



Series Overview

SEPTEMBER 2014

Objective

- *What we hope to see God accomplish in us through this study*

That we shine God's reflected glory.

STATEMENTS OF THE OBJECTIVE

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." (Matt. 5:14 ESV)

"My prayer is that . . . Christians will be known for putting their faith into action in their neighborhoods and around the world. Followers of Christ will be on the cutting edge in taking on the most pressing challenges facing humanity."
—Kevin Palau, *UnChristian*, 244

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Premise

- *Why we are studying this*

People desperately need us to live out our distinctive life in Christ—in public, in private, and even in the face of opposition. Our position as God's kingdom people is not a reason for swagger, but rather a calling for service. When we shine forth as God's unashamed servant-priests, we not only are being true to our Lord and to ourselves, we are fulfilling His plan to draw others to His truth and love.

STATEMENTS OF THE PREMISE

"Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world." (1 Peter 2:12 NLT)

"We must verify the reality of our theological system by backing it up with our *lifestyle* . . . ; and our faith, when expressed through a *body* of Christians, has a power of expression and a visibility that is impossible to match by a single Christian."
—Gene Getz, *The Measure of a Church*, 129, 132

Theme

- *What the study is about*

God calls us as His people to a distinctiveness that isn't insular—far from it! He instead positions His universal Church as a shining light in a world of darkness. But as individual Christians and as local churches, we must regularly search ourselves to make certain that our reflection of God's glory is clearly shining.

STATEMENTS OF THE THEME

"No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness. Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light." (Luke 11:33–36 ESV)

"Too many of us merely exist rather than live as if we are called . . . Your calling is the divine mission to which God has ordained you and that He has burned into your heart and equipped you to accomplish to bring Him glory and advance His kingdom . . . That means that if you and I are not advancing God's kingdom and bringing Him glory, we are not [living] out our calling."
—Tony Evans, *The Kingdom Agenda*, 126–7



The Distinctive Life

LESSON OVERVIEW

LESSON 1

OBJECTIVE:

We Live Distinctively Christian Lives

Theme

God calls every believer to live a distinctive life. This way of living is characterized by following God. It is alien and counter to the world's way of living, yet it is attractive and intuitively draws others to join.

In Leviticus 19:11–18, God calls us to be distinctive in character, with people, in judgment, and in our hearts.

Background

To understand how to live a distinctive life, it is helpful to understand the broader context of Leviticus 19. Following the exodus, God called His people to live holy lives; and Leviticus 19 provides a detailed description of how holiness is to be practiced.

There are two primary commands in the chapter:

- “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” (verse 2 NASB)
- “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” (verse 18 NASB)

You Shall Be Holy

God's people are commanded to be holy. Nobody is excluded; it is not optional. This command is repeated throughout the New Testament by Jesus and the apostles. For example: “[B]e holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy”” (1 Peter 1:15b–16 NASB).

The Greek word used for holiness is *hagios* (ἅγιος). It means to be separate or different. Peter is telling his readers to be set apart for God and different from the world. The differences between believers and non-believers are not found in shades of gray, but rather in stark contrasts. In other words, believers are called to be distinctive.

For God is Holy

Not only does God provide a practical blueprint for holiness in Leviticus 19, He also provides the motivation for holiness. We are commanded to be holy *for* (i.e. because) He is holy.

Many people are motivated to do good works as a means to earn their salvation. Believers, on the other hand, do good works in response to God's holiness, which was manifested when He delivered His people from bondage in Egypt. The joy and freedom in which believers work makes them distinctive and attractive.

Love Your Neighbor as Yourself

There is a relationship between the two primary commands in chapter 19: the holiness of God is demonstrated by His people as they love their neighbor.

God's holiness was demonstrated by His compassion when He delivered His people from bondage. Likewise, holiness is manifested by the people of God when they show kindness, grace, and compassion to others.

DISCUSSION

- In reflecting on the sermon, is there a particular point or passage of Scripture that challenged or confused you?
- Which of the four aspects of distinctiveness (in character, with people, in judgment, in our hearts) is most challenging to you?

GOOD WORKS

Jesus said “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16 NASB).

It may be tempting to view good works in terms of the results or *output* of our effort. But the real meaning of the word has more to do with the *input*, the character of our heart that compels us to work.

The Greek word for good is *kalos* (καλός). It means “beautiful and noble, as an outward reflection of the inward character.” It also conveys the idea of attractiveness and inspires others to embrace what is beautiful and praiseworthy.

When we work in this manner, God's glory is reflected in us; and men are drawn to the Father.



WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Read Leviticus 19.

