

In his study guide for today's text, Chuck Swindoll remarks, isn't it interesting *"that the book of Leviticus is the first book studied by a Jewish child; yet is often among the last books of the Bible to be studied by a Christian."* Today's readers are often put off by these lists of laws regarding diet, sacrifice, social and sexual behavior. But it is within these highly detailed directives that we discover the all-encompassing holiness of God and we can learn how sin devastates our relationship with Him.

Unlike the other four books of the Pentateuch, Leviticus tells no stories and gives few historical accounts; it is as it declares itself to be, a book of regulations for how the nation of Israel can live in a right relationship with their holy God. The phrase, "***I am the Lord your God***" is repeated over 23 times within its 27 chapters. And the phrase ***be holy***, usually paired with ***because I am holy***, occurs over 10 times; often with both of these phrases coupled together, such as in this verse which we find in today's text:

Consecrate yourselves therefore, and **be holy for I am the Lord your God**. Keep my statutes, and observe them; I am the Lord; I sanctify you. Leviticus 20:7-8

An interesting thing to note about this verse is that the words **consecrate** and **sanctify** mean the same thing. God is saying, in response to the fact that I am the one who makes you holy, you need to be living a holy life.

So, if you learn nothing else from the book of Leviticus, learn this: **our Holy God takes our own striving to live a holy life very seriously**. Why? Because our sin – our lack of holiness -- is what most quickly severs the relation which He would have with us.

And yet these days, most Americans seem to be in full rebellion against any such moral laws imposed upon them other than those of their own making. **Which is what makes Leviticus chapters 18 and 20 among the most controversial, quickly rejected portions in our entire Bible**. Because these chapters list God's rules for how to maintain our own sexual holiness before our holy God. They also list the capital consequences that once were mandated for breaking those rules; both of which now grate against our culture's very libertarian attitude towards all things sexual.

A man went to see a psychiatrist, and told him, *"I've been doing some bad things, Doc, and my conscience is really troubling me."*

The psychiatrist replied: *"And so you want something that will help STRENGTHEN your will power?"*

"Well actually," the man replied, "I was thinking of something that might help weaken my conscience."

Such is the sad moral condition of our world today: we don't want to feel guilty for doing what we know to be wrong. But before we go any further looking into God's prohibitions against certain types of sexual relations, we need to learn the origin of **WHY sexuality has become such a hot button issue in our world.**

In his commentary on Leviticus, Warren Wiersbe noted that...

We live in a sex-saturated society. It smiles at couples [living together outside of marriage], encourages abortion as a means of birth control, promotes and endorses kinky sex as a form of entertainment, claims that moral absolutes don't exist, and really believes that people can violate moral standards and escape the consequences. Fulton J. Sheen was right when he said, "*The Victorians pretended sex did not exist; the moderns pretend that nothing else exists.*" (Wiersbe, p.228)

So why does our world seem so obsessed with all things sexual?

I believe the answer can be found in the fact that not only is the sex drive one of our most powerful instincts, but it was also originally designed into us by God – before humankind's fall. God "*created humankind in his image ... male and female he created them and blessed them, and said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it;* (Gen. 1:27-28).

So the sexual nature that was built into us is in some way a reflection of God's character, God's image within us – *Let us make humankind in our image.* Thus our sexuality was not intended to be a source of temptation and evil, but rather a natural part of our holy life.

Notice also that **marriage was the first command given by God to these as yet holy sexual beings.** God intended for these first two and for every man and woman following them, to express their *fruitfulness* by leaving their parental homes, "***cleaving together and becoming one flesh,***" thus forming a new God honoring family. Our sexual experiences within the bounds of marriage were thus intended to be a joyous, sacred, reflection of both "God's image," His personal nature which He designed into us and His blessing upon our lives.

There is some aspect of our *multiplying and subduing the earth* within the relationship of a faithful marriage that reflects both God's personal character and also His hope for the life we live.

So, it is not surprising with humanity's rebellion and subsequent alienation from God that both our sexual nature and the institution of marriage were not only corrupted but have ever since come under constant attack by Satan: both of these having been created before the fall and declared by God to be "very good!"

Which brings us to the reason why God had to give His new nation of Israel such specific rules -- as found here in Leviticus -- for maintaining sexual purity. Because the Egyptian world from

which they had just left and the Canaanite world into which they were now moving practiced all these forms of sexual immorality that are listed out in these chapters.

God declared that it was because of rampant sexual perversity and their practice of such "abominations," that the Canaanites had "*defiled*" the very land in which they had lived and which was now causing that land to *vomit them out*. God further warned the Israelites that should they begin to copy these forbidden sexual sins then the land would vomit them out as well (*such very dramatic imagery for how personal sin can pollute both the surrounding community and destroy an entire culture* cf. Leviticus 18:24-30).

Chapter 18 concludes with this warning.

So keep My charge not to commit any of these abominations that were done before you, and not to defile yourselves by them: I am the Lord your God. Leviticus 18:30

Let's now let's take a summary look at of these rules in chapter 18.

The chapter opens with God telling Moses ...

Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: I am the Lord your God. You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not follow their statutes. My ordinances you shall observe and my statutes you shall keep, following them: I am the Lord your God. You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances; by doing so you shall live: I am the Lord. (Leviticus 18:1-5)

And then verse 6...

