

# Leviticus 19:19-32

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*God gives several very specific instructions to the Israelites*

God begins this set of various commands with the statement, *you are to keep My statutes*. Doing what God commands is always in our best interest. Jesus says,

“If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.”  
(John 14:15)

The New Testament makes clear that loving God leads to our greatest possible benefit, and our greatest true self-interest:

“Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard,  
And which have not entered the heart of man,  
All that God has prepared for those who love Him.”  
(1 Corinthians 2:9)

Some commands in this chapter are accompanied by explanation or reasoning for the giving of it. With other commands we are not given the “why” other than the occasional statement, “*I am the Lord*.” There are some commands God makes where He does not explain how the command benefits us, but only expects us to trust His benevolent intent toward us. The following commands seem to fall under the general category of not mixing common with holy.

God now makes two decrees that seem to be aimed at keeping genetic purity in livestock and crops. He says *you shall not breed together two kinds of your cattle; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed*.

The high priest’s *garment* as well as other tapestries in the tabernacle were commanded to be made from a mixture of wool and linen. Perhaps the next command to not *wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together* was to separate the holy (item used for religious worship) from the common (all other *garments* and fabrics). The word holy means “set apart” like fine dishes that are only used on special occasions. In Deuteronomy 22:11, Moses states that the people were to *not wear a material mixed* of wool and linen together. *Wool* refers to the textile fiber one can obtain from the hair of sheep. It is used specially to make warm clothes. *Linen* is the material obtained from flax, a grass-like plant which gives soft fibers for making cooler clothes (Proverbs 31:13).

In the law of Moses when a man *lies carnally* with a married *woman* (adultery), both the *man* and the *woman* are to suffer the *death* penalty (Deuteronomy 22:22, John 8:5). In the

New Testament it is interesting to note that when the Pharisees accused the *woman* caught in adultery, they did not also accuse the *man* (John 8:4).

However, *if a man lies carnally with a woman who is a slave acquired for another man, but who has in no way been redeemed nor given her freedom, there shall be punishment; they shall not, however, be put to death, because she was not free.* While adultery was punishable by *death* of both the *woman* and *man*, an act of sexual sin between a *man* and a *slave woman* was punishable by other means. Perhaps this was to recognize the extreme high view the Bible places on the sanctity of marriage. Marital sex is holy, and it is not to be mixed with non-marital sexuality, which is common/vulgar.

The *man* who was caught being sexually intimate (*lies carnally*) with the *woman who was a slave* would bring his *guilt offering to the LORD to the doorway of the tent of meeting, a ram for a guilt offering.* Fornication between a *man* and a *slave girl* was sinful, but not deserving of *death*. Rather, a *guilt offering* was to be offered. *The priest shall also make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before the LORD for his sin which he has committed, and the sin which he has committed will be forgiven him.* With appropriate confession, this *sin* was to be *forgiven* (1 John 1:9).

God gave the Israelites many instructions regarding their methods of agriculture. The following command applies to the trees in the Promised Land. God states that *when you enter the land and plant all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden to you; it shall not be eaten. Then in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to the LORD.* This *fruit* from the *fourth year* would have been brought to the tabernacle in Shiloh (or later the temple in Jerusalem) and enjoyed in the presence of Yahweh.

A portion was to be given to the Levitical priests. Finally, *in the fifth year* an Israelite could *eat of its fruit*. The reasoning God gives for these instructions is so *that the trees' yield may increase for you; I am the LORD your God.* When young *fruit trees* put all their energy into *fruit* production rather than root, trunk, branch and leaf growth, it can cause a lack of growth and maturity that can be fatal for it in the long run. By plucking the emerging *fruit* off the *trees* for the first *three years* it would allow the *trees* to concentrate on establishing a strong root network as well as strong branches that will allow it to bear *fruit* for many years. Perhaps this could be viewed as training Israel to have an investment mentality—to defer pleasure now for a better reward later. Current rewards could be viewed as common, while future rewards are holy.

