

# Leviticus 19:9-18

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/lev/lev-19/leviticus-199-18/>

*God now begins to illustrate how individuals can be self-governing and servant-minded, which will produce a blessed society that lives in harmony with God and each other.*

God starts this section by forbidding certain exploitative behaviors that tend to stem from the fallen state of human nature. Since the fall of Adam, human nature (the flesh) is characterized by being stingy, deceitful, *injustice in judgment*, bearing *grudges*, taking *vengeance* and being self-focused by being hateful to others. This produces a miserable culture of exploitation and violence. God wants His people to follow His Spirit which will produce the *fruit* that Leviticus 19 is seeking to establish. Serving one another in *love* will produce a prosperous and enjoyable society.

We can look at the *fruit* of our lives, at any point, to see whether we are choosing the flesh or the Spirit. The flesh produces immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, hostility, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these (Galatians 5:19-21). To the extent a believer's life produces these things, that believer is not walking in the Spirit, but in the flesh. This is how we can know whether we have chosen the Spirit or the flesh at any point in time. Conversely, walking in the Spirit produces a *fruit/result* of love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, kindness, gentleness and self-governance (Galatians 5:22-23).

God commands His people to care for *the needy and the stranger* of the land by leaving *the very corners of your field*. Also, by refraining to *gather the gleanings of your harvest. Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard*. To *glean* was to "pick up the crumbs" so to speak. The process of *gleaning* means picking up the *fallen fruit* and the leftovers from the *harvest*. In this manner, the *field* owner participated in feeding the local poor by leaving the *corners* of their *field* unharvested. They overlooked the leftover *gleanings* for the those in economic need to gather from the *corners of the field*. This generosity applied to anyone who was *needy*, including *the stranger*, meaning immigrants and converts from other nations.

A lifestyle of self-governance pleases God. God does not desire to impose Himself upon His people; He desires that they make life-giving choices for themselves. This command of providing for the needy is repeated in Leviticus 23:22 in connection with the Feast of Weeks, as well as in Deuteronomy 24:19-22. With each *field* owner leaving behind the *gleanings*, the *needy* could then walk through the *corners* of the *field* or the *gleaning* to gather food for their sustenance. Rather than creating a welfare system of handouts, God wanted His people to exemplify self-governance and industry by allowing *the needy and the stranger* the dignity of gathering for themselves.

Truth is a great foundation for any society, or relationship. When truth pervades a culture it produces trust, and harmony. When individuals or groups *steal* from or *lie to one another*, it produces distrust and corruption in the fabric of the culture. When people can trust one another, commerce and exchange flourishes, elevating the community. This can be seen on a national, communal, familial, or individual level.

God's way is different from the way of the flesh. God's way is a way of truth. He says, *'You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD. 'You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. One form of robbery was to hold a person's daily wage until the next day or longer. Many people in that time lived day by day on what they could make each day. Therefore, God says, "The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning."* This command is also reinforced by Moses in Deuteronomy:

“You shall not oppress a hired servant who is poor and needy, whether he is one of your countrymen or one of your aliens who is in your land in your towns. You shall give him his *wages* on his day before the sun sets, for he is poor and sets his heart on it; so that he will not cry against you to the LORD and it become sin in you.”  
(Deuteronomy 24:14-15)

When there are no perceived consequences for bad behavior, we can be tempted by our flesh to take advantage of another or unleash our frustrations on them. God forbids this kind of behavior by saying, *"You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind."* One may think that because the *deaf man* will not hear the *curse*, or the *blind* person will not see the *stumbling block* or who left it, there will be no direct consequences to them for their words or actions. But God makes clear that all actions will have a consequence, for God sees all.

Many commands in the law of Moses are written in case-law style. This means these commands will give extreme examples or precedents so the principles given can be used to judge other cases that are similar in nature. This principle to *not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind* can also be applied to cursing any person behind their back (who cannot hear the *curse*) or laying a *stumbling block before* anyone who is unaware or *blind* to it. Though a person may not get caught immediately breaking this principle, it is clear that everyone will have to give an account for every word and deed done in this life because God sees and hears everything. And God has the power to rectify disobedience in this life as well as after physical death,

“But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”  
(Matthew 12:36-37)

It is fitting for this command to be concluded with the command to *revere* (fear) *your God*. *It is* He who is watching humankind and will judge every word and deed,

“And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.”  
(Revelation 20:12)

Though we are discouraged from being judgmental to others, it is inevitable and necessary for us to *judge* the actions of ourselves and others in our minds, and if we have jurisdiction (parent to child, employer to employee) then openly as well. A necessary office in a healthy culture is the office of *judge*. God commanded Moses to appoint judges throughout the tribes of Israel (Deuteronomy 16:18).

When the office of *judge* is executed in fairness and righteousness, and properly interprets the legislative decrees set forth, the society embraces the justice executed by that office (Deuteronomy 16:18-20). When the *judge* is *partial* or there is corruption in the office of the *judge*, the society will become fractured and dysfunctional, and people will tend to take justice into their own hands. God demands that judges *do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly*.

