

LAW OF HOLINESS - CONTINUED

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Over the past few weeks I have been encouraging us to read and value the Old Testament ... which people tend to avoid.

Most people can't name the first 5 books of the Bible ...let alone be familiar with the content.

Many people mock/scoff at least parts of the Old Testament and claim it's out-of-date or absurd ... of no relevance. Many have the cafeteria approach ... many like to "pick and choose".

The Book of Leviticus is a source of much confusion and debate ... with lots of picking and choosing. It is one of the least-liked books in the Bible? All those sacrifices ... all those strange laws. And yet all scripture is inspired and profitable ... for us.

Leviticus contains a number of laws that cause problems for many New Testament believers. Unclean meats ... we have heard of unclean "footballs" ... what about sowing mixed seeds ... wearing garments of mixed fibres ... what about stoning to death homosexuals and disobedient children.

We've seen how some laws are moral and eternal (murder) ... while others are temporary or limited (circumcision ... or laws for physical priesthood).

Yet ... all the laws do reveal something of God's mind ... very often there is an underlying intent ... and can be valuable to us today.

Last week we started reviewing the "Holiness Code" in Leviticus ... chapters 17-26.

God is a Holy God. He wants His people to be Holy (to be separated from the world. Separated unto Him).

When dealing with carnal ... rebellious Old Testament people ... He set a number of physical standards of Holiness. Things like: Don't touch carcasses of unclean animals if you want to come to the sanctuary. If you did touch unclean carcasses ... you would have to wait until sunset or perhaps bathe.

Although the same physical laws of uncleanness no longer apply (no physical temple) ... we saw that God still expects us to be clean spiritually ... to avoid spiritual uncleanness. The physical law has been replaced with a spiritual law for us today.

1 Peter 1:13-16 (NKJV)

13 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;

14 **as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts**, as in your ignorance;

15 **but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct**,

16 **because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."**

There is an instruction to believers: Be Holy in all conduct. This is for us. And it's quoted from Leviticus Chapter 19. It is a very important principle.

The Book of Leviticus mentions "Holy" or "Holiness" more than 100 times (Hebrew: Qodesh). The book is overflowing with instructions for us to Be Holy.

Let's continue our review of the Holiness Code.

- To better understand some of the "tricky passages"
- To see what applications there are that still apply for us today

We started last week in Leviticus Chapter 17.

Leviticus 17:1-6 (NKJV)

1 And **the Lord spoke to Moses**, saying,

2 "**Speak to Aaron, to his sons, and to all the children of Israel, and say to them**, 'This is the thing which the Lord has commanded, saying:

3 “Whatever man of the house of Israel who kills an ox or lamb or goat in the camp, or who kills it outside the camp,

4 and does not bring it to the door of the tabernacle of meeting to offer an offering to the Lord before the tabernacle of the Lord, the guilt of bloodshed shall be imputed to that man. He has shed blood; and that man shall be cut off from among his people,

5 to the end that **the children of Israel may bring their sacrifices which they offer in the open field, that they may bring them to the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of meeting, to the priest, and offer them as peace offerings to the Lord.**

6 **And the priest shall sprinkle the blood on the altar of the Lord at the door of the tabernacle of meeting,** and burn the fat for a sweet aroma to the Lord.

Sacrifices were only allowed at the sanctuary.

Leviticus 17:10-14 (NKJV)

10 ‘And **whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people.**

11 **For the life of the flesh is in the blood,** and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for **it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.**’

12 Therefore I said to the children of Israel, **‘No one among you shall eat blood, nor shall any stranger who dwells among you eat blood.’**

13 “Whatever man of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who hunts and catches any animal or bird that may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with dust;

14 for it is the life of all flesh. Its blood sustains its life. Therefore I said to the children of Israel, **‘You shall not eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood.** Whoever eats it shall be cut off.’

