

LEVITICUS

Lesson 27 - Chapter 19

We just got started last time in Leviticus chapter 19, a chapter that focuses on the holiness of the worshipper.

Let's re-read part of the chapter.

READ LEVITICUS CHAPTER 19:1 - 18

We see that 6 of the 10 Commandments are directly addressed in this chapter, and the words state the duties and responsibilities that every believer in the God of Israel is to take on. We are told immediately in verse 2 that, "you shall be holy, for I YHWH, am holy". While this instruction is paid some lip service in modern Christianity, for the most part our personal holy behavior has been set aside because of the supposed danger of "works" and "legalism". I think the foundational problem that caused that kind of twisted logic comes from the erroneous belief that Jesus did away with the Torah, and with it went any tangible definition of what holiness is and what it looks like in the life of a Believer. What that statement about being holy as God is holy means is that we are to imitate God, whose very nature is holiness. And that kind of holiness is expressed in our moral integrity, which **MUST** in turn be manifested in our behavior and actions, not just our intentions or inner feelings.

I explained last week that the whole purpose of our human will is to express and manifest moral decisions. But from what source are we to draw in order to distinguish what is moral versus what is not? According to the secular progressive world that source is the human heart and intellect. According to the church it is the denominational articles of faith and its associated religious doctrines. According to God it is His laws and commands as revealed in His Torah.

So holiness is an inner condition that must be expressed outwardly to have any practical value. God is not a holy God who behaves in an unholy way; so for us to claim holiness because of our relationship with Yeshua but to behave as though our decisions and actions are separate from that inner holiness makes us hypocrites in the worst possible way. Therefore we are to accept (as a gift from God by means of Messiah) a new essential nature that produces a kind of holiness that transforms our moral decisions and our behavior into a kind that mimics and is in harmony with that of the Creator.

In verse 4 Israel is told not to "turn to idols". "**Do not turn to**" is a Hebrew idiom; it means that one is not to call on, nor to rely on, something or someone; in this case an Israelite is not to call on the power of an idol, a false god, for help.

Next in vs. 5 and 6 sacrificial offerings are addressedbut it doesn't speak of sacrifices in general; rather it specifically refers to the Zevah Shelamim class of offerings. And the instructions are that this kind of offering must be done exactly according to how Yehoveh ordained it and that it must be eaten on the 1st day (all things that are defined back in Leviticus 7). We'll not go into detail here but one might ask why, of the 5 different classes of offerings we studied, God would select the Shelamim offerings as the ones to make a dire warning against violation of its proper protocol. Because it says that he who eats of it improperly shall be found guilty (by God) and that the penalty is that the violator will be cut-off from his people. In other words that person will either be excommunicated from the nation of Israel (that includes separation from God) or executed. Well the reality is that the Shelamim class of offerings would far outpace all the other sacrifices in quantity and frequency. And this was because, by rule, the worshipper who offered his animal for a Shelamim sacrifice could a) perform the sacrifice whenever and as often as he determined he wanted to and b) he got to keep the largest portion of meat for himself and his family as compared to any other kind of sacrifice.

Now it's been a while since we've discussed this aspect of sacrifices in general so since it's mentioned in verse 8 let me remind you of it; notice that the problem with improper eating of the sacrificial meat (meaning to take a portion of it that is not assigned to that person) is that the worshipper has "profaned what is sacred to the Lord....." Recall several weeks ago we talked about "God's holy property". Whatever animal is chosen to be sacrificed to Yehoveh has its ownership officially transferred to God at some precise moment (usually when hands are laid on the head of the animal at the Tabernacle). From that instant onward that sacrificial animal now belongs to God; it becomes "holy property". So to improperly eat of an animal that has been turned over to God is to violate His holy property. And there does not exist a much more serious crime that an Israelite could commit than that; hence the severe penalty of being "cut-off from your people" in consequence for doing it.

