

You Shall Be Holy

11 March • Monday of the First Week in Lent

Leviticus 19:1-2, 11-18

¹And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²“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.

¹¹“You shall not steal; you shall not deal falsely; you shall not lie to one another. ¹²You 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. ¹⁴You 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. ¹⁶You 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.

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. ¹⁸You 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.

Meditation

Our reading in Leviticus 19 today begins with God asking Moses to declare to the whole assembly of Israel that because He is holy, we are to be holy. Holiness is an essential part of the nature of God. God’s holiness

is the perfect freedom from all evil and sin. One of the important implications of this truth is that if God is perfectly holy, then we can be confident that His actions toward us are always perfect and just. Thus when God calls us to be holy, I believe He is calling us to a holiness that is nothing less than conformity to His own character.

With these thoughts in mind, I hope we can see how much more God is asking of us than mere morality and compliance to His commands. As long as our notions of holiness are limited to doing certain things and not doing other things, we can go through our entire lives obeying the rules (or at least maintaining the appearance of doing so) without dealing with far more fundamental questions and that is: Whose are we? To whom do we give our first love and loyalty? At the core, God's call to be holy is a radical, all-encompassing claim on our lives, our loves, and our very identities. In other words, to be holy means, all that we are, and all that we have, belongs to God. There is no aspect of our lives that God does not want to influence and shape.

Therefore the call by God to "Be holy, because I am holy," is not primarily about moral purity. The people of God must visibly embody the character of God and it begins with a personal relationship with God in Christ and sharing in Christ's holiness and that is: growing to be more like Christ and turning our life in grateful service to God and others and living in such a way that we may show the world what God is like. As Jesus would say in Matthew 5:17, "...let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Prayer

Dear Lord Jesus, I want to be more holy in my heart and life. Remove all the sin that binds and oppresses me and take away my bent to sinning. Help me grow deeply in love with You all the days of my life and change me from glory into glory, that I may reflect Your character in all that I do. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen!

Action

Live today with the conscious presence of God in your mind. As you go about your work and encounter the people that God puts in your life today, think of how Jesus would like you to love and bless them so that you will give Him all the glory.

*Rev Stanley Chua
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When You Pray

12 March • Tuesday of the First Week in Lent

Matthew 6:7-15

⁷“And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. ⁸Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ⁹Pray then like this:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name.

¹⁰Your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

¹¹Give us this day our daily bread,
¹²and forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.

¹³And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.

¹⁴For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, ¹⁵but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Meditation

Ever notice that the ‘Lord’s Prayer’ has a lot of asking? That seems to be the tone of Jesus’ teaching: ask Him, and you *will* receive. He is the Father who knows what you need—so ask!

This ‘children’s prayer’ (as I sometimes call it) involves asking Father for physical needs—our daily bread. Father please, I need a job, food, clothes, somewhere

to stay. I'm worried about my future. Take all your cares, your worries, your anxieties and cast them onto Him.

The prayer then asks Father for spiritual needs. The deepest spiritual need is forgiveness. Every day say, "Forgive me Father, I have sinned". I cheated in that test, I hit my sister, I coveted my neighbour's car, I looked at pornography yet again. I'm so sorry. Confess your sins and He will forgive you—it's a promise. The Father longs to unburden us from the shame and guilt of sin. Prayer invites us to hand it over to Christ crucified.

The prayer concludes by asking Father for protection. There is an evil one out there, whispering devilish thoughts in our ear. He's already got us to stumble so many times. Our earnest plea is "Father help me not do it again!". Only the words of God, meditated in the soul, obeyed in the flesh, can override his poisonous tones. *Your* will be done.

Pharisees pray to be seen. Gentiles pray to be heard. Christians pray to lean.

*O what peace we often forfeit,
O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!*
-Joseph M. Scriven (1855)

Prayer

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Amen.

Action

Talk to your Father. Every day. Use this prayer to learn how to do it. He's waiting to reward you.

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A New Birth of Freedom

13 March • Wednesday of the First Week in Lent

Galatians 4:21—5:1

²¹Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not listen to the law? ²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. ²³But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise. ²⁴Now this may be interpreted allegorically: these women are two covenants. One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. ²⁵Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother. ²⁷For it is written,

“Rejoice, O barren one who does not bear;
break forth and cry aloud, you who are not in labor!
For the children of the desolate one will be more
than those of the one who has a husband.”