Don’t eat blood. That still applies today ... compare Genesis Chapter 9 and Acts Chapter 15.

Leviticus 18:6-9 (NKJV)

6 **“None of you shall approach anyone who is near of kin to him, to uncover his nakedness:** I am the Lord.

7 **The nakedness of your father or the nakedness of your mother you shall not uncover.** She is your mother; you shall not uncover her nakedness.

8 **The nakedness of your father's wife you shall not uncover;** it is your father's nakedness.

9 **The nakedness of your sister, the daughter of your father, or the daughter of your mother,** whether born at home or elsewhere, **their nakedness you shall not uncover.**

Incest was prohibited. That is still applicable today. Most countries have legislation about this.

Remember: In any event ...Biblically ... only legitimate “relationships” are between two married people (ignoring polygamy for now). Everything else is either fornication ... or adultery or homosexuality.

We finished up in Leviticus 18:22-29 ... so let's pick up there.

Leviticus 18:22 (NKJV)

22 **You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination.**

Homosexuality is an abomination.

This (and Leviticus Chapter 20) is **the big problem to many today ... even churches.** Because our societies not only tolerate homosexuality ... they want to celebrate it as something wonderful ... with numerous Gay Pride Events ... and many see this verse as an expression of hate ... a hate crime. Entirely unChristian. A proof to them that we should reject the Old Testament. In fact ... reject God and the whole Bible!!

Many churches get embarrassed by these references to homosexuality ... “it’s a cultural matter ... for ancient times ... not relevant for us today ... modern believers who live in love towards all”.

Quite a few churches have now (or are increasingly) accepting and welcoming “gays” into their fellowships ... some even offering same-sex marriages. They claim they're being loving and tolerant and inclusive ... and “Christian” ... towards homosexuals.

Just another area where “the world” and its standards are invading many churches. Making the Book of Leviticus ... and particularly chapters 18 and 20 ... a real battleground.

Leviticus 18:23-30 (NKJV)

23 **Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it. Nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. It is perversion.**

24 “Do not defile yourselves with any of these things; for by all these the nations are defiled, which I am casting out before you.

25 For the land is defiled; therefore I visit the punishment of its iniquity upon it, and the land vomits out its inhabitants.

26 **You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, and shall not commit any of these abominations,** either any of your own nation or any stranger who dwells among you

27 (for all these abominations the men of the land have done, who were before you, and thus the land is defiled),

28 lest the land vomit you out also when you defile it, as it vomited out the nations that were before you.

29 **For whoever commits any of these abominations, the persons who commit them shall be cut off from among their people.**

30 **‘Therefore you shall keep My ordinance, so that you do not commit any of these abominable customs which were committed before you, and that you do not defile yourselves by them: I am the Lord your God.’** ” (*I am the Lord your God = Be Holy for I am Holy*)

Bestiality. Remember when we looked at the New Testament use of “unclean”. It nearly always appears in association with sexual immorality (which is the focus of Leviticus Chapter 18).

Leviticus 19:1-2 (NKJV)

1 And **the Lord spoke** to Moses, saying,

2 **“Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy.**

Be Holy! Still applies! The Apostle Peter quoted it to us earlier.

Leviticus 19:3-4 (NKJV)

3 **“Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths:** I am the Lord your God. (*I am the Lord your God = Be Holy for I am Holy*)

4 **“Do not turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molded gods:** I am the Lord your God. (*I am the Lord your God = Be Holy for I am Holy*)

Three of the Ten Commandments .. still applicable.

Ephesians 6:1-3 (NKJV)

1 **Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.**

2 **“Honour your father and mother,” which is the first commandment with promise:**

3 **“that it may be well with you and you may live long on the earth.”**

Paul quotes the 5th commandment. (One of the Big 10). These are moral laws and are still applicable today ... for all people.

