

EXODUS: Lesson Seven, Sinai: Priesthood and Holiness
Leviticus 1-15, 17-22, 24, 26-27

Subject: Holiness is demanded in offerings, priestly duties, purification, and other laws.

Main Idea: Holiness is a believer's greatest need.

Principles:

1. *Atonement is the only means by which we can approach a Holy God.*
2. *Holy living involves separation from sin and putting on Christ's righteousness.*

Introduction

What comes to mind when you hear the word “holiness”? Maybe you think of a person who is morally rigid or is disinterested in anything unreligious. Perhaps you think of a person who claims to have magical, spiritual powers. You may think holiness is something you will never have or would even want to have.

Few people have a Biblical understanding of holiness. If they did, they would find it extremely desirable. Jonathan Edwards wrote, “He that sees the beauty of holiness, or true moral good, sees the greatest and most important thing in the world.”ⁱ The Bible portrays holiness as a believer's greatest need! Does this surprise you? You may think your greatest need is to be more loving, more honest, or more self-disciplined, but do you know *why* we do not love as we should, *why* we are not more honest, *why* we are not more self-controlled? It is because we are not holy. Sometimes we think our greatest need is to have a burden lifted or a provision met. Did you know that God is more concerned with our holiness than with our comfort? Warren Wiersbe writes, “Happiness, not holiness, is the chief pursuit of most people today, including many professed Christians. They want Jesus to solve their problems and carry their burdens, but they don't want Him to control their lives and change their character. It doesn't disturb them that eight times in the Bible, God said to His people, ‘Be holy, for I am holy,’ *and He means it.*” In truth, we will never have true happiness apart from holiness.

Holiness has to do with separation from what is “unclean” and consecration to what is pure. At its root, however, holiness means “whole-ness.” God is holy because He is complete. We, on the other hand, are incomplete, but God's plan is to make us whole. Have you ever thought of holiness as your greatest need?

Holiness is the theme of the book of Leviticus. This lesson covers most of the book (three chapters that discuss Israel's special observances will be covered in Lesson 8). After a general introduction, we will study the four distinct sections of Leviticus in two major divisions.

I. Introduction to Leviticus

A. Authorship and Titles

- i. Author: Jesus affirmed that Moses was the author of Leviticus (Matthew 8:4; Mark 1:44). He did so under the inspiration and direction of the Holy Spirit (1:1; 4:1; 6:1, 7:37-38; 26:4, 7; 37:27-28, etc.).
- i. Title: Many centuries after it was written, the title “Leviticus” was given to this book of the Bible by men who translated the Hebrew text into Greek (the result is known as the Septuagint). The title refers to the Israelite descendants of Levi. The Levites were the keepers of the Tabernacle (Numbers 8:10-15). Specific instructions for their work are not given until the book of Numbers. However, Leviticus explains the work of Aaron and his descendants, the priests, who were also Levites.
- ii. Rabbinic Titles: The rabbinic name for the book was *torat kohanim*, “instructions for [or by] the priests.” The priests were not only to receive these instructions, they were also responsible for teaching them to the people (Leviticus 10:10-11; Jeremiah 18:18; Haggai 2:10-13; Malachi 2:6-7).ⁱⁱ *Wayyiqra’* was the more common Hebrew name by which this book was known, from the first word of the text (“And He called”). While we may find it unusual that the book begins with the conjunction “and,” this closely connects it with the previous book of Exodus. At the close of Exodus, the Tabernacle construction was completed and God told Moses to ordain the priests (Exodus 40:12-15). According to God’s instructions, their ordination was to include sacrifices. Before the ordination could take place and the priests could begin their official duties, they needed instructions about *how* to offer the sacrifices.

B. Outline: Leviticus 1-7 explain how sacrifices were to be offered. Leviticus 8-10 logically follows, recording the priests’ ordination. Once installed into their positions, the priests were also responsible for teaching the people God’s ways. Hence, God gave them the principles they were to teach. Chapters 11-17 largely contain laws about remaining in a pure state, which was essential to participation in worshipping at the Tabernacle. An “unclean” individual was not considered fit to participate in the sacrifices and worship. Chapters 18-27, often called the “Holiness Code,” contain specific laws about living holy lives. Three special chapters are devoted to the importance of feasting and celebration and are covered separately in our next lesson. We can further condense the four sections of Leviticus into two categories: the first half of the book taught the Israelites *how to approach their holy God* (chapters 1-10) and the second half of the book taught them *how to live holy lives* (chapters 11-27).