- What are the commands in verses 2 and 18?
 - Are these commands related in any way?
 - What sets these commands apart from other commands in this chapter?
- Identify some practical ways in which the text instructs us to live distinctively.
- What phrase is repeated throughout the chapter?
- What motivation does God provide for being holy?



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

- There are several references to “neighbor” in this chapter. Does the text provide any insights about who our neighbor is?
- What phrase did you identify that is repeated throughout the chapter? Why do you think it is repeated?
- Review the Lesson 1 Guide in the appendix regarding the Greek word *hagios*.
 - What does it mean to be holy?
 - How does holiness relate to the theme of living a distinctive life?
- Review the Lesson 1 Guide in the appendix regarding the Greek word *kalos*.
 - What does it mean to do “good” works?



HOW DO I USE THIS KNOWLEDGE?

- How are good works related to living a distinctive life?
 - What are some practical ways in which you can live distinctively?
 - Consider the four aspects of distinctiveness discussed in the message: in character, with people, in judgment, and in our hearts.
- Reflect on your own motivation for good works.
 - Are there any attitudes or beliefs that may be clouding the attractiveness of your works?
 - How can you change your attitudes so that your good works become winsome and attractive (*kalos*)?

THE LIGHT OF OUR GOOD DEEDS

The higher that radio and TV antennas hang above the ground, the more people they reach. When attached to a tall tower and often atop a high hill, the broadcast avoids the ground clutter and extends the signal much farther. The higher the antenna, the more listeners and viewers can be reached.

Before the age of radio and television, Jesus used a similar illustration appropriate to his historical context to explain a key point and inspire his followers. He talked about lighting a candle and setting it on a stand so that it would illuminate the largest possible area. He said: *In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.* (Matt. 5:16)

The Christian Church has been at the forefront of helping others around the world. In Jesus' name hospitals, schools, humanitarian efforts, and disaster relief have all provided for the needs of those less fortunate.

The “light” of our good deeds (or the message broadcast by our lives) should be powerful and uncluttered, reaching as many people as possible. And it needs to be in Jesus' name. The goal is not for people to think we are wonderful, although that is nice; rather the desired outcome is *that they see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*

—Dan Bolin, *Fresh Bread* blog
(May 21, 2014)

“Too many of us merely exist rather than live as if we are called . . . Your calling is the divine mission to which God has ordained you and that He has burned into your heart and equipped you to accomplish to bring Him glory and advance His kingdom . . . That means that if you and I are not advancing God’s kingdom and bringing Him glory, we are not [living] out our calling.”

—Tony Evans, *The Kingdom Agenda*, 126–7.



The Kingdom Agenda in Private

LESSON OVERVIEW

LESSON 2

OBJECTIVE:

We Live By God's Kingdom Agenda

Theme

God's kingdom is formed in our hearts now and, in another sense, will be formed when Jesus returns. His kingdom is where the King reigns, and it is this reigning in our lives that makes us a city on a hill. Put another way, it is the light of His glory that reflects off our marble walls, allowing the world to see the King's residence. Being citizens of the kingdom, we live according to a different agenda—a kingdom agenda. This changes much about how we live.

Change of Address

In his letter to the believers at Colossae, Paul tells them that he prays for them to the Father who "has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son" (Col. 1:13 ESV).

With this imagery, Paul recalls the ancient practice of a conquering nation massively relocating the people they defeated. One of the purposes of this practice was to assimilate the conquered peoples into the culture and life of their new ruling kingdom. The hope was that such an assimilation would reduce any desire to return to the original country, thus increasing the resources of the ruling nation.

While this was often not a good thing in the ancient world, in our case it is. The "domain of darkness" in which we lived was far inferior to the life which God has for us in the "kingdom of his beloved Son." Our

previous address led only to death; our new address leads to life everlasting.

We've moved! God has moved us from our old shack on Sin Street into a new home on Grace Avenue.



Get Your New Self On

Paul goes on in chapter 3 to encourage us to think and live like we have a new address. As a new culture may require a new form of dress, Paul says that we should "put off our old self" which may have been the height of fashion in the domain of darkness but has no place now in the kingdom of God's Son. We should instead "put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Col. 3:10 ESV).

"Set Your Minds"

This change from the old self to the new self begins internally. "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth" (Col. 3:1-2 ESV). Our mindset, attitudes, motivation, and discipline should all be calibrated in light of our new culture. The architecture of our private life must be built according to God's blueprint to pass inspection in our new neighborhood.

OPENING QUESTIONS

Have you ever moved to a new place with a different culture than the one where you lived before? If so, what was that transition like? In the end, was the change a good one for you?

What are some examples from the Bible of people or groups moving from one culture to another? Discuss some examples where the change was good, and some where the change was not so good.

