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Epiphany 7 • Leviticus 19:1–2, 9–18 • February 23, 2014

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Epiphany 7 • Leviticus 19:1–2, 9–18 • February 23, 2014**Text Notes**

Verses 1–2: “Holy you will be because holy am I, Yahweh, your God.” The commands in Leviticus 19 pertain to almost every area of Israelite life. By commanding such a mix of laws, Yahweh implies that every sphere of life is subject to him. Every action has ramifications for the relationship between God and human beings. And all commands are on the same footing. One is not more important than the other. “Holy you will be . . .” is the theme of the chapter. What follows in the chapter is the elaboration of the theme—what it means to “be holy.”

Verses 9–10: There are four prohibitions, two for the field (v. 9) and two for the vineyard (v. 10). They all are designed to provide care for the “poor” and the “stranger” (cf. Lv 23:22; Dt 24:19–22).

“I am Yahweh, your God.” This refrain punctuates the paragraphs in the chapter. It is approximately equivalent to “because I, Yahweh, say so.” Since God “says so,” the social legislation to care for the poor becomes a sacred act.

Verses 11–18: Each two verse paragraph is followed by the refrain “I am Yahweh,” which indicates that relationships between people are also divine concerns. Most of the commands deal in matters of conscience because, to an extent, the crimes can be committed in secret and go undetected.

Verses 11–12: A quotation of the eighth commandment is followed by a paraphrase of the ninth and fourth.

Verse 14: If the verse is also taken metaphorically, not just of those literally deaf and blind, the principle includes victimizing others by taking advantage of their gullibility or ignorance. The verse concludes, “You shall fear your God, I am Yahweh,” because the exploitation of vulnerable people may never be uncovered. Fear of God is the only restraint.

Verses 17–18: “Do not hate your brother in your heart . . . Love your neighbor as yourself. I am Yahweh.” Because the previous verses have touched every area of life and all kinds of people, the meaning of “neighbor” is not limited. Here Yahweh commands his people to love their “neighbor” as they love themselves without regard for the worthiness of the person being loved. Both Jesus and Paul said that all the other duties to our neighbors are summed up in this command (cf. Mt 5:21–48; Mt 22:39–40; Rom 13:9).

Thoughts for Sermon

In his well known sermon, “How Christians Should Regard Moses” (*LW* 35:161–74), Luther says some surprising things about the law. For example, he insists that Christians must not have Moses as the ruler or lawgiver anymore, and God himself will not have it either. The law of Moses is no longer binding on us because it was given only to Israel. Famously, he says, “Moses has nothing to do with us. If I were to accept Moses in one commandment, I would have to accept the entire Moses.”

The reason we are no longer bound by Moses and by his authority is because God’s Son, Jesus, is the one who showed us real authority by his resurrection from the dead. No one else has displayed such power, not even Moses. Jesus has the authority to

forgive sins (Mt 9:6). Jesus has the authority to cast out demons and heal the sick (Mk 3:15). All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to him (Mt 28:18). (Cf., 1 Cor 15:24, Eph 1:21, Col 2:10).

Jesus is our Lord and Savior. By grace, he has redeemed us and adopted us into his family. As Peter says, “But you are a *chosen race*, a royal *priesthood*, a *holy nation*, a *people for God’s own possession*, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Pt 2:9, emphasis added).

Since we have been called from darkness to light, we are Jesus’s servants. As Luther says, “we have our own master, Christ, and he has set before us what we are to know, observe, do, and leave undone.”

So, what does this text have to do with us? Well, Jesus, in his own teaching, makes use of this text from Leviticus. A lawyer asked him, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?’ and he said to them, ‘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 foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and Prophets” (Mt 22:35–40).

The text is interesting to us because our Lord uses it to teach us how we are to live as his children in this world. Verses 9–18, especially, help us think through what it looks like to “love your neighbor like yourself.”¹ It is important to remember that while both the OT text and Jesus’s words can function as the second use of the law—condemning us for not “being holy” and not loving as God asks—primarily, they are both given to people whom God has redeemed and brought into his kingdom by grace, people who have a relationship with Yahweh and to whom Yahweh has made his promises. Therefore, the words are meant to help us understand what kind of people we are to be, now that we belong to Christ. What are our lives to look like and how can they best reflect Christ? It is from this perspective that Leviticus 1–2, 9–18 have something to teach us.

Tim Saleska

Endnote

¹ Luther also makes the point that texts like Leviticus 19:9–18, are relevant to us, not because Moses gave the law, but because its content, like the Ten Commandments, has been written into the hearts of all men.