

**Leviticus 19:1-2**

“Be holy,” God says. Be without sin. Be perfect in thought, word, and deed. Keep every commandment without fail. Impossible? Yes. That’s like commanding us to be an eagle, or a horse, or an alligator. We cannot be those animals because we’re human beings. We cannot be what we are not. And yet, that is exactly what God commands. When He says, “Be holy, for I the Lord your God, am holy,” He is commanding us to be what we are not. He is commanding us to be as He is. God is holy. We are sinful.

Once we were holy. In Eden, before sin entered God’s perfect world, our human race was holy—made in God’s image. Adam and Eve were created without sin. But God’s holy children lost their holiness. And since that time, every child born to man is born in sin—born already not holy.

Does that matter? Yes. The consequences of being “not holy” are great and terrible. “The wages of sin is death.” “The soul that sins shall die.” Only those who are like God can enter into His Paradise. Only holy people go to heaven. And so, what are we to do? Strive to be what we are not? But we can no more be holy than we can flap our arms and soar high off the ground like a bird. Even though we may try to do what is right, we always fall short. And we cannot erase who we are. You and I are born already doomed to eternal death—our parents gave birth to unholy children.

Dear sinner, all is not lost. Fear not, for the very words which condemn us also give us hope. When God says, “Be holy...as I am holy,” He would have us look away from our efforts to His grace and mercy in Jesus Christ. The words, “Be holy,” are to direct your eyes away from your unholy lives to the holy, innocent Son of God—away from your behavior to God in the flesh who lived a life of perfect moral behavior for you.

“Be holy,” is more than a command—it is an invitation. God would have you believe with all your heart that His beloved Son was holy in your place—not as an example to follow, but as He who became your Savior. We cannot be what we are not, so God became what we are. He put on our human flesh. He covered Himself with our sins. He, the holy Son of God, became the cursed One on the tree of the cross. God charged our sins to His account. He, Jesus, became sin for you, that you might be covered with Him.

That happened in your baptism. There in the water, Jesus covered you with His holiness. That cleansing bath removed the guilt of all your sins. In baptism God declares you to be His holy child. This holiness is not of your own doing, it is that which Christ gives to you. When God says, “Be holy,” therefore, He is simply saying, “Be baptized.” Because baptism made you into what you were not. Once an unholy sinner, in baptism God made you His saint—a holy person in thought, word, and deed—because baptism gives you Christ. And in Him, God sees not your sins, but a child of His covered completely with the perfect innocence of Jesus.

“Be holy.” Do we as God’s people strive to live a life of holy obedience? Yes. But that’s not how we become holy. We become holy through Jesus. He is our Holiness. He is our Innocence. He is our Savior. Because of Him, God declares us holy in baptism, and in Him we now live as God’s holy people. Amen.

