

The Problem with Leviticus

Matthew 22: 34-40 *Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together.*

35 *One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question:*

36 *“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”*

37 *Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’*

38 *This is the first and greatest commandment.*

39 *And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’*

I enjoy reading the Bible a lot, but I don't enjoy Leviticus or even Deuteronomy for that matter.

Have You ever seen the movie, “The Breakup” with Vince Vaughn and Jennifer Anniston?

It is a chick flick, but because there is a woman in my life that I love, I have seen this movie.

There is a couple of scenes in the movie that really got my attention.

One of those scenes involves Vince laying on the couch watching a baseball game on television while Jennifer is in the kitchen working very hard to prepare a meal for guests that are arriving shortly.

She picks up a little plastic bag with three lemons in it and she appears to be distraught.

Evidently and apparently, she had asked Vince to pick up a dozen lemons for her at the grocery store.

He never asked for clarification on why she needed twelve, so he just got her three.

Now, the fight is on.

She makes it clear to him that she wanted twelve for a lemon decoration center piece for the middle of the dining room table.



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She also makes it painfully clear that three are not going to cut it.

Flash forward to after the dinner guests leave and it's late.

Jennifer tries to convince Vince to help her do the dishes together, so that it won't take so long.

Now keep in mind that Hollywood got this whole fight down perfectly because not only did they fight about doing the dishes, but the whole thing about the lemons also returned to the mix, because every man in this room knows, the whole lemon thing is not going away.

When the argument evolves into one about doing the dishes, Vince gets angry and says something that involves revelation about men and women.

Vince angrily gets up to help with the dishes, so Jennifer tells him to forget it.

What she says next is astonishing to men.

She concludes that she didn't want him to do the dishes as much as she wanted him to want to do the dishes.

If you don't know what it she means by that statement, then probably you struggle with reading the Bible, especially when it comes to reading books like Leviticus.

Because what she wants from this man who is supposed to love her, is the same thing God wants from us.

God wants our love.

Jennifer is looking at Vince and saying, if you loved me you would have gotten twelve lemons instead of three, and I would not have had to ask you to do the dishes with me.

Why am I picking on Leviticus today?

After all, the subject matter of Leviticus includes the slaughtering of animals, the stoning of adulterers and bodily discharges, and we look at this and we ask the question, what has all of this have to do with love?

I am going here, because Leviticus hides an extremely deep truth about God that we need desperately to learn.



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39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’

40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

Now, what most people don’t know is that the first part of what Jesus said is from **Deuteronomy 6: 4** Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.

5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

But what about the neighbor part in Matthew?

Some people believed that Jesus just made this part up on the spur of the moment about loving your neighbor as yourself.

However, that cannot be true, because Jesus went on to say that all 613 requirements of the law hang on these two commandments.

The part about loving your neighbor as yourself comes from Leviticus.

In this book of the law, hidden in all of the does and the don’ts, are phrases like, leave food out for the poor so they don’t starve to death, don’t leave something dangerous out there that could injure someone, don’t slander people, pay people for the work that they do.

It then summarizes this by saying you should love your neighbor as yourself, I am the Lord. Where?

Leviticus 19: 18 “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

Now look at **John 14: 15** “If you love me, keep my commands.



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Now understand this, most of the time there is no real problem with a translation in Bible however sometimes problems do arise.

There is a grammar issue in **John 14: 15** that begs some attention.

The question is, is this command in the indicative tense or the imperative tense?

Bear with me while we wade through this.

If we dig back in our past to about the fifth grade, we know that the imperative means a command.

Back when we were in the fifth grade, we understood imperative commands because we heard clear imperative commands on a regular basis, such as, sit down, stop talking, don't even think about doing that.

We did not have any problem understanding exactly what the teacher was saying and what we needed to do to make our teacher happy.

We understood imperative commands.

The translation in **John 14: 15** was in the imperative.

If you read this in the imperative, It sounds like a straight-forward command.

I have had people say to me that this sounds very legalistic.

So, it begs the question, are we living in the age of grace or are we living in the age of the law.

This question is being dealt with in this passage.

I tell you often that if we love God, we will do what He tells us to do.

Why do I tell you this, because questions arise in Christians quiet consistently like this, "What do I have to do to prove everyone, including God myself, that I love God?"

This question proves to me that the people that ask this question, don't understand this passage by reading it in the imperative tense.

See if you can understand this in this light, this is the same question that Vince Vaughn is asking Jennifer in the, what do I have to do for you, to prove that I love you?

In other words, tell me what the minimum standard requirements are for me to perform, to prove that I love you and I will do that so that I can check that box off.

