

# From Redemption to Requirement (Leviticus 17)

To Read:

1. Deuteronomy 12
2. John 6:22-59

## I. Introduction

### A. Last time we were in Leviticus, we finished the first half of the book and looked at the climax: the Day of Atonement

21. If we go back to our outline for Leviticus, we can remember that the first half of Leviticus dealt with judicial holiness
12. This section answered the question: how does Israel become holy?
3. And in this part of the book, we saw three sections that taught the Israelites about redemption and atonement:
  - 1a. In chapters 1-7, we saw provisions for holiness as the sacrificial system was described: blood would be shed to wash away their sin and bring them back to God
  - 1b. In chapters 8-10, we saw the mediator of holiness as the priesthood was described: a mediator would be appointed to represent man to God and God to man and who could present the necessary sacrifice
  - 1c. In chapters 11-15, we saw reminders of holiness as the cleanness laws were given which reminded the people of their great need, their ultimate hope and their necessary distinction - the core of the gospel
14. Then these three sections were joined together in one great event, one day on which the uncleanness of the people would be washed away through sacrifice and their guilt carried away into the wilderness so that God could dwell in their midst - the Day of Atonement was the climax and ultimate promise of the first half of Leviticus
  - a. God would act on one great day through their mediator to present the perfect sacrifice and to remove their sin from them

### 1 B. This means that we are ready to start the second half of Leviticus this morning, which we've titled: Applied Holiness

11. This section answers the question: what does holiness look like? If Israel has been made holy, how should she be holy?
2. This second half of Leviticus transitions from a handbook that describes the sacrificial system and the priesthood to a series of community laws and this half of the book of Leviticus can be very hard to understand
3. If we thought the sacrificial laws were archaic and hard to understand, the second half of the book is worse - there are some understandable laws but then some laws that we might be completely unsure what to do with
4. This half of the book is prone to misuse, to cherry picking laws that we think we understand and can apply and rip them out of context pretending that they are able to stand on their own instead of allowing the book to speak as a whole
5. So, I'm going to try to carefully go through this section and understand what the purpose of each section of laws is and understand how every law was part of that purpose before we turn and try to apply any of these laws to ourselves

### 1 C. But, before we jump into this second half of Leviticus, chapter 17 actually acts as somewhat of a transition section between the first half and the second half of Leviticus

1. Before we transition from holiness won for us to holiness lived in us, we need to consider how the two types of holiness are joined: Are they two completely separate concepts or are they intimately joined together? Are they both equally important, or does one supersede the other? And if so, how?
12. That's going to be the topic of our study this morning: how do we get from redemption to requirement? How do we get from atonement to action?
3. So, in Leviticus 17, we're going to see three closely related commands and each one has a reason, a purpose that points back to Leviticus 1-16 - each command is explicitly based on what had gone before
4. In other words, Leviticus 17 is going to show us that the commands of Leviticus are not dissociated from the atonement of Leviticus - the laws commanded in Leviticus flow from the redemption promised in Leviticus

### 1 D. So, let's read Leviticus 17 together

### 1 2 3 E. Proposition: Leviticus 17 shows us that applied holiness is not divorced from judicial holiness nor are they equivalent concepts, rather applied holiness flows from judicial holiness and reflects it. Practical holiness is impossible if we have not been made holy, but if we have been made holy then it is an absolute requirement.

11. What did this teach the ancient Israelites about God?
12. How should this point us to Christ?
13. How can this be applied to us?

