

Week of May 18/19, 2013

Living in Holiness

Passage Outline:

1. Separate from Society's Standards - Leviticus 18:1-5
2. Separate from Sinful Practices - Leviticus 18:20-26
3. Separate from False Spirituality - Leviticus 20:6-8

What will Pastor Jim be Talking About? And Why?

God sets us apart for holy living, so we should reject unbiblical aspects of our culture. God can help us separate ourselves from the unbiblical aspects of your culture and stand out by living in holiness.

1. Separate from Society's Standards - Leviticus 18:1-5

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.

A quick reading of Leviticus 18:1-5 reveals a direct requirement that God had for the nation of Israel, to be set apart from the world—but also to be set apart unto the Lord. God called His people to separate from the standards of worldly society and embrace the standards God was giving them. They were not to “follow the practices of the land of Egypt, where you used to live, nor follow the practices of the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you.” God was in effect warning Israel ahead of time that, while these practices might seem appealing at some points, in the conclusion they would end in death.

Please articles “Egypt’s Many Gods” and “Who Were the Canaanites?” contained in the heavy duty preparation packet.

God didn't simply tell the people not to walk in the ways or follow the practices of the surrounding nations without giving them an alternative. In verses 4-5 we see the positive aspects of living life God's way, obeying My *laws* and following My *decrees*. The Israelites received word that they were to practice My laws and follow My decrees. When both words are used together they have a major force to mean the whole of God's revelation. The people are to both live out and practice these laws. In effect God wants to see His laws not merely kept at the surface level but rather He wanted them to become part of the inner, personal life of the nation.

It is easy to look back at Israel and condemn them for their falling away from God. However, when we evaluate our lives in light of God's Word, do we reject the standards of the world that oppose His principles? Unbiblical cultural influences prove to be slippery creatures which pop up in the strangest of places (for example: What is playing on your personal digital device right now? What television shows or movies do we watch that do not line up with God's Word?) We must understand that holy living before a Holy God demands a conscious day-by-day and moment-by-moment choice to live life that is radically counterculture in today's society. To live this kind of life was not optional for the Israelite, and is not optional for the Christian. It is the only acceptable choice to live before the holy God!

2. Separate from Sinful Practices - Leviticus 18:20-26

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. ²³ "Do not have sexual rela-

tions 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,

God listed five detestable practices that Israel should not participate in nor tolerate. They included: sexual immorality (adultery), child sacrifice (offerings to Molech), profaning Yahweh's name, homosexuality, and bestiality. God mentioned that these were the reasons He was driving out the other nations from the land of Canaan.

Any type of sexual relations with a woman other than one's wife was forbidden (Ex. 20:14; Deut. 22:22). Such activity was forbidden for a number of reasons but primarily because it broke apart the family structure. The Book of Proverbs warns the reader that "the one who commits adultery lacks sense; whoever does so destroys himself" (Prov. 6:32).

The Canaanite custom of child sacrifice, making your children pass through the fire to Molech (a god of the ancient Near East) was to be avoided. Molech was a reprehensible god that the Israelites sometimes became ensnared with, particularly during the period of the kings. We see that sacrifices to Molech occurred in a number of places in Israelite history (see 1 Kings 11:7; 2 Kings 23:10; Jer. 32:35). Child sacrifice was sometimes a simple, straightforward practice of throwing one's child alive into the fire or at other times setting a child on the red-hot and out-stretched arms of the iron god Molech.

To profane the name of your God usually means to make something unholy (e.g. the Lord's sanctuary, offering) or to be unholy. To profane something is to make it unholy either by action or misuse so that others have a lower view of "who" and "what" God is. One may profane God's name simply by one's behavior (or lack of behavior) in today's society if the person is considered a Christian (Story: A woman with Christian bumper stickers who reads off a fellow driver). Our actions have eternal consequences which not only the lost world but God also sees in our behavior.

Homosexuality is universally condemned throughout the Old and New Testaments. In this chapter the act is condemned in the most stringent way. God calls such acts detestable, a word whose root in Hebrew means "an abomination," or "an abhorrence," or in other words, "something to be avoided." We are living in a time of history when homosexuality is no longer considered a sin. And, when Christians do speak out against such activity, we are often considered narrow minded or even prejudice. But the truth of the matter is that these are God's commands, not our ideas. Regardless of the social pressure, we must be true to God's Word.

Read the article "Abomination: A Word Study" contained in the heavy duty preparation packet.

Bestiality is likewise thoroughly condemned throughout Scripture (Ex. 22:19; Deut. 27:21). Such prohibitions focused on crossing over the boundary which God had established between the sexes and the animal kingdom. The punishment for both homosexuality and bestiality was the implementation of the death penalty (Lev. 20:13; Ex. 22:19).

God stated that the nations He would drive out of Canaan "defiled themselves by all these things." In Genesis 15:16 God had told Abraham that He would not deal with the Amorites as they deserved until their sin "reached its full measure." God had given the Canaanites/Amorites hundreds of years for repentance to turn from their sins, yet they did not. Rather, they sank deeper into sexual and societal depravity. Now the time had come for the Canaanites and Amorites to be driven out of the land due to their immorality.

