

The Call to be Holy

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[0 : 00] So, here's the review. Remember that if you were here week one, we looked at the fact that Leviticus is shaped in what's called a chiasm.

And a chiasm is a literary term for a structure that follows A, B, C, D, C, B, A.

So we talked about how the Gruffalo is a chiasm. If you've read the Gruffalo, most of Julia Donaldson books are all chiasms. So if you have kids or if you don't have kids and you just happen to have all the Julia Donaldson books, you can check this out at home that they tend to be snake, rabbit, duck, Gruffalo, duck, rabbit, snake, something like that.

That's what Leviticus is. Lots of books of the Bible in the Old Testament are like that. So you can see the chiasm on your outline there. There's an intro statement. The Lord spoke from inside the tent of Moses.

And the big problem that's presented there is that the people of Israel don't have access to the Lord. They were made for God's presence. And so the Lord is not speaking face to face.

[1 : 11] He's inside Moses' outside. And then the chiasm starts. And so I just want to note just where we are. You'll see we're tonight on C2 on the handout.

Look at A1 is ritual sacrifices. A2 at the bottom is ritual feasts. B1 is priestly ordination. B2 is priestly qualification.

See that? C1 ceremonial purity. So all this stuff about not touching dead bodies, not touching blood, things like that.

C2 where we are tonight is moral purity. So you see how those correspond to one another and the heart of Leviticus is the day of atonement. So we looked at the day of atonement last time and we looked at it.

We said that the day of the atonement is not only the climax of Leviticus, it's the climax of the whole Torah, the first five books of the Bible. It is the centerpiece, the heart of the heart. It is the event whereby God cleanses and forgives his people and it ultimately points to Christ.

[2 : 15] There's the great act of ritual grace in the Torah and the first five books of the Bible. And so we're in the section just after that. And if you are around week one, the last thing I'll say about it is that we said is if there are two things to learn from Leviticus.

One, you are made to enter into God's presence and God has made a way. So in the Old Testament through the Levitical rites. And the second thing is as soon as God makes a way for you to enter the tabernacle, that is just the beginning of life with God.

And so the second half of Leviticus is all about the idea of now become holy. So in other words, God has purified you, cleans you and cleansed the temple so you can go in, but now you actually have to be holy.

So the first half of Leviticus gets you in. The second half of Leviticus is now how you go and live in the light of what God has done. So enter into God's presence, part two, be holy as I am holy.

That's the thesis of the whole second half. And that's really at the heart of what we're seeing tonight in the chapters that we have. So now that means that Leviticus presents a paradigm.

[3 : 27] The paradigm is the law tells you you're unclean and you don't deserve to be in God's presence.

God makes a way by way of sacrifice so that you can enter God's presence. And we call that grace. And then after God has made a way and purified you and the space to be with you, he then says now go and live a different life, a new life, a reformed life.

So that's what theologians or Bible scholars or the church in general, all of us, call a law, grace, holiness paradigm.

That the Bible operates consistently from Genesis 3 on that paradigm. The law convicts. God makes a way. And then when God makes a way, God says now go and live like me. Take on my character. Law, grace, holiness paradigm. Okay, that's Leviticus. The law tells you you're impure. The day of atonement makes the way and then go and be holy as I am holy. [4 : 34] That's exactly what we have. Now that's the entire Bible. That's the New Testament. That's the Old Testament. That's the Old Covenant. That's the New Covenant. Because both the Old Covenant and the New Covenant are covenants of grace.

Ultimately, the Old Covenant and the New Covenant are one covenant fulfilled in Jesus. And so that means that you have the same ideas throughout the whole of the Bible and it's all right here in the book of Leviticus.

Okay, so in this section, we're being told that God is holy and so we're supposed to be holy too. So let's look at that. If you look down with me at chapter 17, we're told at the beginning of chapter 17 that the day of atonement is complete.

The way has been made. You can enter into God's presence. God will come down into your presence. But then now that the Levitical law, the right is completed, we realize that that's not the goal ultimately.