- C. Story Line:** The Israelites arrived at Sinai just a couple of months after they left Egypt (Exodus 19:1) and remained for nearly a year (Numbers 10:11). Since the Tabernacle was set up one year after the Israelites' departure from Egypt (Exodus 40:2), Moses presumably received all of the instructions in Leviticus sometime near the end of their year at Sinai. We only find two short narratives in all of Leviticus. Except for these, the action does not resume until Numbers 10, when the Israelites finally depart from Sinai.
- D. Theme:** Variations of the word "holiness" appear 150 times in Leviticus. Key verses instructed the Israelites that they were to be holy because God, whom they represented, is holy (Leviticus 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:26; 21:8, 15, 23).
- E. Relevance:** The book of Leviticus was the first book studied by a Jewish child.ⁱⁱⁱ However, considering its content, we might ask whether the book is relevant for us today. It is, after all, predominantly a book of ceremonies and rituals. Sometimes the Law of Moses is divided into three categories: moral laws (such as the Ten Commandments), civil laws (the laws that pertain to Old Testament society, such as those found in the Book of the Covenant [Exodus 21-23]), and ceremonial laws (such as those we find in Leviticus). The moral laws are binding for all time. In one form or another, the New Testament repeats them. However, as the book of Hebrews emphasizes, the priesthood and the system of sacrifices have been fulfilled in Jesus. We no longer need a priest to act as an intermediary nor do we need to make animal sacrifices. Nevertheless, we should see *all the laws* as valuable for our instruction and containing principles by which we should live. Holiness is the great need of people in every generation.

II. Approaching a Holy God – Leviticus 1-10

- A. Offerings** – Leviticus 1-7: The first seven chapters in Leviticus describe five kinds of sacrifices, first describing them from the perspective of the worshipper's responsibility (1:2) and then giving additional instructions for the priests (6:8).
- i. Description and Purpose of Offerings
 1. *Basis of Offerings*
 - a. The Lord's Covenant was the basis upon which the Israelites had become God's people. The system of sacrifices was given in that context. In other words, the Israelites offered sacrifices to a God with whom they already had a relationship. The sacrifices were not intended as a means by which they *bought* the relationship, but a means by which they *responded* to their gracious God and a means of *renewing* their fellowship with Him.

- b. The sacrifices were “an aroma pleasing to the Lord” (1:9, 13, 17; 2:2, 9; 3:5; 4:31; 6:15, 21). Physically speaking, smoke rose from each sacrifice and produced a pleasing aroma. Since God is spirit, the phrase reflects His pleasure and acceptance of true worship.
2. *Voluntary Nature of Many Offerings*: The first three of the five sacrifices were voluntary offerings. The second two were compulsory as atonement for sin (4:1; 5:14). The fact that three of the five offerings listed were voluntary indicates that the motive for giving was of primary importance. Sadly, throughout their history, the Israelites repeatedly resorted to legalistic worship rather than giving out of gratitude and a genuine desire to renew their fellowship with God.
 3. *According to Financial Ability*: The animals that could be presented were domestic rather than wild ones, thereby making their sacrifice costly. Although what was offered varied, what did not vary was the quality of the sacrifice. The animals were to be perfect specimens and the flour offered was to be the finest flour. The financial ability of the worshipper determined their offering: the most poor offered only grain while others offered birds or mammals, according to their financial ability.
 4. *Centralized and Regulated Worship*: The Israelites were familiar with the practice of sacrifice. It was practiced by all the nations surrounding them. Formerly, the Israelites offered sacrifices in their own way and in locations of their own choosing (Leviticus 17:3-8), just as the pagans did. From this time forward, the Lord required them to only be offered at the Tabernacle, where a priest would act as mediator (17:5). Furthermore, pagan ceremonies of sacrifice sometimes included the drinking of blood (17:10), based on a superstitious belief that it was a means of taking the animal’s strength into one’s own being. The Israelites were to reject such practices. Instead, the shedding of blood was to bring a humbling sense of the loss of life, which was the cost of their forgiveness (chapter 17 emphasizes that blood symbolizes life and that life is sacred).
 5. *Worshipper’s Involvement*: Finally, the worshipper was very involved in the sacrifice process.
 - a. The fact that the animals offered were domestic identified the worshipper with their sacrifice, whether for dedication, thanksgiving, or forgiveness of sin. To further the sense of identification, the worshippers put their hands on the head of the animal before killing it, symbolically demonstrating that

“this animal is mine and is being offered in my place.” whether for dedication, thanksgiving, or forgiveness of sin. Although the text does not indicate it, most scholars believe that the worshippers spoke certain words over the animal when they laid their hands on it. For a Sin Offering or Guilt Offering, those words were likely a confession of sin.

