

# “Love Your Neighbor as Yourself”

Leviticus 19: The Heart of Leviticus Part I

<sup>ESV</sup> **Leviticus 19:1** And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,

<sup>2</sup> "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.

<sup>3</sup> Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep my Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God.

<sup>4</sup> Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves any gods of cast metal: I am the LORD your God.

<sup>5</sup> "When you offer a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD, you shall offer it so that you may be accepted.

<sup>6</sup> It shall be eaten the same day you offer it or on the day after, and anything left over until the third day shall be burned up with fire.

<sup>7</sup> If it is eaten at all on the third day, it is tainted; it will not be accepted,

<sup>8</sup> and everyone who eats it shall bear his iniquity, because he has profaned what is holy to the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from his people.

<sup>9</sup> "When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest.

<sup>10</sup> And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God.

<sup>11</sup> "You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another.

<sup>12</sup> You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.

<sup>13</sup> "You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him. The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning.

<sup>14</sup> You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD.

<sup>15</sup> "You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.

<sup>16</sup> You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD.

<sup>17</sup> "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him.

<sup>18</sup> You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD.

## Arbitrary, Hodge Podge, or Meaningful Laws?

Several years ago, I served as a youth pastor in Denver. There are a few lessons I remember giving to the teenagers. Leviticus 19 is one of them. I do not recall the exact circumstances leading up to this lesson, but I can make an educated guess. Many Christians have this assumption that the Law(s) of God put forward in the OT have entirely passed away. At best, they will say that only the laws of the NT apply. I often like to say that what this amounts to is a [Steven Wright joke](#). He says, "I woke up one morning to find that everything in my apartment had been stolen and replaced with an exact replica. So I told my roommate, 'Everything in our house has been stolen and replaced with an exact replica.' He said, 'Do I know you?'" This is what this idea of NT law vs. OT law feels like. We aren't under the Ten Commandments, but we are under Jesus' commandments, which are an exact replica.

With that as a background, I turned on this particular Wednesday evening to Leviticus 19. I said, “How many of you think it is OK to wear clothing mixed with two different kinds of material?” After a brief moment of confusion, for they had never considered this before, all raised their hands. Then I asked, “How many of you think that we shouldn’t steal?” Again, all raised their hands. Then I asked, “How about tattoos? Is it OK to get a tattoo?” Most felt it was a trap, but a good many raised their hands in the affirmative. I finally asked, “How about practicing sorcery or consulting mediums for the dead?” Almost all said this was not OK. Then the boom came. All of these are forbidden in the same chapter in Leviticus 19.

The obvious question becomes, on what basis do we say that one law applies today, while the very next law in the list does not, but then the very next law in the list does? My point was that the entire exercise was on of arbitrary, personal feelings. They just decided which ones they would keep and which ones they wouldn’t. By the time I concluded the lesson, my purpose was to make them familiar with the chapter and to get them to think about why they would pick and choose like this. Certainly, it didn’t come from Leviticus

19. Maybe there were other principles involved that could allow this, but that was for another lesson.

Leviticus 19 is a **terribly important** chapter, not only in Leviticus itself, but in the Bible as a whole. It is also **quite confusing** to lay people and scholars alike. The chapter contains what seems to be a hodge-podge of random laws. I went to an old Bible and found that my notes gave good, short headings: **honor father and mother, idols, offerings, farmers, deaf and blind, anti-political correctness, hatred, clothing, cross breeds, new age, tattoos, aliens** (as in immigrants), **weights and measures**. What possible sense can we make of this kind of a list? Why is it here? How does it apply to us today, if at all? These are the questions I want to tackle in the next two weeks.

## Context

### *Center of Leviticus*

Let's begin with some **context**. First, recall that last time we saw that chapter 18 deals with exclusively **sexual ethics**, especially as they pertain to biological families. Ch. 18 transitioned us from the courtyard part of the book, where the first 17 chs. take place, to the holy place, as the book it

patterned after the tabernacle, the very place where all these words were spoken to Moses from in the first place (**Lev 1:1**).

Next, recall that Ch. 20 is a **reverse parallel chapter** to 18. The two are twins. Their laws are the same and their reasons for existing are the same: If they do not obey, **the land will vomit them out** (**Lev 18:28; 20:22**). As we will see when we come to Ch. 20, its order is rearranged, because its focus shifts from family to punishment. But the point here is that these twin chapters serve, as Mary Douglas says, “**Like two massively carved pillars on either side of a shrine.**”<sup>1</sup> Or, perhaps we might say that they serve like two golden cherubim guarding the ark of the covenant.

## *Ten Commandments*

What went **inside the ark**? The most important thing was **the tablets of the Ten Commandments**. Curiously, going back to perhaps the fifth century AD, the *Leviticus Rabbah* (a homiletic midrash/commentary) on Leviticus states, “**The nineteenth chapter of Leviticus contains the Ten Commandments**” (*Leviticus Rabbah, 24*). As a container,

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<sup>1</sup> **Mary Douglas**, *Leviticus as Literature*, 236.

the ark of the covenant metaphor seems to work quite well, as does the shrine idea.

Now, the law is holy (**Rom 7:12; Ps 19:8-9**). Holiness has been perhaps **the central idea** of the entire book. But it is no accident that Ch. 19 begins, “**And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, you shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy’**” (**Lev 19:1-2**). Holiness is in fact the theme of Leviticus 19. It should not surprise you then to see that when you analyze the structure of the book, you find that its center of Leviticus 19 (which is then reiterated in Ch. 26).

