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LEVITICUS 26:1-27:34

This is our last lesson in Leviticus. We've seen some great Bible truths, but the central theme of the book has been the fact that God is holy and man is not. However, the Holy Spirit has also taught us in this book that man can become holy through the blood of a substitute. We have emphasized again and again that the blood of that substitute in the Old Testament was the blood of bulls and goats and turtledoves and the blood of the substitute in the New Testament is the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We've also seen the Mosaic Law given to the children of God...rules and regulations and rituals and rites and ceremonies...all detailed so that man could be in obedience to God and in fellowship with God and could worship God in the way God demands.

In today's lesson, we're going to see the Lord God of Israel as He gives four responsibilities that He expected the children of Israel to carry out and I want us to see these responsibilities as they apply to the believer today.

God called the Jews of the Old Testament and the believer today to

1) Obey His Commandments (Leviticus 26:1-13)

Verse 3 tells us that to obey God is to "walk in God's statutes", and on down in this chapter we see to disobey God is to walk contrary to the Lord and despise and reject His statutes.

See, if I'm walking one direction and God is walking another direction, then I'm not moving toward God, I'm moving away from God!
And, guess who needs to change directions? I DO!! God isn't about to change directions!

So, the first thing we see this morning is that God has called us to walk in His statutes...to obey His commandments and Moses gives us four excellent reasons why...

a) v. 1...because of who God is

The God of Israel, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is the true and living God and not an idol someone has manufactured. The Hebrew word for "idol" is "elilim" and it means "nothing."

And you know...when you stop and think about it...that's exactly what an idol is...it's a nothing. Now, it might look like a "something." It might even look like a **somebody**, but whether that idol is a graven image, a marble statue or even a **hobby** or a **job**, or a **pleasure**, or a **husband** or a **child**...when that idol that you've allowed to come between you and God is measured against God...that idol will always be a **nothing** compared to God!

Remember when Moses came down from the mountain after receiving God's Law and he gave the commandments to the people? What did the people say? "...all that God has said, we will do..."

But, God knew these folks far better than these folks knew themselves, didn't He? God knew that even though they had promised to obey God, it wouldn't be long before they would abandon the worship of Jehovah for the worship of idols...or **even worse**...they would do what many of **us**

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do...they would try to worship God **and** idols. They would be neither hot nor cold...they would be **lukewarm**...and God would want to spew them out of His mouth.

God said He will share His glory with no one else...
because of who He is! He is "the LORD your God."

Not only were **they** and are **we** to obey God for who He is, but also

b) v 2a...because of what God did

The word, "sabbaths," refers to all the special days on the Jewish calendar...not just the seventh day of the week. We saw this last week...God had given His children feast days and they were to celebrate them in remembrance of what He had done for them. God says in the Book of Deuteronomy that they were to celebrate them with **great joy**, and we'll see more of that in just a few minutes.

Passover was to remind them of God's deliverance. The Feast of Tabernacles was to remind them of God's care of them as they wandered in the wilderness. The Feast of Firstfruits and Pentecost were "harvest festivals" when the people gave thanks for the Lord's blessing on their labor.

Even the weekly Sabbath was a sign that was **exclusively between God and Israel** and they could thank God that He had chosen them to be His own people.

And I believe that we as Christians should get up every morning and thank God for what He's done for us. (Every day should be Easter morning.) We don't keep the Sabbath according to Mosaic Law, but we do set aside the Lord's Day as a day of worship.

So, I want to ask you...have you paused today and just thanked the Lord for what He has done for you? The primary reason for coming to church on Sunday is to worship God and to exalt and lift high the name of Jesus and to allow the Holy Spirit to remind us of all that God has done for us! (But, you don't have to wait until Sunday!!)

So, we've seen that we're to obey God for who He is, and what He has done for us, but also, we're to obey God

c) v 2b...because of where God dwells

The God of Israel dwelt in the camp of Israel!

The nations all around them had gods they had made living in their temple! But, Israel had the **God who made them** dwelling in their midst. How could they even think of disobeying Him when He was so near?

To deliberately disobey God was not only a violation of His holy law, it was a desecration of His holy sanctuary. The application for you and me today is obvious, isn't it?

Our bodies are the holy sanctuary of God. Knowing that, how can we even think of disobeying God when He is so near? How can we think of hearing things or watching things, or reading things, or going places or saying things or doing things or thinking things that are disobedient to His

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purpose and His plan when God is so near?

I love those little flip calendars...I have one in my kitchen and two on my vanity. (My husband has one on his vanity and it never gets flipped unless I flip it...) Anyway, one day this week, one of my many flip calendars said this...

“Spend your time in nothing which you know must be repented of;
in nothing which you might not pray the blessing of God upon;
in nothing which you could not review with a quiet conscience on your dying bed;
in nothing which you might not safely or properly be found doing if death should surprise you in the act.”

And, I might add to that...spend your time in nothing that you would be ashamed to be found doing if Jesus came for you.