Think about how you lived before you became a Christian. What are some ways you live differently now?

What are some ways you *think* differently now?



"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above...."



WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Read Colossians 3:1–4:1.

- What are some example attitudes and behaviors of the old self?
- What are some contrasting attitudes and behaviors of the new self?
- What are some of the overarching or hallmark qualities which Paul says we should exhibit as "God's chosen ones"?
- How do these internal changes affect the relationships in our lives?

JEREMIAH 9:23-24

Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD." (ESV)



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

What about the change?
 What about the difference?
 What about the grace?
 What about forgiveness?

What about a life that's showing
 I'm undergoing the change?

—Steven Curtis Chapman, *The Change*

"Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all." (Col. 3:11 ESV)

- Paul says "Here there is not . . ." Where are such distinctions emphasized and for what reasons?
- Why is verse 11 an important point for believers in this discourse of changing?

Paul twice uses the phrase "whatever you do." Discuss each one. What is Paul driving at with these admonitions?

How do the changes described in verses 3:9–17 directly lead to the attitudes and behaviors described in verses 3:18–4:1? What is the Christian's motivation for these behaviors?



HOW DO I USE THIS KNOWLEDGE?

"If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light." (Luke 11:36 ESV)

Think about an oil lamp with a wick and glass globe. How can such a lamp become ineffective? One way is external, putting a basket over it, for example. What are some internal causes of the lamp not shining as intended?

What are some internal or private ways that our lamp dims and does not shine wholly bright as intended?

Think and pray about your own internal attitudes and private life. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you more effectually live by God's kingdom agenda in your heart, and to let that shine out to the relationships in your life.

How should man live, save as
 glass
 To let the white light without
 flame, the Father, pass
 Unstained.

—C.S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress*



The Kingdom Agenda in Public

LESSON OVERVIEW

LESSON 3

OBJECTIVE:

We Live Exceptionally

Theme

God calls and empowers us to live as citizens of the most exceptional kingdom that has ever been or will ever be. As citizens of this city on a hill, we bring a long-term perspective to the public forum. We also foster freedom, education, justice, and sharing.

Eternal Perspective

God calls us to a distinctive life in His eternal kingdom. A city set on a hill commands a broader and longer view than a city set in a plain. When we keep the eternal perspective in mind, we can rest in the knowledge that God has everything under control; and He will fulfill His purposes for our lives, for the entire world, and for His kingdom. This fact colors and brightens all that we do. It gives us a new perspective, and this empowers us to live distinctively! Our eternal perspective allows us to work with hope today, knowing that our work has value and purpose even if we never see the ultimate fruit of our labor in our lifetime.

Freedom

As Christians, we have been set free from the power and penalty of sin and the Law (John 8:31–36, Rom. 8:1–2). This helps us to champion freedom for others in this world caught in bonds that seem unbreakable. We can offer bright hope to those who feel trapped in an enveloping darkness. Genuine concern for freedom, both physical and spiritual, has been a hallmark

of many Christians over the past two millennia. And as people who have been made free by grace, it should be a natural part of our distinctiveness.

Education

Since education and freedom go hand in hand, it's fitting that the Hebrews had the earliest known public education system in their homes and synagogues. Even before the Israelites entered the Promised Land, Moses encouraged them to diligently teach their children all the ways of the Lord which he had taught to them (Deut. 6:4–9, 11:18–21). Likewise, education grounded in and enthused by the eternal perspective of God's kingdom gives believers a freedom that shines brightly on those all around them.

Justice & Sharing

Throughout the Old Testament, God shows himself to be concerned with both justice and mercy. They are equally part of His nature, and the combination is only possible through an eternal perspective. As residents of His eternal kingdom, we must be champions of justice and of sharing in the societies where we live. Both must be grounded in God's word, because they are easily twisted into harmful charades of what God intends. Remember the balanced, grounded instruction from Micah, where He tells us ". . .to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God" (Mic. 6:8 ESV).

OPENING QUESTIONS

In the previous lesson, we studied what it means to live the kingdom agenda in your private life. This week, the focus shifts to your public life. This side of heaven, we all struggle to varying degrees in both areas; but you will find that not everyone struggles the same. What about you? Is it easier for you to be a Christian in your private life or in your public life?

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14–16 ESV).

Have you experienced a time when someone saw your light shining? Did they give glory to God because of your good works?

What is our role as Christians in the public forum?



WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Read Micah 6:4–8.

How does this passage mention or allude to each of the ideas in this week’s lesson:

- Freedom
- Education
- Justice
- Sharing

What does Micah say are some common misconceptions about the proper response to God? What do these examples have in common?

