

## Perfecting Holiness

Leviticus 11-15

I have a bold ambition this afternoon. To summarize the whole of the Christian life! And I plan to do that from a study of these five chapters in the book of Leviticus.

You might think I'm crazy. Or wonder, "How is he ever going to finish that in half an hour?" Maybe you just wonder how we can possibly focus our attention upon these many, many verses in a way that will be both edifying and appropriate. After all, there are over 200 verses here, and I am not sure that I want to read some of them in the public presence of mixed company and of young children.

If you follow my outlines from week to week, and you may or may not find that helpful, point one today is a summary of these chapters, and at this point I am going to do nothing except read that summary to you, to give you the big picture, with few details. Here is my explanation of these chapters, condensed just as compactly as possible. Three...

### I. OLD TESTAMENT REGULATIONS.

First,

#### A. The distinction between clean and unclean animals.

That is in chapter 11, and though I'm not going to take the time to read through that entire chapter publicly, I would encourage you to do so on your own.

Second, we read about,

#### B. The uncleanness resulting from childbirth and reproductive functions.

Those are found in chapter 12 and then again in chapter 15.

Again, you would do well to read through those, perhaps after hearing this whole sermon, they will make some more sense.

And thirdly, we read about,

#### C. The uncleanness resulting from contagious skin diseases.

You can read all that you want to about that, and probably quite a bit more, in chapters 13-14.

Having said that, the question again arises, "What does all that have to do with us today?" And my answer is, "Everything." These chapters have everything to do with the Christian life. Remember, what Paul tells us about the Bible.

2 Tim. 3:16 "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God."

That verse continues, to include the overall purpose of the whole Bible. It is the consequence or application of the doctrine of inspiration. Because the Bible is inspired, we read, it "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

So Leviticus chapters 11 through 15 are given to us "for instruction in righteousness," to "equip us for every good work." With that in mind, the place to begin is to recognize and identify,

### II. NEW COVENANT ADVANCEMENTS OVER LEVITICUS

Chapters 11-15. And that's why I'm not going to spend time detailing these regulations, because the important thing here is to see the fulfillments made clear after the coming of Jesus Christ.

To begin with the distinction between the animals, the point is obvious. For us,

## **A. All animals are rendered clean.**

In Leviticus 11, there is a great distinction.

11:1-8

There are several theories as to why certain animals were classified one way or the other, including issues of hygiene. Those forbidden animals were more prone to disease and sickness. But I think there is a much more significant idea, that of wholeness and normality. That is, only animals that were whole or normal, free from any physical deformity, could be used for the sacrifices.

And since animals belong basically to three categories, land animals, animals that swim in the seas, and animals that fly in the air, any animal with features that are mixed are rendered unclean. So fish without scales or fins were unclean. Incomplete, in essence, as fish. Birds that prey upon other animals, coming into contact with death, were unclean. And only land animals whose hoofs are split, who chew their cud, were clean. Those animals, of course, are the vegetarians, again remaining undefiled by contact with death.

So there was some sense of reason and order in all of that, but that's not the point for us. Because now all those distinctions are gone!

Turn with me to,

Acts 10:9 The next day, as they went on their journey and drew near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. 10 Then he became very hungry and wanted to eat; but while they made ready, he fell into a trance 11 and saw heaven opened and an object like a great sheet bound at the four corners, descending to him and let down to the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts,

creeping things, and birds of the air. 13 And a voice came to him, "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." 14 But Peter said, "Not so, Lord! For I have never eaten anything common or unclean." 15 And a voice spoke to him again the second time, "What God has cleansed you must not call common." 16 This was done three times. And the object was taken up into heaven again. [Skip down to verse...] 28 Then he said to them, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean."

So Peter helps us understand that the OT separating of the animals was a reflection of the separating of the nations of the world. Just as certain animals were unclean, so were the Gentiles! But no longer! The gospel goes to every nation, the whole world.

Acts 10:34 Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. 35 "But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him. 36 "The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ--He is Lord of all."

How is that important for us? It is the very basis of the great commission Jesus gives to his church.

Mat. 28:18 "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. 19 "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

And we go to all nations, we go the world with the gospel, because of this great truth,

Gal. 3:26 “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. 28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

So we learn by contrast. As the restrictions of the Old Covenant identified and isolated only one nation, now the nation of God’s people is universal. And we learn that from the abolition of the animal distinctions.

We also learn in the New Covenant that,

**B. There are no ceremonial defilements.**

So as you read chapters 13 and 14, all about leprosy and the cleansing of lepers, this is the contrast, there is no ceremonial defilement that can keep us separated from the love of God shown to us in Jesus Christ.

Let me use the example of leprosy.