Who would want to do the dishes?

Now look at Peter's question in **Matthew 18: 21** *Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?"*

22 *Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."*

Peter notices that Jesus talks a lot about forgiving others.

He perceives correctly that this subject is important to Jesus, so he wants to prove that it is important to him.

So, he asks a completely stupid question, how often do you want me to do this stupid thing?

Go ahead Jesus and put a number on it, so I can check that box off.

Surely, seven should be impressive enough.

Remember this, because it is so true, do not be surprised when we attempt to box Jesus into answering a question that we think we know the answer to, that he answers that question with an outrageous number.

Forgiveness with a number requirement that we will not be able to meet without the help of our Savior.

Another question, involving giving, well how much do I have to give to prove I love God, is it 10%, is it on gross or take-home pay, how about my returns on investments?

In other words, what is the minimum amount that I need to give to prove that I love God and keep His commandments?

Digress with me a little bit to consider some of the answers for these questions.

Remember again that Jesus said to Love God and to love your neighbors.



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So, that begs the question, who is my neighbor, after all, to love my neighbor, it only makes sense that I know who my neighbor is?

Turn to **Luke 10: 25-37**

25 On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

26 "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

27 He answered, "'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, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"

28 "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

29 But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

30 In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

31 A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

32 So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

33 But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

34 He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.

35 The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

36 "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

37 The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

How Jesus answers the question of who is my neighbor, is turned on this, "expert in the law," in this story, who would you want your neighbor to be?

Law is always asking for limits, how far is too far, when is enough enough, what are the minimum requirements, etc.

It funnels down to this question, if God is going to forgive missing all these details anyway why does any of this matter?

What difference does it make?

We often think that the opposite of the Law is grace.

One is the Old Testament, and one is of the New Testament.

When we treat these two like opposites, we come to ridiculous conclusion that we can do whatever we want to do.

This conclusion misses the heart of God.

I am going to attempt explain the difference between the Law and Grace in a way that we can grasp more easily.

I know people that rent out their homes to people for vacation purposes.

One of these people that rent explained to me how it works.

I require people to take out renters insurance on the home for duration of their stay because I don't have any relationship with these people.

I don't have any way of knowing if they are the kind of people that will take care of my property or damage it, because after all, it's not their property and they choose to not treat it like it's their property.

However, if close friends of mine who I have a relationship want to use my home, I will not make them provide an additional insurance coverage for their stay,

Not only that, depending on the depth of our relationship, I may not charge them at all for their stay.

For the people that stay in my home for free because of our relationship, there is no list of rules in place to protect my property.

This describes the difference the kind of relationship we would have with a God that we do not know very well, and a God that we not only know well, but we have a strong relationship with and we know what He likes and what he wants, and that child of God, does have to include a long list of rules.

You just know what pleases Him and you know what displeases Him.

And if you have that kind of relationship with Him, if you are doing something wrong, He does not reject you, He corrects you.

When you know these kinds of truths, you begin to see things in the Bible that you never saw before.

Think of the Corinthian church for example, In ***1 Corinthians 3: 1 Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ.***

2 I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready.

3 You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?

He is saying that their relationship was that like a toddler and a parent.

Have you noticed how your relationship with your children changed as they grew up and matured?

Look at it this way the younger they were the more rules were required to keep them safe and headed in the right direction in life.

But as they grew they learned what was expected of them by there loving parents and chose to follow what they had learned.

1 Corinthians 6: 12 “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything.

Once again, Vince Vaughn tried to force Jennifer Anniston to tell him how many times do I have to do the dishes to prove to you that I love you?

Are you getting it, that that is the wrong question to ask?

When you are in a loving relationship, the question becomes what is the loving thing to do?

It's a very different question and leaves a very different result?

God wants you to change the way you ask questions, instead of asking, how many times am I required to forgive someone, ask it like this, what is the loving thing to do?

How about revisiting the question of giving, shouldn't this question change from how much do I have to give to prove to God that I love Him, to asking the question, what is the loving thing to do?

God wants you give out of a loving heart.

Then, the acceptable level of sacrifice is replaced with the loving thing to do.

Now look at ***1 Corinthians 13: 1-13*** *If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal.*

2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing.

3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away.



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**9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part,
10 but when completeness comes, what is in part disappears.
11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me.
12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.
13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.**

Have you noticed that when you have a food drive, people might ask how much do you want us to bring, but others just bring more?

The answer to question is, If you love me, you would want to do the dishes.

That makes it indicative tense, not imperative tense.

Paul says if anyone could have earned anything from God based meeting the legalistic standards, I count it all as loss when it comes to loving Christ.

Remember courting.



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