

Leviticus Chapters 17-18 – John Karmelich

1. We now begin a new section of Leviticus. It is all about life after salvation. I call this lesson “blood, sex and behavior”. Hopefully that title will stick in your head until I come back to it. ☺
2. Let’s review Leviticus so far to date and see why this next section of the book is necessary:
 - a) First, Leviticus had eight chapters that focused on different sacrifices one made to God. It teaches about our commitment to God and how to have a relationship with Him.
 - b) Next, Leviticus had several chapters dealing with training the high priest. The job of the priest was to assist people in their sacrifice rituals. The role of the high priest is to intercede between the people and God. They help people draw closer to God.
 - c) Next, Leviticus had four chapters dealing with what the Jewish people could eat and various hygiene issues. In particular, Chapters 13-15 contained word-pictures had to do with different types of sins that affect our relationship with God.
 - d) The last lesson, Chapter 16, was about a ritual to cover any “missed sins”, as well as an opportunity for any Israelite to confess any sin that is on their heart.
 - e) With all of that said, shouldn’t Chapter 16 be the “happily ever after” ending to Leviticus?
 - i) After all, in Chapter 16, everyone is now forgiven of everything. ☺ The point is one is “clean” up to that moment. What about the rest of one’s life? That is the purpose of Chapters 17 to essentially the end of the book. Dealing with “life after being saved”. It is about one’s behavior as a follower of God as opposed to the previous chapters that dealt with how to recognize sin and how to deal with sin.
 - f) In other words, Chapters 17 to the end of Leviticus can be summarized by the question of, “I’m saved, I’m forgiven, now what do I do?” ☺
 - i) That pattern is common throughout the bible. Most of Paul’s letters initially focus on what God has done for us, and then what we should do in response to what God has done for us. That is what we see here in Leviticus
3. Before we get into the specific’s of these two chapters, let’s discuss “the law” and Christianity.
 - a) In other words, do we as followers of Jesus Christ have to obey all this stuff? It’s a complicated question, and I’m going to take a crack at it right now.
 - b) Let’s start with the fact that Christians are saved by faith alone. One is saved by the belief that Jesus died for our sins, we accept His payment for our sins, and that Jesus was not only resurrected but is part of the God-head trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One must also accept the fact that Jesus is LORD of one’s life. That’s pretty much it. The rest is commentary and details. ☺
 - c) This gets back to the question of “now what?” If one is saved by the faith in that knowledge, what does one do now?
 - d) To quote James, “But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that – and shudder.” (James 2:18-19, NIV)
 - i) To paraphrase James, demons believe Jesus is God. How should we differ from demons? The difference is demons understand who Jesus is, but still choose to rebel against Him as Lord. We as believers choose to follow and obey what Jesus teaches us. That is essentially what separates our behavior from that of demons.
 - ii) James is also saying that if we have faith, then our actions must follow. Our actions are natural outputs of our faith.
 - iii) The classic example is the chair. We may have faith a chair will hold our weight. True faith is acting upon that faith and sitting in the chair.
 - iv) The point of all of this is that our behavior matters. We are saved by faith alone, but our behavior should naturally follow our faith.

- e) Which leads us back to “the law”: That’s a summary term for all of the Old Testament laws. It includes many of the rules laid out in the next two chapters of Leviticus. Are we as Christians required to obey these laws?
- i) First, remember that God does not change. (See James 1:17). What God finds “good” in the Old Testament, He still finds “good” in the New Testament. What God finds bad or disgusting in the Old Testament is still bad or disgusting in the New Testament. God’s standard for right and wrong does not change with the Cross. What changed is Jesus fulfilled the “requirements” of the law for forgiveness and we accept Jesus’ payment as the perfect sacrifice for our sins.
 - ii) Next, understand that the law is a good thing. One can read these laws and rules and say, “God’s way of living is a good thing. He knows better than me what is best for my life. These laws are a guideline to living a happy and joyful life no matter what my circumstances of the moment.”
 - iii) The problem is not with the law itself, but with our rebellion. The problem is nobody is perfect and there is a sinful nature within us that “wants” to rebel.
 - iv) The classic joke is there are two ways to get into heaven: One is to never disobey any of the Old Testament laws even once. We then tell Jesus to move over. ☺
The other way to accept Jesus payment for the forgiveness of our sins.
- f) OK John, you still haven’t answered the question: Do we have to obey these laws?
- i) Jesus said the only unforgivable sin is “Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit”. (Ref. Matthew 12:31-32 et.al.). That is a continual lifetime denial of Jesus as God. That implies that all other sins are forgivable if we confess them and turn from them.
 - ii) Therefore, to answer the question, of “do we have to obey the laws?” The answer is yes in the sense that disobedience is “sin” to God, but we are still saved because we are trusting in the blood of Jesus for our redemption, not the keeping of the laws. We as Christians are “free” from the requirements of the law, but at the same time should look at God’s laws as a guideline for our own happiness.
 - a) To put it another way, I’m free to do whatever I want. However, if I love God, why would I want to be disobedient to Him?
