

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

Leviticus 19: 19-25

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We'll continue to read Leviticus chapter 19, and today we'll read from verse 19 to verse 25.

In considering how the Ten Commandments apply to daily life, we've learned that our response toward God involves submitting to His authority, and our response toward others means loving them as ourselves. Today, we'll explore the third aspect—how we approach our possessions, covering verses 19 to 25.

This passage can be challenging to interpret, especially when trying to apply it in our modern context, as it seems somewhat disconnected from today's life. It includes three main commands: First, prohibition against mixing species. In today's world, many daily products and practices inevitably involve mixed materials or hybrid items. Second, handling cases of sexual immorality with an unredeemed maidservant. In modern society, slavery has largely been abolished, making this situation feel outdated. Third, handling fruit from newly planted trees. With today's agricultural advancements, the growth cycles of fruit trees are often significantly shorter.

If we read this passage literally, it might seem irrelevant for New Testament believers. My perspective is that it's unnecessary to follow these regulations strictly according to their literal interpretation. Instead, we should look for the spiritual principles behind them, which might offer practical insights for daily life. Although these regulations involve possessions, our ability to control such things is increasingly limited. Let's consider these principles from a spiritual perspective to discover how they might apply in our everyday lives.

Verse 19: “You shall keep My statutes. You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind. You shall not sow your field with mixed seed. Nor shall a garment of mixed linen and wool come upon you.”

Let's begin by understanding this passage literally. It mentions three specific prohibitions for the Israelites, starting with the instruction not to allow different species to mate. Cattle, for example, were to breed within their kind, as were sheep. This aligns with God's original creation order, where everything was designed to reproduce "according to its kind," preserving the purity of each species.

An example of crossbreeding is when people mate horses and donkeys to produce mules, which combine the strength of horses and the endurance of donkeys, making them useful as labor animals. However, in line with God's design, mules cannot produce offspring, underscoring that this mixture remains within natural limits set by God.

While the verse specifically prohibits interbreeding livestock, we do see mention of mules in the Old Testament, indicating they were in use. In 2 Samuel 13:29, after Absalom kills his brother Amnon, the other royal sons flee on mules, suggesting that mules were commonly used by King David's family and possibly throughout Israel. This reference may reflect a deviation from the original guideline, even if indirectly. In this case, it's interesting to consider whether this adoption of mules was viewed as a positive adaptation or simply a pragmatic choice that eventually became normalized in Israel.

In 1 Kings 1:33, where David has Solomon ride his mule to Gihon to be anointed as king, we see a positive use of the mule, symbolizing royal authority and continuity. Despite the prohibition on crossbreeding, God seems to permit mules' use for specific purposes, particularly in instances tied to authority and responsibility, like Solomon's anointing. Similarly, the returned exiles under Zerubbabel brought back hundreds of mules, showing their practical value and widespread use without divine rebuke.

The second command, prohibiting mixed seeds, had practical benefits for agriculture, ensuring effective planting and harvesting cycles. Mixing seeds could

disrupt growth patterns, making the harvest unpredictable and difficult. Ancient Israelite farmers often practiced crop rotation rather than mixing, which kept the soil nutrients balanced and productive. This concept also hints at spiritual purity: avoiding mixture in the land they stewarded was akin to maintaining moral integrity.

Finally, the prohibition against mixing materials like wool and linen for clothing was another boundary, symbolizing that holiness involved practical, daily choices. Interestingly, God commanded that the priests' ephods and breastplates be woven with a mix of fine materials, setting these garments apart as holy. For everyday Israelites, however, wearing unmixed materials underscored a distinct separation between the ordinary and the holy, serving as a reminder of their unique relationship with God and the purity He desired for them.

For New Testament believers, we are not bound to the literal observance of these rules. However, from a spiritual perspective, they reveal principles we should strive to uphold within our control, as follows:

First, the command not to crossbreed different kinds of animals symbolizes that life must not be mixed. After receiving grace and salvation, we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and God has given us a new life. We are to live by this new life, rather than by our old fleshly nature. Mixed life does not please God, so we should earnestly strive to live out God's life. While this is our common goal, it is also something we often fall short of. Therefore, we pray together for God's mercy. At the very least, we must understand that living a mixed life is not pleasing to God, and we should try our best to live out His life.

Second, we are not to sow mixed seeds. Sowing refers to our words and teachings for God. When we speak for God to meet others' needs, what we sow must purely be the seed of Christ's life. We should not mix in worldly philosophy, local customs, or sectarian divisions within religion. We must faithfully teach God's word according to the pure words of Scripture and the light and revelation He gives us.

Third, we are instructed not to wear garments made of mixed fibers. Garments symbolize our conduct, and our behavior must be an outward expression of our inner spiritual life. It should not stem from adhering to religious regulations,

traditional customs, or even ethical and moral constraints, but rather from complete submission to the leading of the Holy Spirit. This produces a life that reflects the highest virtues.

Next, we look at how a female servant caught in immorality was to be treated. In those times, if someone fell into poverty and could no longer sustain themselves, they could sell themselves into servanthood or slavery to ensure basic survival. These servants became part of the owner's property. However, unlike material possessions, which the owner could control completely, the servant—though belonging to the master—was still a person and retained certain fundamental rights. This treatment differed from how slaves were regarded in surrounding societies, where they had no such protections.

Verse 20: “Whoever lies carnally with a woman who is betrothed to a man as a concubine, and who has not at all been redeemed nor given her freedom, for this there shall be scourging; but they shall not be put to death, because she was not free.”

Since the maidservant is the master's property, the master has the authority to assign her to a spouse of his choosing. This verse describes a scenario where the master has already betrothed his maidservant to someone, intending for her to become his wife. However, the prospective husband has yet to pay the redemption price, which would grant her freedom and establish her as his wife. If, during this period, the maidservant has relations with another man, both individuals must face punishment. The nature of this punishment is explained in the following verses.

