

“The Holiness of God” (Part 2)
(Leviticus 19:1-18)
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Introduction:

1 The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.

3 " 'Each of you must respect his mother and father, and you must observe my Sabbaths. I am the LORD your God.

4 " 'Do not turn to idols or make gods of cast metal for yourselves. I am the LORD your God.

5 " 'When you sacrifice a fellowship offering to the LORD, sacrifice it in such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf. 6 It shall be eaten on the day you sacrifice it or on the next day; anything left over until the third day must be burned up. 7 If any of it is eaten on the third day, it is impure and will not be accepted. 8 Whoever eats it will be held responsible because he has desecrated what is holy to the LORD; that person must be cut off from his people.

9 " 'When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.

11 " 'Do not steal. " 'Do not lie. " 'Do not deceive one another.

12 " 'Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.

13 " 'Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him. " 'Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight.

14 " 'Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the LORD.

15 " 'Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

16 " 'Do not go about spreading slander among your people. " 'Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the LORD.

17 " 'Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt.

18 " 'Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

So how are the memory verses coming along? Verse of the month. The verse pack. Have you singled out a topic?

In speaking to people here and there it seems that God is already begun working in many of us. I know he has in me. For example, there is a sit-com that I love to watch. It is incredibly well written, very witty, but extremely crass and vulgar. I used to watch episode after episode, laughing my heart away, but I've lost the desire to watch that. And when I'm tempted to watch it, I'm reminding myself, "What good will that do me?" So I'm staying away from it. It might seem insignificant to some, but any movement toward holiness is significant, so I'm glad.

I hope that God is stirring within many of you as well. I hope that there is within you a dormant fire that has been re-kindled. A fire re-lit by the Holy Spirit, that makes sin and compromise appear appalling and holiness appear beautiful and pursuit worthy. Let's keep stoking those fires. Some of you might have already fallen back into old sins and old patterns of disobedience. Don't lose

hope. Don't get discouraged. The battle for holiness remember, is a life-long pursuit. We will never reach perfection while we are alive, but we are still called to achieve it. So, stay on course.

At the same time, by now, you should have already had some discussions in your Life Groups about what role they will play in helping each other pursue holiness. Continue to work that out. Move into a deeper level of transparency and intimacy. The bible calls us to confess our sins to one another. James 5:16 goes like this.

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

If you remember, we mentioned a couple times in the past two weeks the motivation for pursuing holiness. It isn't about becoming a better person. It isn't about self-improvement. It isn't so I'll feel better about myself. It isn't primarily about any of those things. If you listen to the teachings of the pastor of the largest so-called church in North America, that's what you would hear. He would say that it's all about you. If I mentioned his name you would know him. He has the whitest, and prettiest smile on the continent. He wrote books like "Your Best Life Now" and "Becoming a Better You" and other books like that. His teaching is far too man-centered with no reference point to God. It is nothing more than self-help, positive thinking, with a Christian twist. That's not why we are pursuing holiness.

The main reason why you and I, as God's children, are pursuing holiness is because of 1 Peter 1:15-16.

15But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; **16**for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Today's passage in Leviticus is the Old Testament version of the 1 Peter passage. Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.

God, his nature and his character, is the reason why we are doing this.

Last week we talked about the nature-aspect of God's holiness. We were taught that for God to be holy means that he is completely other from all the rest of creation. We said that the definition for the holiness of God was "who among the gods is like you?" He stands distinct, unique and alone.

Now related to that is the other side or the other meaning of the holiness of God and that is the focus of today's message. The other side of God's holiness is that he is totally, utterly, completely separated from sin and evil. God can have no communion with sin.

Job 34:10 **10** "So listen to me, you men of understanding.

Far be it from God to do evil,
from the Almighty to do wrong.

Hab 1:13a

13 Your eyes are too pure to look on evil;
you cannot tolerate wrong.

But the moral aspect of God's holiness is also seen positively in His moral excellence. So his goodness, mercy, love, justice, righteousness, wisdom, forgiveness, only make sense when built upon the foundation of his holiness.

God being holy means he cannot sin. God is not tempted to sin. Sin does not appeal to him. In fact the only response God can have toward sin is utter disdain and hatred. For example the bible says, "is God like man that he should lie?" (Num 23:19) And of course the answer is no. So in that verse are both dimensions of the holiness of God. Is God man? Of course not. Does God sin, in this case lying? Of course not. He is separated, he is different in both ways.

So God does not sin and in that way he is holy. But that's not all. He has an emotional and volitional response to sin and evil. He doesn't just sit back, observe the world of humans from afar, and keeps his hands clean from all the filth. He has a response. He hates sin. He punishes sin. So when we see words like, such and such a sin is an abomination, or when he says in Malachi, I hate divorce, it can lead to us misunderstanding God if we didn't understand the holiness of God. We might just see him as an angry and capricious God.

This may be hard for us grasp because you and I were born sinners. You and I have not lived a day where we have not sinned. Sin is our companion, day in and day out. So it may be hard to fathom what sinlessness looks like.

Trying to make sense of God apart from his holiness will run us into a whole bunch of wrong turns and dead-ends.

For example, every once in a while a news story appears that is so out of the ordinary, so depraved and perverted you can't imagine that a human being could be capable of that. It makes you sick to your stomach. It's one of those stories that challenges you to the very core of your beliefs. You may be firmly against capital punishment, but when you hear a story like this one, you're willing to make an exception. Stories of raping children. Or the story a short while ago of a man in Austria who holed up in a secret room in his basement his daughter, with whom he had sex over and over and had several children with her. Every once in a while you hear a story like that. And with strong opinions around the water cooler, everyone, Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus all agree. That is wrong. There is no exception. There is no condition under which that behavior could ever be considered permissible, let alone right.