None of you shall approach anyone near of kin to uncover their nakedness: I am the Lord. Leviticus 18:6

"*To uncover their nakedness*" is a euphemism for having a sexual relationship with another person. What verse 6 described in summary, verses 7-18 then go into specific detail listing out all the variations of both blood relatives and in-laws from which such relations were prohibited.

Why such detail? I can only speculate that like argumentative children who keep asking "but what about...," the Israelites had to have every prohibited angle covered. **Simply put, maintaining one's holiness before God does not allow marriage with any other relative related to you by blood or by marriage, up to including polygamy which is covered by the ban on marrying sisters or mothers and daughters** (vs.17-18).

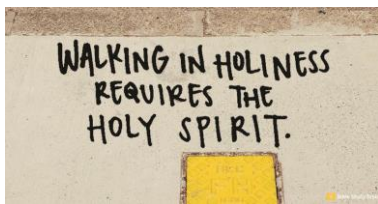
Interestingly, there was one Biblical exception to these marriage bans, which was the "redemption" obligation placed upon the brother of a man who dies childless, to marry his widow and with her raise a child in his brother's name, so that none of the Hebrew families might disappear from the land (Deuteronomy 25:5-10)

Verse 21 prohibits the offering of children in sacrifice to Molech, which in a pagan religion was done strangely enough to somehow increase the fertility of the land. God declared that such casual giving away of a child's life was an insult against Him as that child's creator.

Verses 22 and 23 then very clearly ban both homosexual acts and bestiality calling both of these an “**abomination**” – that which is an personal affront to God – and a “**perversion**” – that which is a distortion of the human character. These prohibitions are again repeated in Chapter 20 – with the death penalty prescribed for anyone caught doing so. Thus, no one can say that the Bible does not clearly speak against these modern liberated sexual practices which are actually as old as Sodom and Gomorrah.

But also be very careful to note that **the Bible does not condemn such attractions, only the actions.** In our own personal striving for holiness within the fallen and twisted world in which we have grown, we may have to fight many internal battles with an attraction to various things personally harmful or prohibited, but only by our actions are we condemned.

Wiersbe concluded his commentary on this portion of Leviticus by remarking that since God created us as sexual beings and blessed monogamous marriage as the only sacred relationship in which two humans might live, He has every right to establish the regulations that control such relationships. And our continued obedience will help protect these wonderful blessings from the defilements of the world. The laissez faire attitude of our modern world that says “anything goes” is not for the Christian. When it comes to moral standards, we [Christians] are becoming more and more a persecuted remnant, but we dare not retreat. (W.229)



Of course, under the laws of the Old Covenant, people who violated these sexual prohibitions, or who sacrificed their children, or who consulted with witches were to be put to death. But, under the new Covenant of Grace obtained for us by Christ Jesus. Those who have committed such sins can repent of their sin, can be forgiven and just like you, me, and all other sinners can be reborn

as God’s child. **But it is also clear that having been forgiven and welcomed into God’s family, God still expects us to remove such sins from our lives and to pursue the same level of holiness that He asked of the Israelites under the Old Covenant** - God still says to us, “***you shall be holy for I am holy***” (1 Peter 1:16 cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21; Ephesians 5:1–10; and Colossians 3:1–7).

Before we conclude today, I would add one more explanation, this time from our new Testament lesson as to why God apparently is so hung up on sex.

As I pointed out earlier, God had originally made us as sexual beings designed to “cleave and become one flesh” according to His image, which we recognize as a spiritual attribute, since multiple times God has assured us that He is only a spirit. Thus, our act of becoming faithfully and spiritually “one” with our spouse is in some way a reflection of the unity that is shared between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Jesus has also told us, when we come to God by faith, this same Spirit of our triune God then comes to live with and within us in the same faithfully singular relationship. Which is what we had originally been designed to do... as Paul’s letter to the Corinthian Christians would teach us.

your body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord, and the Lord for your body... do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you
1 Corinthians 6:13-19

Then, using Biblical language describing marriage – of *the two becoming one flesh* – Paul pointed out that any Christian seeking sexual pleasure through fornication would literally be bringing the Spirit of God into bed with a prostitute (once more a compelling mental image as to why God would consider such actions an “abomination”).”

That is why Paul declares that such sexual sins actually harm “the body itself,” referring not only to your own spiritually indwelt physical body, but also the body of Christ of which you have become a part.

And so Paul concludes

you are not your own! For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.
1 Corinthians 6:20

The only other thing I would share with you about your “sacred sexuality,” is to remind you that **we are primarily spiritual beings, who due to our alienation from God now live and interact somewhat blindly within the physical and spiritual world where we currently reside.** Thus we desperately need to live in a restored relationship with God, so that He might guide us around the many temptations and pitfalls that exist in our fallen world. Those choices which we then make according to God’s design for our lives and in accordance with his laws, will cause us to be “blessed” in this life. While those laws which we break especially in relation to the sacredness of our sexuality, will cause much more personal spiritual damage than we can imagine. So as Paul has instructed, let us flee from all such temptations.

Let’s pray about this.