

Adult Bible Class

The Book of Leviticus - Lesson #10

Chapter 17 Continued - The Life Is in the Blood

Leviticus 17:10 (NLT) "And if any native Israelite or foreigner living among you eats or drinks blood in any form, I will turn against that person and cut him off from the community of your people, **11** for the life of the body is in its blood. I have given you the blood on the altar to purify you, making you right with the Lord. It is the blood, given in exchange for a life, that makes purification possible. **12** That is why I have said to the people of Israel, 'You must never eat or drink blood—neither you nor the foreigners living among you.'

13 "And if any native Israelite or foreigner living among you goes hunting and kills an animal or bird that is approved for eating, he must drain its blood and cover it with earth. **14** The life of every creature is in its blood. That is why I have said to the people of Israel, 'You must never eat or drink blood, for the life of any creature is in its blood.' So whoever consumes blood will be cut off from the community.

15 "And if any native-born Israelites or foreigners eat the meat of an animal that died naturally or was torn up by wild animals, they must wash their clothes and bathe themselves in water. They will remain ceremonially unclean until evening, but then they will be clean. **16** But if they do not wash their clothes and bathe themselves, they will be punished for their sin."

The theme of respect for the blood, and the prohibition against eating blood began in Genesis and continues throughout God's word. It is not just a theme of the Law of Moses, but it is a continuing theme throughout Scripture. God told Noah:

Genesis 9:4 (NLT) But you must never eat any meat that still has the lifeblood in it.

It is interesting to note that this prohibition of eating blood continued from Noah's day into the New Testament. In the book of Acts, the apostles convened the Jerusalem Council because Gentile Christians were being taught by some Jewish Christians to follow the law of Moses and be circumcised to be saved. The apostles did not agree with this and held the council to determine exactly what would be required of the Gentile Christians. Here is what Acts tells us about the matter:

Acts 15:5 (NLT) But then some of the believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and insisted, "The Gentile converts must be circumcised and required to follow the law of Moses."

6 So the apostles and elders met together to resolve this issue...**13** ...James stood and said, "Brothers, listen to me. **14** Peter has told you about the time God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for himself. **15** And this conversion of Gentiles is exactly what the prophets predicted..."

19 "And so my judgment is that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God. **20** Instead, we should write and tell them to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from sexual immorality, from eating the meat of strangled animals, and from consuming blood. **21** For these laws of Moses have been preached in Jewish synagogues in every city on every Sabbath for many generations."

Though much of the Old Testament law was fulfilled in Christ, yet the prohibition against eating blood was considered important enough to carry on into the New Testament church. It is great respect for the blood that Jesus shed as

payment for our sins, for cleansing from sin, that kept this ancient law in effect in the New Testament. Look at the following Scripture:

Ephesians 2:12 In those days you [Gentiles] were living apart from Christ. You were excluded from citizenship among the people of Israel, and you did not know the covenant promises God had made to them. You lived in this world without God and without hope. **13** But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to him through the blood of Christ.

14 For Christ himself has brought peace to us. He united Jews and Gentiles into one people when, in his own body on the cross, he broke down the wall of hostility that separated us.

Hebrews 9:11 So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. **12** With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever . . .

18 That is why even the first covenant was put into effect with the blood of an animal...**22** In fact, according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness . . .

24 For Christ did not enter into a holy place made with human hands, which was only a copy of the true one in heaven. He entered into heaven itself to appear now before God on our behalf...But now, once for all time, he has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice.

Life is in the blood. The blood carries water and nourishment to every cell. It maintains the body's temperature and removes the waste material of the body's cells. The blood also transmits the very "breath of life," carrying the oxygen from the lungs throughout the body to all its cells. The purpose of blood is to give life.

So just how should we, as modern New Testament Christians, view this issue of eating blood? Since it is a New Testament theme, we should heed the prohibition. But what exactly constitutes eating blood?