- b. The worshipper killed the animal, then skinned, cut, and washed it.
 - c. The priests’ role was to use the blood in the prescribed manner, then arrange and burn the prescribed pieces of meat on the altar. The priests also benefited from the offerings by receiving portions of certain sacrifices as their means of providing for themselves and their families.
 - d. With certain sacrifices, the worshippers also ate portions of the meat. “The Jews didn’t eat a great deal of meat because it was too costly to slaughter their animals... [Therefore,] any animal used for food had to be brought to the altar and presented as a fellowship (peace) offering to the Lord.”^{iv}
- ii. Types of Offerings: The first three sacrifices (Burnt, Grain, and Fellowship) are the most common in the Old Testament. The last two offerings (Sin and Guilt Offerings) were specifically for atonement for sin.
1. *The Burnt Offering* – 1:1-17; 6:8-13: The Burnt Offering is the only one in which the entire animal was burnt on the altar. Although it was for atonement (1:4), the entire burning of it indicates its special emphasis was dedication.
 2. *The Grain Offering* (also known as a “Meat” Offering [an outdated use of the term “meat,” not referring to animal flesh] or Cereal Offering) – 2:1-16; 6:14-23: The root meaning of the Hebrew term translated “Grain Offering” implies that it was a gift. Grain Offerings often accompanied Burnt Offerings and Fellowship Offerings. When used these ways, they were an expression of thanksgiving to God. They also served as a substitute Sin Offering for the most poor among the people, 5:11-12.) The Grain Offerings were always to be prepared without yeast, reminding the Israelites of their haste in leaving Egypt and how the Lord had redeemed them (Deuteronomy 16:3). However, these offerings were required to contain salt. As a preservative, salt reminded the Israelites of God’s covenant faithfulness. The priests received a portion of this offering.

3. *The Fellowship Offering* – 3:1-17; 7:11-36: Chapter 7 subdivides Fellowship Offerings into three separate types: Thank Offerings for specific blessings (Leviticus 7:12-15), Freewill Offerings (7:16) for general expressions of gratitude, and Votive Offerings (7:16) for vows. The worshippers ate the Fellowship Offerings, along with the priests, as part of a celebratory and sacred meal in which God was perceived to be the honored guest.^v The fat, considered to be the premier portion, was always offered to the Lord (3:16).
 4. *The Sin Offering* – 4:1-5:13; 6:24-30: The Sin Offering provided atonement for specific, *unintentional sins* in which no restitution was involved. These offerings were not voluntary, like the offerings listed earlier. Rather, they were required as a result of specific sins. It is of importance to note that no immediate provision was made for sins committed willfully, such as defiance of one of the Ten Commandments (Numbers 15:30-31). The only hope for a person who sinned willfully was the mercy of God in response to repentance (such as David expressed in Psalm 51 after committing adultery with Bathsheba).
 5. *The Guilt Offering* – 5:14-6:7; 7:1-10: The Guilt Offering differed from the Sin Offering in that it dealt with cases of sin in which restitution was required. In addition to animal sacrifice, such an offense required full restitution plus a twenty percent penalty.
 6. *Other Offerings*: Drink Offerings, referred to elsewhere (Exodus 30:9; 37:16; Leviticus 23:13; Numbers 6:15, etc.) sometimes accompanied Burnt, Grain, or Fellowship Offerings. Other kinds of offerings that are mentioned in the Law of Moses include special purification rituals, fulfillment of Nazirite vows, and special acts of consecration.^{vi}
- iii. Limitations of Offerings: The sacrifices (primarily the Sin and Guilt Offerings) made atonement for sin. Leviticus 1-7 refers to atonement thirteen times. To ‘make atonement’ (*kipper*) indicates “an act of reconciliation with an aggrieved individual... The worshipper angered God by his sin... and the atoning sacrifice pacified the Lord’s anger. The English word *atonement* reflects this idea of reconciliation (separated parties now “at-one”[reconciled]).^{vii} We might ask, “Did these rituals of sacrifice actually merit peace with God?”

