

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

Holy Love Pastor Steven Gaines Leviticus 19:9-18 September 13, 2015

Would you take your Bibles and turn with me to the book of Leviticus 19. We are going to be looking at a portion of this chapter, reading from Verse 9 through Verse 18. Oh, the children are dismissed for Children's Church. So Leviticus 19, starting in Verse 9. Now as we jump into this passage, since we haven't been studying Leviticus, and it is not a book that is that familiar to us, to many of us, the way the book is structured, the first seven chapters deal with different offerings that the Israelites were commanded to give. Chapters 8-10 deal with the priesthood. Chapters 11-15 cover the issue of ritual cleanness or uncleanness. Chapter 16 covers the Day of Atonement, and you may remember from several weeks ago, that Ty read that as a Scripture-reading for one of his sermons. And then Chapter 17 to the end of Leviticus is sometimes referred to as 'The Holiness Code'. That is, it a collection of a rather varied lot of instructions and commands that are given to the people there. And so, our passage in Leviticus 19 is part of that Holiness Code. So just to give it a little bit of context as we launch in. So starting at Verse 9 of Chapter 19.

Leviticus 19:9-18 ~ "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. 10 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.

11 "You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. 12 You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. 13 "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. 14 You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the LORD. 15 "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. 16 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.

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

17 “You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. 18 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.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

Father, we come before You today, and we give praise to You because You are a God who has revealed Yourself to us in His word. You've not left us in the dark, that You have given us instruction for our lives, to understand both Your character and nature, and how that character and nature should be reflected in us, in our dealings, and in our interactions with one another. And so Father, I pray today that You might come, by Your Holy Spirit, and enable me to set forth this passage of Scripture in a way that is honoring and pleasing to You, and that You would do Your work among us this day. And I pray this in Christ's name, Amen.

You may remember that there is an account in the Gospels where one of the Pharisees, the Pharisees were actually getting together, and they were trying to find a way to test Jesus. It says in Matthew that one of them, one of those Pharisees who was a lawyer, decided to come to Jesus and ask Him a question. That is one of the ways, of course, we know in the Gospels that one of the ways they wanted to test Jesus was throw out a question to Him to see how He would respond. So the question that was asked was this one: *What is the greatest commandment in the law?* Now, that is a pretty good question if you think about it, and if you consider the law in the Old Testament, not just being the Ten Commandments, but all the civil and ceremonial laws that were there, what would be the one greatest commandment that He would choose out of that? And here is how Jesus responded, He said:

Matthew 22:37-40 ~ “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

When we hear this second commandment, ...*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*, normally when we first consider it, it comes to our mind that this was something that Jesus said, and it was. But when Jesus said it, He wasn't

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

introducing a new teaching to the Israelites, the people hearing Him, or to the Pharisees, He was quoting out of Leviticus 19.

In fact, if you go through and survey the New Testament, you find out that this part of Leviticus 19 is quoted by Paul in the book of Romans, Chapter 13. It is also quoted by James in Chapter 2, where he is talking about the royal law according to Scripture. It is also brought forth in the book of Galatians, Chapter 5, where we are told that we are not to use our freedom as an opportunity for the flesh. So this is an important command that was given in the Old Testament, that is reflected many times in the New. Sometimes, when we think about the idea of love, we think of something that is very subjective, something that is kind of very transcendent, or it is a personal thing. You have what love is to you, or to me, or perhaps the romantic notions of love that fill our culture, this idea of feeling and emotion only. What I want us to do today, as we look through Leviticus 19, in this section, is to see that love has a dimension, and that dimension is holiness of our conduct. That we cannot love our neighbor as ourselves in just some subjective way where we feel like we are loving our neighbor. But rather, that in God's purposes, He gave some very specific instructions and guidance to His people to help them see what it meant to love other people. Today, as we look through Leviticus 19, we are going to try to consider five points. So if you'll hang with me today through five points, but I promise there will be no sub-point, or no sub-sub-points to this. So you have on one hand you have five fingers, so if you can just kind of follow along with me, and hang with me, we'll be in good shape.