 - iii) I should add that the New Testament is our guide for law interpretation. For example, the food laws from a few chapters ago are not an issue for Christian. Jesus declared all foods “clean”. (See Mark 7:19). On the other hand, I’m positive “do not murder” is still on the books. ☺ Again, it does not mean for example, murder is an unforgivable sin. You may have to face the death penalty for one’s debt to society, but God can forgive all of one’s sins if one confesses them.
 - iv) As to other laws, many of them are given are given for our benefit. For example, adultery may be a forgivable sin, but look at the harm it does to those around us.
 - v) Another issue is being a witness to those around us. People can’t read our minds. They don’t know if we are Christians or not. All we can do is judge behavior. Therefore, God desires we “act differently” as a witness to both believers and unbelievers. If our behavior is no different from nonbelievers, they would say, “Why should I join their group? I don’t see any difference in how they behave!”
 - vi) Finally, many of these laws are for our well-being and happiness. To not steal, murder, commit adultery, etc. leads one to a better and happier life.
4. Now that I’ve gotten all of that out of my system, on to Chapters 17 and 18. I said these chapters are about “blood, sex and behavior” and I meant it. ☺
- a) Chapter 17 deals with regulations about blood.
 - i) Blood represents “life” to God. It is about the respect for human life, animal life and the fact that God created life. Our instinctive function is to “live” and these chapters deal with behavior laws about living a God-centered life.

- ii) Further, the cultures around the Israelites were full of pagan rituals involving the drinking of blood and the “giving” of the blood to pagan gods. Much of Chapter 17 is God saying in effect, “Don’t be like the other nations around you and act “differently” as I prescribe. This is for your own happiness and because I want you to be My witnesses to the world”.
 - b) Chapter 18 deals with regulations about sex.
 - i) After “life”, sex is one of the strongest drives in the human body. One of the great misconceptions through Christian history is that the act of sex is somehow “dirty” unless it is for producing children. That is nonsense. God created it for the sense of enjoyment and God created marriage for our own happiness.
 - ii) Because sex is such a pleasurable experience, it has been perverted by mankind. It has been used all through history as part of pagan rituals. Since it brings us such emotional pleasure, people assume that some “god” must be involved and it honors the pagan gods to do some sort of perverted sexual ritual.
 - iii) For the Israelites, where they came from (Egypt) and where they are going (Israel) is full of people that regularly perform pagan rituals involving perverted sex. Chapter 18 is God saying in effect, “Don’t be like the people where you were and don’t be like the people where you are going. What they do sexually disgusts me and I want you to behave differently as My witnesses to the word.”
 - c) One also has to understand that the bible often uses “adultery” as a synonym for idol worshipping. God ordained marriage early in Genesis. The idea of a marriage is to be loyal to ones spouse. To commit adultery is to break that loyalty. When we sin, we break that commitment to God and that is why adultery (breaking our vows to our spouse) is similar to idolatry (breaking our vows to God).
 - i) The Chapter 17 blood regulations were to prevent the Israelites to commit some of the idolatrous (i.e., worshipping other gods) practices of the nations around them.
 - ii) That is also why a chapter on sex (Chapter 18) comes right after a chapter on blood-sacrifices (Chapter 17). Both chapters teach us what God expects from us and give us laws for the purpose of staying committed to our relationship to God.
5. Chapter 17, Verse 1: The LORD said to Moses, ² "Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelites and say to them: `This is what the LORD has commanded:
- a) Both Chapters 17 and 18 open with similar statements. The idea is that Moses is the civil leader and these laws as described in these chapters are to be for everyone.
 - b) Notice that Aaron and the high priests are “singled out” among the Israelites. In other words, the chapter does not just say, “Speak to all of Israel”. It says to speak to Aaron, the high priests, his sons who are next in line to be high priests and also to all of Israel.
 - i) The idea here is that violations of these sins are grounds for ex-communication from public worship or more severe penalties. The priests need to be aware when others have sinned.
 - ii) Further, one has to consider the idea that priests are held to a higher standard. The idea is that God has given them the privilege of leadership, and with that comes responsibility. As I’ve stated in the early lessons of Leviticus, all Christians are called to be priests and in this context, God holds us to a higher standard.
6. Verse 3: Any Israelite who sacrifices an ox, a lamb or a goat in the camp or outside of it ⁴ instead of bringing it to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to present it as an offering to the LORD in front of the tabernacle of the LORD--that man shall be considered guilty of bloodshed; he has shed blood and must be cut off from his people.
- a) When you read the original text it can be read one of two ways: One way to read this is that anytime an Israelite is to kill an animal, they are to present it to God. The idea is that even if an animal is killed only for personal consumption, part of the animal is given to the priests and it is presented to God.

- i) The application of this view is God is to be involved in every aspect of our lives. The same way Christians should give thanks for every meal is the same idea as the Israelites taking every animal they kill and offer part of it to God.
 - ii) I disagree with this interpretation, even though it can be read this way. Visualize millions of Israelites. This would mean every time one of them kills an animal, it has to be brought to the priest. There would be a very long line at the tabernacle if this were true. ☹ The counter-argument is while they were living in the desert, they rarely ate their own animals.
 - b) Another way to read this text is that it only applies to offerings to God and not to food consumption in general. The NIV translation “leans” on that interpretation and translates it accordingly. A good supporting argument is that the original Hebrew has more than one word for “kill” and the one used in this text is usually associated with offerings.
