

## Sins Leading to Death (Leviticus 20:1-21)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Leviticus

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### I. Review and Introduction to This Lesson

- a. **Leviticus 18-20** addresses a number of *moral and ethical laws*.
- b. In these chapters, by considering those laws, we can see many aspects of God's character. Our goal is to see God for who He is; we do not want to make the mistake of creating an imaginary 'god' who reflects only those aspects of his character that we happen to like. From **Leviticus 18-19**, we have seen the following regarding God's nature:
  - i. He does not want His people to be corrupted by the influence of the world (practices of Egypt and Canaan) regarding sexual immorality and perversion.
  - ii. He wants to protect the family and children.
  - iii. He cares about those that many societies tend to reject: the poor, resident aliens, those with handicaps (blind, deaf), and the elderly.
  - iv. He is always honest and treats all people fairly, regardless of outward appearances or wealth (or lack thereof).
  - v. He hates the occult and related practices.
  - vi. He loves everyone, and wants His people to do likewise.
- c. In **Leviticus 20**, we will find *additional aspects* of God's character revealed.
  - i. This chapter begins by explaining the punishments associated with breaking some of the laws laid out in the two prior chapters.

### II. Punishments for Breaking Various Laws

- a. Read **Leviticus 20:1-16**.
- b. The penalty for breaking the following commands is *death*!
  - i. Giving one's children to worshiping a ruler.
  - ii. Cursing one's father or mother.
  - iii. Committing adultery (both the man and woman involved).
  - iv. Committing incest or getting involved in homosexual intimate relations.

- v. Committing bestiality; having sexual relations with an animal.
  - 1. The animal involved is to be killed, as well.
- c. In most cases, it is *the community* that is to impose the punishment on the sinners. (However, for certain types of sins it sounds like the Lord will impose the punishment Himself, directly.)
  - i. Re-read **Leviticus 20:3-5**.
  - ii. In the case of someone giving his or her child to worship a ruler, it is explained that if the people don't impose punishment on the sinner (kill him by stoning), *the Lord will hold the whole community to account*.
  - iii. Tolerating extreme sins within the community will be met with punishment by God Himself, upon the sinner, as well as on those who looked the other way and refused to deal with it!
- d. Notice in this chapter that while many sins are to be punished by death, not all are. For example, in some cases, it just says the person will die childless.
  - i. Some sins are more serious than others. While all sin is wickedness, it appears that in the eyes of God, not all sin is of the same gravity.
- e. Lessons for us to consider include:
  - i. God hates sin and *punishes* those who disregard what He says. God is not only to be loved but to be feared as well.
    - 1. Many today struggle with the idea of God *punishing* people. Many even struggle with the idea of parents punishing their own children.
    - 2. God not only tells us what to do and not to do, but what will happen if we disregard what He says and proceed to sin. He warns us of the consequences, even as Jesus did in the gospels.
    - 3. **Example:** My son-in-law with his son (my grandson):
      - a. The father told his young son to stop playing, since it was time to leave our home and go to bed. However, the son initially disregarded his father and kept playing.
      - b. The father told his son that if he did not stop playing with his toys and prepare to leave, he would be taken out anyway, and then disciplined when they got to their home.

- c. The child reflected on this and quickly reasoned that *in light of the punishment he would otherwise receive*, he should obey his father immediately!

4. **Example:** The City of San Francisco, California

- a. California adopted a new criminal justice reform proposition in recent years that downgraded theft of anything under \$950 to a misdemeanor. Therefore, in many places in that state (such as San Francisco), these crimes are no longer prosecuted.
- b. The retail company Target recently announced that it would be closing one of its main stores in downtown San Francisco. A local policeman said this store had been losing \$25,000/day from rampant shoplifting.
  - i. This followed the pharmacy chain Walgreens announcing it would be closing five more stores in San Francisco, citing theft issues.
  - ii. Other stores in that city have had to hire more private security guards and keep frequently-stolen items such as laundry detergent, Tylenol and razor blades in cabinets under lock and key.

5. **Question:** What happens when you have a law, but *no consequences* for it being violated?

- a. **Answer:** I think we all know the answer. Many people will *totally disregard the law*!
- b. **Related Question:** What happens when parents tell their children what to do, *but provide no consequences for disobedience*?
  - i. “Do not withhold correction from a child, for if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell.” (**Proverbs 23:13–14**, NKJV)
  - ii. In the NIV translation, this passage says, “*punish him with the rod...*”.

6. Jesus and the apostles told people not only what to do (and what not to do), but also what *would happen if they did not obey* the teachings of Jesus. They explained the consequences (punishments) that would result from disobedience.

- a. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus discusses the consequences of not obeying His commands.
  - i. “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that *leads to destruction*, and there are many who go in by it.” (**Matthew 7:13**, NKJV)
  - ii. “Every tree that does not bear good fruit is *cut down and thrown into the fire*.” (**Matthew 7:19**, NKJV)
  - iii. “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And *great was its fall*.” (**Matthew 7:26-27**, NKJV)
- b. Read **Mark 9:42-48**.
  - i. “And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, *to be cast into hell fire—where ‘Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched.’*” (**Mark 9:47-48**, NKJV)
- c. Read **Hebrews 10:26-31**.
  - i. “For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but *a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries*.” (**Hebrews 10:26-27**, NKJV)
  - ii. Many Christians incorrectly conclude that under the new covenant, under God’s grace, the Lord will have a much more lenient attitude toward the sins of His people than He did under the Law of Moses. This passage indicates that this is not the case!
    - 1. “Anyone who has rejected Moses’ law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. *Of how much worse punishment*, do you suppose, will he be

thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord. And again, 'The LORD will judge His people.' *It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*"  
(**Hebrews 10:28-31**, NKJV)

