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LEVITICUS 17:1-20:27

Today's lesson plainly centers on the principle of "holiness." We said at the beginning of our study of Leviticus that the theme of the entire book is holiness.

The word "holy" is not foreign to believers. **God is holy. Jesus is holy. The Holy Spirit is holy. God's Word is holy. The angels of God are holy.** And all that's well and good. But when we start to think of ourselves as holy, when I think of you as holy and you think of me as holy and we read in the New Testament that we've been called to holiness...we've been told we're to be holy as God is holy, and we've been commanded to walk a pure and a holy walk...then we think "uh-oh!" That's a little different than considering the Godhead as holy and God's Word as holy and the angels as holy, isn't it?

I mean...look at me! Do I look holy? Well, you don't either!
But, God has called us to holiness and we cannot get away from that!

Well, with all that in mind...Today we're going to see God setting forth special areas of life that must be respected and kept holy. Now, we may not be held to the letter of each one of these laws today, but we are to keep the spirit of them.

Each area of life that we'll be looking at today is an area of our life that we live in 1999. These areas of life didn't end when Moses died.

See, God is demonstrating in the Book of Leviticus that we're not to be holy one day a week. We're to be holy every day... 365 days a year.

Among other commentaries, I've been using Warren Wiersbe's little commentary on Leviticus entitled *Be Holy*. He opens this little book by telling of a worship service he attended one Sunday and the music minister said, "Please stand and sing hymn 325, 'Take Time to be Holy', and we'll sing verses one and four."

Dr. Wiersbe said if he had been out in the congregation instead of up on the platform he would probably have laughed out loud. "Imagine," Dr. Wiersbe said, "a Christian congregation singing 'Take Time to be Holy' and not taking the time to sing the entire song! If we can't take the less than 4 minutes to sing a song about holiness, we're not likely to devote ourselves to 'perfecting holiness in the fear of God', are we."

One of our inalienable rights is the pursuit of happiness, and the average child of God pursues happiness much harder than he pursues of holiness. I mean, the average believer wants Jesus to solve his problems and carry his burdens but he doesn't want Jesus to control his life and change his character.

My prayer is that after we have finished the Books of Leviticus and Numbers, we will never again be satisfied with being "an average Christian."

Well, we said we were going to look at four areas of life that are to be set apart...holy, sanctified to the Lord.

1) **The Sanctity of Blood** - Chapter 17

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On the surface, this doesn't appear to apply to us, but stay with...

The word "blood" is used 460 times in the Bible...with 361 of them being in the Old Testament and 13 of them in this one chapter.

And, if you'll just look down at verse 11, you'll find the verse that most clearly spells out for us the significance of the blood in salvation.

Long before medical science discovered the importance of the circulation of the blood in the human body and its importance to life...Scripture told us that the blood was the life.

We've seen over and over in our study that when a sacrifice was offered and its blood was shed, it meant the giving of one life for the life of another.

Any theology that ignores or minimizes the blood isn't founded on the Word of God. Why? Because without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin and as we've said over and over one of the essentials of our faith is the substitutionary atonement. We've said that this means because Jesus shed His blood for us and paid for our sins at the Cross, and drank the bitter cup of God's wrath for our sins...we don't have to!

The story is told of a preacher who went to pastor a church in Washington and on his first Sunday there, a woman came up to him and said, "I do hope you won't talk too much about the blood as our former pastor did."

The new preacher said, "Oh, I will not say too much about the blood."

The lady was so pleased and said, "I'm so glad to hear you say that! And then he said, "It is impossible to say too much about the blood."

Some of the regulations in this chapter seem strange to us today and some of them were temporary even in **that** day, but let's just see if we can apply the principles to our lives.

Verses 1-7 tell us that as Israel wandered in the wilderness all clean animals were to be slaughtered at the Tabernacle. (This was changed later when they prepared to enter Canaan because God knew the people would be scattered too far to come to the Tabernacle every time they were going to kill an animal.)

Now, some commentators said these animals were animals that were to be used for food **and** animals that were to be sacrificed, and some commentators said these animals were only those to be sacrificed. I don't see that it makes a whole lot of difference, because these folks probably didn't eat a lot of their animals. They were too important to them for other things...dairy products, beasts of burden, etc.

But, why would God instruct them to always bring their animals to the Tabernacle?

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Well, put simply...

It was one thing to get Israel out of Egypt, and
it was something else to get Egypt out of Israel.

See, back in Egypt, the Hebrew children had fallen into worshipping the gods the Egyptians worshiped.

Ezekiel 20:8: "They rebelled against Me and were not willing to listen to Me; they did not cast away the detestable things of their eyes, nor did they forsake the idols of Egypt."

Beloved, God didn't redeem these folks out of Egypt because they were good, He redeemed them because He is God. He heard their cry and He had made a covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and when God makes a covenant, He keeps it.