The next command is one that is reiterated throughout scripture, “*you shall not eat anything with the blood.*” One reason the Bible says not to eat *the blood* is because a living thing's life is *the blood* (Genesis 9:4, Leviticus 17:11). The command not to consume *blood* is coupled here with another oft-repeated command that prohibits the *practice of divination or soothsaying.* *Divination or soothsaying* consists of a person wanting to gain information from the spiritual dimension that will give them a personal advantage in the physical dimension. The person soliciting these acts could have been a

charlatan who made a living tricking people, or it could have been a person with a real occult connection to the dark side of the spirit realm, the dominion of Satan. In either case it is a transaction driven by exploitation. This could be viewed as the common/vulgar use of spirituality not a holy approach to spirituality.

Jewish men throughout the centuries have followed the command to *not round off the side-growth of your heads nor harm the edges of your beard*. The Jewish Talmud (recorded oral tradition) explains strict parameters for the length of the hair that grows on the side of the *head* which it defines as the hair in front of the ears extending to beneath the cheekbone, on a level with the nose (Talmud – Makkot 20a). These locks of hair are called “payot” in Hebrew. Some sources say it was possible that there were pagan groups who shaved this area of the *head* and *beard* at the time this was written. In that case, this provision was to create a distinction from identifying with these pagan practices.

God makes another command that forbids a behavior that was prevalent in paganism and forbidden to God’s people: *you shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves: I am the LORD*. God did not want the Israelites to mutilate or put *tattoo marks* on their bodies. There are verses throughout the Bible that illustrate how a believer’s body is the Temple of God (2 Chronicles 2:4-6, 1 Corinthians 3:17). Being God’s temple we are to treat our bodies with utmost respect. In 1 Kings, we see the prophets of Baal cutting themselves as a popular custom of their worship,

“So they cried with a loud voice and cut themselves according to their custom with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them.”  
(1 Kings 18:28)

Prostitution is a big business in a Godless culture. In ancient times it was often coupled with pagan worship. A parent in this era who was poor could have been tempted to earn money by selling their *daughter* into this terrible industry. God forbids this by saying *do not profane your daughter by making her a harlot, so that the land will not fall to harlotry and the land become full of lewdness*. Today, sex trafficking is as prevalent as ever despite it being outlawed in many places. The exploitation of women and children was not to be practiced in Israel. This would set Israel apart (“holy”) from the surrounding pagan nations and allow Israel to serve its appointed function as a priestly nation, showing surrounding nations a better way to live and thrive (Exodus 19:6).

God mentions the fourth of the ten commandments by saying *you shall keep My sabbaths*, with this verse adding *and revere My sanctuary; I am the LORD*. The phrase *keep My sabbaths* refers to resting on the seventh day of the week as God did after the sixth day of creation. However, by Jesus’ day this and many other commands were observed in an overly legalistic fashion. Jesus points out in Matthew 12:

“What man is there among you who has a sheep, and if it falls into a pit on the *sabbath*, will he not take hold of it and lift it out? How much more valuable

then is a man than a sheep! So then, it is lawful to do good on the *sabbath*.”  
(Matthew 12:11-12).

Jesus also pointed out that the sabbath day was created in order to benefit humanity, not to be a burden (Mark 2:27).

The commands of the law, whether positive commands (a command to do a good work) or negative commands (a command to refrain from a prohibited work), have a hierarchy of value. Fulfilling a positive command like helping your neighbor get his sheep out of a pit would over-rule the negative command to do no work on the *sabbath* day (Leviticus 23:3). It seemed that what Jesus faced was people focusing on the letter of the law without understanding the spirit of the law, which was to spur human flourishing. Focusing on the letter typically leads to legalism, which leads to a different sort of exploitation, an abuse of institutional power that serves the rule-makers. This is precisely the opposite of the *sabbath* law’s intent, which is to bless.

God’s *sanctuary* refers to the tabernacle Moses constructed in the wilderness, traveled around from camp to camp 40 years in the wilderness, and finally came to rest in the Promised Land at Shiloh where it remained for several hundred years. Later, in the covenant God makes with David, God says that David’s son Solomon (and by extension Jesus) would build Him a house. The Son of David would build a house for Yahweh as God’s new sanctuary (2 Samuel 7:12-13, Mark 14:58). Solomon built the first temple in Jerusalem. At Jesus’ return He will build and reign from the third temple in Jerusalem, also called Ezekiel’s Temple, for one thousand years.

