

## Leviticus Chapter 20 – John Karmelich

1. I call Leviticus Chapter 20, “Motivation”.
  - a) This is the last chapter of a four-chapter section of what I call “Life after salvation”. It is about one’s daily life as a Christian. In other words, “I’m saved, I’m forgiven, now what?”
  - b) Chapter 20 indirectly asks the question, “What happens if I don’t obey God’s laws about every day life? The answer to some of those laws is the death penalty. Like I said, Chapter 20 is “motivating”. ☺ We’ll discuss in this lesson that the penalties are different for the Christian than it was for the Israelites. God’s attitude toward sin does not change.
    - i) Our greatest motivation to serve God is out of love for Him. Still, God’s “back up plan” for motivation deals with punishment. One of the great issues of this chapter is why that is necessary as a motivational tool.
  - c) What I also hope is to convey in this lesson is the seriousness of dealing with some of the sins of this chapter. God’s institution of the death penalty is a motivation tool to keep us away from these sinful acts. Note that salvation is a separate issue. This is about ending the life of a person here on earth.
  - d) Another issue that is underlying Chapter 20 has to do with “protection of society”. The focus of this chapter is on the punishment for sin. The main idea is not so much to punish the guilty for their sin, but to protect the Israelite society from the spreading of the issues of immoral behavior listed in this chapter. Again, this is about “motivation”. The motivation for all of this punishment is for the protection of society.
2. With that grim introduction complete, ☺ welcome to my study of Leviticus Chapter 20.
  - a) Chapter 20 gets back to some of the sexual sins mentioned back in Chapter 18.
  - b) It also recounts some other sins discussed in Chapters 17-19, and elsewhere.
  - c) The focus of Chapter 20 is on the punishment for those sins. As I said, it is the “motivating” factor to be obedient to God’s laws and the protection of society.
  - d) Remember that this section of Scripture deals with the life of the believer. It is not about achieving salvation or asking forgiveness of sins. That is all dealt with in earlier chapters. We are now focusing on the “daily” life of the believer. To put it another way, this is not about our behavior in church, this is about our “Monday through Saturday” behavior.
3. It might help to take a step back and talk about the “big-picture” ideas of Leviticus:
  - a) The main theme of Leviticus is how to act “holy”. The word simply means to be “separated” for God. The idea is that every aspect of our lives should be pleasing to God.
  - b) Leviticus first spent chapters on sacrifices. The idea of a sacrifice is to give up something we desire for the sake of something else. The idea of “holy living” is to give up (i.e., sacrifice) living like nonbelievers around us in order to live a life that is pleasing to God.
  - c) Someone might now ask, “Well, what happens if I choose to believe in God, yet disobey some of the laws? Throughout Leviticus so far, we’ve had a few references to types of punishment, but no direct discussion of the topic. A common punishment previously mentioned in Leviticus is when a person violates some law, they are “unclean” for a set time being. To be “unclean” means they are to be isolated from society. Here in Chapter 20, we get into real tough punishment, which are mainly death penalties.
  - d) Remember that now all sins have equal weight in God’s eyes. It is true that God is perfect and therefore any sin we commit does displease Him. That is different from the idea that all sins are weighted equal. For example, some sins in Leviticus only require temporary isolation or excommunication. Other sins require the death penalty. If all sins are somehow “equal”, why isn’t the punishment equal for all sins?
    - i) Jesus made a statement to Pontius Pilate that the person who brought Jesus to Pilate was guilty of “the greater sin”. (John 19:11) My point here is if Jesus says someone is guilty of a greater sin, then Jesus does not weigh all sins equally.