²⁸Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. ²⁹But just as at that time he who was born according to the flesh persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so also it is now. ³⁰But what does the Scripture say? “Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman.” ³¹So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman.

5 For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.

Meditation

(A) In his passionate appeal to the churches of Galatia,

the Apostle Paul based an allegorical argument on **Abraham**. Abraham was the father of the faithful, and Paul said that believers in Christ can also claim him as their father: “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:29).

(B) Paul reminded his readers that Abraham had two sons, two **Boys**—“one [Ishmael] born of a slave woman [Hagar], and one [Isaac] by a free woman [Sarah]” (4:22). Ishmael was “born according to the flesh”, while Isaac was “born through promise” (v 23).

(C) “Interpreted allegorically”, Paul wrote that the women were two **Covenants**. Hagar represented Mount Sinai, where the Mosaic Law was given, bearing children for slavery, since inability to keep the Law kept people in bondage, like those in earthly Jerusalem. However, Sarah and her **Children** of promise represented “the Jerusalem above” (4:24-26). Paul reminded the Galatian Christians that they were “children of promise”. However, like Isaac, they would face **Conflict**, including derision and persecution, because they are “born according to the Spirit”, from those who are “born according to the flesh” (4:28-29). (Paul would elaborate on the inward struggle between the sinful flesh and the Spirit in every believer, Gal 5:16-26).

Paul issued the clarion call: “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1). From Father Abraham we move to another Abraham, Abraham Lincoln, who at the close of his great Gettysburg Address (November 1863), asked Americans to resolve that “this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, and

for the people shall not perish from the earth.” I once memorised that address, and later visited the Civil-War battlefield of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, where Lincoln made that memorable speech.

As Christians, we also have “a new birth of freedom”—a freedom to serve our Lord Jesus Christ and one another—and we must be led by the Spirit not to fall back into legalism, or to be led astray by the lusts of the flesh, but to experience increasingly the blessed liberty of the children of promise, the children of God. “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (5:13).

Prayer

Thank You, gracious heavenly Father, for giving us new birth by Your Word and Spirit to a life of liberty secured by the blood of Your beloved Son. In His service is perfect liberty, and in His Name we pray. Amen.

Action

Am I free to serve? Cherish your freedom to pray, and watch for opportunities to serve others each day.

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Why Are You Cast Down... Hope in God

14 March • Thursday of the First Week in Lent

Psalm 42:1-11

¹As a deer pants for flowing streams,
so pants my soul for you, O God.

²My soul thirsts for God,
for the living God.

When shall I come and appear before God?

³My tears have been my food
day and night,
while they say to me all the day long,
“Where is your God?”

⁴These things I remember,
as I pour out my soul:
how I would go with the throng
and lead them in procession to the house of God
with glad shouts and songs of praise,
a multitude keeping festival.

⁵Why are you cast down, O my soul,
and why are you in turmoil within me?
Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,
my salvation ⁶and my God.

My soul is cast down within me;
therefore I remember you
from the land of Jordan and of Hermon,
from Mount Mizar.

⁷Deep calls to deep
at the roar of your waterfalls;
all your breakers and your waves
have gone over me.

⁸By day the LORD commands his steadfast love,
and at night his song is with me,
a prayer to the God of my life.

⁹I say to God, my rock:

“Why have you forgotten me?

Why do I go mourning

because of the oppression of the enemy?”

¹⁰As with a deadly wound in my bones,

my adversaries taunt me,

while they say to me all the day long,

“Where is your God?”

¹¹Why are you cast down, O my soul,

and why are you in turmoil within me?

Hope in God; for I shall again praise him,

my salvation and my God.

Meditation

Absence makes the heart grow fonder (v 4). Also desperation (being cast down—vv 8, 11) can arise out of denial. This Maskil is a poem that instructs, expressing so well the experience of the Psalmist who can remember (vv 4, 6) a past privilege or warm relationship now denied or made difficult. The intensity of this yearning is compared to that of a thirsty deer panting (after strenuous flight from danger) for a drink from the mountain stream—“*When shall I come and appear before God?*” (v 2b)

Many people drift into a spiritual desert wasteland (or are obsessed with the rat race) not realising how quickly they are dehydrating. They may exist for years, panting for refreshment, while ignoring the living water (from the “living God” [v 2]).

