

Be Holy for the Lord is Holy
The Book of Leviticus
1 Peter 1:13-21

Scripture:

1 Peter 1:13-21

13 Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy." 17 And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, 18 knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. 20 He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you 21 who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

Pray

Introduction:

1. How many of you have ever read the book of Leviticus all the way through?
2. How many of you actually felt like you enjoyed reading it?
3. How many of you understood it?

Leviticus, more than any other book of the Bible, with all of its laws, sacrifices, offerings, ceremonies, and regulation can feel most disconnected from the Christian life and our experience of God today.

But before we get into why it's not disconnected from our Christian life and why you shouldn't discount or skip this book in your Bible reading, I want to give you a little back ground so you understand what this book is about and why God put it in the Pentateuch (first 5 books of the Bible).

Leviticus is the third book of the Bible, and its author is traditionally said to be Moses. Also, as we think about its placement within the Pentateuch it is very fitting that it comes right after Exodus.

As it was mentioned last week, in Exodus 19-24 we get the covenant that God makes with his people on Mt. Sinai, in chapter 34 there is the renewal of that covenant after the Golden Calf incident, and then we finish the book with the construction of the tabernacle and God's glory filling it in chapters 36-40.

Now, with the Sinai covenant in place and the tabernacle built, Leviticus comes in to explain in greater detail, the regulations and ceremonies that were to govern the religious and civil life of the Hebrew nation in the tabernacle, the wilderness, and eventually in the land of Canaan which happens in the book of Numbers.

In fact, this is why many scholars believe that the book is divided the way it is.

It comes out of Exodus and the building of the tabernacle, so the first 16 chapters are mostly devoted to sacrifices and priestly issues. The book of Numbers comes directly after it so chapters 17-27 are mostly concerned with the civil life of the Israelites and how they are supposed to live especially when they come into the land that God was giving to them.

And because the priests were the ones who were supposed to administer the sacrifices and were in charge of regulating the civil life of Israel Leviticus is often called the book or law of the Priests.

Yet, despite it being, in one sense, a manual for the priests and really the whole nation of Israel for how they are to live out their covenant relationship with God, there is an overarching idea or truth that God is trying to communicate through this book. It's a truth that gets at the heart of who God is and what he desires for his people.

And the main idea is this: **God is holy, therefore we as his people must be holy.**

So today as we take a 10,000 ft view of this book, we are going to see how God has woven this great truth throughout the whole book of Leviticus, and we will see how it still applies to us today even though so many of the regulations have been fulfilled and set aside by Christ.

So with that in mind I want to look at 4 main points that God communicates in this book that help us to unpack this main idea that **God is Holy, therefore we as his people must be holy.**

1. **God is Holy**
2. **Man is Sinful**
3. **God Graciously Provides Atonement**
4. **God's People are Called to Obedience**

So let's start with our first point this morning which is:

1. **God is Holy**

Leviticus 19:1-2

1 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "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."

Now when we think of the word holy in scripture one of the main thoughts that comes to mind is this idea of “purity.” **Meaning, that there is no presence of wrong.** And in one sense this is true when we say God as holy. He is morally pure, has never done anything wrong, and everything he does is good and right.

But the word holy, which is “*qadosh*” in Hebrew, when applied to God does mean pure or moral perfection, but it also means to be completely separate from. **It hits at the idea that God is completely separate from, and far superior to us, his creation, in every single way possible.**

And as we look at the book of Leviticus the idea of God’s moral purity and his being far superior and separate from us becomes clear.

Look with me at God’s word.

Leviticus 1:3

3 If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish. He shall bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD.

Now I realize that this verse is only talking about one of the offerings, a burnt offering. But it illustrates a point that is true of all of the animal sacrifices and offerings in Leviticus and the rest of scripture whether it is a burnt offering (chp. 1), a peace offering (chp. 3), a sin offering (chp. 4), a guilt offering (chp. 5), consecration offerings for the priests (chps. 8-9), the offering for the Day of atonement (chp. 16), or offerings given for vows (chp 27).

All of these offerings required animals that were without blemish. Why is that? Because God is incompatible with anything that is not perfect or blemished. This required them to sacrifice unblemished animals so that their offerings could be accepted by an unblemished and perfect God.

Then in chapter 11 God is gives them a list of clean animals that they can eat and unclean animals they can’t eat, and then gives the reason for these commands in 11:45 when he says:

45 For I am the LORD who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.

God is making clear that his commands to eat or not eat are about his holiness and his set apartness.

Beyond this we have regulations that are a call to holiness in chapters 18-22, the Holy Feasts in chapter 23, the holy regulations about the Sabbath year, and the year of Jubilee in chapter 26.

All of which are in the book of Leviticus and are to be observed by the Israelites so that God's holiness would be displayed, seen, and revered by his people. **He wanted them to understand that he is God and that he is holy and set apart.**

But God's holiness isn't just limited to the book of Leviticus, but it is one of the resounding truths about God that scripture is pointing to on every page.

Look at the following verses

1 Samuel 2:2

There is none holy like the LORD: for there is none besides you; there is no rock like our God.

Psalm 99:9

Exalt the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; for the LORD our God is holy!

