

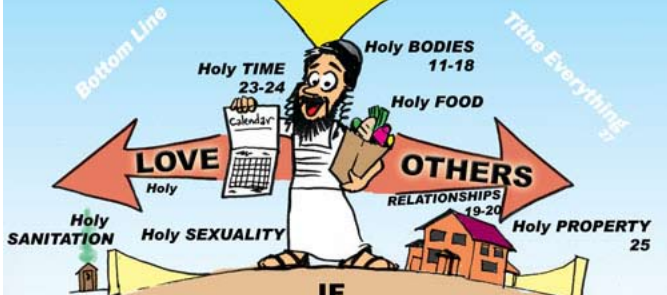
Leviticus

Week 2

Leviticus 11-27

BE HOLY

GOD



IF 26

OBEDIENCE → BLESSING
DISOBEDIENCE → CURSES

YET,
God Keeps Covenant
Jesus will bring new Law
(Hebrews 7:12)

Monday: Leviticus 15-18

Tuesday: Leviticus 19-22

Wednesday: Leviticus 23-25

Thursday: Leviticus 26-Numbers 1

Friday: Numbers 2-4

Introduction

Congratulations! You've made it half-way through Leviticus. Hopefully you didn't do your reading while eating dinner; especially if there was meat involved. This week we move into the second half of the equation. Remember, Leviticus can be divided into two sections:

Loving God: Through sacrifice, unholy people can approach the Holy God.

Loving People: Through obedience, unholy people can live in holy community.

About the chart

The key phrase to the second half of Leviticus is "Be Holy." As human beings we are born into this world completely self-absorbed, focused on self-preservation. If we were left to our own devices the world would be a very scary place. People would be fighting over property, spreading diseases, stealing food, killing to get what they want. Hey, that's sound like our world today! If our world, which is full of laws, is struggling to not annihilate itself, can you imagine what a completely lawless world would be like?

God established the detailed laws of personal cleanliness, sanitation, property rights, and sexuality in Leviticus not because He really enjoyed watching His people suffer under the burden of the Law. No. God gave them civil laws because He loved them. He knew that without these laws the people of Israel would kill themselves off in a matter of weeks. They would be sexually promiscuous (because every culture at that time associated sexual activity with the worship of the fertility gods), get infectious diseases, spread those diseases among innocent people and children, and wipe out the nation. God put hard and safe boundaries around His children to keep them from being infected both spiritually and physically. Here are two things to keep in mind when you begin reading the laws about human interaction.

1. It was always about worship. The laws about uncleanness were designed, first and foremost, to protect the Tabernacle. God could not allow anything unclean to come into the Tabernacle. Why? Was it because He was harsh and not compassionate toward hurting people? Just the opposite. God rigidly protected the sanctity and purity of the Tabernacle because He was teaching the people, and us, that keeping the worship of God exalted to the highest priority and center of our lives is the ONLY way that we will be healthy. The worship of God is not just a fun option for religious people to do on a free Sunday. God is our source of life. Relationship with him is the core of our existence. If we do not hold that relationship in the highest regard and “guard our heart” then we will be cut off from the flow of life and will begin to be infected by all sorts of maladies both spiritually and physically. Simply put, it’s the overflow principle. If we want to have holy and healthy relationships then we need to start with a holy and healthy relationship with God. If

that is in place, then our human relationship will flow naturally.

2. When sin and infection (which in the Hebrew mind were viewed as one in the same) entered the camp it had to be isolated. The most compassionate thing the priests could do to an infected person was to send them outside the camp into isolation. There they could heal, and there they would be guarded from infecting the rest of the community.

As you look at the chart, notice all the areas that God was concerned with in the lives of His people. God cares about our lives, every little detail. He wants us to be holy and healthy. Knowing that we, under the New Testament, are not bound by the details of the Law, still pay attention to the spirit and motivation of the laws that you read this week. Ask God to expose you to places in your heart that are infected, that need a time of isolation, healing, cleansing, and reconciliation to Him and to the community.

