

Article # 2 **How to Spell 'Holy' (Leviticus 19:1-37)**

1. The Necessity of Holiness

The necessity of holiness is found in the first primary commandment: “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2). Note the following factors relative to this command.

- (1) The necessity of holiness is seen by the fact that the entire nation of Israelites is commanded to be holy. Thus, holiness is not an option, but an imperative.
- (2) The command also provides a motivation for holiness. (3) There is also a provision for the holiness which God required of His people.
- (4) Finally, God Himself provided the pattern for holiness. God is holy, which is the basis for Israel’s holiness.

2. The Nature of Holiness

- (1) Holiness involved obedience to the commandments of God.
- (2) Holiness involved sacrifice. Holiness entails sacrifice. But more than this, every act of obedience to the commandments of God was a sacrificial act.
- (3) Holiness was more than a matter of observing religious rituals—it was intensely practical piety, involving a wide variety of actions as a part of one’s everyday life.
- (4) Holiness is the imitation of God
- (6) Finally (and, most emphatically in Leviticus 19), holiness is practiced by loving one’s neighbor as one’s self (v. 18).

There are, as I have suggested, two primary commands in chapter 19: (1) the command to be holy, and (2) to love one’s neighbor as one’s self. There is a direct relationship between these two commands as I understand the chapter. The holiness of God is demonstrated by His people as they love their neighbor. The term “neighbor,” has a wide range of meaning in this chapter:

- One’s neighbor is one’s fellow-countryman (v. 11, 17)
- One’s neighbor is alien, foreigner (v. 10, 32-33, 34)
- One’s neighbor is those who are weak and vulnerable (v. 10, 14)
- One’s neighbor is one’s enemy (v. 17-18)

3. Holiness in the New Testament

Our Lord, referring to the command of Leviticus 19:2, said, “Therefore, you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). Other commands from Leviticus 19 are also taken up by our Lord as well: “But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you” (Matt. 5:44). In Leviticus 19:17 the people of God were taught: “You shall not hate your fellow-countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him.” So also, in the Lord’s teaching in Matthew 5:21-26 and 18:15-17 the individual who has been wronged must seek to bring reconciliation (and thus to restore love and harmony) with his neighbor. The Lord Jesus taught that the command to love one’s neighbor as himself summarized half of the law (Matt. 22:39-40). With this St. Paul agreed (Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14). The apostle

Peter also referred to Leviticus 19:2 as the foundation for his call to holy living: “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet. 1:14-16).

4. Perversions of Holiness

The scriptures, along with the history of the church, have recorded a number of ways in which holiness has been distorted.

1. **Stained Glass Holiness.** Stained glass holiness is the view that restricts holiness to the realm of the ceremonial. It is “Sunday go to meeting holiness.” Ceremonial holiness thinks of holiness only in terms of special days, of special “holy” places, and of special “holy” activities. It tends to divorce righteousness in everyday living from religious activities and ceremonies. For example, the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day fell into the same error. They were meticulous about ceremonial holiness, and yet they did not love their neighbors. They did not preserve justice and they did not protect the widows and orphans. They had the appearance of ceremonial righteousness, but they lacked practical holiness: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you devour widows’ houses, even while for a pretense you make long prayers; therefore you shall receive greater condemnation” (Matt. 23:14).
2. **Positional Holiness.** Positional holiness is that holiness which is supposed to accompany a certain office or position. For example, the Jews of Jesus’ day would have assumed that a priest (and especially the high priest) was holy. Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying, “The scribes and the Pharisees have seated themselves in the chair of Moses; therefore all that they tell you, do and observe, but do not do according to their deeds; for they say things, and do not do them. And they tie up heavy loads, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves are unwilling to move them with so much as a finger. But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries, and lengthen the tassels of their garments. And they love the place of honor at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi” (Matt. 23:1-7).
3. **Equating Holiness With the Miraculous.** Here is one of the subtlest and dangerous errors of all—assuming that wherever miracles are performed, God must be present and the person must be holy. “‘But the prophet who shall speak a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he shall speak in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.’ And you may say in your heart, ‘How shall we know the word which the LORD has not spoken?’ When a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the thing does not come about or come true, that is the thing, which the LORD has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; you shall not be afraid of him” (Deut. 18:20-22). The Lord’s words in the New Testament seem to go even farther: “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly

are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits ... So then, you will know them by their fruits. Not every one who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who do the will of My Father who is in heaven. Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.' Therefore every one who hears these words of Mine and acts upon them may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock" (Matt. 7:15-16a, 20-24).

4. **Isolation Holiness.** Over the centuries, men have tended to equate holiness with separation. One's holiness could be measured in terms of the distance between the "saint" and the "sinner." No wonder the scribes and Pharisees were shocked by the fact that Jesus spent time with "sinners" rather than with them: "And when the scribes and the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax-gatherers, they began saying to His disciples, 'Why is He eating and drinking with tax-gatherers and sinners?'" (Mark 2:16). Jesus answer was that He came to save sinners. He who was holy was not defiled by being in the presence of sinners. It was His intrinsic holiness and the holiness of His actions, which proved Him to be the Holy One of Israel.
5. **Holiness by Redefinition.** The scribes and Pharisees were ingenious at getting around the Word of God. Thus, they re-defined the Law to conform to their own sinfulness. If holiness was manifested by loving one's neighbor, they re-defined "neighbor" to be their friends and fellow-countrymen. Furthermore, in Jesus' requirement a person's neighbor is not limited to members of his own people (Luke 10:29-37), and pre-Christian Judaism was never able to ascend to this thought. The hypocrisy of Judaism is seen in Luke chapter 10, where our Lord has summarized the teaching of the Old Testament law: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself" (Luke 10:27). To this, the Israelite lawyer sought to defend himself by responding, "And who is my neighbor?" (Luke 10:29). In the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord exposed this error: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:43-48).