

Be Holy for I am Holy (Leviticus 20:22-27)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Leviticus

I. Review and Introduction to This Lesson

- a. **Leviticus 18-20** addresses several *moral and ethical laws*.
- b. In these chapters, by considering those laws, we can see many aspects of God's character. For example, we see:
 - 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 20:1-21**, we looked at the punishments associated with breaking some of the laws of **Leviticus 18-19**.
- d. In the remaining verses of **Leviticus 20**, we now encounter *one of the most important themes* of the entire Bible: God's holiness, and his desire for His people to be holy and separate from the world.

II. Be Holy for I am Holy

- a. Read **Leviticus 20:22-26**.
- b. God does not want His people to become like the residents of Canaan (who were living in all kinds of wickedness and depravity).
- c. God wanted to make a distinction between His people (who He separated from the world) and all other people, just as He had made a distinction between the clean vs. unclean animals (in **Leviticus 11**).

- d. Holiness and separation from the world.
 - i. Re-read **Leviticus 20:26**.
 - ii. God had told them earlier, while first encamped at Mount Sinai, something very similar. Read **Exodus 19:1-6**.
 - 1. The Lord had brought His people out of worldly Egypt and wanted them to be his own holy people, a separate nation.
 - 2. Peter refers to this in **1 Peter 2:9**.
- e. The starting place: seeing God as a holy God.
 - i. Read **Revelation 4:1-8**.
 - 1. “The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!’” (**Revelation 4:8**, NKJV)
 - 2. This picture of the four living creatures around the throne is reminiscent of the four living creatures around the throne in **Ezekiel 1** and the seraphim surrounding the enthroned Lord in **Isaiah 6**.
 - ii. Read **Isaiah 6:1-5**.
 - 1. “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.”
 - 2. After quoting from **Isaiah 6**, the apostle John wrote: “These things Isaiah said when he saw His glory and spoke of Him.” (**John 12:41**, NKJV)
 - a. **Question:** Who was it that Isaiah saw, and spoke of, in the vision of **Isaiah 6**?
 - i. The Scriptures are clear that no one can see God (the Father); however, we can see His Son, who could take on human, visible form. (**John 1:18**, **1 John 4:12** and **1 Timothy 6:14-16**)
 - ii. Also, recall that Jesus had said, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father”. (**John 14:9**, NKJV)
 - b. **Answer:** Therefore, this vision in the throne room was of Isaiah seeing *the Son of God* prior to His incarnation in human form (as Jesus).

- iii. God is first and foremost a *holy God*. He is set apart. There is no one and nothing like Him. He is not like any other so-called “god”.
 - 1. Everything *associated with God and devoted to Him* is holy. That includes His name, the seventh day on which He rested from His creation, His temple, the city in which His temple resides, and the furnishings of his temple.
 - 2. When the Lord calls to Moses from the burning bush, the first thing He says (whether directly or through an angel) is to tell Moses, “Do not come any closer. Take your sandals off your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground.” (**Exodus 3:5**)
 - 3. When Jesus taught His disciples how to pray, teaching them the Lord’s Prayer, the first thing we say in petitioning the Father is: “Holy is your name”, or “May your name be held holy” (**Matthew 6:9, Luke 11:2**).
 - a. Some consider this phrase at the beginning of the prayer to be *giving praise and glory to God*.
 - b. Others consider this to be *a pledge on our part to live holy lives*, so that the name of God will be held up as holy in the eyes of all the world. For example, from early Christian writer Tertullian:
 - i. “... for our own petition, when we say, ‘Hallowed be Thy name,’ we pray this; that it may be hallowed in us who are in Him, as well in all others for whom the grace of God is still waiting; that we may obey this precept, too, in ‘praying for all,’ even for our personal enemies. And therefore, with suspended utterance, not saying, ‘Hallowed be it in us’, we say, - ‘in all.’”
 - ii. (Source: Tertullian, *On Prayer*, chapter 3; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 682)
- f. The call for us to be a *holy people* carries forward in the New Testament.
 - i. Read **1 Peter 1:13-16, 2:4-5** and **2:9-12**.
 - 1. This call to being God’s holy people underpins what Peter taught on many challenging subjects, including purity, submission to one another, submission to the governing authorities, humility, and leaving behind lusts of the flesh.

