

Leviticus Chapters 21-22 – John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is “A higher calling”. It’s about going above and beyond the normal call of duty. We’ll get back to that in a moment. First, let’s describe the “situation” in Leviticus:
 - a) Over the last bunch of chapters, the discussion is about how God wants us to live on a daily basis. The idea is not so much about our “Sunday” behavior as much as it is about our everyday behavior. The last several lessons were about how to live a life day-by-day pleasing to God.
 - b) Chapters 21 and 22 get back to the priests. They are about special rules and requirements for the priests. We haven’t discussed the priests in a good number of lessons and its time for a quick memory refreshment course:
 - i) Moses led all of the Israelites out of Egypt. When Leviticus was written, it was not much further after this event. There are a few million Israelites at this point. They are all descendants of the same man, Jacob. He had 12 children. Each Israelite is a descendant of one of these 12 children, thus the “12 tribes” of Israel.
 - ii) Now more than four hundred years after Jacob lived, one of those tribes was picked to be the priests. All descendants of Levi were to be priests to the remaining Israelites. Of the Levites, one was picked to be the head priest named Aaron. His sons were next in line to be the high priest.
 - iii) In earlier chapters of Leviticus discussed the duties of the High Priest. Chapters 21 and 22 are about the “everyday” requirements lifestyle of the priests.
2. OK, I know all of that. Why should I care? ☺
 - a) One has to understand is that God calls all Christians to be priests. (See 1st Peter 2:9.) Not in the sense that we have to quit our jobs and wear black linens. ☺ A role of the priest is to help people intercede between themselves and God. In other words, we are to help others draw closer to God. We are to pray for others. We are to minister (help in service) to others. We are to worship with others. That is the role of the priest.
 - b) What is to be learned in this lesson is about the “lifestyle” of our role as priests. Many of the functions and the specifics of these verses no longer apply to our life. However, the principals themselves still apply.
 - c) Another aspect is to learn about Jesus as our “high priest”. (See Hebrews 4:14-15). The word-pictures in this lesson help us to understand what is Jesus role as our high priest.
 - d) Back when I first started Leviticus, I said I wanted to emphasize the Christian role as “priests” as taught in Leviticus. These two chapters are no exceptions. The last bunch of lessons all had lessons on how one is to live as a believer in God. Chapters 21 and 22 are “A higher calling”. Thus the title of this lesson. It is about additional changes to our lifestyle in our role as priests for God.
 - e) With that said, I’ve got 55 verses to cover in this lesson and its time to get moving!
3. Chapter 21, Verse 1: The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: `A priest must not make himself ceremonially unclean for any of his people who die,² except for a close relative, such as his mother or father, his son or daughter, his brother,³ or an unmarried sister who is dependent on him since she has no husband--for her he may make himself unclean.⁴ He must not make himself unclean for people related to him by marriage, and so defile himself.
 - a) Notice who this chapter is written to: “The priests, the sons of Aaron”.
 - i) God spoke to Moses, as opposed to Aaron or his sons directly. The idea was for Moses to write this down and Aaron’ sons to study this for future reference.
 - ii) Remember that Aaron has already received chapter after chapter of instructions in the early chapters of Leviticus. Those chapters focused on the offerings.
 - iii) This chapter and Chapter 22 focus on their “lifestyle”.

- b) OK, the first thing God brings up in “priests’ lifestyle” issues is funerals in Verses 1-6.
- i) You’ll notice the next thing God brings up in Verse 7 is marriage. In other words, the top 2 topics are “sex and death” or “life and death”.
- c) Why death first? That’s a pretty depressing topic for an opener isn’t it? ☺
- i) The text essentially says that a priest cannot leave the tabernacle area for the sake of a funeral. The only exceptions are a close relative, including mom, dad, a child, brother or unmarried sister. (More on the “unmarried sister” in a moment.)
