paul tells the church to reinstate him because his response to their "excommunication" was sincere and appropriate and that it had lasted long enough.

## *More instructions on being holy. Leviticus 19:9-18*

Our lesson writer adequately sums up most of the regulations in this set as included in the theme of 'loving your neighbor,' the specific law given in v. 18, and repeated by Jesus in more than one gospel and by Paul, even before the gospels were written. Several of these commands repeat one or more of the Ten Commandments from Exodus 20. Others treat the basics of standard human decency: for example, not cursing the deaf or purposefully tripping the blind; paying wages when they're expected and for labor accomplished. Verses 9 and 10, for example, allow the poor to maintain personal dignity both for themselves and within the

community, because they are allowed to work for what is granted them. It's a unique social system, where the rich share their wealth with the poor, but without losing anything. If they harvested all the way to the ends of the fields, they would collect the grain while having to pay the harvesters in currency of some kind. With the "generosity" described in verses 9 & 10, the owner of the field pays the poor who finish the harvest, by granting them the grain itself (payment in kind) rather than paying them in currency. On the other hand, Jesus' parable of the day laborers appears to die-hard capitalists as injustice because everyone got paid the same amount regardless of how many hours they worked. Social justice looks at the situation in a totally different light. All the laborers were present, ready to work, at the beginning of the day and all of them needed to earn a day's wage. The real injustice is that some got selected to work, whereas others didn't.

QUESTION: on what basis were some chosen and others not?

The first ones selected didn't perform according to the expectations of the land owner. In the end he needed everyone to get the job done. And each of the them needed a full day's wage and was ready to work for it.

**QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:**

1. On my reading of the "love your neighbor" command in this context, I recognized the legitimacy of the question the man asked Jesus: Who's my neighbor? Why do you think I could see the legitimacy of that question?
2. What might it mean to compartmentalize holy living as a Christian?
3. How do these verses attempt to prevent compartmentalizing holiness?

*Conclusion:*

As a conclusion to this lesson, I'm going to leave us with three thoughts that the author of the discussion guide raised near the end of the guide for this lesson:<sup>1</sup>

1. At times we as the church have mistaken the call to reflect God's holiness as a reasons to separate ourselves from the broken world around us.
2. If we are not careful, we can begin to treat passages like Leviticus 19 as one big list of dos and don'ts that we only follow to check a box.
3. We are never promised in Scripture that God's people will not face relational conflict both inside and outside the church; living in community can be messy.

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<sup>1</sup> Miranda Musick, *Faith Connections, Leader's Guide* Fall 25, Kansas City, the Foundary