- e) With all of that said, Leviticus Chapter 20 focuses on some of the more grievous sins that one can commit. If Chapter 19 was an expanded commentary on the 10 Commandments, you can think of Chapter 20 as an expanded commentary on the 10 “No-No’s. ☺ (Yes, I made up that term and there are no official “10-No-No’s.) My point here is that Chapter 20 focuses on the things that are very displeasing to Him in the life of the believer.
    - i) In other words, if we as Christians desire to live a life pleasing to God, we should be aware of what is very displeasing to God.
4. What popped in my head as I thought about this chapter is the fact it was written to believers.
- a) By this point in Leviticus, God is focusing on the lives of “saved” people. It is written to those who desire to commit their lives to serving God.
  - b) This chapter gives big warnings about sexual deviancy, offering child sacrifices to idols and other things that most of us would find disgusting. One would wonder why all of this is even necessary. The world around the Israelites was full of these sins (See Verse 23). God wrote these laws and these punishments as motivation to keep the Israelites (and us) away from the sinful influence of the world around us.
  - c) The sad thing is the bible is full of stories about some of these sins being committed. Christian history is full of stories of some (or all) of these sins being committed.
  - d) The point I’m getting at is “this stuff is out there” and it’s in the church.
  - e) As sick as this stuff is in this chapter, there is a temptation for believers to go down this path. As you read this chapter, one can’t help but think, “This stuff is disgusting. There is no way I would do that”. In reality, the temptation is there. Sin usually starts off small, and if goes unchecked, leads to the more grievous sins of this chapter.
  - f) My point is not to read this chapter and think of some “famous” Christian who say, may have committed adultery, but to read this chapter and think, “God wrote this for me. He doesn’t want me to go down this path. I need to stick close to Him in order to prevent me from committing one of these sins.”
5. This is a good time to discuss the topic of “government punishment” and “church punishment”.
- a) For starters, understand that God is “pro-death-penalty. The first five books of the Bible are considered the most important books by religious Jews. They were all authored by Moses. (By the way, Jesus quotes from all five books and attributed the author of all five to Moses. That’s enough proof for me they are penned by Moses!) My point here is the only punishment ordained by God in all five books is the death penalty. God condemns murder in all five books and institutes a death penalty.
  - b) It is important to state again that Jesus said the only unforgivable sin is “blasphemy of the Holy Spirit”. That is a lifetime denial of Jesus as God. That means all other sins are forgivable, including murder and the ones mentioned in this chapter.
    - i) My point here is that a person committing one of these sins can ask God for forgiveness and still go to heaven. A punishment is still carried out “here on earth” for the sake of society. It is designed to discourage others from committing the same sin. One has to distinguish the death penalty from salvation.
  - c) The purpose of government is mainly to protect the individual living under those governments. It is to provide justice for the individual as well as society. It is a role of government to punish people for inappropriate behavior. Again, the purpose of government is to protect its society.
    - i) The bible says that all governments are God ordained (Romans 13:1) in the sense God “allows” such governments to exist, good ones and bad ones.
    - ii) With that said, the laws of this chapter are designed to be “over and above” what is for society. These are laws “for the believers in God”. (We’ll discuss in a matter of moments the issue of Christianity and these punishments.)

- d) The next thing to bring up is the issue of the death penalty for sin.
  - i) Let me explain with an example: One of the laws in this chapter is a death penalty for adulterers. If we find a church member committing adultery, we don't have them executed, even if they are found guilty. Again, the New Testament is our guide for dealing with sin issues and the interpretation of the Old Testament.
  - ii) Jesus gave a four-point outline in Matthew 18:15-17 dealing with sin in the church. The idea is 1) confront the sinner directly; 2) if they don't repent, confront them with witnesses, 3) if they still don't repent, tell the local church and 4) if they still don't repent, kick them out of the church.
    - a) My point here is Jesus never says, "Kill them for disobedience". Jesus desire is for all believers to live a holy life. By this 4-step method, the hope is the ex-communicated member will be so miserable outside of the church, they would want to repent.
  - iii) With that said, one has to balance Jesus' "4-step method" with getting the government involved. Again, governments are God-ordained, for justice and the protection of society. If someone commits murder, the person must still be prosecuted. This is a separate issue from church-forgiveness. If the person wishes to confess, he or she could still be a "Christian in good standing", even though they may have to go to jail or get the death penalty. One has to separate the issue of forgiveness on a church-level with the issue of justice for the sake of society.
- 6. What this chapter is all about is, "How are we as a Christian "society" supposed to act?
  - a) Are we to require nonbelievers to live by these standards? (No, more on this later.)
  - b) Are we to require Christians to live by these Old Testament Standards? (The answer is to use the New Testament as the interpretation for these standards.)
  - c) Finally, we still have to remember what God finds "disgusting" in the Old Testament, God finds "disgusting" in the New Testament. A good reason for the Christians to study this chapter is to understand what is not pleasing to God.
- 7. Verse 1: The LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup> "Say to the Israelites: `Any Israelite or any alien living in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech must be put to death. The people of the community are to stone him. <sup>3</sup> I will set my face against that man and I will cut him off from his people; for by giving his children to Molech, he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name.
  - a) As you can see, God doesn't waste much time getting to the point here. ☺ These three verses say that if any Israelite offers their children to Molech, that Israelite is to be stoned to death. Further, God is saying, "He will set His face against Him", which assumedly means that person is going to hell.
  - b) First, let's discuss what Molech worship is. In order to please this false god, people would sacrifice (i.e., murder) their babies. The false idea is if you are willing to trust Molech so much you offer your children, he will bless you with prosperity.
    - i) This reminds me of a classic bible question about Genesis: People often ask why God would require Abraham to offer his son Isaac. The truth is God asked Abraham to do "nothing more" than what the pagans living around Abraham do. God was asking Abraham to do the same thing that the Molech-worshippers were willing to do. Yes, the story of the offering of Isaac is very symbolic of God offering "His only Son". I also wanted to point out that Molech worship was around at the time of Abraham and show its historical context.
  - c) It's hard for us to imagine something as cruel as taking one's own baby and offer it to be burned up in a sacrifice to a god.
    - i) There have been many sermons preached how the modern abortion "industry" is comparable to Molech sacrifices. It is comparable in that people gave their babies to that pagan god as a desire for a better life. Most people abort their babies out of "convenience" as they don't want these children to affect their lifestyle.