The Jews were to let the blood drain from an animal when they butchered it for eating. But even when this is done, some traces of blood are always left. It is impossible to get *all* of the blood out. Apparently, eating small, trace quantities of blood is not what was banned. The prohibition was against eating or drinking quantities of animal blood. In the United States and many other nations, the vast majority of the animals butchered and sold in grocery stores are drained of their blood. Blood has a tendency to spoil quickly, so therefore it is drained.

In ancient times, the shedding of *animal blood* on an altar in sacrificial atonement for human sin was a temporary means of showing faith in God's promised redemption. This was necessary until the coming of Christ, the "*Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world*" (John 1:29). The substitutionary taking of the "life" (that is, the blood) of an innocent, blemish-free animal symbolized the great price of salvation, forgiveness and reconciliation that would one day be paid by the Creator Himself, becoming man and willingly taking all our sins upon Himself.

Because life is in the blood, it should not be eaten. Because of the blood that Jesus shed, blood should not be consumed - from Noah's day to this day (but go ahead and enjoy that steak!).

Leviticus Chapters 18

Leviticus 18:1 (NLT) Then the Lord said to Moses, ² "Give the following instructions to the people of Israel. I am the Lord your God. ³ So do not act like the people in Egypt, where you used to live, or like the people of Canaan, where I am taking you. You must not imitate their way of life. ⁴ You must obey all my regulations and be careful to obey my decrees, for I am the Lord your God. ⁵ If you obey my decrees and my regulations, you will find life through them. I am the Lord."

The children of Israel were on their way to the land of Canaan. This was the land promised to their forefathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and they were on their way to receive it. God brought them out of Egypt through a mighty deliverance with miracles and wonders. He brought them into the wilderness to give them His law at Sinai and to give them His instructions concerning how to build the Tabernacle for the worship of God. Before they were ready to enter the land, they needed His Law.

Any civilized society must be governed by laws - for protection, for order, and for the wellbeing of everyone in that society. God's laws were for the wellbeing of His people. The Old Testament laws of Leviticus were given to the children of Israel for protection, for order, for wellbeing, as well as to be a picture of future New Testament salvation through Jesus Christ. All of these laws were to be obeyed for the benefit of the children of Israel and for the sake of the "type and shadow" that was within them. God's words were not to be trifled with, but they were to be held in great respect and honor. When God's people obey God's word, they "*will find life through them.*"

They were in the desert - the wilderness. This was a place of refining and drawing close to God (and would be throughout Scripture). They had left Egypt, a land of idol worshipers and slavery. They were headed to Canaan, a land of idol worshipers where the people committed wicked acts. The people of Canaan were going to be removed from the land - and the land was going to be given to the Israelites. However, the Israelites were expected to be holy before their God:

Leviticus 20:22 (NLT) "You must keep all my decrees and regulations by putting them into practice; otherwise the land to which I am bringing you as your new home will vomit you out. ²³ Do not live according to the customs of the people I am driving out before you. It is because they do these shameful things that I detest them...²⁶ You must be holy because I, the Lord, am holy. I have set you apart from all other people to be my very own."

Leviticus 18:28 So do not defile the land and give it a reason to vomit you out, as it will vomit out the people who live there now. ²⁹ Whoever commits any of these detestable sins will be cut off from the community of Israel. ³⁰ So obey my instructions, and do not defile yourselves by committing any of these detestable practices that were committed by the people who lived in the land before you. I am the Lord your God."

What are these "*detestable practices?*" They are indicated in chapters 18-20. Chapter 18 lists forbidden sexual practices. The KJV and NKJV use language such as, "*None of you shall approach to any that is near of kin to him, to uncover their nakedness*" (verse 6). A modern translation states it like this, "*You must never have sexual relations with a close relative, for I am the Lord*" (NLT).

Chapter 18 lists forbidden intimate relationships with various close relatives such as mother, father, step-mother, aunt, daughter-in-law, grand-daughter, step-sister, your wife's sister, etc. The reasons are given throughout the chapter:

- ... for this would violate your father.
- ... for this would violate yourself.
- ... for this would violate your brother.
- ... They are close relatives, and this would be a wicked act.
- ... for they would be rivals.

