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**Summer 2023**  
**Set Apart: A Life Lived for God**

**Sermon Title:** Divinely Different

**To be used with Session 2:** Set Apart by Christ

**Scripture:** Leviticus 18:1-5

**Connection with the Study:** To complement the Bible study “Set Apart by Christ” this sermon shows that God has always called His people to be set apart from sin and the ways of the world. This is not something that God does for us while we sit back and enjoy the ride. Not sinning is the result of deliberate choice and effort (Rom. 6:12-13) as we are empowered by the Holy Spirit. The Israelites had been delivered by God from slavery in Egypt and would ultimately enter Canaan. Both lands were occupied by pagans who did not worship God and who presented challenges to the faithfulness of God’s people.

**Introduction:** On February 12, 2023, Donna was part of the crowd at Super Bowl LVII. She was unique among the approximately 70,000 fans in attendance as the only mom to ever have sons facing each other in the big game. Doing her best to avoid the appearance of playing favorites, she wore a jersey, jacket, and shoes that paid tribute to both teams. The tactic was clever, appropriate, and worked well for the proud parent of Kansas City Chiefs’ tight end, Travis Kelce, and Philadelphia Eagles’ center, Jason Kelce. While being acceptable in athletic competitions, such compromises and divisions of loyalty are inappropriate and confusing for members of the family of God. It is important that our lives display the One to whom we belong and Him only rather than a combination of allegiance to Him and the world to which we once belonged.

## **1. Authority Established (Lev. 18:1-2)**

In Exodus 3:13, Moses asked God what He should tell the Israelites if they asked him what His name was. In response, God gave him an identity and a declaration that proclaimed both His relationship with and authority over His people. (3:14-15) With that, God bound the identity of Israelites to that of their ancestors and to their God. From then on, it became common for that relationship to be summarized by “I am Yahweh” or “I am Yahweh, your God.”

Every person operates from one or more bases of authority, such as parents, their own opinion, lessons learned by experience, local practices, the law, fear, an organization, and so forth. The Israelites had a background that included recent events such as the Exodus and surviving in the wilderness as well as historical traditions such as the Patriarchs. At times, the mixture of those elements must have certainly led to a degree of angst or confusion. When the need arose to make decisions affecting the ongoing formation of their nation, who could be trusted above the others?

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Instead of leaving it up to a council or vote, God continued to speak through Moses and essentially said, “I am that authority. I am The Authority! I will direct you.”

## **2. Process of Elimination (Lev. 18:3)**

Considering the limitations of communication, travel, and being confined to the wilderness at the time, God had just said that lifestyles, traditions, and worship practices of the other nations was taboo.

“Israel is not to follow the customs of the Egyptians nor of the Canaanites. When they settle in Canaan, they might be tempted to put into practice some Egyptian customs that had enamored them. Or they might envy some of the practices of the Canaanites so much that they would imitate them. The customs in view are cultic practices rooted in fertility rites and alternative patterns of family relationships. Nor is Israel to walk in the decrees of the neighbor nations. ‘Walk’ means to follow these decrees in everyday life by inclination.”<sup>1</sup>

Some of the Israelites may have felt that the only option left available to them was to form whatever unique civilization they decided to create.

When the Bible repeats things, we can be certain that they are important. The message of verses 2 and 8 is very important and it is repeated and further elaborated upon in passages such as Leviticus 18:24-30 and Deuteronomy 18:9-14. The consequences of sinful practices are also spelled out in verses such as Isaiah 59:2.

## **3. Different Is Not Enough (Leviticus 18:4-5)**

If a certain goal can be reached by travelling due north but everyone else is going due east and due west, it is not to your advantage to refuse to join them by heading due south. It was not enough for the Israelites to be different from the Egyptians and the nations they would encounter once they entered the Promised Land. Holiness is more than not doing certain wrong things with everyone else. God knows human nature and He drove the point home to the wandering Israelites. They were to follow and obey Him exclusively.

The two Hebrew words translated *ordinances* and *statutes*, when combined, stand for the whole law of God.

“Practice” and “keep” are words that were usually in the third person. However, in this case they are each in the second person making it more direct and, in that it comes from God, it is commanded, and therefore not optional. This is the only acceptable direction and is of infinitely more value than simply avoiding the practices of the Egyptians and Canaanites.

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<sup>1</sup> John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1992), 293.

Verse 4 is emphatic with “You are to...” being stated twice. In both verses 4 and 5, God made certain they understood that the command is coming directly from Him: “I am the Lord (your God).”

**Conclusion:** People hear our words and see our actions, but God knows our hearts. In Matthew 18:9-14 Jesus told about two men who went to the temple to pray. One boasted to God, “God, I thank you that I’m not like other people—greedy, unrighteous, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of everything I get” (vv. 11-12). The other understood who he really was and to whom he was speaking when he cried, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner!” (v. 13). We must seek to have the same honesty and humility as the second who was also the one justified by God (v. 14).

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