

Leviticus 17 - 21
Laws for Everyday Living
January 6, 2019

Next Week. Leviticus 22-27

Proverbs 28:9. “If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable.”

Wesley's Questions for Class Meetings. #1. “Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?”

What does the Bible Mean?

Leviticus Chapters 17-26 is referred to as the *Holiness Code*. It is an edition of written material for release. It is a *new edition* of relationship instructions (with God and society). The Israelites are called to be holy in a way that reflects Yahweh’s holiness. Holiness is understood beyond God’s presence in the community. Holiness is related to life in the society. We discussed Wesley’s thoughts on that last week. In the Holiness Code social justice and ritual practice are interrelated and both reflect the holiness of Yahweh. The people are to worship properly and to exhibit integrity in their dealings with one another.

The Holiness Code also extends the boundary of community to include aliens. The aliens must be treated fairly and justly. The experiences of the Israelites in Egypt justify the fair treatment of aliens. The code expands the community and embraces all life within the community.

Read. Leviticus 17: 1-13.

The chapter begins with a review of rules of animal sacrifice. These are some additions:

- Sacrifices outside the sanctuary are forbidden and violators are to be cut off from the community. The practice can lead to idol worship.
- Eating blood is forbidden. One who does so will be cut off from the community. Cut off means to be exiled and left alone for God to judge. Blood was seen as the animal’s life. It is used to atone for the people’s lives. Wesley took atonement to an earlier definition, “at-one-ment” or reconciliation. It overcomes the alienation between man and God. Jesus Christ was the ultimate atonement for we sinners.
- Anyone who kills wild game for food or who eats wild game killed by predators may do so but must wash to be cleaned.

Read. Leviticus 18:1 – 20:7.

This is a separate block of the Holiness Code. The section is directed at priests and people alike. The instructions call the people to act in ways that cause them to experience holiness. The instructions regard family relations, worship, judicial rulings,

sexual matters and business practices – every area of the personal and community lives of the people.

Read. Leviticus 18:1-30.

The chapter deals with sexual practices. The Lord instructed Moses that the people must not do as is practiced in Egypt where they used to live. Likewise they should not do as they do in Canaan where they are going.

One item of current debate and discussion is the prohibition in Verse 22 of male homosexual relationships (“to lie with a male as with a woman is detestable or an abomination.”) Nowhere in the Old Testament is lesbianism prohibited.

Verse 18:5, reads, “You must obey (or observe or keep) my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the Lord.) The word is like a soldier's duty on watch. He must pay attention to every detail to protect his fellow soldiers. So we must obey God to protect our fellowship.

The chapter ends with warning. The nations where God (and the Israelites) is going became defiled by these acts by the nations that occupy the land and God will drive the nations out of the land. If Israel follows the actions of its predecessors, it will be vomited out with them. People who do not obey will be cut off from the people.

Read. Leviticus 19: 1-37.

Leviticus 19 continues with some forty-five distinct rulings. It opens with a call to Israel to be holy and offers God's holiness to them as an example and as justification. The apex of Old Testament ethical teachings is found here. It is expressed in the negative and the positive. All of the Ten Commandments are included in some form. Holiness is more than ethics; it is behavior that imitates God's behavior – *imitation Dei* for the theologians!

Some matters dealt with:

- Do not harvest one's crops to the edges of the fields and do not glean (collect grain left from the reapers) the fields. Leave these portions for the poor and aliens.
- Be honest.
- Do not defraud (steal or rob).
- Judgment must not preferential – even for the poor.
- Do not exploit helplessness (hold back wages, curse the deaf and put a stumbling block before the blind).
- Do not *hate* your neighbor (that is active mental plotting in one's heart). Instead bring your feelings into the open and reprove (rebuke or express disapproval) in the open.
- New fruit trees must not be harvested for three years. On the fourth year he harvest is as an offering to God.

- Do not ... put tattoo marks on yourselves.
- Use honest weights and measures.

Social Holiness which is the theme of Chapter 19, is a Wesley “core term.” It focuses on family relations, the poor, fair wages, slander, sexual exploitation, neighborly responsibility, land management and ceremony. Verse 19 is the key verse. “Love your neighbor as yourself.” This was the second “great commandment” quoted by Jesus in all four synoptic gospels and Paul in Romans and Galatians and James. This sums up Social Holiness. In his preface to Hymns and Sacred Poems, Wesley writes, “The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. Faith working by love is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.”

Read. Leviticus 20: 1-27.

Chapter 20 outlines the penalties for violating many regulations. Israel is called to be holy. The holiness reflects God’s holiness and is significantly grounded in history. Israel is treated differently from other peoples. God says they are separate. Israel’s special role is related to their practice of holiness and obedience.

The people are warned that anyone in the land that gives (sacrifices) a child to Moloch (a Phoenician and Amorite god) is to be stoned to death. Such sacrifice defiles God’s sanctuary and profanes his holy name. Likewise anyone who “closes their eyes” to such practice will be cut off from the people if the community fails to put the violator to death.

Other prohibitions:

- Use of spiritualists or mediums (wizards) is forbidden and punished by God.
- Cursing one’s father or mother must be put to death.
- There are many warnings against sexual sins.

Read. Leviticus 21: 1-24.

Chapter 21 is related to priestly activity. Touching a corpse was the worst defilement. The dead were the farthest thing from the holy. A funeral service with the corpse present would have been unimaginable. Any contact by any priest with any corpse was a concession. Priests were only allowed to be with a corpse of his closest blood relatives – not his wife or her relatives.

Priests could not mourn (wear sackcloth or ashes).

Priests couldn’t marry a promiscuous woman, one who had been raped or a divorced woman.

Special requirements were placed on the high priest. He could not show signs of mourning or be in the presence of any corpse or follow the bier in a funeral. He had to marry a virgin (probably a prepubescent) in order to protect the priestly line. Strangely,

no biblical text tells how a high priest was chosen.

The holiness of the sanctuary, the rituals and God himself could not tolerate imperfection. Therefore males of the priestly line who were physically abnormal were not allowed to function as a priest at the altar. They could eat sacrificial offerings, both holy and most holy.

The laws that God gave to Israel were to *set them apart* from other people that they might be “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.” (Exodus 19:6) Wesley followed the New Testament focus on the love of God. He characterized our lives of loving God with all our heart and soul and loving our neighbor as ourselves.”

What does the Bible mean to me?

1. How important to you is taking time to be a friend of God? How much time do we take?
2. What can we do to increase our time with God?
3. How can Christians protect themselves against many of the sexual mores of today?
4. Does following God’s directions help us to live better with our families?... neighbors?...the disadvantaged?
5. What is my chief incentive to be “holy”?
6. Where do we see Satanic, cultic or occult practices today?
7. From what part of the world is most difficult for us to separate ourselves?