

God's People Have a Different Master (Leviticus 19)

To read:

1. Romans 13:8-14,
Galatians 5:1-15
2. I Peter 1:13-25

I. Introduction

A. Several weeks ago we started the second half of Leviticus starting with Leviticus 17

1. If we go back to our outline for Leviticus, we remember that the first half of Leviticus dealt with judicial holiness
2. This section answered the question: how does Israel become holy?
3. And now we're entering the second section of Leviticus, dealing with practical holiness
4. This section is meant to answer the question: how should Israel be holy?
5. We started this section by seeing how Leviticus 17 connects judicial holiness to practical holiness
6. Leviticus 17 showed us that holiness lived in us is based on and is a reflection of holiness worked for us

B. Then, last time we were in Leviticus, we saw that Leviticus 18-20 stands as a discrete unit at the center of Leviticus

1. In fact, Leviticus 18-20 is a sort of chiasm, an A-B-A pattern where chapters 18 and 20 reflect each other and frame chapter 19 - and the center of the chiasm, the picture in the frame, is usually the most important part
2. So we started by looking at chapters 18 and 20 and saw that God's people have a different measure
 3. That is, they should not do as the Egyptians do, nor should they do as the Canaanites do - they can't live by the standards of this world, they can't reflect their practices or imbibe their philosophies
 4. And sexual ethics played an important role in these two chapters because sexual ethics will always be one area where God's people and the world are clearly worlds apart
 5. Sexual ethics is not by any means the only area in which God's people should not reflect the world, but it is a very visible and persistent area and can serve as a diagnostic area for God's people

C. But, if God's people are not to reflect the nations around them, then what should they look like?

1. And that's what the center of our chiasm is going to tell us - God's people shouldn't reflect this world, instead they should reflect their Redeemer; God's people should be holy because God is holy
 2. And, true to form, the center of this chiasm is a very important passage, not only is it the positive teaching for this section of Leviticus, it also becomes the platform on which all of Leviticus is built
 3. And as we look at the New Testament, the importance of Leviticus 19 only grows - Leviticus 19 may seem like a fairly obscure chapter in the Old Testament, but it is actually the most quoted chapter in the New Testament
 4. Whatever Leviticus 19 is trying to teach us must stand at the very center of what it means to be God's people, so this morning I want to carefully go through Leviticus 19 and consider its teaching

D. Let's start by reading Leviticus 19 together

E. Proposition: God's people must reflect the image of their Redeemer, which means that they must love God supremely, that is God must be their supreme treasure, and they must love others effectively, that is they must sacrificially serve others in honor of their God.

1. What did this teach the ancient Israelites about God?
2. How should this point us to Christ?
3. How can we apply this to ourselves?

1 II. What did this teach the ancient Israelites about God?

1 A. First, God's people must reflect God

1. We saw last time in Leviticus that Leviticus 18 and 20 were joined by a common theme
 - 1 a. Leviticus 18:2 - *You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you.*
 - 1 b. Leviticus 18:24 - *Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.*
 - 1 c. Leviticus 20:23 - *And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them.*
2. Leviticus 19 is also joined together by a repeated phrase: I am the Lord your God
 - a. This phrase occurs thirteen times in this chapter as a reason to obey the command just given
 - 1 b. For example, Leviticus 19:4 - *Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves any gods of cast metal: I am the LORD your God.*
 - c. On its own, this repeated phrase sounds like a simple statement of authority - do this because I'm God - and it is a statement of authority, but I think it's something more as well
 - d. I think that this repeated phrase is a pointer back to Leviticus 19:2
3. Leviticus 19 starts with the counterpoint to the repeated phrase of Leviticus 18 and 20
 - 1 a. Leviticus 19:1-2 - *And 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.*
 - b. Leviticus 18 and 20 told the Israelites they could not be like the nations, and Leviticus 19 starts by saying they should reflect God instead
 - c. The Israelites should reflect the nature and the character of God not the rebellion of the nations, so their characterization should be 'holy' because God's characterization is 'holy'
 - 1 d. And then this repeated phrase, "I am the Lord your God", becomes a reminder phrase pointing back to this truth - you should live in these ways because these things reflect who I am
4. And that's the main point of Leviticus 19 - God's people should reflect God
 - a. God's people have a different measure, that is they cannot follow the pattern of this world, because God's people have a different Master - they serve God the Lord and reflect Him in all their ways
 - b. So ultimately, God's people's goal isn't to look different than the world - that will be the end, but that is not the goal - the goal of God's people is to look like God, to reflect the character of their Redeemer and to declare that they are His
 - c. Which meant God's people didn't need to study the nations to figure out what they were doing so they could do something else, no God's people just needed to study God and reflect Him and they would be different than the nations
- ★ 25. But what does reflecting God look like? How do God's people reflect God's character?
 - a. I think Leviticus 19 gives us two ways:

