

God Blesses Obedience and Punishes Disobedience [Slide 1] Leviticus 26

A holy God blesses his people's obedience and punishes their disobedience. What was true for ancient Israel is also true for us today. I invite you to turn in your Bible to Leviticus 26. Leviticus is the third book in the Bible. This is another long chapter which I will summarize at points and at other points read selections from it. Leviticus 26.

[Slide 2] In the first three verses God issues a summary call for obedience from the nation Israel. God forbids idolatry while calling upon the Israelites to keep his Sabbaths, to reverence his tabernacle, and to keep his commandments.

[Slide 3] In verses 4-13 God explains how he will bless the nation Israel when it obeys his laws. First, he will grant them agricultural prosperity in verses 4-5. Read. Then God will give them peace in the land and victory over their enemies. Read verses 6-8. Read. In verses 9-10 God promises to bless their crops so that they had plenty to eat. Read. In verses 11-12 God promised that he would live among his people and walk among or fellowship with them. In verse 13 God reminded the Israelites that he was the one who brought them out of slavery in Egypt and set them free.

[Slide 4] In verses 14-39 God explains how he will punish the Israelites for their disobedience. In verses 16-17 God warns that he will bring upon his people sickness and enemies for their disobedience. Read.

I want to make a side comment about verse 16 while we're here. There is a defective strand of Biblical teaching that comes out of the Prosperity Gospel movement that claims that all sickness or disease is caused by the Devil and therefore when we call on God in prayer for healing, he will always heal us because God wants to overthrow the works of the Devil. That teaching is false because its starting premise is false. Not all sickness or disease is caused by the Devil. Some sickness is the result of the fact that we live in a fallen world that has been corrupted by sin. In some cases, as you can see here in verse 16, God uses disease or sickness as a form of punishment or discipline. Some sickness may be caused by the Devil or his demons, but certainly not all. God obviously does not heal every disease or health issue even of godly believers because then death would not happen to most of us. Most of us will die from medical problems or the slow wearing out of our bodies, and no amount of prayer will change that. God does graciously heal people at times, but he has never promised that he will heal every health problem.

In verse 18 God warns the Israelites that if they don't respond to God's corrections, then he would punish them seven times more. In verses 19-22 God warns that he will bring drought, plague, and fierce beasts upon the people. God warns again in verses 23 and 24 that if the Israelites don't repent, he will punish them seven times more. In verses 25 & 26 God warns that he will bring Israel's enemies, pestilence, and famine against them. For a third time in verses 27-28 God warned them that if they didn't repent, he would punish them seven times more.

In verse 29 God warned them that enemy destruction and famine would be so severe that they would eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters. This actually did happen in later Jewish history. In verses 30-33 God prophesied further desolation and destruction by enemies culminating in Israel being scattered among the nations. This happened to the northern kingdom of Israel which was conquered and deported by the Assyrians and to the southern kingdom of Judah that was conquered and deported by the Babylonians. In verses 34-35 God

says that once the Israelites are removed from the land the land will finally enjoy its Sabbath rest. Verses 36-39 say that anyone left in the land will be full of fear and anxiety, running even when no one is pursuing them, finally rotting away because of their sins.

[Slide 5] In verses 40-43 God promises that if the people will confess their sins, he will be reconciled to them and remember his covenant with them, which is another way of saying that he will bless them once more for turning back in obedience to him.

[Slide 6] Finally in verses 44-46 God promises that he will never get so angry with them that he will reject them as his people and break the covenant he has with them. Even when he sends them off into captivity in other nations, God will still remain their God. Let me read those verses. Read verses 44-46.

Here's the key point. God deals the same way with NT believers as he did with OT Israel. You can expect him to treat you the same way he treated the Jewish people. Let's talk about what that looks like in our relationship with God.

[Slide 7] First, God blesses obedience. God always loves you. His love for you is not conditioned on your obedience. In fact the Bible is quite clear that God loved you when you were not saved, when you were still his enemy. Look at Romans 5:8-10 on your outline. Later on in Romans 8:38-39 Paul writes, "Read." Nothing can separate you from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus for those who belong to Christ Jesus. God will always love you, but he may not bless you, because his blessing is conditioned upon your obedience.

What do I mean by God's blessing? It could be any number of things. It could be good health and long life. It could be business success or financial gain. It could be protection from harm and danger. It could be favor with other people. It could be children who are a joy. It could be great fruitfulness in ministry, including the privilege of leading people to Christ. It could be inner joy and peace, the absence of worry and fear. It could be the absence of enemies and the goodwill of others. It could be opportunities to make a real difference in people's lives. It could be future rewards in Heaven. It could even be the growth in you of Christ-like character.

Listen to this promise of blessing from Jesus in Matthew 6:31-33. Read. God will bless you with whatever you need for food or clothing if you first seek God's kingdom and seek to live righteously. Proverbs 16:7 says, "Read."

God rewards us for our obedience. Conversely, don't expect God to bless you if you are disobeying him. Because God is gracious, he sometimes blesses us when we don't deserve it, but the key is that you can't expect blessing if you are not obeying. If you are not experiencing God's blessing, the first question you need to ask is whether you are obeying him or not.