Verses 9 and 10 deal with making provision for the poor and the strangers who live among Israel. But notice how these 2 commands would not even have had any effect for many years. At the time these commands were given Israel was a wandering community of 3 million souls; they certainly didn't farm. And these 2 commands are directly about farming (something they wouldn't engage in until about 40 more years passed). Just in case you've forgotten these passages we are reading in Leviticus were being given to Moses, at Mt. Sinai, less than a year after Israel escaped from Egypt. And many of these commands will have no meaning or direct function for the Israelites until they have conquered the Promised Land of Canaan and made it their own. Of course these Israelites didn't KNOW at this moment that most of them would never see the day that they had vineyards and fields of their own. As far as they knew they were perhaps but a few weeks away from their final destination. But God is preparing them nonetheless, for even though the direct application of these agricultural rules was many years away the principles they were based on could be exercised immediately. And the principal was that those in Israelite society who were unable to care for themselves were to be shown mercy and a means to survive.

In direct application the admonition of verse 9 that is to not reap all the way to the edges of ones' field, simply meant that when an owner of a field harvested his grain he was to leave a

certain amount of the field completely unharvested; thus the poor could harvest it (this is usually called gleaning) and have food. But that is not all there is to it. The second part of the command concerning field crops is that the field's owner should not gather "the gleanings". Since we'll see several examples in both the OT and the NT of this subject let's take a moment to understand this practice a little better.

There are two allocations of grain for the poor: the **pe'ah**, and the **leket**. **Pe'ah** means corner, or edge. It is that part of one's field that is to be left unharvested altogether. Of course the obvious question that every farmer would have asked is, just how much of my field does that amount to? The Mishnah says that in general, without a good reason that it should be otherwise, 1/16th of a person's field should be left unharvested.....about 6 or 7%. And that would depend on local economic conditions such as how many poor people that needed aid that were there, and how abundant the harvest appeared to be. If it was a bad harvest a **higher** percentage might be required to be allocated for the poor. And so that we get the picture correctly, it was up to the poor to come and themselves harvest the grain....it wasn't gathered then delivered to them by the farmer.

The other allocation of grain for the poor, **Leket**, referred to the gleanings. Gleanings are that part of the harvest that fell to the ground as a normal result of the harvesting procedure. The way grain was harvested in those days was that a person would, in one motion, catch the stalks of the grain in one hand and cut them off at the ground with a sickle that was in his or her other hand. With each stroke of the sickle some small number of stalks fell out of the hand of the harvester as he went about his job; by the law of **leket**, the farmers were NOT ALLOWED to reach down and pick those dropped stalks of grain off the ground. Those were to be left for the poor to "glean". One of the prime examples of this in action is in the book of Ruth.

Now vineyards, which will be an important and large part of Israel's agricultural economy, were to be dealt with along the same lines as grain fields. So some quantity of grapes were also to be set-aside for the poor. God's command is that not all the fruit is to be picked off the vines; rather some is to be left for the poor. Further, the grapes that fell to the ground were NOT to be picked up by the farmer they were to be left for the poor to pick up. The grapes that were to be left unharvested.....those still attached to the vine..... are called '**olelot** and generally, these are the grapes that have been slow to mature. So when harvest time comes and the grape clusters are plucked, the grapes that are small and not fully matured are to be left to mature a while longer; it is THOSE grapes that will ultimately be harvested by the poor. **Peret** is the Hebrew word for those grapes that fell to the ground and MUST be left where they lay until the poor come to pick them up.

Now who were the poor and the strangers who came in after the harvest and helped themselves? The poor were those who had no money to buy a field, or maybe they were a family where the father had died and thus there was no income; perhaps they were sickly or lame and couldn't work. These were desperate people, not lazy people. God, and therefore the Israelites, tolerated no laziness in their society. By definition those defined as "the poor" were Israelites; the other class of people permitted to partake of this kind of charity were strangers, in Hebrew, **ger**. The meaning of ger as used here is NOT the foreigners who

became a part of Israel; this is not referring to the mixed multitude of Egyptians and others who joined up with Israel when they left Egypt. Rather these **ger** are people like a foreign merchants or traders who were in town for a while; or perhaps it was a foreign mercenary soldier or a craftsman who had come to find work. In all cases it meant someone who either had no intention to become part of Israel or who was not welcome to become part of Israel. And Yehoveh made it clear that if they lived among Israel even they were to be shown mercy and given a means to survive at a subsistence level.