2. It is important to understand *why* we do things (not just *what* we need to do), whenever possible. This point can be illustrated with a few examples.
 - a. Just to be clear, let me emphasize that we need to follow the commands of God *whether or not we understand the reason behind those commands!*
 - i. Abraham obeyed God in sacrificing his son Isaac in **Genesis 22**. That is held up as one of the greatest single acts of faith in the entire Bible.
 - b. A few years ago, Alison and I visited a house church led by a man who was raised Old-Order Amish. The man had a large family and lived in rural Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. The women in the family dressed in traditional conservative Anabaptist style, with long dresses and head coverings. They asked if I would give the lesson on Sunday, and I asked what topic they would like me to speak on. To my great surprise, they said, "Would you please teach on the *head covering?*"
 - i. They explained that although everyone in their circles practiced this teaching from **1 Corinthians 11**, most could not explain or defend it. Consequently, many, when challenged by others in different church settings, would quickly abandon the practice. They did not understand the reason why they were doing it!
 - c. Another example is from Francis Schaeffer's book, *How Should We Then Live: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture*. One of the main points the author made was that the foundation of the modern Christian world eroded quietly over a period of time, as a result of hypocrisy and of prior generations thinking could pass down a 'Christian culture' while *failing to pass along the "whys"* of the Christian faith and way of life.
 - i. Things like:
 1. Why not experiment with recreational drugs.

2. Why not have sex with partners you are not married to (especially once birth control and abortion became widely available).
 3. Why believe in Jesus and participate in church life.
 4. Why respect those who are older.
- ii. As a result, my generation (the 'baby boomers') rapidly discarded many Christian moral teachings. While my parents' generation held to them for the most part, they failed to explain why. Consequently, when their children reached college age and were challenged with alternative messages (many which appealed to the flesh), they fell for them!
- d. This is why it is so important that Peter lays the foundation of why we Christians must live in this unusual and challenging way (submitting to government, wives submitting to husbands, servants submitting to masters, avoiding outward adornment, being willing to suffer for righteousness' sake, being considerate, respecting elders, avoiding the popular pagan lifestyle of lust, drinking parties and debauchery, etc.).
 - i. He is a holy God, set apart.
 - ii. God expects His people to be a holy people, set apart from the rest of the world for a special purpose.
- ii. Read **Romans 12:1**.
 1. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, *holy*, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service." (**Romans 12:1**, NKJV)
 2. This is the great transition verse in **Romans**, coming right after **Romans 1-11**, which establishes the Christians (most of which are Gentiles) as the continuation of Israel, God's people.
 3. All the specific instructions that follow, in **Romans 12-16**, expand on what this means (to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God).

iii. Read **2 Corinthians 6:11-7:1**.

1. This is the basis for Paul telling them not to be yoked with unbelievers, being separate from the world, and avoiding filthiness of the flesh.
2. One of several implications of this teaching is that Christians can marry only other Christians.

iv. Read **Hebrews 12:14-17**.

1. Pursue peace and holiness.
2. This is the foundation for not being like Esau (fornicator, living to gratify the flesh).
3. Without holiness, *no one will see the Lord*!
 - a. Since leaving the large church we had been a part of for 35+ years, I have heard some strange stories circulating in those circles regarding rumors about why we left.
 - b. The church we left strongly emphasized evangelism, baptism as an essential part of conversion, and mentoring-type discipleship. Holiness and separation from the world were not emphasized nor taught much.
 - c. One person said she heard we had left “to join some kind of *‘holiness’ movement*”!
 - i. My response: The church of Jesus Christ *had BETTER* be a *‘holiness’ movement*!
 - ii. Let us pay careful attention to *ALL* of the passages in the New Testament regarding salvation that make strong, all-inclusive statements that contain phrases such as: “*all must*” or “*no man can... unless*”, etc. The same Bible that says:
 1. *No one* can enter the kingdom of God unless he is “born again of water and the spirit: (**John 3:3-5**); and
 2. “... the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and *all liars* shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is

the second death.” (**Revelation 21:8**, NKJV); also says...