Well, the last reason we're to obey God is

d) v 3-13...because of what God promised

Verses 14 and following give us a long list of “if you do this, I’ll do that” and this involves rewards and punishments.

Remember that the children of Israel were just that...they were **children** in their faith...and you teach children primarily through rewards and punishments.

I mean...you can't give children lectures on ethics and expect them to understand, but you can promise to reward them if they obey and punish them when they disobey.

This will protect them from harming themselves and better understand why obedience is the key to a happy life. All rules and regulations that God lays down for us and that we lay down for our own children and grandchildren are expressions of love for good in our lives.

We must remember that these folks had been given this land they were about to enter. It was theirs because of the covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Remember what kind of covenant this was? **It was unconditional!!**

The land would **always** be theirs. It was theirs **then**, has been theirs **ever since then** and **always will be** theirs...even the part they never ever possessed...even the part the Arabs occupy...even the part Arafat wants...even the part our own government has encouraged them to give away.

But, having said all that...they couldn't **enjoy** the land unless they obeyed the laws God gave to Moses. Unfortunately, they disobeyed the law...they became so lukewarm that God did spew them out of His land. They ceased to enjoy the land and eventually God took them from the land...**they still owned it, but they couldn't enjoy it.**

Now, how does this apply to us? Well, let me tell you. As children of God today, we already have everything we need.

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Peter says that God has already granted to us **everything we need pertaining to life and godliness**. Paul tells us we already possess **every spiritual blessing in Christ Jesus**.

To possess these blessings is one thing...to enjoy them is another!

There's a verse over in the little book of Jude that tells us "to keep ourselves in the love of God." This must mean that we can remove ourselves...not from God's presence, but from His umbrella of protection. We can become so disobedient that the spiritual blessings that are ours in Christ cannot be enjoyed because we have removed ourselves from His love.

I did a little calligraphy picture years ago and it hangs in our living room at the cabin: **"If you don't feel close to God, guess who moved?"**

And, I would ask you that same question today...if you don't feel close to God, guess who moved?

Well, in addition to obedience to God, another responsibility we have to God is to

2) Submit to God's Chastisements (Verses 14-39)

"For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives." Hebrews 12:6

Israel's special relationship to Jehovah brought the obligation to obey His voice and to glorify His name. "To whom much is given, much is required." Privilege brings responsibility.

J. Vernon McGee calls Leviticus 26 the "iffy chapter." The word "if" is used nine times, and it has to do with the conditions on which they occupy the land...God says, "If you **do** this and this and this, then I will do this and this and this..." But, God also says, "If you do **not** do this and this and this, then I will do this and this and this."

We're not going to take the time to go into all the chastisements this chapter lists...but let me just say this again...God said, "I have given you the land. It's yours. And, it will always be yours...nothing can change that...but, if you fail to obey Me...you won't get to live in the land that you own..."

Notice with me Verse 33.

See, God had told these people that they were to allow their land to lie fallow every seventh year. This was to allow the land to replenish and renourish itself. Farmers do that today...they rotate their crops, don't they?

But these folks said, "No, God, we're not going to follow your plan for our land. We're going to farm it every year...we're not going to let the land enjoy any rest"...and so for 490 years, they disobeyed God. We know it was for 490 years, because God plainly tells us right here in these verses that while they are scattered among the nations, the land will enjoy the sabbath years **which it did not observe** while they were living on it...490 divided by 7 is 70 years and that's how long these folks were in exile in Babylon.

Isn't our God such a God of order?

Well, the third responsibility God has called His people to is to

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3) Trust His Covenant (Verses 40-46)

Why did you discipline your children when they were young? Did you discipline them to drive them away from you? Or did you discipline them in order to bring them to yourself?

When God disciplines us, He does it...**not to drive us away...but to bring us back into His arms of love where He can bless us once again.**

1 John 1:9: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

This is not an excuse for us to sin...but what a promise! What a wonderful, wonderful thing to know that God forgives our sin!

Just as God made a covenant with the Jewish people, He has also made a covenant with us. He sealed it with the blood of His dear Son. He has promised to never leave us or forsake us. He has promised to forgive us of all our sin...to cleanse us from all unrighteousness!

And, Beloved, His promises to us are "Yea and amen." They are "Yes in Christ Jesus."

May God help us to trust His covenant and remember that just as He did not abandon these folks even in the midst of their chastisement, He doesn't abandon us in the midst of ours.

Well, let's see one last area of responsibility God has called us to

4) Keep our Commitments to God (Leviticus 27)

This chapter basically teaches us that God expects us to keep our commitments to Him, and to be honest in all our dealings with Him.

God has placed high expectations on His children. But, they didn't meet those expectations. In fact, after the Book of Malachi, the last book of the Old Testament, was written...it was 400 years before we have any recorded word from God to mankind.

God expected the Jewish children to act responsibly in these areas and He expects no less of us. The difference is this...**we are living under the grace of God and not under the Law.**

We're to serve God, and we're to be obedient to God, and we're to submit to God, and we're to trust God's promises, and we're to keep our commitments to God **out of gratitude**...with a joyful heart...

