

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Pentecost 23 – October 16th and 19th, 2008

Leviticus 19:1-2, 15-18

¹The LORD said to Moses, ²“Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy. ¹⁵“Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly. ¹⁶“Do not go about spreading slander among your people. ¹⁷“Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor’s life. I am the LORD. ¹⁷“Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt. ¹⁸“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.

Dear Children of God,

I was a big fan of the TV show “Cheers” which hasn’t been on the air for some time now. I always liked the opening when Norm would walk into the bar and there would be a quick exchange of some pretty funny lines. One of the ones that I remember is when Norm was asked how it was going and he answered, “It is a dog eat dog world out there and I am wearing Milkbone underwear.” His point was very clear. The world was very tough and he was right in the middle of it.

As we look around us we might jump to the same conclusion as Norm. The world around us is very tough and down right cutthroat. People are always trying to get ahead. People are trying to get ahead in their jobs, in their finances and in just about anything else that there is to get ahead at. Getting ahead is not all bad, but for some people it is all consuming and people will stop at nothing to get what they want. The world has different views than what God does.

Today in our text, we see that God is warning us that we are not live as the world lives. We as redeemed children of God are different in our approach to life. We recognize that God has made us different. He made us different when he called us into his family. We are together with Christ. We are called Christians. So how does God want us as Christians to live. Our theme for today will help guide us as we ask the question:

Theme: How should a Christian live?

- 1. With the right attitude**
- 2. With the right words**
- 3. With the right actions**

The words for our text come from the portion of God’s Word, where God was retelling the 10 Commandments for the people of Israel. In the book of Exodus, God had given Moses the 10 commandments along with the many other laws to govern their worship life and their everyday life. But like all people, some didn’t always fully grasp what God had in mind when he gave the 10 Commandments. For this reason Moses repeated these things for the people of Israel so that there would be more understanding. This repeating is what we find in the book of Leviticus. Leviticus gives the people of Israel a fuller picture of what God had in mind when he gave them the 10 Commandments

God had Moses address the people of Israel, **“The LORD said to Moses, “Speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them: ‘Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy.’”** God didn’t want Moses to leave anyone out. Moses was to address the whole crowd of people. There are some good reminders in these words. First God wanted to make sure that as many people as possible heard Moses message about what God had commanded them. Here at St. Luke’s, we have similar opportunities every week. We can come to Church to be reminded over and over again what God wants us to do and what God has already done for us. We can come to Church and know for certain that the Bible will be used

and that our faith will be strengthened. We don't have to wonder if the Church doors will be closed or if we will be doing something other than studying God's Word. Every Thursday and Sunday, we come to together so that God can speak to the whole assembly of believers here at St. Luke's.

So what did Moses do when he had the whole assembly of Israel gathered around. He said, **"Be holy because I the Lord your God, am holy."** Do we really understand what God communicated through the mouth of Moses? These short but very powerful words tell us what kind of attitude we as Christians should have. Let's dig a little deeper into these words. What exactly does it mean when God say that we should be holy? What does it mean to be holy? We have learned from school age on that holy means to be perfect or sinless. And as we look closer, we realize that God says we are to be holy because our God and Lord is holy. Wait a minute! I can understand that God is holy. After all, he is God and we know and believe that God is perfect and sinless. But how in the world can God expect us to be holy? Is this even fair or reasonable? Are God's standards too hard for us? The answer is a Yes and No answer.

In reality none of us can be holy. We are from the time of our conception unholy and far from perfect. Our lives are a very bold and flashing sign which cries out that we have not even come close to being holy. So what is God talking about? God is talking about the holiness that he gave us. We have to remember that a great exchange took place about 2000 years ago. Jesus hung on a cross in perfect holiness. He took all of our unholiness on himself and he gave us his holiness. In this way, we are holy. Only through the innocent and precious blood of Jesus are we holy. And this holiness that God has given to us is what affects our attitude as we live as Christians. I don't live a Christian life to get holiness. I lead a Christian life to thank God for the holiness that he so graciously gave to me. We need to remember this as we move forward in today's sermon. If we mix this up or are confused on holiness then we might begin to think that we need to work to get God's holiness. This is wrong!

So how does this holiness that God has given us affect your life and my life. It affects everything doesn't it. I am not to live to satisfy my old sinful self. I live to thank and praise my God by following the New Self that is in me by the power of the Holy Spirit. One of the ways that we can do this starts right in our hearts. If you look at the text that we have before us this morning, you can see that some of these warnings are directed to what comes out of our hearts. Some of it is directed to things that come out of our mouths and other things are directed to our actions towards others.

As we look at sin, all too many of us have this false idea of sin. We think that sins which are only in our hearts and minds are not as bad as the sins that others can see and judge. For instance Moses writes, **"Do not hate your brother in your heart.... Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people."** All too often people have hatred in their heart towards someone else. Maybe it is someone at work, Maybe it is a family member. Maybe it is someone at school or just someone in front of us on the road that is going to slow. Are you telling me that God wants me to control my anger in my heart and not just in my actions? Of course he does. Are you telling me I can't hold a grudge against someone else, even if that other person deserves it? It is all about attitude, isn't it? God tells us to live in holiness as we control our attitudes in our hearts.

Being holy also affects our words. God recognized that our mouths while small in size are great in their hurtfulness. Our little mouths can go along ways in praising our Lord and Savior or hurting our Lord and Savior. Moses says, **"Do not go about spreading slander among your people.... Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt."** It never ceases to amaze me how hurtful we can be to our fellow people with our words. As you stand in line at the grocery store you see tabloid magazine after tabloid magazine. I always wonder who buys these worthless and hurtful magazines and as soon as I think that the person in front of me will buy one. Why would anyone buy such a horrible magazine, and yet we realize that the only reason there are these types of magazines is because there is a demand for them. They wouldn't be there if no one bought ever bought one.

But then you get to thinking and you realize that you can be just as hurtful without buying one of these magazines. School kids can be very mean at times. They can try to impress their friends and fellow classmates by making fun of someone else and just as bad is the person who listens and laughs at the

expense of someone else. We have adults who think that gossiping is perfectly fine and that no one is really hurt by these words anyway. Or maybe they think that talking about someone else's problems isn't really wrong. Moses said that we should not spread slander or hurtful words among ourselves. There is nothing to be gained by hurting someone else's reputation.

Rather than hurting our neighbor, we should look out for our neighbor. Our text tells us that we should rebuke our neighbor if they are doing something wrong so that they may realize their wicked ways and turn from their sin to God's forgiveness. That would be a great way to use our words rather than destroying someone else with our words.

And God finishes with letting us know that we are to live in holiness which will also affect our actions. **“Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.... Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life... but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.”** Our actions speak volumes about what is in our hearts and minds. If we judge people by what they look like on the outside we are not doing what our Lord commanded us to do. God tells us that we are not let our thoughts be influenced by things that world might judge like how rich someone is or where they live or what color their skin is. How horrible it is for people to God to be so shallow in their faith.

God sums it up this way, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Isn't that simple? Think about how you want to be treat. Do you want others to harm you or to speak slander against you? Of course not. Do we want others to hate us or to judge us without getting to know us? Obviously not. May the Lord's love fill our hearts with his holiness as we seek to live our lives to serve and thank the God who has given us his perfect holiness. This is not a holiness we deserve or can ever earn. This is God's gift to us. May we find forgiveness when we have fallen short of this holiness and my we find strength in God's promise to forgive us. Amen.