- A. Exposition: Leviticus 1-7 (5:1-6 accounts for sins)
- B. Clean and Unclean: Leviticus 8-17
- C. Sexual Ethics: Leviticus 18
- D. The Holiness of God: Leviticus 19** (19:33-35 Egyptian reference)
- C<sup>1</sup>. Sexual Ethics: Leviticus 20
- B<sup>1</sup>. Clean and Unclean: Leviticus 21-22
- A<sup>1</sup>. Exposition: Leviticus 23-25 (24:10-23 “eye for an eye”)
- D<sup>1</sup>. **Holiness of the Name: Leviticus 26** (26:44-46 Egyptian reference)
- Conclusion: Holy Things Belonging to the LORD: Leviticus 27**

So, it is quite interesting that you would have **twin chapters** dealing with sexual sins and the family guarding a central

chapter, the greatest place of honor in the book, which focuses on holiness.

A closely related word to holiness is **righteousness**. This word is found in the chapter also. “**You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor**” (**Lev 19:15**). What kind of righteousness? It is righteousness with respect to fellow **citizens, neighbors, people, laborers, and brothers**.<sup>2</sup> In other words, these are not laws that deal merely with priests (you could argue that it deals with the entire nation which God made to be a “**kingdom of priests**” [**Ex 19:6**],<sup>3</sup> though some have argued that this status was revoked at the Sinai debacle).<sup>4</sup> They are for everyone.

Exactly how Leviticus 19 relates to the 10 Commandments has been debated for a long time. But that it does, seems self-evident. Consider how it begins after the holiness introduction. “**Each of you must respect his mother**

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<sup>2</sup> **Jonathan Magonet**, “The Structure and Meaning of Leviticus 19,” *Hebrew Annual Review* 7 (1983): chart on p. 153, and discussion 161. The list first appears in **Gordon J. Wenham**, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 267. Kline adds “laborer.” **Moshe Kline**, “The Editor was Nodding: A Reading of Leviticus 19 In Memory of Mary Douglas,” *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 8; Article 17 (2008): 10. [http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article\\_94.pdf](http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article_94.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> **Baruch A. Levine**, *Leviticus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), xv, 125.

<sup>4</sup> **Scott W. Hahn**, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2009), 144.

and father...” (Lev 19:3). This is the Fifth Commandment. “You must observe my Sabbaths” (19:3b). This is the Fourth Commandment. A little later it says, “Do not steal” (19:11). This is the Eighth Commandment. “Do not lie” (11b). This is a form of the Ninth Commandment. Scholars have argued that all Ten of the Commandments are here:<sup>5</sup>

Commandment	Wenham (1979)	Weinfeld (1985)	Hartley (1992)
1	4	—	—
2	4a	4a, 31	4b
3	12	12	12
4	3, 30	3b, 30a	3, 30
5	3	3a, 32	3
6	16	16	16
7	20–22, 29	19–25, 29	29
8	11, 13	11a	11a
9	15–16	11b	11b
10	17–18	35–36	17–18

In fact, the chapter even uses the same introductory language as the Ten Commandments, “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex 20:2). “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt” (Lev 19:36) [in the chapter, there are laws pertaining to slavery too].

<sup>5</sup> Chart in Joshua Stewart, “Leviticus 19: Torah in Brief,” (2010), 14. [https://www.academia.edu/3659978/Leviticus\\_19\\_Torah\\_in\\_Brief](https://www.academia.edu/3659978/Leviticus_19_Torah_in_Brief).

If this chapter therefore [circulates around the Ten](#), if they make up the essence of the chapter, then we have to ask ourselves a question about its [significance today](#). Do the Ten Commandments cease to have meaning in the lives of God's people just because they are in the OT? Of course they don't. These are [transcendent moral laws](#) that we find in Genesis, long before Moses came around. They are in the NT, not because Jesus threw the Ten away only to replace them with an exact replica, but because the Ten are transcendent moral law applicable to all people all the time.

This isn't to say that the Ten *as given to Israel* do not have their own unique circumstantial application. They do. For example, God didn't bring all people out of Egypt and slavery ([Ex 20:2](#); [Dt 5:6](#)). And in justification for the Sabbath in Deuteronomy, it was because God brought them out that they were to keep the Sabbath ([Dt 5:12](#)). But just because Israel has a special covenant and relationship to the Ten, it does not follow that no one else knows about them or is not responsible to keep them. That's the whole point of the land vomiting out the nations in the previous chapter for essentially violating [the Seventh Commandment](#).

## *Structure of the Chapter*

To begin to make sense of the laws themselves and any application to today, especially in Christ's church, it is vital to try and figure out if there is **any kind of discernable structure to their order**. Scholars fall into three groups on this question. 1) those who consider it formless, 2) those who consider it based on a decalogue structure, 3) those who still seek a comprehensive structure.<sup>6</sup>

I've never been one to think that the Bible is just a **hodge-podge** of randomly thrown together ideas. Just because we can't discern a purpose it does not mean there is no purpose. Maybe God (and Moses and the editor) is smarter than we are. There does in fact seem to be **some kind of organizational theme around the Ten Commandments**, though admittedly, it is difficult to discern (**more next week**).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> **Moshe Kline**, "The Editor was Nodding: A Reading of Leviticus 19 In Memory of Mary Douglas," *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 8; Article 17 (2008): 1.