Monday: Healthy Sexuality

Leviticus 15, 18

What is at risk of being defiled by uncleanness in 15:31?

What got the Canaanites in trouble? (18:24)

What will happen to the Israelites if they fall into the same behaviors as the Canaanites? (18:28)

Food for thought:

Sex sells. It is the American way. Americans will use sexuality to sell just about anything. Think about this for a minute. What does a scantily clad woman really have to do with a car? Does she drive one? Does she work on one? The woman in the pictures probably doesn't. So why is she there? She's there because men are pigs and the American male has given in to his animal-like sexuality. In fact, in our culture we have even exalted this sexuality as the norm and as good

When it comes to sexuality there seem to be two camps. On one side we have the pin-up girl, free-love, recreational, voyeuristic, barn-yard sexuality where women are sex objects and men are competing to be the alpha male. In the other camp there is the "Victorian" approach to sexuality. Somewhere along the line the church bought into the notion that sexuality was dirty and evil. The church has clung to the notion that spiritual things are good and physical things are bad. Since sex is one of the most physical things humans can do, it was seen as debase and obscene.

Unfortunately, most Christians are very confused in this area which has led to a great deal of emotional pain and confusion. Much of the confusion about sexuality has come from a misunderstanding of passages like we find in Leviticus 15 and 18. Upon first reading it sounds like God is saying that sex is bad and that if you do it you will be "unclean." Within the confines of the covenant relationship of marriage, sex is a beautiful and ordained gift from God. It was meant to be enjoyed. However, outside of the confines of a covenant relationship (e.g. Lev. chapter 18...sheep? hello!) sex can be one of the most

emotionally, physically, and spiritually devastating experiences in a person's life.

Satan knows how sacred our sexuality is to God. That is why sexuality is under such intense attack in our culture. If he can get the "pagan" world to see it as nothing more than a recreational pastime, then they can be destroyed by the damaging effects of promiscuity. If he can get the church convinced that it is "dirty" and a desire to be suppressed or overcome, then he can destroy good marriages and heap loads of shame on Christians, leaving them wounded in the battle.

How are you doing in this area? Are there past experiences that haunt you and keep you from being positive and healthy in your current place? What are you doing to get free from the shame that you are heaping on yourself?

Tuesday: Be Holy

Leviticus 19

According to v. 2, what is God's standard for His people?

As you read chapter 19, meditate on these various laws. See if one or two of them jump out at you and speak to your heart. Why?

Food for thought:

In Leviticus 19 we come to the heart of the matter. What does God really want from His people? Does He want them to become enslaved to the tedium of ritual law, frozen in petrified ineptness? No. What God wants is holiness.

This statement begs the question, “What is holiness?” When we think of holiness we tend to think of it as synonymous with perfection. The Hebrew word translated “holy” is the word *Kadosh*. In the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) and in the New Testament the word translated “holy” is *hagios*. In both languages the word means “to be set apart for a specific purpose.”

That is what God wants from His people. He doesn't want them to be perfect by following external rituals. Everyone knows that you can go through the motions on the outside and not be authentically present on the inside. God is not after the externals, He is after the heart. A holy heart is a heart that has been called out from the kingdom and the ways of the world and has committed itself to focus on the Kingdom of God. A heart that is holy will automatically modify the external behaviors. The term “sanctification” is *hagiazō*, which is the verbal form of *hagia*. In other words, to be sanctified is the process of being set apart and transformed into the image of God.

When Jesus came He said in Matthew 5 that He did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it. He did abolish the tedious external laws, because those had become the idol of the Pharisees. They thought they would be made holy by observing a list of “do's” and “don'ts”. Jesus did not abolish the Law, He intensified it.

He said in Matthew 22:37-40, *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

Do you see how the entire book of Leviticus is summarized in these three verses? Leviticus 1-10 is all about loving God through sacrifices. Leviticus 11-27 is all about loving your neighbor.

How can we be holy? We can understand that God has called us out of the world for the purpose of knowing Him, being filled by Him, and overflowing with His presence in love for the world around us. With that understanding of holiness in mind, read the following New Testament verses and see if they have new meaning for you.