Mark 1:40 “Now a leper came to [Jesus], imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, “If You are willing, You can make me clean.” 41 Then Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed.” 42 As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed.”

Jesus even defines the preaching of the gospel in terms of this cleansing, the outward cleansing coming to represent the true and spiritual cleansing of the heart. Jesus commissioned the twelve apostles with this ministry,

Mat. 10:5 “Do not go into the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter a city of the Samaritans. 6 “But go rather to the lost sheep

of the house of Israel. 7 “And as you go, preach, saying, ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ 8 “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.”

Let me use another example, of the contrast between Old Covenant defilement and new covenant blessings. The regular bleeding of a woman.

Luke 8:43 Now a woman, having a flow of blood for twelve years, who had spent all her livelihood on physicians and could not be healed by any, 44 came from behind and touched the border of His garment. And immediately her flow of blood stopped...48 And He said to her, “Daughter, be of good cheer; your faith has made you well. Go in peace.”

There are no ceremonial barriers to the gospel of Jesus Christ! And there are no more animal sacrifices.

**C. Ceremonial sacrifices have ended with Christ.**

Those sacrifices are repeated in these chapters, and since we’ve studied them in weeks’ past, I won’t review them tonight. Four of the five are mentioned in these chapters. The burnt offering. The peace offering, including the wave and heave offerings. The sin offering. And the trespass offering.

And what do we read in the New Testament about those sacrifices?

Heb. 9:6 Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. 7 But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people’s sins committed in ignorance; 8 the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. 9 It

was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience-- 10 concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. 11 But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. 12 Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. 13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, 14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? 15 And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”

“How much more shall the blood of Christ...?” That’s what we learn from the animal sacrifices. Whatever they meant, whatever their purpose, in representing the cleansing and atonement of sin, Jesus has accomplished in the flesh. Once and for all. So we study those sacrifices, in order to give us a great understanding of what Jesus has accomplished once and for all.

We have a great advancement in Christ. We have a great advancement in our New Covenant worship. And if you come to that conclusion after reading through all these details from the book of Leviticus, then I have been successful in my preaching.

At least partially. For there is more here than simply what is done away with. For there are also,

### III. ABIDING PRINCIPLES FROM LEVITICUS 11-15.

And they are thoroughly embodied in the teaching of the New Testament. And these principles do, very much, determine and define the whole of the Christian life. In this regard, I want to focus upon those verses I read earlier,  
11:44-45

I want to focus on what that means. In the simplest manner, it means that,

#### A. God’s people are called to separate themselves.

To be separate is to be holy. To be holy is to be separate.

In the big picture of Leviticus, this is the importance of all these regulations of separations. They were a constant reminder to the people of Israel that they were separated unto God.

Think about it. Every time they ate, their separation as the people of God was made obvious and evident. They could only eat certain animals. Every time they went to worship, their separation as the people of God was made clear, with the requirements of all those sacrifices.

In all the daily affairs of life, in all their social interactions, even as they travelled, they were made constantly aware of their status before God. They were a separate people, a holy nation among all the other nations of the world.

It goes back to what we studied last week,  
Lev. 10:10 “...that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean.”

They were separated unto God! And then Peter uses this summary statement from Leviticus as the summation of our

Christian duty.

1 Peter 1:13 “Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; 14 as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; 15 but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.”

Peter takes this grand and glorious principle from Leviticus and makes it transcend all the ceremonial aspects of the Old Covenant. “Be holy, for I am holy.”

Be separate. Set yourselves apart. And the reference is obviously to our daily lives, as I just read, “Be holy in all your conduct.”

But what does it mean to be holy in all your conduct? It means to obey the law! Verse 14 I just read. “As obedient children...” Holiness is obedience!

Go back to Leviticus.

Lev. 20:7 “Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am the LORD your God. 8 ‘And you shall keep My statutes, and perform them: I am the LORD who sanctifies you.”

Be holy...Keep my statutes!

And,

Lev. 20:26 “And you shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.”

The context of that verse includes this,

v.22 “You shall therefore keep all My statutes and all My judgments, and perform them, that the land where I am bringing you to dwell may not vomit you out. 23 ‘And you shall not walk in the statutes of the nation which I am casting out before you; for they commit all these things, and therefore I abhor them.”

Obedience is holiness. And what do we read about holiness in the New Covenant?

Hebrews 12:14 “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.”

That is an exhortation for us. Pursue holiness! Pursue obedience. “Without which no one will see the Lord.”

Jesus puts it this way,

Mat. 5:17 “Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. 18 “For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. 19 “Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 “For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

There is nothing different there from what is found in Leviticus!

Lev. 11:44 “You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy.”