Consider the roles of:

1. **The Psalmist** who makes the refrain three times in

self-talk “*Why are you cast down, O my soul ...*” (vv 5, 11; 43:5).

2. **God** after whom he longs and thirsts (vv 1-2) who He reaffirms as “living” (v 2); **God of Hope** (vv 5, 11); **my** salvation and **my** God (vv 5, 11); the LORD (of Covenant) who commands his steadfast love, even his nocturnal song (v 8); the God of **my** life (v 8); **my** rock (v 9); the God to be praised (vv 5, 11)—then in his desperation, he asks God “*Why have you forsaken me?*” (v 9a).

3. **the throng/multitude** with whom the Psalmist “remembers” he had fellowship with and even leading in “songs of praise” processing to the house of God on a Feast day of the LORD (v 4).

4. **his enemy/adversaries** oppress and “taunt” saying “all the day long”, ‘*Where is your God?*’ (vv 3, 9-10).

In the midst of discouragement and turmoil with your reliance on WHO God is and WHAT He has done, like the Psalmist, affirm to yourself, “***Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God***” (vv 5-6a, 11 & 43:5)!

Prayer

Thank You, Lord that because Your Son, our Lord Jesus has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, You will supply every need including giving us hope in You, according to Your riches in glory in Christ Jesus, amen.

Action

Increase your Hope in God through His Scripture (Rom 15:4), Prayer (Eph 6:18-19), the Fellowship of believers (Eph 4:4) and witness (Phlm 6).

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The Desires of the Spirit Are Against the Flesh

15 March • Friday of the First Week in Lent

Galatians 5:16-26

¹⁶But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law. ¹⁹Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

²⁵If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

²⁶Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another.

Meditation

The Bible teaches us of a constant struggle as a Christian between life in the flesh versus life led by the Spirit (Rom 7). This can be portrayed as having two dogs in the house—a white dog (Spirit-led) and a black dog (flesh). The more we feed the black dog, the stronger and more demanding it gets. We need to reckon that we belong to Christ Jesus and have crucified the black dog (flesh) with its ugly desires and passions. Instead we should feed and nourish the white dog (Spirit-led) by regular

intake of the Word, prayer and spiritual disciplines so that it will guard our hearts and minds in Jesus and enable us to bear fruits of the Spirit in our lives—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Then we can truly live a victorious Christian life, be a good witness for Christ, give glory to God and serve our neighbours in love. As Martin Luther once wrote, “Faith is a divine work in us that transforms us and begets us anew from God, kills the Old Adam, makes us entirely different people in heart, spirit, mind, and all our powers, and brings the Holy Spirit with it.”

Prayer

Lord Jesus, help me to walk faithfully, be sensitive to the leading of the Spirit and not feed the flesh with its desires and passions which leads to destruction.

Action

Pray and think of things in your own life that feeds the flesh and list them down with a pen. Commit them to God and ask for His strength to overcome them. Take gradual steps to curb and eliminate these from your life.

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You Shall Be a People Holy to the LORD

16 March • Saturday of the First Week in Lent

Deuteronomy 26:16-19

¹⁶“This day the LORD your God commands you to do these statutes and rules. You shall therefore be careful to do them with all your heart and with all your soul. ¹⁷You have declared today that the LORD is your God, and that you will walk in his ways, and keep his statutes and his commandments and his rules, and will obey his voice. ¹⁸And the LORD has declared today that you are a people for his treasured possession, as he has promised you, and that you are to keep all his commandments, ¹⁹and that he will set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations that he has made, and that you shall be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised.”

Meditation

Holiness is a high calling for His covenant people. The Lord wanted this message to be communicated even before giving His commandments to Israelites. “And you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” (Ex 19:6)

It was a collective calling for the redeemed people and along with it came a new identity and dignity—“Holy nation and a treasured possession of God.” They were people with no identity or no dignity in the past. It is God given privilege for those who were under bondage for generations. Purely by His grace! As God’s own people they were called to treasure and guard this identity. That should have given them enough motivation to move on towards the Promised Land. But they were to pass through pagan nations. As redeemed people, there was

a challenge to protect their distinction as they journey in the wilderness. Though displaced, they were not to be disgraced people.

