

Sexual Depravity (Leviticus 18)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Leviticus

I. Review and Introduction to This Lesson

- a. The primary focus of most of **Leviticus 1-17** was the priesthood, the sacrificial system, and religious regulations pertaining to those things.
 - i. **Leviticus 1-7** discussed the rules and regulations regarding five different types of sacrificial offerings that the priests would make.
 - ii. In **Leviticus 8-10** we learned about the ordination of the priests, and how they are to conduct themselves.
 - iii. **Leviticus 11** explained the rules regarding clean animals (which people were allowed to eat) vs. the unclean animals (which they were forbidden to eat).
 - iv. **Leviticus 12-15** dealt with how the priests can serve to make people spiritually clean again after certain events (childbirth, outbreaks of leprosy/mildew, discharges from the body).
 - v. **Leviticus 16** explained what the High Priest was to do on the Day of Atonement.
 - vi. **Leviticus 17** addressed the significance of blood: the prohibition of eating blood and more rules for the priests in connection with sacrifices offered.
- b. Now, in **Leviticus 18-20** the attention turns to rules regarding some important *moral and ethical* issues. These include ‘the Second Greatest Commandment (to love our neighbors as ourselves), helping the poor, and avoiding sexual sins.
 - i. **Leviticus 18** touches on some rather disturbing subjects:
 1. Incest (prohibitions on marriage and intimate sexual relations with close relatives);
 2. Bestiality (people having sexual relations with animals); and
 3. Homosexuality (an explosive issue today, including in more and more ‘Christian’ communities).

II. What is the Value of the Law of Moses, for Us?

- a. We know that the Law of Moses was replaced. God's people will not be saved by following the Law of Moses.
- b. **Question:** In our minds, should we see this part of Scripture as if it were in *strikeout font* (such as would be used for part of a contract that has been cancelled, which is no longer relevant)?
 - i. Read **Colossians 2:13-17**.
 1. The Law of Moses was wiped out, taken away, nailed to the cross.
 2. We are no longer to be judged on that basis.
 3. The requirements of the Law of Moses were "shadows of things to come".
 - ii. In **Hebrews 8:6-13** it says that Jeremiah (in **Jeremiah 31**, designated **Jeremiah 38** in the LXX) had prophesied that the days were coming that God would make a *new covenant*.
 1. "In that He says, 'A *new covenant*,' He has made the first *obsolete ...*" (**Hebrews 8:13**, NKJV)
 - iii. "Christ has redeemed us from the *curse of the law ...*" (**Galatians 3:13**, NKJV)
- c. Many Christians view the Law of Moses in a very negative light, seeing it as simply a list of rules that were impossible for one to follow perfectly. Therefore, they conclude, the 'good news' is that we are saved solely by believing in Jesus and what he did for us on the cross.
 - i. They conclude therefore that anything we do (works) is useless or worse regarding our salvation.
 - ii. They also tend to conclude that under the new covenant, there are no rules or laws that we are required to follow.
 - iii. **Question:** Was there any *good purpose* to the Law of Moses, other than (as many claim) to show us that we are failures at following laws?
 1. Paul wrote: "But before faith came, we were kept under guard by the law, kept for the faith which would afterward be revealed. Therefore *the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ*, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor." (**Galatians 3:23-25**, NKJV)