 - i) This interpretation makes more sense. The idea is an Israelite cannot make an offering to God any old place they feel like. It has to be at the tabernacle.
 - ii) This goes back to the idea that we must obey God by His rules and not ours.
 - iii) With that said, let’s read a few more verses and tie it all together:
7. Verse 5: This is so the Israelites will bring to the LORD the sacrifices they are now making in the open fields. They must bring them to the priest, that is, to the LORD, at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and sacrifice them as fellowship offerings. ⁶ The priest is to sprinkle the blood against the altar of the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and burn the fat as an aroma pleasing to the LORD.
- a) What the text is saying is that when any animal sacrifice is made, it must be brought to the priests. The ritual itself repeats some of the key points already stated in Leviticus: The idea is that some of the blood must be sprinkled on the altar of the “indoor structure” which is probably the altar used for incense (prayer). The fat of the animal must also be separated as the fat represents the “best” of an animal and brought to God.
 - b) This sacrifice is called the “peace offering” or “fellowship” offering. The idea is that one is already forgiven of one’s sins and one just wants to spend time with God.
 - i) Remember the previous chapter was the “day of atonement” ritual. That is an annual ritual to be cleansed of all sins. This section of Leviticus is asking in effect, “I’m already forgiven of all my sins, now what?” Part of that “now what” is to remember God wants to spend time with us. Today, it is mainly through one’s personal prayer life. Back then, it was done by this peace (fellowship) offering.
 - c) The idea here is that we are only to approach God on His terms. Just because we are forgiven of our sins does not mean we can now approach God on our terms.
 - i) We as Christians can now only approach God and pray to Him based on the shed blood of Jesus. That doesn’t change once we are forgiven of our sins. This is also about “behavior”. Once one is saved, one should want to change one’s behavior in a way that is pleasing to God. We are saved by faith. If we have such faith and do love God, then we should act in a way that is pleasing to Him.
 - d) The danger here is “laziness”. An Israelite can think, “Oh, let me save a trip to the tabernacle. I just killed an animal out in the field. Here God, let me have peace with you out here and save myself a trip downtown.” ☹
 - i) That is why the law forbids sacrifices without coming to the altar. A priest is necessary (required) to intervene between an Israelite and God. One cannot approach God directly and any-old-way-they-want-to.
 - ii) A priest is required for the Christian too. Jesus is our High Priest. He intercedes between God the Father and us. (See Hebrews 6:20, 8:1). The application here is that we can’t do an end-run around Jesus to approach God the Father.

8. Verse 7: They must no longer offer any of their sacrifices to the goat idols to whom they prostitute themselves. This is to be a lasting ordinance for them and for the generations to come.'
- a) The key word here is "goat idols". The Hebrew word literally means "hairy ones".
 - i) It requires a bit of a historical explanation: A false-god at that time was a god-goat. Some of you may have heard of "pan", which is a derivate of the Greek-name of this pagan god. The idea is that this pagan god somehow manifested himself in goats. These goats were worshipped as gods.
 - b) Remember the Israelites spent the last four hundred years in Egypt. This goat-god was a common worship in Egypt. The same Israelites were about to enter the Promised Land. The inhabitants of that land were called "Canaanites". They too worshipped this goat-god. The idea to the tell the Israelites, "Don't do the customs where you were and don't do the customs where you are going to be." We'll get more into that phrase in a moment.
9. Verse 8: "Say to them: `Any Israelite or any alien living among them who offers a burnt offering or sacrifice ⁹ and does not bring it to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting to sacrifice it to the LORD--that man must be cut off from his people.
- a) Again, the main idea is that any offering must be done at the tabernacle, and not "any old place one felt like it."
 - b) The main idea God is trying to get across here is to prevent worship of false gods. The way one gets away from God is usually by "getting lazy" in one's worship. God is trying to prevent this from happening by saying that any animal offered in sacrifice must be offered by the priests at the tabernacle.
 - i) The modern equivalent of this problem might be to think, "I don't have to go to church or get together with other Christians, I believe this stuff and I can just pray to God on my own when I feel like it." One then says, "I'm too busy for church because I have to work so much or I need to do fill-in-the-blank. "Materialism" is an example of a modern false god that can slowly replace one's dedication to our relationship with the true God.
 - c) There is not much said in these two chapters about punishments for violations of these ordinances. The topic of "punishment" comes up more in Chapter 20. An exception is in Verse 9 where it says a violation of this ordinance (i.e., making a sacrifice anywhere but the tabernacle) is to be "cut off" from his people.
 - i) Scholars debate over what "cut off" means. Most likely, it means the person is excommunicated from the Israelites and cut off from society. It could also be interpreted as a death penalty or as God saying this person is cut off from heaven. Most likely, the first interpretation (cut off from society) is correct.
10. Verse 10: " `Any Israelite or any alien living among them who eats any blood--I will set my face against that person who eats blood and will cut him off from his people. ¹¹ For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. ¹² Therefore I say to the Israelites, "None of you may eat blood, nor may an alien living among you eat blood."
- a) The paragraph forbids the eating or drinking of blood in any way, shape or form. The idea is that blood represents "life" to God and one must have respect for all life.