What does Micah say is the better response? How does it differ from the other examples?

MICAH 6:5

O my people, remember what Balak king of Moab devised,
and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him,
and what happened from Shittim to Gilgal,
that you may know the righteous acts of the LORD. (ESV)



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

1 TIMOTHY 4:16

Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. (ESV)

ACTS 28:30-31

He [Paul] lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance. (ESV)

Why does God reach back 700 years for examples of His righteous acts?

Why does God prefer the response of Micah 6:8? Is this a new idea in Micah, that there is something God would rather have from us than sacrifice? Compare with Proverbs 21:2–4.

Read Hebrews 13:16. How is this a proper response to what God has done for us through Christ?

Do you think these exhortations of doing justice, loving kindness, doing good, and sharing what we have are things that can only be done in private?

How are the ideas of freedom and education related? Why is education as important for the church as it was for the Israelites?



HOW DO I USE THIS KNOWLEDGE?

Think about the four areas of society mentioned in today's lesson. For each one, discuss an aspect of that area which could benefit today from the perspective and involvement of believers living out their distinctiveness in Christ.

- Freedom
- Education
- Justice
- Sharing

Consider these four areas in the context of your sphere of influence: your city, work, neighborhood, school, etc. Think and pray about ways God may want to use you as a light—wholly bright—in those areas.

From subtle love of softening things,
From easy choices, weakenings—
Not by these are spirits fortified,
Not this way went the Crucified.
From all that dims your Calvary,
O Lamb of God, deliver me.

Give me the love that leads the way,
The faith that nothing can dismay,
The hope no disappointments tire,
The passion that will burn like fire;
Let me not sink to be a clod:
Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God!

—Amy Carmichael.



When Darkness Threatens

LESSON OVERVIEW

LESSON 4

OBJECTIVE:

We Keep On!

Theme

God desires that we shine brilliantly in the world around us. Unfortunately, ominous dark clouds of adversity can overwhelm us. We know that our God is already victorious, as Jesus, our Messiah, has conquered the power and penalty of sin. The problem is that we still live in a world where the presence of sin is still very alive, active, and alarming. Regardless of how we may feel, we must not become discouraged and grow weary. Rather, we must live distinctive lives that are strong in the Lord and fix our eyes on Him as we live by *His* power that is powerfully at work within us. (See Eph. 6:10; Heb. 12:1; Col. 1:29.)

The City

Ephesus was a large city of 250,000–300,000 people. As the most important city in the Roman province of Asia (modern-day Turkey), it was called “the gateway to Asia.”

Like many cultures in our world today, the people of Ephesus were very spiritual. There were few self-proclaimed atheists in this city full of idolaters. Their deity of choice was Diana, the Roman goddess of fertility, who was called Artemis in Greek. She was worshipped in a temple that was built, destroyed, and rebuilt multiple times. The Temple of Artemis became so magnificent that it became one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

The Backdrop

On Paul’s second missionary journey, he met Priscilla and Aquila, tent makers in Corinth. He soon became their friend and business partner while making tents and teaching in the local synagogue (Acts 18:1–7). They traveled with him to Ephesus before Paul left them there and journeyed on to Caesarea and Antioch.

Paul returned to Ephesus on his third missionary journey and found a group of disciples, likely members of Priscilla and Aquila’s house church. He baptized converts and stayed in the city again, teaching first in the synagogue and later at a local school (Acts 19:1–9).

Paul’s stay in Ephesus was filled with stress and danger. In his letter to the Corinthians, he compared this experience in Ephesus to “fighting wild beasts” (1 Cor. 15:32). He battled obstinate Jews, evil spirits, and preached against the rampant paganism embedded within the culture (Acts 19:11–41). Yet regardless of the evil oppression and persecution, Paul was courageous in the Lord and pressed on as he knew that “tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope” (Rom. 5:3–4 NASB).

OPENING QUESTIONS

How is persecution similar and how has it changed since the first century?

What is the relationship between persecution and spiritual warfare?

In what ways have you experienced persecution or spiritual attack? Were you spiritually prepared? How did you respond?

How have you seen someone shine brightly for Christ while enduring some form of persecution?



The Great Theater in Ephesus, originally built in the third century BC, has a capacity of 25,000 seats.



WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Read Ephesians 6:10–20.

How many commands does Paul give the Ephesians in this section?

Why does Paul charge them to put on the full armor of God? (verses 11, 13).