## 1 II. What did this teach the ancient Israelites about God?

### 1 A. Blood was really important

- 1 1. Leviticus 17:3-4 - *If any one of the house of Israel kills an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or kills it outside the camp, and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting to offer it as a gift to the LORD in front of the tabernacle of the LORD, bloodguilt shall be imputed to that man. He has shed blood, and that man shall be cut off from among his people.*
- 1 2. Or again, Leviticus 17:10 - *If any one of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people.*
- 1 3. And again, Leviticus 17:13 - *Any one also of the people of Israel, or of the strangers who sojourn among them, who takes in hunting any beast or bird that may be eaten shall pour out its blood and cover it with earth.*
4. Leviticus 17 is three closely related sets of laws that all revolve around how blood is handled - blood must only be offered at God's sanctuary, blood belongs to God alone, and blood must be carefully handled - blood and how God's people handle blood is very important to Leviticus
- 1 5. Now, as we go through the Old Testament, this isn't exactly a new concept, in fact similar teaching is given in Genesis 9:4, when God told Noah that he could eat of the animals as well as the plants - *But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.*
- 2 6. And this prohibition has been hinted at in previous sections of Leviticus: Leviticus 3:17 - *It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, in all your dwelling places, that you eat neither fat nor blood."* - Leviticus 7:26 - *Moreover, you shall eat no blood whatever, whether of fowl or of animal, in any of your dwelling places.*
7. But Leviticus 17 is the high point of this doctrine - blood must not be eaten, it is a sacred object and must be handled with extreme care before God - blood was really important and not to be treated lightly

### 1 1 B. Blood was really important because of sacrifice; that is, God's laws flowed from God's promise

1. Not only does this chapter of Leviticus prohibit blood, it also introduces the reason for the prohibition
2. In the first prohibition, blood must be offered at God's sanctuary because it was there that they were made holy
  - 1 a. Leviticus 17:5-7 - *This is to the end that the people of Israel may bring their sacrifices that they sacrifice in the open field, that they may bring them to the LORD, to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting, and sacrifice them as sacrifices of peace offerings to the LORD. And the priest shall throw the blood on the altar of the LORD at the entrance of the tent of meeting and burn the fat for a pleasing aroma to the LORD. So they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices to goat demons, after whom they whore. This shall be a statute forever for them throughout their generations.*
  - b. Blood was really important because blood was what was offered to bind them to God, blood had been offered to God to join them in union and in fellowship with God
  - c. So they must not be careless with the blood of any sacrificial animal and certainly they should not offer sacrificial blood to any other god - they had been redeemed, restored, and made one with God by blood and they must reflect that truth in their lives, the blood of sacrifice had always and would always belong to God
  - d. If God's people had been joined to God through blood then their lives must reflect that truth - the laws that God gives are meant to bring the fruit of redemption into the lives of God's people
3. And in the second and third prohibitions, blood must not be eaten because blood was shed for their atonement
  - 1 a. Leviticus 17:11-12 - *For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life. Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, No person among you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger who sojourns among you eat blood.*
  - 1 b. Leviticus 17:14 - *For the life of every creature is its blood: its blood is its life. Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off.*
  - c. Blood was really important because blood represented life and the shedding of blood represented redemptive, sacrificial giving of life
  - d. Because the life blood had been given to make atonement for them, to redeem them from God's wrath, to wash them from sin and to pay back their debt to God they could not turn around and appropriate blood for themselves - blood had been given to God for them and they needed to reflect that truth in their lives
  - e. Again, God's laws were meant to bring the fruit of redemption into the lives of God's people - if blood had been shed for them, they must hold blood as a sacred object, their lives must reflect the blood that was shed

**1 1 C. Obeying these laws was incredibly important; that is, refusing to reflect atonement was, in effect, rejecting atonement**