- ii) Another comparison might be those who choose to have their children raised by nannies and sitters so the adults can “enjoy life more”. I never condemn the family where both parents have to work out of necessity. I only challenge those who worship “materialism” as a priority over time with one’s children.
  - d) I warned you Chapter 20 is a heavy, condemning chapter. Hang in there folks, Leviticus eventually gets better. ☺
  - e) Notice the last sentence of Verse 2: “The people of the community are to stone him.”
    - i) Notice the verse does not say, “Have somebody push the guy over a cliff”. ☺
    - ii) The point is that deed of public execution is to be “public”. The community (i.e., those who live around this guilty person) are the ones doing the stoning.
    - iii) This gets to a (not the) purpose of this stoning. It is not just so the guilty can be killed. It is so the rest of the community can know how “disgusting” this is. This is a visual reminder to everyone around how this sin is forbidden. Again, the underlying purpose of this punishment is the protection of society.
    - iv) If you are having any sympathy for the guy or gal being killed, stop and think about the baby. Who is pleading on the baby’s behalf? A baby was just killed for the sake of this pagan god. My point is God cares about the life of that baby and wants us to perform “justice” for the sake of society.
  - f) Verse 3 says, “He (the guilty) has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name.”
    - i) The question becomes, “How did that person defile God’s sanctuary?”
      - a) The answer is that the Israelites were “God’s representatives” to the world. If the nations around Israel wanted to know what God was like, all they had to do was watch the Israelites. It was their “job” to represent God. When a sin like this occurs, it “defiles” God.
      - b) The same principal is to apply to Christians. Our job is to represent God. When we sin, God himself gets “a bad rap”.
    - ii) This is what “You shall not take God’s name in vain” is really all about. That law is one of the 10 Commandments. (Ref.: Exodus 20:7) People think that this commandment is to falsely invoke God’s name in swearing. What that command is really about is our representation of God. When we publicly sin and claim to be “God’s representative” (i.e., a believing Christian) we violate this command.
8. Verse 4: If the people of the community close their eyes when that man gives one of his children to Molech and they fail to put him to death, <sup>5</sup> I will set my face against that man and his family and will cut off from their people both him and all who follow him in prostituting themselves to Molech.
- a) The next logical question an Israelite could ask is, “What if we as a community fail to publicly execute a person guilty of this crime? The answer is Verses 4 and 5.
  - b) God is saying in effect, “Oh, and by the way, if you fail to publicly execute the guilty as I prescribe, you’re in worse shape than you thought. I’ll personally get on your back and make your life even more miserable if you don’t kill the guy. Don’t try me!” ☺
    - i) For the Nation of Israel, this literally came true. The Nation of Israel eventually split into two nations, called Israel and Judah. Israel went into captivity first when they was guilty of this very crime. (Reference: 2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 17:17-18).
    - ii) Some time later, the kingdom of Judah also went into captivity. God said one of the main reasons was the guilt of idolatry. My point is that the warning here in Leviticus came true. (Reference 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 36:14-17).
    - iii) So how does this affect my life today? Glad you asked! ☺ A church that ignores a sin problem within the church will be eliminated or ineffective as a church. That was one of Jesus’ main points in Revelation Chapters 2-3. God can and does make people ineffective witnesses for Him if we fail to live a life of obedience to Him.

