

BaptistWay Bible Series for March 20: Holy living calls for holy relationships_30705

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Holy living calls for holy relationships

Leviticus 19:1-4, 9-18, 32-37

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The disorganized rabble Moses led out of Egypt was not prepared to function as God's covenant nation. So Moses, following direction from God, led the Israelites to Mount Sinai. Here they built a portable house of worship and received the laws to shape them into a holy nation-set apart for God's purpose.

The first lesson in this study covered the ritualistic sacrificial system and how acts of worship demonstrate obedience to God. The second lesson dealt with the Day of Atonement on which the nation of Israel was annually reconciled to God. This week's lesson is taken from Leviticus 19, a part of the "Holiness Code" (Leviticus 17-26).

The Holiness Code was to teach the Israelites how to separate themselves from the pagan practices of their neighbors. Without consistent steady

guidance and vigilant leadership, the Israelites adopted and incorporated practices which interfered with their worship of Jehovah.

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God foresaw the need for the Holiness Code when he told the Israelites: “You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in Canaan, where I am bringing you” (18:3).

God reminded Moses in Leviticus 19:1 to “be holy because I am holy.” Israel not only was required to worship a holy God, but also to practice holiness in interpersonal relationships.

Becoming holy for God's purpose requires obedience to God's directions for relationships with people. The Israelites were to be set apart to be used by God, but they were not to function in isolation. They were to work within a society centered on worship of God and developed through people.

They were not to function in isolation. Implementing God's plan of redemption for the whole world could not be accomplished by withdrawing from the world. Moral behavior demonstrated obedience to God's plan for using Israel.

The Ten Commandments, given to Moses on Mount Sinai, are the foundation for God's covenant relationship with Israel. The commandments define both the duties to God and toward other people. The passages we focus on from Leviticus 19 reflect some of the Ten Commandments given to

Moses as the basis for holiness in relationship to God and with one's fellow man. A reading of Exodus 20:1-17 is effective preparation for studying Leviticus 19.

Leviticus 19:1-2

Israel was a holy nation because God himself is holy. The Israelites worshipped God as “the Lord your God,” and they were told to have no other God but Jehovah. Worshipping a holy God required them to be holy themselves-totally obedient and set apart for his purpose.

Leviticus 19:3

The Israelites were to respect their fathers and mothers. God has instituted the family system as the method through which society would be established. Respect for parents is vital to the family system.

Leviticus 19:3-4

The nation of Israel was to observe the Sabbath and not make idols or gods of cast metal. Respect for a holy God demanded nothing be allowed to come before or profane God's name.

Leviticus 19:9-10

The Israelites were to feed the poor and the alien by leaving gleanings in the field. These unfortunate people were taken care of without being forced to beg for food.

Leviticus 19:11

Theft of property was violation of the law. Deception practiced by swearing

falsely in God's name was condemned. Individual property rights were to be respected, and a holy character was not to be compromised.

Leviticus 19:13-18

Defrauding or robbing a neighbor was condemned. Ethical treatment of the physically challenged was directed. Fair judgment is required for all people-rich or poor. Slander, endangerment and hatred are listed as hindrances to relationships.

Leviticus 19:18

Jesus himself provided the commentary on this verse in Mark 12:28-31 when he stated the admonition to “love your neighbor as yourself” was the second-most important commandment.

Leviticus 19:32-34

Respect for the aged and love for aliens are evidence of obedience to God through caring for others.

Leviticus 19:35-36

Honest business practices show respect for God through ethical treatment of people in the marketplace.

Christ himself gave us the motivation for carrying out the requirements for holy behavior. In Mark 12:28-31, Jesus answered a question about which commandment was the most important. He answered: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength” (v. 30). Then he said: “The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these” (v. 31).

Application

Moses was following God's direction in the Sinai wilderness for instructing the Israelites in how to live a holy lifestyle. Since we do not live under the same conditions and we have the written word of God to guide us, we may feel superior to the Israelites. We may think we have incorporated the teachings of the Bible into our thoughts and actions and further study of the Old Testament record is not necessary. Thus, we fail to identify with the Israelites.

We need to realize our moral behavior reflects our relationship with God, whether we are an ancient Israelite wandering in the desert or a modern entrepreneur working in an electronically driven society.

Interpersonal relationships are vital for the fulfillment of God's will for our lives. We cannot exist in a vacuum, separated from people. We grow through our relationships with God and with other people. We open our lives up to God's direction by forming relationships with other people. Their needs can challenge us, and sometimes even their mistreatment of us can motivate us.

Discussion question

- ◆ How does my treatment of other people reveal my love for God?

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