The second question to ask is whether you are misinterpreting God's blessing, because sometimes God's blessing looks more like a curse than a blessing. Sometimes what appear to be disabilities or trials, God uses to work very positive things in our life. A setback can be the very best thing that can happen to us. Losing some of my early girlfriends, at the time did not seem to be blessings, but they were. I've heard of blind people who thanked God for their blindness because of how it led to a greater good in their life. People thank God for lost jobs because they are forced to look elsewhere and end up with a better position. God blesses obedience.

[Slide 8] The second thing we learn about our relationship with God is that God punishes or disciplines disobedience. I like the word, discipline, better because punishment suggests only pain while discipline brings with it the idea that God inflicts pain in order to bring about some good in our life. Here is the good that God intends when he disciplines us. Read Hebrews 12:4-10. God disciplines us so that we might share in his holiness or to put it more simply, he disciplines us so that we might become like him.

All sin and disobedience breaks our fellowship with God until we acknowledge that sin and ask for forgiveness. Listen to what the apostle John writes in 1 John 1:5-7 which is on your sermon outline. Read 1 John 1:5-7. If you are walking in the light, that is obeying God and living a righteous light, then you have fellowship with God. If you are disobeying God then you are walking in the darkness and have no fellowship with God. Whenever you sin either against God or man, you break fellowship or intimacy with God or man. It is like you erect a little fence between you and God.

That fence is a barrier. It keeps you from coming close right next to God because something has come between you. Now, you can't easily hug or walk arm in arm. Your relationship with God becomes a little cold and distant, if you even bother to talk to God at all. Once you start down this path it's easier to sin in some other way. So, you put more slats on the fence and now it's a little harder for God to get your attention, because you're not looking to him as much. In fact you get used to not speaking to him, not going to church, not reading your Bible and now you have built a full fence and you're pretty much unaware of God most of the time.

Someone may ask you if something is wrong and you might say, "Oh no, everything's fine." But it's not fine until we follow through on the third thing we learn in this passage.

[Slide 9] Repentance and confession restore us to a place of blessing. The only way to bring the fence down is by admitting what put it up. "God, I was wrong to blow up at my kids. Will you forgive me? God, I talked behind that person's back and I shouldn't have. Will you forgive me? God, I could have helped in that situation but I just didn't want to give up my afternoon. Will you forgive me? 1 John 1:9 says, "Read." Repentance is changing my attitude about my sin, and confessing it, restores me to a place of blessing, where God can bless me.

When I confess, I tear down the fence. The more I confess, the more the fence comes down. When I acknowledge everything I have done or failed to do that offended God, then I have dismantled the whole fence and nothing remains between God and me. God and I are then free to fellowship with each other.

[Slide 10] The final thing we saw from Leviticus 26 which is also true for us is that no matter how far we fall in disobedience, God will not break covenant with us. He will not reject us as his children. He will not put us in the camp of the wicked.

In Romans 8:1 Paul says, "Read." The Greek language employs a double negative in this verse to emphasize the absolute impossibility of those who are in Christ Jesus ever coming under God's condemnation. It simply will not happen. Jesus' death on the cross paid for all your sins, even the future ones you have not yet committed. Your salvation is not dependent on how faithful you are to God, but on how faithful God is to you.

Some people will argue that if you can't lose your salvation, then people will just sin because they won't fear going to Hell. We have just talked about what happens when you disobey God. He doesn't overlook disobedience. He disciplines his children when they don't repent. Sin causes us to lose fellowship with God and his blessing. I haven't even talked about the natural consequences of sin that are in themselves painful and unpleasant. There are plenty of good reasons to obey God and not to disobey him, besides holding the threat of Hell over someone's head.

There are a number of reasons why our salvation must be secure if God is going to be the God he says he is. The Scripture teaches that God cannot lie or break his promise, but if God promises eternal life to those who believe in Jesus as he does in John 3:16, then it would be impossible for God to take away one's salvation after they believed in Jesus, because that would mean God broke his promise. It would mean that eternal life really isn't eternal.

Ephesians 2:8 says that we are saved by grace and not by works lest any man should boast. In other words, God saves us as a gift, not because we have earned or deserved salvation. But if I have to keep my salvation by not committing certain sins, then I have earned my salvation by my effort or by my works. Then salvation is not truly by grace and God has lied.

If God should cast me off into Hell for whatever sin, then it means that God does not unconditionally love those who are in his family. It would mean he conditionally loves us as long as we don't commit certain sins. It means that something can separate me from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus: namely me. This false belief diminishes God's great love and makes him more like one of us who often do conditionally love others.

When you look at the history of Israel you can see God's faithful covenant love in display in the nation. When the majority of Israelites rejected Jesus as their Messiah, what happened? God did turn them over to their enemies and allowed them to be taken captive to other nations just as he warned in Leviticus 26. The Romans conquered Israel and dispersed the Jews throughout the world. Did God then forget his people? No, after two millennia in a development that has not been repeated in human history, God re-established the nation of Israel in the Promised Land in 1948. Jesus' own prophecies in the Gospels as well as the teaching of the book of Revelation affirm that God has not rejected his covenant with the Jews. They will have a part to play in the future. Jesus' millennial Kingdom will be headquartered in Jerusalem in the nation of Israel. Paul promises that in the future all of Israel will be saved.

This is the nature of our God. If you become part of his family by trusting in his Son, then he will always be your ever-loving Father and he will never abandon or desert you. He won't let you get away with sin, he will certainly discipline you, but he won't let you get away. He is the Father who never fails his children. He is what every father is supposed to be. And he is more than deserving of your obedience. Let's pray.