The goal is only part of the way there. Now that we are in God's presence, we've got to live a holy life. And God first comes and gives the two reasons for the Levitical law to begin with for this entire system.

[5 : 50] And here they are. They're down in first and verse 11. So why this gracious Levitical system? Look at chapter 17 verse 11. First he says, for the life of the flesh is in the blood.

And I've given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. So first he says, one of the big theses of the whole Testament is right here in this verse.

The life is in the blood. You're going to see this line repeated a couple more times in Leviticus. It's so fundamental to understanding the Old Testament rites, religious ceremonies.

And what is it about? The life is in the blood. It's saying that in the view of an ancient Erester person, blood was the most essential part of the human body.

And it's very true that we know that we need the blood to be in our body for our bodies to work. If the blood gets out of your body, it doesn't work anymore. And so they would say, life is in the blood.

[6 : 57] So that's why looking back at the purity laws, bleeding, any type of bleeding, became a sign of uncleanness. Not because bleeding is sinful, but because it's a symbol of the fact that the world is losing blood.

Chaos has entered. It's a death sign and symbol. People are not supposed to be losing blood. And so anytime there's a loss of blood, there's a ritual impurity.

And so here on the flip side, on the backside of the David Talmud, we said, look, God says, life is in the blood. The blood has been spilled. And so the blood, the life, has covered over your deathly condition.

And then from there, he's going to say now, very literally, don't eat food that's full of blood. Don't drink blood.

That's one of the commandments. And that's one of the first things he says. And he says, because in the ritual ceremonies, that is the symbol of life.

[8 : 00] And so you're not to mistreat it. It's a representation of chaos and death if you use blood in the wrong way. Now there's a second reason that's stacked on top of that one for this entire system.

And we learn about what it is right after that. If you look down at verse chapter 18, verse three, backed up to verse two, the Lord speaks.

He says to the people of Israel, I'm the Lord your God, you shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt. So just before that in 17 verse 14, 15, don't eat the blood, meaning don't consume blood, or you will be cut off from God's people.

Right after that, I'm the Lord your God, I brought you out of the land of Egypt. Do not live as they did in the land of Egypt. All right, so now the entire holiness code we're about to read is premised on this line.

Do not live as they did in the land of Egypt, meaning in the land of Egypt, clearly they were using blood for consumption. And the rest of the Levitical code in these several chapters is bookended in that way.

[9:10] Verse chapter 18, do not behave in your life as the people in Egypt did, or as any of the pagan nations. And at the end of chapter 20, and at the beginning of chapter 21, it says this again, do not live as the Egyptians did in the land of Egypt when you were under their yoke of slavery.

In other words, it's saying the entire system is I have set you apart from paganism. I have rescued you from your impurities and your sins. I have given you my presence, and now what does it mean to be holy?

It means don't be like the nations, because the nations are pagans. So this is the distinction that in the Old Testament, holiness is defined for humans in distinction from pagan lifestyles.

Now in the New Testament, the same thing happens. So you read these lists that Paul makes.

They're not even easy for us as modern people to read sometimes, because the kinds of things that Paul lists in the list in the Greco-Roman Empire that he's telling the Corinthian church, the Thessalonian church, not to do are the same types of lists you read about here.

So he says things like don't be full of acts of porneia, sexual immorality. He even lists things like orgies and all sorts of stuff that for us modern Westerners is hard to even read sometimes.

[10:31] And he's doing the same exact thing. He's saying in a pagan culture, these are the types of practices that are normal, common. And holiness is that you have been saved, made pure, and set apart to live a life that is like the character of God, not like the pagan culture all around you.

And so from there, the rest of these holiness laws that we get, these moral purity laws in Leviticus, chapter 17, 18, 19, and 20, are really expressions of what it means to live a distinct life from a pagan life, a life where you don't believe in the God of the Bible.