2. **Question:** *In what sense was the Law of Moses like a tutor leading us to Christ?*
- a. A tutor would serve an important role of educating a child or young student. However, after the student had learned and progressed to a certain point, the tutor would no longer be needed. The tutor would bring the student along, but only to a certain point in their education.
 - b. One of the ways that the Law of Moses (the first five books of the Old Testament) leads us to faith in Christ is through the prophecies. For example:
 - i. In **Genesis 49:8-12**, there is a prophecy regarding the promised ruler to come from Judah.
 - ii. In **Deuteronomy 18:15-19**, there is a prophecy about a prophet to come who would be “like Moses”. According to Peter and Stephen, that is a prophecy about Jesus (**Acts 3:22-23, Acts 7:37**).
 - c. A second way the The Law of Moses serves as a tutor is that it contains several stories that foreshadow aspects of Christ. For example:
 - i. Abraham, sacrificing his beloved only son, on the wood, in **Genesis 22**;
 - ii. The Passover Lamb of **Exodus 12**, whose blood saved the people from death; and
 - iii. The entire sacrificial system, with the High Priest who would enter the Most Holy Place (representing heaven itself) with blood, as explained in detail in **Hebrews 8-10**.
 - d. A third way The Law of Moses serves as a tutor is explained by early Christian writer Clement of Alexandria. He made the case that the Law introduced man to many foundational ethical and moral principles that that prepared people for the higher moral standards of Jesus’ teachings. That included calling God’s people to restrain the sinful urges of their own flesh. (Source: Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies*, book 2, chapter 18; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 2, pp. 365-368.)

- i. The commandments of the Law of Moses taught people self-restraint.
- ii. The ethical and moral teachings point to the good nature of God.
- iii. Examples provided by the Law (to teach piety, generosity, justice toward others) include:
 1. Men not wearing womens clothing: for men to be masculine, strong, not effeminate.
 2. Sin with Midianite women (immorality and idolatry) to teach self-control and purity.
 3. Leaving some grain and grapes behind when harvesting, for the poor and the resident aliens. Be generous and show concern for others.
 4. Sexual restraint, to treat others with respect, to honor marriage.
 5. Treating animals kindly, even those belonging to our adversaries.
 6. Don't treat animals cruelly.
 7. Limitations regarding divorce (which Jesus would later further restrict).
- iv. The Law led people part of the way. Jesus took people *the rest of the way* to God's ultimate high moral and ethical standards for His people.

d. Do Not Commit Incest

i. Read **Leviticus 18:1-18**.

1. No incest. Marriage and sexual relations with close relatives are prohibited. The Jews were forbidden to have sexual relations with:
 - a. Their father or mother;
 - b. Their sister (even half-sister, a practical prohibition for the Jews since polygamy was still allowed at this point);

- i. Note that Abraham's marriage to Sarah would not have been allowed under the Law of Moses.
 - c. Their aunt, daughter-in-law, grand-daughter, etc;
 - d. Others who are close relatives; or
 - e. The sister of your wife, while the first one is still living (due to rivalry concerns).
 - i. Note that Jacob's marriage to Rachel, after he was already married to Leah, would not have been allowed.
- ii. Read **Leviticus 18:19-21**.
 1. Do not lie with a woman (your wife) at the time of her monthly period.
 - a. **Question:** Does this restriction still apply today, or not?
 - b. I was asked this question recently. While I don't know the answer, for one early Christian perspective on this consider the discussion in *Apostolic Constitutions*, book 6, section 5, chapter 28; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 7, p. 463.
 2. Don't lie with your neighbor's wife (adultery).
 3. Don't give your children to worship a ruler.
- iii. Read **Leviticus 18:22-23**.
 1. No homosexual intimate relations (man with man).
 2. No bestiality (sexual relations between humans and animals). Both men and women offenders are addressed.
- iv. Read **Leviticus 18:24-30**.
 1. Canaan, the land they were soon to enter, was defiled by the people there who had been involved in all of these types of sins.
 - a. That is why those people are being driven out.
 2. The Israelites must not pick up any of the wicked ways of the residents of that land.

III. Another Look at the Canaanites

a. Read **Genesis 15:13-21**.

- i. Abraham promised 400+ years earlier, while living in Canaan, that his descendants would be humbled for 400 years in another land, then would return to inherit Canaan.
- ii. The timing of their return would be when the sin of the Amorites was “filled up”.
- iii. **Question:** What were the people of that land involved in, at the time the Israelites were sent there to cast them out, at the end of the Exodus journey?
 1. Incest; having sex with their parents, children, brothers, sisters, and other close relatives.
 2. Rampant adultery.
 3. Bestiality.
 4. Same-sex intimate relations.
 5. There was so much depravity that the Lord said, “the *land* is defiled”!

b. Read **Wisdom of Solomon 12:3-11** and **12:19-22**.

