

## A Holy God Requires Sexual Purity From His People [Slide 1] Leviticus 18

If we are going to have a relationship with a holy God then we need to get our sexual house in order. Sexual immorality is not an inconsequential thing in God's sight. It was the primary reason God allowed the Israelites to kill off all the native Canaanites. The Canaanites had become so debased through their sexual immorality, that God judged them by having the Israelites kill them. However God warned Israel that he would judge them in a similar way if they followed the example of the Canaanites. God is serious that his people put away sexual immorality if they are going to follow him. That is what our passage teaches today.

I invite you to turn to Leviticus 18 in your Bible. Leviticus is the third book in the Old Testament. Leviticus 18. We will work our way through the chapter and then I will make some applications.

[Slide 2] Let's begin with verses 1-3. Read. Egypt was known for its intermarriage within the royal family. Canaan was known for its bestiality, immorality, and child sacrifice. God's people were not to act like those they formerly lived among in Egypt, nor like those in Canaan, in the land to which they were traveling. Sadly, it is always a struggle for God's people to remain distinct from the unbelievers around them. Too often God's people look the same in their behavior as those who don't know God. Even here in the United States, it is not clear that the sexual practices of Christians differ all that much from those who are not followers of Christ. God has called us to save sex for marriage and to flee fornication, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, and their precursors: pornography, lust, sexting, etc. How purposefully do we flee those kinds of behaviors? That is what God asks us to do.

Verses 4-5. Read. In this context a statute is a decree or rule given out by God. A judgment is a legal decision by God. The two words are basically synonyms for commandments or laws. It is important to note the final words of verse 5. A person should obey God's commands by which he may live if he does them. The word "live" does not refer to existing or having a heartbeat. You can have both those and disobey God. Live, here means to enjoy a fulfilled, good life, with God's blessing.

God's law, particularly his moral law, protects us from those behaviors that will ultimately damage us and diminish our life. God did not give these laws in Leviticus 18 to keep us from enjoying something good. He gave them to us to protect us from something harmful so that we might enjoy the good life of living in harmony with God. Most of the laws in this chapter you will have no problem seeing as protections against something that could harm you or others.

In verses 6-16 God lists numerous prohibitions of sex with near relatives or cases of incest. I'm not going to read that long list, but I want to comment on something you may not have thought about. Most countries, even if their laws are not influenced by the Bible, tend to prohibit marriages between near relatives. The reason is because inbreeding among families tends to allow a lot of harmful recessive genes to appear such as hemophilia and other potentially life threatening conditions. The American Journal of Human Genetics states that where the couple are siblings or a parent and child, then the offspring have about a 30% risk of retardation or some other problem.

Nevertheless, at the beginning of human history you would have necessarily had marriages of near relatives. Adam and Eve's children would have had to intermarry because there were no

other options. At the beginning of the human race that would not have been a health problem, because harmful genetic mutations probably began with the Fall of mankind. It would have taken a good while for those harmful genetic mutations to accumulate in the reproductive cells of humans. Hence, Sarah was Abraham's half-sister whom he married. By the time of the Exodus, 400 years later, intermarriage evidently had become a serious health issue. Incest though goes beyond just being a physical health issue. It causes deep damage emotionally and socially within families.

You can read the prohibitions on your own in vss 6-16.

Verses 17-18 forbid multiple marriages. Read.

Verse 19 is the one regulation that seems out of place in this list. Read. I don't know why this legislation is in this list. Perhaps there was some kind of pagan worship practice that made this law necessary, otherwise I have no clue why this law is in this chapter.

Verse 20 prohibits adultery. Read.

Verse 21 prohibits child sacrifice. Read. Scholars believe that children were sacrificed while alive to Molech either by throwing them into a fire or placing them in the arms of a statue of Molech that had been heated. Archaeological excavations of the Ammonites who lived in Canaan show evidence of child sacrifice.

I can't help but point out that abortion is our culture's form of child sacrifice. If you want to know who the god is to whom the child is being sacrificed, find out the reason behind the abortion. It could be the god of a boyfriend or husband or family members who are pressuring the woman to get an abortion. It could be the god of convenience because this child is not coming at the right time for personal finances, career progress, or a host of other pragmatic reasons. It could be the god of self because the woman doesn't want a child, but birth control failed or no one used it in the first place. Often, but not always, the goddess of sexual license is a player in the situation because most of the time married couples do not seek abortions. It is usually those who engage in sex outside of marriage who choose an abortion. We don't have altars and sacrificial fires. We have abortion clinics and medical instruments. We do a more sanitized job of killing nowadays.

Verse 22 prohibits homosexual sex. Read.

Verse 23 prohibits bestiality. Read.

God says that the abominable practices listed in this chapter are why God had the inhabitants of the land destroyed once the Israelites conquered the Promised Land. Read verses 24-28. First, God says that the Promised Land had become defiled by all these ungodly practices and that is why God visited punishment upon the Canaanites.

God referred to what the Canaanites did as abominations. The Hebrew word is towabah and it means offensive, disgusting or abominable. The word was used to describe a wide range of practices some of which I have listed on your outline. The Egyptians felt it was towabah for them to eat with Hebrews and they found the Jewish sacrifices to be towabah. God finds homosexual sex, idolatry and child sacrifice to be towabah, but he also calls pride, scoffing, oppressing the poor and offering sacrifices with blood still in the animals as towabah. So, towabah described a wide range of behaviors, some of which we might not think are that bad. Offensive to God is probably a better translation than abominable.

