

# God's Message to Us in Leviticus 1-27

*Halifax, NS*

28 January 2018, 2:00 PM

## **Introduction**

Today we will continue our sermon series in which we are looking at God's message to us in every book of the Bible.

- We have now come to the third book in the Bible, Leviticus.
  - This is sometimes a book that God's people have a hard time relating to in our day because it is filled with talk about sacrifices and priests and ritual regulations about lepers and unclean animals.
    - But I hope to show you today that Leviticus is actually full of important teaching about Jesus Christ and our relationship with God through Him.
    - As with all the books of the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit had us in mind when He guided Moses in writing these things.
  - The placement of this book tells us something of its importance.
    - Moses is the prophet the Holy Spirit used to give us the first five books of the Bible—called the Pentateuch—
      - And Leviticus is placed right in the middle of them.
      - It stands out, sort of interrupting the flow of the narrative—
        - You have Genesis that shows creation, the great accounts of God's dealings with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and giving them the promises of salvation through a promised Son,
        - And then you have Exodus where God visits His people in Egypt, as He promised to do at the end of Genesis, to deliver them out of bondage in Egypt that they might be His people.
        - Then there is Leviticus which interrupts the narrative with all of this material about the ceremonies and rituals of the Levites and the priests...
        - Then with Numbers the narrative picks back up as you see the people in the wilderness for forty years because of their disobedience...
        - Deuteronomy comes next. It is full of teaching from Moses designed to prepare the next generation for entering the Promised Land.
    - So you see how Leviticus, as a book mostly of regulations and ceremonies, stands out in the middle of the narrative.
      - This is deliberate because Leviticus reveals a matter of central importance to God's people in every age:
        - It shows us how we as sinners are able to be the people of the Holy God who made heaven and earth.

TRANS> And it is with this that I want to begin as we consider God's message to us in this book.

- I want to begin with this point:

### **I. In Leviticus God calls us to be holy as He is holy!**

- A. This theme permeates the whole book.

1. The root of the Hebrew word that is translated *holy* is used over a hundred times in Leviticus.
  - It is used as an adjective, a noun, and a verb and is translated by words such as sanctify, hallow, consecrate, and sanctuary.
  - It also appears in every two out of three chapters.
2. The call to be holy as God is holy is expressly stated a number of times throughout the book.
  - a. You find it in Leviticus 11:45 where the Lord Himself says:
    - **Lev 11:45: “For I am the LORD who brings you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God. You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy.”**
    - God brought them out of Egypt to make them His people—and if they are going to be His people, they must be holy because He is holy.
  - b. This call to be holy is repeated again in Leviticus 19:2 where God says this to Moses:
    - **Lev 19:2: “Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.’ ”**
    - And then He gives them a number of moral requirements—starting off with *honour your father and mother* and speaking of things like loving your enemies.
  - c. In chapter 20, the call to be holy is repeated in the midst of a number of ceremonial regulations:
    - **Lev 20:26: “And you shall be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy, and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be Mine.”**
    - Did you notice the gracious words here?
      - He says “that you should be mine.”
        - He counts us as His own possession—and that is why He calls us to be holy. Others do not belong to Him, but we do.
  - d. In Leviticus 21, He talks about how the priests of Israel are to be holy.
    - **Lev 21:8: “Therefore you shall consecrate him, for he offers the bread of your God. He shall be holy to you, for I the LORD, who sanctify you, am holy.”**
    - The ceremonies related to the priests show that we must have a priest that is perfectly holy.

TRANS> So there is all of this talk about holiness—and this call to be holy...

#### B. But what does it mean to be holy?

1. When something is holy, it is set apart from what is common or ordinary...
  - Holiness especially refers to that which is set apart from sin, defilement, corruption, impurity... Like God, it is that which is set apart from sin.
  - That becomes very clear from the way the word is used throughout the entire book of Leviticus.