1. A number of Old Testament passages clearly indicate that the ritual of offering sacrifices, in and of itself, was meaningless (Psalm 40:6-8, 51:16-17; Amos 5:21-24). Hebrews 10 and 11 affirm this. Abel's sacrifice (Genesis 4:4) was pleasing to God because it was brought in faith (Hebrews 11:4). *Faith* is what pleases God (Genesis 15:6; Hebrews 11:6).
2. Additionally, the blood of the animal did not merit God's forgiveness. Hebrews 10:4 says, "For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins." The only adequate sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins is the blood of Jesus.
3. Another inadequacy of the system of sacrifices was that they were not exhaustive in atoning for *all* sin (i.e. volitional sin). For this reason, the gifts and sacrifices offered were unable to clear the consciences of the worshipper (Hebrews 9:9). Only Christ's blood can cleanse our consciences and do away with *all* sin (Hebrews 9:14, 26). As the author of Hebrews writes, "And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary" (10:18).
4. *In every age*, forgiveness has been granted by God's grace in response to genuine repentance and in view of Jesus' sacrifice. Of course, the Israelites in Moses' day probably had very little understanding of the person and work of Christ. The *object* of their faith was God Himself but the *content* of faith increased as progressive revelation concerning the Messiah was given (such as Isaiah 53:10).^{viii} In other words, although Jesus' sacrifice had not occurred yet, the benefits of His sacrifice for Old Testament believers was real.
5. We also must note that such forgiveness has always been personal, not corporate. The covenant God made with the Israelites at Sinai brought them into a corporate relationship with Yahweh. However, in every age, a personal relationship with God has always been on the basis of personal faith. The account of Israel's patriarchs (particularly the life of Abraham) demonstrates this (Genesis 15:6).

B. Institution of Priests – Leviticus 8-10

- i. The Ordination Ceremony – chapter 8: Leviticus 8 mirrors Exodus 29, in which the Lord gave Moses instructions for consecrating the priests. The ceremony took place over seven days and involved three steps. First, the priests were washed and dressed in their special attire. Next, the Tabernacle and the priests were anointed with special oil. Finally, three sacrifices were offered: a Sin Offering (bull), a Burnt Offering (ram), and a Fellowship Offering (second ram). Blood was smeared on Aaron's right ear, thumb, and big toe, indicating his ordination for service.

ii. Sacrifices for Israel – Chapter 9

1. *Aaron's First Sacrifices*: Once the priests were ordained, they began their official ministry, offering sacrifices for themselves and for the Israelites. First, Aaron and his sons offered a bull calf as a Sin Offering and a ram as a Burnt Offering on their own behalf. Next, they offered Sin, Burnt, Fellowship, and Grain Offerings, prescribed by the Lord for the occasion, that were brought by the people on their own behalf.
2. *Aaron's Blessing*: After this, Aaron lifted his hands and blessed the Israelites. This blessing is given in Numbers 6:24-26: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn His face toward you and give you peace." Invoking blessings on the people was another priestly function (Deuteronomy 10:8; 21:5).
3. *Entrance into the Tabernacle*: Then, Aaron and Moses went together into the Tabernacle. When they came out, they blessed the people jointly. By so doing, Moses demonstrated his approval on all the proceedings.
4. *The Appearance of the Lord*: On this first, official, corporate, worship service at the Tabernacle, God showed His presence in a dramatic way: the glory of the Lord appeared to all the people. Fire came out from His presence in the Tabernacle and instantly consumed the sacrifices that were already burning on the altar. The Israelites spontaneously fell facedown and shouted for joy! God was indeed in their midst. The sacrifices were the means by which the Israelites could approach a holy God and worship. The priests were essential as mediators. By His sensational appearance, the Lord indicated that when He is approached in the right way, He is pleased.

iii. The Death of Nadab and Abihu – Chapter 10

1. *"Unauthorized Fire"*: The incense on the altar within the Tabernacle was to be burned with hot coals taken from the Bronze Altar in the courtyard. Nadab and Abihu, Aaron's eldest sons, somehow offered a form of "unauthorized" fire to ignite the incense. Thus, on their very first day of service, they lost their lives. Since the Lord gave Aaron a warning against consuming alcohol immediately following their deaths (10:8-11), perhaps his sons had had enough wine to prevent them from performing their duties with the necessary care and reverence. The grave and dangerous responsibility the priests bore certainly demanded a clear head at all times. Instantly, fire came out from the presence of the Lord (presumably within the Holy of Holies) and consumed both men.

Nadab and Abihu had experienced the special privilege of feasting in the Lord's presence on the Covenant Meal on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24:9-11). They were priests of Israel. With greater privilege comes greater responsibility.

2. *New Testament Equivalent:* In Acts 5, God responded with the same kind of swift judgment on Ananias and Sapphira, a married couple who lied about the amount of money they had made on the sale of their property (they claimed to have given the full amount to the church, when in fact, they had withheld a portion for themselves). It seems that God made an example of Nadab, Abihu, Ananias and Sapphira to deter others from regarding His commands too lightly. Both instances occurred at the outset of new eras, in which God and His people would relate to one another according to new revelation (the Mosaic Covenant in the first instance and the New Covenant in the second). The immediacy and severity of God's response almost certainly deterred a careless attitude toward His revelation from developing early on, before enough time passed for it to be more widely known. If a careless disregard for God's revelation prevailed among these first generations, it might never have reached subsequent generations.
3. *Failure to Eat the Sacrifices:* Moses was upset when he learned that Aaron's two younger sons had not eaten their portion of the sin offering. Doing so "symbolized that the priest achieved reconciliation for the offending party through carrying out the ritual meal."^{ix} However, Aaron explained to Moses that considering the special circumstances of what occurred that day, the Lord would not have been honored if they had eaten the sacrifice. Here we have an indication that the priests had the obligation to be discerning and abide by the spirit of the laws, as well as the letter of the law.