- c) The good news is we're done talking about child sacrifice and consequences there of here in Chapter 20. The bad news is it doesn't get much easier. ☺
9. Verse 6: " I will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute himself by following them, and I will cut him off from his people.
- a) In the last chapter and last lesson, I discussed why this is sinful. There is a real demonic power in mediums (channelers of the dead) and spiritualist (fortune tellers). Grant it, most of them today are scam artists. Still, there is some real demonic power associated with this practice and it is to be avoided by those who seek God.
- i) God is saying in effect, "Do you want to know what your future holds? Then read your bible and follow God. Avoid these people like the plague. Do you want to talk to your dead loved one? They are with me. Look to Me for guidance, not your departed loved one!"
- b) This also shows that these "arts" are as old as the bible.
- c) Notice Verse 6 does not say, "And you shall stone the guilty to death". It just says that God Himself will cut that person off. This sin does not require a public execution, at least not by this verse. It could mean eternal damnation or something "lighter". ☺ Personally, I don't want to be in the neighborhood when God's lighting bolt strikes. ☺
- d) Again, we're back to my opening theme of "motivation". This activity is not to be tolerated. Our primary motivation is to be out of love for God. If that doesn't do the trick, notice the consequences.
- e) One can ask, "How can a loving God do such a thing?" The better question is how can we do such things? God condemns this person as they are held to a higher standard as a follower of God. Turning to a medium is yet another example of those who willfully choose to defy God. In a sense, eternal condemnation is giving a person what they want. It is God saying to them, "OK, you don't want to follow me? Fine, I'll give you what you want and turn my back from you!"
10. Verse 7: `Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the LORD your God.<sup>8</sup> Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the LORD, who makes you holy.
- a) Verse 7 is a "break" from this verse-by-verse list of penalties. It is God saying in effect, "Look folks, if you are going to follow Me, then do it. Here are My rules, follow them."
- b) Verses 7 and 8 are the "two sided coin" of self-discipline and dependence upon God.
- i) One extreme is to say, "All I have to do is try hard enough and I can obey all of God's laws. The other extreme is to say, "All I have to do is trust in the fact that God is working on me and never lift a finger to try to do what is right". Both extremes are false concepts for a disciple (follower) of Christ.
- ii) Remember the words "disciple" and "discipline" have the same root word. The term "disciple" does not just apply to the 12 Apostles. It applies to anyone who desires to live a life obedient to God. Jesus said to go and make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). As disciples, effort required on our part. The key is to rely upon God's power in order to be obedient to God's laws.
- c) The first two words of Verse 7 are to "consecrate yourselves". The idea is to make the mental decision to change one's behavior in a way that is pleasing to God.
- i) That has to be balanced with the last part of Verse 8 that says, "I am the LORD, who makes you holy."
- ii) This leads back to one of my favorite expressions: Without God, we can't. Without us, God won't". God is always looking for people willing to make a commitment to follow Him. Given that commitment, God then provides us with the power to live a life obedient to Him.
- iii) The secret to Verses 7 and 8 are to understand that in order to live a life pleasing to God, we have to draw upon His power. At the same time, we can't just "sit there". God can't guide us unless we are moving in the first place.

- d) One of the classical debates in Christianity is whether or not a Christian is “sinful”.
    - i) I bring up this debate here because the last phrase of Verse 8 says, “I am the LORD, who makes you holy”. If God is “making us” holy, some argue that Christians are not sinful if we follow Him.
    - ii) The point is we are eternally forgiven of all our sins, and therefore the Christian is no longer sinful. The other side is the Christian still is human, and we make mistakes all the time and still sin.
    - iii) I’ve personally never had a problem with this debate. It is all about perspective. From God’s perspective, He sees us with “cross-filtered glasses” and knows that one day, we will be in heaven in our perfectly forgiven state. From the human perspective, we still sin and have to deal with sin every day.
    - iv) Remember that all of these rules and regulations are given to followers of God, and not unbelievers. A reason God gives us all of these laws and warnings is to keep us from “wandering” away from Him
  - e) Meanwhile, back to the executioner’s room. ☺
11. Verse 9: “If anyone curses his father or mother, he must be put to death. He has cursed his father or his mother, and his blood will be on his own head.
- a) The verse says that if someone curses his parents, they are to be killed.
  - b) Let me start by explaining what this verse does not mean: A dad cannot say his wife, “Hey honey, Junior won’t clean his room and he just cursed us out. Meet me outside with some rocks so we can put him to death.” ☺
    - i) As tempting as the idea is to kill our children at times of disobedience, ☺ this is not what the verse is teaching us. Remember, grandchildren are a reward in life for not killing your children when you seriously considered it. ☺
  - c) This verse is about a grown child (i.e., adult) cursing his or her relationship with his or her parents and is no longer willing to honor them as their parents. (There is an extended commentary on this point in Deuteronomy 21:18-21 if interested.)
    - i) Suppose a child turned out to be a life-long thief and criminal despite extended warnings from the parents. The adult-child no longer even listens to the advice and warnings of the parents. That is an example of when this law comes into play.
  - d) Verse 9 is an extended commentary on the Commandment to “Honor your father and mother”. (Exodus 20:12). The opposite of “honoring” is to curse them. Just as honoring represents a life-long commitment, so does the concept of “cursing” in a life-long manner.
  - e) If one has so much hatred toward their parents, how can they show love to other people?
  - f) Imagine someone thinking of you or me, “Yeah, they claim to be a Christian, but look how they treat their parents. I wouldn’t want to be like them.” This is about willful disobedience to God and the consequence of that action.
12. Verse 10: “If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife--with the wife of his neighbor--both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death.
- a) Now we get into adultery. The punishment is both parties must be put to death.
  - b) In practice, this rarely happened. There are no recorded incidents in the bible where a couple was actually put to death for adultery. I’m sure there are such cases through history. It is just that none were actually recorded in the bible.
    - i) Another bible law is that one cannot be condemned of the crime unless there are two or three witnesses to the crime. (Ref. Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:5) Since most sexual acts are done in private, it is hard to get witnesses to such a crime.
    - ii) The only bible case where adultery was actually on trial is when a woman was brought to Jesus for adultery. (Reference John 8:1-10). The accusers were trying to trap Jesus. If He condemned her, Jesus would not show compassion. If He forgave her, Jesus would be disobedient to the Law.