Leviticus 19:9-17 (NKJV)

9 **“When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not wholly reap the corners of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 And you shall not glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather every grape of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger:** I am the Lord your God. (*I am the Lord your God = Be Holy for I am Holy*)

11 **“You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.**

12 And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.

13 **“You shall not cheat your neighbour, nor rob him.** The wages of him who is hired shall not remain with you all night until morning.

14 You shall not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind, but shall fear your God: I am the Lord.

15 “You shall do no injustice in judgment. You shall not be partial to the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty. In righteousness you shall judge your neighbour.

16 **You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people;** nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbour: I am the Lord.

17 “You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbour, and not bear sin because of him.

• Make provision for the poor ... as a principle . This still applies today. (not literally this way now ... not many would go out to glean in the fields)

- Don't steal (one of the "Big 10")
- Don't defraud your neighbour
- Don't be partial or biased in judgment ... be scrupulously fair with your neighbours
- Don't be a slanderer ... telling tales

All God's laws. All very sensible laws. All useful today? All marks of Holiness?

Leviticus 19:18 (NKJV)

18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but **you shall love your neighbour as yourself:** I am the Lord.

Love your neighbour as yourself.

Probably no one disputes this law? A sign of a real Christian? Yet it's in the next chapter to condemnation of homosexual conduct. How can churches accept one law ... and not the other? Or even claim that by accepting homosexual conduct they are loving their neighbour as themselves? So somehow they are complying with Leviticus 19:18 by rejecting Leviticus 18:22.

Jesus endorses this as one of the 2 greatest commandments ... quoting Leviticus!

Leviticus 19:19 (NKJV)

19 "**You shall keep My statutes.** **You shall not let your livestock breed with another kind.** **You shall not sow your field with mixed seed.** **Nor shall a garment of mixed linen and wool come upon you.**

Critics make a big issue of this verse. But it's fairly modest in some ways.

What penalty applies? None (other laws ... say you are unclean so you have to bathe ... or some laws that have the death penalty). But ... no penalty here in this verse.

In a sense ... very good advice?

God created creatures “after their kinds”. Trying to “mix” breeds is unlikely to improve God’s creation? Horses and donkeys produce mules ... by and large that are usually infertile.

Mixed seeds in a “commercial” field is likely to cause problems? Different growth patterns ... they need different soils ... different times of maturing/harvest ... different heights at harvest etc.

Garments of materials from very different sources ... linen and wool. Linen is of plant origin (flax plant) ... wool is of animal origin (sheep/goats and similar). Wool is often worn to keep warm ... linen to keep cool ... so it might make an awkward combination? The instruction is specific to linen and wool ... not other mixtures.

What is God’s intent? Is God really that bothered about these things. Be Holy ... be separate! God wants His people to be separate ... from the world’s ways. Not mixing with heathen nations and gradually acquiring their ways and their values and their standards. God doesn’t want His people mixing with other people that will cause them harm.

There is a spiritual lesson involved. It was okay for Israel to trade with nearby nations ... to visit them ... but they needed to maintain a certain amount of separation ... not to mix too closely.

For example. You could have horses and cows can share a field ... but don’t try to mix too closely ... to breed them.

Likewise you could have barley and grapes in fields next to each other ... but don’t mix too closely.

We can be close to the world ... but not that close. Israel should have remained separate ... learned the lesson of purity ... being Holy. But they didn’t. You know the history!

Psalms 106:34-40 (NKJV)

34 **They did not destroy the peoples,**

Concerning whom the Lord had commanded them,

35 But **they mingled with the Gentiles**

And learned their works; *(God wanted them driven out)*

36 **They served their idols,**

Which became a snare to them.

37 **They even sacrificed their sons**

And their daughters to demons,

38 **And shed innocent blood,**

The blood of their sons and daughters,

Whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan;

And the land was polluted with blood. *(How bad can it get when you get too close to the heathen?)*

39 **Thus they were defiled by their own works,**

And played the harlot by their own deeds.