Then if look in the New Testament at 1 Peter 1:15 which I read at the beginning it says:

1 Peter 1:15

15 ...he who called you is holy...

God all throughout the book of Leviticus and all through out the Old and New Testament is time and time again communicating and pressing upon us the fact that he is a Holy God. He is morally pure and perfect, and he is far superior to us and is set apart from us in every way.

So why is it so important that we understand that God is holy? **One, Because holiness isn't just one reason we worship God, but it is the reason we worship God.** As the flying creatures sing of God in Revelation 4:8:

Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!

They are worshiping God for who he is, and the essence of his being is holiness.

We want and need God to be holy because all that God is as perfectly loving, perfectly just, perfectly pure, perfectly gracious, perfectly powerful, etc... are all true and made possible because God is holy and set apart.

Therefore, if God were not holy, perfect, pure, and far superior in every way, he wouldn't be God and therefore he would not be worthy of our worship and obedience.

Second, when we understand God's holiness, all the other truths of scripture begin to come in focus and require us to take them seriously. This includes our 2nd point for this morning which is this:

2. Man is Sinful

Leviticus 5:17

17 If anyone sins, doing any of the things that by the LORD's commandments ought not to be done, though he did not know it, then realizes his guilt, he shall bear his iniquity.

Now, I realize that I don't need to sell most of you on the idea that we as human beings are sinful. That we miss the mark of walking in the perfect ways of our creator God and that we live in a society, country, and world, where billions have rejected the perfect ways of our holy God.

But I do think we need to be reminded how sinful we actually are, and how sin infects every area of our lives and creation.

So I am going to walk through a bunch of verses that talk about and show the different sins in Leviticus and the different circumstances under which it needs to be dealt with in people and within God's creation.

Leviticus 4:1-3

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If anyone sins unintentionally in any of the LORD's commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them, 3 if it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, then he shall offer for the sin that he has committed a bull from the herd without blemish to the LORD for a sin offering."

Leviticus 5:1

If anyone sins in that he hears a public adjuration to testify, and though he is a witness, whether he has seen or come to know the matter, yet does not speak, he shall bear his iniquity...

Leviticus 6:2-3

2 If anyone sins and commits a breach of faith against the LORD by deceiving his neighbor in a matter of deposit or security, or through robbery, or if he has oppressed his neighbor 3 or has found something lost and lied about it, swearing falsely—in any of all the things that people do and sin thereby...

Leviticus 10: 1-2

10 Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them. 2 And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.

Then in chapter 12-15 we see how sin has affected our bodies and creation as there are laws about leprosy and diseases in people and home structures, and for dealing with bodily discharges and the need for purification after childbirth.

But it doesn't end there and it actually gets worse as Leviticus 18 lays out a detailed list of sexual sins, chapter 19 tells God's people not to oppress one another, and chapter 20 has to make it clear that there are punishments for sacrificing their children because that was common practice in the nations around them which unfortunately still exists today.

Then after all this, so that his people would understand the seriousness of their sin, God says in Leviticus 26:21-22:

21 Then if you walk contrary to me and will not listen to me, I will continue striking you, sevenfold for your sins. 22 And I will let loose the wild beasts against you, which shall bereave you of your children and destroy your livestock and make you few in number, so that your roads shall be deserted.

Now let me ask you, do you realize how bad sin actually is? How depraved you are apart from the work of God in your life? And do you understand the reality that sin has cursed this world to the very core of it?

If you're not convinced by Leviticus than listen to Paul words in Romans 3:10-12:

10 None is righteous, no, not one; 11 no one understands; no one seeks for God. 12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.

There is not a single ounce of goodness in and of ourselves.

Romans 8:20:21

20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

All of creation is fully and wholly corrupted because of sin.

And finally in Isaiah 59:2:

Isaiah 59:2

2 but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.

The weight and corruption of sin is so heavy and total that there is no way in all creation that we can ever escape the holy and perfect judgement of God. And as a result there is an infinite and unpassable separation between us and God

So all we are left to do is echo Paul's words in Romans 7:24 when he says:

24 Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Yet, God in his holy and perfect mercy has given us an answer to this most pressing question.

3. God Graciously Provides Atonement

Leviticus 4:1-6, 20

1 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to the people of Israel, saying, If anyone sins unintentionally in any of the LORD’s commandments about things not to be done, and does any one of them, 3 if it is the anointed priest who sins, thus bringing guilt on the people, then he shall offer for the sin that he has committed a bull from the herd without blemish to the LORD for a sin offering. 4 He shall bring the bull to the entrance of the tent of meeting before the LORD and lay his hand on the head of the bull and kill the bull before the LORD. 5 And the anointed priest shall take some of the blood of the bull and bring it into the tent of meeting, 6 and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle part of the blood seven times before the LORD in front of the veil of the sanctuary.

20 Thus shall he do with the bull. As he did with the bull of the sin offering, so shall he do with this. And the priest shall make atonement for them, and they shall be forgiven.

According to the law, when someone sinned, either intentionally or unintentionally, they were to bring an unblemished animal to the tabernacle. Once there, they were supposed to lay their hand upon the animal's head which symbolically transferred their sin to that animal.