 - b) Why does "blood" represent life? After all, the brain or heart could represent our lives. Why does God place so much emphasis on blood?
 - i) Maybe it's because the blood flows throughout the body. It is a word picture of how life "flows all through us". Whatever the reason, God says blood represents our life, and well, that settles it for me. ☺
 - c) Historically, there is also the issue of false-gods and blood drinking. It was common in that culture to offer the blood of a killed animal to the "god" that helped them in the hunt.
 - d) Drinking blood was a common ritual among the pagan religions of that time. This is another example of telling the Israelites, "Don't do like everyone around you is doing".

- e) I want to comment on something Jesus said: "Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink." (John 6:54-55 NIV).
 - i) First of all, Jesus is not being literal. The apostles did not cannibalize Jesus. The idea is Jesus blood was spilled as the eternal sacrifice on our behalf. Jesus fulfilled all of the blood sacrifice requirements as laid out in Leviticus.
 - ii) When Jesus asks us to "drink His blood", it is the idea we accept His sacrifice on our behalf in order to be forgiven of sins.
 - f) So does this mean a Christian can't order a t-bone steak rare? ☺ It's a non-issue.
 - i) This specific issue came up in Acts Chapter 15. The Jewish-born Christians were debating about what they should require of non-Jewish Christians. The Jewish-Christians asked non-Jewish Christians to refrain from drinking blood. (See Acts 15:20, 15:29). The idea is that this practice is so offensive to a Jewish person, they asked (not demanded) that a non-Jewish Christian refrain from this in order to not offend a Jewish person.
 - ii) Notice Verse 12 says this section is written to the Israelites. It is non-binding to the Gentile-Christian. What is important is for the Christian to remember that God wants us to respect all life and avoid blood as part of any cult ritual.
 - iii) The point today is God wants us to have a respect for life. To drink blood as part of a ritual for a pagan god is obviously forbidden for a Christian. To order a steak rare is a non-issue. I would also add, based on Acts 15 that we should refrain from doing things that others consider offensive.
 - a) For example, if a naïve Christian thinks it is wrong to eat a rare steak, we should give up our right to eat that steak in their presence, even if we know better. It is more important to not offend a young-in-faith Christian than to have the right to eat what we want.
 - g) I should also mention a bad-interpretation practice here: The Jehovah-Witnesses will not allow blood transfusions during surgery. A transfusion is to give one extra blood during surgery as to preserve our life. They interpret that procedure as "drinking blood". For starters, the Orthodox Jews, who take Leviticus very literally think transfusions are acceptable. The idea of this bible verse is to prevent the drinking of blood as some sort of cult ritual. To take human blood in order to keep living and save a life is very acceptable.
11. Verse 13: " `Any Israelite or any alien living among you who hunts any animal or bird that may be eaten must drain out the blood and cover it with earth,¹⁴ because the life of every creature is its blood. That is why I have said to the Israelites, "You must not eat the blood of any creature, because the life of every creature is its blood; anyone who eats it must be cut off."
- a) The subject of offering animals and dealing with blood is still the topic at hand. The topic now deviates a little to the subject of "hunting".
 - b) As I stated earlier, it was common practice among the Egyptians and the Canaanites to offer thanks to their gods when hunting to "thank their god for the kill". Part of that gratitude was to either offer the pagan god part of the animal or drink the blood.
 - i) What God is trying to do is help the Israelites get rid of their bad habits. Remember they lived in Egypt for 400 years. They were bound to pick up some of the habits of the Egyptians. They were also about the entire Promised Land where the Canaanites live. They were bound to pick up their habits as well. These laws were designed to help the Israelites avoid pagan worship.
 - ii) The application for us is about "behavior modification". God wants us to change from the way we were prior to being saved and at the same time, avoid the bad habits of nonbelievers around us.

- c) Let's get back to the text: When an Israelite hunts and kills an animal for food, the blood must be drained out on the ground and covered with dirt (my interpretation of Verse 13).
 - i) What this did was get the Israelite to focus on God when hunting for food.
 - ii) Most of us today get our food from stores and restaurants. We forget that our food comes from God and we need to be grateful to God for providing our food. A prayer of thanks before or right after a meal is a good way to apply this principal to our life today.
 - d) God gives us the reason for this ritual in Verse 14: "Because the life of the creature is in the blood". Blood represents life to God. God wants us to respect life in the sense that all life belongs to God and we need to show our gratitude to God for providing these animals to us for our consumption.
 - e) Do these verses imply that it is best to be a vegetarian? No. If anything, they say it is ok to eat meat, as long as it is prepared properly. A view in Judaism is that the greatest purpose an animal can serve is as nutrition for a human. As degrading as that sounds, there is truth to that. God has redeemed humans, not other animals. No other animal has a soul the same way humans do. The main idea getting across from these verses is to have a respect for all life. If anything, these verses would help us to treat all animals with a sense of respect and a reminder that all life belongs to God.
12. Verse 15: " `Anyone, whether native-born or alien, who eats anything found dead or torn by wild animals must wash his clothes and bathe with water, and he will be ceremonially unclean till evening; then he will be clean. ¹⁶ But if he does not wash his clothes and bathe himself, he will be held responsible.' "
- a) The topic changes a little in Verse 15: We are now on the topic of "road kill". ☺ The idea is an Israelite finds an animal that is already dead and eats it. The punishment is spelled out and it is not too severe. The punishment is the person is "unclean" until evening. To remind you, to be "unclean" to be isolated from the community until that evening.