They were to be conscious that their holiness is rooted in God's holiness. It is not mere external purity but internal. The Lord rightly reminded them again, 'Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.' (Lev 19:2, 1 Pet 1:16)

Israel's redemption had a greater purpose to fulfil. They were set apart for God's purposes. Their consecrated lifestyle would resound, "the LORD is our God". In doing so, God's people's obedience and allegiance to YHWH will be evident. What better can the redeemed people do than this? The Ten Commandments are not just to memorise and preserve in their hearts. They had to obey. Note the words—"be careful to do them". God given freedom requires them to obey Him. True, obedience to God was a crucial criteria! But they were required to do more than strictly following the statutes. Their obedience should be spontaneous, springing out of love and loyalty to God. Note the words again, "with all your heart and with all your soul". It is possible only if there is a strong desire to please Him with undivided allegiance.

The reward for obedience came from God. Look at God's promise, "he will set you in praise and in fame and in honour high above all nations that he has made, and that you shall be a people holy to the LORD your God, as he promised." The people of God are royal priests declaring His praises to the Nations. It is amazing to see how God fulfils His missional purpose through His redeemed people. (1 Pet 2:9-10)

Prayer

Holy God! Thank You for calling us to be Your holy nation. We are ever grateful for redeeming us by Your precious blood. We do understand the challenges and Your expectations. The world around us is full of Godless and corrupt practices. Grant us that determination to guard that purity of life as we live here on earth.

We depend on Your grace not our strength. Help us not to miss Your will to be holy. Remind us of this high calling to be a people for Your treasured possession in our daily walk.

Action

It is a success seeking world. “Some how” and “Any how” philosophies ignore God’s ways. In the process of achieving success we may be corrupted.

Let us commit to God’s ways and His methods as we serve Him.

Let us seek God’s approval not men’s applause in our daily walk.

*Rev Ranganathan Prabhu
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Hate Even His Own Life

17 March • Second Sunday in Lent

Luke 14:26-33

²⁶“If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. ²⁷Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. ²⁸For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? ²⁹Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, ³⁰saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ ³¹Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? ³²And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. ³³So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.

Meditation

Here is one of the tough sayings of Jesus!

The cost of commitment, the cost of discipleship, the cost of following Jesus to see the completion of salvation on earth nearly seems an impossible task!

Yet it is important to reflect upon this passage in the context of today, as well as from the testimony of those who have gone before!

There is so much talk about easing life’s burdens; house and kitchen appliances, ATMs, drive through meals and coffee, online dating, online shopping etc. Yet the reality still remains that someone is required to place the order, vacuum the house, drive the car, deposit the

money to be able to withdraw it, own a device to go online etc.

There is a cost linked to everything in our world today! Jesus was using this very clear clarification of what it means to follow Him, as a prompt to followers that in being a disciple there is a cost. Ask anyone who has served in a foreign country, they will tell you that the personal cost is high, in regard to being absent for weddings, funerals, special events for family and friends.

This is truly what Jesus is talking about! He is asking whether you are able to commit your life and the life of your family and friends into His hands? This reflection is a true test of faith and trust! As a grandparent, at one stage living 15,000 kilometres away, now 5,000 kilometres away from our children and grandchildren, I have learnt what it means to intercede for my family and to trust them into God's hands, while I do what Jesus has called me to do!

My wife and I know what it is like to have our lives in danger, our lives on the line but our faith and trust is firm in Jesus. Like Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, (Dan 3:16-18) ".....The God whom we serve will save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. But even if he doesn't, we want to make it clear to you, Your Majesty, we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up." Faith and trust are the key qualities in living an obedient life as a disciple of Jesus.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank You for having confidence in me to stand strong in my desire to follow You as Your disciple. Forgive me for the times when I have looked back or

considered an easier way. Help me to hold firmly to Your hand as You lead and guide me. I am Yours! Use me today! In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Action

Take a few moments to write down what really holds you back from being a true disciple of Jesus! Pray this through, talk to your church leader. Jesus will help you if you trust Him!

*Colonel Rodney S. Walters
Territorial Commander
The Salvation Army
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