- ii) It might help here to remember a cliché Jesus used, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.” (Matthew 8:22b, NIV). Jesus used this cliché after a person said he would follow Jesus he after buried his father. His father wasn’t dead, it was a way of saying, “When I grow up and be on my own, I’ll follow you.” Jesus wasn’t being cruel. Jesus’ point is to be a follower of Him is about one’s “new life” as a Christian and focusing on other Christians as a priority, not as an all-inclusive group. (In other words, the primary mission of Christians is to help other Christians first, and then the world around us.)
- a) And your point is? ☺ The role of the Old Testament Priest is to focus on the “living”, not the dead. This is a symbolic reason why a priest was never to leave the tabernacle. It is a symbolic way of saying ones role as a priest takes priority over death, with the exception of close family.
- iii) Most Jewish rabbi’s follow this law by not going to a cemetery for a funeral. They will perform a service at a temple, but then “stay there”.
- iv) Now let’s turn to Jesus. That’s always a good thing to do in a bible study. ☺ Suppose I pray to Jesus and He responds by saying, “Not now John, I’m really sad because of my friend Joe across town is really sick. I don’t fell like helping you right now because I have to deal with my own grief.”
- a) My point is Jesus never stops being a priest to all of us because of the sorrow of some other situation. We can and should pray to God about everything and anything. We can’t say, “Well I shouldn’t pray about my problems right now when there is all of this suffering going on in the world. God doesn’t have time or the inclination to deal with my issues.”
- b) Again, Jesus never stops being a high priest for us. The same concept applies to the Jewish priests. If someone dies, the priest can pray and grieve at the tabernacle, but they must never stop their role as priests.
- d) Does this mean Christians shouldn’t go to funerals or cemeteries? Of course not. I learned a long time ago the purpose of funerals is to comfort the living, not for the sake of the dead. The “dead” are now in God’s hands. We go to comfort the living.
- i) The point is to teach that priests are anointed by God for continual around-the-clock service for God. They never go off duty. It doesn’t mean they can’t sleep. It means they are always on call. The same applies to all Christians. When God calls us, or an opportunity arises to be of service, we are to be service.
- e) Let’s talk about the exceptions: Close family members.
- i) The text says if a close family dies to the high priest, he is allowed to go to the funeral. This is because the grief is too much for him to bear. God “understands” us. If someone very close to me dies, for the moment, I’m of “no use” to serve others because I’m busy grieving for my family member.
- ii) God has to draw the line somewhere and He put it between close relatives and distant relatives. If it is not a close relative who died, the priest is still on duty.
- iii) Again, to the Christian, the principal is what is key. It is the idea that God wants us on “call”. Obviously, if we are grieving the loss of someone close to us, God doesn’t expect us to ignore the funeral so we can go say, out in the mission fields. God is compassionate and makes exceptions for these cases.

- f) Last thing: Why is the “married sister” not in the close-family-exception clause? ☺
 - i) The text says a priest can be “ceremonially unclean” (i.e., be around the dead body) of a close family member, except for a married sister.
 - ii) The idea is in the family structure, the married sister now “belongs” to the husband. It is about respecting the family structure.
 - iii) A “married brother” is not an exemption because the brother is anointed as possible future high priest. Therefore, the death of a close “priest relative” counts.
- 4. Verse 5: " `Priests must not shave their heads or shave off the edges of their beards or cut their bodies. ⁶ They must be holy to their God and must not profane the name of their God. Because they present the offerings made to the LORD by fire, the food of their God, they are to be holy.
 - a) The pagan custom of that area was when a person died, those who mourned would cut themselves or shave off part of their beards. It was a way of showing remorse, the same way we wear black to a funeral, only more painful. ☺
 - b) Verse 6 gives the reason why the priests must do this: The basic idea is the priests were separated to be “holy”. The idea is they have a higher calling than the average Israelite.
 - c) Let me make up an illustration here: Suppose it was a custom of a pagan god to wear green hats for funerals. If a high priest wore a green hat, people would think the high priest also worshipped this false god. This is about “appearance”. People watch what we do and make assumptions about our lifestyle. The point is not only to avoid pagan worship, but also to do things to avoid the appearance of pagan worship.
