

THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS – LESSON 6

Leviticus And Sin

Holiness in Sexual Behavior

Leviticus 18

1 The Lord said to Moses,² “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘I am the Lord your God. 3 You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. 4 You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the Lord your God. 5 Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the Lord.

6 “ ‘No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the Lord.

7 “ ‘Do not dishonor your father by having sexual relations with your mother. She is your mother; do not have relations with her.

8 “ ‘Do not have sexual relations with your father’s wife; that would dishonor your father.

9 “ ‘Do not have sexual relations with your sister, either your father’s daughter or your mother’s daughter, whether she was born in the same home or elsewhere.

10 “ ‘Do not have sexual relations with your son’s daughter or your daughter’s daughter; that would dishonor you.

11 “ ‘Do not have sexual relations with the daughter of your father’s wife, born to your father; she is your sister.

12 “ ‘Do not have sexual relations with your father’s sister; she is your father’s close relative.

13 “ ‘Do not have sexual relations with your mother’s sister, because she is your mother’s close relative.

14 “ ‘Do not dishonor your father’s brother by approaching his wife to have sexual relations; she is your aunt.

15 “ ‘Do not have sexual relations with your daughter-in-law. She is your son’s wife; do not have relations with her.

16 “ ‘Do not have sexual relations with your brother’s wife; that would dishonor your brother.

17 “ ‘Do not have sexual relations with both a woman and her daughter. Do not have sexual relations with either her son’s daughter or her daughter’s daughter; they are her close relatives. That is wickedness.

18 “ ‘Do not take your wife’s sister as a rival wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living.

19 “ ‘Do not approach a woman to have sexual relations during the uncleanness of her monthly period.

20 “ ‘Do not have sexual relations with your neighbor’s wife and defile yourself with her.

21 “ ‘Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the Lord.

22 “ ‘Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.

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23 “ Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it; that is a perversion.

24 “ Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. 25 Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. 26 But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the aliens living among you must not do any of these detestable things, 27 for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. 28 And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.

29 “ Everyone who does any of these detestable things—such persons must be cut off from their people. 30 Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the Lord your God.’ ”

The first 16 chapters of Leviticus are concerned primarily with the conduct and rituals of official worship. Chapter 17 pivots and turns to issues of private religion and morality. It stresses the need for Israel to be different from the people around them by not worshipping demons and by not eating blood.

Chapter 18 goes further and specifically sets out the fundamental principles of what constitutes holy sexual unions in the eyes of God. Chapter 19 deals with principals of holiness toward one’s neighbor. Chapter 20 outlines the penalties for capital offenses (mostly those in chapter 18).

It is clear from the underlined sections listed above (vs 3, 24, 26, 27, 29, 30) that the nations around Israel were not sexually pure in the eyes of God. Egypt and Canaan committed ALL the unlawful practices listed in Leviticus 18. Archeology further attest to the following...

- In Egyptian royal families, brothers married sisters
- The laws of Hammurabi forbade some forms of incest, but allowed others
- Homosexuality was known to be practiced among the Canaanites and in Mesopotamia¹
- Bestiality in known from Egyptian, Canaanite and Hittite sources
- There was a cult in the Eastern delta that involved the cohabitation of women with goats
- Ugaritic texts speak of gods copulating with animals
- The Hittite laws legislate against some forms of bestiality while permitting others
- Adultery was common in the ancient world

Israel’s sexual morality, as defined in Leviticus, is one of the primary things that was to set Israel apart as the Lord’s special people.

¹ And, of course, in Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19).

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Question: Why aren't these incestuous, barbaric sexual practices the norm in most societies like they used to be?

Answer: The Judea-Christian ethic's influence on the world which began primarily in Leviticus.

One of the words for "law" in the Pentateuch is "hoq" and is derived from the verb "to inscribe". God inscribed (hoq) a boundary for the sea which it may not cross (Jer 5:22). When used in describing a law it draws attention to the idea that it is a decree given by a ruler or law-giver. This is emphasized over and over again in Leviticus with the phrase, **"I am the Lord."** In other words,

the justification for the law is simply that God decrees it. There is no other explanation needed and God doesn't need to justify it. God sets the boundaries that we are not to cross because he is God and we are not. End of story...

Illicit Marriages

The first general principle of Leviticus 18 is...

Leviticus 18:6

6 "No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the Lord.

According to God's law as given on Mount Sinai, a man may not marry his...

Mother (vs 7)	Aunt (vs 12-13) i.e. his father's or mother's sister	Step-mother (vs 8)	Aunt by marriage (vs 14) i.e. uncle's wife
Sister or half-sister (vs 9)	Step-sister (vs 11), Step-daughter (vs 17) ²	Sister-in-law (vs 16), Daughter-in-law (vs 15)	
Granddaughter (vs 10)	Step-granddaughter (vs 17)		

The rules or laws (Hebrew "hoq") of Lev 18:6-18 effectively define the limits within which a man may seek a wife or a wife may seek a husband.³ A woman who consented to an illicit union was regarded as equally guilty as the man and suffered the same fate (Lev 20:10ff).

² Marriage with a daughter is not mentioned because it was already universally accepted as an illicit union and is included in vs 6 and other places.