 - b) In other words, this is forbidden, but the punishment is not that bad. There is a health risk to eating animals already dead and the "unclean" factor is a way to isolate that person in case they get sick.
13. OK, we've just finished Chapter 17. Before I move on to Chapter 18, which is a different topic, let's stop and apply this to our lives. Let's face it, most Christians don't spend a lot of time drinking blood or have to worry about eating our steaks too rare. Why should we care about Chapter 17? I'm so glad you asked that question! ☺
- a) The first thing to understand that is God does not change. In the Old Testament He takes the shedding of blood seriously, and in the New Testament God takes the shedding of blood seriously. Yes, it points to Jesus ultimate sacrifice. That should be number one on the lists of things to get out of this chapter. The other thing is to have a respect for all life.
 - b) These rituals teach us to keep our focus upon God in every day life. The rituals were designed to keep the Israelites from turning to false gods. A reason to modify our behavior is to keep our focus upon God himself and to avoid things that could lead us to sin and worshipping false gods. Remember that idolatry usually begins with an apathetic (i.e., "lazy") attitude towards the things that God desires for our lives.
14. Chapter 18, Verse 1: The LORD said to Moses, ² "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: `I am the LORD your God. ³ You must not do as they do in Egypt, where you used to live, and you must not do as they do in the land of Canaan, where I am bringing you. Do not follow their practices. ⁴ You must obey my laws and be careful to follow my decrees. I am the LORD your God.
- a) Chapter 18 begins a new discussion. The "blood laws" stop at the end of Chapter 17. Chapter 18 deals with sexual behavior.
 - b) Notice Chapter 18 is addressed to Moses and all of Israel. There is no mention of Aaron or the High Priests. The idea here is that these laws apply to all believers in God with no special exceptions for the high priests or anyone else.

- c) One of the things I have been alluding to in this study is that the Israelites must not act like the Egyptians where they just were and not be like the Canaanites where they were going. In other words, don't act like the "world" around them. Here in Verses 1-4 of Chapter 18, this command is bluntly stated to avoid acting like them.
 - i) Chapter 18 is going to get into bad sexual practices. Some if not all of these things are pretty disgusting to read about. What is implied (and historically true) is that the Egyptians and the Canaanites actually practiced these things.
 - d) An interesting thing to consider historically is that both the Egyptians and the Canaanites were the "sons of Ham". Ham is one of the three sons of Noah. Back in Genesis 9, Ham's son Canaan did something to "violate" his father. It is not stated, but it is probably some sort of sexual act. Noah cursed Canaan and his descendants. (Ref. Genesis 9:24-25.)
 - i) There are hints in the bible that the Egyptians were also descendants of Ham (See Psalm 78:51 and 105:23). My point is that both groups seem to have some "historical sexual deviancy" in their culture.
 - ii) Going back to Noah, why would Noah curse the children of Canaan as opposed to Canaan himself for his bad deeds? The idea is that Canaan would pass his bad habits on to his children. That became historically true based on biblical records and archeological records of the Canaanites. To quote one archeologist who studied the Canaanite culture and how sexually deviant they were, "Its amazing God did not judge them much sooner than they did."
15. Verse 5: Keep my decrees and laws, for the man who obeys them will live by them. I am the LORD.
- a) The key point is God saying in effect, "If you're going to obey my laws, I won't just accept lip service. You must obey them and not just read them or teach them."
 - b) The basic idea of Verse 5 is if you choose to use God's laws as one's standards for salvation, you have to accept all of those laws. God's laws are not a cafeteria buffet where one can pick and choose which ones you like.
 - c) Verse 5 is also quoted a few times in the New Testament. (Ref. Romans 10:5, Galatians 3:12.) The New Testament quotes and comments on this verse and says in effect, "Look, the Israelites spent centuries trying to live by these laws and failed. When you study the History of Israel in the Old Testament, it is a history of failure to be obedient to these laws. Christians need to see the law in that perspective. These are still God's standards for right and wrong. What is changed is that we look to Jesus as the fulfillment of the laws and not our own ability to obey them."
 - d) So do we as Christians still have to obey all of these laws? Again, the New Testament is our guide on which laws are still on the books.
 - i) A short answer is the famous phrase, "Love God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength, and then go do whatever you want". I find that if we focus on loving God, then the power of God works in us to change us in conformance to how God wants us to live.
 - ii) Let me put it another way: Most of us have heard the phrase, "You are what you eat" and that is true. It is also true that if we spend years as a student under one particular teacher, we become like that teacher. Children act like their parents. It is also true we become what we worship. Whatever we model, we become. The same applies with our Christian faith. God "molds" us if we consistently spend the time and trouble sticking close to Him like a student to a teacher.
 - iii) The way we "stick" to God is a commitment to regular prayer, regular time in God's word, regular time in worship and time with other Christians.
 - iv) The mistake we make is we try to obey God based on our own self-discipline. The "trick" is letting God work through us to be in conformity to His will. That means asking Him regularly that His will be done and trusting in that fact.

