

God's People Have a Different Measure (Leviticus 18, 20)

I. Introduction

A. Last week we started the second half of Leviticus by looking at the transition chapter in Leviticus 17

- ② 1. If we go back to our outline for Leviticus, we remember that the first half of Leviticus dealt with judicial holiness
- ① 2. This section answered the question: how does Israel become holy?
- ① 3. And now we're entering the second section of Leviticus, dealing with practical holiness
- ① 4. This section is meant to answer the question: how should Israel be holy?
- ① 5. And we started this section last week by seeing how Leviticus 17 connects judicial holiness to practical holiness
6. Leviticus 17 showed us that holiness lived in us is based on and is a reflection of holiness worked for us
7. Neither can stand alone: judicial holiness without practical holiness is licentiousness while practical holiness without judicial holiness is legalism - God's people must reflect redemption, that is the definition of holiness

① B. Having worked through this transition, we're now ready to jump into the laws of Leviticus

- ① 1. So, for the next couple of weeks in Leviticus, we're going to look at Leviticus 18-20
2. Leviticus 18-20 is a discreet set of laws that all go together and we can see this because the section starts and ends with virtually the same statement and the statement is repeated in the middle again
 - ① a. Leviticus 18:3 - *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 walk in their statutes.*
 - ① b. Leviticus 18:24-25 - *"Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.*
 - ① c. Leviticus 20:23 - *And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them.*
- ① ③ 3. This is the theme that binds this section together, and this section is arranged as a chiasm, an A-B-A pattern
 - ② a. So chapters 18 and 20 are almost repeats of each other - clearly there are some differences, but the laws and the reasons are nearly synonymous
 - ① b. And then, at the center, stands Leviticus 19 - the center and unpaired part of a chiasm is often the stressed point, telling us that Leviticus 19 is very central to this portion of Leviticus and to the entire book
 - c. In fact, next time we're in Leviticus, we'll see that Leviticus 19 is really central to the entire Bible, but that will have to wait a couple of weeks
4. So, as we go through this section, I want to first look at the outside of the chiasm and then the inside
 - ② a. So today, we'll see that Leviticus 18 and 20 are primarily negative commands, what the Israelites should not reflect - and we'll call this section, "God's People Have a Different Measure"
 - ① b. And in a couple of weeks, we'll see that Leviticus 19 is comparatively positive commands, what the Israelites should instead reflect - and we'll call this section, "God's People Have a Different Master"

C. But before we jump into Leviticus 18 and 20 this morning, I want to give you some theory on how I understand them

1. As we look at Leviticus 18 and 20, we're going to see that primarily they have to do with sexual ethics and prohibited sexual relationships and we might expect a message that is about God's people and sex
2. But that's not primarily what I'm going to do this morning, although we'll assuredly touch on it, because I'm not convinced that that's the main point of Leviticus 18 and 20
3. Instead, I'm going to focus on the commentary given about these laws and then see how the commands fit
4. In other words, I think the commentary in these passages is primary and the laws are secondary - the commentary is what binds this section together and the laws serve to be examples of the commentary
5. In fact, this is similar to what I did last week with the commands on blood - we considered the commentary, how the commands were connected to redemption, and then how the commands reflected the commentary
6. So this morning, our message is going to be focused on the statement, *"You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt... or as they do in the land of Canaan"* and then we'll see how the specific laws are examples of that

① D. Proposition: Leviticus 18 and 20 follow Leviticus 17 and call us to see that if God's people are to reflect redemption then they cannot be reflecting the world.

- ① 1. What did this teach the ancient Israelites about God?
- ① 2. How should this point us to Christ?
- ① 3. How can this be applied to us?