- Ever since mankind fell, sin is sadly that which is *common* and *ordinary* in this world, and God makes His people to be something different—to be holy.
2. So holiness is a very excellent quality.
- Being free from corruption, sin, impurity, and so on is a wonderful thing.
- a. It is a marvellous that God is holy.
- He is the sovereign, unchangeable, all-powerful, omnipresent Creator and the judge of all beings.
    - How horrible it would be, with all that power and authority, if God were corrupt and impure!
  - But holiness is the characteristic that distinguishes Him from us most of all—well, that and the fact that He is self-existing and unchangeable.
    - But of the attributes that He shares with us, holiness is the one that permeates them all—it describes all of His other attributes.
      - For example, His power is a holy power, His justice is a holy justice, His mercy is a holy mercy, His wrath is a holy wrath, His wisdom is a holy wisdom, His love is a holy love... and so also, His acts are holy, His words are holy, His promises are holy, His judgments are holy.
      - Everything about God is holy—everything about Him is completely free of corruption and sin.
    - We can never be sure of our leaders in the nation but what they are acting in corruption...
      - But God is always holy.
      - We can always be sure that He will do the right thing.
- b. And of course it is also an excellent thing for *people* to be holy.
- It means that we are free from corruption—free of sin—to be holy like God.
  - We were holy when God first created us.
    - We had no sin.
    - We were holy like God—there was no corruption, no defilement, no wickedness in us.
      - There was love and justice and goodness and purity.
      - What a beautiful world it was!
  - But of course now we are fallen.
    - We are defiled by sin—we do not live in an upright way—our hearts are set on evil.
    - Our defining act of wickedness was to reject God as our God.
      - Our severance from Him is that which plunged us into the depths of defilement and corruption.
      - We are completely unfit for communion with God and are only fit for the pit of punishment.

TRANS> But here is the marvellous thing about Leviticus:

C. In Leviticus, God calls His people, even though they are sinful, to be holy as He is holy!

1. The great encouragement in this is that it is possible for us to be holy as God is holy.

- In Leviticus, we have the very heart of the gospel set forth to us in shadows—we are shown by the shadows how we can be holy.
  - Christ Himself and His work is presented to us in these shadows.
    - We are able to benefit more from learning about these shadows than they did—because they show us about Christ whom we now know.
    - The shadows deepen our understanding of our holy God and our holy Saviour who is our holy priest and our holy sacrifice and our holy temple...
      - It is by association with Him that we are God's holy people!

➤ What good news this is for sinners who were cut off from God as unclean, defiled, unacceptable.

2. God shows us here how we are brought from the place of defilement and sin to the place of holiness before Him.

- The essence of the matter is that we must be separated from this world of sin and brought to Christ our Saviour—
  - Then we have Him as a holy priest and a holy sacrifice to save us...
  - And we have a new life of holiness, set apart from idolatry, immorality, and corruption as God's holy people.
  - Leviticus shows us that both of these things are required—a priest with a sacrifice to atone for our sin; and a new life lived for God.
- We are brought from the world to Christ, from sin to righteousness, from defilement to holiness, from Satan to God.
  - It is God Himself that sanctifies us through Jesus Christ who is God the Son.
  - Leviticus is the good news in shadows of how Christ makes us holy.

## II. Let us now look at our holy Saviour as He is presented in Leviticus—and at how He makes us holy...

- first, as the holy sacrifice for our sins...
- And second as our holy priest who offers the sacrifice.

A. In Leviticus 1-7, He is presented to us as the holy offering that we need as sinners.

- There are, in fact, five different offerings presented here—one in each of the first five chapters—each showing us something different about our Saviour,
  - And in chapter 6 and 7, more details are given about each of these offerings.

BACKGROUND> Before we look at these five offerings, let me make sure you understand what I mean when I say that Jesus is Himself the holy offering.

- If you turn to Hebrews 10, it explains that the sacrifices and offerings under the law (the ones we read about in Leviticus) are shadows or pictures of Christ.
  - They could not and did not themselves truly take away our sins.

- They only took away our sins in a ritualistic or symbolic way, while Jesus is the only one who can truly sanctify us (or make us holy—sanctify is the same root word).
- Only He can make us holy.
- Look at Hebrews 10:1: **For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.**
  - As shadows of good things to come, they truly show us about Jesus—but they are not the actual things that are required.
  - Verse 4 explains that they could not take away sin—and therefore Jesus had a body prepared for Him so that He could become that sacrifice and offering.
    - **Heb 10:4-5: For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. <sup>5</sup> Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: “Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me.”**
  - It goes on to explain that He came and did what was required—something that the priests of the old covenant could only do ritually, He did in truth:
    - **Heb 10:11-14: Every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.**

TRANS> Now let’s look at the five offerings—one in each chapter.