1 B. Second, God's people must love God supremely

1. Leviticus 19 doesn't look very remarkable at first glance - it seems like a motley collection of laws that sometimes seem a little random, but I think on further study two principles stand out that uphold all these laws
2. And the first principle is this: God's people must love God supremely, He must be their treasure and their joy and they must renounce all else
3. So, throughout Leviticus 19, we see laws that call God's people to renounce other gods, other treasures, other joys
 - 1 a. Leviticus 19:4 - *Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves any gods of cast metal: I am the LORD your God.*
 - 1 b. Or again, Leviticus 19:29-30 - *"Do not profane your daughter by making her a prostitute, lest the land fall into prostitution and the land become full of depravity. You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.*
 - i. This might not seem to be a call to renounce other gods until we remember that ritual prostitution was often central to the worship of foreign gods
 - ii. So this law is paired with the opposite - do not give your daughter to be a ritual prostitute in the worship of other gods, instead pursue My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary
 - 1 c. Or again, Leviticus 19:31 - *"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.*
 - d. God's people were to renounce all other gods and all other powers that might claim their allegiance or their affection because such allegiance and affection belonged to God alone

4. And we see the flip side of this principle - God's people are to dedicate themselves to the service, worship, and enjoyment of God
 - a. Primarily this is seen in laws calling for devotion to God in the lives of God's people
 - b. For example, the call to keep the Sabbath is repeated twice in Leviticus 19, in verses 3 and 30 - the Sabbath was a statement of rest and trust and treasure - God was their ultimate treasure, they could pursue Him and trust Him to provide everything else that was necessary
 - c. Or, in verses 5-8 there is a call to handle God's peace offerings with reverence and honor - the peace offering itself was a supreme act of worship and treasure, to share a meal with God Himself, and God's people needed to recognize the significance of that act and not treat it lightly or flippantly - God was the ultimate treasure and they got to sit at His table, they should do so with care and with joy
 - d. Verse 26 calls the people to refrain from eating blood - a practical statement of trust in God's promise and reverence and worship for God's sacrifice
 - e. Their lives were to be marked by passive and active statements of devotion to God - He was their treasure and they must love Him above all else
5. God is His own ultimate treasure - God loves nothing more than Himself and He is right to do so, there is nothing more perfect, more beautiful, more good, more lovely than Him
 - a. So, if God's people are to reflect God, then God must become their greatest treasure as well - they must love Him supremely and pursue Him wholeheartedly
 - b. Their lives ought to be a statement of devotion to God because God's existence is a statement of devotion to Himself