1 Corinthians 1:2

To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified [being made holy] in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ – their Lord and ours:

Ephesians 1:4

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.

Hebrews 12:14

Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

1 Peter 1:15

But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”

1 Peter 2:5

you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Wednesday: Creating Space for Perspective

Leviticus 23-25

Make a chart that lists the different feasts in Leviticus 23 and when they occur in the year.

What was supposed to happen to the land every seven years? Why? (25:1-2)

What was supposed to happen to personal property every 50 years? (25:8-24)

Why were they supposed to do this with the property? (25:23)

Food for thought:

The value of our times seems to be this: “work hard all the time so that you can earn money afford to buy all the stuff you want that will make you happy. You earned it, its yours.” How did you feel when you read chapters 23-25? In the 50th year all property was to be returned?!? How preposterous. What’s the point of buying and selling land if you can’t keep it? Exactly.

There are two lessons to keep in mind from today’s reading. God set aside special days in the yearly cycle of His people in order to force them to stop, take a deep breath, and reflect on the nature of reality. Notice how He forced them to do things on these festivals that go against basic human nature. They were called upon to make sacrifices, confess their sins, stop working, and live in simple tents. Why? Because God knew that the natural human tendency is to buy into the notion that it is through our own hard work that we are worth anything. God says, “Stop it!” you need to just sit down and take a look around. Who is God here? You need to rest, enjoy my creation, and stop thinking that the fate of the world rests in your hands.

1. As Christians we are no longer bound by the strict religious calendar. Especially in Protestant traditions we have completely lost sight of the fact that there is a natural flow to the year. There are seasons of intense work and then there are seasons of rest, reflection, worship, and celebration. Perhaps it would do us well to follow a simple plan of “creating space for perspective”

Daily: Take time to breathe deeply and meditate on the fact that God is in control and you are not.

Weekly: Take a Sabbath day to worship God and fellowship with your spiritual community.

Seasonally: Observe the seasonal flow of the year and take advantage of Holy-days like Christmas, Easter, and Summer vacation! If you want to last for the long haul in an effective life of ministry, it would do you well to allow yourself to slow down in these seasons and rest.

2. The second lesson has to do with property. We think that we actually own things. We spend a great deal of time and energy acquiring things, protecting things, and maintaining things. For what? So that when we die we can do what with them again? Oh yes...nothing! The sooner we can grasp the idea that EVERYTHING belongs to the Lord and that we are nothing more than stewards of what He has chosen to give us, the sooner we can get on with living in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Did you catch in the previous chapters the notion of the gleanings? (19:9-10) The people who had the crops were only supposed to run through the fields one time for the harvest. Anything that was left over belonged to the poor. In that way everyone was taken care of in the community, regardless of their wealth. Can you imagine if everyone in our world did not consider their own property their own, but took it upon themselves to make sure that everyone had enough to eat? It would be a very different world. Take some time and examine your own life. Are you taking time to breathe and step off the rat wheel of "success" in our culture? Do you view your property as God's and not your own? Are you hoarding your "hard earned" treasures for yourself, or are you allowing the "gleanings" to go to the poor?

Thursday: Give it All...

10% is a good start.

Leviticus 27

List the types of things that a person could dedicate to the Lord.

What could NOT be dedicated to the Lord by a special vow? Why? (v. 26, 30)

Food for thought:

This chapter is dealing with special vows that are made to the Lord as a demonstration of extreme devotion and dedication. These vows are in no way demanded by the Law. However, God does take vows very seriously. This whole chapter could be summarized like this, "You don't have to give special offerings to God and make over and above commitments to God...but if you do, you had better follow through with them. God does not take promises lightly."

Here's the part of the chapter that may be lost to the contemporary reader. In vv. 30-33 God clarifies something. He says that you cannot dedicate your firstborn or your first 10% of your crops and income. Why is that? Does God not want our best? Yes, of course He does. The point is that you cannot dedicate it to God because...YOU'VE ALREADY GIVEN IT. The title BELONGS to the Lord.