In fact, the word for LORD all through the Book of Leviticus is the covenant keeping name...YAHWEH. you already know this...any time you see LORD in all capitals, it means YAHWEH...JEHOVAH. and this is the covenant keeping name of God.

So, God's purpose is to keep the focus of the children of Israel upon the one true God. **God is a jealous God...**this is what the Bible teaches us, and He will not share His glory with another. Look down at verse 7...

God knew that if folks were allowed to slaughter animals anywhere but the Tabernacle, they just might be tempted to sacrifice to the goat god and cover up their sin by saying, "Oh, we were just killing a goat to sacrifice to God or for our family to eat."

God loved these folks so much that He wanted them exclusively for Himself!!

So...**every animal, whether to be eaten or to be sacrificed**...every animal was to be brought to the Tabernacle and its blood was to be shed there.

Verses 10-14 tell us that they were not to eat the blood of the animals. In many heathen religions it was a common practice to use blood for food.

If a Jew went out hunting and killed an animal or bird for his family's meat, he had to be very careful to drain out the blood of that animal or bird and the blood and to be covered with earth.

Even today, orthodox Jews are very careful to purchase only kosher meat from which the blood has been drained.

The rest of this chapter speaks against eating meat that has not been properly slaughtered and drained of its blood.

Now, all this seems so foreign to us...but there's a **real application** for us today.

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It's not enough to turn **to God**...we must also turn **from the world**.

In Scripture, Egypt is always a picture of the world. And, God knew that Egypt still had a pull and an attraction for these folks, just as the world still has an attraction for some of us.

And, for the Israelites, the thing God called them to leave behind in this passage was any pagan practices involving shedding blood of animals. He laid down strict laws concerning the shedding of the blood of their animals. The shedding of the blood of animals was to be done God's way because it was the blood of animals that made atonement for their sin.

May I ask you...what has God called you to leave behind?

All the things of the world that call you...all the things from your sinful past that call you... the things you used to do then, or your flesh longs to do now...God says, "Child of Mine, turn away from all that. I've got a better walk for you to walk and a better song for you to sing. I love you and I want you different from the world around you. Leave the world behind you. Turn to Me and turn away from the world and all the things that had a hold on you before you turned to Me."

Well, not only were the Israelites to respect the sanctity of the blood, they were also to respect

2) The Sanctity of Sex Chapter 18

Now, we're not going to read this chapter, but let me just point out that this chapter addresses just about every sexual sin anyone could think of...from incest to bestiality, from homosexuality to impure sex between heterosexuals. This chapter addresses the fact that they were not to offer any of their children to the god, Molech. This seems out of place in a chapter that deals with sex, but we need to understand the worship of the heathen god, Molech, involved sexual practice.

Remember from whence these folks had come and where they were going!!

The things mentioned in this chapter were a way of life for the Egyptians. And they were headed for the land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey, but that wasn't all that was in Canaan, the Canaanites were there and the Canaanites were an immoral people!

So, they were between a rock and a hard place...**the Egyptians behind them and the Canaanites before them**, and both were grossly immoral people.

God created sex. God gave sex to us for our enjoyment and to bring babies into the world. But, God has a way for us to enjoy sex and He will not accept any other way but His way! He designed sex to be between one man and one woman within the confines of marriage!

Beloved, God says, "I am the LORD your God."

Who makes the rules? God makes the rules!
Can we break His rules? Yes, but rest assured God will allow us to be broken by His rules when we break His rules.

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All we have to do is look around us...

We see broken homes, broken relationships, broken spirits, broken bodies...venereal diseases, AIDS, unwanted and unloved children, abandoned and murdered children, abortion and more.

We see a society that is consumed with sex. We can't go to a movie, we can't watch TV without being bombarded with sex. And, it's never the sweet sex of marriage that God ordained.

I was in the beauty shop this past week and as I was waiting, I was looking for a decent magazine to read and I saw on the cover of one of the magazines this caption...

"Enjoy Sex Like You Were Single"

What's the implication? The implication of that statement is that sex cannot be enjoyed the way God commanded...

Let me say it the way J. Vernon McGee said it...

"When you can create a universe and all that it contains, then you can make your own commandments.

But, as long as you're living in God's world, breathing His air, using His sunshine, drinking His water, walking His earth, you better play by His rules and obey His commandments."

God tells His children if we break His rules, we'll pay for it...and we will...by disease or death at worst and by regret and guilt at best!!

Paul said it this way in 1 Corinthians 3...

"Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are."

And, all around us we are seeing folks who are suffering brokenness because they broke God's laws.

Well, not only were the people called to sanctify the blood and to sanctify sex, they were also called to

3) The Sanctity of Relationships (Chapter 19)

Holiness in daily life...with all its relationships...in the home, at work, in the marketplace, at school, at church...everywhere, all the time, in everything...holiness is to be evident in the believer's life.