Summary Statement: The book of Leviticus is fundamental to the New Testament understanding of atonement.

Principle: *Atonement is the only means by which we can approach a holy God.*

The concepts of sacrifice and of priesthood would have been familiar to the Israelites. The nations surrounding Israel also offered sacrifices to their gods and also used priests. However, their purpose in doing so could not be more different.

- The pagan worshipper’s sacrifice was often to manipulate or curry favor with an angry god. Unlike the pagan gods, the God of Israel “cannot be coerced or compelled to respond.”^x While biblical atonement is provided by sacrifice and through a mediator, *it can only be granted by grace and received by faith*. Nothing we offer God merits His favor.
- Secondly, the other nations offered sacrifices for the maintenance and sustenance of their very human-like, needy gods. Their gods were hungry and wanted to be fed, whereas the God of Israel is not in the least bit needy. Mark Rooker says, “The faithful Israelite would understand that it is actually impossible to enrich God... While in the pagan world the sacrifices were something *the gods needed*, in Israel the sacrifices were something *the people needed*... [emphasis mine].”^{xi}

God used both the similarities and differences in the two systems to guide the Israelites into an early understanding of the message of His “Gospel” (good news): atonement was the only means by which they could approach their holy God.

By viewing the ceremonial laws of Leviticus in the context of the entire Mosaic Law, we see that Leviticus points right at the heart of the Gospel.

- Romans 3:23 tells us that we are all sinners. The Law did not make people sinful, but it revealed their sinful state (Galatians 4:4-5; Romans 7:12; 8:1-4; 3:19-28). The book of Romans teaches that our sin puts us under God’s wrath. Since we are all sinners (Romans 3:23) and God’s absolute standard has not changed, a permanent sacrifice was needed.
- The Biblical concept of atonement includes both the wiping out of our sin *and* the pacifying of God’s wrath. The reason for Christ’s anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane was far more than His dread of physical torture. It was because He understood that, by choosing to take the sins of the world on Himself, He was choosing to become the object of God’s wrath. He who had never known separation from intimacy with the Father would, in those six hours, become the recipient of God’s wrath. Christ bore the “curse of the law” (Galatians 3:13) as our substitute. God accepted Jesus’ sacrifice to demonstrate His righteousness, so that He “might be just and the One who justifies those who have faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:25-26). By means of Jesus’ blood, justice has been done and God’s wrath has been appeased.
- Each of us will face God one day for judgment. Either we will be judged according to the standard of the Law or we will be judged on the basis of blood, that is, the sacrifice of Christ. There are no other options. If we stand before Him in judgment without having appropriated Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf, nothing in us, nothing we have done, will merit peace with God, since no one other than Christ can meet the Law’s demand for perfection.

These principles of atonement were first revealed through the Levitical system of sacrifices.

- They taught Israel that, before they could approach a holy God, blood had to be shed to atone for sin.
- They taught them that only a mediator, a priest, could offer these sacrifices.
- There was no other way to approach God. God cannot compromise or be “bought off.” His holy character demands an absolute standard. These principles paved the way for the fuller revelation of the Gospel in the New Testament.

Application: Apart from the truth that “the wages of sin is death” (Romans 3:23), there is no “good news” (Gospel). We naturally wonder why God would make atonement for us at such a great price to Himself. Why did He do it? In the sense of our natural ability, when we love a person, it is because we are drawn to some qualities in that person. That is not the case with God’s love. He loves freely; there is *nothing in us* that merited His love. Neither was He under any obligation to provide a means by which we could be saved from the wrath we deserve. He chose to demonstrate His grace and make us the objects of His love. This is the mystery we will marvel over throughout eternity! When was the last time you considered that God did all this freely *for you*?

Transition: Before we can be holy, we must first be reconciled to God. Leviticus 1-10 indicates that reconciliation occurs by atonement. Once we have peace with God, we can lead holy lives. For Israel, holiness involved being set apart from the other nations and maintaining God’s distinctive laws (Leviticus 11-27). The priests were to teach the people to distinguish between the holy and the common, the “clean” and the “unclean” (10:10-11) and pass judgment on such matters.

