

January 31, 2010 Temple Baptist Church, Jamestown, ND

TITLE: HOLY TO THE LORD, HOLY FOR THE LORD, Leviticus 1-27 (*Through the Bible* #5)

The most effective tool God has of bringing people to Himself is you and me. As people see God at work in us, the Holy Spirit uses that witness to draw people to God. Jesus calls it being salt and light.

You and I are also the reason many choose not to follow the Lord. Jesus says it may be that they fear the light, because they would rather not admit the darkness of what they do and live. It's a circular trap caused by sin and the lies of the evil one. But sometimes people choose not to follow the Lord we profess to follow because they do not see Him in our lives. We say one thing, but live another.

When we insist that we are right, but live in ways that even those apart from God understand to be wrong, we get in the way of God's witness and power. Jesus called those who emphasize the outward form of living right or pure lives, but who neglect their hearts *play actors, hypocrites*.

How does one live in such a way that God is not only honored, but others are drawn to Him? The book of Leviticus is the temporary answer for God's people Israel. Exodus ends with the cloud symbolizing God's glory and presence filling the tabernacle. Leviticus is a book of instructions on how to live as God's people, in right relation to Him and with each other. This book then sets the stage for the people moving toward the promised land of Canaan, recorded in the book of Numbers.

Leviticus means *relating/pertaining to the Levites*, a word which comes from Latin and Greek. Who are Levites? (Audience participation.) Descendants of Levi (Jacob's third son), whom God sets apart after the debacle with the golden calf to serve Him in matters of worship and service with the tabernacle.

Leviticus is probably the most difficult of the books for us to read as the customs and instructions seem so strange to our hearing. Keep in mind that they are about relationships, specifically **living in right relation to God and others as His covenant people**. The book opens with five different sacrifices or offerings: the burnt offering, grain offering, fellowship/peace offering, sin/purification offering and the guilt/reparation offering. The instructions do not explain the reason or meaning of the offerings, which were clear to the Israelites, but the way in which they are to be conducted. Some of the offerings are gifts to God, some have to do with fellowship with others, some deal with atonement for sin. **Except for the burnt offering sacrifice the offerings involve shared meals so the people remember their relationship with God and each other.**

Following the instructions about the five offerings, the priesthood is initiated with the ordination of Aaron and his sons (Leviticus 8-9). Soon after they begin their ministry, though, tragedy strikes as two of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, die when they do not follow God's directions. God then gives His instructions not just to Moses, but also to Aaron. Remember that the LORD told the people that they would be to Him a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:6). **As Aaron and his descendants are to serve as priests between the Israelite people and God, the Israelite people are to serve as priests between other peoples and God.** The purpose of the priest is to direct people to God and assist them in their relationship with Him.

Chapters 11-15 instruct the people about various foods, diseases, and bodily discharges which lead to their being clean or unclean. *Clean* means *acceptable to God in worship*; *unclean* means *unacceptable to God and banned from tabernacle worship* [Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 47]. Some of these laws are hygienic in nature, others are expressions of simple obedience, but all are in relationship to God. Think *covenant* when reading.

Chapter 16 concludes what some call the Levitical code with instructions about the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur, to be celebrated by Israel once each year to make atonement for their sins and purify the tabernacle.

The people are to be holy, because God is holy. Chapters 17-25 are called the Holiness Code, how people are to live in relationship with each other as His holy people. Chapter 26 lists various rewards and punishments for living by God's covenant. Chapter 27 gives direction on how to redeem/buy back people, land and other items dedicated to the Lord.

Why should you and I care about all this, especially since we are not Israelites? At the beginning of the message I asked this question: *How does one live in such a way that God is not only honored, but others are drawn to Him?* **We, too, are called to live as holy people.** Leviticus helps us begin to understand what that means.

- ◆ To be holy is to be set apart to the Lord.