1. In chapter 1, the whole burnt offering is spoken of.
  - It is called that because with this offering, the entire animal is completely burned up on the altar (see verse 9).
  - It is sometimes called the dedication offering because it represents the total dedication of our lives to God that is rightly required of every human being.
    - We should live our lives entirely for the glory of God—it is only right that we love the LORD with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.
    - Of course we fail to do this, and that is why we need an offering to represent us that is completely given up to God.
      - In requiring this offering, it is as if God is saying: “inasmuch as you are not totally dedicated to me and inasmuch as this is required of you, you are to offer a sacrifice that is totally given to Me in your place.”
      - The worshipper was instructed to place his hand on the head of the offering (v. 4) to signify that it was representing him—it was accepted on his behalf.
  - You can see how this offering is a picture of Jesus Christ who completely poured out His life to God as our representative.
    - This is what is required of us by our holy God.
    - Nothing less is acceptable, and Jesus met that requirement by, as He says, always doing what pleases the Father.
      - Philippians reminds us that He obeyed to the point of going to the cross for us.

- Even though we were not fully dedicated to God, He was.
    - And by faith, we have union with Him and with His total dedication to God imputed to us.
    - God accepts His total dedication for all of His people.
      - It is described in verse 17 as a sweet aroma to the LORD.
2. In chapter 2, we have the grain offering.
    - This offering was appointed to express thanks to God.
      - They would take a portion of the grain from their harvest and give it to the priest who would offer it to God and take a portion for himself.
      - It was anointed with oil and also seasoned with salt.
    - This offering recognised that God was the one who sustained them in the land.
      - And it points to Christ Himself as the bread of life who sustains us.
      - He is the fruit of the earth, being born of woman, who is anointed with the Holy Spirit, yet also the Son of God who came down from heaven.
  3. In chapter 3, the peace offering is presented to us.
    - This offering is called the peace or fellowship offering because it represents the people eating with the priest and with the Lord, sharing in the offering that was sacrificed for them.
      - Here you have friends eating together—sharing what they have.
        - And of course as the animal offered represents Christ, it shows that we are spiritually nourished by Christ whom God has provided.
      - The peace offering is prominent at the Passover when the people are nourished by the sacrifice to take their journey that they might serve God.
        - Now at the Lord’s Table, we have communion in Christ, His body and blood nourishing us spiritually as we partake physically of the bread and wine in faith.
        - This reminds us that Christ is the one who provides life of us by His sacrifice, and that we share in the life of God through Him.
          - Unless we feed upon Him, we cannot live.
  4. In chapter 4, we have the sin offering.
    - It was offered to make atonement for sin in general—not for specific sins, but because we are sinners who commit sins!
      - Its primary feature was the sprinkling of blood on the altar to atone for sin—showing that the animal died for the worshipper’s sins—in the place of the worshipper.
      - One prominent example of the sin offering was the offering that was offered on the Day of Atonement when the priest went in to the holy of holies to offer a sacrifice for the whole congregation.
        - It was offered at many other times as well—for example, before other sacrifices were offered to show that sin must be taken care of first.
      - This is most definitely a picture of Jesus Christ, who, as Peter says in 1 Pet 3:18, **suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God...**
  5. In chapter 5 & 6, the guilt offering is described.
    - It is very much like the sin offering, except it is for specific sins—

- such as when someone needed to be forgiven for ritual defilement under the ceremonial law,
- or when they needed forgiveness for sin against their neighbour that required them to make restitution to their neighbour.
- When we commit particular sins, we are to come to Jesus who was crucified and plead for forgiveness—knowing that God is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness because Jesus died for us.

TRANS> All of these offerings represent Jesus who was offered for us to make us holy.

- Our gracious heavenly Father has provided Him as the offering that truly sanctifies us.
- But He is not only the offering, He is also the holy priest who offers the offering.

B. In Leviticus 8-10, the Lord shows us that the priest who offers sacrifices to make us holy must himself be perfectly holy.