III. Living a Holy Life – Leviticus 11 - 27

A. Purification – Leviticus 11-16: Chapters 11-15 record purification laws and end with the much-needed provision of cleansing in the camp, which came annually on the Day of Atonement (this important chapter is covered in the following lesson). The subjects discussed in the context of purification are diet, childbirth, growths on the skin and on walls of homes, and bodily discharges. The key idea is contained in 11:44-45: “I am the Lord your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy... I am the Lord who brought you up out of Egypt to be your God; therefore be holy, because I am holy.”

i. Clean vs. Unclean

1. *Three Categories:* Essentially, to be clean was to be “fit for worship.”^{xii} Gordon Wenham, an expert on Leviticus, explains that the “holy” and the “common” were two larger categories, with the “clean” and the “unclean” as subcategories of the “common.” Altogether, this makes for three groupings: 1) things that were holy, 2) things that were common and clean and 3) things that were common and unclean. These categories were reflected in the people themselves, in their spaces, and with the animals.

- a. People: Generally speaking, Israel’s priests were holy, the Israelite people were to remain clean, and Gentiles were considered unclean.
 - b. Three spaces: The Tabernacle (the holy), the camp of Israel (the clean), and the area outside the camp (the unclean).
 - c. Animals: those suitable for sacrifice (holy), those not fit for sacrifice but still clean (and thus edible), and animals outside both of these categories (unclean, neither fit for sacrifice nor consumption).^{xiii}
2. Wenham suggests that the clean and the unclean reflect the distinction between life and death. “The worst kind of uncleanness is generated by death, hence the corpses of clean animals are particularly defiling (Leviticus 11:24-40). God on the other hand is the source of abundant, perfect life, and it is therefore wrong to bring into His presence anything that suggests death.”^{xiv} This is why it was most important to keep the unclean from coming into contact with what was holy.
 3. Warren Wiersbe says it this way: “God’s purpose for Israel was that the nation be ‘a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ (Ex. 19:6, NKJV). Everything in the life of the Old Testament Jew was either ‘holy’ (set apart for God’s exclusive use) or ‘common,’ and the ‘common’ things were either ‘clean’ (the people could use them) or ‘unclean’ (it was forbidden to use them).”^{xv}
 4. Christopher Wright adds: “[This] fits in with what we have seen to be the primary concern of Leviticus as a whole, namely that God may continue to dwell in the midst of a people who are clean. The laws that follow must be seen as a means to that end, not as an end in themselves.”^{xvi}
- ii. Dietary Laws – Leviticus 11
1. Many proposals have been made in an attempt to understand the basis upon which God decreed an animal clean or unclean. Among other explanations, some rationales involve symbolism, some are aesthetic, and some involve hygiene. The true rationale behind the laws is not given. The Lord stated that blood was sacred (17:11-14). This may be one of the reasons that carnivorous animals and birds of prey were considered unclean. It is noteworthy that while the vegetarian diet of man was relaxed after the Flood (Genesis 1:29-30; 9:3-4), these dietary laws cut back on the amount of meat eaten, fostering respect for life. Some of these laws were undoubtedly necessary in a time when there was no refrigeration or antibiotics.

2. While the rationale behind the laws is not clearly stated, the motivation behind keeping them is apparent: *obedience to a holy God made the Israelites distinctive from other nations and showed their commitment to their covenant God.*^{xvii} The Israelites' inability to eat certain foods prevented them from participating in pagan festivals, protecting them from becoming more and more like the nations around them. Observation of dietary laws is one of the means by which Jews have continued to remain distinctive to this day.
- iii. Childbirth – Leviticus 12
1. *Loss of Blood*: Since the Lord gave the mandate to “be fruitful and multiply” (Genesis 1:28; 9:1, 7), we should not understand a woman’s “unclean” state following childbirth to reflect God’s attitude toward childbearing. However, the process did bring a woman into contact with blood. Chapter 15 indicates that menstruation also made a woman unclean. In both cases, the woman declared unclean had lost blood. Since the “life is in the blood” (Leviticus 17:11), any loss of blood was associated with death.
 2. *Distance from the Tabernacle*: While unclean conditions were not always due to sin, being in an unclean state did preclude an Israelite from being fit for worship. Practically speaking, a woman was more susceptible to infection following childbirth. These restrictions kept her away from the public. Pagan fertility rites encouraged temple prostitution as a means of enacting the births of gods and goddesses to please their deities. Keeping a new mother away disassociated the Tabernacle from childbirth completely in the minds of the Israelites.
 3. *Son Versus Daughter*: Much discussion surrounds the fact that a woman remained in an unclean condition longer after bearing a daughter than a son. This oddity can be partly explained by the fact that a baby boy’s timely circumcision required the mother’s presence in the Tabernacle area sooner. Another reason the mother may have remained unclean for double the time if she bore a daughter was in anticipation of an infant daughter’s own future childbearing.^{xviii}
- iv. Growths – Leviticus 13-14: Chapter 13 covers growths on the skin. Raw, peeling skin is a picture of unhealthy life, thus those with such skin conditions were designated unclean. Similarly, mold (chapter 14) suggests death rather than life. In all these situations, the priests acted as health inspectors.