 - d) My father taught me many years ago that in life not only do you have to do the right thing, but whenever possible, avoid the appearance of doing the wrong thing. That is the principal behind the idea of these verses.
 - e) Paul taught the same principal when it came to eating meat offered to idols. Paul said in effect its ok to eat such meat as Paul understood such idols are not real gods. However, if eating such meat would offend a naïve Christian, then we should give up our right to eat that meat as not to cause a naïve Christian to stumble in their faith. (Ref.: 1st Cor. 8: 4-9.)
You can apply this principal to anything we eat, drink or wear.
- 5. Verse 7: " `They must not marry women defiled by prostitution or divorced from their husbands, because priests are holy to their God. ⁸ Regard them as holy, because they offer up the food of your God. Consider them holy, because I the LORD am holy--I who make you holy.
 - a) Verse 7 lists the next “no-no” of a priest: They cannot marry a prostitute or divorcee. When we get to Verse 13, we’ll discover they must marry a virgin.
 - b) Remember of the 12 tribes of Israel, the Levites were picked to be the priests. Of the Levites, Aaron and his descendants were picked to be the high priests. The concept here is about “keeping the blood line pure”. If a priest married someone who was recently divorced or a prostitute, there might be a question if the baby was “really his” or if it belonged to a previous lover of the woman.
 - c) Through this section of Leviticus, we are going to get word pictures of the High Priest as being “perfectly holy”. There must be no fault or “blemish”. Part of that word picture has to do with the wife he has picked.
 - d) Let’s take a quick break and discuss prostitution and divorce as it relates to these verses.
 - i) There is a sin called “fornication”, which simply means any sexual act outside of a marriage of a man and a woman. Prostitution is someone paid for this act. Note that Paul says fornicators (among other selected sins) will not be in heaven. (See 1st Corinthians 6:9). When Paul says that, he means those who continue a lifestyle of that act without turning to Jesus for repentance.
 - ii) In the next verse of 1st Corinthians (6:10), Paul says, “And so were some of you”. It means that those who did engage in that lifestyle, and then turn from it in order to please God, achieve salvation. (Of course, the usual Christian requirements of believing in Jesus as God, trusting in Him for sin payment, etc. apply too.)

- iii) The next issue is divorce. There are several places in the New Testament where a list of sins are given that are “signs” of people who are not saved. Among those lists, divorce is never listed. In fact, Jesus even said divorce is permitted in cases of adultery. (Matthew 19:9). Even if one divorces for other reasons, it is a sin, but it is not an unforgivable sin.
- iv) The reason I gave this little commentary is someone might read this verse in Leviticus and think that one can lose their salvation if they don’t marry in virginity. While such actions as prostitution and divorce (in some cases) may be sinful, it is a forgivable sin if it is confessed as displeasing to God.
- e) Let’s get back to Verses 7 and 8. Once again, God gives the reason why the priest must marry a virgin. In essence, Verse 8 says the reason is because “the priests are the ones making the sacrifices to God and they are separated from the people (“holy”) to me.”
 - i) The idea is the priests must obey this martial law, “because God says so”. The idea is God saying in effect, “Look Mr. High Priest and your sons, I picked you for a special duty. With privilege comes responsibility. You must follow my special rules to be a priest because you are called to this role.”
 - ii) As I stated in the introduction, we as Christians are called to be priests. Remember that I titled this lesson “a higher calling”. Our behavior must be modified in gratitude for God “picking us” just as He has chosen the High Priest.
 - iii) Does that mean Christians have to marry as virgins? Technically no, but this is the God’s ideal for us. To violate that means some other sin had to have been performed. As implied earlier, God allows “u-turns” from mistakes we have made in our life in order to follow Him. It is not an unforgivable issue.
- 6. Verse 9: " `If a priest's daughter defiles herself by becoming a prostitute, she disgraces her father; she must be burned in the fire.
 - a) The verse says that if a priest’s daughter becomes a prostitute, it is a death penalty.
 - i) The traditional Jewish interpretation of this verse is not that she is to die by fire, but to be killed (probably by stoning) and then the dead body is to be burned.