<sup>7</sup> Kline says, "The solution that I propose is consistent with the view mentioned in the Talmud that the Ark contained the fragments of the first set of tablets as well as the intact second set. The hypothesis I propose is that the fragmented parallels to the Decalogue in Leviticus 19 are to be seen as the fragments of the first tablets, while the five-pair structure embedded in the chapter should be seen as parallel to the second tablets" (p. 51). His discussion is extremely complex but fascinating too. I will not pursue this further here except to reinforce the point that if the structure of the chapter is rooted in the Ten, then it would appear that all of the laws in it are in some way or another also related directly to the Ten. This has to have significance for just throwing out things we do not like anymore.

Something easier to spot is how many of verses end with either “I am the LORD your God” or “I am the LORD” (see table).

<b>“Be Holy as I Am Holy” (Leviticus 19:2)</b>				
As Generally Understood by Wenham				
Vv.	Kind of Duty	Duty	Vs.	Formula
2b-10	Religious Duties	Be Holy	2b	“I the LORD your God...”
		Honor parents	3a	I am the LORD your God
		Keeps sabbaths	3b	
		Idols of metal	4	I am the LORD your God
		Peace offerings Harvesting and the Poor	5-8 9-10	I am the LORD your God
11-18	Ethical Duties	Steal	11	I am the LORD
		Deal falsely		
		Lie		
		Swear falsely by Name		
		Oppress neighbor	13	
		Rob him		
		Pay him		
		Curse the deaf	14	
		Stumbling block blind		
		Fear God		
Justice in court	15 16			
Slander				
Life of neighbor	16			
Hate brother in heart	17 18			
Reason frankly with him				
Take vengeance				
Love neighbor as self				
19-37	Misc. Duties	Different cattle breed	19 20 21-22 23-25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35-36 37	I am the LORD your God
		Sow field two kinds seed		
		Garments two kinds mat.		
		Slave/sex/another owner		
		Guilt offering		
		Planting trees/eating fruit (praise offering)		
		Eating flesh with blood		
		Omens/fortune telling		
		Round hair/mar beard Cut body/tattoo		
		Prostitute daughter		
		Keep Sabbaths		
		Reverence sanctuary		
		Mediums/necromancers		
Honor the old				
Fear God				
No wrong to stranger				
Love him as yourself				
Weights and measures				
Observe all statutes/rules				

These phrases appear 16 times. When you start to look at these more closely, you can discern a kind of three-tiered organization around them, so that the first part of the chapter deals with **religious duties**, the second with **ethical duties** (note how the Ten Commandment's are divided into laws about God, First Table and laws towards man, Second Table), and the third with **miscellaneous duties**.<sup>8</sup> This at least helps us see that perhaps there is some kind of form and

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<sup>8</sup> This is how Wenham breaks it down.

- 2b-10 Religious Duties**
  - Be holy (2b)
  - Honor parents and sabbath (3)
  - No idolatry (4)
  - Sacrifices and food (5-10)
- 11-18 Good Neighborliness**
  - Honesty (11-12)
  - No exploitation (13-14)
  - Justice in court (15-16)
  - Love your neighbor (17-18)
- 19-37 Miscellaneous Duties**
  - No mixed breeding (19-25)
  - No pagan practices (26-28)
  - No sacred prostitution (29-30)
  - No necromancy (31)
  - Respect the old (32)
  - Love the alien (33-34)
  - Fair trading (35-36)

meaning to the placement of these laws after all and that yes, we are seeing some kind of organization around the Ten.

The chapter does something else. When you look carefully at the language of the chapter, you find that several phrases are virtually repeated.

Repetition in Leviticus 19	
“You shall keep my Sabbaths” (vs. 3)	“You shall keep my Sabbaths” (vs. 30)
“Do not turn to idols” (vs. 4)	“Do not turn to mediums” (vs. 31)
“You shall fear your God” (vs. 14)	“You shall fear your God” (vs. 32)
“You shall do not injustice” (vs. 15)	“You shall do not wrong in judgment” (vs. 35) (identical Hebrew)
“Love your neighbor as yourself” (vs. 18)	“Love him as yourself” (vs. 34)
“You shall keep my statutes” (vs. 19)	“You shall observe all my statutes” (37)

What this means is that **vv. 30-37** are a repetition of **vv. 1-19a**. To put that another way, they are like chs. 18 and 20, twins which guard but serve different purposes. To put it yet another way, we can create a chiasm that looks like this:

- |                                      |                         |                           |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| A. Ch. 18                            |                         | A. 19:3-8                 |
| B. 19:1-18                           |                         | B. 19:9-18                |
| C. <b>19:19-29</b>                   | It further breaks down: | C. <b>19:19-29</b>        |
| B <sup>1</sup> . 19:30-37            |                         | A <sup>1</sup> . 19:30-31 |
| A <sup>1</sup> . Ch. 20 <sup>9</sup> |                         | B. 19:32-36               |

This is good news for us, because it gives us a natural break to end a sermon at vs. 18.

<sup>9</sup> This is the structure in [Magonet](#), 152. The other chiasm is p. 166.

There is one further point I thought was interesting and relevant. **Vv. 1-10** is a series that moves from **good to bad**, while **vv. 11-19a** gives laws that move from **bad to good**.<sup>10</sup> Again, this shows that there is intentionality to the list, and above all other things, if there is intentionality and it isn't just randomly thrown together laws, then we can begin to make sense of it all and see about its meaning for today.