40 **Therefore the wrath of the Lord was kindled against His people,**

So that He abhorred His own inheritance. *(That's how bad it got)*

(NCV) "They mixed with the other nations and learned their customs" *(That was a problem)*

It's hard to imagine that an eternal majestic God would be particularly interested in a garment of mixed fibres ... but He'll be exceedingly interested in the spiritual lesson of His Holy Saints mixing too closely with the world.

2 Corinthians 6:14-15 (NKJV)

14 **Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?**

15 **And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?**

Yoked = too close! To be pretty close to someone ... joined to them. We are supposed to be separate from the world. There has to be a separation.

2 Corinthians 6:16-17 (NKJV)

16 And **what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God.** As God has said:

"I will dwell in them

And walk among them.

I will be their God,

And they shall be My people."

17 Therefore

**“Come out from among them
And be separate, says the Lord.
Do not touch what is unclean,
And I will receive you.”**

Be separate! Don't be among them!

2 Corinthians 7:1 (NKJV)

1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, **let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.**

Keep away from what's unclean. Don't get too intimate with the world ... its values and its standards.

We are in the world ... and inevitably must associate with various people ... like horses and cows in the same field ... but don't get too intimate with the world. Maintain a healthy and a Holy separation ... AS A HOLY PEOPLE. We can't afford to acquire their ways and values.

1 Corinthians 15:33 (NKJV)

33 **Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits.”**

1 Corinthians 15:33 (NIV)

33 **Do not be misled: “Bad company corrupts good character.”**

Look around your associates ... families ... church experiences. The lesson applies ... even in church.

Maybe we don't need to get too excited about the content of our shirts or blouses ... or being careful to keep green beans and lettuces separate in our kitchen gardens ... but the Godly principle is to KEEP SEPARATE what should be kept separate. KEEP OURSELVES SEPARATE AND HOLY from a carnal world. We can't do it perfectly ... but avoid intimate contact ... if it's getting too close and we are getting too close to the world's ways.

I spent a bit of time on this topic ... as it seems to generate a lot of comment. But notice ... only one verse ... and not even any penalty. Just some good advice from God!

Leviticus 19:26-28 (NKJV)

26 **“You shall not eat anything with the blood, nor shall you practice divination or soothsaying.** *(The occult is not where we should be found)*

27 **You shall not shave around the sides of your head, nor shall you disfigure the edges of your beard.**

28 **You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor tattoo any marks on you: I am the Lord.**

Leviticus 19:27 (KJV)

27 **Ye shall not round the corners of your heads, neither shalt thou mar the corners of thy beard.**

A number of Jewish sects sport “ringlets” ... hanging down over their ears. Various styles. Some will trim their beards but only use scissors or an electric razor ... but not cut-throat razor or blade. Rabbis have lots of rules. Most Jews don’t pay any attention.

What’s this all about? The NKJV and others ... “don’t shave” around the side of the head. Don’t disfigure (destroy ... corrupt) the beard.

As far as can be known ... it seems to be pagan worship practices ... common in Egypt and Canaan. Historians seem to think it was customary in some cultures to “shape” the beard to honour pagan gods or goddesses.

Specific context ... though not fully clear 3,500 years later. It is okay to be clean-shaven!

What about tattoos?

There is only half a verse in the entire Bible. It seems to be in context of “for the dead” though not very clear. Something of a pagan practice. What can we learn from that? Not a lot really.

There are good reasons to be cautious about getting a tattoo. What’s the downsides? Some get infected. Some pigments believed to be

carcinogenic. They are generally permanent. Approximately 20% of people regret having a tattoo (as they get older ... or circumstances change). Years ago it used to be sailors and “rebels” ... now it seems everybody and his dog is getting a tattoo.

I'd find it difficult to condemn having a tattoo ...based on half a verse ... that might once have been related to some heathen practice linked to the dead.

However ... many churches will condemn based on this half a verse (for example: United Church of God and Living Church of God and other churches of God).