 - b) Remember that the next high priest is the oldest son of the existing high priest, with some exceptions coming up in the next set of verses. A good question becomes, “what about daughters of high priests? Do they have duties and responsibilities?
 - i) A duty of a priest is she may have to marry someone who will be the next high priest. Let’s say a high priest only has daughters. The daughters are going to have to marry a Levite in order to “produce” the next high priest. The idea is again, to keep the bloodline symbolically “pure” for the high priest.
 - c) The principal behind this verse gets back to the idea that if you are called to be God’s representative, “people are watching us”. Imagine someone watching you and saying, “That person calls themselves a Christian. Have you seen their daughter and how she lives?” Unfortunately, our children make bad choices. Sometimes we have to separate our duties to God as priority over our love for our children. When an adult-child of ours goes down the wrong path, we can mourn for them and tell them to change, but sometimes we have to choose between God versus approving of their choices. That is the idea here. Notice Verse 9 says nothing about mourning for the sins of that daughter. This is about one’s decision to be committed to God, despite the consequences.
- 7. Verse 10: " `The high priest, the one among his brothers who has had the anointing oil poured on his head and who has been ordained to wear the priestly garments, must not let his hair become unkempt or tear his clothes.
 - a) The idea here is if a person is to become High Priest, he is to “respect the uniform”. That means the priest is never to tear that garment.

- b) The other part of the verse says his hair must be not be unkempt. The King James Version translates this phrase as “not uncover his head”. By that translation, it is the idea that high priest must always wear his headpiece as part of the uniform.
 - i) While the translation is debated, the principal is the same. The idea is God saying again in effect, “I picked you for this office as priest. As a priest, you must have respect for your duty. A way of outwardly showing that respect is to respect one’s uniform and the way one presents themselves to the public.”
 - c) Again, the idea for the Christian is “people are watching us”. Whether we realize it or not, we are always on parade of the public’s eye. A sin or the appearance of a sin is “amplified” because non-Christians are judging our behavior.
 - i) Remember Jesus’ line that people will know we are Christians by our love for one another. (John 13:35). What is implied in that sentence is we are being watched. That is a similar concept to what is being taught in Verse 10.
 - d) It is interesting to tie this verse to Jesus’ trial prior to the cross. If you study the details of Jesus’ trial before the Jewish high council (called the Sanhedrin), you will discover every aspect of that trial is illegal by Jewish law and Jewish tradition. Verse 10 stated that a priest may not tear his garments. One sin committed by the High Priest during Jesus trial is he tore his garments in anger. (Matthew 26:65, et.al.)
8. Verse 11: He must not enter a place where there is a dead body. He must not make himself unclean, even for his father or mother,¹² nor leave the sanctuary of his God or desecrate it, because he has been dedicated by the anointing oil of his God. I am the LORD.
- a) As I stated earlier, the high priest was not allowed to leave the sanctuary to go to a cemetery. The idea is the priest is always “on duty” and cannot leave that specified area.
 - b) The word-picture has to do with the duty of the priest to “intercede for the living”. The main job of the priest was to be an “intercessory middle-man” between people and God.
 - c) The idea for Christians is God uses Jesus as the perfect bridge between God and man. We view Jesus as “100% God and 100% man” and perfect in both aspects, so He is the only one qualified to be that perfect bridge between God and us.
 - d) The idea as it related to this verse is the focus of the High Priest is on the “living”. Those who have died have, well, “died”. They are now either in heaven or hell. No more intercession is necessary for their life. The priest is always on duty for the living.
 - e) Now let’s get back to our role as priests. We are to help minister to the “living”. Does this mean Christians can’t go to funerals? Of course not. If anything, we should go to help minister to others who are grieving. The principal behind this verse is that we are always on call for the “living”.
 - f) Verse 12 repeats the same concept as earlier verses. To paraphrase Verse 12, God is saying, “You want a reason why you can’t touch a dead body? I’m God and I say so. Any questions so far? ☺ Further, I called you to be a priest. With that privilege comes responsibility and one of your (our) responsibilities is to always be on duty.”
