

March 2

### Leviticus 18-20

Welcome back! Today you read portions of Deuteronomy, Numbers, and a bit from Exodus. But the bulk of today's reading was from Leviticus chapters 18-20. And we are continuing our reading of the Laws of Moses. Yesterday I said that the Laws of Moses did two things: a) they revealed something about God, and b) they revealed something about us, what God requires of us. The same is true here today.

Now the Big Idea of today's reading is holiness. The word "holy" means to be "set apart." And it's important for us to understand the context in which the Israelites find themselves when God gives them these commands.

- 1) They had relatively recently been freed from 400 years of slavery in Egypt and were steeped in cultural practices that were contrary to who God is and what he desires for and from them.
- 2) They are moving from Sinai to the Promised Land and are literally a nation in transit.
- 3) They are surrounded by pagan cultures who worship false gods and who require such things as child sacrifice (Molech) and others who endorse and even require prostitution and various other sexual perversions.
- 4) The Nation of Israel was a theocracy. There was no sacred/secular divide. Everything they did reflected on the God whom they worship. The way they lived their lives says something about the God they worship and what he requires of them.

Given these realities it is clear that while, to the modern American ear, these laws may sound harsh and severe, it is clear that God desires his people to be like he is: Holy. While not in today's reading, the impetus for these commands is stated in the middle of these chapters. In Leviticus 19:2 it says, "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy." (ESV). We hear the New Testament echo this command in 1 Peter 1:15-16 where Peter says that we Christians are to be holy, as the one who called them is holy. Jesus, in Matthew 5 says that we are to be like our father in heaven, perfect.

God was intentional to give clear directions on how his people are to be different than the cultures and peoples that lived around them.

Now, you will have noticed that in today's reading the law gives a lot of attention to the subject of sexual sin and sexual purity. For example we read about how a man is to conduct himself with a woman he marries if he suspects her of sexual unfaithfulness. Also, we read on the consequences of divorce and the "defilement" that takes place when a man unduly divorces his wife. But we also read about a wide array of sexual deviations and violations including adultery, incest, homosexuality, and bestiality. These laws should draw our attention to the seriousness with which God looks upon sexual sin.

As I study the bible I think the reason for the added attention is because of humanity's tendency toward sexual sin of various kinds. In Romans 1, Paul says that "by

unrighteousness they suppress the truth” and exchange the truth and glory of God for “images resembling mortal man...” He says that when we do this our thinking becomes “futile”, and “darkened” and we begin to behave foolishly and call it wise. The result is that we give ourselves over to all kinds of sin. And the first sin Paul says we give ourselves over to is sexual sin.

This makes sense in some ways. The pentacle of God’s creation was humanity. And because of Sin, our tendency is to try and supplant God with what he created. So, why not replace God in our hearts, and minds, and lives with what we deem to be the “greatest thing ever made” - Humans.

But this, my friends, is a deadly mistake. God would have us be “set apart” or Holy, as he is Holy. God wants good for his people and so gives them laws that not only help restrain sinful behavior and give instruction for how to live peaceably amongst one another, but how to live in a way that would help them see him more clearly.

Now, the law never gives the impression that by it someone can be saved. In fact, the scriptures teach that the law actually reveals our fallen-ness and need for a savior (see Romans 3-7 for more on this). But what the laws on sexual purity do is help us see that our God is not a god who uses people such as the false god Molech. While it’s unclear what the “child sacrifices” to Molech actually looked like, some believe that it was the giving of children over to the priests in order to make them into temple prostitutes in service of Molech. Either way you slice it, Molech desires either child murder, or the selling of children into sexual slavery.

These Laws reveal that God is very different than the gods all around his people. He is “set apart” in his righteousness, yes, but also in his care for his people. The laws reflect his attention to the details of daily life.

Additionally, these laws reflect his desire for how his people are living, which brings me to our application questions for today:

- 1) How are you living “set apart” or Holy?
  - a. At work
  - b. How is your family living differently than those around you?
  - c. How is your marriage different than those of non-Christians?
- 2) How does the way you live reflect on the God you worship & what does it say about what he requires of you and desires for you?
- 3) Consider you day today and ask God to show you how you can live “set apart” for him, today.
  - a. Perhaps at work,
  - b. At home, etc.
- 4) Take some notes, pray, and act on what God reveals to you today. Don’t simply leave it as an intellectual exercise. Put it into action and begin living “set apart” today.