

## Living God's Way: Leviticus 19:1-2 & 9-18

**Introduction:** The first thing to say about Leviticus 19 is that these instructions are not about how to gain access to God's grace, that is, it is about doing them and that will entitle you to belong to the people of God.

Nobody (except Jesus himself) has or could perfectly follow these commands because human sinfulness will always get in the way. Just as the Israelites who first received them from Moses did nothing to deserve their freedom from Egypt or their special relationship with God but received it as a gift, so we today are saved by God's grace alone. As St Paul said in Ephesians 2:8-9; 'it is by grace you are saved, through faith – this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast.'

But, and it is a big 'but', having been saved by grace through faith, the question is; how should we live as God's people? This passage is a wonderful answer to that question.

Verse 2 gives us the short answer: 'be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.' That is to say, 'let the way you live be a reflection of who I am and what I am like.'

So what *is* God like?

We know from the Bible that God is righteous, that is, he always acts in accordance with his own nature of fairness and justice. We know that he is also loving and merciful. It was because of these aspects of his character that he sent Jesus into our world. Romans 5:8 says that 'God demonstrates his love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'

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More than that, we have a living example of what someone who followed these commands would actually look like. Jesus said, John 14:9, 'He who has seen me has seen the Father,' He also said, John 13:15, 'I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.'

Jesus is the only person who has ever perfectly followed the commandments of God and in doing that he perfectly displayed the idea of being 'holy as God is holy'.

So let us look at how Leviticus 19 points the way for us to follow.

The key verse is at the end, Verse 18, '... love your neighbour as yourself.' When someone asked Jesus which was the greatest commandment he said it was to love God with all your heart. He then said, quoting this verse, 'the second is like it, you shall love your neighbour as yourself, on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets'.

So, in loving ones neighbour as oneself one would leave some of the harvest for needy people to have, verses 9 and 10. Also, and following the principles behind the Ten Commandments, we 'must not lie, deceive, one another or swear falsely, Verses 11 to 13 and Verse 16. Also, verses 11 and 13 say that we must not steal or defraud our neighbour.

Following the commandment about murder, verse 16 says we must not do anything to endanger our neighbour's life.

Going even deeper, verse 14 says we must have special care for the deaf and blind. And in verse 15, we must not pervert justice, but treat

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everybody fairly. Finally, verses 17 and 18, we must not hate our brother in our heart or bear a grudge. In short, we must love our neighbour as ourselves.

Just imagine what this world would be like if people tried to follow these words.

Earlier it was noted that following God's commandments (even if we could) does not earn us the right to be accepted by God. But that does not absolve Christians from basing their lives on these moral and ethical principles. For example, St Paul in Romans 13 said, 'he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, do not commit adultery, do not murder, do not steal, do not covet, and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: Love your neighbour as yourself. Love does no harm to its neighbour. Therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.'

**Conclusion:** The big question that comes from all this is, how can we possibly comply with these commandments even if we **have** been forgiven by grace through faith in Jesus, given that we still sin and wrestle with our darker side?

The answer is, we can't, but God has given us his Holy Spirit. His work is to guide us and help us. He is the one who will gradually change us and help us to become more and more like Jesus. We draw down this help when we pray, when we read the Scriptures and when we support one another in the fellowship of his church.

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Out of this daily walk with God he does his beautiful work whereby we, to quote St Paul, 'are being changed from one degree of glory to another', 2 Corinthians 3:17-18.

That is why St Paul is able to say in Galatians 5:22 that 'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.'

May our heavenly Father give us the grace to seek his help to follow the way laid out in Leviticus 19 and in the teachings of our Lord Jesus Christ and his holy apostles.