In Paul's letter to the believers in Philippi, he shared with them that the gospel "had been made known throughout the whole Praetorian Guard" and that they knew he was "imprisoned for Christ" (Phil. 1:1–13). He spent a lot of time with Roman soldiers and knew believers throughout the Roman Empire would understand the imagery of the soldier's armor. With this in mind, what purposes did the following serve for the Roman soldier: belt, breastplate, shoes, shield, helmet, and sword?

Why does Paul relate the Roman soldier's belt to truth? Righteousness with protective armor like a breastplate? Faith with a shield? Gospel of peace with shoes? Salvation with a helmet? Word of God with a sword?

Why did Paul begin with the "belt of truth"?

Sooner or later every believer discovers that the Christian life is a battleground, not a playground, and that he faces an enemy who is much stronger than he is—apart from the Lord.

—Warren Wiersbe, *Be Rich: Gaining the Things Money Can't Buy*



WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

ROMANS 5:3–5

Not only this, but we also rejoice in sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance, character, and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (NET)

In light of the context, what does it mean to "be strong in the Lord"?

According to other Scriptures (Isaiah 53:11, Romans 4:5, 2 Corinthians 5:21), our Lord Jesus imputed His righteousness to us. Since this is true, what does it mean for us to put on the breastplate of righteousness?

In verse 13, what is Paul referring to when he mentions "in the evil day"? Is he referring to any day in the present evil age when darkness threatens or what we know as "the day of the Lord"? (Joel 1–2; Ezek. 38–39).

Paul encourages the Ephesians to "pray at all times in the Spirit." What role does the Holy Spirit play in a Christian's prayer life? Please provide Scripture verses to support your understanding.



HOW DO I USE THIS KNOWLEDGE?

The Christian life is a spiritual struggle. Problems, suffering, and persecution are normal, not abnormal, for Christians in a fallen world (Rom. 5:3–4, 8:17–18; 1 Peter 1:6–9, 2:11, 4:12–17, 5:10). With this in mind, Paul did not charge the Ephesians to put on just the helmet of salvation, but rather a complete suit of armor from head to toe. He was aware of the deceptive nature of Satan and how vulnerable the Ephesians could leave themselves. He even repeats himself in verse 13 for emphasis.

In light of the above, answer the following questions:

- How do you put on the spiritual armor of God?
- What area of your armor is most vulnerable to attack?

While you receive your strength from God, what can *you* do to tighten up the weak points in your armor?

No matter how complete the armor; no matter how skilled we may be in the science of war; no matter how courageous we may be, we may be certain that without prayer we shall be defeated. God alone can give the victory; and when the Christian soldier goes forth armed completely for the spiritual conflict, if he looks to God by prayer, he may be sure of a triumph.

—Albert Barnes, *Notes on the Whole Bible*.



Appendix

Series Overview

Objective: That we shine God's reflected glory.

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden." (Matt. 5:14 ESV)

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—Kevin Palau, *UnChristian*, 244

Premise: People desperately need Christians to live out our distinctive life in Christ—in public, in private, and even in the face of opposition. Our position as God's kingdom people is not a reason for swagger, but rather a calling for service. When we shine forth as God's unashamed servant-priests, we not only are being true to our Lord and ourselves, we are fulfilling His plan to draw others to His truth and love.

"Be careful to live properly among your unbelieving neighbors. Then even if they accuse you of doing wrong, they will see your honorable behavior, and they will give honor to God when he judges the world." (1 Peter 2:12 NLT)

"We must verify the reality of our theological system by backing it up with our *lifestyle* . . . ; and our faith, when expressed through a *body* of Christians, has a power of expression and a visibility that is impossible to match by a single Christian." —Gene Getz, *The Measure of a Church*, 129, 132

Theme of the study: God calls His people to a distinctiveness that isn't insular—far from it! He instead positions His universal Church as a shining light in a world of darkness. But as individual Christians and as local churches, we must regularly search ourselves to make certain that our reflection of God's glory is clearly shining.

Statements of the theme: "No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness. Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light."
(Luke 11:33–36 ESV)

"Too many of us merely exist rather than live as if we are called . . . Your calling is the divine mission to which God has ordained you and that He has burned into your heart and equipped you to accomplish to bring Him glory and advance His kingdom . . . That means that if you and I are not advancing God's kingdom and bringing Him glory, we are not [living] out our calling." —Tony Evans, *The Kingdom Agenda*, 126–7

Pastor's Suggested Reading

The Christian Mindset in a Secular Society, Henry

The Church: Purpose, Profile, Priorities, Swindoll

The Church of the Irresistible Influence, Lewis

Hidden in Plain Sight, Buchanan

The Kingdom Agenda, Evans

Matthew—Thy Kingdom Come, Walvoord

The Measure of a Church, Getz

Mission in the Old Testament, Kaiser

Notes on Leviticus, Mackintosh

The Sermon on the Mount, Carson

Surprising Insights from the Unchurched, Rainer

Toxic Charity, Lupton

UnChristian, Kinnaman & Lyons

Lesson 1 Guide

Objectives

What should we learn in this study?

