

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Leviticus 19:9-18

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it is time for us to read the Bible again. We will continue reading Leviticus chapter 19, and today we'll read from verses 9 to 18.

Chapter 19 discusses the application of the Ten Commandments in daily life, which means the development of the commandments into statutes and ordinances. The first section, from verses 3 to 8, concerns matter toward God, focusing especially on the peace offerings given to God as acts of thanksgiving, vow fulfillment, or willingly given offerings. Although the peace offerings were initiated by individuals and were accepted by God, the sacrificial process still had to be done according to God's way, especially regarding how the sacrificial items were enjoyed. If there was any leftover on the second day, it had to be burned; it could not be eaten on the third day, or else it would profane the holy items, and the individual would be cut off from the people. Here, we see that the most crucial part of what is directed toward God is to submit to His authority and follow His commands in offering sacrifices.

The second section, from verses 9 to 18, concerns our responsibilities toward others. In Matthew 22:35-40, a lawyer tried to test Jesus by asking Him which commandment was the greatest in the law. Jesus responded in Matthew 22:37-40, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets." The summary of the law, then, is to love God and to love our neighbor as ourselves. This section of statutes and ordinances concerning others guides us from various perspectives on how to love our neighbors as ourselves.

We should understand that the law is not merely a set of rigid, cold commands for people to obey. The true spiritual meaning behind the law is God's eager desire for each person to love their neighbor as themselves. In today's end times, nations are rising against nations, people are rising against people—even within the same country, during election seasons, rumors, slander, and defamation are used, with opponents viewed as enemies and suppressed by any means.

Dear brothers and sisters, remember Jesus' heartfelt teachings in the Sermon on the Mount: You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world. God hopes each of us will become an example of loving our neighbor as ourselves. Toward those around us, whether we know them or not, may we show more love and more tolerance, so that because of the presence of Christians, our nation becomes more peaceful and beautiful. Now let us read God's instructions to the Israelites, which are also instructions for the church today.

Verses 9-10: "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger: I am the Lord your God."

God told the Israelites that when they entered the promised land, they would have fields and vineyards. On one hand, they would work hard, and on the other, God would send rain. This way, their fields would be full of crops, and their vineyards would bear abundant fruit. During the harvest, which is filled with joy, they should remember God's command to love their neighbors as themselves, especially to love the poor and strangers among them. Therefore, God's statute instructed the Israelites not to reap the corners of their fields or gather the gleanings, and not to pick every grape from their vineyards or gather the fallen grapes, for these were designated by God as provisions for the poor and the strangers.

Here we see God's generosity, and He desires His people to be generous so that the unfortunate among them could survive. God richly blesses people and desires

that they generously give to those in need. Therefore, when reaping the fields, the corners must not be harvested, and the crops fallen on the ground must not be picked up but left for the poor and strangers.

God wants people to recognize that human effort alone is not sufficient; they still need God's blessings, such as rain and favorable weather. Since it is God's blessing, how could all the harvest be kept for oneself? The Chinese people, traditionally frugal, tend to emphasize the boundaries of self and others, which can lead to stinginess and harshness. Thus, we must particularly practice generosity, willing to consider those in need when we enjoy our harvests.

Here, we not only see God's generosity but also His meticulousness. God hopes that the Israelites would not only be generous but also set laws regarding harvest practices—fields must not be fully harvested, vineyards' fruits not fully picked, and anything fallen left uncollected. These statutes must be followed by the Israelites. Additionally, the poor and the strangers are thus given the right to go into others' fields and vineyards to gather what is due to them. This is their portion from God, and they do not need to beg like beggars, hoping for others' mercy; they can gather with dignity the portion that God left for them.

If God had not established such statutes, how could Ruth, a Moabite woman, following her mother-in-law Naomi back to Bethlehem, have survived in their poverty? How could Ruth have, as a Moabite, dared to gather grain in Boaz's field? Because of this generous statute, Ruth was able to glean in Boaz's field, eventually meeting Boaz, and Ruth ultimately became the great-grandmother of David, Israel's greatest king. By following this statute of generosity, the entire nation of Israel was blessed.

Verse 11: “You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.”

This is the eighth commandment: not to steal—meaning not to take what belongs to others by improper means. These things can be material, like money or goods, or immaterial, like people's reputation or rights. One should not use improper

means to take possession of what belongs to others, whether through theft, deceit, or lying. The previous two verses spoke of sharing what we possess with those in need; this verse, conversely, directly tells us not to take anything that does not belong to us by improper means.

Verse 12: “And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.”

This is the third commandment: not to take God’s name in vain. Applying this commandment in daily life, this verse follows the previous commandment against deceit and lying. Sometimes, when deception or lying is exposed, and others come to question, people may swear by God’s name to avoid being found out. Often, this is thought to be expedient and said casually. However, God seriously tells us that this is profaning His name. Here God specifically adds, “I am the Lord,” reminding us that before God, there is no jest. Just as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, recorded in Matthew 5:37, “But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”

Verse 13: “You shall not cheat your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning.”