³ It is assumed that marriages are to only take place between fellow Israelites (Deut 7:3).

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Other Illicit Sexual Unions & Unholy Practices

1. Adultery (vs 20)
 - a. Adultery in the OT has a narrower definition than in the NT. In the OT adultery is defined as sexual intercourse with a married or betrothed woman by someone who was not her husband. Once a woman was actually married or betrothed to be married, sex with anyone other than her legal husband brought the death penalty on both the woman and her adulterous lover.
 - b. Intercourse between a married man with an unattached woman was a sin, but did not warrant the death penalty and was not considered adultery. Marriage was most often required and divorce was not an option.
2. Child sacrifice (vs 21)
 - a. The remnants of Molech child sacrifices have been found in North Africa and evidence suggests that it came from Phoenicia which was just north of ancient Israel.
 - b. Strong evidence of child sacrifices that took place during the period of the Israelite conquest of the land of Canaan (around the time of Jephthah in Judges) have been discovered in Jordan at the temple of Amman, the home of the Ammonites. Interestingly enough, I Kings 11:7 actually says the Molech was “the detestable god of the Ammonites”.
3. Homosexuality (vs 22)
 - a. Homosexuality is condemned throughout the OT and NT.⁴ Here it is described by the word “detestable” or “abomination”.
 - i. תועבה *tô'êbâ*; or תעבה *tonebah*; properly, something disgusting (morally), i.e. (as noun) an abhorrence; especially idolatry or (concretely) an idol; a disgusting thing, abominable in ritual sense (of unclean food, idols, mixed marriages) in ethical sense (of wickedness etc)
 - ii. The simple meaning of the Hebrew word is to “hate” or “abhor”. An abomination, as described in the OT, is literally something detestable that God hates.⁵
4. Bestiality (vs 23)
 - a. תְּבַל *tebel*; mixture, i.e. unnatural bestiality: — confusion.
A violation of nature or divine order, perversion (in sexual sin)

Leviticus 18 and the New Testament

The moral rules of most of the OT still apply today, certainly those of Leviticus 18 still do. For example:

1. Incest

1 Corinthians 5:1-2

1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife.² And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this?

⁴ See especially Gen 19, Lev 20:10, Judges 19:22ff, Rom 1:27, I Cor 6:9.

⁵ For other examples of things that are an abomination to God, see Pr 6:16; 11:1.

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2. Idolatry

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Revelation 2:14

14 Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.

3. Adultery

Romans 13:8-10

8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, “Do not commit adultery,” “Do not murder,” “Do not steal,” “Do not covet,” and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” 10 Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.

a. The Law of Christ (NT) concerning adultery, divorce and remarriage is probably much clearer than we’d like to admit. We have a hard time accepting it.

Matthew 19:3-12⁶

3 Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?”

4 “Haven’t you read,” he replied, “that at the beginning the Creator ‘made them male and female,’ 5 and said, ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh’? 6 So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore, what God has joined together, let man not separate.”

7 “Why then,” they asked, “did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?”

8 Jesus replied, “Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. 9 I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery.”

10 The disciples said to him, “If this is the situation between a husband and wife, it is better not to marry.” 11 Jesus replied, “Not everyone can accept this word, but only those to whom it has been given. 12 For some are eunuchs because they were born that way; others were

⁶ See also Luke 16:18; Mark 10:2-12

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made that way by men; and others have renounced marriage because of the kingdom of heaven. The one who can accept this should accept it.”

Jesus’ point is that God NEVER intended for divorce to be an option between a husband and a wife, not even in the OT. It was reluctantly PERMITTED in very limited circumstances (adultery) because the Israelites had hard hearts. Vs 9 is obviously a hard teaching and the disciples themselves blanched under its requirements so much so that they felt it was better not to marry. Jesus didn’t necessarily disagree with them.

Matthew 5:27-28

27 “You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ 28 But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

It’s not just the act that must be avoided, but the thought as well. The OT taught this too.

Exodus 20:17

17 “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”

4. Homosexuality

Romans 1:26-27

26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. 27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.

- a. The LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual, Transgender) movement has been pushing hard to gain full acceptance in Western society and with some success. Gay marriage is now the law of the land in the U.S. with full integration into the tax code and inheritance rights.
- b. But it is clear that the Bible calls homosexuality a sin. It is listed alongside heterosexual adultery, incest, and bestiality as an unholy sexual union in both the OT and NT. It is also clear that those who had formerly practiced homosexuality but later became disciples of Jesus had to leave that lifestyle permanently.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11

9 Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

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- c. How should we, as Ambassadors of Christ, interface with a world that is demanding not only acceptance of LGBT lifestyles, but the actual celebration of them?
- i. Watch video at strengthinweakness.org
 1. We must stop ridicule. You don't get the idea in 1 Corinthians that people went around making jokes about being gay. Homosexuality is a form of sexual immorality just like heterosexual adultery is. It can be repented of just like any other form of immorality.
 2. We need to learn to acknowledge people's lifestyles while being clear that we do not condone them or agree with them, but do so in love.
 3. We are not to judge those outside the church. That is God's job. Our job is to hold out the word of life to them, to preach the gospel.