Lev 19:1-10 (Good to Bad)	Lev 19:11-18 (Bad to Good)
Be holy for I the Lord your God, am holy	You shall not steal, swear falsely, profane the name
Revere your mother and father, keep Sabbaths	You shall not place a stumbling block before the blind
Do not turn to idols or make molten gods	Judge your neighbor fairly
He has profaned what is sacred, he will be cut off	Love your neighbor as yourself

## Starting Good: Be Holy, for I the LORD Your God am Holy (Lev 19:2)

It is to these 18 verses that we will now turn in our **first of two sermons** on Leviticus 19. What I find most interesting about them is that in their good to bad, bad to good movement, we end up **beginning and ending with two verses that Jesus uses in the Sermon on the Mount**. The first comes

<sup>10</sup> This insight is in **Kline**, 5. **He sees the same thing in vv. 19-37.**

at the end of the introduction of Lev 19. “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ‘Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, *You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy*” (Lev 19:1-2). This last part bears great similarity to Jesus’ “*You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*” (Matt 5:48) and in Luke, “*Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful*” (Luke 6:36).

What is the relationship between “perfect,” “mercy,” and “holiness?” Many tend to read all three as some kind of moral character, as if God is commanding perfectionism.<sup>11</sup> We can short circuit that quickly enough. It is important to remember something we have seen a lot of in Leviticus at this point. “The vast majority of things designated as holy are inanimate objects such as the ark, the altar, and the lampstands for the tabernacle. The word is also applied to places (Mount Sinai, the inside of the temple), to time (the sabbath), to geopolitical abstractions (land, nation), and to animals (devoted or sacrificed); none of these have character

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<sup>11</sup> See Martin Luther at the end of the sermon. Also, Jesus hints at this same idea when he tells the rich young ruler, “If you wish to be perfect...” (Mat 19:21). I do believe that there is a sense in which this is teaching moral perfectionism. That sense is when someone wishes to be saved by their works (under the Covenant of Works). As the ruler found out, this is an impossibility to do. Therefore, the only way this command can be fulfilled by someone is through faith via the gracious act of God giving them a new heart and desire to be like him, not in sinless perfection, but in whole orientation of the new creation in Christ. See the discussion that follows.

or moral agency of any kind.” Walton points out, “The only persons (potential moral agents) designated as a holy thing are the priests, but this is never interpreted to imply that the priests are more moral or have a different moral character from the rest of the assembly.”<sup>12</sup> These things are holy simply because God declared them as such.<sup>13</sup>

In essence, the word *qds̄*, really refers to something that belongs to the sphere of God’s being or activity.<sup>14</sup> Hence, God is holy in this verse. Someone has noticed that “the term indicates a relationship more than a quality.”<sup>15</sup> Therefore, if Israel is to be holy, they must maintain a proper relationship with Yahweh. “God is the origin of holiness and holiness resides in His nature and character. God is the one who enables His creatures to be holy.”<sup>16</sup> And how did they get

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<sup>12</sup> John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest: Covenant, Retribution, and the Fate of the Canaanites* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2017), 105–106.

<sup>13</sup> Stewart, 5. Walton argues that the statement is not actually a command (see p. 107), even though it can be translated as a command. Matthew and 1 Peter 1:16, the closest parallel to Lev 19, the verbs are future indicatives (“You shall be perfect...” “You shall be holy, for I am holy”). Michael Emadi tells me that the NT writers use the future indicative as a command quite a bit. Further, in Luke, the verb is an imperative, a verb of command. Because the command idea fits Wehham’s structure much more nicely, I lean towards this being a command in Leviticus 19:2.

<sup>14</sup> Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 48; see also Wilson, “Holiness” and “Purity” in Mesopotamia, 87, in Walton, 108.

<sup>15</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (trans. D. M. G. Stalker; 2 vols.; Peabody, Mass.: Prince Press, 2005), 1:205; quoted in Stewart.

<sup>16</sup> Baesick “Peter” Choi, “The Exegetical Interpretation of Leviticus 19:1-18 and the Restoration of the Jewish Community in the Post-Exilic Period,” MA Thesis to Trinity Western University (2013), 10.

into this relationship? Through election and grace via a **covenant**, and if you are an individual, by faith in this holy God through the same covenant.

What's going on in **Matthew 5:48**? Well, first, this verse seems “**deliberately modeled on the structure of Lev 19:2.**”<sup>17</sup> In fact, “**the form of the verse is exactly like Leviticus 19:2, with ‘holy’ displaced by ‘perfect.’**” This seems to be because of the influence of **Deuteronomy 18:13** which uses the same Greek word as Matthew, “**Thou shalt be *perfect (teleios)* before the Lord thy God**” (Dt 18:13 LXA).

In the OT, “**There is a dominant and clear notion of ‘wholeness’ in the *tel-* word group.**” It overlaps with *shalom* (peace) and *tammim* (whole/blameless). In the LXX, all the instances of *teleios* mean “**unblemished, undivided, complete, whole.**” The change from holy to *teleios* is very significant. It is the same call to holiness that we see throughout the OT, **not moral perfection, but wholehearted orientation toward God.** Someone suggests that the word ‘holy’ was too loaded in the Pharisees’ minds with the very things Jesus is arguing against. They saw it as merely defining external obedience.

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[https://www.twu.ca/sites/default/files/244062\\_pdf\\_232962\\_18866c2c-2b0e-11e3-8ae3-c05fef8616fa\\_choi\\_b.pdf](https://www.twu.ca/sites/default/files/244062_pdf_232962_18866c2c-2b0e-11e3-8ae3-c05fef8616fa_choi_b.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> **Craig L. Blomberg**, “Matthew,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 28.

