

# LEVITICUS

## Chapter 19

*The LORD Is Holy*

**And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “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. 3 Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God. 4 Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves any gods of cast metal: I am the LORD your God. 5 “When you offer a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD, you shall offer it so that you may be accepted. 6 It shall be eaten the same day you offer it or on the day after, and anything left over until the third day shall be burned up with fire. 7 If it is eaten at all on the third day, it is tainted; it will not be accepted, 8 and everyone who eats it shall bear his iniquity, because he has profaned what is holy to the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from his people.**

**19:2** *all the congregation* – God addressed the Israelites as a liturgical community. Later, God will address each person individually. The following commands use the singular “you”: vv 9, 10, 12, 15b–18, 19b, 29, 32, 34b. (TLSB)

*I the LORD your God am holy.* Only God is intrinsically holy; He is the source of Israel’s holiness. (TLSB)

*Be holy.* - Holiness is the key theme of Leviticus, ringing like a refrain in various forms throughout the book (e.g., v. 45; 19:2; 20:7, 26; 21:8, 15; 22:9, 16, 32). The word “holy” appears more often in Leviticus than in any other book of the Bible. Israel was to be totally consecrated to God. Her holiness was to be expressed in every aspect of her life, to the extent that all of life had a certain ceremonial quality. Because of who God is and what he has done (v. 45), his people must dedicate themselves fully to him (cf. Mt 5:48). (CSB)

They were not only to be pure and sinless, but their entire life was to present a definite and unvarying contrast to sin and transgression in any form. That is the fundamental thought of the chapter. (Kretzmann)

This requirement for Israel’s continued communion with God is applied in the present chapter to a great number of situations, the majority of which deal with the requirements of love for others. (CSB)

**19:3–4** Fourth, Third, and First Commandments restated. (TLSB)

**19:5** *peace offering.* Unacceptable peace offerings cut God’s people off from His blessings flowing through their family and into their congregation. In the truest sense, it was spiritual suicide. (TLSB)

**19:7–8** *tainted ... profaned.* Without refrigeration, meat became rancid and unacceptable to God. (TLSB)

**19:1–8** God ties His holiness to Israel in words not unlike those of Jesus, who said, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5). He is the source of our holiness, life, and salvation. God attached Himself to us through His means of grace. God’s Word and Sacraments feed and nourish us as surely as a vine feeds and nourishes its branches. • Lord, by Your abundant grace, have mercy on us. Nurture us through Your Word and Sacraments, through Christ, our Savior. Amen. (TLSB)

*Love Your Neighbor as Yourself*

**9 “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. 10 And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God. 11 “You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. 12 You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. 13 “You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning. 14 You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD. 15 “You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor. 16 You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life[a] of your neighbor: I am the LORD. 17 “You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. 18 You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.**

**19:11-18** Israelites did not have personal copies of Scripture as we do. Instead the Bible was read to them in public. As the Israelites heard this section read they surely couldn't help noticing the repetition of certain words and phrases leading up to the great climax about loving their neighbors as themselves. (PBC)

The four units in this section consist mainly of prohibitions. By these prohibitions the Lord covered the members of His holy community with the canopy of His holiness and protected them from abuse by their associates. The prohibitions deal with those kinds of abuse and injustice that could not be treated in a normal court of law, but could only be judged by God. By prohibiting them, God made these acts of injustice sins against Himself and His holiness. (CC)

**19:11–12** See Ex 20:7, 15–16. (CSB)

Why this particular order? And why mention these commandments in connection with each other? The reason is that a person who deceived others by falsely claiming ownership of a certain piece of property would actually be guilty of stealing that property, and the deceiver might be tempted to take an oath before God that he was telling the truth. (PBC)

The prohibitions in these verses protected the property of each Israelite. They recall the Seventh Commandment (Ex. 20:15) and deal with secret acts of theft and their subsequent denial. (CC)