- iii) Jesus “rose above” the situation by saying there were no accusers present. The point is Jesus did not disobey this law, but He mentioned other laws that argue for a fair trial. If you read that paragraph carefully in John Chapter 8, Jesus did not forgive her either. Jesus just said, “Sin no more”.
  - c) Does this mean we make adultery illegal in society? I’m not sure it can be enforced. This is one of those situations where we need to have one standard for the church and another for the “world”. God never says to kill nonbelievers for this sin. The focus is only on believers. As I stated in the introduction, the New Testament is our guide for dealing with sin in the church. The “Matthew 18” 4-step process ends with ex-communication. God does not call on us to execute sinners today. What we should understand from this text in Leviticus is how seriously God hates the sin of adultery. It is a forgivable sin, but it is also one to be avoided.
  - d) Why is adultery listed in the same text as child sacrifices and other hideous sins?
    - i) If you recall, God uses adultery as a synonym for idolatry. Adultery is to violate one’s commitment to marriage. Idolatry is to violate one’s commitment to God. To maintain a good marriage and a good relationship with God both require hard work and constant attention. God uses marriage as a model of our relationship with Him. It does not mean God calls all people to be married. It just means God uses marriage as a model of our relationship with Him.
  - e) I want to take a moment and talk to adults who are sexual temptation outside of marriage. When such temptations come remember the following rules:
    - i) Rule #1: Flee. God tells us to flee temptation. (See 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 2:22.) The word “flee” does not mean to stand there and pray for the situation to get better. ☺ It means to get your feet moving and follow your feet!
      - a) God promises “an escape route” when such temptations comes. (See 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 10:13).
    - ii) Remember the concept of regular prayer against such temptation. The night Jesus was betrayed, he asked his disciples to pray with Him three times. All three times the disciples fell asleep. Notice the correlation between that fact the disciples failed to pray with Jesus three times and the fact Peter denied Jesus three times the next day. There is a correlation between the strength to resist temptation (which comes from God) and prayer itself. (Reference: Mark 14 or Luke 22.)
    - iii) Remember to have regular time in God’s word. I always liked the proverb that says, “Sin will keep you from this book and this book will keep you from sin”.
    - iv) Finally, if such temptation arises, stop and pray for that person who is tempting you. It’s hard to be lustful for a person when you are praying for their well being or their salvation. This gets your perspective on God and not on sin.
13. Verse 11: “If a man sleeps with his father’s wife, he has dishonored his father. Both the man and the woman must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads. <sup>12</sup> “If a man sleeps with his daughter-in-law, both of them must be put to death. What they have done is a perversion; their blood will be on their own heads. <sup>13</sup> “If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.
- a) Here we have three verses that all end with the same phrase: “Their blood be on their heads”. In other words, their actions have condemned themselves and they must be executed for their sins. Again, eternal salvation is a separate issue. They may ask for forgiveness prior to the execution and receive it from God. That does not stop the judgment from happening for the sake of society.
  - b) The specific sins at hand are 1) sex with one’s mother or stepmother (Verse 11), 2) sex with one’s daughter in law (Verse 12) and 3) homosexuality (Verse 13).

