

“Two Commands of Holiness”

Proper 25-A October 29, 2008

Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18

Introduction:

One of the reasons non-Christians give for not wanting to become a Christian is that we, who are Christians, act ‘holier than thou’. In other words, we seem to be hypocrites. Yet, we are people whose family and friends know us. They know we are not “holy” people; and, they know we believe in God through Jesus Christ. They see us – up close - struggling with becoming what we believe. People who know us casually tend only to see the discrepancy between what we say we believe and how we act. Therefore, they judge us as hypocrites.

The truth is, God commands us to be holy. It is not a matter of trying to be better than other people or to show off. Being holy is a state of condition in our relationship with God. In our lesson from Leviticus we read: *“You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.”* So, I suppose it is fair to ask,

“What Is holiness” and “How Do We Get It?”

From the Holman Bible Dictionary we have this definition of holy: It is a *characteristic unique to God’s nature which becomes the goal for human moral character. The idea of “holy” is important for an understanding of God, of worship, and of the people of God in the Bible.*

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This we know for sure: God is holy, and we aren't God. Yet, we are to try and be like God. The Christian life is not a stagnant life. It is a life of growth, change, and challenge. John Wesley challenged the 'people called Methodist' to "go on to perfection" –Perfection is one definition of holiness. That was his way of keeping people moving toward holiness.

Another way of defining holiness has to do with Sanctification – being set aside for Godly purposes. When this building was completed and set aside for worship it became a holy place. When we enter here to worship God we set ourselves apart from the world. We sanctify ourselves in our worship of God, and thus engage in a holy activity that in turn makes us holy.

We don't become holy simply by becoming a Christian. I've used the analogy of us giving Jesus our rags of sin, and He clothing us with His robe of righteousness. In that way we acquire His righteousness so we can stand before God. While theologically true, it is not that simple in the crucible of daily life. The day we invite Jesus into our lives we acquire His righteousness through faith but we remain the same person of habit. Our bad attitudes and habits remain with us. Sometimes, at our conversion God miraculously takes away some habit, like cussing. Mostly

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though we lose those bad characteristics and acquire new Godly habits through intentional growth in God's grace.

Holiness is gained through action; through growth; through study of God's Word, through Worship, and through intentional acts of service on behalf of other people. In support of this let's look at the

Descriptions of Holiness in Leviticus:

In our lesson from Leviticus there are six specific actions God instructs us to take as evidence that we are working at being holy, because we value our relationship with God who is holy.

The first one comes from verse 15: ¹⁵*“Be fair in your judging. You must not show special favor to poor people or great people, but be fair when you judge your neighbor.* The Bible says that God shows no partiality and neither should we. A Holy God treats everyone fairly. How fair are we in our treatment of others – especially people not like us? For some of us this is an area of growth we can work on.

The second holy action is found in verse 16: ¹⁶*You must not spread false stories against other people,* Slander is a major obstacle to holiness. It injures people, people created in the image of God. Slander involves lying.

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Spreading slander within the church injures the Body of Christ, and that is definitely not a holy thing to do. So, if you are someone who feels more important by spreading false stories – STOP IT! It's stunting your spiritual growth.

The third action is also found in verse 16: *and you must not do anything that would put your neighbor's life in danger.* This goes back to the original commandments, doesn't it – *thou shalt not commit murder?* I know you wouldn't murder someone but slandering someone can destroy their life.

The fourth action comes from verse 17: ¹⁷*“You must not hate your fellow citizen in your heart. If your neighbor does something wrong, tell him about it, or you will be partly to blame.* This gets to the issue of holding resentments. God did not create us to hold resentment, anger, hatred inside ourselves. It is not the way God designed us to live. We are to go to our brother or sister when that person hurts us and lovingly confront them. In that way the issue can be faced and dealt with. That is God's way. It is the way of holiness.

The fifth action is in verse 18: ¹⁸*Forget about the wrong things people do to you, and do not try to get even.* God doesn't want us spending ourselves trying to get even

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with those who wrong us. It wastes time and energy and keeps us from doing positive things with our lives. God wants us to work on forgiveness and turning over that person to God. In His time and way, God will right the wrong and balance the scale. It is not an action we need to spend ourselves on. The question is, “how deeply do we trust God”?

The sixth action also comes from verse 18: *Love your neighbor as you love yourself.* Here in Jeremiah we have the second of the two great commandments that Jesus says makes us holy. Loving our neighbor as much as we love ourselves is to love them with a God-like love. It is a holy thing to do. Do we want to prosper in our soul, be in good health and go to heaven? We should also want those same things for our neighbor.

The first great commandment comes from Deuteronomy 6:4-6, and is part of the Shemah – a famous liturgical response in Jewish worship: *“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; ⁵and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.*

God has given us two commands dealing with love and with holiness. We are to give everything we are to God.

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That is our upward call in Christ. Likewise, we are to give everything we want from God for ourselves to our neighbor. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus said our neighbor is the person who needs us the most.

God said, “I am holy” and “you shall be holy”. It is a command for how to live. It is also a promise for a future transformation. The greatest gift we can give our neighbors is to introduce them to Jesus. In Him we are made holy – forever.

God who is a holy God is also a God of love. Therefore, to love as God loves is to be holy.