- i. (Note that while this book is not included in most modern (Protestant) Bibles, it was included in the King James Version of the Bible until around the late 1800’s, and is still included in Roman Catholic and Orthodox Bibles.)
- ii. Sins of the Canaanites included:
 1. Sorcery, the occult;
 2. Child sacrifice;
 3. Orgies; and even
 4. Eating human flesh and blood.
- iii. However, as wicked as the Canaanites were, the Lord destroyed them only gradually, over time, *to give them an opportunity to repent!*
 1. While many superficially see in the instructions of God to wipe out the Canaanites a merciless and cruel God of the Old

Testament, actually a different picture emerges when we see the entire story.

- a. The Canaanites had become incredibly wicked and corrupt.
 - b. God, even then, gave the people of that land an opportunity to repent.
 - i. However, most of them refused.
 - ii. Rahab was one from among them who did fear God; as a result, she and her family were spared from destruction.
 - c. God was extremely concerned that the wicked practices of the Canaanites would be adopted by His people.
 - i. He warned his people not to practice those sins.
 - ii. He told his people to wipe out the Canaanites, not to make treaties or alliances with them; not to intermarry with them, lest they become corrupt as well.
2. In this account we see multiple aspect of God: His mercy and patience (wanting even the most wicked to repent, and being willing to forgive them if/when they do) as well as His justice (bringing judgment on those who refuse to repent from their wickedness).
- a. Furthermore, He is concerned about protecting the righteous from picking up the bad behavior of the wicked (which would lead to their own destruction).

IV. On Homosexual Intimate Relations

- a. Today, the Bible's teachings on homosexuality have become extremely controversial.
 - i. Many today have rejected the Bible and the entire Christian faith in reaction to this unpopular teaching.
 - ii. Others have tried to explain it away, claiming that one can be a Christian today while engaging in these kinds of relationships.
- b. **Question:** What parts (if any) of the Law of Moses still apply to Christians today? What about the part addressing homosexuality?

- i. Some Christians today dismiss the prohibition on homosexual relations as part of the old Law of Moses, which was nailed to the cross.
 - ii. Many churches teach that since we have been liberated from the Law, as we “love our neighbor as ourselves” we are good. They see condemning homosexual relations as bigotry, hatred and intolerance. Now that we have progressed as a society and reject slavery and racial discrimination, the next frontier in spiritual progress is to embrace homosexuality.
- c. **Recent Illustration of How Far Our Culture Has Drifted:** While in a hospital waiting room recently, I saw U.S. President Joe Biden (who identifies as a Roman Catholic Christian) on television, addressing the United Nations in New York City. President Biden was proclaiming how important it was to respect LGBTQ+ rights in Afghanistan.
- i. I must admit, this struck me as a poor attempt to provide some kind of moral veneer or whitewash to the end of a 20-year, failed U.S. war in the Afghanistan.
 1. As if the reason the U.S. military was sent there had nothing to do with money, mineral resources, geostrategic location, etc!
- d. **Another Example:** Several years ago I was teaching the book of **Genesis** to a large group of Christian college students in Boston, and I asked them, “What the sin of Sodom was that led to its destruction in **Genesis 19?**”.
- i. The room became very quiet. *No one* wanted to raise their hand and answer that question!
 - ii. I then read the following passage from the letter of **Jude**:
 1. “But I want to remind you, though you once knew this, that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed those who did not believe. And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day; as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.” (**Jude 5-7**, NKJV)
 - iii. The room became *even more* uncomfortably quiet (with the silence broken some of the brothers laughing nervously).
 - iv. Recall that Massachusetts (where we live) was the *first* state in the U.S. to legalize same-sex ‘marriage’.