But throughout the Sermon, Jesus is showing that it is the heart as well, the entire inner person has to match the outward behavior.<sup>18</sup> Thus, “In the present connection, however, ‘perfect’ means ‘brought to completion, full-grown, lacking nothing.’”<sup>19</sup>

As a command (see n. 13), if it isn’t talking about perfectionism, “Then why even try to become perfect?” The answer would be, “Because that is what God commands ... a follower of Jesus cannot do otherwise.” As Christians, we year for perfection (Php 3:7-16). We have already received the righteousness of imputation. And, Christ has imparted to us his Holy Spirit so that now we actually struggle with wanting to obey God. “It is exactly to those who strive to attain the goal that the victory is assured.”<sup>20</sup>

As for Luke, his word “compassion” or “mercy” proposes an imitation of God using a quality that the OT gives directly to him. God in the OT is ... said to be merciful (*oiktirmōn*, Exod 34:6; Deut 4:31; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2).<sup>21</sup> Hence, the Targum of Lev 22:28 says, “My people, children

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<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Pennington, *The Sermon on the Mount and Human Flourishing: A Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), Ch. 3.

<sup>19</sup> William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, vol. 9, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 317.

<sup>20</sup> Hendriksen, 317.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel according to Luke I–IX: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 28, *Anchor Yale Bible* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 641.

of Israel, just as your father in heaven is compassionate, so be compassionate on the earth.”<sup>22</sup>

Also *oiktirmos* (“mercy”) applied to God often appears in **covenantal contexts** (1Ch 21:13; 2Ch 30:9; Ne. 9:19, 27, 28, 31; Ps 24:6 LXX, 50:3 LXX; 68:17 LXX; 78:8 LXX; 118:77 LXX,; Isa 63:15; Dan 9:9, 18 [Θ]; Hos 2:21 LXX; Zech 1:16). Thus imitating the merciful God should be understood not simply as an ethical precept, but as a call to be a faithful partner in the covenant relationship.<sup>23</sup> So, we come full circle. Are you starting to get a feel for what Leviticus 19 is going to be about? These commands are not just to come from outward duty, **but from inward, heartfelt love** of a covenant God who has so richly and mercifully saved you.

## Descending to the Bad (Lev 19:3-10)

### *Revere Parents (3a)*

If the passage begins with this lofty **and good** ideal of holiness, it moves in ever descending depths, to great

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<sup>22</sup> François Bovon and Helmut Koester, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50*, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 241.

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<sup>23</sup> David W. Pao and Eckhard J. Schnabel, “Luke,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 298.

wickedness that arises when Israel refuses this wholeness that God grants as a status. This is what law does in its first use. It brings you down, convicting you that you are not a good person. The first formal command is vs. 3a. It applies to everyone. “Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father.” As we have seen, this is essentially the Fifth Commandment.

In the Fifth, the word is “honor.” Honoring mother and father is both an outward act (you do what they tell you to do), and an inward disposition (you want to honor them in your heart). This inward disposition never goes away. To honor them is to adorn, pay tribute to, respect, or rise. It is something you would do when you are in the presence of royalty, or someone else highly esteemed. The word used here is “revere” or “fear,” something that the older some children get, the less they do regarding their parents.

A lot of people think that the primary focus of the command is on little children obeying their parents. In fact, it is much more likely that it is on fully grown adults honoring their parents when they get old (taking care of them, providing a good burial, dealing fairly with their estate, etc.). This is clear in many other places. “Whoever strikes his father or his mother shall be put to death” (Ex

21:15). This isn't talking about a three-year-old. “Do not curse” your father or mother (Ex 21:17) or revile them (Matt 15:4). You are not to say, “I wish you were dead” to their face *or under your breath*—outwardly or inwardly—for this is a grave sin which was punished by death. In Gen 28:7, “Jacob had obeyed his father and his mother and gone to Paddan-aram.” Jacob was quite old when he did this. In the Proverbs:

- A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a sorrow to his mother. Prov 10:1
- A foolish son is a grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him. Prov 17:2
- He who does violence to his father and chases away his mother is a son who brings shame and reproach. Prov 19:2
- Listen to your father who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old. Prov 23:22
- Whoever robs his father or his mother and says, “That is no transgression” is a companion to a man who destroys. Prov 28:24

## *Keep Sabbaths (3b)*

Revering parents is a good thing. So also is **keeping God's sabbaths**. The word here is **plural**: sabbaths. This would include the seventh day (hence, the Fourth

Commandment), but also **any other sabbath days** in the feast calendar, many of which will be discussed near the end of Leviticus.

The word “sabbath” means “**rest.**” The whole point of a sabbath is to rest. But this doesn’t mean it is to sleep. God kept sabbath on the seventh day in **Genesis 2:1-3**. But he didn’t take a nap. Instead, he was enthroned on high as the king of the earth-temple he had just created. When Israel “sabbathed,” she was to rest from all of her normal labor so that she might attend to the corporate worship of God with his people. This was her great enjoyable pleasure of life. This “rest” saw all Israelites enter into God’s enthroned creation rest. In it, through the worship of this God, he bestowed upon them great renewal of mind and heart. For in worshipping, what were they doing but **fulfilling the great end to which they were created**? And if you are fulfilling the very purpose of existing, how will this not renew your whole being, to make you fit for the coming labors of life during the week?

Sabbath worship is a huge controversy in some circles of Christianity today. Many think that all sabbath worship has ceased. In fact, Paul talks about sabbaths (plural) having been fulfilled in Christ’s coming (**Rom 14:5; Col 2:16**). He

concludes that to keep them is nothing and to not keep them is nothing. I would argue that all OT sabbaths are particular instances of a universal principle that still rings true. Think of it like meat sacrificed to idols. Paul sees this as nothing as well (1Co 8; 10:19), yet he still says that he doesn't want people eating with demons (20), because the principle of idolatry still rings true, even if the meat itself is now a non-issue.