- e) Believe it or not, this does lead back to Verse 5 and “those who obey God’s laws shall live by them”. It is impossible to be perfectly obedient as we are imperfect people. Obedience does not come directly from self-discipline. Obedience comes from trusting God to work through us to live in conformity to His will. “Behavior modification” is a major part of the Christian life. It doesn’t come through trying harder. It comes by faith. If we are trusting in God, then our actions will follow.
- f) “Obedience does not save one from sin and hell, but it does mark those who are saved” (John MacArthur).
16. Verse 6: “No one is to approach any close relative to have sexual relations. I am the LORD.
- a) Verse 6 is a good summary of the next 12 verses of Chapter 18. The next 12 verses give specific examples of inappropriate sexual relations.
- b) To paraphrase God here, He is saying, “I designed sex to be between the husband and the wife and that’s it. Therefore, men are not to have sex with any other close relative.”
- c) The King James Version translates “sexual relations” as “uncover one’s nakedness”. The idea of the original Hebrew text is a little broader than just physical sex. It also includes fondling and any sexual sort of act.
- d) Verse 6 includes the phrase “I am the Lord”. It is God saying in effect, “You want a reason to not do these things? Try this reason: I am God and I say so.” ☺ It would be like your parents saying, “You can’t do this because I say so!” If God is the “Lord” of our lives, it means He is in charge and we have to accept His will.
17. Verse 7: “Do not dishonor your father by having sexual relations with your mother. She is your mother; do not have relations with her.
- a) The first of the sexual “no-no’s” is to have sex with one’s mother.
- b) The verse uses the phrase, “She is your mother”. The idea is for the guy to not see his mother as a sexual object, but as one’s own mother.
- c) Most of us get disgusted just reading this verse. Why would God even have to include something like this in the bible? The truth is, unless it was spelled out here in this verse, someone would think, “Hey, it’s ok to do this because the bible never prohibited it”.
- d) The scary part is practices like this existed in the world around the Israelites.
18. Verse 8: “Do not have sexual relations with your father's wife; that would dishonor your father.
- a) Verse 8 expands this sexual prohibition to a stepmother.
- b) One of the 10 commandments is to “Honor your father and mother”. (Exodus 20:12). Verses 7 and 8 are an expanded commentary on that principal.
19. Verse 9: “Do not have sexual relations with your sister, either your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether she was born in the same home or elsewhere.
- a) The commentary now expands to include having sex with one’s sister or stepsister. The last phrase includes an emphasis on where she was born. For example, a stepsister could have lived a thousand miles away. It is no excuse.
- b) There are records that the Egyptian Pharaoh’s practiced incest (sex with a sibling) in order to keep children in the family line. There are also Canaanite records of this practice.
- c) This is another example, of “Don’t do the perverted things that the nations around you are doing.”
20. Verse 10: “Do not have sexual relations with your son's daughter or your daughter's daughter; that would dishonor you. ¹¹ “Do not have sexual relations with the daughter of your father's wife, born to your father; she is your sister. ¹² “Do not have sexual relations with your father's sister; she is your father's close relative. ¹³ “Do not have sexual relations with your mother's sister, because she is your mother's close relative. ¹⁴ “Do not dishonor your father's brother by approaching his wife to have sexual relations; she is your aunt. ¹⁵ “Do not have sexual relations with your daughter-in-law. She is your son's wife; do not have relations with her.
- a) These verses expand the commentary to include one’s niece, one’s granddaughter, one’s stepsister, one’s aunt (no matter how she’s your aunt), daughter in law, and sister in law.

- b) These verses are written to the men. Notice all the prohibitions are “on” women. This is a very male-dominated society where the men are held accountable as the sexual “leaders”.
 - i) People criticize the bible for being too male dominant. If anything, the bible taught of the protection for women far more than any other culture of that time.
 - c) Again, to us, all of these sexual ideas are disgusting and perverted and we would never consider doing such things. These ideas were practiced in that culture at that time.
 - d) Another idea getting across is that some perverted men see all women as sexual objects. The verses emphasize the respect for the family structure as a reason to not see these women as such.
 - e) One can stop at this point and think about Adam and Eve. If all mankind began with one couple, then brothers, sisters and cousins must have had sex with each other in order to continue the human race.
 - i) There is a fancy word used among bible scholars called “dispensation”. It means a lot of different things to different people, but the basic idea is that one set of laws can apply during one time era, and another set of laws applies in another time era.
 - a) For example, we don’t bring sheep to sacrifice at church today. What was the “law” in one time era is not the law during the present time era.
 - ii) The same applies to sexual relations with close relatives. It was necessary for Adam and Eve’s children to have sex with one another just as it was for Noah’s three children and their grandchildren. In those days, there were not a lot of options when one went to a singles function. ☺
 - iii) Once the population was sufficiently expanded, God can at that point in time say, “OK, folks, that’s enough of that. I want to respect the husband and wife family as a unit and not sexually pervert it.”
 - iv) I mention all of this because some perverted mind might think, “Well, if it was ok for Adam and Eve’s children to do this, why not me?” That is why God spells out all of these perverted sins in this chapter. If it weren’t listed, people would do it.