1 C. Third, God's people must love others effectively

1. This is actually what the bulk of the laws in Leviticus 19 focus on and I'm not going to go through each law this morning, but let's just flip through and see some of the ways that God's people were to love others and I've divide these laws into two portions - God's people must not fail to uphold justice and God's people must love to show mercy
- 1.2. First, God's people must not fail to uphold justice
 - a. So there are prohibitions against stealing (verses 11-12), oppression (verses 13-14), slander (verse 16), and unjust measures (verses 35-36) - God's people cannot use others in unjust ways to serve themselves
 - b. Verse 15 even specifically calls for God's people to turn away from all injustice and to have a system of justice that upholds God's character - 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.
 - c. And Leviticus 19 calls God's people to take care how they seek justice - vengeance should not be hastily applied nor should justice be ignored but justice should be well considered; so verses 20-22 describe a hard to judge case, a case that falls in a grey area in other laws of the Pentateuch, and shows how to apply justice rightly
- 1.3. Loving others means not falling below the demands of justice, but it doesn't stop there - God's people must not fail to uphold justice, but they must also love to show mercy
 - a. So God's people should sacrifice their own goods to care for the needs of the poor in verses 9-10
 - b. And God's people should seek to serve and protect the foreigner in verses 33-34
 - c. And this heart for others is upheld supremely in the center of the passage in Leviticus 19:18 - *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.*
4. God's people were to love others effectively, turning away from injustice and embracing mercy toward others
 - a. God's love for Himself had been primarily demonstrated in His love for others - God's people knew what God's love was like because God had chosen them and rescued them and redeemed them
 - b. If God's love for Himself had been displayed in love for others, then God's people must reflect that - God's people's love for God must be displayed in their love for others
 - c. In fact, as we go through Scripture it will teach us that this is the clearest way to determine if someone loves God - whether someone loves God or not is a hard thing to measure directly, but someone who loves God will always effectively love others because that's what God's love is like
5. So, above all else, God's people should be known as those full of justice and mercy
 - 1 5 a. In fact, Micah 6:8 would be a faithful summary of Leviticus 19 - *He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?*
 - b. God's people are to love God supremely like God loves God and therefore they are to love others effectively, that is upholding justice and loving mercy

1 III. How should this point us to Christ?

1 A. Jesus is the One who perfectly reflected God

1. Leviticus 19 sits at the center of Leviticus and calls God's people to reflect the God who had redeemed them by sacrifice, who had brought them out of the land of slavery and was taking them to the land of promise
 - a. Unfortunately, in most ways this call was unheeded by the Israelites - sometimes they came closer to trying to reflect the character of their God, but at their best points they were woefully inadequate and at their worst they were an utter abomination - no sinful man could reflect the glory and the character of God
 - b. In fact, Leviticus 19 ought to leave us feeling a little hopeless - no one could ever hope to be holy like God Himself is holy - we shouldn't downplay that command or make it mean less than it does, this is a command to impossibility
2. So, we ought to rejoice with great joy when one comes who can perfectly reflect the glory and the character of God, and that one is Jesus
 - 1 a. So we see in Colossians 1:15 - *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*
 - 1 b. Or again in John 1:14, 18 - *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth... No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*
 - 1 c. Or again, Hebrews 1:1-3 - *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.*
3. Jesus is the perfect reflection of God that Leviticus 19 was longing for and Jesus is truly the only one who is God's people - everyone else failed, they had all fallen short, but Jesus fulfilled what God's people ought to be
 - a. So, in the end, Leviticus 19 excludes us from being God's people, it cuts off equally Jew and Gentile, none could possibly live up to the expectations of God's people, except Jesus
 - b. Our only hope is to go to Jesus and pray that He will welcome us into His kingdom - we have no right to be God's people but Jesus earned that right by perfectly reflecting God
 - c. Leviticus 19 stands against us, but we can rejoice because Jesus is holy as God Himself is holy AND He is a Savior who welcomes sinners into His kingdom
4. Leviticus 19 is a call to see our need for the gospel
 - a. Leviticus 19 calls us to see that there is no way we can be God's people, that we need someone to stand up and take our place, to live the life that we should have lived so that we can dwell with God forever - and that person is Jesus