So I'm going to give you five words that are going to be those words on which we hang the teaching of the passage. The first one is *Generosity*, that love that is holy requires generosity in us. That is, not thinking just about us ourselves, but thinking about other people. The second word that I will use is *Integrity*, that is in our conduct, in our manner of acting, and speaking, and thinking. So that is *Integrity*. The third point, I'm going to use the word *Deference*. I couldn't really think of one word that was better than this, but it is the idea of actually deferring and thinking about people who are in a weaker position than we are. So we are not looking to our strength, but we are looking to others in their weakness, but we are doing it in a way where we are deferring to them, and considering how it is that we are to defer to them in their lives. So *Deference*. The fourth one is *Justice*, and so in this one we will see that God, who is completely and wholly just and fair in all His dealings, that in us, in our love towards other people, we have to be just. We can't say that we love someone, we love our brothers, and then act in ways that are unfair, and show partiality. And then the fifth one is *Forgiveness*, that a love that is

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

holy must be a love that exercises forgiveness towards other people. That is, both in our hearts, and also in our outward expressions towards others. So real quick, it is *Generosity, Integrity, Deference, Justice, and Forgiveness*. So that is all the points we are going to have today.

1) Generosity:

So let's jump into the first one, *Generosity*. When we look here in Leviticus 19, we read in Verses 9 and 10, that when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge. Now think about this context. I don't know that we have anyone here that is a farmer, or engaged in that as their occupation. I know we probably have a lot of amateur farmers that are here from one degree to another, wherever you fall on that scale. But remember in this context, that the people of Israel, it would have been a primarily agricultural society. So this would have been something where they were addressing the masses of people. I didn't grow up on a farm, maybe you did, or you know someone that did, but what I always hear from people that are farmers, or grew up on farms, is it is tremendously hard work. It is something where you are responsible for your crops, and your animals, the hours start very early, and in a way, you never really leave your work. It is always there and it surrounds you.

Now, consider for yourself for a minute, that if you were a hardworking farmer, Paul does use that kind of terminology, even in the New Testament, to describe that, that God was telling you, "You know what? You go out to your fields, and you work hard, and prepare them, and you plant them, and you make sure that they are watered, and then when it is time to harvest it, you do the harvesting, and maybe you pay other people to help you in all these endeavors. Now what I want you to do is do all of this work, and work hard so that every night you go to bed, and you are tired, and exhausted, and do all of this, but then in the end, I don't want you to harvest all that you've worked for." Just think about that, and ponder what that means, would mean to you. It would be a little bit hard, would it not? To think to yourself, "I'm doing all of this work, and yet, I'm being bound to the fact that I can't take all of it. I have to leave something of this work that I did." And not only that, it is saying that, as we read here, that not only are you supposed to not reap your field all the way up to the edge, but it says that you are not to gather the gleanings after the harvest. So that means that when you've gone through, and you've been harvesting, and there are leftovers that are down there on the ground, you can't go pick those up. Wouldn't we think in our hearts, if that were us, "That's my stuff," right? "I have the right to get that off the ground, and I have the

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

right to mow this field, or harvest it, to the very edge, the very, very edge that is there.”

I think one thing, when we consider the holy dimension of love for us, is that this is going against our natural temptation to stinginess and self-focus. It is that temptation, that indwelling sin, works inside of us where we wake up in the morning, and we think about me, I think about me, and maybe those things that are right around me. I think about my burdens and my concerns. But this command would have forced the people of Israel to have consciously thought not about themselves, but for someone else. Now, there is a threefold provision that is mentioned here, and we will talk a little bit about the recipients here in a second, but one of those was the harvest gleanings, and that was the leftover that was there in the field after they had done the main harvesting. And we know this illustration from the book of Ruth, it is a very famous book of the Bible where God provided for Ruth and Naomi through Boaz, and through the gleanings of his field, and how generous Boaz was. She was able to go out there, and to gather those.

We also see here, in addition to these gleanings, there was that remnant that was there, that was not done all the way to the edge. He also mentions this idea of a vineyard, and it says that you are not supposed to pick up the fallen grapes of your vineyard. Now think about that for a minute. You know, it would be like having things, and if you drop them, or perhaps things were not part of this big bunch of grapes, and there were little individual grapes, or little smaller ones, you are supposed to leave those, leave those on the ground. But why? Well, because God wanted to provide for a category of people termed here in Leviticus *‘the poor and for the sojourner’*. Now when you read other parts of the Old Testament, there were other categories. There was the sojourner, that is, someone that came from another country into the land of Israel, He was providing for. In other passages, you’d find out He was providing for the widow. That is, for the women who had no husband, and also for the fatherless. And so that is a theme that you read over and over as you go through the Old Testament, it is the fatherless, and it is the widow, and it is the sojourner.