- Holiness is not optional. In Leviticus 19, God calls *all* believers to live holy and distinctive lives; none are exempt. This command is affirmed several times in the New Testament.
- God also provides the motivation for holiness; we are to be holy *because* He is holy. His holiness is demonstrated in the deliverance of His people from Egypt, and we respond in gratitude.
- Holiness is not commanded as a means to earn salvation. We are not saved by works, but by His grace (Eph. 2:10).
- Our lifestyle should be distinctive—not different for the sake of being different, but attractively different. We should be as shining lights (wholly bright) that draw men to the Father.
- One of the ways our holiness should be expressed is in loving our neighbor.
- Our holiness is like a light in the world, and our good works should inspire men to praise the Father.

Key Concepts

- The concept of distinctiveness is captured in two Greek words: *hagios* and *kalos*.

"If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light." (Luke 11:36 ESV)

Insights

Old Testament

Following the exodus from Egypt, God called upon his people to live holy lives. The Mosaic Covenant was established so that Israel would be a holy nation (Ex. 19:6). While there are a few earlier hints about how holiness is to be practiced, Leviticus 19 is the first detailed exposition on the practice of holiness. Therefore, it is in the broader context of holiness that God calls upon His children to live *distinctive lives*.

There are two primary commands in Leviticus 19, both of which are repeated by Jesus and the apostles throughout the New Testament:

- "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy." (verse 2 NASB)
- "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (verse 18 NASB)

You shall be holy: Leviticus is addressed to the entire nation of Israel, and thus the entire nation is commanded to be holy. Nobody is excluded from this command; it is not optional. But God did not command His people to be holy without explaining how: chapter 19 is a detailed discussion about *how* holiness should be practiced.

For I the Lord your God am holy: God provides the pattern and motivation for holiness; we are commanded to be holy *for* (i.e. *because*) He is holy. God's holiness was manifested in the deliverance of His people from bondage in Egypt; thus His people should be motivated to live a life of holiness based on their gratitude for the redemption that God accomplished. The statement "I am the Lord" is repeated at least 15 times in the chapter; God is clearly emphasizing His relationship with His people.

You shall love your neighbor as yourself: There is a direct relationship between the two primary commands in this chapter: the holiness of God is demonstrated by His people as they love their neighbor. God's holiness was manifested by His compassion on the Israelites when they were afflicted in Egypt and when He delivered them from their bondage. Likewise, holiness is to be manifested by the people of God by their kindness, grace, and compassion on others, especially toward the needy and the afflicted. It is not that holiness is manifested only by loving your neighbor, but that holiness must include an active love for your neighbor.

In Chapter 19, the term "neighbor" has a wide range of meaning:

- One's neighbor is one's fellow-countryman (verses 11, 17).
- One's neighbor is alien, a foreigner (verses 10, 32–33, 34).
- One's neighbor is anyone who is weak and vulnerable (verses 10, 14).
- One's neighbor is one's enemy (verses 17–18).

New Testament

Both of the primary commands in Leviticus 19 are repeated throughout the New Testament by Jesus and the apostles. (See Matt. 5:43, 19:19, 22:39; Mark 12:31, 33; Luke 10:27; Rom. 13:9; Gal. 5:14; James 2:8; 1 Peter 1:16.)

"As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but like the Holy One who called you, be holy [Greek: *hagios*] yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy [*hagios*], for I am holy [*hagios*].'" (1 Peter 1:14–16 NASB)

The Greek word *hagios* fundamentally means "different" or "separate" and implies "different from the world" or "set apart by (or for) God." The differences between believers and non-believers are not found in shades of gray, but rather in stark contrasts. In a word, believers are *distinctive*.

The concept of *distinctive lives* is also found in Jesus' teaching. In Matthew 5:13-16, Jesus says believers are "the light of the world" and compares them to a "city set on a hill [that] cannot be hidden" (NASB).

"Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good [Greek: *kalos*] works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 5:16 NASB).

That they may see your good works: The Greek adjective *kalos* is translated "good," and it may be tempting to view this in terms of the results or *output* of our effort. But the real meaning of the word has more to do with the *input*, the motivation of our heart that compels us to work. The word *kalos* can mean "magnificent; morally good; noble; excellent in its nature and characteristics, and therefore well adapted to its ends; beautiful by reason of purity of heart and life, and hence praiseworthy." In this sense, our lives become distinctive and attractive, much like the city on the hill that cannot be hidden.