OK hold it right there. As American Christians we have bought into the idea that tithing (giving 10% of all that we have) to God is an optional act. In our minds we feel like we are really stepping out in faith when we work our way up to a 10% giving level. Read this passage again. The 10% belongs to God; it isn't yours to choose to give or not to give. If we follow this to its logical conclusion then we could say that by not giving our 10% to God we are actually stealing from Him by withholding from Him what belongs to Him. Yikes! How many times have we heard that preached? By even writing these words I am risking being accused of legalism and emotional extortion. Yet, that is what this chapter is teaching. Why is giving so hard for us? Why do we hold back from God? Bottom line...its a trust issue. We don't believe that God is the one who provides our needs.

We don't believe that this is His Kingdom and that everything we "own" actually belongs to Him and He is letting us use it. If we would just let go of the notion that we can own anything and that we can control our own destiny through economic or political manipulation, we would be free of worry and be able to operate, every moment, in the peace of God that passes all understanding.

It's true; you do not have to give big offerings to God. You do not have to take a vow of poverty and shave your head. Some may be compelled to do so. If so, they had better follow through. For the rest of us, we need to remember that the 10% issue is a matter of ownership. It's not yours, it's God's.

Friday: Special Jobs

Numbers 2-4

How were the Israelites organized in the camp?

What was different about the Levites and, specifically, the sons of Aaron?

Why were the Levites set apart for working in the Tabernacle? (3:12)

How were the Levites organized and what did they do?

Food for thought:

In today's reading we see the practical side of a worshipping community. Up to this point in Exodus and Leviticus the people have been instructed concerning the worship of God through burnt offering and cleansing rituals. The worship of God revolved around the tent called the Tabernacle. Now, let's put this into perspective. The book of Leviticus was not a story (with the exception of the brothers toasted). Leviticus was the Law itself. The story left off at the base of Mount Sinai where Moses had a close encounter of the Divine Kind. Now, at the beginning of Numbers the story is about to continue. Do you remember what is happening in the story? God had promised to Abraham that He would give him the land of Canaan. The Israelites were currently a mobile nation, on the move to the Promised Land, being led by the pillar of cloud/fire, and being fed by manna.

So, what does this mobility mean for worship? It means that somebody had to pack up the Tabernacle and transport it to the next camping site. How do you transport the Most Holy Place that is never to be seen or touched? God had to set aside people to be God's tent movers. This was probably hard, physical, and tedious labor. Every time the pillar started moving, the Levites would have to kick into gear, tear down the tent, carefully pack it up, physically carry it to wherever the pillar landed, unpack it, set it up, and then begin proper worship again.

Here are some observations about this process that can have application to us:

1. The people of God were mobile, flexible, and ready to move whenever the pillar led them.
2. It was the pillar that dictated when they moved,

how far they would travel, and where they would stop. God led, not the people.

3. There was hard, physical, and unglamorous work involved whenever God led them out.

4. God appointed certain people to certain tasks. Each section of the community had their specific task, and if each player did their part then the whole community would be able to move without any problem. This seems to be a similar image to the New Testament analogy of the people of God being the body of Christ. Each person has a part in the body. No part is higher or lower than another. All parts are necessary to the health and functionality of the community.

Today, ask yourself a) am I open to God leading me wherever and whenever He wants? b) do I know what part of the body I play?

As with the Tabernacle, there are many roles to play in the body of Christ and in being a worshipping community. In the house church there are physical things that need to be done in order to create a re-creative space for worship. Houses need to be cleaned, food needs to be prepared, children need to be watched and taught, and kitchens need to be cleaned. It's not glamorous, but it is worship. So, the next time you are doing your "family chore" remember the Levites as they were rolling up the Tabernacle tent and hoisting it on their shoulders for the long walk. As a community, we all pitch in and do our part so that God can be glorified, we can be edified, and the Kingdom of God can have space in which to grow in our lives and in our neighborhoods.