What I'm saying is this...we do not do these things because we think that by **doing things** we're going to be more acceptable to God. **If grace means anything, it means this...God has already accepted you.** There's nothing you can do to make God love you any more and there's nothing you can do to make God love you any less! What we do does not impress God one bit if our heart is not right before Him!

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Folks, we are saved by grace through faith...then there is the growth process, where day by day we are being made more like Jesus, and being conformed more and more into the image of God's dear Son, but that is not something you accomplish by **your performance** and by **your efforts**.

Remember we mentioned that the feasts of the Israelites were to be observed **with great joy**. In fact, let me quote what the Scripture says:

"You shall **rejoice** in the place which the Lord your God shall choose...you shall keep the feast with **joy**."

That's the Old Testament...the New Testament tells us to rejoice in the Lord always...Why? Because all our needs will be met according to the Lord's riches in glory by Christ Jesus. Because the peace of God that surpasses all our understanding will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Because God's mercies are new every morning. Because He is conforming us to the image of His dear Son. Because He will be faithful to complete the good work that He began in us...and we could go on and on.

The bottom line is this...we're to serve the Lord not just because He has laid down commandments to obey (and may I say that's reason enough)... but also because **we want to**. We should come to Sunday School and church, not because we have to but because **we get to**. (LILA) We should worship our Heavenly Father not because we have to but because **He has allowed us to**. We should study His precious Word not because we have to, because **it is such a privilege to do so**.

Obedience and service shouldn't be a heavy burden to us. Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who are weary and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls." Jesus said, "My yoke is easy and My load is light."

I spoke with someone this week who wants very much to get her life in line with God's will. Maybe there are things that need to be put right. Maybe the sweet fellowship with the Lord has been missing because of some sin in her life...maybe it's just been apathy on her part toward the things of God...I don't know the depths of her heart...but let me just close with this illustration and hopefully make a point with it...(This is Ron Dunn's illustration...but I'm going to give you my version)

Have you ever noticed a fallen tree or a fallen limb? We have a lot of pecan trees in our yard and they are bad about dropping limbs all year, for no reason except maybe a little wind came through. Most of these limbs are bare, but occasionally there will be a limb that falls that has leaves still on it.

Now, when fall and winter comes, the leaves fall off the trees, but if the fallen, dead limbs with leaves are still on the ground or if we have taken them down to the back pasture where we dump all the yard clippings...**you can be assured the leaves are still on the limbs**. Why? **I mean...the leaves have fallen off the live trees...why haven't they fallen off the dead limbs?**

It's because leaves don't fall off trees...they are **pushed off** the trees by the life that is in the tree. As the sap begins to fall in that tree, it pushes off those old dead leaves, and they fall to the ground to make room for the new leaves next Spring. **But, since there's no life on the dead limbs, there's nothing to push off the dead leaves.**

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Isn't God smart? What if He'd arranged that differently? I mean, we have about 35 pecan trees in our yard. Now it's getting to be Fall and it's time for those dead leaves to fall off and I get me a ladder and I climb up one of those trees, and here I am...I'm pulling off all those dead leaves...I'm pulling them off...and you know, they hang on pretty good, and I'm pulling all those old dead leaves...and finally, I finish. It's taken me a whole day, and I look up and oh no! Right at the top there's another leaf...well anyway, close enough...

And, I only have 34 trees to go! Suddenly, God speaks to me and He says, "Gloria, my child, what in the world are you doing?" And, I say, "Well, Father, I'm pulling off all these old dead leaves so there'll be room for new leaves next Spring." And, God says, "You know, I don't ever recall creating anyone so stupid." He says, "Child, you don't have to pull off the dead leaves...all you need to do is to make certain the **tree is alive and healthy and that life is flowing** and it will, by itself, push off all the old dead leaves and make room for the new leaves."

See, Folks, the glorious thing about living on this side of Calvary is that we have the Holy Spirit within us and if we allow Him to have His way with us and we walk in Him, those old dead leaves will take care of themselves...we don't have to pull and tug and get rid of stuff in our lives... He'll do it for us...if we just allow Him to.

In fact, if our "being good" is by our own efforts and our own doing...it won't last...we'll burn out just as I would burn out trying to take all the dead leaves off 35 pecan trees.

Do you see what I'm saying? We don't have to keep the Mosaic Law. But, God has still called His children to obedience. However, our obedience must be joyful and led by the Spirit...not out of duty or resentment or to show others how "spiritual" we are. He has called us to be holy as He is holy, but the holiness must come from the dear Holy Spirit **leading us and guiding us and convicting us and teaching us**. We can't be holy in our own puny strength and effort!!

I pray that what we take with us from the Book of Leviticus is a deep sense of gratitude to the Lord Jesus Christ for shedding His precious blood as our substitutionary atonement.

I pray that we have a renewed desire to walk in the holiness that God has called us to...

And I pray that if there is anyone in this room who is not certain that she has been washed in the blood of the Lamb of God and has the Holy Spirit living within her...that today will be the day of her salvation.