This admonition makes clear that judges are to *judge* based on what is true and right, without partiality of any kind. The *judge* is not to *be partial to the poor*, and decide “The rich man can pay, so we will help out the *poor* man.” Conversely, the *judge* is not to *defer to the great* and say, “Perhaps if I do something for this great person, they will do something for me in return.” Rather, each *judge* is to *judge* each person as a *neighbor and judge* them *fairly*.

In connection with judging *fairly*, God commands *you shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor*. Slander comes from selfishness and hatred. If we care for a person and find an offense in them, we should bring the offense to them in person and attempt to help them (James 5:19-20). But when there is *hate* for a person who offends, the flesh will be inclined to slander that person to denigrate them in the sight of others.

Slander tends to have the reverse result than the *slanderer* intended. That is why Solomon says in Proverbs 10:18, “He who conceals hatred has lying lips, and he who spreads slander is a fool.” Beyond slander there are many sins that are born out of selfishness and hatred. God wishing to enlighten us to this wisdom continues by saying, *you shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart*. This admonition is like the command Jesus gave in the Sermon on the Mount, exhorting His followers to focus on having the right heart attitude, as terrible sins like murder and adultery begin in the heart (Matthew 5:27-30). Leviticus 19:16 implies this connection between heart attitudes and

physical violence, immediately following the instruction against slander with a warning for Israelites *not to act against the life of your neighbor*.

God's people should still correct wrongs. Moses continues, saying *you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people*. It is good to correct wrong behavior. But the focus should remain on benefitting the person receiving the correction, rather than executing retribution. An execution of retribution is likely to lead to a blood feud. God's people are not to *take vengeance* for themselves for having been wronged. Neither are they to *bear any grudge* against their neighbors. Bearing a *grudge* poisons our own soul. We are the primary loser. But it can also spill out as vengeance, which destroys communal harmony.

This section ends with what Jesus calls the second most important command in the entire law "*but you shall love your neighbor as yourself*" (Matthew 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-31). If *sin* can be birthed from *hate* (Leviticus 19:16-17), then *love* (*hate's* opposite) can resolve such disputes (Leviticus 19:18):

"Above all, keep fervent in your *love* for one another, because *love* covers a multitude of sins.  
(1 Peter 4:8)

Every one of God's commands can be fulfilled by *love*. Paul says in 1 Timothy 1:5 that the goal of the Law is *love* from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Paul consistently repeats how *love* is the fulfillment of the law (Romans 13:9, Galatians 5:14).

James, Jesus' half-brother, references Leviticus 18:19 (to love our neighbor as ourselves) when he contrasts *love* with being *partial in judgement* by saying:

"If, however, you are fulfilling the royal law according to the Scripture, "***YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF***," you are doing well. But if you show partiality, you are committing sin *and* are convicted by the law as transgressors."  
(James 2:8-9)

Paul states that believers fulfill the law to *love your neighbor as yourself* when we use the freedom God gave us to make choices in order to serve one another:

"For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another."  
(Galatians 5:13-15).

“Ahav” is the Hebrew word for *love*. The Bible uses “Ahav” to describe intimate affection between father and son, husband and wife, between friends, and mother to child. Another way to understand love is as a verb, an action. Action-love is to seek the best interest of another individual. As Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15).

This kind of action-oriented love of choice is implied in Leviticus 19:18, to love a neighbor as one’s self. This action-orientation is emphasized by Jesus in His parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). Jesus told this parable just after quoting Leviticus 19:18 as being the second most important commandment, to *love your neighbor as yourself*. He told the parable of the Good Samaritan in response to someone asking ‘Who is my neighbor?’ seeking to justify himself, and excuse himself from having to obey that command (Luke 10:29).

In Jesus’s telling of The Good Samaritan, Jesus defined “neighbor” as anyone who needs help, regardless of natural affection. In His parable, a Samaritan (an enemy of Jews) helped a Jewish man in need, by taking action to seek medical attention for him after being beaten by robbers.

The Greek word “agape” reflects this kind of action *love*, which is a *love* of choice. Agape *love* is used in Luke 10:27, so is the kind of love being described in Jesus’s telling of The Good Samaritan. Agape *love* is making a deliberate choice to act in ways that follow God’s commands and serve the best interest of others (1 Corinthians 13:3-8a). Peter, in his second letter, describes a progression that begins with faith and culminates in agape *love*, which is the bond of perfection (Colossians 3:14):

“Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love (‘agape’).”  
(2 Peter 1:5-7)

Later, Leviticus 19:34 speaks of a foreigner who resides in Israel of whom God says, “you shall *love* him as yourself.” This makes clear that “neighbor” is a concept that means “whoever is in your sphere of influence” as Jesus emphasized in His parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37).

## **Biblical Text**

**<sup>9</sup> ‘Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. <sup>10</sup> Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the LORD your**

God. <sup>11</sup> ‘You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. <sup>12</sup> You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD. <sup>13</sup> ‘You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob *him*. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning. <sup>14</sup> You shall not curse a deaf man, nor place a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall revere your God; I am the LORD. <sup>15</sup> ‘You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. <sup>16</sup> You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the LORD. <sup>17</sup> ‘You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. <sup>18</sup> You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.