This commandment is an expansion of the Tenth Commandment, prohibiting covetousness and teaching us to love our neighbor. In daily life, we often interact closely with neighbors, and what belongs to them can easily become a temptation for us. Therefore, this part of the Tenth Commandment specifically reminds us not to covet what belongs to our neighbor or take it by force. This could mean moving boundary markers, taking fruit from their trees, or using their tools without permission. If you hire someone to work for you, you must not withhold their wages. Once the work is done, you should pay them immediately, without holding back their payment until the next day, because everyone has needs, and withholding wages impacts their livelihood.

Verse 14: “You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the Lord.”

The Lord God is the God of the orphan and widow. Toward the vulnerable, God shows special compassion and grace. God specifically warns the Israelites not to curse the deaf; though they may not hear it, God hears. After humanity’s fall, our nature, aligned with Satan, often causes us to look down on those less fortunate and even bully those with physical disabilities. But God does not allow Israel to do this, and they must not place a stumbling block before the blind. Though the blind cannot see it, God does. If you cause the blind to stumble, it will be counted against you.

In church history, the care for vulnerable groups has been a beautiful testimony. Many missionaries who traveled to different countries often began their ministry by helping the vulnerable. George Muller, originally from Germany, became known in England for founding orphanages. Amy Carmichael, an Irishwoman, went to India to rescue girls from temple prostitution. In Taiwan, early Western missionaries established leper colonies, homes for children with polio, and hospitals and schools in remote mountainous areas. These are all examples of the church’s beautiful witness.

In these last days, however, there are churches that, in the name of God, discriminate against or even bully vulnerable groups. Such a church is no longer God’s church. So here, God adds a specific phrase: “You shall fear your God: I am the Lord.” Fear God, and you will care for the vulnerable in alignment with His heart.

Verse 15: “You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honor the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbor.”

This is directed at the leaders of Israel, instructing them to judge according to righteousness and avoid unjust judgments. They must not favor the poor nor show

partiality to the powerful, as all are their neighbors. Therefore, they should judge solely based on righteousness; this is the responsibility of leaders.

In the New Testament, this principle applies within the church. If disputes arise among the saints, the elders of the church must mediate for both sides with the same principle of righteousness, avoiding bias. Such disputes must be resolved within the church rather than taken to worldly courts. Paul gives clear teaching in 1 Corinthians 6:1-8: “Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints?”

Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren?

But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers! Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated? No, you yourselves do wrong and cheat, and you do these things to your brethren!” Paul’s wording is very strong, hoping we will take it to heart.

Verse 16: “You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the Lord.”

You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people. We are ambassadors of peace, ministers of reconciliation, so we must not spread gossip or sow discord, which causes disputes. Gossip within the church easily disrupts harmony; therefore, not only should we refrain from speaking it, but we should stop it immediately if

we hear it. This prevents unnecessary troubles. Regarding believers who like to gossip about others, the church should offer appropriate counsel.

Then it says, “nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor.” This refers to deliberately harming a neighbor or even causing their death. It could mean bearing false witness that leads to your neighbor’s death or, knowing the truth, remaining silent and refusing to testify, resulting in their condemnation. These actions do not please God. So, God specifically adds the phrase, “I am the Lord.” God is always watching over His people and examining them.

Verse 17: “You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor and not bear sin because of him.”

This verse speaks about not harboring hatred against your brother but instead loving him. The verse uses the terms “brother” and “neighbor” interchangeably. If a brother or neighbor does something wrong and you know about it, you should point it out directly so they can correct it in time. Since they are your brother and your neighbor, if you genuinely love them, you will help them by correcting their mistakes promptly to prevent them from falling into sin. Otherwise, you will bear responsibility for failing to correct them.

Verse 18: “You shall not take vengeance nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”

“Do not take vengeance” means that when others wrong us, we must not repay evil with evil, nor should we take revenge or even seek justice for ourselves. Romans 12:19-21 says, “Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore, ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Not only must we not take revenge, but we must also not hold a

grudge against our fellow citizens, as all are God's people. When others wrong you, do not harbor resentment; rather, love your neighbor as yourself. The same applies to the church today: if you cannot love your fellow brothers and sisters as yourself, how can you bear witness for God in the world?

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. The statutes directed toward others among the Israelites are clearly laid out in Leviticus, and they are also the principles that should govern how brothers and sisters interact in church life. Bless the church life I belong to, that it may be one in which brothers and sisters love one another. May the church I am a part of become a beautiful testimony that draws our neighbors to come. Bless my church and its fellowship. We pray in the holy name of the Lord Jesus Christ.