 - i) Again, in our role as priest, this does not mean we can’t take time off to grieve, or take a vacation, or “whatever”. This is about the fact that we are always to live a life pleasing to God in all that do, wherever we are regardless of the situation.
9. Verse 13: “The woman he marries must be a virgin.¹⁴ He must not marry a widow, a divorced woman, or a woman defiled by prostitution, but only a virgin from his own people,¹⁵ so he will not defile his offspring among his people. I am the LORD, who makes him holy. ’ ”
- a) These verses tie back to Verses 7 and 8. They list the type of woman a priest must marry. The essential idea is that it must be a Jewish virgin.
 - b) I already talked about the symbolism of the Jewish virgin. The idea is to “keep the blood-line pure” for the high priest. If a priest marries a prostitute or a divorced woman, people would wonder when was the last time this woman had sex with someone else and “is” the baby of a high priest really his. This is about “appearance” as well as duty.

- c) So why is this verse repeated here? Verse 13 is essentially the same as Verses 7-8.
- i) I kept thinking as a single son of a priest, "Yeah, yeah, duties, duties. Tell me that part again about who I can marry and who I can't marry." ☺
 - ii) Actually, I believe the reason the verses are repeated is because everything in-between these verses are designed to be taught as one lesson. It is a poetic way of saying in effect, "I as God want the high priest to be pure. Let me give you some examples of how the high priest is to remain pure. I'll start and end with an emphasis on purity in marriage and give other examples in-between."
10. Verse 16: The LORD said to Moses, ¹⁷ "Say to Aaron: `For the generations to come none of your descendants who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God. ¹⁸ No man who has any defect may come near: no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed; ¹⁹ no man with a crippled foot or hand, ²⁰ or who is hunchbacked or dwarfed, or who has any eye defect, or who has festering or running sores or damaged testicles. ²¹ No descendant of Aaron the priest who has any defect is to come near to present the offerings made to the LORD by fire. He has a defect; he must not come near to offer the food of his God.
- a) The idea of these verses is that if someone is to be high priest, he is to be free of any physical defect. Notice Verse 17 and Verse 21 are fairly identical. The verses in-between are examples of what God considers a defect.
 - b) One can read this and think, "This is unfair. A guy can be eliminated as high priest because he has some sort of physical deformity? Isn't God being unfair here?"
 - i) First of all, God picked Aaron and his sons to be High Priest. It was God's sovereign will to pick this person. It is an example of, "If we want to approach God, He is God and we are not. We have to play by His rules and not by ours".
 - ii) The idea of no-deformities is that the High Priest is to be as "perfect" as possible. A perfect God needs a "perfect" representative between God and man. I talked earlier how Jesus is 100% (perfect) God and 100% (perfect) man. He represents the ultimate fulfillment. In the meantime, in order to show that word-picture, God wants as perfect-as possible human specimen as a high priest. The idea is a word-picture of our representative to God being as perfect as possible.
 - c) Does this mean anyone with one of these deformities can't be a pastor? ☺ Of course not. That misses the point. Our "perfect high priest" is always on duty. All of us who are called are now "perfectly forgiven" and are called to serve God.
 - d) Getting back to the Israelites, this served a practical purpose as well. When people brought animals to be sacrificed, they had to bring non-deformed animals. The idea is we give God our best and most valuable, and not the leftovers. An "average" Israelite could see a deformed high priest and think, "Why should I bring God my best (non-deformed) animal when a deformed guy can be a high priest?"
 - i) In summary, what is in the "inside" of us counts to God, but appearance matters in that people judge us by our behavior. What we do in our behavior may or may not be sinful, but it can cause weaker-in-faith to stumble based on appearance.
11. Verse 22: He may eat the most holy food of his God, as well as the holy food; ²³ yet because of his defect, he must not go near the curtain or approach the altar, and so desecrate my sanctuary. I am the LORD, who makes them holy. ' "
- a) Going back to the early chapters of Leviticus, the way the priests got food was based on the sacrificial offers of the people. Part of the animal offerings was for the priest. That food was to be shared by their family.