21. Verse 16: " `Do not have sexual relations with your brother's wife; that would dishonor your brother.
- a) The sexual no-no list continues with a prohibition of one’s sister in law.
 - b) There is an interesting exception to Verse 16. When a brother dies, the Jewish custom is for the living brother to also take the wife of the dead brother as his own. The idea is to raise up children “in his name” and continue the line of the family brother. This was not a binding requirement, but a “request” made by God. (Reference Deuteronomy 25: 5-9).
22. Verse 17: " `Do not have sexual relations with both a woman and her daughter. Do not have sexual relations with either her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter; they are her close relatives. That is wickedness.
- a) The last of these direct prohibitions listed are not having sex with both a woman and her daughter. The next sentence includes not having sex with one’s granddaughter.
 - b) To sum up this section, incense is prohibited and just about every possible scenario is spelled out in this section. The general idea is all of this is perverted.
 - c) As I explained in the introduction, God designed sex to be between a married man and a married woman, period. These verses are an expanded commentary on that concept. God is not anti-sex. It is one of the great pleasures in life to be enjoyed. God is warning against the perverting of His gift to us and using that gift in inappropriate means.
23. Verse 18: " `Do not take your wife's sister as a rival wife and have sexual relations with her while your wife is living.
- a) The verse prohibits marrying two sisters simultaneously.
 - i) Earlier I explained that it is acceptable to marry a woman and her sister only after the sister’s husband dies. This verse expands upon that thought to prohibit this while the brother is still alive.

- b) One can go back to Genesis and say, "Wait a minute, Jacob married two sisters and that was never condemned". Again, that was 400 years earlier and the principal of "dispensation" applies here. Also, read carefully the story of Jacob marrying both sisters. It was nothing but grief and rivalry in that family because of that situation. If anything, the stories of Jacob and his two wives would be a good historical example of why not to marry two sisters.
 - c) This also leads to a quick discussion of polygamy. That is the practice of marrying more than one woman. Technically, it is legal as there is no verse that specifically prohibits marrying more than one woman. The only place it is listed is that it was forbidden for Jewish kings to multiply wives (Ref.: Deuteronomy 17:17).
 - i) The "ideal" that God wanted to create was a one man-one woman relationship. It is designed to teach us about our relationship with God.
 - ii) Every story in the bible involving polygamy turned out to be a disaster and trouble for the family. It may be legally permitted, but it is "nothing but trouble" based on the historical examples as such.
24. Verse 19: `Do not approach a woman to have sexual relations during the uncleanness of her monthly period.
- a) This is a "repeat" of what was commanded in Leviticus 15:19. Back in Chapter 15, the discussion was about what events made a husband and wife "unclean". To be unclean is a short-term punishment to be isolated from society, for say, the rest of the day.
 - b) So why is this verse repeated here? Here we are outlining all sorts of perverted sexual sins and then comes the prohibition against having sex during a woman's monthly menstrual period.
 - i) Remember the topic at hand is about "how" to live an obedient life to God when it comes to sex. God first listed all sorts of perverted acts that are prohibited. God is further defining what is acceptable here to list (as a reminder for a couple) to not have sex during this time-period.
 - c) To recall from Chapter 15, this is about a respect for "life" and "blood". When a woman has a discharge, "dead" blood is being released. It is another reminder for us that God associates blood with human life.
 - d) This might be a good time to take a quick breather and remind ourselves about "Christians and the law". What is disgusting to God then is disgusting to God now. "Legally" Christians are not bound by these laws. On the other hand, it is a sign of our faith to not do anything that God would find displeasing.
25. Verse 20: `Do not have sexual relations with your neighbor's wife and defile yourself with her.
- a) One of the 10 Commandments is not "desire" a neighbor's wife (Exodus 20:17). Verse 20 is an expanded commentary on that command to include sexual desire. Again, the basic idea is honor one's marriage.
26. Verse 21: " `Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, for you must not profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.
- a) Molech was a common false god in that time era. Children were sacrificed to Molech. People wrongly thought, "If I trust Molech by offering him my first child, he will bless me with lots more children."
 - b) The reason Molech worship is listed among the sexual sins, is that these sexual perversions caused a lot of unwanted pregnancies and unwanted children. These children were then offered to Molech. The worship of Molech went hand-in-hand with sexual perversion.
 - i) This leads to the abortion debate today. The vast majority of abortions are simply because of unwanted babies. We kill children today in the womb for the same reason children were offered to Molech at that time. Enough said.

27. Verse 22: " `Do not lie with a man as one lies with a woman; that is detestable.
- a) Here is a verse that specifically prohibits homosexuality. The term "detestable" is also translated "abomination". It means that the idea is disgusting to God.
 - b) The New Testament, which is the Christian guide for interpreting the Old Testament, also specifically prohibits this act. (See Romans 1:24, 1st Corinthians 6:9, 1st Timothy 1:10).
 - i) It is important to add that homosexuality is not an unforgivable sin. I am convinced many are born with a weakness for this temptation just as all of us have weaknesses we have to deal with. The sin is giving in to that temptation.
