

# Leviticus 19:1-4

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/lev/lev-19/leviticus-191-4/>

*Leviticus 19 begins with God commanding the Israelites to be holy as He is holy. God highlights three of the ten commandments that will be key to this task.*

Leviticus 19 begins by saying, *Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying.* The word *Then* indicates that the information to follow should be considered in light of the previous discussion (Chapter 18). Leviticus 18 describes and prohibits various kinds of behaviors which constitute an exploitive lifestyle. When a society, family, or individual embraces these sinful behaviors they become fractured and dysfunctional. These behaviors were prevalent among the Egyptian culture from which the Israelites were redeemed, as well as among the Canaanite culture in the land to which they were now about to settle (Leviticus 18:3).

God tells *Moses* to *speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, 'You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.'* The Hebrew word for *holy* is "kadosh" and literally means "set apart." God wants His people to be set apart from all the other people of the earth. God desires that they live lives of communal harmony based on love for one another, rather than an exploitive lifestyle. God desires His human creations to make choices that lead to life and flourishing rather than death and decay (Deuteronomy 30:19).

It is commonly thought that the opposite of *holy* is unrighteous. However, the opposite of *holy* is "common." The nations of the earth had at this time exploitive lifestyles in common which manifested as sexual immorality, robbery, idolatry, as well as in other ways. Beyond being set-apart from the other nations in behavior, God also gave Israel several physical ways to be set-apart, such as circumcision and diet.

God uses the same phrase *you shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy* in Leviticus 11:45 while defining clean and unclean animals for the Israelites to eat or not eat. Perhaps by God telling the Israelites to maintain a diet of only clean animals, it would further set apart the Israelites from the rest of the nations. Israel's role in the world is to be a light to the nations, (Isaiah 49:6, 60:3), a role they would accomplish only by being set-apart from the other nations by following God's way of loving one another (Leviticus 19:18), rather than living a life of exploitation (Leviticus 18).

God is the only creator. There are no gods beside Him who fashioned the world, or who know the path to our true self-interest. To follow any other gods is to follow a path that will be self-destructive. Israel was set apart to show a better way to the world. A way of life.

Believers in Jesus (who are the grafted-in branches of the olive tree that is Israel, as described in Romans 11), are also to be set apart (*holy*) from the world (unbelievers), in the same way Israel was to be set apart. Jesus in His parable of the vineyard owner may have been alluding to both New Testament believers and Israel. Israel might be represented by the first workers hired to work the vineyard in Jesus's parable of the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16). They were given a

contract with a specific benefit for a specific obedience, just as Israel was given a covenant with specific promises of reward for obedience. New Testament believers might represent the last to enter the vineyard to work. These were workers who agreed to work and trust the beneficence of the vineyard owner for their reward. The vineyard owner represents God. God has promised great rewards to New Testament believers that are connected with God's spiritual kingdom (Revelation 3:21, 22:12 ).

Next, in Leviticus 19:3-4, God reaffirms three of the Ten Commandments.

1. *Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father.*
2. *you shall keep My sabbaths; I am the LORD your God.*
3. *Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods; I am the LORD your God.*

Obedying God's commands will set the *sons of Israel* apart from the other nations and create a culture of harmony and self-governance. Self-governance is only possible when people recognize that there is a God to whom they are accountable. A benevolent God who knows what is for their best and will direct them in paths that are for their benefit (Deuteronomy 10:13).

Self-governance begins to be learned when children submit to the benevolence of human parents. Human parents have a perspective and understanding of what behavior is beneficial for their children. This is an informed perspective that goes beyond the understanding of a child. Children cannot yet have the perspective of a parent, due to immaturity. They are children. They must learn the beneficial perspective from their parents. This is why we should *reverence* our *mother and father*. The Hebrew word for *reverence* is "yare" and is often translated "fear" in reference to God. It includes the idea that God has our best interest at heart, and is keeping us from self-harm.

In the same way, adult humans should acknowledge the true and living God as their Heavenly Father, and obey His ways. He knows what is best for us, and understands a perspective that we mere humans cannot understand. That is why we should follow God, rather than following idols that we make for ourselves. The command *Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods* emphasizes the fact that we make idols for ourselves.

Isaiah 44 elaborates on this point, noting that humans will cut down a tree, use half as firewood, then make an image of the other half and pray to it, saying "Deliver me, for you are my god!" (Isaiah 44:16-17). This is obviously self-deception, a mere sophisticated form of rationalization. The fact that we create idols for ourselves makes clear that we are using the idol as a moral justification to follow our appetites, in the name of "doing what I want to do." In a rationalist/materialist society, they would never think to worship a wooden statue. But it is just as foolish to look at the evidence of our surrounding creation, its intricate design, the incredible levels of fine tuning, and the amount of information packed within the smallest of cells and say "This was an accident, therefor I am not morally accountable to anyone but myself."

Sandwiched in between the two admonitions for children to obey their human parents, and adults to obey their Heavenly Father (rather than making idols to morally justify following their own ways of exploitation) is an admonition for Israel to keep God's command to honor His *sabbath*

laws. This admonition might have been added to emphasize that God is still supreme over all. While we should honor our parents, they are not supreme. God is supreme. If it comes to choosing, the choice is clear: God is the supreme authority, and we are to obey Him above all.

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>1</sup> Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: <sup>2</sup> “Speak to all the congregation of the sons of Israel and say to them, ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. <sup>3</sup> Every one of you shall reverence his mother and his father, and you shall keep My sabbaths; I am the LORD your God. <sup>4</sup> Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves molten gods; I am the LORD your God.**