7. Let us not only tell people what Jesus and the apostles taught, but ALSO warn them (and each other) of the *consequences*: the punishments if they fail to obey!
  - ii. Not all sins are the same, in the eyes of God.
    1. **Question:** Since *all sins* separate us from God, does that mean that in the eyes of God *all sin is the same* (therefore, all punishments for sins should be the same)?
      - a. Some would argue that all sins are the same, based on what Paul wrote in **Romans 3**: "...For *there is no difference*; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...". (**Romans 3:22-23**, NKJV)
      - b. However, in that passage, Paul is making the case that the Jews, as well as the Gentiles (both groups), are under sin.
        - i. Therefore, both groups stand in need of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.
    2. Passages that point to the idea that some sins are much more serious than others (not all sins are the same in the eyes of God) include:
      - a. Jesus told Pilate, "...You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore, the one who delivered Me to you *has the greater sin.*" (**John 19:11**, NKJV)
        - i. Jesus is saying that while Pilate was sinning in how he dealt with Him, Judas had committed *an even greater sin* than Pilate.
      - b. "And that servant who knew his master's will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be

beaten with many stripes. But he who did not know, yet committed things deserving of stripes, shall be beaten with few. For everyone to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more.” (**Luke 12:47–48**, NKJV)

- i. Those who know more are held to a higher standard.
  - ii. Consequently, if those who know more sin, they *deserve a greater punishment* than those who commit the same sin outwardly, but who may not possess the same amount of awareness.
- c. “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality *sins against his own body*.” (**1 Corinthians 6:18**, NKJV)
  - i. Actual physical, sexual immorality is a greater sin than sins only involving the mind (but not the flesh).
  - ii. This distinction (that committing sexual immorality *in the flesh* is much more severe than committing it *in our hearts*) is something that practically all people understand. This does not contradict what Jesus said in **Matthew 5:28**.
  - iii. God created us body and spirit. His plan is to redeem us body and spirit, as explained in **1 Corinthians 15**. Sins against both the body and spirit have greater consequences than sins that do not involve the flesh.
- 3. Also, “If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death. There is *sin leading to death*. I do not say that he should pray about that. All unrighteousness is sin, and there is *sin not leading to death*.” (**1 John 5:16–17**, NKJV)
- 4. **Question:** Which sins are the ones that “lead to death”?
  - a. Examples of sins that clearly will disqualify us from eternal life, if we continue to commit them:

- i. “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.” (**1 Corinthians 6:9–11**, NKJV)
- b. **To Consider:** Perhaps those sins that *lead to spiritual death* are foreshadowed by those sins in the Old Testament that *led to physical death*?
  - i. For example, sins that led to the death of people in the Wilderness, as discussed in **1 Corinthians 10**. Those sins included:
    - 1. Sexual immorality,
    - 2. Idolatry,
    - 3. Testing the Lord, and
    - 4. Complaining (which we might not think is a major sin, but God does).
  - ii. Perhaps we can also learn some things here from the examples of sins that called for the death penalty, in **Leviticus 20** (giving one’s children to worshiping a ruler, cursing one’s father and mother, adultery, homosexual acts, etc.).
- iii. The community is responsible for addressing serious sin in our midst. There will be consequences for any church that becomes lazy, sentimental, conflict-avoiding or cowardly, and looks the other way in the face of serious sin.
  - 1. In **Leviticus 20:14**, it says that the man who marries a mother and her daughter, all three are to be burned to death in fire “so that there may be no wickedness among you.”
  - 2. The Lord wants the spiritual wickedness cleaned out of the community.

- iv. In the New Testament, we see the same thing. The community (the church) is responsible for disciplining and expelling those who are in serious sin.

1. Read **Revelation 2:18-23**.

- a. Jesus begins his address to the church in Thyatira by acknowledging several positive things about that church.
- b. However, Jesus is upset with the church in Thyatira for *tolerating the sins* of Jezebel and others.
  - i. They should have expelled the unrepentant sinners from their midst, but had not done so.

2. Read **1 Corinthians 5:1-13**.

- a. Paul is upset with the Corinthian church for tolerating sexual sin in their midst.
- b. They were expected to put the wicked person out of their fellowship.

3. **Question:** Why do so few churches today heed these clear instructions, which the churches in Thyatira and Corinth also wanted to avoid?

- a. **Possible Answers:** Perhaps they avoid disciplining sin in the church because of cowardice, conflict-avoiding, favoritism, laziness, not wanting to lose members (or financial contributions from members). Perhaps they do not want to be considered 'judgmental' or hypocritical (dealing with certain sins but ignoring others).

4. Just as our physical bodies have an immune system to defend against the invasion of germs that could kill us, the church needs to have a defense against sin that can spread like germs (or like yeast) and potentially destroy the church.

- v. **Challenge:** Let us never forget that God holds us responsible for keeping the church clean of those involved in serious sin. God will judge our community, and especially the church leaders, if we fail to do this for any reason.

- 1. Refusing to deal firmly with sin will lead to the destruction of those involved in the sin, as well as the rest of the church (the healthy part).

2. If someone is in serious sin, we need to call the person to repent. If they refuse to repent, we need to expel them from the church and hand them over to Satan, out of love for them and for the entire church. (See **1 Corinthians 5:5**.)