Fifteen times in this chapter, God says, "I am the LORD your God."

You know what? We don't need any other reason to obey what He has given us. The fact and truth that He is the LORD our God is enough!!

"I AM JEHOVAH, THE COVENANT KEEPING GOD!!

This chapter tells us to be holy and show respect in all our relationships.

v.3 – respect for our parents

v. 9-10 – respect and responsibility for the poor

v. 11-18 – respect for our fellow man

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- v. 23-25 – respect for our environment
- v. 29 – respect for our children
- v. 30-31 – reverence for the sacredness of God
- v. 32 – respect for the elderly
- v. 33-34 – respect for the stranger
- v. 35-36 – respect for integrity in business

Well, can you think of anything God left out? I believe this chapter covers all the areas of everyday life, don't you?

God is the covenant keeping God of Israel and the covenant keeping God of believers, as well. And, we have the responsibility to obey Him!

Well, let's look at the last point and then we'll wind this down...

4) The Sanctity of Judgment (Chapter 20)

In chapter 20, we see the judgment of God upon the people when they break His laws...and do you know what His judgment is? Well, this chapter tells us it is death in most instances. Do you know what this tells me? This tells me that capital punishment isn't something that was dreamed up by the conservative right wing Republicans!!

There were actually 15 offenses in Israel that were capital crimes. Let me just list them for you...

- Striking or cursing a parent
- Breaking the Sabbath
- Blaspheming God
- Engaging in occult practices
- Propheying falsely
- Adultery
- Rape
- Unchastity before marriage
- Incest
- Homosexuality
- Bestiality
- Kidnapping
- Idolatry
- False witness in a case involving capital crime
- Killing a human intentionally

The people of Israel were the covenant people of God. Therefore the Law of God was the Law of the land.

Verse 22...

God has many ways of bringing His judgment upon people.
He can use earthquakes, hurricanes, floods, tornadoes, droughts,
or He can use an enemy to come in and take over or even an
enemy from within to bring a nation down.

Except perhaps in some Muslim societies, there isn't a crime I just mentioned that would merit capital punishment in most nations today...including murder.

But, the Biblical view of law is different from ours.

God gave His Law to **restrain sin**, not to **reform sinners**...
not for the purpose of improving the offenders

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I'm always amused when folks say capital punishment doesn't deter murder. Well, of course it does! If a murderer is put to death, I believe we can safely say he's deterred from murdering again, can't we?

Beloved, what does the Book of Galatians say about the Law?
"The Law is our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ?"

See, the Law was given to show man he couldn't keep it! I don't know about you, but I'm sure I've committed sin that under the Law was punishable by death! Don't look at me so spiritual...you have, too! Have you ever put anything or anyone before God? Then, if you haven't done anything else you've been guilty of idolatry!!

They couldn't keep the Law and **we** can't keep the Law.
Now, we'd all have to agree that some folks do a better job than others at keeping it.

Suppose three friends were standing on the banks of the mighty Mississippi and they all three dive in and they get about half way across...
and then one goes under and she drowns...(I'm sorry, Iris)
The other two proceed and at about three quarters of the way, another one gives out, and goes under and she drowns....
The last one proceeds until at 99 and 44/100 % across the river, and she gives out and she goes under and she drowns....

Well, isn't it true that the second did better than the first? And isn't it true that the third surpassed the second?

But, I want to ask you...Is any one of them any less dead than the other?

Let me say to any person who would be saved by keeping the Law...God will not be pleased with anything less than 100% obedience and you don't have that kind of moral ability!

But, God has called us to be holy...so if we can't keep the Law...how in the world are we gonna ever be holy? I mean, has God called us to do and be something we cannot do and be?

There is a way

... let me tell you what it is...

We have a Redeemer

We have a Savior

We have an Advocate with the Father

We have a Substitute

We have a precious Lamb of God who comes to the Father and says,
"Father, I died for this poor, wretched sinner. Father, You know her frame...You know she's but dust...You know what a failure she is. But, Father My blood covers all she's ever done, is doing or ever will do. Don't count her sins against her, Father. They've already been laid upon Me. My blood was shed so she can be holy."

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And, you know what? He doesn't count our sins against us!! When God looks at us, He sees the blood of Jesus...and not only that, but God has given us the dear Spirit to live within us...to empower us and enable us to live before Him in purity and walk before Him in holiness!!

Does this mean we'll never sin again? No, but if we're seeking His will in all we do, it does mean we won't want to! And, He does hold us accountable for our sins...EXAMPLE...gang member Ronnie led to Jesus...

Praise God that we were born on this side of Calvary!

Praise God for the blessings of His holy Word!

Praise God for the precious blood that washes me whiter than snow!

Martin Luther said "The Law diagnoses the disease and grace gives the remedy

Praise God for His wonderful, amazing grace.