1. You can see in Leviticus 8 how God gave the priests, that represented Christ, all kinds of purification ceremonies before they could serve.

a. The great characteristic they needed was holiness,

- but since they were sinful men, God required symbolic purification—ceremonial purification—to point to His holy Son who really is pure!
  - They had to offer sacrifices for their own sins before they could offer sacrifices for the people...
  - And they had to go through ceremonial washings and baptisms for a period of seven days.
  - They had to have special holy garments made for them to show that they were clothed in righteousness.
  - They had to be anointed with oil.
- It was as if God were saying, “These priests are not really holy, so as those who represent the priest that you need, I will give them all of these purification rites.
  - “Then you can see clearly that I require a holy priest if you are to be my people.”

b. Hebrews 7 explains how Christ as our priest (unlike these priests) truly was holy—not just ritually—but personally and truly.

- In Hebrews 7:26-8:2, it says: **For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; <sup>27</sup> who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people’s, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. <sup>28</sup> For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever. <sup>1</sup> Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, <sup>2</sup> a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.**

- No other priest would do!

- How beautifully our Saviour is set forth by all these purification ceremonies in Leviticus.
  - They could not come before God without all the purification rites.
2. In Leviticus 9, the priests, having been consecrated, begin their ministry...
- Having been purified, they offer the sacrifices, and in a ceremonial way, God shows that He accepts them...
  - At the end of the chapter, from the middle of verse 23, it says: **Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people, <sup>24</sup> and fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces.**
  - When we read this, we should immediately rejoice in how much more we are accepted—
    - not just ritually, as they were,
    - but now truly by the offering of our perfect holy priest Jesus Christ.
3. In Leviticus 10, God gives us another portrayal of the perfection required—a terrifying portrayal.
- Here, Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, offer strange fire on the altar—fire not according to the formula that God had given them...
    - And the Lord consumes them with fire.
    - That's right, these two young men who have just been through the purification rites and are starting their service are killed right on the spot.
  - Do you see why God does this? Do you see why He is so strict about the ceremonies?
    - He does this because the ceremonies He appointed were to show by rituals that the priest who saves His people must be perfectly holy.
  - All this to make it clear that a priest who was not holy was not acceptable to represent us.
    - Aaron and his sons had only a ceremonial holiness, but Christ has true holiness that is graphically pictured by ceremonial holiness.

TRANS> What a priest we have and what a sacrifice!

- He alone is able to make us holy before God.
- And that brings me to the next thing I want show you from Leviticus:

### **III. Leviticus shows you that if you are to be God's people, you must be holy.**

- The people of Israel had a requirement for both ritual holiness and ceremonial holiness—and each of these points us to God's requirement for holiness for us.
  - Let's look at this.

#### **A. Israel's requirement for ceremonial holiness teaches us that we must be in Christ.**

1. There were certain ceremonial requirements for the people which made it clear that they were part of the people for whom the sacrifices were offered.
  - There were food laws and clothing laws that marked them out from the people of other nations who were not sanctified by the sacrifices.
  - There were also holy days and feasts that they were given to show that they belonged to the people who were consecrated to God.



- God shows us through all of this that we must be sanctified by the blood of Christ that He offered for us... or we are still in our sins.
    - As Hebrews says, there is no way into the holiest but by the blood of Jesus.
    - You must trust in Him. Otherwise, you are cut off from God!
2. We also see in Leviticus that the people were not allowed to come before God if they had infirmities that were associated with God's curse against sin...
- a. For example, if they had been in contact with a dead body, they had to first be purified because there will be no death in God's coming kingdom.
    - If they had leprosy or certain deformities, they were not permitted to join the assembly because in glory there will be no lepers.
    - And for women, part of the curse was with struggle in bringing forth children—everything from their monthly period to labour pains—
      - And so they were not allowed to draw near in those times until they had been ritually purified.
    - And men had to be circumcised and could not come to worship if they had emitted semen without purification because they were cursed to bring forth children that were sinners.
  - b. What does this show us? That God does not accept people with infirmities?
    - Yes it does—in a good way.
      - It shows us that when God saves us, He also promises to give us new bodies that will not have the effects of the curse.
      - Bodies with the curse of death and sickness and infirmity are not suitable to be in God's presence—or fit for service and worship.
    - The prohibition of such persons with infirmities related to the curse teaches us that when God brings us to glory, He will wipe away the curse.
      - Those with infirmities can worship under the New Covenant because of Christ our risen Saviour who will deliver us.
3. So when you read about ritual requirements for worshippers in Leviticus, you need to think:
- “Apart from Jesus my priest and His sacrifice that was offered to atone for my sin, I am guilty and defiled. I am condemned and unacceptable to God.
  - “But as one who has come to Him as my priest to be purified by His offering of Himself, I am cleansed and able to come before God acceptably.
    - “He is my burnt offering, my grain offering, my fellowship offering, my sin offering, my guilt offering.
  - “He is the perfect, holy, Son of God, and not only has He offered sacrifice to purify me, but He is also going to raise me up with an immortal body that will free from the curse of God.
    - “By Him, I am able to come to the Father.”
  - Now that Jesus has come,
    - We don't have ceremonial purification anymore, but we have the record of these ceremonies to help us understand the perfection of Jesus as our priest.
  - The ceremonies we have now are only two—baptism and the Lord's Supper—and they are entirely different...