- i) The common thread is to respect the family structure. To have sex with say, one's stepmother is to have contempt for one's father, which again is a violation of one of the 10 commandments. Remember all of these acts are so "disgusting" to God, He calls for a death sentence. God wants these acts forbidden among believers.
  - ii) All three of these violations are saying in effect, "Respect the family. That includes respect for the parent and respect for the children. If you love your family, why would you want to have sex with his wife?"
  - iii) The reason homosexuality is thrown in the mix is that it too, disrespects the basic family structure that God desires.
- c) In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, there was a member of that church who had sex with his stepmother. The implication is the Corinthian church was proud of the fact they were so "tolerant" and so filled with God's love they allowed this to happen. Paul condemned the church for this toleration. My point here is that Paul never calls for a death sentence for this sin. Paul does call for ex-communication from the church for this "couple". (Reference: 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians Chapter 5, Verses 1-8).
- d) Does God want us to publicly condemn such actions today?
- i) It amazes me how many "Christians" who want say, homosexuality illegal never have the same standard for adultery or those who curse their parents. Yes, the bible calls homosexuality a sin, but the same level of sinfulness applies to the other acts in this same chapter.
  - ii) Again, we need to apply one set of rules for those who claim to be Christians and another set of standards for everyone else.
  - iii) For example, God does not say in this verse, "If you find a Canaanite committing one of these sins, go hunt them down and kill them." The lives of nonbelievers are "God's problem" in that He is to eternally judge them, not us. Our job is simply to not be influenced by their lifestyle. We are to have one standard for believers in God and another standard for nonbelievers. If the toughest penalty today for sin within the church is ex-communication (again, See Matthew 18), why should we be any harsher on non-Christians?
  - iv) On the other hand, I have a problem with public "condoning" of sin. I do believe it is the Christian job, whenever possible to stand up and say publicly to say any of these things are wrong. Again, violent protest is wrong, but if free speech is allowed, than free speech must be used. I keep think of Jesus' line when it comes to being a public witness: "Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves". (Matthew 10:16b, NKJV).
14. Verse 14: " `If a man marries both a woman and her mother, it is wicked. Both he and they must be burned in the fire, so that no wickedness will be among you.
- a) Here comes another no-no: Marrying a woman and her mother. Notice it is not just a death penalty, but the methodology of the death penalty is spelled out: "burnt with fire".
  - b) The condemnation is not just against having sex with both, but marrying both.
  - c) What God is trying to get across here is how serious He wants us to respect the family structure. Any significant violation calls for a death penalty.
  - d) Why would God spell this out? Because the Canaanites did this practice. Further, if God didn't spell it out, "someone" would think it is acceptable practice.
15. Verse 15: " `If a man has sexual relations with an animal, he must be put to death, and you must kill the animal. <sup>16</sup> " `If a woman approaches an animal to have sexual relations with it, kill both the woman and the animal. They must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads.
- a) These two verses condemn the idea of bestiality. That is for a human to have sexual relations with an animal.
  - b) Notice both the human and the animal are to be killed. Part of the reason is there is to be no "offspring" is allowed by this deviancy.

16. Let me wrap up this section on perverted sexual practices with some thoughts:
- a) Remember all of these concepts were practiced by the nations around Israel. It is God's warning to the Israelites not to be like the nations around them.
  - b) A lot of these practices tie to a quote from Romans 1:24: Paul said, "Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another". (NIV).
    - i) To paraphrase Paul here, God is saying, "Don't do that. I'm telling you again don't do that. OK, fine if that's what you want, I'll "give you over" to that sin. I'll "grease the road" so it will be even harder for you to stop."
    - ii) The idea of God "giving one over" is that there is a physical change in the person committing that sin.
  - c) It's hard for me to imagine doing any one of these things. However, I do know it exists. There is an adrenaline rush to do things one knows instinctively is wrong, and people do them. Sometimes it is demonic influences and sometimes it is just people who willfully decide to turn from God. These sins are the results of such actions.
  - d) As I read some of these laws, I kept thinking of Jesus statement on marriage: "So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." (Matthew 19:6 NIV)
    - i) The idea is marriage is created by God. When two people get married, the concept is "they become one under God".
    - ii) Now think of all the sexual deviancy spelled out in chapter. All of it is a violation of what God desired for marriage: One man and one woman. To defy that marital ideal is to defy "what God has joined together". God takes this concept so seriously that He called for a death penalty for any of these violations.
    - iii) Again, this is not a call for everyone to be married. Some people are called to be celibate and that is not a sin. The point of all of this is that God does condone sexual relations, but only in the context of marriage.
17. Verse 17: " `If a man marries his sister, the daughter of either his father or his mother, and they have sexual relations, it is a disgrace. They must be cut off before the eyes of their people. He has dishonored his sister and will be held responsible.
- a) From Verses 17-21 we have "less serious" sexual sins. One can read the verses so far and think, "Does that mean every sexual incident outside of marriage calls for a death penalty? The answer is no. Don't get me wrong. The sexual sins of Verses 17-21 are still sins. The point is they are "lower" in penalty status than the previous set of verses.
  - b) Why would God spell out a lower-than-death penalty for a guy marrying his sister?
    - i) The answer is the other sins so far have to do with adultery or some sort of sexual perversion to the basis one-man, one-woman family structure. In this sin, it is not a violation of the basic family structure, but it is a sin nonetheless.
  - c) The Jewish society is not to permit this sin. The punishment is banishment.
18. Verse 18: " `If a man lies with a woman during her monthly period and has sexual relations with her, he has exposed the source of her flow, and she has also uncovered it. Both of them must be cut off from their people.
- a) We're now back to a topic covered in Chapter 15. It said that a Jewish woman is "unclean" during her menstrual period. To be "unclean" is to be isolated from society.
  - b) The idea here is that a menstrual period represents "dead blood" in that the blood is not used for producing a child. This does not mean God wants women pregnant every month. It is just another symbol of how "blood represents life" and it is to be respected.
  - c) Chapter 15 Verse 24 said if a couple has sex during this time, they are "unclean" for seven days. Here in Chapter 20, the penalty increases to banishment.
    - i) This is not a contradiction. The concept of Chapter 15 has to do with "accidental" sex. In other words, a couple did it and they didn't realize her period started.