The church has always worshiped God especially one day a week, on the First Day. I want you to think about this question of whether sabbath as a ritual has passed into oblivion in every sense. If it has, ask yourself which other parts of this list this morning no longer apply. Vs. 3 ends, "I am the LORD your God." This is one of our sixteen markers that designates that we have ended a minor section of laws.

### *Idols (4)*

The next section begins in vs. 4 and continues through vs. 10. The first law deals with idols. "Do not turn to idols or make for yourselves any gods of cast metal: I am the LORD your God" (Lev 19:4). This marks a turn in that the

previous commands are all stated positively (“you shall”) and this one is put negatively (“you shall *not*”). This is clearly the **Second Commandment**. What is it teaching? The ancient practice was to create a metal or stone or wood representation of a deity. The point of this was to “house” the deity in a safe and local container where, through ceremonial ritual, you could cause the deity to dwell in it, thereby receiving some kind of benefit from it as you offered worship to it in that place. The practice is virtually identical to Roman Catholic saint veneration.

The verse refers to **idols** (*elil*). It is a different word from that used in the Second Commandment (*pesel*). A *pesel* is a graven image. And in fact, the LXX uses the same word for the Commandment and here, so this is too. But the word *elil* adds something more. The word literally means, “**weak**” or “**feeble**.” In other words, the very purpose for which the idol is made is incapable of being carried out. By whom? By the gods (*elohim*). In this case, it is specifically telling Israel not to make images of other gods. Why? “**I am the LORD your God**,” the statement that also shows we have ended another sub-division. Has this law passed away? I would hope the answer would be an obvious no. Christians are not to turn to

gods or demons through idolatry at any time, ever. Jesus bought us. We belong to him and the Father who sent him.

### *Peace Offerings (5-8)*

The next law deals with “a sacrifice of peace offerings.” You will recall that the peace offering was dealt with in Leviticus 3, but we’ve seen it show up in many other places as well (e.g. 7:15-20). This was an offering that you give to God out of thanks for something like recovering from illness, a safe voyage at sea or land, or release from prison (Ps 107:4-25). As such, the idea is inherently one of having communion with the Almighty, and in fact the Lord’s Supper is its NT equivalent. Here is the wording of the law, “When you offer a sacrifice of peace offerings to the LORD, you shall offer it so that you may be accepted. It shall be eaten the same day you offer it or on the day after, and anything left over until the third day shall be burned up with fire. If it is eaten at all on the third day, it is tainted; it will not be accepted, and everyone who eats it shall bear his iniquity, because he has profaned what is holy to the LORD, and that person shall be cut off from his people” (Lev 19:5-8).

Only meat **properly sacrificed** peace offering could be eaten. These verses regulate which food could be eaten and under what conditions. It is specifically directed towards the layman rather than the priest.<sup>24</sup> Is there **any relevance to today**? What is interesting to me about it is how similar it sounds to something else in the Sermon on the Mount. “**If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison**” (**Matt 5:23-25**). Remember, the whole point of the introduction is that these laws are as much about the heart as the hands. It is about the whole person, and this is precisely what Jesus is getting at. In this way, you can think about loving God and neighbor as being involved in this offering.

You might ask, how is this worse than idolatry if we are moving from good to bad. The answer is **the punishment**. These people are **cut off** from their people.

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<sup>24</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 266.

## *Food and the Poor (9-10)*

Related to the peace offering, in that they are about food, are the laws in **vv. 9-10**. “When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God” (**Lev 19:9-10**).

These concern “**the poor and the sojourner.**” Both of these groups are targeted for special political laws in modern society. Since perhaps the 1930s, the poor have been able to receive things like welfare and food stamps, free healthcare and pay almost no taxes. Similarly, there are certain kinds of sojourners, specifically what are today called illegal aliens, who are also the targets of special government treatment.

I have always been struck by how this law **refuses to give handouts to the poor or the sojourner**. This particular law concerns food. How will the poor and those who are travelling about get their food? They go throughout other people’s fields and glean that which remains. “**If a man will not work, he will not eat**” (**2Th 3:10**). However, it seems

that this law **targets those who “have”** even more than those who “have not.” It is really about the landowner, the farmer. How many laws today are on the books that allow people to put up no trespassing signs which would prevent this very kind of law from being obeyed? Often, our fields are so well picked over by the machines that little to nothing remains anyway. What God is insisting upon here is that the rich have to leave room—a significant amount of room—for the poor to work for their food.

Not all laws carry over one-to-one into modern society, as we just saw. There is little in modern society that emulates this law on either side of the spectrum, one because our society doesn't really work like this anymore; two because the poor are given handouts; and three because how do you legislate the heart of a rich man? But it should be clear that for God's people, each person must find room in their heart to find ways to allow others to eat and find dignity in doing so. Certainly the principle does not pass away, even if the specific application differs in a modern world.

This list **now ends with our formula**, thus completing **four sets of laws** that **move from good to bad**. How might this be worse than the previous in the list? Again, it is put negatively (you shall not). But more, God cares greatly

about the poor. It is for not caring about them that [Amos](#) blasts the rich of his day and they go into captivity. It is for the same thing that [Psalm 82](#) says the Gods of the nations will die like men. This law isn't just about you, but others. Our God does not tolerate that kind of indiscriminate blindness towards the poor and sojourners in the land.