In verse 11 the topic switches from social responsibility for the poor to civil law. The immediate topic is, **you shall not steal**, which is of course a repeat of the 8th commandment. I suspect you're beginning to see why Leviticus 19 is often seen as a Torah within the Torah as it recounts, and in some cases expounds, on many principles that have already been ordained in either Exodus or earlier parts of Leviticus. And this same verse also refers indirectly to the 9th commandment, **you shall not lie**; because it says that one should not deceive or have unfair dealings with another person. This concept of honest dealing is indeed quite apart from most Middle Eastern cultures in that day and even in the present. Getting the best of a business deal by lying, cheating, and holding back relevant information is considered a positive and admirable thing in most Arab cultures. It's looked at as being wise and cunning; of course it sets up every transaction as being adversarial in nature whereby there must be a winner and a loser. And lest you think I'm picking on the Arabs I can tell you first hand that many of world cultures think exactly the same way. But Yehoveh says that His set-apart people are to be above-board and fair. Now being shrewd.....doing your homework, driving a hard bargain....that's a different matter. It doesn't take too much study of the Talmud to see that fair dealing and justice became the bulwarks of Hebrew thinking and society. It seems that all throughout history.....no doubt due to the principles God set down in the Torah.....that the Hebrews have had a heart for the underdog; something, I might add, that America has also been known for and is a virtue that we've not yet lost.

Moving along; in verse 12 we get a repeat of the 3rd commandment not to swear falsely using God's name. Understand that in those times to swear an oath automatically meant invoking the name of one god or another. If you didn't invoke a god, it probably wasn't even considered a legitimate oath. And Yehoveh says don't you ever invoke His name in swearing an oath that either is an impossibility to carry out, or you know you have no intention of doing. A long time later Yeshua will tell us that it is better not to make an oath at all; just make our yes, yes and our no, no.....and leave it at that. Besides life and circumstances change. Swearing an oath today may prove to be undoable tomorrow through no direct fault of your own, or no intention to deceive. Remember that Yehoveh doesn't look upon our careless oaths or use of His Name with a grandfatherly wink and nod.

Verse 13 starts a series of verses that begins to more carefully define God's idea of fairness, justice, and truthfulness. Let me emphasize something that is being shown to us repeatedly in our studies, and I'm afraid it's high time we acknowledge it and deal with it in our lives. Every single matter that the Lord sets down as a rule, or law, or command is the unveiling of goodness and righteousness; by definition all that is opposite of those rules and ordinances is evil. This is the real meaning of morality. Every last ordinance of God represents divinely defined morality. Therefore every time we disobey it is an immoral act and evil.

As how to apply these laws and commands to our modern lives I'm not saying to you that we're all supposed to go literally buy a field and not harvest it all setting some aside for the poor; because in our day and age (especially in America) I have no doubts that the leftovers (the gleanings) would often just sit there and rot. Yet the principle behind the law of gleaning is plain and rather easy to apply in our modern American society; we're to ALWAYS budget for charity. If we have a large and abundant field, we give. If we have a small field, we give. The proportion, however, remains about the same. Yet if we see greater need, due to harder times, we give more. Naturally the amounts will differ according to the size of our fields.....our incomes and wealth....but there is no allowance by Yehoveh to stop giving because we're not all Bill Gates, nor because we'd prefer a new and better car but to have one means no room for charity.

Verse 13 speaks of two types of false dealing: fraud and robbery. In Hebrew fraud is **'oshek**, and robbery is **gezelah**. The Bible defines robbery as taking something from someone that already belongs to him. I own a goat, you take my goat knowing that it is mine and not yours, and that is robbery. Fraud means to withhold something from someone, to which the law says they are entitled. You don't have it yet, or own it yet, but by all rights it should be yours; instead of giving it to you as I should I hold it back from you either through deception or from a position of power. It could refer to something (like money) that is owed to someone and in fact that is the example given at the end of verse 13 when it says "...the wages of a laborer shall not remain with you until morning". Biblically wages means more than money owed from doing work; it includes the labor itself. So when someone holds back wages it means that the person who did the job has lost both the effort and the compensation for his effort.

In the strictest sense this command not to withhold wages until morning means not to withhold a workers wages until the next day. In that era the person who earned that money likely would use it immediately to purchase food for his family for THAT day. Withholding the money even overnight meant people went to bed hungry. This was unfair and unjust in God's view. The usual and customary way.....the expected way in Hebrew society and likely in most others as well.....was for a day laborer to be paid immediately at the end of the workday. So for a field owner to hold a harvester's wages overnight, God calls it fraud, **'oshek**.

Now the next command, not to insult the deaf, isn't exactly the way we might think of it. The idea here is that because that person can't hear you, then you can pretend that you're saying something nice to them when in fact you are insulting them. You can be smiling to their face but saying terrible things about them. So this is both false and unjust.

Of course this evil practice goes hand-in-hand with putting a stumbling block before the blind. This command could be taken completely literally and be correct; but later Jewish thought on the matter made both of these regulations as about concerning general behavior. For instance to take advantage of a person's weakness.....which could be seen as a type of blindness or deafness.....is seen as violation of this command in Lev. 19:14. This principle was also applied to a person of lesser intelligence and as a result someone smarter or better educated could easily mislead him. And this is finished off with the admonition that "you shall fear your God.....". In other words that deaf person may not know that you insulted him, or that blind person be aware that you put that object in his path so that you could watch him stumble but

Yehoveh sees all things, and you will not escape His gaze or His defense on behalf of those who are powerless.

Justice in both the judicial sense and in the sense of fair play is the focus of verses 15 and 16. I marvel at the way that God follows a pattern that basically begins with Exodus 20 and His first formal ordinances to His set-apart people, and then how He patiently and lovingly paints an ever more defined picture by expanding and building upon those 10 basic commands. That is God starts with teaching the primary colors (the 10 commandments) and then starts to teach about hue and tone (the remaining 603 laws). He sets down the most foundational principles in a few words and then steadily, over time at a pace humans can absorb, He introduces nuances and deeper understanding of their application and meaning. At first these rules seem mostly like a list of simple human behavioral do's and don'ts.....mechanical and locked into physical earthbound reality. Later, after the people have been taught the basics, Yehoveh starts to add aspects that seem unfamiliar, even odd; things like the laws of clean and unclean that really don't have that much to do with fair and just behavior among men. Things that make one understand that there is something about these laws and commands that extend well beyond biological life and human culture and civil structure. Finally 13 centuries later Yeshua comes to explain that the Torah and all it's ordinances and rituals are a foreshadow of the world to come; and all of the principles contained in the Law had a far greater spiritual component, full of much deeper meaning than as simply a complex legal system that led to crime and punishment.

The instruction of God not to render an "unfair decision" seems like a no-brainer. What else might Yehoveh say, that men SHOULD render unfair decisions? Actually let's remember that what is going on here is that God is, in most respects, teaching Israel to imitate Him. God is holy and so He is teaching Israel what holiness is and what holy behavior looks like. Yehoveh says not to show special favoritism to the poor nor special deference to the rich. Justice is not just if one gets special treatment and another does not. This is not always an easy ideal for men to live up to. In some societies (particularly those of an aristocratic nature) it goes without question that the rich are treated differently than the poor because the poor are there to serve the rich. It's understood to be that way by both classes. The poor are less important to the grand scheme of things than the rich. As much as that turns our stomachs in America we have had a recent tendency to violate the other end of the scale by showing undo favoritism at times to the poor. Beginning in the Hippie movement era judges began to interject into our criminal laws the theory of societal and communal guilt; that is that often the overall society is more at fault than the actual perpetrator of a crime. And usually the basis of that societal fault was a criminal's poverty and illiteracy or broken home. In other words the Judge in some cases would count the socio-economic status of a person as a factor when determining their sentence.....and at times even in determining their guilt or innocence. We're told that who our nation regards as "the poor" should at times have less personal responsibility to do what is right and be punished less for what they did wrong because they are poor and therefore at a disadvantage. A middle class person has less excuse for his actions because he's not poor, yet has his own problems in obtaining justice because his means to the best legal council is limited. A rich person has a whole different set of problems to deal with; most of his crimes are called "white collar", which means that they are more about lapses in ethics than criminality (according to our legal system), and so justice is often more about returning money that was of

ill gain than about losing one's freedom for an extended period of time as a consequence for taking that money in the first place.