1. This was hailed as a great milestone of progress in our society, by many.
 2. I believe the day is fast approaching in the U.S., when those who teach and preach on this will be shut down and no longer protected by the First Amendment.
 - a. Already, this is considered “hate speech” in many circles.
 - b. Preachers who address this subject head-on likely will be removed from social media, blocked from YouTube, etc.
 - c. Financial pressures may be brought to bear on churches and individual preachers/teachers, as well. Tax-exempt status of churches may be revoked for churches that teach on this.
 3. The attitude of most churches: avoid the subject altogether, since this is an uncomfortable topic. They do not want to be branded as intolerant, bigots, haters, judgmental, etc. They do not want to alienate members.
 - a. The unfortunate result: many in the younger generation, being bombarded by the messages of the world, do not have clear convictions on what the Bible teaches regarding homosexuality.
 - b. Similar to head-covering teaching in conservative Anabaptist circles: if people are not taught *why we believe something*, when a counter-cultural conviction is challenged by others, the conviction can collapse rather quickly.
- e. Other New Testament Scriptures
- i. Read **Acts 15:24-29**
 1. “Sexual immorality” is one of the four things from the Law of Moses that the Gentiles were expected to follow.
 2. Consider how the Law defined sexual immorality!
 - ii. Read **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**.
 1. Paul explains that those involved in sexual immorality, including those involved in sodomy (homosexual intimate relations) would not inherit the kingdom of God.

2. Some of the Christians in Corinth had come from backgrounds that included lifestyles of sodomy, fornication and/or adulterery.
 - a. “That is what some of you were.”
 - b. The good news here, that can give hope to all who repent: “But you were washed...”
- iii. Read **Romans 1:18-32**.
 1. The spiritual descent of mankind began with rejecting the existence of God, worshipping created things (idolatry) and then descending into sexual degradation (including homosexual intimate relations) and every other sin.
- f. How the Christians, in the beginning, differed from the world around them (See Bardesan quote, in the Appendix to these notes).
 - i. In the ancient world of the early Church, all manner of sexual and marital deviancy was practiced. For example, incest was common in parts of the Middle East, and homosexual ‘marriage’ was accepted in parts of Europe.
 1. Same-sex marriage is nothing new. This is not ‘progress’; rather, it is regressing to the pagan practices that were accepted in the past.
 - ii. However, the Christians (regardless of the culture they were in) lived as a “new race”, following the teachings of Jesus regarding sexual ethics. They either remained single and celibate, or married one person of the opposite sex and remained faithful to their spouse, in accordance with the laws of their Lord.
 1. Regardless of our own cultural heritage, we likewise are one new race, following the laws of Jesus and the apostles rather than the prevailing customs of our own cultural heritage.
- g. My own experience with a close friend I was sharing the faith with.
 - i. The day we hit this teaching (on homosexuality) was the day he stopped wanting to study the Bible.
 1. Read **John 3:19-21**.
 - ii. Even this summer, as our dialogue continued, he said he respects Christians and the Bible to some degree, but specifically scoffed at “certain things in **Leviticus**” which he did not mention, which he totally rejected as being not from God.

