

Understanding God in the Old Testament

A God of Holiness

Leviticus 18-20

This morning I want to continue on in our look of God in the Old Testament and look at the book of Leviticus 18-20. I pray that from last week's message that many of you found new freedom in your relationship with God. It is so important for us to understand that our salvation is not found on performance or achievement, it is not found in meeting someone's expectations, but it is found simply in the kindness and love of God that sent his Son into this world.

We have been called to walk in grace, in mercy, and in the power of the work of Jesus Christ. All of the formula's that you read in books, all the expectations of religious Christians, all of the "should's" that we hear within the Christian faith fail to see grace and turn back to a life of law.

I think it has something to do with insecurity and fear hoping that limits will protect us. Or with ingrained training from our childhood when following the rules over relationship was enforced. Or with trying to take control of our circumstances when in reality we can't even control our own behavior. People who gravitate to rules and regulations find comfort in maintaining some sense of order, yet we live in a world of uncontrollable desires, wants, and power.

The reason why rules and regulations don't save people is because they are sinful and lawless people. We all have this problem. That is why faith in Jesus Christ is the only answer – a work that is done by him, with his own power, with his own purity, with his own sacrifice, and with this own love. A faith based on relationship with him and not rules given by him. Relationship is the key. That is why he even told the Israelites in Exodus that his goal was "That he would be their God, and that they would be his people."

A new bond was to take place – a relationship that was to require a different life from them compared to what the rest of the world was doing. This relationship calls us to a different life as well. A life that is different based on God's grace. A life of holiness – separated from the way the world lives to a life focused on one's relationship with God.

In chapter 18 we find that God is preparing the Israelites to go to Canaan. He knows the dangers of influence of the other cultures and so he gives them clear expectations as to what a relationship with him should look like. Look with me at **Leviticus 18:1-5**:

Then the Lord said to Moses, 2 "Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. I am the Lord your God. 3 So do not act like the people in Egypt, where you used to live, or like the people of Canaan, where I am taking you. You must not imitate their way of life. 4 You must obey all my regulations and be careful to

obey my decrees, for I am the Lord your God. 5 If you obey my decrees and my regulations, you will find life through them. I am the Lord.

First, we find that challenges them to not live like they used to live in Egypt. While in Egypt they were surrounded by idols and luxuries in life, often voicing that they would rather be in the comfort of Egypt than in the wilderness with God. I believe that **As human beings we fall into the trap of living our lives in the past instead of moving forward in our relationship with God.**

Those who remain in the past get too comfortable, they get stuck in their learning, they lack any sense of adventure and newness, and they become apathetic hoping that things will go back to the “Good Old Days”. **When God calls us to be holy people, he calls us out of the past into an adventure of daily growth and maturity.** We can either resist God and be nothing but people who fill a chair on a Sunday morning, or we can enter in with God being people who live everyday with purpose and meaning. **Romans 6:4** tells us:

4 For we died and were buried with Christ by baptism. And just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, now we also may live new lives.

Living a life of holiness means that pursue a new way of life. A call out of the past into a new hope of the future. If you are a Christian who’s life is no different today than your life before you learned of who Jesus Christ was, then you don’t understand the Good News of Jesus. He came so that you would have life and have it more abundantly. Jesus came so that your life would change and that his grace would motivate you to share the Good News with other people.

Second, we read that God challenges the Israelites not to live like the people of Canaan, the place he was taking them to. The land of Canaan was known for its idolatry, its sexual immorality and drunkenness. Although many would debate over how bad it was in comparison to our world today, the reality is that even though we may seem more civilized about it, we are surrounded by these same things in our society.

Is it difficult to be a devoted believer of Jesus Christ in the world we live in today? Are we constantly faced with impure thoughts and ideas that constantly bombard our homes each and everyday? Absolutely! Is it difficult to live a different life than those around us who don’t know Jesus Christ? Yes! For anyone to deny the challenge of living a life devoted to God in this world would be done so in ignorance.

We are surrounded by a culture that makes it difficult to live for God. In order to maintain our relationship with God we need to separate ourselves from the negative influences of our culture. Philippians 4:8 tells us:

Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise.