Now, I don’t know, does that make it easier for you or not? Right? It depends on your attitude towards these people. Because sometimes we, in our thinking, we think like this, “You know, I work hard, and why should I give this to somebody else? Well, if someone was poor, it had to be their own fault, or their own issue, and so why would I even consider someone that had need. If they just worked hard enough, God would have provided for them.” So here let’s leave our current

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

political 21st Century American thoughts about poverty, and the poor, and oppression, and all that. Let's just push it to the side because that wasn't present here in Leviticus 19, and so it would be wrong for us to force that onto the text. Just read it as it is, to know that those people who came from outside of Israel into Israel would have been at an extreme disadvantage. They would not have had the ability to have land there. So if they didn't have land in an agricultural context, it would be very hard for them to provide for themselves. Or perhaps the best work they would be able to get would be sort of a day laborer type work that was there. The category of the fatherless, and of the widow, in a society where it was founded upon the patriarchal society, if you didn't have a husband, if you didn't have parents in that time, how would you have been provided for? So God had a plan to look out for those who had need. I think when we look at this command for generosity, that we see a picture of God's benevolence. Psalm 145 says this:

Psalm 145:14-16 ~

*14 The LORD upholds all who are falling
and raises up all who are bowed down.*

*15 The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.*

*16 You open your hand;
you satisfy the desire of every living thing.*

We find that the very nature and character of God, that He is a benevolent God, that He is providing for us. That as much as we think about how hard we've worked, and how we've earned this money, or our living, or our sustenance, that at the end of the day, it is all from Him. That if He gave us the ability to work, we need to give glory to Him, and thank Him for that. If He gave us the wisdom and understanding to do well and be successful, we need to realize that it still came from Him, that ability. When we consider this aspect of love worked out, how we should love our neighbor, that one of those aspects is that we consider other people and their need, we are reminded from the New Testament in Galatians 6, that we are given this admonition:

Galatians 6:10 ~ So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

So we are being called today, although we are not under this specific civil law that would cause us to our fields. You know, if you plant a garden, and it is 20 feet by 30 feet, you can harvest all of it, right? And if you drop a tomato you can go pick it

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

up because I don't know if it would be the deer, or some other animal that will come by and grab it from you. So it is not that kind of specific application, but rather it is understanding the original intent of it, and how that applies to us. God has not called us today, in the body of Christ, to look only to ourselves, but to actually look to other people who are in a weak state, people who need help, and for us to have a generous heart first, and then a willingness to turn aside from our own interests, and our own accomplishments, or success, or wealth, or whatever it is, but to turn and look, and to be willing to give some of that away to another person who is in need.

Now sometimes that may be easy, if you have an abundance, or a super-abundance, to give just a little bit of that abundance. You've still got a lot left. But oftentimes it is harder when there are so many different demands that come to us for ourselves to think about others and their needs. So today I would call you, as you consider a love that is holy, in emulating God and His character as a benevolent God, and being benevolent in your own hearts.

2) Integrity:

Let's move to the second point, that of *Integrity*. We read in Verse 11:

Leviticus 19:11-12 ~ "You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. 12 You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.

We see here the temptation within our hearts countered, the temptations to use false dealings and actions to feed the desires of the flesh. We find here represented some of the Ten Commandments that were given—stealing, bearing false witness, taking the Lord's name in vain, or using it in a vain manner. And we see here a call that we need to have integrity towards God, but also integrity towards our fellow man. We might not think about this often, but if you love me, you are not going to steal from me. That is not something you probably think about when you think of loving somebody else, but it is true. No matter how emotionally deep you feel for me, if you are pilfering my things, you are not loving me.

I remember my grandfather had this neighbor, and when he was older, my grandfather lived out in the country, and he had sheds here and there, and stuff, you know, kind of laying around. It was not like our suburban environment, but he had this neighbor, and apparently the neighbor, this young neighbor moved in and

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

they were kind of friends. He was always cordial, and nice, and happy, but later on we found out, you know you'd go in there and things were just missing from the shed. All kinds of tools that were in there and it turned out that this was just a practice by this man, that when he wanted something, he just kind of came over and borrowed it from him. Of course, he was always nice to my grandfather, and he was always kind, and spoke to him well, but do you see the inconsistency that is there? That we have to be holy to each other, even though it is not a feeling, or emotional thing, it is something where we are treating each other with respect. But I respect your things, and so I'm not going to take them from you.