 - c) When one is debating someone over homosexuality, consider using this verse in context of the two surrounding verses:
 - i) The previous verse prohibits sacrificing children to false gods. Almost all reasonable people would argue that this act is wrong. The next verse (Verse 23) prohibits sex with animals. Almost all reasonable people would argue that this act is wrong. Here, the "verse in the middle" argues against homosexuality. God "surrounds" this verse with two other verses that most would consider a sin.
28. Verse 23: " `Do not have sexual relations with an animal and defile yourself with it. A woman must not present herself to an animal to have sexual relations with it; that is a perversion.
- a) Here we have the specific sin of having sex with an animal. Most people are so disgusted by this, they think it should not even be mentioned in the bible. The point if it is not listed, some would think it is acceptable.
 - b) A lot of these perversions come from the danger of sexual addictions. Like most addictions, one craves "more and more" in order to get the same high as before. The same applies to sexual addictions. It gets increasingly perverted in order for such addicts to get the same "rush" as before. These sexual perversions existed at the time of this writing and exist today.
29. Verse 24: " `Do not defile yourselves in any of these ways, because this is how the nations that I am going to drive out before you became defiled. ²⁵ Even the land was defiled; so I punished it for its sin, and the land vomited out its inhabitants. ²⁶ But you must keep my decrees and my laws. The native-born and the aliens living among you must not do any of these detestable things, ²⁷ for all these things were done by the people who lived in the land before you, and the land became defiled. ²⁸ And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out as it vomited out the nations that were before you.
- a) Over 400 years earlier, God told Abraham that one day his descendants would inherit the Promised Land. God specifically told Abraham there would be a 400-year gap. One of the reasons for this gap is "for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure". (Ref: Genesis 15:16b NIV). In other words, the Amorites, who are part of the Canaanite group, practiced these sexually perverted things. Over the next 400 years, the problem would be so bad, they "had" to be killed like a mercy killing of a horse.
 - b) One reason the Israelites inherited the Promised Land is that the present inhabitants were so wicked and so perverted, God was saying to them, "OK, folks that's enough. You guys are beyond help and you need to be eliminated as you are beyond help." God used the Israelites as His instrument to punish the existing residents of the Promised Land.
 - c) With that said, Verses 24-25 are God saying in effect, "Do not be like the people in the Promised Land to where I am sending you. I am using you to punish them. Oh, and by the way, if you act like them, I'll punish you guys the same way I punished them. If anything, I hold you (the Israelites) even more accountable as you are aware of my laws.
 - d) God held the Canaanites accountable because they should have "instinctively" known all of this perversion is wrong just as we should. God held the Israelites to even a higher standard as God revealed the laws specifically to them.
 - i) A point for you and I is God holds us to a higher standard than the nonbeliever because we "should" know our bible.

30. Verse 29: " `Everyone who does any of these detestable things--such persons must be cut off from their people. ³⁰ Keep my requirements and do not follow any of the detestable customs that were practiced before you came and do not defile yourselves with them. I am the LORD your God.' "
- a) Here we have the punishment for committing any of these bad sexual acts: "One must be cut off from their people". That could mean a death sentence or just ex-communication. The point is that it is not to be permitted. God ends this section with the real reason the Israelites are to obey these laws: "I am the LORD your God". In other words, God said it and we have to obey it. If He is our "Lord", then we don't have any say so in this matter.
 - b) Notice the bible does not say, "And you shall kill a nonbeliever who practices these things." It is not the job of Christians to "fix" nonbelievers. None of this behavior is to be permitted within the church, but it is not our job to fix the behavior of non-Christians. Jesus said people would know we are Christians by our love for one another, and not our ability to condemn the world around us. (Reference John 13:35.)
31. OK, time to wash up ☺ and wrap up this section. Most of us can think, "OK, I know I am not perfect and sin at times, but I've never done anything this bad. Why should I know this stuff?"
- a) Now I can get back to my opening theme of "Blood, sex and behavior".
 - b) One of the main points to get across from this bible text is that obedience to these laws is not a model of how to get into heaven. At the same time, if one has faith in God and believes He is our "Lord", then one acts on their faith and lives in obedience to God. In other words, we are to act differently than the world around us. That includes the world where we came from before we were saved (a word-picture of Egypt) and whatever place in this lifetime we are going to live (a word-picture of the land of the Canaanites).
 - c) God wants us to change our behavior not to "earn" our way into heaven, but out of gratitude for the salvation He has given us. These two chapters are full of examples of how we to modify our behavior. Some of these laws apply to our society today (e.g., sexual perversions) and some do not (e.g., we don't have to make animal sacrifices today). Again, the New Testament is our guideline to apply these laws to our life.
 - d) I have to admit, this is a "heavy" and difficult set of verses to digest. Even if one forgets all of the specifics, remember that a God that loves us also cares for our well being. That concept comes through all of Leviticus as well as the entire bible. These laws are given for our own well being and our own happiness. It is God's way of saying, "I know what is best for you and I want you to live a happy and fulfilled life. Follow my rules".
32. Let's pray: Father, Help us to remember that it is only by Your grace and Your power that we don't fall into temptation into one of these categories. Help us to stick close to You and rely upon You to live a life of obedience. Help us also to remember that it is not through our strength that we obey You, but by Your power. Out of the love You have shown to us, help us to live a life of gratitude and obedience to You. Help us to do it for our own benefit and as Your witnesses to the world around us. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.