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

1 A. First, God's people cannot reflect this world

1. This is the repeated refrain and main point of Leviticus 18 and 20
 - 1 a. Leviticus 18:1-4 - *And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "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 walk in their statutes. You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God."*
 - 1 b. Leviticus 20:22-26 - *"You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my rules and do them, that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out. And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them. But I have said to you, 'You shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey.' I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples. You shall therefore separate the clean beast from the unclean, and the unclean bird from the clean. You shall not make yourselves detestable by beast or by bird or by anything with which the ground crawls, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine."*
2. This flows from what we studied last week in Leviticus 17: if the purpose of holiness is to reflect redemption then God's people can't reflect an unredeemed world in rebellion against God; it would be complete nonsense
3. And more than nonsense, it would be dangerous - it would be denying the effects of redemption and forfeiting them, so Leviticus 18 gives a stern warning
 - 1 a. Leviticus 18:24-30 - *"Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among (for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclean), lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. For everyone who does any of these abominations, the persons who do them shall be cut off from among their people. So keep my charge never to practice any of these abominable customs that were practiced before you, and never to make yourselves unclean by them: I am the LORD your God."*
4. That's the main point of Leviticus 18-20, God's people cannot reflect the world
 - a. What the world does, what the world cares about, what the world looks like, what the world loves - those things are not to be the pattern or the norm for the people of God
 - b. The things the world loves and does are the things that are condemning them, the things the world loves and does are symptoms of hating redemption, so the things the world loves and does are anathema to God's people

1 B. Second, sexual practices are often a bellwether of worldliness

1. As we read through Leviticus 18 and 20, we quickly notice that most of the laws described are about sexual relationships
 - a. Leviticus 18 prohibits a wide variety of incestual relationships and then a list of unnatural and abominable relationships, and Leviticus 20 prohibits adultery, incest and unnatural relationships again
 - b. Clearly, right sexual relationships were important to God's people, but why?
2. I'm going to propose this morning that the reason that Leviticus 18 and 20 are filled with sexual ethics are because sexual ethics are often an excellent diagnostic of whether the people of God are pursuing the world or not
 - a. The world rebels against God and rejects redemption in every area of life, but there are few areas of life where this is as evident as in sexual relationships - we can feel this around us today, the world loves to pursue sexual relationships that are contrary to God's design and God's goodness and calls God's people to join them
 - b. Sex and lust are powerful motivators and, apart from the joys of redemption, they drive the world into corrupt and abominable practices
 - c. So sexual ethics are an expression of the greater principle of not following after the world - not the only expression, but an easily identified expression of following after the world
 - d. So Leviticus 18 and 20 define the great principle - God's redeemed people cannot reflect the world - and then illustrates that point with an example - sexual relationships
 - e. God's reflection in sexual relationships is one man and one woman bound for life to reflect the union of Christ and the church, the world will try to reflect anything else and will run after every corruption of God's design

3. So, there's a couple of things to take away here, I think
 - a. First, God's people can't follow the sexual patterns of this world - this world will call out to us to join them in every perversion and God's people cannot join them, our sexuality must reflect redemption and not the world - I'll come back to this when we get to application
 - b. But, at the same time, we don't need to be overly worried that the world's sexual ethic is completely corrupt - it always has been and always will be - we aren't losing any battles about sexual ethics in our day and age, its simply that the world will always have a corrupt sexual ethic and we will always need to be different that the world - that is the norm for God's people

1 C. Third, God's limits are designed to lead us to life

1. As we saw a moment ago, the world's ways led to destruction and death, because of such abominations the peoples had been vomited out of the land, but if Israel turned away from such things their fate would be different
- 1 2. So we come to Leviticus 18:5 - *You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.*
3. The world's ways led to exile and death, God's ways led to life - in other words, God's commands weren't arbitrary or capricious, they were designed to maximize the blessings of redemption, by living within God's limits God's people would enjoy the life that God had given to them
4. So these laws weren't merely a set of 'you shall nots', they weren't meant to be a drudgery, a denial of pleasure, freedom and fun - no, these laws were meant to lead to the greatest joys, the greatest goods, the life of God
5. In fact, that's the nature of all of God's laws - God's laws aren't a deprivation but are meant to lead us to life and joy when embraced and obeyed in faith
6. So God's people shouldn't dread God's laws or obey them as obeying a tyrant, they should rejoice in God's laws and obey them as obeying a loving Father - God was looking out for His people's good, God was leading them to life

D. Kid's Question:

- 1 1. If God's people have been redeemed, what can they not do?
- 1 2. God's people cannot look like the world.
3. And that's what I mean by, "God's People Have a Different Measure." God's people cannot measure themselves by the world's standards, they cannot follow its pattern - they must pattern something else.