We also see here, along with that, the same idea in dealing falsely. But if you love another person, you are going to look out for their best interests and not your own. False dealings of course can be outright, and blatant, but they can also be very subtle, misrepresenting something. There was this Andy Griffith episode we watched recently, and Barney decides to become a real estate agent. So he gets real into this, and he tries to convince Andy to sell his house. And so he finds some buyers for Andy's house, so Andy can leave this house, and move to another one, and have his home that he would dream of. So he brings the potential buyers over, and he's giving Opie some lecture about how he is supposed to be honest about things, and well, he covers over the fact that the pipes, whenever you use a certain faucet or something, making this hideous screeching sound. That there is this big crack in the kitchen that has somehow been covered over. And some other feature that was there, but Opie tells them, right? Opie stands right up in front of them and, "Oh, Dad, did you tell them about the crack in the kitchen," and he is trying to hush him up over here, "Oh, shut up! We don't need to tell them about that. You've got to understand," as he explained to Opie, "The people we bought it from, there was a crack there and they covered it up. And the people that those people bought it from, it had a crack and they covered it up too. So we're not really doing anything wrong, we're just kind of passing on the crack in the same way."

So there are all sorts of smaller ways that we can be deceptive in our dealings. You know when someone asks you a straightforward question, we just need to give a straightforward answer. So this is very hard for us, because we want to maneuver around, especially as adults, we're older, we're more complicated, the world is a complex place. So we want to kind of massage everything that we say in a certain way. But the Lord knows what is at the intent of our hearts and our actions, whether other people catch it or not, He knows, and He sees what is there. We see these others swearing by His name falsely, and profaning the name of the Lord, our God, that in our dealings, we need to make sure that, as we invoke the Lord, one

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

way or the other, whether it would be an oath, or a vow, or even the way that we would reference His name in our situation, that we need to be very careful so that our love towards Him, and towards others, is holy. Now we know, concerning God's character, of course, that He is a holy God, 1 John 1 tells us:

1 John 1:5 ~ ...that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

That is, there is no aspect, or part of unholiness in Him.

Numbers 23:19 ~

***God is not man, that he should lie,
or a son of man, that he should change his mind.
Has he said, and will he not do it?
Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?***

In application today, we can consider the words of Andrew Bonar. He said this:

Christians need to be warned and admonished on these heads (these points) as much as Israel. There is a contamination of conscience too frequently found in even Christian men from continual intercourse with an unconscientious world.

Do you catch what he's saying there? That because we live in the world system, and the world system by nature is unconscientious and not concerned with God's holiness, that if we live in it and we breathe the air that is there for us to breathe, that there are traces of that that begin to come into our way of thinking, our mode of operation. And if we're not careful, then we can become just like the world in this way. He goes on further by saying:

Glorify God, therefore, by a jealous integrity and a noble uprightness. Cast reproach on the world's meanness and show you carry God's presence with you into every place, and at every hour, and in all engagements.

He's calling here for us to do more than just avoiding that which is sin or disobedience to God. He's saying, "See the opportunity by being a person of integrity, of carrying it into the world. And having that integrity and that uprightness, go face-to-face with that of the world which is unrighteous and is unholy, so that we can shine like lights in this world." Well, let's move on now to our third point, the point of deference, looking at Verses 13 and 14.

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

3) Deference:

We read here:

Leviticus 19:13 ~ “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. 14 You shall not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block before the blind, but you shall fear your God: I am the Lord.

One of the temptations that we have when we get into a strong position is to take advantage of the weak. Now, that has a lot of different facets. If we get into a position of power, whether it's in a church or in government, whether it's in an organization or company, we have a great opportunity in that power that's been given to us, to do good and to glorify God and to look out for others, but often times there's the advantage with that power that we have, to actually use other people in a way that we should not use them, and not look out for their strengths or their need for strength.

The examples that he gives here, first of all, is not oppressing your neighbor or robbing him, and of the issue of the wages of a hired worker not remaining with you all night until morning. Now again, we need to put off our context of the 21st Century where you get a paycheck perhaps on some regular basis, every two weeks, or month, or whatever it is, or in your business and you get payments from your clients. And let's think back to the situation here of a hired worker. We have such an abundance today in our time and in our country that it's hard to imagine sustenance, living that is, it's hard to imagine a place where we really needed to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” this idea that I need to make sure I have money, because I'm going to need that money to buy tomorrow's bread, and I need it because I might not have it.

