

**Love in the Law of Leviticus**  
**Matthew 5, 22,**

Leviticus can seem like an odd book of the Bible. It talks about sacrifices, offerings, priests, strange fire, priestly sin, the South Sinai Diet, defilement, skin disease, natural remedies, how to treat our bodies, appropriate and immoral sexual behavior, treating strangers nicely, capital crimes and punishments, feasting, blasphemy, an eye for an eye, caring for the poor, letting the land rest, slavery and freedom. There are so many moral codes, laws and regulations that it had to be written down in order to remember it and obey it.

In this sermon, I don't want to repeat what you have read. I want to explain, to interpret what you have read by providing you with its meaning.

In the strangest of ways, Leviticus is a book of love.

Leviticus was written to:

- 1 - Remind the children of Israel that there is only one God (unlike Egypt) and that there is only one way to approach him – his way; just like there was only one way to be redeemed from Egypt through a sacrificed lamb.

There were many things that made it hard for the disciples and Jews to accept Jesus, but exclusivity was not one of them. They knew there was only one way to God.

*John 14:6 - "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

In the modern era, we have problems with the words, 'the' and 'except.' The Jews' problem was the pronoun "me." They did believe there was only one way to God. They just didn't believe it was Jesus. And this became the theme of the Jewish disciples' preaching -

*Acts 4:12 - And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name [Jesus] under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*

- 2 - Weary the children of Israel. In Egypt, Israel cried out for salvation from their taskmasters. In the sacrificial system, Israel cries out to God for a Savior from the law.

*Acts 15:10 - Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?*

- 3 - Horrify the children of Israel. Innumerable animals were sacrificed in the OT and Israel was 'elbows-deep' in the sound of crying animals, the smell of blood and the stench of burning carcasses.

Genesis 2:17 - "...of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."

- 4 – Make sin costly. It cost an Israelite to sin and the law demonstrated it's cost: bull for the rich; lamb for the middle class; pigeon for the poor. Everyone may pay differently but everyone pays for sin.

Or, as God was teaching them in those sacrifices, someone must pay for sin (Jesus).

Ever since then, Israel has lived in the never-ending reality of that statement. If anyone understands the

- a) horror of sin and
- b) the cost of sin,

Israel does.

- 5 – To raise the question, "Why?"

Leviticus is hard to understand and the question we ask most while reading it is 'Why??

Why? Why? Why? To make your hearts ready and willing for Jesus.

- \*Specificity,
  - \* weariness,
  - \* horror
  - \* cost and
  - \* questioning
- sum up the book of Leviticus

And behind it all is God's love. Leviticus teaches us how to safely land our hearts on the surface of a God who is more brilliant and dangerous than the sun.

That's the meaning behind the laws of Leviticus and it is all about love. God cannot be other than holy, and we have violated his holiness. He can't resend his holiness and still be God because one of God's attributes is that he never changes. And I don't want God to change. I want him to be holiness and love at the same time because if he ever changes one thing, he might change another thing and one of the things I do not want to change is the promise of eternal life. So, God, in his infinite wisdom, 'found' a way to maintain his holiness and exercise his love simultaneously and without changing either. God himself, would satisfy the demands of the law, even at the cost of his own Son. That's the kind of loving that God is.

I want to say two things about the laws found in Leviticus –

### First: Jesus summarized Leviticus in two statements –

T - **Matthew 22:36-40** - “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” <sup>37</sup> And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. <sup>38</sup> This is the great and first commandment. <sup>39</sup> And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

a) The point of the law is to teach us how to love God and others

(The first 4 of the Ten Commandments define how we relate to God and the remaining 6 describe how to relate to others)

b) The point of the prophets was to proclaim that law in reminding, warning and promising the people about the law and the consequences of obedience and disobedience

Jesus says the whole OT law can be summed up in loving God first and foremost and then loving others as we love ourselves.

IMP: Is God selfish to command us to love him? No. Why? Because God is the best thing in creation to love and the best thing in creation for us to love.

It is wrong for humans to require people love them because humans are not the best for other humans. But God is.

It is self-harm to love another person or thing more than God. This is called idol worship and God forbids it because he loves us too much to let us worship something that is not in our best interests.

God is our *summum bonum* / highest good

“God, and God alone, is man’s highest good.”

Herman Bavinck

He is the highest good from which all other goods are derived.