h. Lessons for Christians

- i. Don't avoid this topic. Teach clearly and boldly "the whole counsel of God". (**Acts 20:26-27**)
- ii. The opposite of homosexual immorality is not heterosexuality. It is Biblical *purity*.
 1. Either remain single and celibate, or married to one person of the opposite sex, also a Christian, until death.
 - a. Those are the *only two* options.
 2. Wherever we live, *we follow the distinctive laws of our own kingdom*.
 3. Don't worry about the local laws or customs. Let us avoid political means to attempt to change the world around us.
 4. Let us take the high ground, morally. Our opponents are not progressing; they are *regressing* to the old corrupt ways of Canaan, Sodom and the pagan world!
- iii. Let us not be hypocrites. Let us not *only* address the sin of homosexuality. We must proclaim the entire Christian message impartially, regarding all manner of sexual sin:
 1. Lust and coveting those who belong to others is sinful. We need to address heterosexual immorality, fornication (sex before marriage) and internet pornography, as well.
 2. Marriage is for life. Marrying a divorced person is called *adultery* by Jesus (**Matthew 5:32**). Adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God (**1 Corinthians 6:9-10, Revelation 21:8**).
 3. We must preach (and practice) *righteousness and self-control* (**Acts 24:24-25**), including lust of the eyes, internet pornography, and other sexual temptations.
 4. Recognize the mortal danger of conforming to the sins of the culture we are surrounded by. We are to be a people set-apart for God.
- iv. Don't dismiss or write-off those enslaved to these sins. Many have repented, and many more will.
 1. God loved even the Canaanites and gave them opportunity to repent.

2. We will need to be “wise as serpents, innocent as doves”.
- v. Preach the word in season and out of season.
 1. Read **2 Timothy 4:1-5**.
 2. Proclaim everything Jesus taught, both when it is popular *and when it is not*. That includes the issues that are comforting and those that are disturbing.
 - a. We need to provide strong medicine for those in danger of mortal illnesses.
 3. Call people to repent and hold up righteousness and holiness.

APPENDIX: Excerpts from Bardesan on Ancient Customs Regarding Marriage

Bardesan, also called Bardesanes (c. 154-222 AD) was a Syriac convert to Christianity who was familiar with customs throughout the ancient world. In *The Book of the Laws of Divers Countries* (found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 8, pp. 730-733), he wrote:

“The Persians, again, have made themselves laws permitting them to take as wives their sisters, and their daughters, and their daughters’ daughters; and there are some who go yet further, and take even their mothers. Some of these said Persians are scattered abroad, away from their country, and are found in Media, and in the country of the Parthians, and in Egypt, and in Phrygia (they are called Magi); and in all the countries and zones in which they are found, they are governed by this law which was made for their fathers...

“Among the Bactrians (*in Central Asia, near modern-day Afghanistan*), who are called Cashani, the women adorn themselves with the goodly raiment of men, and with much gold, and with costly jewels; and the slaves and handmaids minister to them more than to their husbands; and they ride on horses decked out with trappings of gold and with precious stones. These women, moreover, do not practice continency, but have intimacies with their slaves, and with strangers who go to that country; and their husbands do not find fault with them, nor have the women themselves any fear of punishment, because the Cashani look upon their wives only as mistresses...

“But in the North, and in the country of the Gauls (*modern-day France*) and their neighbors, such youths among them as are handsome the men take as wives, and they even have feasts on the occasion; and it is not considered by them as a disgrace, nor as a reproach, because of the law which prevails among them...

“Among the Britons many men take one and the same wife...

“Among the Parthians (*who lived in land in the northeastern part of modern-day Iran*), on the other hand, one man takes many wives, and all of them keep to him only, because of the law which has been made there in that country...

“And what shall we say of the new race of us Christians, whom Christ at His advent planted in every country and in every region? For, lo! wherever we are, we are all called after the one name of Christ—Christians. On one day, the first of the week, we assemble ourselves together, and on the days of the readings we abstain from taking sustenance. The brethren who are in Gaul do not take males for wives, nor those who are in Parthia two wives; nor do those who are in Judea circumcise themselves; nor do our sisters who are among the Geli consort with strangers; nor do those brethren who are in Persia take their daughters for wives; nor do those who are in Media abandon their dead, or bury them alive, or give them as food to the dogs; nor do those who are in Edessa kill their wives or their sisters when they commit impurity, but they withdraw from them, and give them over to the judgment of God; nor do those who are in Hatra stone thieves to death; but, *wherever they are, and in whatever place they are found, the laws of the several countries do not hinder them from obeying the law of their Sovereign, Christ.*”