

**GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**  
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany (A)

Leviticus 19.1-2, 9-18

Psalm 119.33-40

1 Cor. 3.10-11, 16-23

Matthew 5.38-48

**Leviticus 19.1-2, 9-18**

1. In Hebrew Leviticus is called by its opening word, *Wayyiqrā*, which means “And he called ...”
  - a. The title Leviticus comes from *Leuitikon*, the word used in the Greek version of the Old Testament (the *Septuagint*), as translated into the Latin Vulgate.
    - i. The title derives from the book being a liturgical manual for the Levitical priesthood.
2. The book is a priestly handbook, as so is encountered only once in the Sunday lectionary, but it also contains instruction to the Israelites in the need for holiness.
  - a. Ch. 19 is concerned with rules of conduct for all the people.
3. The rules found in ch. 19 reflect cultic and social life before Israel’s exile. The rules serve as a link between the Ten Commandments and the later post-exilic law.
  - a. The first two verses are an introduction to the rules set forth in the chapter.
4. The leaving of gleanings for the hungry (vv. 9-10) may be compared with Lev. 23.22; Deut. 24.19-22, and Ruth 2.
  - a. This practice may represent an early Israelite adaptation of the pagan practice of leaving some of the harvest as an offering to the earth god responsible for the soil’s fertility, but the rejection of this pagan motivation is indicated by the explicit invocation of the LORD at the end of this section.
5. Vv. 11-18 deal with the responsibility to practice justice and charity.
  - a. The rules set forth are more explicit than those found in the Ten Commandments. In each case the rules are re-emphasized with the explicit invocation of the LORD.

**Psalm 119.33-40**

1. In this selection from the longest psalm in all the psalter, the psalmist prays for wisdom in the biblical sense.
2. Wisdom involves not intellectual acumen, but the ability to see how all things in God’s creation work together.
  - a. Specifically, wisdom involves the ability to see how God’s commandments bring life, the goal of all human striving.
3. The psalmist prays (v. 38) that God will fulfill His promise. Literally, what is prayed is that God will “make His word stand,” *i.e.*, come to pass.
  - a. Note that the verbs throughout are active (teach, give, make, incline, turn, fulfill) on God’s part.

- i. The psalmist recognizes that the initiative is with God, and we are but a part of His creation.
- ii. The actor then shifts in v. 40. “Behold, I long for your commandments ...” The psalmist has gained wisdom and now seeks actively to do God’s will.

### **1 Corinthians 3.10-11. 16-23**

1. Paul continues his teaching focused on building up one Body.
2. The double reference in v. 11 to “foundation” is thought to relate to a rebuke against those in Corinth who insist that they “belong to Cephas” (*cf.* 3.4), that *Peter* is the foundation (the rock) of the Church.
  - a. Paul makes clear that the foundation is Jesus.
3. Having used building/construction metaphors, Paul switches to a description of the “edifice” itself.
4. Paul’s reference to the Body as the temple of God has been misconstrued by many to refer to the need for personal sanctity.
  - a. Personal sanctity is enjoined by Paul, but not here. What he speaks of is the *Church* as a temple. He uses “you” in the plural.
  - b. Sanctity is lived in sacrificial service, not in wisdom speculation and resulting division.
  - c. Paul quotes from the *Septuagint* translation of Job 5.13. What the Corinthians think of as wisdom is no more than craftiness.
5. All are to belong to Jesus, not to any faction.

### **Matthew 5.38-48**

1. Having contrasted—using the rhetorical device of hyperthesis (stating a proposition and taking it to its logical extreme)—His teaching with the Mosaic Law, Jesus now engages in a direct reversal of earlier teaching.
2. In teaching on retaliation and the relationship with enemies, Jesus up-ends the *lex talionis* (“an eye for an eye”) of Exod. 21.22-25; Lev. 24.20; and Deut. 19.21.
  - a. Jesus changes the focus to nonretaliation, but the specific examples He uses are contextually limited in application.
    - i. The word Jesus uses for “resist” (v. 39a) is *anthistēmi*. This refers to a legal context (*cf.* Isa. 50.8). Violence and physical damages are to be avoided, and yet moral and psychological resistance are not excluded.
    - ii. “Turning the other cheek” suggests a back-handed slap, a traditional form of insult. The concept is to bear insult rather than to suffer physical assault.
    - iii. The giving of coat and cloak refers to collateral that could or could not be required in a law court.

- iv. “Going the extra mile” is a reference to the Roman practice of conscripting private citizens to carry military equipment for soldiers as they traveled.
  - b. In each example, Jesus is speaking of exceeding expectations; doing more than required.
- 3. The injunction not to “resist” may be contrasted with Rom. 12.19-21 (based on Prov. 25.21-22).
  - a. Jesus’ teaching is a strategy for winning, not for passive resignation or indifference to evil.
    - i. The goal is to shame an opponent into a change of heart. (Modern examples might include Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.)
- 4. In speaking of love of neighbor and hatred of enemy, Jesus is attacking false translations of Scripture.
  - a. Note that He quotes Lev. 19.18, but only partially, leaving out “as yourself”.
    - i. The words “and hate your enemy” are not found in Scripture.
    - ii. The contrast Jesus is making is very much dulled by translations (such as the NRSV) that place the whole phrase in quotation marks. Jesus is making the point that Scripture must be cited accurately.
- 5. Vitally, throughout this passage, Jesus addresses “you” in the *plural*. He is not talking about the conduct of an individual, but about the heroic witness of a persecuted group, as in the Church.