III – We, like children at a birthday party, tend to focus on gifts and forget people. But imagine if a child was given a gift, left the party and locked themselves in their room with this single, inanimate object, never to speak to his parents again, much less the giver of the gift. We would think that horribly wrong. But this is what we do when we accept God’s gifts and forget the Giver. This is called atheism and, as Stephen Charnock has proven, in his *Existence and Attributes of God*, we are often practical atheists.

Jesus summed up Leviticus when he said the law is all about loving God and others.

One more word about the second part of Jesus's summary statement: Since all humans are image bearers, all humans are deserving of the love, respect and dignity due God himself. When we fail to do so, we fail to love God.

How we treat people, is how we treat God

### Second: Jesus fulfilled all the law

**T - Matthew 5:17-20** - *"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. <sup>18</sup> For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. <sup>19</sup> Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. <sup>20</sup> For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.*

This is a plaguing statement. How is my righteousness going to exceed that of the scribes and Pharisees so I can get to heaven?

The Pharisees were the most affluent and powerful group in the Jewish culture, at least at the time of Jesus Christ's earthly ministry. Even their name drips with self-righteousness, as they are the "separated ones," which is from the Aramaic (Semitic) and comes from "perishayya," meaning "separated, separatist," and closely corresponds to the Hebrew word "parush," from "parash," meaning "he separated," with the "he" being God. The Pharisees claimed to be the most like God.

And this is the key to understanding Jesus's statement -

**Luke 18:9** – [Speaking to Pharisees] *He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt:* (See how self-righteousness makes us think there is a difference in people whereas grace makes us all the same)

**Luke 16:15** - *You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts.*

**Matthew 23:23-24** - *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. <sup>24</sup> You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!*

**Matthew 23:13-15** - *But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut the kingdom of heaven in people's faces. For you neither enter yourselves nor allow those who would enter to go in. <sup>15</sup> Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea*

*and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.*

[Why can Jesus speak to people like that and I can't?

- 1 – It's the Creator-creation distinction.
- 2 – Jesus alone knows the full damning weight of what the Pharisees are doing/teaching
- 3 – Jesus alone knows who is and who is not a Pharisee]

In effect, the Pharisees were really only self-righteous which is an impossibility. No one can be self-righteous before God.

Ironically, for all of their righteousness, the Pharisees ended up being separated from God because they rejected Jesus.

How do I get God's righteousness? (Because that's the only kind of righteousness there really is)

It all comes down to Jesus fulfilling the law.

- a) Passive obedience – Jesus's death
- b) Active obedience – Jesus's life

*Romans 5:10-11 - For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. <sup>11</sup> More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.*

Bottom line: It's not my life that reconciles me to God. It's Jesus's life.

Jesus fulfilled the law, so I don't have to. Jesus kept Leviticus so I don't have to. At the end of every page in Leviticus, through all the specificity, weariness, horror and cost, I can just say, "Thank you, Jesus!"

God set reconciliation in the rhythm of the world.

- It was every 50 years (Lev 25).
- It was every week (Ex 20)
- It is every day (Lam 3).
- Jesus makes it every moment (Hb 4:16).

**Jesus is my Jubilee!** He sets me free.

*Romans 8:2-3 - For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. <sup>3</sup> For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do.*

### Conclusion:

If you haven't read Leviticus, you want to make yourself read it. You want to be horrified. You want to be wearied. You want to see the cost of sin and salvation. You want to ask, "Why?" Only then will you understand and appreciate Jesus.

First: Jesus summarized Leviticus in two statements: love God and love people.

Second: Jesus fulfilled Leviticus, so I don't have to.

This is why we all join with Paul in saying, *"Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift!"* (Romans 9:15).

Let's stand together and do that in song.

### Community Groups:

1 – What has been most insightful about reading Leviticus?

2 – What has been most wearying about reading Leviticus?

3 – What would you say to encourage someone to read Leviticus?

4 – How is Leviticus all about God's love?

5 – Of the five reasons that Pastor mentioned for Leviticus, which one has most influenced you?

- \*Specificity,
- \* weariness,
- \* horror
- \* cost and
- \* questioning

6 – Why are we glad God doesn't eradicate his holiness in order to demonstrate his love?

7 – How does God satisfy his holiness while exhibiting his love?

8 – How would you explain the Ten Commandments and their purpose?

9 – In Matthew 22, how did Jesus summarize the law?

10 – What does it mean that God is our greatest good?

11 – Why did Jesus fulfil the law?

12 – What does Jesus's active obedience do for me?

13 – How can I have a righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees?

14 – How is Jesus our Sabbath? Our year of Jubilee?