3. without holiness, “*no one* will see the Lord” (**Hebrews 12:14**).
- iii. Living a holy way of life is not something that is ‘optional’ if we want to inherit eternal life!
4. John Wesley (1703-1791, Anglican preacher) referred to this statement from **Hebrews 12:14** (that no one will see the Lord without holiness) as perhaps *the most unpopular verse to preach* in the entire Bible!
 - a. Read an abridged selection from Wesley’s tract, *A Blow at the Root*. (See appendix at the end of these notes.)
 - b. Wesley said that everyone wants to be saved *without actually living a holy (set apart) life*. Depending on the group, they tend to pursue salvation by attempting to *replace holiness with other things*, such as:
 - i. Rituals, candles, incense, church services, sacrifices, prayers, etc.
 - ii. Be a nice person, attend a Christian church, etc.
 - iii. Claiming the righteousness of Christ is automatically imputed to us (therefore, we don’t need to be *living holy lives*).

III. The Meaning and Challenges of Holiness

- a. The meaning of holiness.
 - i. Set apart from the world, reserved for a special purpose.
 - ii. A great picture of the meaning of ‘holy’ is found in the instructions regarding the holy oil and holy incense, in **Exodus 30**.
 1. Read **Exodus 30:25-33**.
 2. ‘Holy’ means to be set apart; reserved for a special, higher use. Something that is ‘holy’ is not to be treated like something for common use.
- b. Understanding this is the reason *why* we need to live differently from most of the world (versus just following a list of rules).

- i. Although there are laws of Christ we must follow in the Christian faith, the Christian life is *much more* than just figuring out what all the rules are, then listing them out and following them.
- ii. Rules alone will not produce true holiness. The end result is that we may look good on the outside but are rotting spiritually on the inside. We need to clean the *inside of the dish first*.
- iii. If we just learn a set of rules but miss the concept that we must be holy because we serve a holy God, we are in danger of missing the whole thing! We will likely end up prideful and spiritually dead.
- iv. Much easier to follow a list of rules than to live a holy, set-apart life!
- c. Holiness is an essential part of the picture of the Christian life. However, it is not the whole thing.
 - i. **Question:** Which is most important: to breathe, to drink water, or to eat food?
 - 1. **Answer:** That depends. *Whichever one you are lacking* is the most important for you at this time!
 - ii. As mentioned earlier, for years I was part of a church movement that strongly emphasized evangelism and discipleship. Very little emphasis was put on holiness and separation from the world.
 - 1. We would focus on the classic evangelism passages like the Great Commission (**Matthew 28:18-20**), “the Son of Man came to seek and save what was lost” (**Luke 19:10**), and “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some” (**1 Corinthians 9:21-22**)
 - 2. Then I met groups of Christians from groups that were very serious about *separation from the world and holiness*, but with very little emphasis on *seeking and saving the lost*.
 - 3. Imagine a sports team (baseball, basketball, or perhaps softball or volleyball) that had a great offense but no defense. Now imagine another team that had *the exact opposite* strengths/weaknesses.
 - a. Neither group (team) will be very effective in achieving their goal (winning) unless they learn from one another!

- b. I believe Satan wants to keep the evangelism focused and holiness focused churches (offense and defense focus) away from each other.
 - c. He will make them prideful and cause them to look down on others as focusing on the least important things. (Whatever we happen to be focusing on, we can tend to think is the most important thing in God's eyes!)
- 4. **The Challenge:** to excel in BOTH defense (holiness, separation from the world) and offense (attacking the strongholds of Satan, making disciples of all nations).
 - a. It is much easier to focus on just one or the other!
 - b. This is hard to do for both offense-only and defense-only focused churches.
 - i. Recently we were visited by a couple that originally had come from an Amish background. When this subject came up, it was clear that although they were clearly strong on separation from the world, they had *no idea* of where to even begin regarding reaching out to and converting the lost!
 - c. We will have to go 'against the tide' here and be humble, learn from others, and consider how we can effectively reach out to the lost world around us without becoming like them in any sinful way, maintaining separate/holy lives. (There must be no compromise on the commands of Jesus and the apostles.)
- d. *Potential dangers* for those who seek to live holy lives
 - i. Throughout history, there have been swings back-and-forth between worldliness and separation/holiness. There have been many movements in Christianity, and Judaism before that, to restore holiness among God's people.
 - ii. The Pharisees were one such movement, I believe. Many people have understood that the word '*Pharisee*' comes from a Hebrew word that means 'separated'. We often associate the term with hypocritical religious people (based on the interactions Jesus had with them in his own time). However, they were not all bad. Jesus actually agreed with them theologically more than the Sadducees. Also, Paul used his own Pharisee pedigree to his advantage when put before the Sanhedrin.