Earlier in this passage (v. 26), the *practice of divination or soothsaying* was forbidden. The NASB here lists *mediums or spiritists*, adding the command, *do not seek them out to be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God.*

The word Hebrew word for *divination* here is “Nachash” and means “to observe diligently.” The first use of Nachash in scripture occurs in Genesis 30:

“But Laban said to him, ‘If now it pleases you, stay with me; I have divined (‘nachash’) that the LORD has blessed me on your account.’”  
(Genesis 30:27)

The Hebrew word for *soothsaying* is “Anan” and its root means “to cloud over,” and by extension to act covertly. The first use of “Anan” in the Bible is,

“It shall come about, when I bring a cloud (‘Anan’) over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud”  
(Genesis 9:14)

The Hebrew word for *mediums* is “owb” and means “wine skins.” It could also be translated “necromancer,” or one who communicates with deceased spirits. Apparently, the person conjuring up a dead person in these days would deploy the use of a wineskin

and speak or mutter into the wineskin and the practice became named after this liquid storing device.

The Hebrew word for *spiritists* here is “yidoni” and means “one who knows.” The first occurrence in the Bible for “yidoni” is our current passage Leviticus 19:31. It is used many times after, such as when King Josiah removed idols and sorcerers (including the *spiritists*) from the kingdom of Judah (2 Kings 23:24).

In each case, it seems that what is being forbidden is any occult practice of attempting to gain spiritual power, insight, or advantage through any means other than service to and petition of the LORD God. These occult practices are all ways to gain advantage for ourselves, perpetuating the illusion that we know better for ourselves than God knows for us. Here God is forbidding behavior that will ultimately be self-destructive.

Like the fifth of the ten commandments to honor your parents, here God commands, *You shall rise up before the grayheaded and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the LORD.* Honoring the elders who are feeble and need assistance creates a servant-minded society which is outward focused rather than focused on self. It also honors the wisdom of those who have learned from life, setting aside the natural arrogance of youth that, “Only we know what is best for us.”

## Biblical Text

**<sup>19</sup> ‘You are to keep My statutes. You shall not breed together two kinds of your cattle; you shall not sow your field with two kinds of seed, nor wear a garment upon you of two kinds of material mixed together. <sup>20</sup> ‘Now if a man lies carnally with a woman who is a slave acquired for *another* man, but who has in no way been redeemed nor given her freedom, there shall be punishment; they shall not, *however*, be put to death, because she was not free. <sup>21</sup> He shall bring his guilt offering to the LORD to the doorway of the tent of meeting, a ram for a guilt offering. <sup>22</sup> The priest shall also make atonement for him with the ram of the guilt offering before the LORD for his sin which he has committed, and the sin which he has committed will be forgiven him. <sup>23</sup> ‘When you enter the land and plant all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as forbidden. Three years it shall be forbidden to you; *it* shall not be eaten. <sup>24</sup> But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, an offering of praise to the LORD. <sup>25</sup> In the fifth year you are to eat of its fruit, that its yield may increase for you; I am the LORD your God. <sup>26</sup> ‘You shall not eat *anything* with the blood, nor practice divination or soothsaying. <sup>27</sup> You shall not round off the side-growth of your heads nor harm the edges of your beard. <sup>28</sup> You shall not make any cuts in your body for the dead nor make any tattoo marks on yourselves: I am the LORD. <sup>29</sup> ‘Do not profane your daughter by making her a harlot, so that the land will not fall to harlotry and the land become full of lewdness. <sup>30</sup> You shall keep My sabbaths and revere My sanctuary; I am the LORD. <sup>31</sup> ‘Do not**

**turn to mediums or spiritists; do not seek them out to be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God. <sup>32</sup> ‘You shall rise up before the grayheaded and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the LORD.**