Huge applications of this for us tonight. I'm going to give you two in just a minute, but let's just quickly run through some of these laws. I just want to show them to you because I think all of us are going to say, yeah, exactly.

Of course, of course, most of these laws when you read them. And so just look down with me. I have some of the texts listed of the holiness laws. Chapter 18, from verse six to eight, none of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover their nakedness.

I am the Lord. All right? From verse six to 18, it's laws against incest. Okay? And then, by the way, the language uncover the nakedness shows up earlier in the Bible, doesn't it?

[11:49] If you remember, it shows up in the Noah story at the end of the flood story. And so lots of people will talk about how everything was good, the Genesis one mandate that's been reissued after the flood story, be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, everything seems to be fine.

And then it says, Noah uncovered, the sons of Noah uncovered Noah's nakedness. And people will, what does that mean? Okay? Well, we understand a bit more of what it means from this list.

Okay? So it does not mean that they simply saw their father in a state of undress. It's a reference to something in this list here, something much more than that.

And you can read the rest of this list. We don't know exactly what it was, but the language of the metaphor of uncovering nakedness is something much more serious as it's listed here in Leviticus. From there, it goes on and on, things that you would completely expect it to say. Look down with me at verse 21, for example. God says, you shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech.

[12:52] And so profane the name of your God. That is talking about human child sacrifice. You shall not give your children to Molech, which was a God that was worshiped.

It's mentioned five or six times in the Old Testament through actual human sacrifices. Okay? So these are big, big, abominable as the text puts it, things that were happening in the pagan nations. That's what's being listed here. If you keep going from there, jump to chapter 19, verse three. Every one of you, now it gets a little more normal, which you're probably saying, thank you, goodness. Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep the Sabbath. Okay? So honor your parents. That's one of the next lines. And then you keep going from there.

Verse nine in chapter 19. When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge. Neither shall you gather the gleanings at the harvest. So you shall leave a part of the field unharvested at the edges so that the poor can come and eat from your extra.

[13:55] That's the command there. Okay? Just a few others. Verse 11, you shall not steal. Right. Don't steal. You shall not oppress your neighbor.

That's something we would expect not to happen today. Don't oppress your neighbor. Right? Keep going. Verse 15, you shall not do injustice in court. So if you go to court, you don't lie in court.

Don't bear false witness in court. Right? So these are things we'll see that we've seen in the Ten Commandments already. Verse 17, you shall not hate your brother in your heart. Right? So that shows back up in the Sarmadon the mountain when Jesus talks about it. So we see, let me just give you one more. Chapter 20, verse 22 says, you shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them that the land where I'm bringing you, you may live and the land might may not vomit you out.

So if you were here last Sunday, we talked about how much human beings are connected to the land. Adam and Adamah, the very words in Hebrew, how tight they are. And throughout the Torah, throughout the first five books and the rest of the Old Testament, it says that when you act like pagan nations, the land wants to vomit you out.

[15:10] You know, you're sinning not only against God and against people, but also even against the material creation to the point where the land can't hold you in anymore. It has to get rid of you. You have to go into the wilderness. You have to go into exile.

And so in all these things, if you read this list, more and more, most of these things are things that you would recognize as normal for what you would think to be a decent moral society, the things that are listed here.

But the way that it's pitched in the moral code of holiness here in Leviticus is you, Israel, are going to be the exception.

So just think about that for a minute. He's telling them, don't be like all the other nations. Therefore, honor your parents.

Don't steal. Don't oppress your neighbor. Leave a little bit of extra food at the edges of your field so that the poor can eat. Don't marry your siblings.

[16:12] This is what's going to make you different from everybody, wildly different. And this is what it means to be holy and be like me. All right, so let's apply that. The point, we could list it in multiple verses.

I've listed all the verses for you that it says it very explicitly underneath the heading, the point. Chapter 19, verse two, speak to the congregation and say to them, you shall be holy for I am holy. Be like God, distinct from the nations. Be holy as I am holy because I am the Lord your God. Not Molech, he's not your God. Not Ray, the deity of the sun in Egypt, the principal deity that they would have been forced to often worship when they were in slavery in Egypt.