1 Corinthians 5:12-13

12 What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? 13 God will judge those outside. "Expel the wicked person from among you."

Once someone becomes a part of the body of Christ, then we hold them to God's standards.

4. We need to be a place where people who struggle these issues can come to sincerely examine what God has to say about them, how making Jesus Lord is what actually brings peace and fulfillment.
 5. As Guy Hammond says, "There is a tsunami of this headed for the church" and we need to come to grips with what God expects from us in how we handle it.
 6. Comments?
- d. **The issue is not so much one of what is right and what is wrong.** The issue is...

Is ANYTHING "right" or "wrong"?

We live in a world where RELATIVISM dominates.

- i. **Relativism is the philosophical position that all points of view are equally valid and that all truth is defined by the individual. This means that all moral positions, all religious systems, all art forms, all political movements, etc., are truths that are DEFINED by the individual and, therefore, all are equally valid. More and more Western society rejects the idea that there are moral absolutes. Moral relativism teaches that true morality is found in accepting whatever lifestyle the individual desires. The "new morality" is defined as a militant type of "tolerance". If you take a stand for moral absolutes, you are a bigot. Of course, this is inconsistent at best and hypocritical at worst. Why? Because relativism professes that all points of view are equally valid, yet reject those who profess there are absolutes in morality. It seems that what is really meant by the moral relativism is that all points**

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of view are true except for the views that teach moral absolutes, an absolute God, or absolute right and wrong.

John 12:47-48

47 “As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. 48 There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.”

Hebrews 4:12-13

12 For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. 13 Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

- ii. The issue is **WHO DEFINES RIGHT AND WRONG?** Is there a God? Is the Bible the Word of God? Is Jesus the son of God? Is Jesus Lord and God? These are the issues we need to learn to articulate and defend. We APPEAL to people to be reconciled to God.

2 Corinthians 5:20-21

20 We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Deliberate Sin in the New Testament

One of the most stunning realizations one has in reading Leviticus is how few sacrifices were allowed to atone for deliberate, “high-handed”, rebellious sin. God sometimes forgave rebellious sin. But sometimes he did not. Deliberate sin in the NT is denounced just as harshly.

Hebrews 10:26-31

26 If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, 27 but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. 28 Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. 29 How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? 30 For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.” 31 It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

1. What does this teach?

- a. Jesus blood does not cover (forgive) those who continue in deliberate sin (“...no sacrifice for sins is left...”)

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- b. Those who continue in deliberate sin are enemies of God. (Remember, this is written to Christians!)
- c. Judgement and raging fire await those who continue to sin.
- d. Deliberate sin is seen BY GOD as...
 - i. Trampling Jesus under foot
 - ii. Treating his blood as an unholy thing. In other words, profaning Jesus' precious blood.
 - iii. Insulting the Holy Spirit.
- e. A Christian who continues in deliberate, willful sin deserves to be punished more harshly than someone who did the same thing under the Law of Moses.
- f. God is going to exact dreadful, terrible punishment on "his people" (i.e. Christians) who continue in willful sin.

Hebrews 6:4-6

4 It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, 5 who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, 6 if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.

2. What does this teach?

- a. He is clearly talking about someone who was fully redeemed by the blood of Jesus.
 - i. They have been "enlightened".
 - ii. They have the HS.
 - iii. They have participated in God's "divine power"⁷ of personal transformation.
- b. They fell away.
- c. **There is a point of no return.**
 - i. They cannot be brought back to repentance. Apparently the point of no return involves someone becoming so hard that they are past the point of repentance.
 - ii. **We do not know where that point is** (the Bible doesn't say). But what is important for us to know is that there is one and we need to be afraid of that. We need to stay as far away from it as possible.
 - iii. As long as we are willing to repent, God will forgive us.

Galatians 5:19-21

19 The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; 20 idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions 21 and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

⁷ 2 Peter 1:3ff

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3. What does this teach?

- a. Those who live like this (a lifestyle) will not inherit the Kingdom of God. In other words, Jesus blood will not forgive those who continue in this type of lifestyle. He is talking to the Galatian Christians.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. 19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

4. What does this teach?

- a. Just as the Tabernacle (Temple) in the OT had to be kept pure and holy because God's presence lived there, our bodies are now the Tabernacle of the HS and must be kept pure and holy.
- b. We must honor God by what we do with our bodies.
- c. God's Temple is sacred. Since our bodies are God's Temple, we must keep our bodies sacred. God will judge all those who desecrate his Temple.

Romans 6:17-18

17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

5. What does this teach?

- a. Christians are not only forgiven, but are also set free from the slavery of sin. Sin no longer controls us. If it does, then we need to get help. Immediately.

Galatians 5:22-25

22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. 24 Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. 25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

6. What does this teach?

- a. Fruit is the natural outgrowth of a healthy tree or vine. If we have God's Spirit, we will display the natural outgrowth of his Spirit.
- b. We "keep in step with the Spirit" by keeping the Temple of the Holy Spirit (our minds and bodies) pure and clean in the way God's word commands.