- v. Bodily Discharges – Leviticus 15: The loss of body fluids suggested loss of life, even under conditions we think of as normal.
- vi. New Testament Application
 1. At this key point in Israel’s history, God used the laws of purification to teach His people the important truth that the New Testament spells out more clearly: our uncleanness is the reason for the vast gap between our holy God and us. These laws are no longer the means by which God’s people show themselves to be distinctive from the world (Mark 7:14–23; Ephesians 2:11–21; Acts 10:9–16; 34–35). The dietary laws of the Old Testament are specifically abrogated in the New Testament. Jesus shocked His contemporaries by teaching, “What goes into a man’s mouth does not make him ‘unclean.’ . . . But the things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man ‘unclean.’ For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. These are what make a man ‘unclean’” (Matthew 15:17-20). We must attempt to behave in a way befitting our position as God’s chosen people.
 2. “Ultimately, it was on the cross, when the unthinkable took place – namely, that the utterly Holy gave Himself up to the utterly unclean (death) – that the only truly effective sacrificial blood of Christ Himself enabled an unclean world and humanity to be reconciled to their holy Creator God. To paraphrase Paul somewhat: He, the Holy One, became unclean, so that through His blood we who are unclean might be both cleansed and sanctified to share in His holiness.”^{xix}

B. Holiness Code – Leviticus 17-27: Because the term “holy” appears 85 times in the last eleven chapters of Leviticus, it is known as the “Holiness Code.”

- i. Relationship to Purification Laws: The Holiness Code deals with issues that are much broader than those defined by the purification laws of chapters 11 through 16. The Holiness Code addresses moral and social issues. However, it is still closely related to the laws of purification in that what is portrayed as the highest good relates to fullness of life (ultimately, represented by God Himself). Anything that falls short of that, whether it is overt sin or a natural cause (such as being handicapped) made a person unclean. Irregular sacrifice, the consumption of blood, and unlawful sexual relations were all banned because of offense against a holy God.
- ii. Chapter 17: As previously stated, centralization of worship was required to prevent the Israelites’ manner of worship from mimicking that of pagans. Eating blood was forbidden because of the sanctity of life and the blood’s representation of life.

- iii. Chapter 18: These laws helped define the immediate family in an age where multiple generations often lived together. Genetic reasons for avoiding incest were unknown at this time. The Lord stated that practicing incest would make the Israelites like the other nations (18:24-30). If the Israelites did not follow the Lord's laws they were at risk of losing their distinctiveness as His representatives.
- iv. Chapters 19-24: These chapters have towering principles alongside small details to remind the Israelites that holy living was to be considered in every area of life.
 1. Leviticus 19 is particularly full of laws that encourage "loving one's neighbor as one's self" (19:18). Justice, respect for the elderly, avoidance of favoritism, assisting the poor and the alien, and honest business practices are among the topics addressed. From these, it is clear that God was not only concerned with conformity to a code but with the character of His people.
 2. Chapter 24 contains a second story in Leviticus, one in which a blasphemer was stoned. In the Old Testament, blasphemy was sometimes defined as an act of flagrant sin (Numbers 15:30), an insulting remark (Isaiah 37:6), or cursing God (Nehemiah 9:18).^{xx} In this case, the man showed disrespect for the Lord by cursing His name. The general principle taught through the story is the importance of honoring God by honoring His name. Jews have always taken the name of the Lord seriously. In later times, it became their tradition to avoid saying or writing the name "Yahweh" for fear of disrespect. Rather, they simply refer to "The Name." Although Christians consider this unnecessary, too many today have fallen into the practice of using God's name casually.
- v. Chapters 23 and 25: These chapters are covered in the next lesson on Israel's special observances.
- vi. Chapter 26: Chapter 26 summarizes a principle stressed throughout the book of Deuteronomy: obedience to God's laws results in life and disobedience results in death. This lends further support to what has already been said about the laws of purification and the Holiness Code. God and His ways are life giving. Uncleanness is associated with death and disobedience led to death.
- vii. Chapter 27 is an appendix containing laws about vows and gifts.