1 III. How should this point us to Christ?

1 A. First, Jesus is the ultimate embodiment of these laws

1. Leviticus 18 and 20 call God's people to be different than the world, to not follow their pattern or obey their passions, and throughout the ages God's people have done sometimes better and sometimes worse but none did it perfectly - throughout the Old Testament there is a longing that instead of capitulating to the world, God's people would be radically different than the world
2. But then Jesus came and He did what none had done before Him, He chose to reject all that the world was
 - 1 a. In fact, in demonstration of this, Jesus literally rejected the world in favor of serving God, Matthew 4:8-10 - *Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written, "You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve."*
 - 1 b. So He could say to the Jews, those who should have been God's people different than the world, John 8:23 - *He said to them, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world."*
 - 1 c. And even when faced with death, Jesus refused to be associated with this world, John 18:36 - *Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."*
3. Where so many had fallen, Jesus had stood - He refused the fleeting pleasures of this world, it's pleasures, it's powers, and it's patterns, and instead embodied perfectly what Leviticus 18 and 20 had longed for
 - a. Ultimately, Leviticus 18 and 20 were looking for Jesus - He obeyed perfectly and He fulfilled the law

1 B. Second, Jesus is the ultimate call to these laws

1. Leviticus 18 and 20 called God's people to be different than the world and ultimately Christ answered the call, and now, as the One who has perfectly rejected the world, Jesus reiterates the call of Leviticus 18 and 20 to His followers
 - 1 a. John 15:18-19 - *"If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you."*
 - 1 b. John 17:14-16 - *I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world."*
2. Not only had Leviticus 18 and 20 ultimately been for Jesus to fulfill, they also had ultimately been from Jesus
 - a. It is because Jesus was different than the world that God's people were to be different than the world
 - b. Leviticus 18 and 20 anticipated and prefigured Christ's call, *"I am not of the world, therefore you are not of the world."*
 - c. Not only does Jesus obey these laws, He reinvigorates them - He gives them new life and deepens their meaning - Leviticus 18 and 20 are for us because they were about Jesus

1 C. Third, Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of these laws

1. Interestingly, one of the most quoted verses in the New Testament from Leviticus is Leviticus 18:5
 - a. The most interesting thing about these quotations is that they are negative quotations
 - 1 1 Romans 10:5-9 - *For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) or "'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
 - 1 1 i. Or again, Galatians 3:12 - *But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."*
 - b. And Paul also quotes the Old Testament to apparently contradict Leviticus 18:5
 - 1 i. Galatians 3:11 - *Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."*
 - 1 ii. This is a quote out of Habakkuk, Habakkuk 2:4 - *Behold, his soul is puffed up; it is not upright within him, but the righteous shall live by his faith.*
 - c. At first glance, Paul seems to be contradicting the law and using other parts of the Old Testament to show how the Old Testament law was faulty, that Leviticus 18:5 made an untrue and misleading promise
2. But, I think on closer examination that Paul isn't saying the law was bad or that the law wasn't really God's limits designed to lead us to life, in fact he quotes Leviticus 19 authoritatively a couple chapters later in both instances showing he valued the law and thought it was life-giving
 - 1 1 a. For example, in Romans 13:8-10 - *Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet," and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.*
 - 1 1 b. Or in Galatians, Galatians 5:13-14 - *For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."*
3. So Paul isn't saying the law was bad, instead he is saying that it can't give life on its own apart from Christ
 - a. The law was supposed to lead us to life which meant it must lead us to Christ, apart from Christ, apart from the final redemption that the law was based on and leading to, the law could not give life
 - b. If it led anywhere else, especially to a legalistic self-righteousness, it was worthless and more than worthless, an abomination to be condemned
 - c. Paul isn't opposing the law, he is opposing a misinterpretation of the law - Paul opposes any use of the law that doesn't find its ultimate expression in faith in Christ
4. So Paul is showing us that even the promise of life embedded in the law was meant to lead us to Christ
 - a. The law could not fulfill its promise until it was fulfilled in Jesus
 - b. Through faith in Jesus and the obedience that flows from that faith, obedience to God's commands does lead to life because obedience to God's commands is following after Jesus, an expression of our faith
 - c. But apart from faith, apart from living union with Christ, apart from a Christ-reflecting and Christ-exalting obedience, God's commands cannot lead to life because we will never obtain them
 - d. That's the point Paul is trying to make - the law must be fulfilled in Christ, it must be rooted in faith in Him and lived in reflection of Him, otherwise it has become merely a stumbling block