We have to make sure that we do not saturate ourselves with this world and lose our identity as God's people. **Living a life of holiness means that we cannot allow ourselves to be absorbed by the surrounding society because it will bring confusion and ineffectiveness to our relationship with God.** We have to spend more time in God's Word, more time in learning more about God through solid Biblical teaching, more time in listening to God, more time in worship and praise to God, than we give our ear to this world.

If I was to ask you what percentage of your time you give to listening to the world compared to listening to God's word and his voice, what would you say it would be? Fifty-Fifty? If we aren't careful we may find ourselves slipping away from a new life back into the old. That is why there needs to be an edge to our faith, **We always have to do preventative maintenance on our faith to keep it stronger than the noise of this world.** **Romans 10:17** tells us:

17 So faith comes from hearing, that is, hearing the Good News about Christ.

We need to do all that we can to be holy people – people who separate ourselves from the behaviors and values of this world, and separate ourselves to God and his working in and through our lives.

We then read on in chapter 19 and find that God give the Israelites instructions in regards to personal behavior. Here is where we find the theme verse of the book in **Leviticus 19:2**:

You must be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.

I want to remind us that the term “holy” here means “to separate or move away from.” God wants us to live our lives differently than the world. So, here God moves from cultural influence to social responsibility. We know that during the time of the Old Testament that sin ran rampant, bringing the flood of Noah that wiped out mankind because he was so full of sin, and that during this time that a sense of civility was greatly lacking. Yet, I think we can all agree that even in our image of civility today, there are still elements of barbaric behavior. (Geico Commercial: Caveman)

God wanted the Israelites to live their lives with a sense of responsibility to those around them. **Living a life of holiness means that we wouldn't treat each other as objects or with thoughtlessness, but that we would treat each other as people created by God, loved by God, and valued by God.** In fact, we have seen that even in the 10 Commandments that 6 out of the 10 commandments deal with how we treat others.

The way we are to treat other people should be determined by God and not by religious people or even lawless society. Instead of taking on someone else's opinion, we need to go to God and ask him. And if God died for them and loves them, then we need to treat them as God's valued possession. **John 3:16** (a popular verse) tells us:

16 *“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.*

8 *But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. Romans 5:8*

God loves the people of this world, even when they are in their sin. Their sin does not give us license to treat them with less regard than the next. Their sin doesn't give us license to treat them with less regard than our fellow brother and sister in Christ. God values them and therefore we must value them as well. Yes! We guard ourselves from their worldly influence pursuing a new life, but they are God's creation who deserve all the love and patience that God showed us.

Then we come to chapter 20 where God first speaks to the Israelites about Idolatry. The particular deity that he refers to is the god Molech to whom the people in Canaan offered child sacrifices. People also worshipped this deity through ceremonial prostitution and by seeking mediums (Psychics). It was like a religious frenzy.

Living a life of holiness means that we keep our eyes on the only true God and not allow the influence of other religions to sway our faith - Ideas such as Karma, reincarnation, relativism, salvation by works, enlightenment and many more. Instead of listening to this world's ideas, let's go right to the true revelation of God in Scripture and follow that instead.

And finally in chapter 20 we find that there is to be punishments for disobedience. Although today we can find grace and mercy from our sin, there still remains the repercussion of it. Although we can find release from the guilt and shame, and the hurt in our relationship with God, we still have to go through the results of our sin. **Living a life of holiness means that we pursue a different way of life so that we can live beyond the norm and fulfill a special calling given by God.** Otherwise our lives will get tied up in the repercussions of our living instead of the new calling of our lives.

We serve a God of holiness – A God who calls us to be different from the rest of the world, a God who asks us to allow him to influence our lives and not allow the world to drown out his voice. He doesn't want us to live in the past, he doesn't want us to get caught up in today, but he wants us to listen and follow him as our Father God. He wants us to love people and value them, treating them with respect as his creation.

We need to be careful! We need to watch what influences us. We need to do spiritual preventative maintenance by being in God's word, feeding our soul with His truth, so that we can keep an edge to our faith that can cut through any worldly idea that can so easily slip in. We serve a God of holiness who calls us to a new life. Let us walk with him and let him change us into his new creation. Let's Pray!