And glorify your Father: The desired result of our distinctive life is that people turn their heart toward God because of the good works they see in us. As we saw in Leviticus chapter 19, there is a direct relationship between being holy and loving our neighbor. Living a distinctive and holy life necessarily includes an active love for our neighbor. It is a lifestyle that cannot be hidden, and it draws people to the Father.

Additional Resources

"How to Spell Holy," by Bob Deffenbaugh (<https://bible.org/seriespage/how-spell-holy-leviticus-191-37>).

New Testament Greek Lexicon—New American Standard Version (<https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/greek/nas.html>).

Lesson 2 Guide

Objectives

What should we learn in this study?

- We were formerly residents in the “domain of darkness” but God has “transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col. 1:13 ESV).
- As citizens of God’s eternal kingdom, we have “put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator” (Col. 3:10 ESV).
- We should “seek the things that are above” by setting our “minds on things that are above, not on things that are on the earth” (Col. 3:1-2 ESV).
- This change in our situation, our self, and our mindset helps us to live differently in our attitudes, motivations, and internal disciplines.

Key Concepts

- Living the kingdom agenda in a distinctively, wholly bright way starts internally.
- Our internal, private practices will then shine forth through our relationships, attitudes, and behaviors with those around us.

Insights

We have been saved by grace and enrolled as citizens of God’s kingdom. Our proper response to this is to live like citizens of that kingdom out of thankfulness and love. These are internal attitudes of the heart. As we set our minds on God’s love and God’s agenda, it will be imprinted on our hearts and change our attitudes and motivations.

The change in our spiritual situation compels a change in our mindset. Like an excited new citizen of an adopted country, we begin to think and live according to the culture of our new home. And we put off the practices, culture, and mindset of our previous place of spiritual residence.

Our identity is now found in Christ. Whatever “country” we may have come from, Christ is now all, and in all. (See Col. 3:11.) This fact changes how we think about the relationships in our lives, especially with other believers. Our relationships are now infused with love, thankfulness, “kindness, humility, meekness, and patience” (Col. 3:12 ESV).

“If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light.” (Luke 11:36 ESV)

Think about an oil lamp with a wick and glass globe. How can such a lamp become ineffective? One way is external: putting a basket over it, for example. But several ways are internal. If the lamp runs out of oil, if the wick is not kept properly trimmed, or if the interior of the globe becomes coated with soot, the lamp will not fulfill its purpose of giving light.

Paul is helping the Colossians and even us understand how important the internal changes are to letting God’s light shine through us.

Lesson 3 Guide

Objectives

What should we learn in this study?

- As citizens of an eternal kingdom, we have a long perspective that makes our lives distinct from those around us.
- Our long perspective is a source of hope in any situation, because we know that God will fulfill His purposes in His timing.
- We are called to be lights with our lives and actions in society around us, being champions of biblical action in such areas as freedom, education, justice, and sharing.

Key Concepts

- The long perspective inherent in Christianity enables us to lead exceptional lives in the midst of a hope-starved and hostile world.

“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (Matt. 5:14-16 ESV)

Insights

Micah 6:3-8

In verse 5, God asks the Israelites to remember certain events. The encounter between Balak king of Moab and Balaam son of Beor is recounted in Numbers 22-24. Even though Balak hired Balaam to curse the wandering Israelites, Balaam answered him by blessing them four times.

The events at Shittim are recounted in Numbers 25. This was early in Israel’s wandering, shortly after God refused to let them enter Canaan because of their lack of faith in Him. Gilgal was their first stop after entering Canaan with Joshua as their new leader, just before the fall of Jericho.

Micah’s ministry was in the 8th century BC. The events mentioned in verse 5 were about 700 years earlier, and yet God assumes they are remembered. This speaks to the importance that was placed on education by the Hebrews. These details were preserved by Moses and taught for successive generations over centuries.

God, through Micah, is trying to encourage the long perspective. A life lived in humility before God, with a heart seeking to live out His values at all times, is much more precious in His sight than any amount of sacrifice we can make.

Real-Life Examples of Living Exceptionally

One possible area for group discussion is real-life examples of people who worked publicly to make a positive change in one or more of the four areas of this lesson: freedom, education, justice, or sharing. Discussion questions may include the following:

- Have you seen or heard of a Christian who made a positive difference in a public way? Think about both historical and modern examples.
- Were (or are) they public about their faith being connected to their work?
- How did their faith motivate their actions?
- How did their long perspective enable or sustain their efforts?
- What are some examples from the New Testament of believers working in a public way to create positive change in their society?