1 B. If Jesus is the One who perfectly reflected God then Jesus must be the One who perfectly loved God

1. And we see that to be completely true: throughout Jesus' life we see Him act in devotion and obedience to His Father, seeking God's will and God's plan above all else
- 1 2. And near the end of His life, Jesus will point at that obedience, an obedience even willing to go to death, and tell the disciples that it shows His love for His Father, John 14:30-31 - *I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming. He has no claim on me, but I do as the Father has commanded me, so that the world may know that I love the Father. Rise, let us go from here.*
3. Jesus loved God literally to death. He was willing to die to show how much He loved His Father, how much He treasured God's glory and how much He wanted that glory to be displayed to the world. God's glory was Jesus' ultimate treasure - that passion drove His life and drove Him to His death.
4. Jesus is the fulfillment of Leviticus 19 - the One who would renounce all others and make God His supreme treasure

1 C. If Jesus is the One who perfectly reflected God then Jesus must be the One who perfectly loved others

1. Jesus' love for others is almost easier to display than His love for God - which is actually unsurprising because love for others is how love for God ought to be displayed - it is the main diagnostic
 - a. So we see Jesus going about performing acts of mercy - feeding the poor, healing the sick, proclaiming freedom to the slave, even raising the dead - and He often wept over the lostness and destruction of the people around Him
2. But the climax of Jesus' love for others happened at the same point that Jesus displayed His love for God - at the cross
 - 1 a. So, the night before He was crucified, John records this, John 13:1 - *Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.*
 - b. Jesus had loved those around Him, but He would continue loving them to the end. He would sacrifice His own life for their eternal joy. He would risk bearing the wrath of Almighty God so that they could go free. There is no greater love than this.
 - 1 c. So John would later say this, I John 3:16 - *By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us*
 - d. Jesus act of sacrificial service that did not fail to uphold justice but showered mercy on His people is the definition of love for others, the ultimate act of effective love
 - e. None can doubt that He loved others and therefore none can doubt that He loved God
 - f. And Jesus sacrificial love is why we can rejoice that He is the One who perfectly reflected God - through laying His own life down in favor of ours He gave us His right to be God's people
3. So Leviticus 19 is not only a call to see our need for the gospel, but to see the hope of the gospel as well
 - a. We couldn't attain to God's standard and needed someone to attain it for us
 - b. But how could someone ever meet God's standard for us? It could only be by living the life we should have lived and then giving that life to us - only an infinite act of sacrificial love could save a sinful people
 - c. But Jesus showed that love for us which is our hope of salvation
- 1 4. So we can conclude with Romans 5:6-11 - *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person---though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die--- but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

1 IV. How can we apply this to ourselves?

1 A. First, when we come to Leviticus 19, we need to recognize that Jesus fulfilled the law on our behalf

1. That's what we just looked at as we looked at Christ - we have no hope of accomplishing the task that Leviticus 19 sets before the people of God, our best attempts will be but filthy rags
2. But Jesus did it for us, so Leviticus no longer stands against us - in fact, Leviticus 19 no longer binds us at all, first, we were never parties to this covenant and second this covenant no longer is in effect
3. It's not a law that we are under because Jesus fulfilled it and took it to death
4. So we don't have to obey its prescriptions - we don't have to worry about whether our garments are made of two different fabrics, we don't need to eat peace offerings on the first or second day - it's all been done for us
5. But, that doesn't mean that Leviticus 19 means nothing for us, rather that it has a different relation to us now - no longer as a binding law under which's prescriptions we labor, but a celebration of what our Savior did
6. And inasmuch as our Savior did these things for us, we ought to rejoice in them and we ought reflect them, which means that the heart of Leviticus 19 ought to be our heart as well - the laws don't apply to us, but the heart of those laws is our very life and so Leviticus 19 still ought to be reflected in our lives
7. So as God's people we ought to desire to reflect God's character, that is to bear the image of Christ, we ought to desire to love God supremely, that is to love Christ, and we ought to desire to love others effectively, that is as Christ loved us