- d) Chapter 20 Verse 18 has to do with willful disobedience. This is about married Jewish couples willfully defying God's laws. If they are going to be willfully defiant over a matter this small, they will probably be willfully defiant over larger matters as well. That is why the penalty is ex-communication. The idea is they are not to be an influence on others. Remember the focus of this chapter is on sins that can corrupt a whole society.
19. Verse 19: `Do not have sexual relations with the sister of either your mother or your father, for that would dishonor a close relative; both of you would be held responsible. <sup>20</sup> " `If a man sleeps with his aunt, he has dishonored his uncle. They will be held responsible; they will die childless. <sup>21</sup> " `If a man marries his brother's wife, it is an act of impurity; he has dishonored his brother. They will be childless.
- a) Here is the sin of having sex with one's aunt. The penalty is to be "childless". I'll discuss what that means in a moment.
- b) Why isn't this sin a death penalty like the sexual sins listed earlier in the chapter? The idea is that the male is not married. It is a sin in that it dishonor's that close relative. The point here is in the Jewish culture, this sin would not call for a death penalty.
- i) Again, keep in mind the penalties are relevant to the Jewish culture. In the Christian church, this would be still be considered a sin, and the "worst" punishment is ex-communication from the church.
- c) OK, what does "childless" mean? Does that mean to cut off a certain body part so they won't produce children? ☺ No.
- i) What it meant in reality was that any children they had were not responsible to take care of the parents when they got old. It meant that any children they had when they grew up would be told to "dishonor" their parents. For all intents and purposes, the guilty party "was as good as childless".
- d) Congratulations everyone, we have survived the sexual sin penalty phase of Leviticus. ☺
- i) The rest of the chapter is wrap-up comments that cover this whole section of Leviticus that deals with "behavior toward God in everyday life".
20. Verse 22: " `Keep all my decrees and laws and follow them, so that the land where I am bringing you to live may not vomit you out.
- a) Here is where it gets "interesting". God is saying that if the Israelites violate these commands, the land will "vomit them out".
- i) First of all, God is not being literal in the sense that dirt has an ability to vomit. ☺
- ii) It is an expression. The word-picture is that if the society got this morally bad, "somehow, someway", the nation would no longer exist. It would be "as if" the land where they lived had vomited the inhabitants out.
- iii) (And you thought Leviticus was going to get less gross after Verse 21. ☺)
- b) Let's put this sin and concept into perspective:
- i) The idea is not that if just one person commits one of these sins, everyone is "history" and gets kicked out. The danger is public acceptance of these sins.
- ii) At this point, let's read two more verses and come back to this concept.
21. Verse 23: You must not live according to the customs of the nations I am going to drive out before you. Because they did all these things, I abhorred them. <sup>24</sup> But I said to you, "You will possess their land; I will give it to you as an inheritance, a land flowing with milk and honey." I am the LORD your God, who has set you apart from the nations.
- a) These two verses state and imply a couple of key concepts for us to learn:
- i) All of these sexual immoral practices listed in this chapter and in the previous few chapters were happening in the Promised Land where the Canaanites lived. This group of nations collectively called the Canaanites was guilty of all these sins and publicly condemned them.

- ii) God is stating quite clearly in Verse 23 that a reason the Israelites are to possess this land is because God wanted use the Israelites to punish the Canaanites for their sins.
- iii) The other reason God gave the Israelites that specific land is to “set them apart” from other nations. That is back to the concept of “holy living”. This is the idea of living a life that is pleasing to God and not live like the nations around them.
- b) There is a key point being made by this principal: God does not tolerate the public acceptance of sexual immorality in a culture. If a culture gets to a point where the violation of these immoral practices is commonplace, that nation will no longer exist.
  - i) There is often a long time frame for this condemnation. God told Abraham over 400 years earlier that “the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure (Genesis 15:16 NIV). The Amorites were the dominant tribe of the Canaanite culture. God was announcing that in 400 years (more or less), the Canaanites would be removed from the land for committing these sins.
  - ii) Even when God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, it was because the society was so morally corrupt, it was a “mercy killing”. Remember that God told Abraham he would spare Sodom if there were “10 righteous men”. (Genesis 18:32). The point is this place was so morally corrupt, and there were so few (none?) people that followed God’s laws, God destroyed the place.
- c) Billy Graham is famous for the quote, “If God does not judge the United States of America, He owes Sodom and Gomorrah an apology”.
  - i) His point is America is ripe for judgment because we have become tolerant of immoral behavior in its society.
  - ii) The only reason we are not judged (so far) is that there are still a lot of people around here who are “righteous” only in that they choose to live an obedient life to God. That’s not to say God’s judgment on this country won’t happen one day. God’s timing is God’s timing and that is not up to us. This is why it is important for Christians, if and when possible to not tolerate immorality (at the least) within the church and not condone it in society when we encounter it.
  - iii) OK, off my soapbox. ☺ Let’s finish the chapter.