A hired worker would have been at the lowest level of the economy and in society, and so the point here is that they were not to hold their wages. If that hired worker had worked for that day, they needed to get their wages. Some of you may have experienced even in our time of working for employers who didn't pay, the worst kind in some ways, that no matter how nice they were or how many great promises they made to you, they just didn't pay or they didn't pay on time, and you waited, and waited, and waited. But here consider if this person was depending on that money from that day to be able to go buy food for their family. Think about that. If you kept those wages back from them, think about the great disservice and pain

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

that you would put them through by doing that, and it would be misusing the advantage that was given.

We also have here in this a picture of a cruelty that's kind of hard for us to even imagine that could be done, although we know it has been done, and we've seen cruelty in our own hearts. It says you shouldn't curse the deaf. Let that kind of filter through your mind for a minute. You think about taking advantage of someone. That person can't hear you, and yet you're maybe swearing against them or cursing them for something that they did. And maybe there are other people that are around you while you're doing this. Can that person respond to your accusations or the things that you're saying? They can't. They have no ability to do it, and so you're using your position of strength or being over a person who has a disadvantage against them. And the picture as well of putting a stumbling block before the blind, think of the cruelty of this, of a person who couldn't see would have absolutely no way to know that some object was in front of them, and you put it in front of them for the purpose of causing them to stumble, and to see their humble and their weak condition.

Now perhaps none of us would ever do the last two, perhaps, but I can remember as a kid growing up some of the meanness and the cruelty that I saw others do and that I took part of, in looking at other people who didn't have everything together, or they had some weakness or disability in their body. And it was a thing where a group of kids get together sometimes and it just makes it worse, because there's a mob mentality. "We're strong. We're in this club, but look at this person. We're going to put this person down. The context of our fellowship is to look at others that aren't quite like us."

So we have to be careful that even in much more subtle ways, that we don't take advantage of the weak. Perhaps you're in a position at your work, as a manager, a leader, or an owner, and you know that there are employees around you that are maybe in a good way a little bit afraid of you, that you have some power over them in some way or another. So are you going to use that power that you have in that position, to be fair and just and to look out for their needs, or will you take advantage of that and maybe kind of use them a little bit, because you've got them a little bit under your thumb? It's a great temptation that's there. It has many applications for us.

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

As we look at the character of God, let's consider one of the images that's given to us from Isaiah 40. It speaks of God, in Isaiah 40, in great, wonderful ways, that the nations of the earth are like a drop from a bucket, but it also talks about His character like this. It says:

Isaiah 40:11

***He will tend his flock like a shepherd;
he will gather the lambs in his arms;
he will carry them in his bosom,
and gently lead those that are with young.***

It's a beautiful picture of God and His shepherd-like care for us, of taking the weak, the smallest animals that would be there, and carrying them with Him. We sang about Jesus loving the little children, earlier, but there's that famous time where the disciples were trying to keep the children away, and He said, "Don't hinder the little children. Let them come to Me." And then in His own ministry of healing, how He healed the paralytic, and the blind man, and the lepers, not those who were the highest in society, but He reached out to those who were weak and helpless, and in His healing ministry, to show that He was the Son of God, that He reached out to them and He looked to their weakness and their need.

We're often tempted to approach others with the attitude, "How can I use this person for my advantage?" Now, we don't want to raise hands when we consider something like this, because we'd all be guilty at some level, maybe not in the most gross way. But that's the temptation of, "How is this person going to be useful for me?" In these examples of cruelty, of course, what they're really getting out of that is just the opportunity to exhibit some meanness and show someone in their weakness, and to humiliate them. But in other cases we may do it for what we think is our best advantage. But I would say this, this morning, that instead of asking, "What or how can I use a person to my advantage?" that if we have a holy love towards others, we would ask this question: "What is this person's need, and how can I be useful to their advantage, so that I do not oppress the laborer, or the poor, or the person under me, or those who are weak, but rather look to be those who build them up? Well, let's move onto our fourth point where we will look at justice.

4) Justice:

In Verse 15 we read:

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

Leviticus 19:15 ~ “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. 16 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.