1. So, as we go through Leviticus 17, we see the three prohibitions related to blood, three reasons given, and then three statements of what will happen to those who refuse to obey
  - 1 1 a.** Leviticus 17:3-4 - *If any one of the house of Israel kills an ox or a lamb or a goat in the camp, or kills it outside the camp, and does not bring it to the entrance of the tent of meeting to offer it as a gift to the LORD in front of the tabernacle of the LORD, bloodguilt shall be imputed to that man. He has shed blood, and that man shall be cut off from among his people.*
  - 1 1 b.** Leviticus 17:10 - *If any one of the house of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn among them eats any blood, I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from among his people.*
  - 1 1 c.** Leviticus 17:14 - *For the life of every creature is its blood: its blood is its life. Therefore I have said to the people of Israel, You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off.*
2. All three of these prohibitions share a similar consequence, being cut off from God's people
  - a. Being cut off was being separated from God's people and was often associated with or equal to the death penalty, to be cut off was to lose your place among God's people and forfeit the promises made to God's people
  - b. So following these laws was incredibly important, to refuse to allow the truths of redemption to change their actions was to separate themselves from the benefits of redemption, they were cut off
  - c. God's people could not enjoy the benefits of redemption while living lives that ignored redemption - their redemption should change their actions, if it doesn't then they don't share in it
3. So, refusing to reflect atonement was, in effect, to reject atonement - their lives would reflect what God had done for them or they would not be part of God's people

**1 D. In sum, God's laws were rooted in God's redemption**

1. These laws weren't random or arbitrary, they were designed to reflect the effect of atonement in everyday life
2. But, at the same time, these laws weren't efficacious on their own, these laws presuppose atonement - without atonement having been made for them, following God's laws were meaningless, these laws could not make them holy, they could only reflect holiness
3. But that doesn't mean these laws weren't important, instead this makes these laws all the more important - God's commands reflected their redemption, what greater purpose could they have?
4. So these laws expressed redemption in God's people's lives, which meant apart from redemption they became worthless and less than worthless, a hypocritical abomination, but also meant that apart from obedience to these laws, redemption had not been realized
5. Chapter 17 in Leviticus, whatever else it might teach us, serves to join redemption and requirement together in the lives of God's people - neither can stand alone

**E. Kid's Question:**

- 1 1** 1. Why does Leviticus care so much about blood?
- 1 1** 2. Because God wants His people's lives to reflect their redemption.

### 1 III. How should this point us to Christ?

#### 1 A. Jesus is the blood that was shed for us

1. Throughout Leviticus 17, blood is set apart as holy, not to be treated casually and not to be partaken of because it belonged to God, it had been shed for redemption
12. And the holiness of blood had always been pointing forward to a final sacrifice, a final time blood would be offered for a final redemption, so we come to Hebrews 9:22-26 - *Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the holy places every year with blood not his own, for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*
3. The set-apartness of blood was always because Jesus' blood would be shed - in the Old Covenant it was set apart in preparation and in the New Covenant it is set apart in remembrance - it was always about Jesus' blood

#### 1 B. Jesus' blood is the one blood of which we are welcome to partake

1. Throughout Leviticus 17 and all of the Old Testament there is a firm prohibition against partaking of blood - but this prohibition was never to be absolute but preparatory, blood had been prohibited because only one blood would suffice
12. So Jesus teaches in John 6:53-55 - *So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.*
3. The Jews and especially the Pharisees reacted very poorly to Jesus' teaching and rejected Him as opposing the laws of Moses, but they missed the forward-looking redemptive purpose of the law - one significant purpose of the prohibition against blood was to look forward to the one blood that would suffice, the one blood that was powerful, the one blood that could cover sin and give us new life
4. The life truly is in the blood, but no life of animals or even a fellow man would finally heal us, we needed a greater sacrifice and a greater blood to partake of and that was Jesus' blood
15. So, on His last night around the table with His disciples, Jesus says, Matthew 26:27-28 - *And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*
6. Blood would be sacrificed and it would suffice and partaking of it would grant life - no other blood would ever do, and thus it had been prohibited