22. Verse 25: " `You must therefore make a distinction between clean and unclean animals and between unclean and clean birds. Do not defile yourselves by any animal or bird or anything that moves along the ground--those which I have set apart as unclean for you. <sup>26</sup> You are to be holy to me because I, the LORD, am holy, and I have set you apart from the nations to be my own. <sup>27</sup>" `A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads.' "

- a) Way back in Chapter 11 was a discussion of what type of animals an Israelite could eat. In a sense, that was the beginning of this whole section of “How do we obey God in everyday life?” God is wrapping up this whole section on “Holy (daily) living by tying in the “least” of the violations (Verse 25) with one of the “worse” violations (Verse 27).
- b) Verse 25 ties back to Chapter 11. If you recall, there was a whole list of animals that an Israelite could eat and could not eat. Christians are not under that same restriction. I discussed this back in my lesson on Chapter 11. In short, there are New Testament references that state Christians are not tied to these food laws. (E.g., See Acts 10:13-15).
  - i) The punishment for eating an “unclean” animal was temporary banishment from society. The point here is a violation of this law was not very severe.
- c) Now contrast Verse 25 with Verse 27: For an Israelite to have contact with a medium or spiritist (i.e., one who uses demonic powers to contact the dead or tell fortunes) is a death penalty. In other words, some sins only call for temporary isolation. Other sins call for the death penalty. Not all sins have equal punishment in God’s eye, but all are considered sins nonetheless.

- d) Let me try to paraphrase God here: “The reason I (God) have picked you (Israelites) to be My people is not because you are better people by nature than the other nations around you. It is just that I need a specific nation to be My public witnesses to the surrounding world as to how I desire everyone to live. I need a group of people to live-by-example and show the world the best way for people to live.” Therefore, since I rescued you out of slavery and went to all this trouble to redeem you, I expect, out of gratitude for you people to live this way.”
  - e) What is important for Christians to understand is the principals still apply, even though the specific punishments no longer apply.
    - i) For starters, what God finds sinful then, He finds sinful now. Again, the New Testament is our guide as to which laws are to be obeyed and the appropriate punishment for sin.
    - ii) Like the Israelites, individual Christians are “picked” by God and together, we form a “nation” of believers. Like the Israelites, God calls us to live a specific way. It is not a salvation issue; it is an “obedience issue”. It is God wanting people to be His public witnesses to the world around us.
23. We are wrapping up this long multi-chapter section on “How do we please God in every day life: The main idea is to live a life pleasing to God in all aspects. The specifics and the details are all over the bible and not just Leviticus.
- a) The next two chapters deal with the lifestyle of the “priests”. These are specific set of additional requirements if one is to be a “priest” to God. Since all Christians are called “priests”, those regulations have word-pictures for us as well. The difference is Chapters 21-22 focus on our behavior in our role as priests. This chapter, along with the previous chapters, focus on our behavior “in everyday life”.
  - b) What I want us to get out of this chapter is, “Here is what God considers disgusting. Therefore, we as followers of God should also consider it disgusting”. All of these laws are about protecting you from what corrupts the world.
  - c) As I stated in the introduction, this is about “motivation”. Our motivation to serve God is out of our love for Him and our gratitude to Him. That should motivate us to be obedient to His laws and live a lifestyle that He desires for us. Over and above that, God demands that we punish people who are guilty of such sins. The punishment is for the protection of our society.
    - i) If you study world history, all great civilizations (powerful countries, empires, etc.) have fallen after a point of public tolerance of immoral behavior. It is as if wherever they are living, God has “vomited them out of their land” for immoral behavior. God gave these laws and punishments for our well being, not because He wants to harm us. Again, the “motivation” is about protection of society.
  - d) This leads us back to the cliché, “Without God we can’t”. A society that ignores God goes into decay all on its own. Again, history has proven this to be true over and over again. The other part of that same cliché is, “Without us, God won’t”. God wants to use people to get His will done. He picks and chooses people to follow Him (His perspective) and we make a decision to follow Him (our perspective). Such people become God’s witnesses to the world. Such people are to “act differently than the world around us” in the sense we live as God commands for our life. That is what holy living is all about.
24. Let’s pray: Father, We thank you that You have chosen us. We understand that without Your power and Your help, we would act no better than the world around us. By Your power and Your Strength, guide us to live a life that is pleasing to You. Keep us strong against the temptation to do any of the sins listed in this chapter. Help us to see as sinful what You see as sinful. Help us to separate ourselves to live a life pleasing to You. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.