So polluting was the sin of the Canaanite/Amorite that the land had become defiled as well. The word

translated *defiled* carries the connotation of being ceremonially unclean, desecrating that which is holy, or declaring unclean. Because of the rampant evil practiced in the land, God stated that the land will vomit out its inhabitants. The land was so sick that it needed to purge itself of the inhabitant's immoral behavior before it could again begin to heal itself.

Read the article “Israel’s Understanding of the Land” contained in the heavy duty preparation packet.

We can learn two important truths from this text: First, that our children are gifts from God, not something to sacrificed. Children are more important than materials things, personal agenda, and life itself. Second, we too need to embrace God’s plan for human sexuality as it is revealed in His Word. Human sexuality is a gift from God to humanity. We live in a sexually-charged culture. Our society no longer considers different sexual behaviors wrong. But our standard of right and wrong is to be the Bible, not society.

3. Separate from False Spirituality - Leviticus 20:6-8

⁶ "I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute himself by following them, and I will cut him off from his people. ⁷ "Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your God. ⁸ Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy.

In today’s culture it is so tempting to turn to “other” sources of spiritual knowledge. However, Scripture adamantly points out that this is not only folly but also spiritually dangerous. As Israel entered into Canaan they were confronted with various types of occult practices such as divination with the dead (necromancy) as well as the belief in extra-biblical elements (such as ghosts). God strictly warned His people that, “whoever turns to mediums or spiritists, I will turn against that person and cut him off from his people.”

God noted that both mediums and spiritists were forbidden to the nation of Israel. Two reasons are given throughout Scripture as to why God issued this prohibition. First, by following after mediums and spiritists, Israel was saying they wanted more information than God had given them. God had already given all the revelation that the people needed through His Prophets and for us, the Apostles.

Instead the people were to consecrate themselves to be holy, for God was holy. We see the same theme running throughout the whole of Scripture from Genesis to the Book of Revelation. Israel was to abstain from idolatry because they followed/loved/embraced *the* holy God of Israel. Since God’s nature was holy, we His people should live out that same quality. The Bible is full (especially Psalm 119) of the decrees of God which become the guide post for all of life. They keep Christians on the narrow path of righteousness rather than the broad road which leads to destruction.

Lastly, we see the declarative statement, “I am Yahweh who sets you apart.” We see plainly here that it is God who keeps and makes His people set apart and holy. If Israel thought they could keep God’s Laws and decrees in “their own power,” they deluded themselves. Christians cannot keep God’s Holy Word by themselves—we need the power of the Holy Spirit. It is God who sets us apart and makes us holy.

Biblical Truths in Focus

1. We must evaluate society’s standards in light of God’s Word; reject those standards that oppose God’s Word.
2. Pinpoint areas of your life in which you are most susceptible to unbiblical cultural influences, and identify ways you can protect yourself.
3. Understand that holy living before Holy God requires a conscious, day-by-day, moment-by-moment choice to live radically countercultural in today’s society.

4. Recognize God demands His people live holy lives. Holy living is not optional for the Christian, it is the only acceptable choice. Anything less than holiness is sin.
5. Recognize that your children are more important than material things or personal agenda, and evaluate ways in which you may have figuratively sacrificed them.
6. Embrace God's plan for human sexuality as revealed in His Word.
7. Commit to hold fast to God's standard of sexuality even when it is trivialized for going against widely held and accepted assumptions of our society.
8. Identify sources of false "spiritual" guidance within our society that do not rely on Scripture, and commit to rejecting those sources.
9. Give thanks to God for making us holy by the power of His Holy Spirit, living in us. Confess where we have fallen short, and rejoice in God's free and complete forgiveness in Jesus Christ. It is God who truly makes us holy.

Concept Study: *Mediums and Spiritists*

The biblical text has quite a bit to say concerning "mediums" or "spiritists," especially in the levitical legislation. In passages such as Leviticus 19:31; 20:6,27; Deuteronomy 18:9-14; and even in the prophets such as Isaiah 8:19 and 19:3, we see a negative understanding of this type of practice. The Hebrew words refer to the person or place of calling forth the dead, or the one called from the dead (medium); or a knower, one who knows how to call up the dead or who knew the dead well (spiritist). One of the most vivid portraits in the Old Testament of this practice comes in 1 Samuel 28. An exhausted Saul sought advice from the dead Samuel. The Hebrew text states plainly that Saul sought out a "medium" to be the go between from living Saul to dead Samuel.

The Law provided strict penalties for consorting with the dead or hiring the services of a medium or a spiritists. Passages such as Leviticus 20:27 require that anyone found to be a practicing medium be put to death. Passages such as 1 Samuel 28:3 and 2 Kings 23:24 reflect those who practiced necromancy were removed from the land. Regardless of the practice, it was strictly forbidden by Yahweh and no good ever came of it from the biblical prospective.