He's not your God. The Lord is your God. And whereas Ray told you you could do all of these things, Molech demands these evil things from you. I'm the Lord your God.

So be like me, not like them. That's the idea. Then chapter 20, verse seven, consecrate yourselves therefore and be holy for I am the Lord your God.

[17:18] Again, Ray is not your God. Molech is not your God. I am your God. You could say, as a modern person, you could say, man, man is not your God.

Your money is not your God. Sex and power are not your gods. I am the Lord your God. All right, it's the same exact idea for us as well. Chapter 20, verse 26, you shall be holy to me for I am the Lord and holy and I've separated you from the peoples that you should be mine.

So same idea. And then lastly, chapter 21, verse eight, you shall sanctify him, the priest, for he offers the bread of your God. He shall be holy to you for I the Lord who sanctify you and holy.

So that's specific for the priest. All right, so you see that idea? Be holy. Be separate from the nations. If you've been saved by grace, you've been set apart. And to be set apart is to be holy. And to be holy is to be different. And to be different is to be morally pure relative to the nations around you. And to do that is to act like God's very character in your life.

[18:22] Now let's apply that a little more concretely to us. First is, I want to just mention Tom Holland's book, Dominion, and the thesis that comes out of it because the thesis is right here in what we're talking about tonight.

We don't realize Western people in a city like Edinburgh do not realize how Christian everyone in the city really is by value without knowing it.

They don't realize it. They're unaware of how Christian they really are. Not Christian in the sense that they follow Christ and believe the gospel, right? We know most people in our city do not follow Christ. But how Christian our city is based on a text like Leviticus 17 to 20, right?

So this is Tom Holland's famous thesis and his great book, Dominion, which has been one of the most important books written in the past decade probably that has changed for many people the

viability, the plausibility structures of believing in God actually.

So we have people even in our church that have come to the Christian faith through the means of Tom Holland's being convinced by Tom Holland's book, *Dominion*. And in the book, *Dominion*, I've given you just a little bit.

[19 : 40] He says this, we swim in Christian waters, not Roman or Greek. So he's a historian and he says as he studied history, he realized that even as an atheist, which is what he was and sort of still is, but he said, I realized how much of a Christian I am that when I read about the history of Rome, the history of Greece, the history of Egypt, I realized that these dominant cultures that existed for so many centuries are just not my culture.

And the main way he realized that is through the moral values that are most prominent in the law of the land in which we live. And so this is what he writes, just as a bishop of Oxford refused to consider that he might be descended from an ape.

So now are many in the West reluctant to contemplate that their values and even their very lack of belief might be traceable back to Christian origins.

So Tom has this thesis that even the possibility to say, I don't believe in God was made possible by Christianity because Christianity came and said, we don't coerce people.

We don't enslave you and force you to worship our God. Instead, we give you freedom and we tell you, you need to be convinced in your heart. It's Christianity that makes atheism possible in a sense.

[21 : 00] And then ironically, there were no atheists, not legally in most empires prior to the modern, right? The ability to be free to believe what you want to believe is a Christian value that atheists of the modern age like Dawkins stand upon.

Now Richard Dawkins has come out saying this very recently as well. He's recognized that his values are overwhelmingly Christian, Judeo-Christian, he said. And he says he realizes that that's embedded into his cultural life and that he can't get out from underneath that.

So I just want to point this out. It's very important because people will say, look, you don't have to believe in God, the Christian God, to be a good person. And there's a sense in which that's true. By God's common grace, he gives everybody the possibility to recognize the moral law and to step into it, to be a decent human. But when you read the Bible really carefully, actually what you see is that the norm is the anti-Ten commandments that are implicit in all the laws we just read about in Leviticus 17 and 20.