- Instead of being sacrifices, baptism and the Lord's Supper show how those who come to Christ benefit from His sacrifice.
- They are not pictures of Him sacrificing, but pictures of our being cleansed and nourished by His sacrifice for us.
- They mark us out as those who are made holy by Him.

TRANS> But in Leviticus God also shows us another kind of holiness that we must have as His people.

B. Leviticus also shows us that, as those purified by Christ, we must be morally holy.

1. There are lots of moral commandments that are given in Leviticus.
  - a. Sexual immorality, idolatry, blasphemy, Sabbath breaking, dishonouring of parents, not loving our neighbour as ourselves...
    - All of these are said to be forbidden to those who are God's people.
  - b. Those who refused to conform to these moral requirements were to be cut off from the community.
    - They could not be counted with God's holy people if they were living in rebellion against Him.
    - In Leviticus 20, God imposes the death penalty for many things including offering your children to idols, consulting a medium or a familiar spirit, cursing your father or mother, having sex with an animal or with some of your own gender, having sex with a stepmother...
    - There is an example of a young man cursing God in Leviticus 24:10-16, and the punishment is given in Leviticus 24:13-16: **“And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, <sup>14</sup> ‘Take outside the camp him who has cursed; then let all who heard *him* lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. <sup>15</sup> Then you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. <sup>16</sup> And whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of *the LORD*, he shall be put to death.’ ”**
2. These are terrifying regulations, but in the New Testament we are shown that the consequences for deliberate rebellion are even more terrifying for those in the congregation of God's people now that Jesus has come.
  - In Hebrews 10:26, it says: **For if we sin willfully** [that does not speak of those who fall into sin, but those who deliberately choose to live in rebellion] **...For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, <sup>27</sup> but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.**
  - And then in verse 28, it is compared to how it was in Leviticus: **<sup>28</sup> Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. <sup>29</sup> Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?**

- This person is said to be sanctified by the blood of Christ because they professed to trust in Him and were baptised in His name...
  - but then instead of following Him, they turned to a life of sin again...
  - By this, they showed that their profession of Jesus was false.
- Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 6 that you will not inherit God's kingdom if you live in moral rebellion:
  - **1 Cor 6:9-11: Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.**
  - Hebrews 12:14 teaches us that without holiness, no one will see the Lord.

**Conclusion:** So you see then that in Leviticus the LORD shows us the holiness that is required of us as His people!

- By the ceremonies, He shows us the holy priest that He requires and the holy offerings that He requires...
  - And we are able to rejoice in these pictures of our holy Saviour and His offering of Himself that fulfills all of these ceremonies...
- And by the moral requirements, we, as those who have been purified by Christ, are now able to serve God instead of sin.
- Leviticus 26 & 27 set before us the blessing that comes from holiness and the curse that comes from rejecting God's holy covenant.
  - In 26:3, He says: **"If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, then... vs. 9... I will look on you favorably and make you fruitful, multiply you and confirm My covenant with you...<sup>11</sup> I will set My tabernacle among you, and My soul shall not abhor you. <sup>12</sup> I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people."**
  - vs. 14... **"But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, <sup>15</sup> and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, *but* break My covenant, <sup>16</sup> I also will do this to you: I will even appoint terror over you... <sup>17</sup> I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies."**
- And yet, even with these dreadful curses, He promises that if they will repent and come back to Him, He will remember His covenant and bless them.
  - **Lev 26:40-42: "But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, and that they also have walked contrary to Me, <sup>41</sup> and *that* I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled, and they accept their guilt— <sup>42</sup> then I will remember My covenant..."**
  - With Jesus as our king, the people as a whole are always right with God—but as individuals it depends on whether we are in Him or not in Him.