In Leviticus 18 all these practices are linked to sexual activity. Even child sacrifice could involve unwanted offspring of the sexual union. We should not assume based on this chapter that sexual sins are worst sins than other sins, but neither should we minimize the sinfulness of

sexual sins. Hugh Hefner recently died. Unless he had a death-bed conversion, he's not very happy right now. God judges those who defile the gift of sex, by misusing it outside of marriage.

In verses 29-30 God provides a warning that those Israelites who practiced these sins would be cut off from God's people. Read. Scholars have debated whether "cut off" means executed or whether it means they were exiled from their people. Good evidence exists that it means executed, but even if it only means exiled, God communicates that he would not allow those who practiced these sins to continue to contaminate his people. A couple of weeks ago I talked about why church discipline is necessary at times so I won't revisit that topic today.

Most people, if they read this list, would probably agree with it except for verse 19 and, of course, for verse 22 about homosexual behavior. I understand that the actor, Ian McKellen, who played Gandalf in the Lord of the Rings and Magneto in the X-men would take the Gideon Bible in any hotel room he used and cut out Leviticus 18:22 from the Bible. A lot of people may not literally cut the verse out of their Bible but they would either ignore it or reinterpret in some way so that it doesn't actually forbid homosexual sex.

A more sophisticated attack is to scoff at anything the Bible teaches, especially the OT, because after all doesn't the OT also teach that you shouldn't eat pork, you can keep slaves, and body fluids make you unclean before God? They would argue that everything in the OT is outdated and out of touch including the prohibition against homosexual sex.

I've tried to model for you as we have gone through Leviticus that there is a proper way to apply the OT and many improper ways of applying it. You have to understand the context of a particular law before you can apply it properly. You have to discern whether a law is part of the ceremonial law which had the temporary purpose of teaching something about Jesus Christ and leading people to trust in him or whether the law reflected the unchanging moral character of God and thus still has relevance today.

The sexual purity laws are all expansions of the one truth that God created man as male and female and purposed that one man and one woman would come together in a sacred covenant of marriage and become one flesh according to Genesis 2:24. This plan of God for mankind has not changed and Jesus reaffirmed it in his teaching, so you can assume that sexual purity laws permanently reflect God's will.

Ceremonial cleanliness laws that concern bodily fluids illustrate contact with death makes a person unclean. They are temporary regulations that do not apply for all time, such as the regulations on menstrual flow and seminal emissions we have discussed before. You can assume that the laws in Leviticus 18, except for verse 19 do apply to you today because they all uphold God's design for marriage.

[Slide 3] For the rest of the sermon I would like to make some applications for us today. First, let's talk about the correct way to view God's laws. Unregenerate people and maybe even Christians can view God's moral laws as unnecessary restrictions, but the way you should view them is as protective boundaries. In the Middle Ages maps of the known world would often depict monsters at the boundaries of the maps. In those days they didn't know what lay beyond the known borders of the world so they drew in monsters to indicate potential dangers. "There be monsters beyond."

God's moral laws are boundaries he has drawn to protect us. Because he knows everything and because he is all good, he draws accurate boundaries. Those boundaries protect us from things that will hurt us, even if we can't see how they might hurt us. The Israelites might not have fully understood why siblings should not marry, but now we have learned why those laws are a protective boundary. God designed us. He knows what works best for our design. What

works best is a committed, permanent covenant relationship between one man and one woman. Every law that promotes that ideal and discourages the alternatives is for our best.

So many people have tragically lost their way and believe they know what is best for themselves. They have discarded permanent monogamy in marriage and are experimenting with all sorts of alternatives. Those alternatives will not bring fullness of life. They will bring spiritual death in various forms. Those alternatives will cause loss of health, both physical and emotional because they are not life-giving. Rooted in sin, they will bring about harm, not good. When 90% of all live-in relationships don't survive, what I call premarital divorce, you realize that marriage, even with all its challenges, is a far safer route to go.

[Slide 4] The second thing we should talk about is prevention of sexual sin. Sexual passion is like a fire. When it is confined within proper boundaries fire is a good thing whether it is a campfire surrounded by a ring of rocks or a flame coming from a burner on a gas stove. Fire, under control, is a good thing. Sexual passion in the context of marriage is a good thing. Fires become destructive when they become too big and break free from protective boundaries.

One of the key things fires need and what makes them become destructive is when they have too much fuel. A flame in a campfire is okay but a flame in a forest of fuel is a crisis. A flame on a burner does great good but give it the fuel of a whole house and you have tragedy. To prevent sexual sin you need to make sure you don't feed the fire additional fuel.

What you watch on TV or at the movies, what is sometimes soft porn, fuels the fire. Don't think it doesn't affect you. It lowers your defenses. I loved George R.R. Martin's Song of Ice and Fire book series but I had to stop reading it. He is a gifted storyteller but he had too many graphic sex scenes that ruined his books for me. I wouldn't even dare watch the TV series, Game of Thrones, because of what I knew was in the books. The more fuel you give to the fire, the bigger the fire gets and the more out of control it becomes.

Pornography is a serious threat to your spiritual life. It causes you to lust, which Jesus said is the moral equivalent of adultery, and it leads you into even greater sin. I would like you to listen to this videotape testimony from Nate Larkin about his journey out of pornography. It describes the dangers of pornography, but also the hope that is in Jesus. Show YouTube video.

The first step in dealing with a problem is to admit that it exists, so I'm going to close the sermon with a time of silence. This is a time for confessing any sin that needs confessing. I encourage you to take the first step of freedom by admitting to God where you have sinned. In a few minutes I will close us in prayer. Pray.