One more reference in this regard. Please turn to 2 Corinthians 6. Paul is giving very specific exhortations about Christian living. And he gives us a command that has immediate applications to those whom we should marry, among other things.

2 Cor. 6:11 “O Corinthians! We have spoken openly to you, our heart is wide open. 12 You are not restricted by us, but you are restricted by your own affections. 13 Now in return for the same (I speak as to children), you also be open. 14 Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”

The reasoning he gives has reference to our essential identification of holiness. We are set apart. That’s why we should not be unequally yoked.

v.14 “...For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.” 17 Therefore “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.” 18 “I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.”

Do you see the same exhortation there as in Leviticus, only now in the context of moral purity not ceremonial distinctions? “Do not touch what is unclean.” That doesn’t refer to the ceremonial defilement of a person with leprosy. It refers to the defilement of sin, of moral impurity that we do, all too often, touch!

And look at the very next verse,

2 Cor. 7:1 “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

That’s the active engagement in the Christian life which the Bible calls sanctification! It is a command to us. It is an

exhortation. We are not passive. God works in us, to be sure, and you cleanse yourself in your own strength you are doomed to failure. But the exhortation is given to us. “Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

Dear people, you are called to be holy. These words have a plain and simple meaning. Cleanse yourselves from all filthiness! Flesh and spirit--don’t be a Pharisee and think that refers only to outward appearances. In the flesh. In your heart, cleanse yourself from filthiness!

Perfecting holiness!

We’re sometimes uncomfortable with those words, since no one is perfect. We can’t be perfect, and we won’t be, until God makes us perfect in glory. And that is true. But the exhortation is laid upon your souls in terms of sanctification. Get rid of filthiness! Get rid of moral impurity! Get rid of uncleanness!

Shall I give you examples?

1 Cor. 6:18 “Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.”

That’s the seventh commandment. Back to Leviticus, you can read a lot more details about how that commandment applies in chapter 18. Then we read in,

Lev. 19:1 “And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 2 “Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them:

‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy. 3 ‘Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths: I am the LORD your God.’”

There are references to the fifth and fourth commandments!

I could refer to each commandment, as does the book of Leviticus. For example, the second commandment,

Lev. 19:4 “Do not turn to idols, nor make for yourselves molded gods: I am the LORD your God.”

And the third, eighth and ninth commandments,

Lev. 19:11 “You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. 12 And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.”

That’s holiness! And with regard to the work of sanctification in the Christian life, “let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

There is a horrible irony in our country today, among professed Christians. We are often troubled by the removal of external symbols, like a statue of the ten commandments from a public courthouse, but we don’t live our own lives according to the standards of his holiness, either!

And Jesus’ warning is appropriate,

Luke 12:1 “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. 2 For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known.”

Having said all that, there are two crucial points I want to make to keep it in balance. First, the context of our holiness. The objective of the command to holiness. And it is not for our glory!

Rather, it is for the glory of God. When we are called unto holiness,

### **B. We are called to reflect the nature of God himself.**

The words are simple, Old and New Testaments. “you shall be holy, for I am holy.”

There is nothing self-advancing in this. Nothing that leaves us to our own strength or ability. Our duty, to speak of a Christian duty, is to imitate our creature!

Even as Jesus puts it,

Mat. 5:48 “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

Now, that is a process, one yet incomplete throughout all the days of our lives, but the incompleteness of the work of sanctification should never become an excuse not to make progress!

With one other essential understanding. God’s work comes first! That is to say, God work of redemption comes before the call to holiness.

### **C. Our consecration to God is the outworking of his work of redemption.**

We grow in holiness, we grow in our sanctification and in our obedience to the law, because God has first saved us by grace through faith.

There is no place for the works of obedience prior to the God’s work of justification. “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.”

Instead, what do we read in,  
Lev. 11:45 “For I am the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”

The same idea is found in,  
Lev. 22:31 “Therefore you shall keep My commandments, and perform them: I am the LORD. 32 “You shall not profane My holy name, but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel. I am the LORD who sanctifies you, 33 “who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD.”

I saved you, God says. Therefore you shall be holy! I saved you, therefore you shall obey the law.

The same idea is to be found in,  
Lev. 11:44 “For I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy.”

In Peter’s words, we are obedient children. Obedient as children, not obedient in order to become children! And as Paul writes in,

2 Cor. 7:1 “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

Don’t miss those crucial words at the beginning. “Having these promises.”

What promises?

2 Cor. 6:16 “As God has said: “I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.””

And the promise of verse 18, “I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.”

“You are my children,” God declares to us. And we are God’s children because of his grace. “He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved.”

So this is the summary of the Christian life from Leviticus. God has redeemed his people by the blood of Jesus. And he calls his children to love him by imitating him. “As He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct...Be holy, because I am holy.”