

Proper 10C “In Righteousness Shall We Judge and Love Our Neighbor as Ourselves” Leviticus 19:9-18

Our Wednesday evening Bible Class studied the Old Testament book of Leviticus a couple of years ago. It is pretty tough sledding. Luther said, “We can find Christ on every page of the Old Testament.” I believe it, but we have to look pretty hard in Leviticus to see Him. Leviticus is God’s guidebook for how the Old Testament pastor (priest) was to do his job. It also showed God’s Old Testament people how to live their lives. This is the time when God’s people are both church and state, nation and congregation. There is no division between what is sacred and what is secular. There is no distinction between Sunday morning faith and Monday through Saturday lifestyle.

The will of God revealed to His people in His Word given to them through Moses is law of land that they are to obey every day. Here God makes provision for taking care of those people in society who have fallen on hard times in their lives. “Don’t harvest everything from your fields, leave the edges alone. Don’t pick up the grain and grapes that you dropped.” This was to be left for the poor of the community or the immigrants who had no land, in order for them to gather food for themselves.

In Hoyleton we lived next to a five-acre field that the Men’s Club farmed. Even with a big combine, there were plenty of ears left on ground after harvest. Grain would fall on the street off farm trucks and wagons passing in front of the parsonage going to the grain elevator. Maybe they meant that as my bonus? This is God’s version of social safety net. It is His way to provide a living for those who had fallen off of life’s high wire.

Even today, as the people of God we do not want our fellow citizens to hit a hard rock bottom in life. God has called us to help them. But notice, this does not mean that poor Israelites could live in their parents’

basement, play video games, and get a monthly government check. Nothing is being given to them. They have to work, go, gather, and collect the food left over from the harvesters. This will become important later in the book of Ruth.

Our society should provide a safety net that catches people when they fall off of life's high wire and onto hard times. But that safety net dare not become a hammock to relax in, a couch to recline on, or a bed to sleep in for the rest of their lives. Those served by society's good will should see that as a hand up, not a hand out and then pick themselves up and get back on their feet as they are able.

Notice that the word "not" appears a lot in this passage. Don't do it now, but maybe during the offering count the number of times and report it to me after the service. There is much focus on what God's people are not to do. This is a review of what we know as the Ten Commandments. Other than the care we are to have for the proper use of God's holy name, all of the focus of the nots is in how we deal with and act towards those who are around us, our neighbors (5x).

We are to respect the life of others. There should be no slander (honest and truthful in what we say to and about others); no revenge or grudges (we all make mistakes, don't hold their wrongs against them). Consider the famous song of Disney's movie Frozen "let it go." Our lack of forgiveness of others is the poison that we drink hoping that it will kill the other person. It does us in instead. We are to respect another person's property: no stealing from them; pay them regularly and appropriately.

We are to respect another person's legal rights. There is to be fairness under the law. In the USA justice is to be blind. That means no partiality to the poor just because they are poor, but also no regard for the rich just

because of their money. We are to respect another person with disabilities. We are not to take advantage of someone who is disadvantaged physically but provide them the assistance they need to help themselves.

“In righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.” Our culture today says that we can’t judge anyone or anything wrong. This is true if we are using sinful human opinion; but where God has spoken, that we are to say, and call out the wrong. God’s Word of law and gospel is the sharp two-edged sword that divides right and wrong, that separates sin from sinners.

“I am the Lord” appears five times in this passage. God speaks with authority. Parents know this feeling when a child asks “why” over and over and over again. Finally, in frustration you say, “I’m your father/mother, that’s why!” When we think we are smarter than God, or question God’s will, or challenge God’s ways, then we need to hear, “I am Lord.”

“Love your neighbor as yourself.” This is the way Jesus summarizes the second half of God’s law in Matthew 22. All of our dealings with others are to be guided by a love that puts the other ahead of ourselves. That is how God deals with us. In His eternal Son, Jesus Christ, our God shows us a love that is true, pure, and sacrificial; putting us ahead of Himself by living our life, by dying on the cross carrying our sins, by rising from grave defeating our death, and by ascending into heaven preparing our life.

That life in God’s presence, seeing His glory, living in His love, enjoying the perfection He created 4 us is His will that He has revealed to us. For now, guided by the Holy Spirit at work in us thru God’s Word and Sacraments, we bring a little of heaven to earth as we obey His will, live in His ways and share His love with our neighbors, those people He places into our lives. Amen