- The first prohibition (“you shall not steal”) forbids the secret theft and furtive misappropriation of property. (CC)
- The second prohibition (“you shall not dissemble”) forbids the denial of the theft by dissembling or telling lies. (CC)
- The third prohibition (“nor lie”) forbids the affirmation of the lie as a truth by the thief, for often, when challenged, the thief would not only deny the theft, but claim ownership to what he had stolen. (CC)

- The fourth prohibition (“you shall not swear falsely...”) prohibits the use of God’s name in an oath on a witness stand, at the sanctuary (1 Kings 8:31-32), in personal self-defense in an attempt to cover up the theft. (CC)

**19:13-14** These verses primarily forbid mistreating those unable to defend themselves in court. ((PBC)

The second set of commandments in these verses protected each member of the holy congregation from exploitation by powerful people. Three common forms of exploitation are singled out for consideration. (CC)

- First the Lord warns His people against legal exploitation by withholding property or payment from another person, as well as the illegal use of position and influence to gain property by robbery from a vulnerable person. (CC)
- Second, the Lord warns against any delay in paying day laborers. Day laborers could be either Israelites or foreigners (Deut. 24:14-15). They were among the poorest members of Israelite society. Since they had no property and since they lacked permanent employment, they needed their daily wages to support themselves and their families. God protected their livelihood by requiring their employers to pay them at the end of each day. (CC)
- Third and last, the Lord warns against hidden abuse of disadvantaged people. God’s people were forbidden to insult a deaf person or put an obstacle before a blind person. These acts took secret advantage of these people’s handicaps in order to harm them publicly, either out of spite or for persons gain. It was safe to do so because they did not know what was said or done. They were therefore unable to defend themselves by retaliation. By analogy with this, the Israelites were forbidden to insult each other in secret behind each other’s back or bring about someone’s downfall by setting a hidden obstacle before him. This kind of behavior was common in any close community that was riddled with jealousy and rivalry. In it powerful people often worked secretly to shame others who were weak or who did not support them. (CC)

**19:13** *shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him* – Command against exploitation. (TLSB)

*wages of a hired man.* See Dt 24:14–15; Mt 20:8. (CSB)

Protection for society’s poor. (TLSB)

**19:14** *not curse the deaf* – Disgusting is the picture of one smiling benignly while uttering curse words to a person unable to hear. (PBC)

*stumbling block...blind* – Equally despicable is the action of one finding insane pleasure in placing an obstacle in the path of a blind person which would cause him to stumble and fall. (PBC)

Anything that would cause the blind to fall. (TLSB)

A person could break these prohibitions in ways less obvious than outright cursing and placing obstacles. Not helping the deaf and blind is in effect cursing them (literally treating them as insignificant) and causing them to stumble. (PBC)

*I am the Lord.*” This sentence is meant to emphasize the fact that the Lord has made and given all that is on earth and therefore He is to be respected and obeyed. (CSB)

**19:15-16** In response to His righteousness, the Lord expected fairness from His people. (TLSB)

In these verses the Lord prohibits the perpetration of injustice in Israel. This unit presupposes that all Israelites were involved in the local administration of God's justice. This operated on two levels. (CC)

- On one hand, all adult males served as judges in the courts convened to hear legal cases in the gates of their villages. (CC)
- On the other hand, all Israelites served as witnesses for others both in their communal life and in the local courts of law. (CC)

**19:15** *shall do no injustice* – In ancient Israel the elders of the village served as judges when a grievance was brought by one person against another. Everyone – judges, plaintiffs and defendants – probably knew each other well from daily contact in the community. Personal feelings about others could easily affect the judicial process. (PBC)

**19:16** *shall not go around as a slander* – They were not to spread gossip or, because of personal animosity, unjustly accuse a person so he might receive the death penalty. (PBC)

This involves, of course, “casting aside all inhumane conduct, all ill will, as manifested in malicious belittling, blackening, and slandering, and especially in attempts against the life of a neighbor, whether in court or in private life. (Kretzmann)