#### 1 C. Jesus is the image which God's laws reflect

1. Throughout Leviticus 17 we see that God's laws reflect God's redemption, that is God's laws are designed to bring the fruit of redemption into the lives of God's people
2. So, God's law reflected redemption and ultimately it reflected the Redeemer, Jesus Christ - and this is still the purpose of God's law, to remake God's people in the image of redemption, that is, in the image of Christ
13. So Paul describes God's purpose in Romans 8:28-29 - *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.* - God's purpose in redemption is to conform us to the image of the Redeemer, that redemption would be reflected in us
14. Or, he says again in II Corinthians 3:18 - *And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.* - as we gaze on the glory of redemption in Jesus our lives ought to reflect that truth, that is they ought to be made into the same image
5. Like Israel of Old, our lives are to reflect God's redemption, and Jesus is our redemption and so Jesus is the pattern of God's law, our lives ought to reflect God's redemption and so they must reflect Jesus Christ
6. God's law, the Royal Law, the Law of Love, the Law of Christ is still not arbitrary or unknowable - God's purpose is to reflect the glory of the Redeemer in us, to make us into the image of Christ

## ① IV. How can this be applied to us?

### ① A. We need to seek to understand how God's commands still flow from God's redemption

1. If, as I've argued this morning, a main point of Leviticus 17 is to call God's people to see that God's laws always reflect God's redemption, then we need to pursue that truth
2. Because God's laws still flow from God's redemption - a fact that Paul often brings us back to
  - a. So many of Paul's letters seem to have a dual nature: a theological treatise followed by a practical treatise
  - b. For example, Ephesians 1-3 is a glorious theological treatise about God's sovereign, gracious work in salvation to the praise of His glory and Ephesians 4-6 are a practical treatise calling the church to live a certain way
- ① ② c. And Paul sees the two as connected, so He says in Ephesians 4:1 - *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called*, - their manner of life, their walk, was to reflect their calling, their redemption
- d. Or again, Colossians 1 is a theological treatise about the glory of Christ the incarnate Son and the gospel found in Him, while most of Colossians 2-4 are commands to the church
- ① ② e. And the two are connected, Colossians 2:6-7 - *Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving*.
- f. In fact, Paul's letters often follow the same pattern as Leviticus: redemption followed by requirement connected by a statement of purpose joining the two together
3. So as we meditate on Leviticus 17 this morning, we ought to devote ourselves to seeking an understanding of how God's laws reflect His redemption because God wants us to see that
  - a. The Pharisees' problem wasn't that they were devoted to Levitical laws but that they failed to rejoice in their redemptive purpose and as they forgot redemption they corrupted the law
  - b. And we are prone to the same failure - there is the possibility that we could get wrapped up in obeying what we believe God has commanded without ever meditating on why God has commanded it, without seeing how it is reflecting salvation and what Christ has done for us
  - c. And when we fail to see and rejoice in the connection between redemption and requirement we may start twisting the requirements, demanding that others follow our misunderstood interpretations and binding God's people to commands that God hasn't given - not because we're not sincere but because we've loosed God's commands from their gospel origins
  - d. To understand God's law rightly, we need to see its intimate connection to the gospel and how the command flows from the gospel - if we fail to seek that out, we may very well fail to obey the command and corrupt it
4. But this isn't just about getting it right - although getting it right is important - there is a greater motivation to connecting redemption to requirement: the glory of God
  - a. Assuredly understanding the connection of gospel and command is important to understanding God's commands rightly, but above that, understanding how God's commands flow from the gospel is how we obey to the glory of God and not for our own righteousness
  - b. When we can see how the command to be faithful to your wife flows from the gospel truth that Christ will always be faithful to His bride, the church, then we can obey, being faithful to our wives, because we love Christ and love what He has done for us and want to reflect what He has done for us
  - c. Alternatively, when we fail to see the connection between gospel and command, obedience can become a standard that I have met, a creeping self-righteousness on which I rely and from which I can judge others
  - d. So, let's seek to understand how gospel and command go together, not only to understand rightly God's commands but so that we can glorify Him in obedience
5. So, as we ponder God's commands, we should not only purpose to obey, we should strive to understand
  - a. We should ask questions like: how is this command tied to who Jesus is and what He has done for me?
  - b. Or, how does this command reflect the union of Christ and the church?
  - c. Or, how would disobedience to this command deny Christ's redemptive work? How would disobedience to this command deny Christ's lordship?
  - d. When we can answer questions like these then we really understand the command and can apply it in our lives, not merely as legalistic righteousness but as redemptive rejoicing
  - e. So bring everything back to Christ - bring everything back to Christ - how is this rooted in His story? How does this reflect Him? How can I obey for His glory?
6. Now, by no means do I mean that we don't need to obey if we don't understand - always purpose to obey God's commands, but as we obey we should strive to understand and as we understand we should obey better, the purpose of our obedience should not be to declare our righteousness but to rejoice in our redemption



