

**Sermon      November 14, 2021      Leviticus VIII**

Grace, mercy and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Once we pass beyond chapter 16 in the book of Leviticus, the party is over, so to speak. So far we have heard much about God's provision to establish his presence among his people Israel and how they can come before him without fear, have an audience with him and make requests of him, and finally receive his blessing and his holiness. This holiness God imparts to his people is a fact, a promise, and as we will now see, a demand. When God's people receive his forgiveness, purification, and holiness, and then defile themselves with unrighteous acts, they lose God's holiness. They are cut off from God and his holiness. This is where the rubber hits the proverbial road when it comes to living out our faith. This is the time for us to perk up our ears and hear what the Lord our God and Savior has decreed. The areas I will cover today include the use of animal blood, sexual purity, general statutes, and dealings with unclean spirits.

**For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. Leviticus 17:11**

Why do these sacrifices made at the place of God bring forgiveness and peace and why does the blood of these sacrifices bring holiness? Because God says so. Here God says that the blood of animals makes atonement for sin and brings peace with God. The power and efficacy of all these sacrifices then is found here in God's Word of promise. When these sacrifices are made and the blood is sprinkled, everything God says happens actually happens.

Well who does God think he is that he can just snap his fingers and say that from now on this is how it works. This is how it's going to be. Let us be reminded that he created all things and it is in his power to make things any way he wants them. This is how he has made them. Atonement is made through the life blood.

**"If any one of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them drinks any blood, I will set my face against that person who drinks blood and will cut him off from among his people." Leviticus 17:10**

Here we have God's prohibition against drinking the blood of animals. The common pagan rituals of the day included drinking blood. They believed that by doing so they would receive the life-power of the animal whose blood they drank. Thus, God forbid Israel from this practice. Blood would not give them life-power. Blood would bring them atonement with God, allow them to come into his presence without desecrating the place of God, and receive life and holiness not from blood but from God himself.

**So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you." John 6:53**

How can it be that while in Leviticus chapter 17 God forbids the drinking of blood yet here Jesus teaches us to drink his blood? It can be because all these things that came before Christ pointed to him. The blood of animals brought atonement and allowed Israelites to approach God and receive life not from the blood but from God. The animals and blood there pointed forward to Christ. In Christ, we have both atonement with God AND God's life-giving power. Therefore Jesus now instructs us to go ahead and drink his blood which brings forgiveness, life, and salvation. If we hunger and thirst for righteousness, Jesus' blood is where we start. If we don't thirst for Jesus' blood, then it is time for us to do a self-check and fix the problem as fast as possible.

As we turn the page to chapter 18 in Leviticus, the topic is something we might be much more likely to find in present-day conversations – human sexuality.

**You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God. You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord. Leviticus 18:3-5**

The Lord doubles down on why the Israelites should abide by these laws. He is the Lord their God. Therefore, as God's people, this is how he wills them to live. In this chapter God forbids what were some practices of the people in Egypt and Canaan. God forbids incest for the sake of the order of family. He forbids

bestiality for the sake of the order of creation. He forbids homosexual relations for the sake of the order of the genders. Anyone engaging in these acts becomes polluted, unclean, and suffers the negative effects of both. The Israelites were to keep from these practices because they were the simple laws of their God, that they would remain in the life God gave them, and to keep the land from becoming polluted. God laid down a stern warning.

**But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you (for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclean), lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. Leviticus 18:26-28**

If Israel lived in such sexual immorality, the land would vomit them out, just like when we eat some bad food and vomit it up to keep from getting sicker. This judgement applied not just to Israel, but for all nations. Even the pagan nations who lived in the land before them were thrust out because people in their midst lived in these immoral ways. Therefore, we can safely assume these principles apply even today for our nation and all the nations of the world. As for believers, Paul reaffirms these principles still apply to us.

**Flee from sexual immorality ... You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1 Corinthians 6:18,20**

Moving on to chapter 19, we find a further enumeration of divine statutes the holy people of God are to live by to remain in his holiness. This chapter begins with another reaffirmation:

**And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.” Leviticus 19:1-2**

In this chapter we find that much of the substance is similar to the ten commandments – honor father and mother, keep the Sabbath, do not steal, remain sexually pure, etc. which all culminate in the arch commandment,

**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. Leviticus 19:18**

The Israelites could only enjoy God's holiness as long as they were members of the sacred congregation of Israel. Following in the ways of God helped keep them in that status. We can find a correlation between the statutes here in chapter 19 and the teachings of the New Testament. In the NT, we not only find the prohibitions reaffirmed, but we also find positive commands such as not only do not steal but give aid to those who are poor. Of course, Jesus also teaches the greatest commandment that we love our neighbor as ourselves.

Finally, in chapter 20 we find a continuation of the material in the previous chapters, with additional warnings and penalties for disobedience. Prohibitions in this chapter include child sacrifice, cursing parents, more on sexual purity, and the absolute ban on conjuring unclean spirits from the underworld including dead ancestors. Engaging in any of these practices rendered the people unclean and defiled the people, the name of God, and polluted the land. God had bestowed a great privilege upon Israel as his chosen people. With such privilege came great responsibility. That responsibility included abiding in the ways of the Lord, in the way of his holiness.

Jesus did not do away with these laws and statutes given to Israel through Moses. On the contrary, he came to uphold them. His life was in complete conformity with the holiness of God. As the sinless lamb of God, Jesus is able to take upon himself our uncleanness and unrighteousness and bear God's justice against us. Washed in baptism and restored by his body and blood, he has made us the holy people of God. The charge remains – "Be holy as I am holy." God empower us to fulfill that high calling of God in Christ Jesus our Lord! Amen.

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