1 B. We should strive to bear the image of Christ

1. Leviticus 19 called God's people to instead of reflecting the pattern of this world, to reflect the glory and the character of their God
- 1.2. And this is still God's purpose for His people so Peter quotes Leviticus 19 in I Peter 1:14-16 - *As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."*
- 1.3. And God has promised that this will happen for those in Christ, Romans 8:29 - *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.*
4. So that ought to be our goal, our striving, to change our way of thinking and our way of acting so that we reflect what God is, so that we are conformed to the image of Christ
- 1.5. So Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 5:1 - *Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children*
6. That's my first question this morning, is that your goal? Do you want to reflect the character of God? Do you put in effort to look like Him? If you're not sure what that looks like, go read Ephesians 4 and 5 - Ephesians 5:1 is really Paul's summary statement for that section, this is what it looks like to reflect God.

1 C. We should strive to love Christ supremely

1. At the center of Leviticus 19 was a call to wholeheartedly love God demonstrated in obedience and devotion
- 1.2. And, again, this is still God's purpose for His people; Jesus Himself says, in Matthew 22:35-38 - *And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.*
3. And now, since God has come to us in Christ and Jesus has become our Redeemer, we love God in Christ
 - 1 a. So Paul says, at the end of Ephesians - *Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.*
 - 1 b. And, in contrast, Paul says at the end of I Corinthians - *If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!*
4. Just like the ancient Israelites, our lives ought to be devoted to our Redeemer, our lives ought to be directed and guided by our love for Christ
5. So that's my second question this morning, do you have a deep and abiding love for Christ? Is your life directed by a love for Christ?
 - 1 a. Paul's was, so he says in II Corinthians 5:14-15 - *For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.*
6. Are you like Paul? Do you love Christ to the setting aside of yourself to pursue Him and His desires? Do you no longer live for your sake but for Him who for your sake died and was raised?

1 D. We should strive to love others as Christ loved us

1. Love for God was at the center of Leviticus 19, but love for others really made up the bulk of the laws of Leviticus 19 - a true love for God would be expressed in effectively loving your neighbor
- 1 2. And this is still true for God's people, so Jesus quotes Leviticus 19 at the end of the quote we read a moment ago, Matthew 22:36, 39-40 - *"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ... And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."*
- 1 3. And Paul will tell us that though the law has been fulfilled and set aside in Christ, that love for others was the heart of the law and what it still calls us to, Romans 13:8-10 - *Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*
- 1 4. And Paul will tell us that we have a pattern for what this love should look like, continuing the quote in Ephesians 5:1-2 - *Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*
5. That's my third question this morning: do you love others like that? Do you sacrifice of yourself to serve those around you? Do you show your love effectively? Are others able to look at your life and say, he loves those people? Do you love others like Christ loved you?
 - a. That's what Leviticus 19 is about - the laws give practical ways to show love to fellow Israelites and others in the community and maybe not all these laws make sense for us today, but the heart behind them does
 - b. This ought to be the chief mark of a Christian, that we love each other. Assuredly, love for God is the chief commandment but you can say all that you want about loving God, true love for God will be seen in love for others. Practically and effectively loving others is the best diagnostic for loving God.
 - 1 c. So Jesus tells us that others will know we are His disciples if we love one another and, if we can go a step farther, that we aren't His disciples if we don't, John 13:34-35 - *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*
 - 1 d. But this isn't only for other people to diagnose us, John will call us to consider ourselves, to judge whether we love God by whether we love others, I John 4:19-21 - *We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.*
6. So, do you love your brother whom you have seen, the guy you see every day or every week, in reflection of your love for God? Or does your lack of love argue against any real love for God? Christ loved us to the very end, let us show that same love to our brothers and sisters here and to the world.