## **1 B. We need to be careful to reflect redemption in our lives**

1. One truth we saw clearly in Leviticus 17 was that obedience to God's commands was not optional: failure to reflect redemption was, in effect, rejecting redemption and led to being cut off from God's people
2. So, first we need to dedicate ourselves to seeing the connection between redemption and requirement, and then, as we do, we need to be careful to reflect God's redemption in our lives through God's commands
13. Because the consequences of failing to reflect redemption in our lives, failing to live a holy life based on what Christ has done for us, are just as steep if not steeper in the New Covenant, Hebrews 12:14 - *Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*
4. The author of Hebrews warns us, without holiness we will not see God, if we live lives that deny God's redemption then at the last day we will find that we never really participated in God's redemption, we will have been cut off
5. So, striving to live out God's commands in our lives is not an optional extra in the Christian life, it is incredibly important - our lives must reflect redemption, redemption must be applied in our lives
6. So, understanding is good, but obedience is necessary - we need to take care to live out God's commands as a reflection of redemption, to allow Christ's work to take full effect in our lives
7. So this week, continually put the gospel in front of you and the commands that flow from it and then go and purpose to walk in them because Christ has won them for you

## **1 C. We too are called to honor redemption by abstaining from blood**

1. At the core of Leviticus 17 is the prohibition against eating blood because blood was the symbol of the life that had been given to redeem them and bring them back to God
12. And then, as we read through the New Testament, we come to the great debate on what it means to be a Christian Gentile, not bound to the Old Covenant but believing in Christ, and the apostles give their conclusion in Acts 15:19-20, 28-29 - *Therefore my judgment is that we should not trouble those of the Gentiles who turn to God, but should write to them to abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood... For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.*
23. Interestingly, and we'll see this over the next couple weeks, these three or four commands (depending on how you count them) are a succinct summary of Leviticus 17-20 and therefore renew the prohibition on eating blood
4. Now there is a lot of discussion about why these four laws were the only four laws given to the Gentiles and what exactly was meant by these four laws and how they related to the influx of Gentile believers into the predominantly Jewish church,
5. But the more I study Leviticus and the more I see how this command is a restatement of Leviticus 17-20 and how Leviticus 19 is the center of the Old Testament law (which we'll talk about in a couple of weeks), the more I am convinced that the apostles wanted everyone to obey, at least in principle, this core section of Leviticus
6. Now, I say that lightly and from a theological position that as New Testament believers we are not bound to the Old Covenant and its laws, so I still have a lot of questions about my own conviction on that statement and what exactly it means and so I'll say that and say I'm not sure exactly how this applies to you so I'll tread lightly
7. But clearly the apostles thought that even we, as Gentile believers, should handle blood carefully and we can easily see why this would be a glorious gospel truth - we have been redeemed by one blood, there is only one blood that will heal and make us whole, there is only one blood that will bring us to God's table and so, in honor and remembrance, we can reject all other blood
8. It feels very ritualistic, very Old Testament, but in about five minutes we're going to participate in another ritual that, if we didn't do it every week, would feel very 'Old Testament-ish' - we're going to pass around some bread and some juice and remind ourselves that we are sitting at God's table and are eating the flesh and drinking the blood of our Savior together in fellowship with God
9. And that's still the only blood we should touch - so it may seem like a small thing, and personally, I'm not very tempted to drink any real blood, it sounds disgusting to me, but there is a glorious gospel truth in our rejection of any other blood - only Christ's blood would ever do, only Christ's blood could ever make us whole