## **Ascending to the Good (Lev 19:11-18)**

### *Honesty (11-12)*

[Four more sets of laws](#) now take us from [bad to good](#). In this, though we will remain in the law strictly speaking, we can also see the Gospel, if we look to the God who gives them. We begin with [a set of laws dealing with honesty](#). As before, the worse things are put as a “not.” The first set begins, “[You shall not steal](#)” ([Lev 19:11a](#)). This is [the Eighth Commandment](#). These weeks have seen unprecedented looting that was cast by the media as just protesting. Sorry, protesting is one thing. Breaking into stores and robbing owners of all merchandise is stealing. It is a direct violation of the Commandment of God. Anyone who says otherwise

hates God's law. Stealing has never stopped being wrong, not even for politically correct social movements.

Dealing falsely with people is the next law. It is quite possible that this is the Ninth Commandment, “Do not bear false witnesses” (11b). But it is more than just lying about someone. This is cheating them in any way at any time, whether their name or their reputation or their person. The third in the list is similar. “You shall not lie to one another” (11c). Again, this is a version of the Ninth Commandment, which deals with bearing false witness. This, however, extends beyond a legal proceeding and would include all kinds of things such as gossip, slander, defamation, insults, libel, and so on.

Something else to note here is the phrase “one another.” The previous set of laws seems to have been some kind of implied “remote” person (“the poor” or “the sojourner”). You probably don't even know them. But not now. Now, there is a personal relationship of some kind. “One another” is a rather impersonal way of talking about a personal relationship. I'll explain this a little more in the next set.

Lying continues in the next command. “You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the Name of your God” (12). This one combines the Ninth Commandment,

which is generally thought about regarding one another and not God, and the **Third Commandment** which deals with taking the Name of God in vain. Remember, the Name of God is the Second Person of the Trinity. Curiously, this Second Person, Jesus, clearly **talks about oaths in his Sermon on the Mount** and the idea is that you must never call upon God in an oath if you have no intention of keeping that oath. It is a terrible profanity, and this helps you see just how bad this and the preceding laws are. The set ends in vs. 12, “**I am the LORD.**” These are not just markers to outline a paragraph, they are statements that give the reason for obedience. This is God we are talking about, not some dumb idol or helpless god. He is holy. We are to be like him.

### *Exploitation (13-14)*

We move from honesty to **exploitation**. We also are going to move from “one another” to “**neighbor.**” This is a more familiar way of talking about a personal relationship. These laws are moving **from the remote to the intimate**. First, “**You shall not oppress your neighbor or rob him**” (**Lev 19:13a**). Again, stealing comes into view. There also seems to be some implication that status is different—if you

can oppress someone, then you are of a higher status than he is.

“The wages of a hired worker shall not remain with you all night until the morning” (13b). This one proves those different statuses. We are clearly dealing with some kind of hired help and master/lord. It also specifies a way you can rob him. You keep his wages the earned and didn’t give it to him in time. There are all kinds of interesting places we could go with this in a modern world of wages being paid every two-weeks or month or even quarterly and so on. But I’ll refrain. The point is, if he is owed and it hurts him not to pay him, pay him. God is holy. You are his people.

Again, more specific types of oppressed people come into view. “You shall not curse the deaf” (14a). To curse the deaf is to say something horrible about someone who can’t hear what you are saying. It is a mockery of his condition and of his person. You shall not “put a stumbling block before the blind” (14b). This is a parallel idea. The blind can’t see when you put something in their way. How mean and terrible would this be? Curiously, the blind stumble over the stumbling stone, which is Christ (cf. Rom 9:32-33). But God told them about Christ, he didn’t just put Christ there.

He told them and he showed them Christ, but they would not see.

Finally, we get a positive command, showing that we are moving from bad to good. For the moment, it is not a “not” but a “you shall.” “**You shall fear your God**” and it ends with our formula, “**I am the LORD**” (14c). What is the opposite of all these forms of exploitation? **Fearing God**. If exploitation is occurring against someone, you can be certain of one thing—that person does not fear God.<sup>25</sup>

### *Justice in Court (15-16)*

The neighbor theme continues in **the third set**. It deals with **justice** in courts. “**You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor**” (15). This is a word I fear our entire society has lost. Powerful and rich people often get out of going to court altogether, and when they do, they have the best lawyers and justice is often so twisted it isn’t even recognizable. Meanwhile, the whole

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<sup>25</sup> I’m not talking here about some kind of institutional exploitation here, because institutions cannot fear God or anything else. The individuals within it can. Do not make the mistake of taking something that is meant for a person and applying it to a group. The Bible is no a guide for cultural Marxism.

“social justice” madness that has taken over our world despises the idea that the poor must be judged by what they did. Instead, people today want the poor (or fill in whatever intersectionality minority is the latest fad) to get off scot free simply to stick it to the rich. It is hard to think of a law more relevant to times like ours.

The next law still deals with **courts**. This time, focusing on **witnesses**. “**You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor**” (16). Forcing someone into a legal battle because you lie about them or testifying against someone by lying about what they did are both absolutely prohibited. How do you know that this is evil? Our phrase returns again. “**I am the LORD.**” What is the bench-mark for what is good and evil? Not culture. Not political platforms or parties. God. The holy God. It is his own nature that flows through these laws. And he is the only unchangeable moral standard.

## **Finishing Good: Love Your Neighbor As Yourself (Lev 19:17-18)**

The list has thus far been mostly bad and negative (“**you shall not**”). We have one more negative law, and this one

moves to the most personal of all relationships. “**Brother.**” “**You shall not hate your brother in your heart**” (17). Notice that this one **legislates the heart**, rather than the actions. Only God can do this, because only God knows the heart. So-called “**hate**” **crimes** are dark mockeries of this hate-crime, because no man knows the heart, and they don’t actually legislate the heart anyway, they legislate ever moving arbitrary socially changing ethical targets. God does not do that. True hate is always wrong. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that this is the heart of the Sixth Commandment: Murder. This crime, God will judge.