The point is that once a people or a nation begins to meet out justice based in any fashion on rich and poor, or class status then by God's definition justice is not served. But an even larger issue is that God is, of course, revealing HIS character by means of His laws. He is revealing how HE operates and that HE does not show favoritism to the poor, nor disdain for the rich, nor vice versa. His justice is based on the determination of the human will He gave to mankind; wills given specifically for the purpose of choosing to follow the ways of holiness or following the ways of evil. The will to love God or not. Whether one has a large checking account or none at all; and whether one lives on the Seashore or under a bridge is of no bearing as concerns God's justice for the choices that individual makes.

RE-READ VERSES 17 & 18

Verses 17 and 18 are one total thought; thus they must be taken together. Now there are a couple of key words we're going to look at because they help to define just WHO the "brother" is that Israel is told not to hate in their hearts; and WHO this neighbor is that an Israelite is to rebuke. The Hebrew word translated usually as "brother" like in the CJB, or fellow countrymen or kinsfolk in other translations is **ach**. And, ach is a VERY broad and general word; it could be an actual brother.....a sibling....it could mean a close family member, it could mean a distant family member; it could mean a friend. But except in the rarest of cases the outermost boundary of who one's "brother" is as defined by the Hebrew "ach", is a fellow Israelite. Whether that Israelite is a natural born Hebrew or a foreigner who has joined Israel, he is still an Israelite and could be an "ach". Let me be clear: this would NOT refer to anyone outside of the nation of Israel in this particular context. It is not unlike a Christian referring to any other Christian of any nation or denomination as a "brother" in Christ. Same idea.

In the 2nd half of the first verse it says to "reprove" or "rebuke" your neighbor; the Hebrew word for neighbor is **amith**. And **amith** is equally as broad and general as "ach". Yet while **ach** indicates more the idea of a person who has some near or distant familial relationship with you.....even in the sense of the relationship being due to sharing the same faith.....amith really means a person, any person, who you know and have some amount of regular contact with. Today we might say "friend" or "acquaintance" (neighbor is a bit distant in our current way of thinking because in contemporary America, it is fairly normal to live next door to someone, and barely know their name, let alone talk with them). That would NEVER have happened in Israeli society, nor usually in American society even 30 or 40 years ago. So when the Bible says "neighbor" it is assuming that you know this person and have developed some type of regular relationship with them.

Now these two verses are really kind of awkwardly worded if you ask me. The idea of verse 17 though is that we should not be angry or have some issue with someone we know and just let it lay there in our hearts and fester; presumably not letting on to that person that you are angry with them. Rather, says Yehoveh in the 2nd half of verse 17, confront them. Tell them honestly (and presumably decently and lovingly) and with neither anger nor false sweetness of the thing that is causing the problem. Further says verse 18 no matter the outcome you are neither to

seek vengeance nor to allow bitterness to grow in your heart against that person. Instead of that we should "love your neighbor as yourself".

Uh-oh. Another concept supposedly invented in the New Testament.....**love your neighbor as yourself**.....is actually a Torah command given to Israel right here in Leviticus. In fact 13 centuries later when Jesus REPEATS this same Torah command He acknowledges that it is an ancient command "of the Law", the Torah.

NAS Matthew 22:37 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.' 38 "This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 "The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

And just to show you that Jews in general believed this we find in the writings of Rabbi Akiba, who lived about the same time as Yeshua, these words as he comments on Leviticus 19: "Love your neighbor as yourself, is the central principle in the Torah". This ideal of love that Jesus was espousing was simply mainstream Jewish thought of that day....and records show, for centuries before that as well.

Verse 19 says (RE-READ v. 19)

We're going to stop and examine an important principle contained within this rather odd and obscure set of rules set down in verse 19. And that principle revolves around a word we learned a few weeks ago: **tevel**.....meaning **confusion**, and often also translated as **perversion**.

Let us be clear that the commandment of verse 19 is quite literal; it definitely means that whatever is described as not to be mixed, is not to be mixed. It begins by saying that **behemah** are not to be interbred; behemah is often translated as simply animals or cattle or beasts but behemah is actually referring to a range of domesticated farm animals; sheep, goats, or cattle. It could refer to donkeys or even camels (at a much later date, though). So the idea is that a cow shouldn't be interbred with a donkey or a sheep interbred with a goat.....if that were even possible. Then we get the admonition to not plant two different crops in the same field at the same time. The most common temptation to do this would have been to sow a grain crop in the large vacant rows between grape vines. And finally, two different kinds of thread are not to be woven into cloth to make garments; for instance linen and wool are not to be mixed.

But what is behind this command? What possible harm is there in planting some barley under grape vines? Or hybridizing a cow and a buffalo to come up with a hearty animal whose meat is very lean.....a beefalo? What is the evil in using a mixture of (say) silk and cotton to create a fabric that is cool, yet durable? As I said these commands were understood to be completely literal and so were indeed practiced as Law. Yet the Hebrew sages also understood that something much larger and deeper was at work here. In a nutshell what is happening is that God is setting boundaries. Boundaries are the result of one of God's most used and fundamental governing dynamics: and that is that Yehoveh divides, elects, and separates the holy from the unholy and the clean from the unclean.

Boundaries are a difficult thing for men to establish and even harder to maintain; as children of God we are enjoined by Yehoveh with the command to be in harmony with one another and yet simultaneously to recognize the individuality....or better, **distinctions**.....that God has ordained in all His Creation; between good and evil, between clean and unclean, between holy and unholy, and between His people and everybody else.

Now, stay with me because Leviticus 19:19 is PRECISELY about dividing, electing, and separating; it is also about establishing distinctions and boundaries.

Since it is Yehoveh that makes these distinctions and sets up the appropriate boundaries it is man's natural evil inclination to try and blur the distinctions and dismantle the boundaries. We see it so prevalent today embodied in a world that worships multi-culturalism, tolerance, unfettered diversity, moral relativism and in the latest challenge to God's boundaries, same sex marriage. Within the body of Christ the so-called interfaith movement is gaining steam; a movement that seeks to equate all kinds of spiritualism as good things, and to say that all gods worshipped are the same god. They teach that there are many doors to Heaven and that Messiah is but one.

I don't want to detour but I would like to offend your comfort level just a little bit; are you aware of why and how all this blurring of distinctions and erasing of boundaries is taking place? In my view the primary reason, after man's own natural evil inclination, is modern Church doctrines. Doctrines that say that God's laws, where all these distinctions are spelled out and the boundaries are described, are deemed obsolete. Doctrines that say the Torah, the ONLY place in the Bible where holiness is spelled out for us, is about as important to our Bible as an Appendix is to a modern human's digestive system. You know; every human has an Appendix that USED to do something useful apparently but today all it can do is cause trouble. That is basically how the Church sees the Torah and the O.T.....a relic of a past dispensation that does little but cause a modern Believer trouble. And many church' doctrines say that with the advent of Jesus obedience to God's commands is obsolete; in fact to be TOO obedient is tantamount to the dreaded legalistic and works mindset we've all heard preached about so much.

If one believes that the Bible starts at the book of Matthew then one takes away all the underlying principles that Jesus based His teachings on. The point is this: it is the removal of Torah from the Church that has allowed for the erroneous manmade doctrines that have supplanted Scripture as our source of truth. It has also led many professing Christians to deny the deity of Yeshua, to claim that the Church has inherited all the blessings of God and the Jews have been assigned all the curses, and to the dissolving of boundaries between the body of Christ and the world-at-large. And to pronounce the very things that God calls evil, as good. In other words, the God that never changes changed as the page was turned from the book of Ezra to Matthew.

We'll examine the improper mixing of things that God says should be divided and a barrier set between them, and the confusion that it is and that it causes, next week.