Esther & Mordecai

Esther and Mordecai are two people who lived these principles in difficult circumstances. The events recorded in the book of Esther in the Old Testament take place in the Persian capital of Susa during the time the Jews were in captivity, around the 5th century BC. Esther and her uncle Mordecai were Jews living in a political and social society hostile to their religion. Read Esther 3:13 – 4:17.

Mordecai's long perspective enabled him to see the hand of God moving in a seemingly hopeless situation and initiate a daring plan of action. Esther's unwavering faith and commitment to God emboldened her to act publicly and politically on behalf of her people with little hope of her own survival.

When people of faith act with integrity and humility, trusting all outcomes to God and His timing, amazing results can happen!

Lesson 4 Guide

Objectives

What should we learn from this study?

- We are to keep on by “being strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might.” In contrast to giving in and living according to our flesh, the world, and Satan, we have been made alive by the grace of God and we are to continue living in the power of His grace (Eph. 2:1–3; Cor. 12:9–10).
- We are to keep on by clothing ourselves with the spiritual armor of God (Eph. 6:11, 13). We must daily renew our minds, reminding ourselves that we are in a spiritual battle; and like any form of battle, we must have armor to protect ourselves (Rom. 12:2).
- We are to keep on by being men and women who pray. We cannot trust in our own natural resources but we must pray to our supernatural and sovereign Lord for spiritual enlightenment, spiritual enablement, and boldness in our faith (Eph. 1:18, 3:16, 6:19–20).

Insights

“In Christ,” believers receive spiritual blessings and spiritual protection. Ten different times in the opening chapter of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, he describes believers’ standing (or “position”) before God as being “in Christ.” Our position before God is based on the fact that we have been identified with Christ. What is true of Christ is true of us. As we are identified with Christ, we receive “every spiritual blessing”; but we also receive His protection from the schemes of the devil (Eph. 1:3). In looking at the verses below, when we put on the armor of God, we are “putting on Christ” (Rom. 13:11–14).

- Jesus is truth (“belt of truth,” John 14:6).
- Jesus is righteousness (“breastplate of righteousness,” 2 Cor. 5:21).
- Jesus is peace (“shoes of the Gospel of peace,” Eph. 2:14).
- Jesus is the object of our faith (“shield of faith,” Gal. 2:20).
- Jesus is our salvation (“helmet of our salvation,” Luke 2:30).
- Jesus is the word of God (“sword of the spirit,” John 1:1, 14).

“Put on the full armor of God” was a command (Eph.6:11, 13). Paul was not speaking passively but was declaring and charging believers to put on spiritual armor. When believers received Christ, they also received their draft letter to enter the spiritual army of God. This was not optional. The church was and is a spiritually ironclad battleship that believers board the day they are spiritually born. As our spiritual enemy is far more powerful than we are, we *must* put on the armor of God. Therefore, as followers of Jesus, we are to suit up for battle allowing Him to cover and saturate every component of our soul.

The devil does not have just one method of attack. The Greek term for “schemes” is not singular (Eph. 6:11). There are many ways that this “roaring lion seeking someone to devour” will attack (1 Peter 5:8). He masquerades as “an angel of light,” accuses believers before God day and night, and is a father of lies (2 Cor. 11:14; Rev.12:10, 8:44). He twisted God’s words not only with Adam and Eve, but also with Jesus in the wilderness. Therefore, we must “put on Christ” and “keep alert” in prayer (Rom. 13:14; Eph. 6:18; 1 Cor. 16:13).

We are to stand firmly in grace (Eph. 6:11, 13). (See also Rom. 5:2, 11:20; 1 Cor. 16:13; Phil. 4:1; Col. 4:12; 1 Thess. 3:8; 2 Thess. 2:15; 1 Peter 5:12.) Why are the disciples to put on the armor of God? In order that they may be able to stand. While it is popular opinion among many today that in the realm of spiritual warfare, Christians are to “bind Satan,” that is simply not true. The disciples did cast out demons, but they never bound them or Satan. That is not our role, nor do we have the power to do so. In Revelation 20:1–3, it is an angel that comes down from heaven during the millennial reign and binds Satan, not a human. To consider people to have the ability to bind Satan is to underestimate his power and overestimate our own. It is God who wins the war in Revelation by throwing Satan into the lake of fire, not humanity (Rev. 20:9–10). Rather, our role is to withstand the attacks. We dig our heels firmly in the ground of grace that we may stand, die daily to our pride, and clothe ourselves with Christ—our Protector and protection.

Additional Leader Resources

The Believer’s Armor: God’s Provision for Your Protection (<http://www.gty.org/resources/positions/P14/the-believers-armor-gods-provision-for-your-protection>).