So it is with God in regards to all sin. What we consider small sins or large sins, it doesn't matter God hates them all. That is his only response to sin. To respond in any other way would question his moral holiness.

Here are a few reasons why we must deeply understand the absolute moral holiness of God.

1. If we do not our view of God will be nothing short of idolatrous. Idolatry is not just worshipping a statue made of wood, stone or metal. We can be committing idolatry when we worship a God that is not the God portrayed in the bible. For example one extreme is to see God as a cosmic Santa Claus and the other extreme is to see God as a cosmic killjoy. So say the God you worship is a God that only requires that you insert a prayer, press a button and out comes the answer. God is nothing more than our spiritual vending machine. Or say that all your life is lived in fear, not in confidence, not in faith, because your view of God is that he's angry with you, and he sticks his foot out when your walking so you'll trip into pile of dog doo. So many

Christians are guilty of committing idolatry because as one person said, "Since God created us in his image, we've returned the favor and created God in ours."

God, in our eyes, will be nothing more than a pagan god, or a god of Greek mythology, who needs to be appeased, or with the right spells and incantations, can be manipulated. But when we understand God as holy, we are thinking more rightly of him and when we think rightly of him, we are more apt to relate rightly to him.

2. Sin only makes sense when you and I understand the moral holiness of God. Our perception of right and wrong begins to change. It deepens. We stop comparing ourselves to others, usually less-moral-than-we-are people, and we begin to compare ourselves with God and his perfect standard. So we don't justify these so called small sins anymore.

That is what today's passage teaches us. The chapter begins with the command for God's people to be holy because God himself is holy. And then he gets to specifics.

--respecting parents

--idolatry

--proper sacrifices

--mercy toward the poor

--stealing, lying, deceiving and so on.

And what you see scattered throughout this passage is this constant reference point. It's repeated over and over again. "I am the Lord your God." I am YHWH, the covenant name for God in relationship to his people.

So God is saying to his people, to us. Live a holy life, because I am holy. And I am your covenant God.

When that happens, white lies are not just truth bending. A little hate is not okay. We will begin to see sin as the saints of old saw sin, as massive offenses against a holy God.

Joseph, when Potiphar's wife was trying to seduce him, he said these words and ran out of the room.

My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"

David after his sin with Bathsheba penned these words, Psalm 51:4

4 Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,

3. You and I can only begin to view ourselves honestly and rightly, as incredibly wicked and sinful people only in the light of the holiness of God. Apart from the holiness of God, we will continue to distinguish human beings between the Adolf Hitlers and Sadaam Husseins and then the very wide, almost all inclusive spectrum of what we call "good" people. We haven't offended God just a little. Our life, our existence is an offense.

When we understand the moral holiness of God, passages like Romans chapter 1-3 begin to make sense. Those chapters include Paul's incredible treatise on human sin where he concludes with these words,

*9*What shall we conclude then? Are we any better? Not at all! We have already made the charge that Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin. *10*As it is written:

*"There is no one righteous, not even one;
11there is no one who understands,
no one who seeks God.
12All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one."
13"Their throats are open graves;
their tongues practice deceit."
"The poison of vipers is on their lips."
14"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."
15"Their feet are swift to shed blood;
16ruin and misery mark their ways,
17and the way of peace they do not know."
18"There is no fear of God before their eyes."
When we don't understand and acknowledge the holiness of God, we start to think, "God take it easy. Chill out." But once we begin to grasp the holiness of God our perception changes.*

You read these words and you breathe a sigh of desperation saying, this is true of me and all human beings. You confess to God. "You're right. This is indeed the state of my soul."

So even when you look at those ten sin topics in your memory verse packs, you don't say, "got it, got it, got it, need it, got it, got it, need it, need it, got it." You say what Isaiah said, "Woe is me." You say what Peter said, "Go away from me Lord." You say what the Apostle Paul said in Romans 7,

"15I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.
24What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

You say, Lord, I need to work on all of them. When we understand God's holiness, we understand ourselves.

4. The extremes that God went through to redeem humankind only make sense when we understand the holiness of God.

God went to the utmost extreme to rescue us from the curse of sin. He sent his son on a rescue mission to be born as a human, became a man, living a perfect sinless life, and eventually dying on the cross and in doing so, he died, paying the penalty for the sins of all those who would believe in him.

Friends, if sin isn't that bad, then Jesus didn't need to die. There could have been a lesser solution. But because sin, all sin, was so wicked and heinous and an affront to a morally pure and holy God, in love and holiness, God didn't leave us to be condemned to hell, but sent his one and only Son.

Related to this point, this next thing is absolutely true. The deeper our realization of our own sinfulness, the deeper the appreciation for Jesus and his cross. Folks this is true. Apart from understanding the depth and magnitude of the sins we were saved from, we will not understand the depth and magnitude of the grace we were shown.

Conclusion:

Friends, it is a good thing that God is morally holy. He is perfect in holiness. And because he is all those things, we must pursue holiness in our own lives. Holiness says Jerry Bridges, is not optional. Not one of us can say, "I don't think I need to be holy." At all costs we pursue holiness in our lives because God himself is holy.

Let us pray.