John tells us, “**Whoever says he is in the light and hates his brother is still in darkness. Whoever loves his brother abides in the light, and in him there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded his eyes**” (1Jn 2:9-11). God’s people must be known from their love of one another, not hatred. Nothing has changed here.

This law actually is fairly specific. It adds, “**But you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him**” (Lev 19:17b). Clearly, the hatred has arisen because of some kind of disagreement. When this happens, you must

not let the sun go down on your anger, but deal with it so that you do not incur sin on his account. This also sounds like something we saw earlier that Jesus said that if your brother has something against you and you know it, go to him before you offer your gift. In this way, Leviticus 19 not only has the Ten Commandments in mind, but the Sermon on the Mount has Leviticus 19 running throughout it.

This is seen in no better way than the last verse we will look at today. “You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD” (Lev 19:18). Vengeance is in the Sermon, isn’t it? “But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also” (Matt 5:39). Bearing a grudge is something we could say underlies a lot of the early parts of Jesus’ sermon.

But perhaps the most obvious thing is a phrase Jesus simply takes whole from Leviticus 19:18. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” People ignorant of the OT think Jesus is making up a new law here. He isn’t. He is quoting what in other places is called the summary of the Second Table of the Law.

We learn in Matthew 22, “And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ‘Teacher, which is the great

commandment in the Law?’ And he said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 22:35-40). Jesus is getting part of it from Leviticus (the other comes from Deuteronomy).

As we **conclude**, I want you to consider a NT story that deals with this verse. The first comes in Luke 10.<sup>26</sup> “**And** behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, ‘Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? How do you read it?’ And he answered, ‘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.’ And he said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.’ But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’” (Lk 10:25-29).

Notice this man’s question. **What shall I do** to inherit eternal life? Jesus told him what to do. Obey this verse. But

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<sup>26</sup> See also Matt 19:16-19 where Jesus sums up the second table with this law in a very similar if not the identical story where the man asks, “What good deed must I do to have eternal life?”

it says that the man was trying to **justify himself** when he asked who his neighbor was. The obvious reason is that he only wanted to love certain people and so he defined “neighbor” very specifically—as in his next-door neighbor? In this way, he could get out of obeying the law and still claim that he was obeying it.

So Jesus tells a parable. It is the Good Samaritan. This parable rocked the man, because Samaritans not only didn’t live anywhere near good Jews, they were considered half-breed, almost sub-human creatures. **For this to be the man’s neighbor?** Well, he couldn’t love that kind of a person.

Our own text has moved **from the far away** whom you probably don’t even know, to **one another**, to **neighbor**, to **brother**. In this way, it is doing exactly what Jesus is doing. Your neighbor is not just your best friend. He is the one who needs the product of your harvest to eat, who needs justice in court, who needs you not to lie or slander him, who needs you not to hate him.

This man was seeking a salvation by works. “**What must I do.**” If you want to live by works, then you have to do it all. I think this is the double-entendre of “**be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.**” It isn’t that Jesus is teaching a kind of perfectionism. It is rather that Jesus is insisting, as he

does here and elsewhere, that if you want to earn or merit eternal life, you have to be perfect.

There is a parallel story in Matthew 19. In it, Jesus gives the summary of the Second Table of the law as love your neighbor as yourself (**Matt 19:18-19**). He does this in response to a man asking him, “**What good deed must I do to have eternal life?**” (16). The man says that he has kept them all. So Jesus, harkening now back to **Leviticus 19:2** says, “**If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me**” (21). The man went away sorrowful, because he was very rich.

All who trust in their own righteousness come away sorrowful when they hear these requirements. But Jesus tells us that it is possible to do this—**through faith** in him. The only requirement is knowing and believing that Jesus did all this for you so that you might have his life as you are united with him in his resurrection. It comes through faith in him and this faith comes through hearing the word of Christ now.

Of course, his people have come to know that they can't earn or merit eternal life and that they can't ever be perfect. They have trusted in him. But still, many are confused. I wish to leave you with **Martin Luther's application** of all this

in his lectures on the Sermon on the Mount. Sometimes, Luther is maligned for teaching that this holiness and perfection is only here to lead people to the end of themselves. He doesn't. He recognizes what I've been saying throughout. That this command and the entire series of commands is something God's people yearn to obey.

Christ now ends this chapter with this teaching and these illustrations, and says: Therefore be ye perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect. Here our sophists have indulged in many dreams about perfection, and have applied everything to their orders and classes, as if pastors and monks alone were in the state of perfection, and one higher than the other: the bishops higher than the others, and the pope the highest of all. In this way this word is snatched away entirely from the ordinary class of Christians, as if they could not be called or be perfect. But you hear that Christ is not here talking to bishops, monks and nuns; but in general to all Christians who are his disciples and who wish to be called the children of God, not like the publicans and base fellows, such as the Pharisees and our ecclesiastics are.

But how are they to be perfect? Answer, briefly, for elsewhere I have treated of it more fully: We are not to be or become perfect, so as not to have any sin, as they dream

about perfection; but to be perfect means, here and everywhere also in Scripture, that in the first place the doctrine [that we hold] be entirely correct and perfect, and then that the life also be directed and move accordingly; as here this doctrine is that we are to love not only those who do good to us, but also our enemies. He now who teaches this, and lives according to this teaching, he teaches and lives perfectly.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> **Martin Luther**, *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*, trans. Charles A. Hay (Philadelphia: Lutheran Publication Society, 1892), 226–227.

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