The word holy means *set apart*. The LORD is holy, or set apart, from His creation as Creator. He is also set apart from that which is unholy or tainted by sin. When giving the rationale for avoiding animals that are clean and unclean, the LORD reminds Israel, *"I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy. . . I am the LORD who brought you out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy."* Leviticus 11:44, 45

Notice the LORD identifies Himself by His personal name. He calls Himself *your God*, indicating relationship. What are they to do? *Consecrate/sanctify*

themselves, which is a word that comes from the same word as holy. They are to set themselves apart from things and practices that are unholy or make them unholy. The LORD reminds them that He is the One Who delivered them from Egypt for the expressed purpose to be their God. **Note it does not say that He brings them out because they are special. It says He brought them out so that they would be special.**

In another place we read, *“You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my people.”* Leviticus 20:26 The phrase *set you apart* here can also be translated *caused to separate/make a distinction*. Earlier when they approached Sinai God told them they would be His treasured possession, a holy nation (Exodus 19:5, 6). **Their reason for being holy is because the LORD is holy. Since they are His, they need to be as He is.**

One more reference. When it comes to the worship of other gods, they are to remember that they belong to the LORD. *“Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your God. Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy.”* Leviticus 20:7-8 What are they to do? *Keep His decrees and do them*, i.e. do what His word says. **Does obeying God’s word make us holy? No. He makes us holy. We are to obey or follow His word as His holy people.**

This is an important distinction. When Jesus criticizes the righteousness of the Pharisees and others in their attempts to be holy by do’s and don’ts that ignore the heart response, **He was criticizing their attempts to be holy apart from a real relationship with God.** In His Sermon on the Mount teaching, Jesus says that we must love our enemies. He concludes the section with this amazing and impossible statement: *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* Matthew 5:48 The word *perfect* also has the understanding of *complete*. How can one possibly be complete or perfect? The answer is that we can’t. The Pharisees forgot that **actions don’t make one holy, only God does.**

Listen to some of Jesus’ words while He was praying in the garden just prior to His arrest. *“Father . . . I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do.”* John 17:4 (cf. 4:34) The word *completing* is related to the word *perfect*. Later Jesus prays about His followers, *“Sanctify (i.e. set apart/make holy) them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.”* John 17:17-19 Remember Jesus’ last words on the cross? *“It is finished.”* John 19:30 (Same as the word *completed*, related to the word *perfect*.)

Peter encourages his readers, *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 1:15-16 The context is as they *set their hearts fully on the grace to be given when Jesus Christ is*

revealed (1:13). Earlier Peter writes, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. 1 Peter 1:3

To be holy we must come to God, admitting our unholiness, our sin, and let Him cleanse us by the blood of the Lord Jesus through His death on the cross (cf. Hebrews 9:13-14). The writer of Hebrews says that Jesus' death cleanses our consciences so that we can now serve God. Peter says we do so by praising Him for His mercy and focusing on the grace to come.

Do you know Jesus? If so, you are set apart, holy to the Lord. How are you currently living as His? Are there some behaviors that do not reflect His holiness? The writer of Hebrews says that God disciplines us for that very reason, *that we may share in his holiness* (Hebrews 12:10).

◆ To be holy is to love others as we love ourselves.

When the people of Israel were given these instructions, they were a people of 2-3 million, living in relatively close proximity, encamped near Mt. Sinai for a year. They have left their long sojourn in Egypt enroute to the land promised their ancestors. **They are learning to live as God's people.**

In the midst of these rules for life together in relationship as His people, God makes this statement: *"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD."* Leviticus 19:18 Fifteen centuries later Jesus has a conversation with a Jewish expert in the law about the definition of neighbor and tells a story about a Samaritan who cared for a man in need (cf. Luke 10:25-37).

Paul writes that love is the fulfillment of the law (cf. Romans 13:8-10). Jesus says **loving God and loving others summarizes all God's commands** (cf. Mark 12:28-34; Matthew 22:34-40). **That's what it means to be holy.**

Holiness is a vertical relationship with God that is lived out in our horizontal relationships with each other. On a scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being the lowest how would you rate your love of others? What does that say about your being set apart and the effectiveness of your witness for Him?

Conclusion. Is there a step that God is asking you to take today? Does it involve receiving His grace of new life in Christ by faith? Does it involve living by faith in that same grace in your relationships with others? *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. . . In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. 1 Peter 2:9; 3:15 (Pray)*