Then they would kill the animal, as it says, before the Lord, and the priests' would apply the blood to the altar so that atonement could be made for that person's sin and they could be forgiven.

Now this word “**atonement**” in verse 20 is the Hebrew word “Kaphar” means “to cover,” “to ransom,” or “wipe clean/purge.” And this is a super important word that in the ESV appears about 80 times in the Old Testament with 45 of them being in the book of Leviticus alone.

It's important because it answers the question of how we can be freed from the tyranny and captivity of sin, and how we can overcome the infinite separation between us and our holy God.

It comes through the shedding of blood as someone or something else pays the penalty of death for our sin. **Their blood wipes us clean and ransoms us from punishment that we deserve.**

And this should be a reminder to us that we not only serve a gracious God who has made a way of escape for us from the penalty of sin, but we serve a God who so desires dwell with us as his people.

As it says in Exodus 29:45

45 I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God.

But here's the problem. The sacrifices in Leviticus needed to be offered continually, meaning, they could never fully pay the penalty for the sins of God's people. **It was a system that had no end in sight.**

Yet God in his mercy gave the people of Israel a foreshadowing of a greater sacrifice that was to come. In chapter 16 God gives his people a yearly ritual called the Day of Atonement.

On this day, once a year, the High Priest, was to make a sacrifice for himself, the priests, the sanctuary, and all of Israel to make atonement for all of their sins. As it says in Leviticus 16:33-34:

33 He shall make atonement for the holy sanctuary, and he shall make atonement for the tent of meeting and for the altar, and he shall make atonement for the priests and for all the people of the assembly. 34 And this shall be a statute forever for you, that atonement may be made for the people of Israel once in the year because of all their sins.

And in this once a year sacrifice, we have a picture and a pointing forward to the once for all sacrifice that was to come through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. As the author of Hebrews writes in Hebrews 10:1, 4:

1 For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

4 For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

And then he writes in Hebrews 10:12-14

12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13 waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. 14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Our holy God knew that we were held captive by the weight and corruption of sin. He knew that we deserved death and wrath for all the evil that we have committed against him, **and yet he graciously provided a way for us to have our sins wiped clean and atoned for so that he could be our God and we could be his people.**

But it wasn't through the blood of bulls and goats for those were only a foreshadowing of the good things to come. Instead, he gave us the once for all sacrifice of Christ who not only covered our sin, but ransomed us from death and has made us perfect in the sight of God so that we can have an eternal and forever fellowship with the perfect and unchanging God who dwells in unapproachable light.

So, Leviticus gives us this picture of a Holy God, the weightiness of our sin, and it shows God's goodness and mercy as it points forward to our need for the perfect atonement of Christ.

Finally, the last thing it teaches us is this:

4. God Calls us to Obedience

Leviticus 20:22, 26

22 "You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them, that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out.

26 You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.

As good as it is to be reminded that God has made atonement for us through Christ, we also need to remember that God has done that for a purpose.

As I said earlier, chapters 18-27 of Leviticus are all about ritual laws and regulations that the Israelites needed to follow. But the question is, why did they need so many regulations?

It's in following all of these regulations, laws, and rules that the people of Israel were showing themselves to be separate and distinct from the pagan nations around them.

In this way the Israelites were meant to be a witness to the holiness, greatness, and glory of their God. As it in Isaiah 43:6-7:

Isaiah 43:6-7

***[6] I will say to the north, Give up,
and to the south, Do not withhold;
bring my sons from afar
and my daughters from the end of the earth,
[7] everyone who is called by my name,
whom I created for my glory,
whom I formed and made.***

Now, I realize that we can often roll our eyes when we hear the words law, regulations, and obedience because we see ourselves as people who are set free from the law and regulations of the Old Testament.

We know that good works can earn us God's favor because it has been fully earned for us through Christ's sacrifice on the cross. **This is absolutely true.**

But remember what Pastor Dan said last week. **Just as the law was given to Israel after their freedom from Egypt, so too are we called to walk in obedience preciously because we have been set free by Christ.**

As it says in our opening passage this morning.

1 Peter 1:13-15

13 Therefore, preparing your minds for action, and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

This holy, perfect, and superior God has ransomed us from the penalty of sin through his son Jesus Christ so that by his Spirit we would walk in obedience to his commands.

We do this not to earn his favor, but we do it to live for the purpose for which God created us, **to bring him the glory, honor, and praise that he rightly deserves.**

Now if you are here this morning and you just feel like I heaped upon you some great burden of lifeless and joyless obedience I want to point you to Leviticus 26:3-4 which says:

3 If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, 4 then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.

And then God says in verses 12:

12 And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.

The point being that what God has in store for us are his wondrous blessings. And if we want to experience the fullness of those blessing then we need to walk in obedience to him. And this is the exact same thing that Jesus says to his disciples in John 15:10-11.

10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

So then do you want to experience the full blessings and joy of God in your life? Then believe his words, take his commands seriously and keep them, and seek to glorify and honor him with every moment of your life.

For this is why you and I were created. **To be holy, for the Lord our God is holy.**

Let’s Pray.