Some might also question the intent. Is it rebellion (less so nowadays)? To appear worldly?

Leviticus 19:31-37 (NKJV)

31 **“Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them:** I am the Lord your God.

32 **“You shall rise before the grey headed and honour the presence of an old man, and fear your God:** I am the Lord.

33 **“And if a stranger dwells with you in your land, you shall not mistreat him.**

34 **The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt:** I am the Lord your God.

35 **“You shall do no injustice in judgment, in measurement of length, weight, or volume.**

36 **You shall have honest scales, honest weights, an honest ephah, and an honest hin:** I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt.

37 **“Therefore you shall observe all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them: I am the Lord.”**

Very sensible laws!

Onto chapter 20. This deals with capital punishment ... the death penalty.

The Code of Holiness contains a variety of laws and instructions ... about temple worship ... moral ... temporary ... some for just the priests etc.

The penalty also varies. For uncleanness ... it might be just wait for sunset. For some ... like wearing a garment of linen/wool ... no penalty. For serious crimes ... death penalty.

The West Wing episode poked fun at the scriptures ... “can I burn my mother in a small family gathering for wearing garments of different threads?” He’s mocking and scoffing.

Firstly ... no penalty at all there!

Secondly ... death penalty is after due legal process. It requires judges ... a full detailed investigation of the facts and 2 or 3 witnesses (and a false witness would suffer the same fate!)

Some would like to criticise the Old Testament as being primitive. But compare ... in Leviticus 20 ... only about 5 or 6 crimes that require capital punishment ... in England in the 1800s over 200 crimes required capital punishment! Including pick-pockets ... stealing from rabbit warrens ... stealing from shipwreck!!

Now the death penalty is no longer legal in the United Kingdom.

Leviticus 20:6-8 (NKJV)

6 “And **the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face against that person and cut him off from his people.**

7 **Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the Lord your God.**

8 And **you shall keep My statutes, and perform them: I am the Lord who sanctifies you.**

Leviticus 20:27 (NKJV)

27 ‘**A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones.** Their blood shall be upon them.’ ”

In God’s eyes the death penalty must apply.

Leviticus 20:9 (NKJV)

9 “For **everyone who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother. His blood shall be upon him.**

This is often misquoted. Not general disobedience (all kids have their moments). The Book of Proverbs contains lots of instruction for dealing with disobedience and foolishness in the heart of a child.

Not “cuss”. To curse = to treat him with contempt ... to treat as despicable. Really serious abuse ... mentally/emotionally ... possibly physical.

It would have to be brought to judges to investigate fully ... to hear from witnesses. If it all “stacks up”. Then ... if guilty ... the death penalty.

Jesus seems to absolutely endorse this penalty?

Mark 7:5-13 (NKJV)

5 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked Him, “Why do Your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashed hands?” (*They haven’t washed their hands in the “special way”*)

6 He answered and said to them, “**Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites**, as it is written:

‘This people honours Me with their lips,

But their heart is far from Me.

7 And in vain they worship Me,

Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’

8 **For laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men—the washing of pitchers and cups, and many other such things you do.’**

9 He said to them, “**All too well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your tradition.**

10 For Moses said, “Honour your father and your mother’; and, **‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’**

11 But you say, “If a man says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever profit you might have received from me is Corban’—’ (that is, a gift to God),

12 then you no longer let him do anything for his father or his mother,

13 **making the word of God of no effect through your tradition which you have handed down. And many such things you do.”**

They rejected the commandments of God so they could keep their traditions.

Today ... we are no longer in a civil state governed directly by God ... and under His laws. So you and I can't enforce the death penalty.

We now submit to the laws of our countries ... who know better than God ... and have their own very different approaches to the death penalty. I suspect God's laws would be more effective!!

So we should look at the Book of Leviticus and the Code of Holiness and see that there are lessons that we should learn that are applicable for us today.