The verse further clarifies that they are not to be put to death because the maidservant has not yet gained her freedom. This means that if the betrothed maidservant had been redeemed, with her prospective husband fully paying her redemption price, she would be free and thereby formally his wife. If another man then seduced her and committed adultery, it would be regarded as adultery with a neighbor's wife. According to Leviticus 20:10, “The man who commits adultery with

another man's wife, he who commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, the adulterer and the adulteress, shall surely be put to death."

However, in the scenario presented in this verse, since the maidservant is still under bondage and lacks full agency over her actions, the punishment is different. The man who engaged in the wrongful act must not only pay the redemption price for her freedom but also bring a trespass offering for their transgression.

Verse 21-22: "And he shall bring his trespass offering to the Lord, to the door of the tabernacle of meeting, a ram as a trespass offering. The priest shall make atonement for him with the ram of the trespass offering before the Lord for his sin which he has committed. And the sin which he has committed shall be forgiven him."

This verse states that the man—specifically, the one who committed adultery with the maidservant—must bring a ram as a trespass offering. He must bring the ram to the entrance of the tabernacle, presenting it before the Lord. This signifies that he must openly confess their wrongdoing before God and the congregation of Israel. The trespass offering is meant to atone for sins of a specific nature, and he is required to pay the cost of a ram to seek atonement before God, so that his sin may be forgiven.

Here, it is indicated that although both individuals have sinned and face punishment, the man alone bears the cost of the trespass offering because the maidservant has not yet been freed and is in a passive position. Her penalty is to publicly confess the wrongdoing, while the man, having acted voluntarily, must bear the cost of the offering to seek God's forgiveness.

This passage reveals a compassionate aspect within God's laws. In that time, maidservants were regarded as their master's property and had no social standing. A master could choose whom she would marry. However, if the maidservant has feelings for a particular man who is willing to redeem her, the law seems to provide

a “back door” for her to marry the one she loves—an example of God’s extra measure of mercy.

In the second command, while the master owns the maidservant, his authority is not absolute; God takes the maidservant’s personal will into account. The third command discusses the planting of fruit trees, where the growth and fruition of the trees are entirely beyond the master’s control. This illustrates that life’s growth and maturity are ultimately under God’s sovereignty, not within human dominion.

Verse 23: “When you come into the land, and have planted all kinds of trees for food, then you shall count their fruit as uncircumcised. Three years it shall be as uncircumcised to you. It shall not be eaten.”

Those with agricultural experience know that when you plant a fruit tree, it doesn't produce much fruit in the early years, and any fruit it does bear is typically small and sour—barely edible. Seasoned farmers will tell you that growing a fruit tree is like raising a child: the tree must first grow and mature before it can yield good fruit as a return to its caretaker.

Regarding the planting of fruit trees, God has already conveyed to us the spiritual reason behind this principle. He instructed the Israelites that once they entered the Promised Land and planted fruit trees, they should refrain from eating the fruit during the first three years. This was because the fruit had not yet been "circumcised."

We know that every male born in Israel was to be circumcised on the eighth day, after a complete seven-day cycle, symbolizing a period of new beginning. The number eight represents resurrection, and the act of circumcision on the eighth day signified the child being dedicated to God by removing the flesh. Similarly, the fruit tree must wait for three years before its fruit can be considered clean or sanctified, as three represents the number of death and resurrection. The fruit produced during this initial three-year period is still under the "shadow of death" and,

therefore, remains unclean—thus unsuitable for consumption until it has been set apart.

Verse 24: “But in the fourth year all its fruit shall be holy, a praise to the Lord.”

The fruit that the tree bears in the fourth year is to be considered as the "first fruits" and must be set apart as holy, dedicated to God. This offering is to be given to the Lord in thanksgiving and praise. The first fruits symbolize the best and the first portion of the harvest, acknowledging God as the provider and honoring Him with the first of the produce. It is a recognition that all blessings and provisions ultimately come from God, and the act of offering the first fruits reflects gratitude and devotion to Him.

Verse 25: “And in the fifth year you may eat its fruit, that it may yield to you its increase: I am the Lord your God.”

In the fifth year, when the tree has matured and grown, it will bear good fruit, which is meant for human enjoyment. God says that His people are to eat the fruit from the tree, and He will bless the tree, causing it to bear more abundant fruit to supply and provide for people. God concludes with the statement, "I am the Lord your God."

In this section regarding how we manage our possessions, for what we can control, we should not mix, but instead strive to live God's life and live in a way that pleases Him. This is like what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16: "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols?" Therefore, we should separate ourselves from the world and live a life pleasing to God.

For what we cannot fully control, we should be filled with grace and allow others to experience the freedom that God has permitted. For things beyond our control, we must submit to the principles of God's life and patiently wait for the fruit. In the fifth year, there will be God's blessing, and there will be abundant fruit.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. Through Your rich arrangement for the inheritance of the Israelites, You have also shown us that in our daily lives, there are situations we can fully control. In these circumstances, help us to make the decision to live an unadulterated life. Help us to strive to obey the leading of the Holy Spirit in our lives, living a life worthy of our Christian identity. There are situations that we cannot fully control. In these situations, grant us grace and enlarge our capacity to allow the people, events, and things involved to enjoy the freedom that You have permitted. For those aspects of our lives that we cannot control, Lord, have mercy on us. Grant us long-suffering, so that we may, under the working of life's principles, offer what belongs to God and enjoy the good fruit You supply as part of Your blessing. In our lives, under Your control, may we be blessed to live a life that pleases You. We pray in the precious name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen!