

Intro:

In our studies of Leviticus we are now entering the second major section of the book. The first 16 chapters have to do with the ceremonial law intended to show men how to have and maintain fellowship with God.

We learn from those laws several things about sin as I mentioned last time:

- Sin is pervasive – it infects every person in every aspect of life
- Sin is corrosive – left unchecked it breeds more sin, left uncleansed, it pollutes others
- Sin is debasing – it leaves a man unfit for the presence of God, for communion with God
- Sin is constant – if the sacrificial system teaches us anything, the constant requirement of cleansing and sacrifice teaches us that sin is constant
- Sin is expensive – it costs a man his very life unless his soul is redeemed by a costly sacrifice

Chapter 17 was a bit of a transitory chapter, a bridge between the ceremonial laws and the rest of Leviticus, the part that is sometimes called ‘the Holiness Code’. One of my commentators says that this new section deals with “private religion and morality as opposed to official worship.”¹

The section begins with a very sober chapter, one which in some senses you blush to read if you have a spiritual mind.

Read Lev 18.1-9, 19-30

Our title is this:

After the doings of the lands...

... ye shall not do.

Proposition: It is according to God’s great mercy that he saves any of us! But we are washed, but we are sanctified!

I. Content: What does it say?

A. The voice of the Covenant God to Israel (2)

1. Looks back to the redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt (Ex 6.6-7)

¹ Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, p. 250.

- a. The phrase “I am the Lord” is repeated through the chapter (Lev 18.2, 4, 5, 6, 21, 30)
 - b. The phrase claims Israel and its way of life as peculiarly belonging to the Lord
2. Looks up to God as the pattern for life (Lev 11.44)
 3. Looks out to the nations as beyond the boundaries which God’s people must not cross (Lev 18.3-4)
- B. The protection of the marriage bond (6-18)
1. “Uncover nakedness” = have intimate physical relations
 - a. Covers relationships within and without marriage
 - b. “Effectively then these rules define the limits within which a man may seek a wife for himself.”
 2. “Near of kin” = ‘flesh of his flesh’ (lit.)
 - a. Unspoken assumption: Israelites were to seek marriages only with other Israelites
 - 1) Marriages to non-Israelites forbidden elsewhere (Dt 7.3)
 - 2) Preferences were for marriages within ones own tribe (Num 36)
 - b. But a prohibition on marriages from too close a kinship (first and second degree)
 - 1) Mother (7)
 - 2) Step-mother (8)
 - 3) Sister (or half-sister) (9)
 - 4) Grand-daughter (10)
 - 5) Step-sister (11)
 - 6) Aunt (12-13)
 - 7) Aunt by marriage (14)
 - 8) Daughter-in-law (15)
 - 9) Sister-in-law (16 [but Levirate marriage an exception, Dt 25.5ff.])
 - 10) Step-daughter or step-granddaughter (17)
 - 11) Nor two sisters both living at the same time (18)

Note: all of these ‘possibilities’ have to do with people whose spouses are dead or are divorced – laws against adultery would apply if they were still married.

Even the suggestion of some of these things are extremely distasteful to us. But they are founded on God's revealed will and are contrary to the practices of the nations Israel was surrounded with.

3. The underlying principle behind these regulations is God's principle of marriage – the One Flesh relationship
 - a. Note v. 7 – more literal rendering: “You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, that is, the nakedness of your mother”
 - b. The One Flesh principle makes married people One: they are as if they were in blood relationships to others in the family who are only related by marriage

“The basic principles underlying the rules in vv. 6-18 are therefore clear: a man may not marry any woman who is a close blood relation, or any woman who has become a close relative through a previous marriage to one of a man's close blood relatives.”²

C. The protection of the family (19-23)

1. From uncleanness (19)
2. From adultery (20)
3. From child sacrifice (21)
4. From homosexuality (22)
5. From bestiality (23)

Again, some of these things seem almost beyond our comprehension and very distasteful, but they were indeed things done among the heathen in varying degrees.

D. Final warnings and exhortations (24-30)

1. These defilements were the reason for God giving them the land of Canaan (24-25)
2. The commandment is that Israel may not in their turn defile the land and suffer the same consequence (26-28)

² Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, p. 255.

3. Any individual breaking these commands will be cut off (29)
4. Final warning (30)

It is a sad fact of history that many of these abominations eventually found their way into Israel — instead of maintaining distinctiveness, Israel fell into the wickedness of the nations.

- For the accumulation of uncleanness and abomination brought about by these and other sins, the nation was in its turn ‘vomited’ out of the land (Babylonian captivity)

God in mercy and grace brought back a remnant that became the Israel of the first century, only to be vomited out again under the Romans in AD 70.

II. Context: Why does it say it?

A. God’s law is given to increase sinfulness (Rm 7.7-12)

1. Some of the things mentioned in this chapter in Leviticus were practiced by God’s people
 - a. Abraham married his half-sister, Sarah
 - b. Jacob married two sisters
2. There is such a thing as ‘times of ignorance’ (Ac 17.30)

^{KJV} **Ac 17.30** And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

3. The law shows the exceeding sinfulness of sin and its pernicious prevalence in our hearts

B. God’s giving of this law increases revelation concerning God’s principles for marriage

1. Prior to this, we have the Marriage Song of Adam:

^{KJV} **Gen 2.23-24** And Adam said, This *is* now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.²⁴ Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

2. This chapter increases our understanding of the One Flesh relationship
3. The New Testament is going to heighten understanding even further
 - a. All these prohibitions are repeated in the NT in one form or another
 - b. Prohibitions against adultery are heightened in NT
 - 1) Marriage to a divorced woman is adultery (Lk 16.18 et al)
 - 2) Jesus teaches full reciprocity: unfaithful husbands are just as adulterous as unfaithful wives
 - 3) Jesus teaches against ‘mental adultery’ (Mt 5.28)

“Yet this new definition of adultery is not such a break with the OT as may at first appear. It takes the principle underlying the incest laws in Lev 18 to their logical conclusion: if marriage makes a man one flesh with his wife, he may not later desert her and take another.”³

Therefore: there are at least two reasons for this chapter in the Bible.

1. It increases sinfulness (that is, our understanding of sinfulness)
2. It expounds the principle of marriage (based on the One Flesh relationship)

III. Consequences: What does it mean for us?

- A. The concept of holiness expressed in Leviticus calls us to holiness in our day
 1. The Israelites were called to not walk as did the nations around them
 2. Surely we, no less than they, are called to not walk as do the people around us
- B. The concept of grace redeems men from all sorts of evil (1 Cor 6.9-11)
 1. Paul lists many sins which preclude inheritance of the kingdom, including sins exposed in Lev 18 (9)

³ Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, p. 261.

- a. Fornicators
 - b. Idolaters
 - c. Adulterers
 - d. Effeminate, abusers of selves (homosexuals)
2. God's grace is able to save even these (11)
- a. *Such were some of you!*
 - b. But
 - 1) You are washed
 - 2) You are sanctified
 - 3) You are justified
 - c. How?
 - 1) In the Name of Jesus
 - 2) By the Spirit of our God

Conclusion:

Proposition: It is according to God's great mercy that he saves any of us! But we are washed, but we are sanctified!

May we not lift ourselves up in pride, looking down on people who are what we once were.

- Sinners
- Defiled
- Unclean

They can be justified (declared righteous) in Jesus Christ.