I have a picture here of kind of a courtroom context, where perhaps someone has been given authority or power to judge. There would have been a common application of this in the towns and the villages of Israel where oftentimes there would have been perhaps at the gate to the town where the elders of the town might have gathered, when matters could have been heard or considered. And so people would come and they would bring their issues to them. Just sort of like for those of you who are parents or have been parents in the past, you know what this is like when you have multiple kids. An issue is brought to you, and it's an issue of justice, and a lot of times from your perspective it's really about “this” important, right? That's how you perceive it, but you perceive it here, and over on the other side it's more like “this”. This is a matter of utmost importance, and there is a question of justice and fairness that's here, and apart from the overly repeated statement that life is not fair, which is true, apart from that, you still are called to those situations where you have to make judgments. And of course there are all these different factors that come in, and you try to explain the different factors, and a lot of times it just doesn't work when you explain that. But there are many contexts where we are called to exercise justice.

There's a temptation within us to injustice and favoritism. In this case it would be for us to look at a situation and not step back and objectively go, “How can I, being a child of God, a God who is a just God, called in this situation, think about this in biblical thinking to understand things and to make a right judgment here?” That's kind of hard, and sometimes it's a lot easier for us to just go, “Today I just feel kind of like this. Today everybody's guilty.” And maybe tomorrow everybody will be innocent in whatever sphere that we're in. Now, we know here in particular one point that's made in Verse 15 is that you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great. And isn't it a blessing here in this verse that we're told that there are two extremes that are here? And this is all about this balancing act of being just, that there are some cases where a person might be tempted to always be on the side of the poor, thinking about them being in a lower state in society, but you're not supposed to do that, because if it's not just, it's not just. But you're also not on the other side to defer over to the great. Now, you can read more about this in the book of James 2. This is a great New Testament example of this. James says in James 2:

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

James 2:1 ~ My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. 2 For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, 3 and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," 4 have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him?

This is a passage in James that's focusing here in this case about favoritism being shown to the rich, because that was the context that's here. But we have to be careful to do this, that this is another way that our love becomes unholy when we begin to look one way or the other, favoring one side or the other, instead of being just and righteous in the way that God has called us to be.

We know from the book of Romans and its discussion about the justice of God, that God will render to each one according to his works, and that in Him there is no partiality. If you want to emulate the character of God today and be like Him, then you have to cast aside partiality in your life. We understand in the justice of God, the greatest statement of that justice, that even in the forgiveness of our sins, in Christ's atoning death is a propitiation, from Romans 3:26. It says that He did this in such a way that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. He didn't just wink at our sin, but rather in the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrifice upon the cross, that He paid in full and absorbed and exhausted the wrath of God for the sin of everyone who believes. So let's move on and look at the fifth point.

5) Forgiveness:

In Verse 17 we read:

Leviticus 19:17 ~ 17 "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. 18 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.

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

We find here, of course, that the struggle with hatred in our hearts and forgiveness is not just a 21st Century issue. When we look at the New Testament we find it's not just a 1st Century issue, but we find that all the way going back here into Leviticus that it was an issue then as well. There's a real challenge of living in a community, and Israel was to have been God's community, His holy nation, His kingdom of priests. They were to be together. God gave them a place, a land, where they were to dwell together. And then He gave them all this guidance about how they were to do this in a holy way.

One of the main challenges of community life of any sort is other people. It's really simple. It's not that complicated. It doesn't mean if there are just two of you. You get married and then you have your little community of your home and it's just you and your wife or you and your husband. But then you find out that within that community, well there's sin in your wife, and then if you're honest about it, there's sin in you, and so as you work that together, you find that that community life can be hard sometimes. Not only is there sin, but there are a lot of difference about how we think together. It's really a challenge.

So it was a challenge in community life in Israel for people to get along and to think rightly about each other, just as it is a challenge for us today even in the church together as God calls us to be in a body and to have unity together and love towards one another. One thing that other people in our lives do is they reveal things to us about ourselves, and is that not one of the hardest aspects of community life? That if I went off to Alaska somewhere in the wilderness and had a house, and I could live for myself and stay out there by myself, I would have challenges, and hardships, and difficulties, but it would be different than the hardships and difficulties that come with another person. Sometimes other people tell you things about yourself you don't want to hear.