1. "But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, 'Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!'" (**Acts 23:6**, NKJV)
- iii. Some lessons that strongly Bible-oriented groups emphasizing separation/holiness may want to consider include:
1. Beware the temptation to add man-made rules to the faith and judging others on that basis. Those rules will tend to crowd out the commands of God. (**Matthew 15**)
 2. Beware the temptation to focus on the outward, observable, easily measurable things. Clean out the inside of the dish first: the filthy heart. (**Matthew 23**)
 3. Beware the temptation to hyper-focus on relatively minor parts of the laws of God, while neglecting the weightier commands of God. (**Matthew 23**)
 - a. Jesus said to focus on the more important matters, while not neglecting the lesser ones, either.
- e. Underappreciated keys to holiness.
- i. Perfecting holiness through suffering. Read **Hebrews 12:3-11**.
 1. We are chastened by God (go through suffering) that we may be partakers in His holiness!
 2. Becoming holy is not just something that happens fully and automatically at the moment we become Christians.
 3. Instead, it is a painful process that is perfected over time. We must continue in righteousness in the face of suffering!
 4. Recall that Jesus Himself was "made perfect" (complete) through suffering.
 - a. "though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him," (**Hebrews 5:8-9**, NKJV)
 - ii. Perfecting holiness *through the fear of God*.

1. “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, *perfecting holiness in the fear of God.*” (**2 Corinthians 7:1**, NKJV)
- iii. According to the Bible, our own holiness is perfected over time. It is the result of a challenging process that involves suffering. Jesus showed us the way, with His own life.
 1. It involves fearing God, cleansing ourselves from sin, and persevering in godliness and righteousness in the face of suffering!

IV. Appendix: Abridged from John Wesley's tract, *A Blow at the Root*

- a. "'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' Nothing under heaven can be more sure than this; 'for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.' And 'though heaven and earth pass away, yet His word shall not pass away.' As well therefore might God fall from heaven, as his Word fall to the ground. (**Hebrews 12:14, Micah 4:4, Matthew 5:18**).
- b. "No one who is not saved from sin *here* can be saved from hell hereafter. No one can see the kingdom of God above, unless the kingdom of God be in him below. Whoever will reign with Christ in heaven, must have Christ reigning in him on earth. And yet as sure as this is, and as clearly as it is taught in every part of the Holy Scripture, among all the truths of God, there is probably none which is less received by men.
- c. "Yes, professing Christians invariably invent one way or another to get to heaven without holiness. In the place of holiness, some have substituted penances, pilgrimages, and praying to saints and angels. Thousands of professing Christians have no doubt but that, by a diligent use of these things - without any holiness at all - they shall see the Lord in glory.
- d. "However, Protestants will not be satisfied in that manner. They are convinced that whoever leans on such things leans on the staff of a broken reed. Yet, thousands of such Protestants also think that they too will see God without holiness. How? Why, by doing no harm, generally doing good, going to the church, and receiving the sacraments. And many thousands are content with this, believing they are on the high road to heaven. Yet, that is not much better than the hopes of the first group.
- e. "However, other Protestants recognize that such a nominal Christianity is not sufficient. They correctly say that such religion does not stand on the right foundation. However they go on to say that Christ has already accomplished and suffered everything *for* us. They say that His righteousness is imputed to us; therefore, we need none of our own. Since there is so much righteousness and holiness in Him, there needs to be none in us. In fact, they claim, that to think we have any holiness, or to desire or seek any holiness, is to renounce Christ. That from the beginning to the end of salvation, all is in Christ, nothing is in man. And that those who teach otherwise are preachers of legalism, and know nothing of the gospel.
- f. "What evasion! What has Satan done? He has persuaded the very men who receive it to 'turn the grace of God into licentiousness' (**Jude 4**). This is indeed a blow at the root, the root of all holiness, all true religion. The whole design of Christ's death was 'to destroy the works of the devil' (**1 John 3:8**). But now this is overthrown in one stroke."