1 IV. How can this be applied to us?

1 A. First, we must not follow the world's pattern

1. As we've just considered, these laws found their ultimate expression in Jesus and were, in principle, renewed in Him - because Jesus was different than the world, God's people must also be different than the world
2. So that's our first application this morning, we need to live according to the heart of Leviticus 18 and 20, we cannot do as the world does, we cannot follow their pattern, we cannot pursue their passions
 - a. We find this truth across all of the Old Testament, I'll just look at a couple of examples
 - 1 b. Paul tells us if we have been redeemed we cannot look like the world, Romans 12:2 - *Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.*
 - 1 c. And John says even more, we must not only look different than the world, our very desires must be different than the world, I John 2:15-17 - *Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world---the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions---is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.*
3. So, as we hear the warning and command of Leviticus 18 and 20, let's examine ourselves:
 - a. Are there ways that I have internalized the loves of this world? Do I pursue the things that the world rejoices in? Are there areas that I look very similar to the world?
 - b. Am I pursuing possessions in this world? Am I pursuing power in this world? Am I pursuing pleasures in this world? Or am I pursuing Christ?
 - c. If we're honest, I'm sure there are ways that all of us can find in which we have fallen short, so let us prayerfully examine ourselves and as we find areas that we are following the world's pattern instead of Christ's, let us turn away from those things
 - d. Let our motto be: we will not love what they love, we will not do as they do - we have a different measure, a measure designed for our joy

1 B. Second, and closely related, we must flee sexual immorality

1. Although it is not the only way to follow the world's pattern - there are innumerable ways to pursue the passions of this world - sexual immorality is an important area where we must reject the world's pattern
 - a. Now, I want to be careful here - I'm tempted to say, especially in our age as we see the world so aggressively pursuing a sexual ethic opposed to Scripture, but that's how it is in every age, perhaps in different ways but the world has always rejected God through the use of sex
 - b. But, just like every other age, we as God's people must be diligent to reject the world's view of sex and pursue God's view of sex - one man and one woman joined for life sharing the passions that just start to give a taste for the much deeper and lasting passion shared between Christ and the church
 - c. And more than that, we should not only pursue God's pattern but we should pursue God's pattern not as denial but as a joy - to see that this is truly life to live in God's design
2. And again, we see this across the New Testament - in fact, this topic comes up again and again through the New Testament because sexual ethics are a central and obvious area that the world rejects God's pattern
 - 1 a. One place we see this very clearly is I Corinthians 6:15-20 - *Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.*
 - b. Paul says that each individual member of Christ must flee sexual immorality - we were joined to Christ for a different pattern, to capitulate to the world's passions and pattern is to deny the realities of redemption in our lives
 - 1 c. But this struggle against sexual immorality is not merely private, but corporate as well, so in the chapter before, Paul says, I Corinthians 5:1-5 - *It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.*
 - d. God's people were to flee sexual immorality and if someone calling himself a brother refused to flee sexual immorality, God's people were to exclude him - there was to be a guard on the church so that God's pattern would mark the church and not the world's - God's people must reflect God and not the world, even to the exclusion of one claiming Christ
3. So let us individually and corporately flee sexual immorality
 - a. Let us testify with our lives that we follow a different pattern, a pattern given to us by a loving Father that will lead to our ultimate joy and let us encourage one another in that pursuit - to pursue the joys of God's design and not the world's
 - b. Any time the world offers you pleasure, look at that pleasure and remind yourself that that pleasure leads to death, to exile, to abandonment, but God's pattern leads to life and joy
 - c. And then choose Christ and flee sexual immorality