

Leviticus 19:1-2, 17-18 The LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy....'<sup>17</sup> "'Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt.'<sup>18</sup> "'Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.'"

Dear loved by the Lord:

Do you know the tale of the Little Dutch Boy? A boy in the lowlands of Holland was walking to school one day when he saw a leak in the dike, a seawall holding out the ocean. So he stuck his finger in the hole and waited until the people of the village noticed he was missing and finally came and fix it. The story is told to teach that if we act quickly and self-sacrificially we can help avert greater disaster. A small trickle can become a stream and a stream a flood if we don't act decisively and bravely.

We're in the book of Leviticus today. Sometimes we wonder about all those OT laws and their purpose. This may help: Think of the nation of Israel as Holland and the ocean around them as a sea of sin and unbelief and false gods. One reason the Lord gave Israel laws was to serve as a dike, a seawall (we often call it a hedge), to separate his chosen people from the godless world around them. That is really the definition of the word "**holy**": to be chosen and set apart by God as clean from all the uncleanness around you.

This holiness doesn't depend on us. We can't simply wish ourselves clean. No, our theme today is: "**God Provides the Holiness He Demands**" (I) *He graciously declares us to be holy*, and (II) *He strengthens us to live holy lives*.

## I

*The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: 'Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy....'"* To me, this is one of the most terrifying and frustrating verses in the Bible. Why? Because I'm not holy and I can't be holy. Jesus even reiterates this in the NT when he says, "*Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect*" (Mt 5:48).

Do you remember the old Ivory soap commercial? Ivory's claim to fame was that this soap was 99 & 44/100% pure. But even if you and I could be *that* pure with our thoughts, words, and actions, we still wouldn't be perfect/holy. Isaiah wrote, "*All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags*" (Isa 64:6). That means we're not even in the Ivory soap category. By nature we're 0% pure.

So what's the solution to this huge problem? How can we ever hope to live with holy God whom the Bible says is "*a consuming fire*" and who lives "*in unapproachable light*" (Dt 4:24, 1 Tm 6:16)? History is filled with sad accounts of mankind's futile efforts to reach and claim holiness. Luther: Go live in a monastery and beat yourself with whips. Others: Perch on a mountaintop and meditate. Do as many acts of volunteer service as we can. Stay out of jail. But our man-made solutions are always **self-focused**. And every day we sin again and we sin more. The dike is breached. It's not just a trickle of sin. The flood of sin overwhelms us.

So the God who tells us to "*Be holy*" also supplies what we need to "*be holy*." It entails being washed and scrubbed clean -- not with Ivory soap, but with something much purer: the crimson flood of Jesus' blood shed on the cross makes us white as snow. Listen joyfully to these words from Hebrews (10:10): "*We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*" God says, "*Be holy*" and then he gives us what need: "*The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin*" (1 John 1:7). Because of Jesus we are declared to be as holy as the Savior himself! What a priceless gift.

## II

Now that we have been "*called out of darkness into his wonderful light*" (1 Pt 2:9) of holiness, giving us fellowship with God today and eternally, our grateful hearts have a deep desire to live our lives in as holy a manner as possible.

Some may remember Bobby Richardson, former all-star 2<sup>nd</sup> baseman with the NY Yankees in the 1950s and 60s. He was also a Christian gentleman. He once wrote this prayer: **“Dear Lord...your will: nothing more, nothing less, nothing else. Amen.”** That is a prayer for holy living we can *all* pray. If we are sincere about that prayer, then we also will want to know exactly what God’s will is. The more we learn his Word (you can get it for free on your smartphone!), the better we will know God’s will and be moved by the Holy Spirit to try to match our lives with what God says.

God enlightens us here in Leviticus: **“Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.”** What does God say is his will for holy living? One thing he speaks about here is addressing differences with each other in a Christ-like way. He singles out hatred. That’s interesting, since keeping God’s commandments can be summarized in one single *opposite* word: love! Love is holy. Hatred is unholy. The Apostle John addresses this in the NT also. He says, **“Anyone who claims to be in the light (a follower of Christ) but hates his neighbor is still in the darkness”** (1 Jn 2:9). He also says, even more forcefully, **“Anyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life in him”** (1 Jn 3:15).

I read somewhere that hatred is like an acid. It damages not only the object on which it is poured, but also the vessel in which it is stored. As hatred festers it eats away at both the hater and hatee.

Notice how God says that instead of **“seeking revenge or bearing a grudge”** against someone, we are to show love by **“Rebuking your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt.”** The word rebuke in English is a strong word. We often think of “rebuke” as a harsh word sharply spoken. But it really means to address the wrong (in love, of course) rather than let it eat away and cause hatred. It’s similar to what Jesus tells us to do in Matthew 18 (if someone sins against you, go talk to him/her about it and peacefully settle your differences for the benefit of both parties).

Unfortunately, we live in a world today where people often say that considering *anything* wrong is hateful, even if God calls it wrong in the Bible. E.g., if you do not support same-sex marriage, you’re considered a “hater.” If you believe that life begins in the womb and don’t want your tax dollars to go to perform abortions, you’re a “hater.” And the big one today is that if you believe Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation -- **“The only name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved”** (Acts 4:12) -- you’re a “hater.” According to that definition, of course, Moses, the Apostle Paul, and even Jesus were all “haters.”

That’s just a bunch of baloney.

When John the Baptist boldly preached the Word of God at the Jordan and convicted people of their sins and called them to repentance, it wasn’t because he hated them. It’s because he loved them. If people don’t see their sins, then they will never see their need for a Savior. And if they don’t see their need for a Savior, they will never look to Jesus and believe. And if people don’t believe in Jesus, they will be separated from God forever in hell. It is not hateful to want people to go to heaven and not hell.

Real hatred is not **“speaking the truth in love.”** Real hatred is denying or obscuring the truth by advancing a human agenda based on current popular opinions and personal likes and dislikes. True love, lasting love, is helping people go to heaven.

So, fellow Christians, like the little Dutch boy, keep your finger in the hole in the dike. Use God’s Word to love others by plugging the increasingly large hole of sin and unbelief. Taking a stand on God’s life-giving Word doesn’t mean you’re a hater. Sharing the truth with compassion is truly what Jesus meant when he said, **“Love your neighbor as yourself.”**

Amen.