**19:17-18** The material in these verse presupposes a tribal society made up of close blood clans, a society governed by payback. In such a society each offense had to be avenged to preserve the society's social and moral ecology. Payback operated positively as benefaction within the blood clan; it also operated negatively as revenge and hatred against those who stood outside it. The Lord therefore undermined the cycle of revenge by forbidding hatred and commanding love for all members of the Israelite congregation. (CC)

**19:17** *Do not hate your brother.* See 1Jn 2:9, 11; 3:15; 4:20. (CSB)

A society filled with hatred will soon tear itself away from God and self-destruct. (TLSB)

Better than taking a person to court was settling the matter privately. That meant above all refusing to let hatred breed in the heart. (PBC)

That is, not bear a sin on his account by remaining silent, when a remonstrance in time might save one's neighbor from severe transgressions. So even the Israelites, according to this precept, would become partakers of other men's sins. (Kretzmann)

*reason frankly with your neighbor* – Jesus expounded this ordinance in Mt 18:15–17. (TLSB)

Matthew 18:15-17, “<sup>15</sup>“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. <sup>16</sup>But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ <sup>17</sup>If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.”

**19:18 shall not take vengeance** –God pays back evildoers (Ps 94:1; Na 1:2), so thoughts of personal revenge and violence are prohibited. God pays back evildoers (Ps 94:1; Na 1:2), so thoughts of personal revenge and violence are prohibited. Cyprian: “When a wrong is received, patience is to be maintained, and that vengeance is to be left to God” (ANF 5:555). (TLSB)

*love your neighbor as yourself.* Quoted by Christ (Mt 22:39; Mk 12:31; Lk 10:27), Paul (Ro 13:9; Gal 5:14) and James (2:8). The stricter Pharisees (school of Shammai) added to this command what they thought it implied: “Hate your enemy” (Mt 5:43). Jesus’ reaction, “Love your enemies,” was in line with true OT teaching (see vv. 17, 34) and was more in agreement with the middle-of-the-road Pharisees. Rabbi Nahmanides caught their sentiments: “One should place no limitations upon the love for the neighbor, but instead a person should love to do an abundance of good for his fellow being as he does for himself.” “Neighbor” does not merely mean one who lives nearby, but anyone with whom one comes in contact. (CSB)

The Hebrew words translated as “love” and “neighbor” mean doing every kind of good to all people. (PBC)

That is, not bear a sin on his account by remaining silent, when a remonstrance in time might save one’s neighbor from severe transgressions. So even the Israelites, according to this precept, would become partakers of other men’s sins. (Kretzmann)

**19:9–18** God wants His holiness reflected in the lives and conduct of His people. The Israelite community shared in God’s holiness, and so do believers today (cf 1Co 1:2). We are hallowed in the Lord’s name. • Almighty Father, may our conduct reflect sincere faith in Your Gospel. Deliver us from evil thoughts and deeds for the sake of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)

*You Shall Keep My Statutes*

**19 “You shall keep my statutes. You shall not let your cattle breed with a different kind. You shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor shall you wear a garment of cloth made of two kinds of material. 20 “If a man lies sexually with a woman who is a slave, assigned to another man and not yet ransomed or given her freedom, a distinction shall be made. They shall not be put to death, because she was not free; 21 but he shall bring his compensation to the LORD, to the entrance of the tent of meeting, a ram for a guilt offering. 22 And the priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before the LORD for his sin that he has committed, and he shall be forgiven for the sin that he has committed. 23 “When you come into the land and plant any kind of tree for food, then you shall regard its fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden to you; it must not be eaten. 24 And in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to the LORD. 25 But in the fifth year you may eat of its fruit, to increase its yield for you: I am the LORD your God. 26 “You shall not eat any flesh with the blood in it. You shall not interpret omens or tell fortunes. 27 You shall not round off the hair on your temples or mar the edges of your beard. 28 You shall not make any cuts on your body for the dead or tattoo yourselves: I am the LORD. 29 “Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute, lest the land fall into prostitution and the land become full of depravity. 30 You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD. 31 “Do not turn to mediums or necromancers; do not seek them out, and so make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God. 32 “You shall stand up before the gray head and honor the face of an old man, and you shall fear your God: I am the LORD. 33 “When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. 34 You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God. 35 “You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity. 36 You shall have just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin: I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the**