There's a reason God is coming and saying, don't be like all the nations because all the nations are consuming the blood, practicing incest, stealing, lying in every court case, doing the sins that all of us humans, to some degree, struggle from the bottom of our heart, but they're doing it at a maximized level where it is culturally normal.

[22 : 23] And Tom Holland talks about this in his book. He says, when I looked at Greek culture and Roman culture, I realized it is completely culturally normal for a powerful man in the Roman Empire to do whatever he wants with anyone around him.

And in a sense, even the ability in a city like Edinburgh for us to say all collectively agree no matter what we believe in, a man cannot go around the city just doing whatever he wants, speaking to a woman even, even using his words to do whatever he wants.

Tom says, is fundamentally because of Christianity, fundamentally, that that is not normal in Greco-Roman society, that is not normal in the ancient Near Eastern nations.

And so here we see how much our society owes its life and values to Christianity. And it starts right here, God separates Israel from the nations and says, don't be like everybody else, be holy.

And it's just basically the 10 commandments, which have become completely normal for almost all of us. All right, that's the first thing. The second thing, and final thing, I just want to point out.

[23 : 26] The second application, the New Testament, when you come to the New Testament, it quotes these quotes we read, be holy as I am holy, for I am the Lord your God. So we have a direct quotation in the New Testament of this 1 Peter 1.16.

So Peter comes and says, Christians in exile, living in the pagan Roman Empire, 1 Peter 1.16, be holy as I am holy.

So this is Peter quoting from Leviticus to say that the same thing applies in the New Testament, you shall be holy. So it's very simple and we'll wrap up, but when you've experienced the grace of atonement in your lives, when you've experienced the true day of atonement through the Lord

Jesus Christ, you have now been set apart from the nations.

Be holy as I am holy. Be the image of God, take on the character of God. And so as I was preparing for this, again, anytime you study holiness, you're 100% convicted.

You have to be. You have to be. Because the command is have that possess the character of God into this world because you've been set apart. And so we've got to say, I need to come underneath this command tonight and think about all the ways in which my life is not holy.

[24 : 46] I'm not holy. I am like the nations. I'm pursuing things from my heart out to my hands. It starts the desires out to the hands in ways that are not following the character of God.

So let me give you three things to close and I'm just going to list them about how to pursue holiness in your life, something, a couple of things to think about. The first is this.

Holiness is not fundamentally about rules and law. Holiness is underneath this law code.

Holiness is a posture of the heart. It is a love for God from top to bottom. It's a utter devotion to the Lord.

That's what holiness actually is. So it's when your heart is so utterly devoted to the Lord that your hands look like that. Your behavior looks like that.

[25 : 45] It flows from the inside outside. So we see this really clearly right in the sermon on the mount. Here's an example. Holiness is not a plea for money, but it's just an example.

Giving, you think about giving. So in the Old Testament, there's a tithe, 10%. Give 10% of your tithe. In the New Testament, the tithe is abrogated or fulfilled and replaced by the concept of generosity. So in the New Testament, we do not have any more a direct command that says, give 10%. We're going to check on that. Instead, it's just be generous.

And why? because if you come and say, how much do I have to give to the work of the Lord, to the ministry, then immediately you've revealed, we've revealed in that question that we're not yet prepared to say, I'm utterly devoted to the things of the Lord.

I'm utterly, utterly, truly. No, instead, how can I be generous to the point of sacrifice? There's no tithe in the New Testament because the tithe says you must give 10%.

[26 : 48] But after you've experienced the gospel of Jesus, we no longer say, I must give 10%. We say, I just want to be generous. So there's holiness that comes out of the bottom of the heart.

The second thing, the holiness of the heart is only possible if you've come in by grace. So the holiness code can only be observed truly if you've come in through the day of atonement, the real one, the full one, Jesus Christ's day of atonement, the day of atonement that's been offered through the Lamb of God.

In other words, our hearts cannot follow the law of God because without grace we will always lack love for God from the bottom.