In the early days of history, brothers and sisters married. Adam and Eve's children intermarried when the human race began. They had to! There was no one else! Genesis 20:11-12 tells us that Abraham was Sarah's half brother. Why was God "changing the rules" and forbidding brothers and sisters to marry at this particular time in history? *Answers in Genesis* gives us a good explanation:

The more closely related two people are, the more likely it is that they will have similar mistakes in their genes, inherited from the same parents. Therefore, brother and sister are likely to have similar mistakes in their genetic material. If there were to be a union between these two that produces offspring, children would inherit one set of genes from each of their parents. Because the genes probably have similar mistakes, the mistakes pair together and result in deformities in the children.

... However, this fact of present-day life did not apply to Adam and Eve. When the first two people were created, they were perfect. Everything God made was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). That means their genes were perfect—no mistakes. But when sin entered the world because of Adam, God cursed the world so that the perfect creation then began to degenerate, that is, suffer death and decay (Romans 8:22). Over a long period of time, this degeneration would have resulted in all sorts of mistakes occurring in the genetic material of living things.

... By the time of Moses (about 2,500 years later), degenerative mistakes would have accumulated to such an extent in the human race that it would have been necessary for God to establish the laws forbidding brother-sister (and close relative) marriage (Leviticus 18–20).

After the list of forbidden relationships with near relatives, Leviticus states:

Leviticus 18:20 (NIV) "Do not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife and defile yourself with her.

This is a restatement of the seventh commandment. Leviticus continues:

Leviticus 18:21 (NLT) "Do not permit any of your children to be offered as a sacrifice to Molech [NKJV - pass through *the fire* to Molech], for you must not bring shame on the name of your God. I am the Lord.

Why have this prohibition in a chapter of sexual sins? Molech was a pagan god (or should we say demon?) of Canaan and Phoenicia whose name meant "King." His consort was Ashtoreth, and ritual prostitution was considered an important form of worship to him. In addition to sexual rituals of worship to Molech, child sacrifice was also practiced, or as Scripture states it, "*pass through the fire*." It

is thought that the metal idol of Molech was heated to red-hot, and babies were placed on the statue's arms. When a couple sacrificed their first-born to Molech, they believed that Molech would ensure financial prosperity for them and their future children.

Deuteronomy 12:31 (NKJV) You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way; for every abomination to the Lord which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.

Psalm 106:37 They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons

God commanded his people that they were not to offer their children to Molech when they entered the promised land. However, later in time, the Israelites *did* participate in Molech worship:

1 Kings 11:1 Now King Solomon loved many foreign women. Besides Pharaoh's daughter, he married women from Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, and from among the Hittites. ² The Lord had clearly instructed the people of Israel, "You must not marry them, because they will turn your hearts to their gods." Yet Solomon insisted on loving them anyway. ³ He had 700 wives of royal birth and 300 concubines. And in fact, they did turn his heart away from the Lord.

⁴ In Solomon's old age, they turned his heart to worship other gods instead of being completely faithful to the Lord his God, as his father, David, had been. ⁵ Solomon worshiped Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites. ⁶ In this way, Solomon did what was evil in the Lord's sight; he refused to follow the Lord completely, as his father, David, had done.

⁷ On the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, he even built a pagan shrine for Chemosh, the detestable god of Moab, and another for Molech, the detestable god of the Ammonites. ⁸ Solomon built such shrines for all his foreign wives to use for burning incense and sacrificing to their gods.

This was not a very wise act for the wisest man who ever lived.

The Lord spoke to the people of Judah through the prophet Jeremiah concerning their detestable sins.

Jeremiah 7:30 "The people of Judah have sinned before my very eyes," says the Lord. "They have set up their abominable idols right in the Temple that bears my name, defiling it. **31** They have built pagan shrines at Topheth, the garbage dump in the valley of Ben-Hinnom, and there they burn their sons and daughters in the fire. I have never commanded such a horrible deed; it never even crossed my mind to command such a thing!"

Our chapter in Leviticus continues:

Leviticus 18:22 (NKJV) You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It *is* an abomination. **23** Nor shall you mate with any animal, to defile yourself with it.... It *is* perversion.

