

More Fun with Leviticus OR Samantha's Story Leviticus 19:18; 23:22; Romans 12:1-5
with help from Exodus 23:9; Deuteronomy 6:4-5, 20-21; Matthew 7:1-5; 22:34-40
Saint Marks UMC, Charleston WV 4th Sunday after Pentecost (July 6) 2014

Leviticus 19:18 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.

23:22 "And when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner: I am the LORD your God."

Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. ³For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. ⁴For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, ⁵so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Exodus 23:9 "You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 6:4 "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. ⁵You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. ...

²⁰"When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies and the statutes and the rules that the LORD our God has commanded you?' ²¹then you shall say to your son, 'We were Pharaoh's slaves in Egypt. And the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

Matthew 7:1 "Judge not, that you be not judged. ²For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and with the measure you use it will be measured to you. ³Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? ⁵You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Matthew 22:34 But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ³⁶"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" ³⁷And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. ⁴⁰On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

Heather and her mother walked out to the car after church on Sunday morning. They got in, buckled their seat belts, and Heather's mom started the car.

"You know, Mom," Heather began her usual after-church digestion, "I don't like the OLD Testament. Why do we have to talk about it in Sunday School? Why can't we just forget that OLD thing and just read about Jesus in the NEW Testament?"

"Well," began Heather's mom, "That's why I call it the FIRST Testament. It was God's attempt to get people to understand just how much God loves us and wants us to live a good life. After the first chapter of that Amazing Revelation, God sent Jesus to give us the New

Testament. The problem with calling it 'OLD' is that some people think it's worn out and no good."

"Yeah, whatever, Mom. But I still don't like it. Jesus is the one who set everything aright. Why not just study His teachings?"

"You might be surprised, Heather, to realize just how much Jesus told the very same story that was in the First Testament. Do you remember when the lawyer asked Jesus what is the GREAT COMMANDMENT in God's Kingdom?"

"Sure I do. I'm not an idiot. 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Jesus actually snuck two commandments in there and called them one."

"Well, actually, He said that the second one is LIKE the first one; simply *heads and tails of the same coin*. You can't do one without the other. HOWEVER, the point I'm trying to make, my dear precocious wonder: Jesus' GREAT COMMANDMENT is simply a restating of what is said in the FIRST Testament, in Leviticus and Deuteronomy."

"Oh, no, not more "Fun with Leviticus!" That's what our Sunday School teacher called today's lesson."

"I know. You have a wonderful Sunday School teacher, Heather. Here's the point that both she and I are trying to make: Jesus didn't change God's Laws. Jesus took God's formulae for human good living and SHOWED us what it looks like in human flesh. AND He told some really good parables to illustrate."

"But, Mom"

"Remember how Jesus said, 'Don't judge'?"

"Yes, mom. I've heard this a gazillion times. 'THERE'S ONLY ONE THING THAT GOD FORBIDS US TO DO – JUDGE OTHERS – AND IT'S THE ONE THING THAT WE HUMANS ALWAYS WANT TO DO.' Got it! But, I prove my point. THAT is NEW Testament."

"Oh, no, my sweetness. It's as old as the Garden of Eden. The fruit in the garden that Adam and Eve were not allowed to eat. Remember?"

"Sure, but what's that ...?"

"It was the fruit of Judging. They weren't allowed to do it. Soon as they did, they started judging themselves – feeling guilty for not wearing

clothes. And then they started judging others. THAT is when all the trouble began.”

“Really? They never taught us that in Sunday School.”

“Some things a mother has to teach. Listen, Heather. Most of the First Testament essence is the very same thing that Jesus put into a clearer light.

“Let me tell you the story of Samantha. You’ve probably not heard it before.”

“Is this ‘More Fun with Leviticus,’ Mom?”

“Well ... not exactly, but the principle is found there. Just listen:

“Once upon a time, there was a girl named Samantha. She was just about your age.”

“Your stories are always about a girl just about my age, Mom.”

“Stop interrupting. I’ll lose my train of thought.

“One day, Samantha was at school, and a new student came. This new little boy was from a foreign country. And he spoke English with great difficulty. Most of the children were making fun of Jorge. But, for some reason, Samantha took up for him. She made Jorge her project, protecting him from the taunts of the others and becoming his friend.

“She wasn’t quite sure why she had done this, so when she went home she asked her father what he thought of it. And he explained to her that when she was a little girl, she also had been a foreigner. Their family had moved to this great country from another land. She, too, had been the object of prejudice, of people telling her to go home; that there was not enough to share; that she was unwanted; that she would be a welfare bum. ‘You have forgotten much of that, sweetheart. But in a special place down inside of you, you still remember that pain, and you were able to understand Jorge’s pain.’

“That night, when Samantha went to bed, she prayed: *‘Dear God, may I always feel the pain of others and never mistreat them, and cause them pain, like the other children did to Jorge, and like the other children did to me when I was very small.’*

“Not long after that, Samantha was in gym class, when she noticed another little girl who walked with a limp. There was just something about that other little girl that Samantha didn’t like, so she started mocking her, by walking with a fake limp. Samantha laughed about it, on the inside, but not outwardly, because there was something that told her it might not be the right thing to do.

“That night, after saying her prayers and getting into bed, Samantha fell asleep quickly. She began to dream. She dreamed that she awoke and a spider had bitten her leg. It was a poisonous spider, and she had to be taken to the hospital. Once the doctor examined her she had to be taken to surgery. They had to remove a portion of her leg, and when she got home from the hospital, she discovered she had a limp – a limp that would never go away.

“Samantha awoke, in a sweat, and was afraid. She ripped the bed clothes off and looked for spiders. Then she remembered the little girl whose limp she had mocked. A few minutes later, she remembered her prayer from a few weeks before: *‘Dear God, may I always feel the pain of others and never mistreat them, and cause them pain, like the other children did to Jorge, and like the other children did to me when I was very small.’*

“From that time on, whenever Samantha would mistreat anyone, she would have a dream that night about being that other person. And she would always cry and wake up, feeling terrible – unable to go back to sleep. And she would always remember that prayer: *‘Dear God, may I always feel the pain of others and never mistreat them, and cause them pain, like the other children did to Jorge, and like the other children did to me when I was very small.’*

“So, Samantha grew up and remembered to always treat people the way she would like to be treated, regardless of what was different about them. She did it because it was the right thing to do, and she did it because she really didn’t like nightmares. THE END.”

“Nice job, Mom. More fun with Leviticus.

“Hey, Mom. Grandmother’s name is Samantha. Is that story real?”

“I don’t know, sweetheart. Maybe you’ll just have to ask her. Now, let’s go to lunch, what say?”

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. AMEN.