We know here, looking at the passage, that there is a command and a direction here not to hate your brother in your heart. Even here in Leviticus, of all places, we find that this hatred begins in the heart. It's inward, and then it expresses itself in all these different manifestations, the greatest being murder, but so many other things that we do when that hatred wells up in our heart, and we don't deal with it rightly. We see here that with this hatred that's there, that there is an antidote, that within your heart, if you were hating your brother, the antidote is to go and reason frankly with your neighbor.

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

The point is, and this carries on, of course, into the New Testament and to us today very directly, that if you feel that someone has sinned against you, and it's something that you can't overlook or you shouldn't overlook, well then God's called you to go speak to that person in love and in truth, to get the log out of your eye so that you can see clearly the speck that's in their eye, but He still calls you to go. Because a lot of times what happens in our lives in this area is we have a problem within towards another person, and for whatever reason, fear of man, fear of repercussions, we don't go and deal with that, with that other person. But it doesn't go away, and so it stays in our heart and it morphs itself into bitterness, and it does all kinds of things to us so that no one can look at us directly and see that, but inside here is this bitterness and this hatred, and then a grudge that is growing, as it says here in Verse 18, "...bearing a grudge against the sons of your own people," starting inwardly, and that grudge sometimes continues to grow.

You see people towards the end of their lives that haven't dealt with things in their relationships with other people, and they've got things that they've held onto for ten, or thirty, or fifty, or sixty years, and it's as if it was just as alive that day as it was sixty years before, because they carried that grudge with them in a way that God would not have had them to do this.

We know that in Ephesians 4 in this passage on living the new life, we are called as it tells us, to let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and slander to be put away from you along with all malice, that we are to be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you. When we think about the call for us to love our neighbor as ourself, we can't do that while we are hating him in our heart. It won't do for us to express some kind of feeling or emotion to someone where while deep inside we've got this root of bitterness or anger within us. God has called you today to speak the truth in love. And I ask you as you consider this, has someone sinned against you in a way that seems so large that it's impossible to forgive them?

Some of you today have had people in your past sin against you in horrific ways, and to do things to you, and to be inconsiderate and unloving, and to harm you. But as you consider all that they've done to you, I ask you to look at the forgiveness that you have received. Don't minimize your sin towards God, but maximize it, and then look to the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ where we find that God took Him who had no sin, and made Him to become sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him, to realize that our debt against God is so huge that whatever has been done against us, even though it was large, and

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

significant, and hurtful, and painful, and horrific, that even though that is the case, that it is nothing compared to what we have done against a holy and righteous God.

Today if you say, “I can’t forgive, I won’t forgive,” then I would call you to come to Christ, to find in Christ the forgiveness, to find in Christ the source of strength and forgiveness, to turn from your sin, repent of your sin, and to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that even today this very day, that you can have new life in Christ, to be saved from your sin, and have the hope of eternity and a future with Him.

In conclusion today, we’ve looked at what it means to love our neighbor as ourself, and we found in looking at that, loving our neighbor as ourself, that it’s not left to some kind of subjective dimension, but that it translates itself out into real life, into real actions and thoughts towards other people. Paul, in Romans 13 said this: “Owe no one anything except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. Love does no wrong to a neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.” One commentator put it like this considering what love should be like. He said, “If love is cut free from any commandments, it easily dissolves into sentimentality and virtually any course of action can be defended as loving.” Today remember the first greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and your soul, and your mind, but that the second is right there with it, to love your neighbor as yourself. May God give us grace and empower us by the Holy Spirit working within us, that we may reflect His character and His love in our dealings with each other, and those outside of the body of Christ.

Let’s close in prayer...

Heavenly Father, we come to You today as those who are unworthy of forgiveness, as those who do not merit Your grace. We come as those who even today have not wholly devoted every thought to You, every action. But Lord, we thank You for Your grace, and that today that it is by grace that we have been saved, through faith, and this is not of ourselves, but it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast. So Father, I pray today that You would take the words of this message, and that You would apply them to the hearts of those here, and I pray this in Christ’s Name, Amen.

PROVIDENCE CHURCH

Glorifying God by knowing, living and proclaiming His truth in the world

“Holy Love”

Video, audio, description, and transcription are licensed under an [Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).



Attribution:

Providence Church, Duluth, GA, USA

www.ProvidenceDuluth.org

Permission for use beyond the scope of this license may be requested by contacting Providence Church, Duluth, GA through their website.