Another way to say it is if you try to be holy by simply practicing the law that God's given you, the 10 commandments.

You are practicing holiness for holiness sake. So you're actually obeying the law for the sake of the law. And instead, you've got to come through grace.

[27 : 58] In other words, you've got to have experienced God's love for you, utter devotion for you before you can ever have utter devotion for God in every area of life. So the day of atonement, that's why the day of atonement precedes the law giving here.

And in the same way in the book of Exodus, Israel does not go to Sinai and then cross the Red Sea. The only way you ever get to Sinai is if you've passed through the Red Sea.

In other words, you have to have already gone under the waters of death and up from the waters of death into salvation before you ever get to Mount Sinai and hear the 10 commandments.

Otherwise, it's a gospel that's not good news at all. It's just get your life better. Be holy. Do better than you have then. And then maybe I'll let you pass through the Red Sea with me.

Now we passed through the Red Sea and then we come to Mount Sinai. We passed through the day of atonement and then we come to the holiness code. Only if you've experienced the grace of Jesus Christ to the bottom of your soul and seeing how much Jesus has devoted to you, can you turn around and be devoted to him.

[29 : 04] And that's real holiness. That's real holiness. All right. Lastly, just a quick little note on some very practical things. Oh, third, holiness means that law is good.

God's law is good, not bad. The law convicts us. Grace heals us. And then we go back to the law again to learn. This is what it means to reflect God's character in my life.

The law is good, not bad. Grace does not free us from God's law, but frees us into it. Grace frees us from the impossibility of obeying God's law.

And so frees us to step inside of it and live out of it, actually. So the Levitical Ethical Code here is reconstituted for us in the Sermon on the Mount in the New Testament.

So so much of what we read here is found in Jesus' words in the New Testament. And so the last thing is this. That means that, I know, I think that for us modern Christians in a great city like this, a very modern city like this, probably one of the biggest holes to quote Kevin DeYoung's book title, holes in our holiness, is that we tend to play down the role of law in our Christian lives.

[30 : 26] And we just don't take it that seriously. So we're all grace to the point of actually neglecting the call to be holy sometimes. And it is all grace.

And there's a call for those of us who experience that grace to be holy. And that I just love John Owen's line is one you can always keep in your back pocket.

Be killing sin unless it be killing you. Kill sin or it's going to kill you. Right. Mortify your sins.

It's a command. Be holy as I am holy. Lastly, don't lose heart when you sin. Don't give up the fight against your sin.

So there will be folks in this room tonight, in a room this size, even though we're smaller in number today, that are absolutely all of us to some degree, but some of us very specifically struggling with sin patterns that have been there that we've felt like we've lost to a long time ago and can't get past.

[31 : 30] Don't lose heart. Today is the day to fight that sin, to kill your sin. Even if you've lost to it every single day for the last 25 years or however long, today is the day to start killing that sin, to start fighting that sin.

C.S. Lewis wrote a letter to a friend of his, and I've truly got to stop. C.S. Lewis wrote a letter to a friend of his, and he confessed in that letter a sin that had surprised him that he had committed after he had come to faith in Christ.

And he wrote in the letter that even though he was shocked at his own behavior, that he had been strengthened by the fact that he had just written the screw-table letters, in fact, about all the ways Satan can come and tempt him.

And so this is what he said. He said, I feel grateful that the enemy has been driven to resort to stratagems to defeat me. He used to walk boldly up to me for a full frontal attack in the face of all my guns.

That doesn't work anymore. Now he has to use clever strategies to get to me. So he's saying he did. He got me. I send in a way that it surprised me. I didn't see the temptation coming. But he said, but I do know that I used to just dive right in.

[32 : 46] And now it doesn't work anymore in me. My desires have changed. Right? So he said that the more you kill your sin, the more you kill it, whatever it is that you struggle with, the less tempting it will be over time.

That's how it works. Kill your sin lest it be killing you. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the holiness code and we ask that you would teach us to be holy.

So give us a desire to be like you. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.