**land of Egypt. 37 And you shall observe all my statutes and all my rules, and do them: I am the LORD.”**

**19:19** *keep my statutes* – No doubt it was to remind Israel they were to be different from other nations.

*cattle breed with a different kind.* Living things were meant to breed with their own kind. (TLSB)

*kinds of material.* Because the priests wore fabric of mixed yarn (Ex 28:6, 15; 39:29), others were forbidden to wear similar clothing to avoid spiritual ambiguity. (TLSB)

**19:20–22** Ambiguous case; the woman was not free and the betrothal was not settled. The man commits the sin of adultery and is required to sacrifice for his behavior. Had she been free, both she and her lover should be put to death (Dt 22:23–24). (TLSB)

**19:23–25** Fruit trees planted in Canaan were not harvested the first three years. In the fourth year, all of the fruit was declared holy and given to the priests to eat. Beginning the fifth year, the firstfruits were given to God (Ne 10:35, 37); the remainder could be used or sold. (TLSB)

**19:25** *increase its yield.* Offering firstfruits to God freed the remainder of the fruit for common consumption, and God blessed His people with increased yields. (TLSB)

**19:27–28** Practices often employed by cults of the dead. (TLSB)

**19:27** *Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head.* A prohibition still followed by orthodox Jews. (CSB)

**19:28** There was to be no disfiguring of the body, after the manner of the pagans. (CSB)

**19:29** Daughters are not property for commercial enterprise, no matter how poor or desperate the family. Families are precious to God. (TLSB)

**19:30** Israelite families participated in God’s holiness by honoring the Sabbath (vv 2–3) and respecting God’s sanctuary. (TLSB)

**19:31** Consulting the spirits of the dead in search of power, blessing, or help was prohibited. See note, Dt 18:10–11. (TLSB)

**19:32** *the gray head.* The congregation’s elders. (TLSB)

*fear your God.* When honor and respect are paid to the elderly, God is honored, feared, and respected. (TLSB)

**19:33–34** God applied v 18 to the aliens living among them. (TLSB)

**19:34** *you were aliens in Egypt.* See Dt 5:15. (CSB)

The Israelites were once aliens living in Egypt. When they were generous in their treatment of aliens, they honored God’s faithfulness. Cf Ex 22:21. (TLSB)

**19:35–36** Prohibition of false weights and scales applied not only to the Israelites but also to aliens. If one loved one’s neighbor as oneself, such dishonest business practices would never occur. (TLSB)

**19:35** *do no wrong in judgment...measures...weight or quantity.* In a culture with no bureau of weights and measures, cheating in business transactions by falsification of standards was common (see Dt 25:13–16; Pr 11:1; 16:11; 20:10, 23). The prophets also condemned such sin (Am 8:5; Mic 6:10–11). (CSB)

**19:19–37** Through these holy ordinances, God demands the obedience of His people. By His grace, He also chooses to dwell among them and shower them with blessings. By His hand, they were delivered from the corruption of Egypt; by His hand, they would drive out the Canaanites and settle in their land; and by His hand, the land would bring forth its abundance. Today, by the Lord’s nail-pierced hands, we are His people. As God’s holy people, we bring Christ’s message of salvation to all nations (Mt 28:19–20), which is the ultimate expression of loving our neighbors as ourselves. • Forgive us, Lord, for we do not always love our neighbor as ourselves. Strengthen us by Your Holy Spirit, that we may continually boast in what You have done. Amen. (TLSB)