Summary Statement: In the second half of Leviticus, we see holiness presented in its negative aspect through the purification laws and in its positive aspect through the Holiness Code.

Principle: *Holy living involves separation from sin and putting on Christ's righteousness.*

Application: The purification laws address the need to remove impurity from our lives. In terms of defining holiness, this is the aspect of being “set apart,” of remaining distinctive and *separate*, from the impure. The New Testament also encourages separation from sin. Practicing regular confession is so important! We should name our sins before God. Is personal purity a high priority to you? If you truly believed that holiness is your greatest need, from what would you be quicker to set yourself apart?

The Holiness Code addresses the positive aspect of holiness: in New Testament terms, that of becoming “Christ-like,” or conforming to God’s ways. We do this by *putting on* Christ’s righteousness (Galatians 3:27; Ephesians 4:22; Colossians 3:10-12.) This is simply to practice the opposite of the things we must put aside. For example, if we struggle with indulging our minds with sexual fantasies, after confessing these to God, we choose to immediately drive our minds in the opposite direction when temptation arises. We would all benefit from memorizing more Scripture. When temptation to lustful thoughts occurs, an excellent way to occupy our minds is to rehearse God’s word. We might also pick up the phone and call someone we can encourage. Similarly, when we are tempted to be hateful to someone, we can choose to act in kindness instead. When we act this way in obedience to God, we are “clothing ourselves with Christ,” and we are often surprised to see that following obedience God actually changes our feelings toward this person!

The process of “setting aside” and “putting on” is often called sanctification. Sanctification is the word for the process and *holiness is the name for the result!* Holiness is perhaps best defined as “whole-ness.” “The English word ‘holy’ comes from the Old English word *halig* which means ‘to be whole, to be healthy.’ What health is to the body, holiness is to the inner person.”^{xxi} The presence of sin in the world and in our lives has been so destructive to us that we are no longer the “whole” people that God created us to be. Each of us can find evidence within our own lives of being fractured. We are constantly aware how much we hurt others and ourselves. “We are conscious of our inability to cope with life. We put up a façade and bluff our way through life, pretending we can handle anything yet running scared within.”^{xxii} By setting ourselves apart from impurities and putting on Christ-likeness we become the “whole” people God intended us to be. Ray Stedman said it this way: “‘Holiness’ means to have all the parts that were intended to be there and to have them functioning as they were intended to function. So God is really saying in Leviticus, ‘You shall be whole, because I am whole.’”^{xxiii}

Conclusion

We began by saying a believer's greatest need is holiness. So, it is appropriate we that we end by considering the result of neglecting this need. Charles Haddon Spurgeon preached these words to his congregation: "An unholy Church! It is of no use to the world, and of no esteem among men. Oh, it is an abomination, hell's laughter, heaven's abhorrence. And the larger the Church, the more influential, the worst nuisance does it become, when it becomes dead and unholy. The worst evils which have ever come upon the world, have been brought upon her by an unholy Church."^{xxiv} I ask you, is this not what we see in the parts of our world today where the Church has become lazy with regard to holiness? We have lost our influence! We can do the *most for* the world by becoming *less like* the world. That was God's message to His people through Leviticus, and it is His message to us today.

ⁱ As quoted in Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Holy* (p. 9). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

ⁱⁱ Levine, B. A. (1989). *Leviticus* (p. xi). Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lindsey, F. D. (1985). Leviticus. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 163). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^{iv} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Holy* (p. 77). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^v Levine, B. A. (1989). *Leviticus* (p. 14). Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

^{vi} Lindsey, F. D. (1985). Leviticus. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 172). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^{vii} Mathews, Kenneth A. (2009). *Leviticus: Holy God, Holy People* (pp. 30–31). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

^{viii} Lindsey, F. D. (1985). Leviticus. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 165). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^{ix} Mathews, Kenneth A. (2009). *Leviticus: Holy God, Holy People* (p. 101). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.

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^{xvi} Carson, D. A., France, R. T., Motyer, J. A., & Wenham, G. J. (Eds.). (1994). *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 137). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

^{xvii} Rooker, M. F. (2000). *Leviticus* (Vol. 3A, p. 174). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^{xviii} Levine, B. A. (1989). *Leviticus* (p. 250). Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.

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^{xx} Rooker, M. F. (2000). *Leviticus* (Vol. 3A, p. 296). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^{xxi} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Holy* (p. 10). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

^{xxii} Stedman, Ray C. (2012 by Elaine Stedman). *Adventuring Through the Bible* (p. 84). Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers.

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^{xxiv} Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *Be Holy* (p. 16). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.