²⁴ "Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, for the people I am driving out before you have defiled themselves in all these ways. ²⁵ Because the entire land has become defiled, I am punishing the people who live there. I will cause the land to vomit them out.

24 (NLT) "Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, for the people I am driving out before you have defiled themselves in all these ways. **25** Because the entire land has become defiled, I am punishing the people who live there. I will cause the land to vomit them out. **26** You must obey all my decrees and regulations. You must not commit any of these detestable sins. This applies both to native-born Israelites and to the foreigners living among you.

27 "All these detestable activities are practiced by the people of the land where I am taking you, and this is how the land has become defiled. **28** So do not defile the land and give it a reason to vomit you out, as it will vomit out the people who live there now. **29** Whoever commits any of these detestable sins will be cut off from the community of Israel. **30** So obey my instructions, and do not defile yourselves by committing any of these detestable practices that were committed by the people who lived in the land before you. I am the Lord your God."

Leviticus Chapter 19

Regarding the ancient Israelite, the book of Leviticus is a book of holiness - approaching God the way that He demands. In Leviticus we learn that God was particular about what He wanted and what He expected of His people, the children of Israel. His commandments were to be taken seriously. However, the *ceremonial law* (the offering of animal sacrifices, the purifications, the Tabernacle system, the eating of certain foods, the observance of different feasts, etc.) has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ and no longer applies in a literal sense to the New Testament Christian. Instead, by reading about the ceremonial law we see a picture of Jesus Christ, His sacrifice for sin, and New Testament salvation. The *commandments* of God (the moral law) still apply to us today (certain behaviors are still considered sinful, other behaviors are considered right behaviors). Today, God still hates certain things and loves certain things. Principles remain the same.

Holiness in Personal Conduct

Leviticus 19:1 (NLT) The Lord also said to Moses, ² "Give the following instructions to the entire community of Israel. You must be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.

Verse 2b gives us the theme of the book of Leviticus - be holy, because God is holy. This principle continues into the New Testament. Peter wrote, *But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation* (1 Peter 1:15, KJV). We should note that the word *conversation* is another KJV word that has changed meaning over the centuries. In King James' day, the word meant "behavior." Therefore, modern translations are more up-to-date, saying, *But as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct* (ESV). *But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy* (NLT).

Holiness is required - in both the Old and New Testaments.

³ "Each of you must show great respect for your mother and father, and you must always observe my Sabbath days of rest. I am the Lord your God.

⁴ "Do not put your trust in idols or make metal images of gods for yourselves. I am the Lord your God.

Verses 3 and 4 reiterate the first, second, fourth and fifth commandments. The KJV says, *Ye shall fear every man his mother, and his father.* The words "fear" and "respect" are interchangeable. Reverence to parents is the foundation for a solid family. A solid family is the foundation upon which society is built.

Regarding idols - the Hebrew word for *idols* is "nothings." Paul wrote, *We know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one* (1 Corinthians 8:4b, KJV).

⁵ "When you sacrifice a peace offering to the Lord, offer it properly so you will be accepted by God.

⁶ The sacrifice must be eaten on the same day you offer it or on the next day...⁸ Anyone who eats it on the third day will be punished for defiling what is holy to the Lord and will be cut off from the community.

God was very particular regarding how sacrifices were to be offered. Things had to be done God's way. Even the peace offering, which was an offering of fellowship and feasting, was to be offered in a certain way.

⁹ "When you harvest the crops of your land, do not harvest the grain along the edges of your fields, and do not pick up what the harvesters drop. ¹⁰ It is the same with your grape crop—do not strip every last bunch of grapes from the vines, and do not pick up the grapes that fall to the ground. Leave them for the poor and the foreigners living among you. I am the Lord your God.

God's method of providing for the poor was pure genius! The poor were allowed to gather what was left over from the harvest (the KJV calls it "gleaning") - and the Israelites were commanded to leave something for the poor to glean! This way, the poor could work for their food (which gave them some self-esteem) and the people could practice mercy and charity, thereby helping the poor.