 - b) Now let's go back to the "deformed" member of the High Priest family. That deformed person could think, "So, am I now an outcast because of my deformity?" The answer is no. This verse says they are still part of His family and may eat of that food. They cannot be the high priest, but they can still be of service to God in the tabernacle.

- c) The high priest, in all of his “perfection” must still care for the needs of the “deformed” members of his family. It is a word-picture how we need to care for the less-abled among us and not to discriminate.
12. Verse 24: So Moses told this to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelites.
- a) Verse 24 is the last verse of this chapter. Remember the chapter breaks were not part of the original text. Most of Leviticus is a list of “do’s and don’ts”. Every now and then, there is a bit of straight historical narrative. Verse 24 is one of those places.
 - b) It is as if all of Chapter 21, except for this verse is God giving instructions to Moses. Here in Verse 24, we have a historical note that Moses actually told Aaron and his sons what was written down.
 - c) And the point is? Aaron has no excuses. He can’t claim he didn’t know the truth.
 - i) I am convinced Christians will be held accountable based on what we know. Someone who is illiterate (can’t read) can still follow Jesus. The problem with knowing one’s bible well is we are now accountable for what we know. It is still better to draw close to God and be accountable than to be naïve. We just need to understand that there is a price for knowing about God and His requirements.
 - ii) That leads back to this verse. Aaron now knows his stuff. He had the privilege of being the high priest and was accountable as such. We as Christians are chosen by God to be priests to others and with that knowledge comes accountability.
13. Chapter 22, Verse 1: The LORD said to Moses, ² "Tell Aaron and his sons to treat with respect the sacred offerings the Israelites consecrate to me, so they will not profane my holy name. I am the LORD.
- a) Chapter 22 continues the concept of how a priest is to behave in their role as priests.
 - b) The difference between Chapter 21 and Chapter 22 is Chapter 21 focuses “inward” and Chapter 22 focuses “outward”. Chapter 21 talks about who a priest is to marry, their physical appearance, how they handle dead bodies and other things.
 - i) Chapter 22 now focuses on the priests’ relationship with “average” Israelites. It is “outward” in that it deals with a priest relationship with non-priests and those outside of his immediate family. The focus is still on the behavior of the priest, but the focus is on how the priest behaves in dealing with those who are not priests.
 - c) Which leads us to this Verse: The discussion starts with when people bring offerings to High Priest and how they should handle those offerings.
 - i) Going back to the early chapters of Leviticus, the main topic was animal sacrifices and “grain” sacrifices. The average Israelite gave up these items in order to commit their lives to God, show remorse for sin, ask for forgiveness of sin and strengthen their relationship with God. In a sense, these verses and this chapter come back to that topic, but this time it is from the priest’s perspective.
 - ii) It starts with the concept of respect. One of the priests’ behavior duties is to respect the offerings made by people when they presented these offerings to God.
 - iii) Let me give an example: Imagine a priest saying, “Nah, I have enough food today. Hold your offerings for some other time.” The priest must always be on duty.
 - d) An example of a violation of this law is in the Book of Samuel, the sons of the high priest Eli would take some meat being offered for themselves. (1st Samuel 2:13). God punished Eli for this and predicted that his descendants would no longer be priests one day and other relatives took over that role. (Reference 1st Samuel 2:30).
 - e) Suppose someone came to you or me for help in a spiritual matter. Assuming we don’t have a legitimate excuse, we refuse to help them. Remember the role of all Christians as “priests” is to help others draw closer to God. We do that by praying for and with each other. We do that in service to one another. We do that by giving of our time and resources to help others draw closer to God. To not help is a sin in that we are not “respecting their offering” to God.

- f) On a similar note, I always have a problem with people who just go to church and never volunteer to get involved with that church. Obviously there are exceptions when one is hurting in some way. I also make exceptions for newer believers who don't know any better. For example, when we spend time watching children during church service time, we are "ministering" to the parents as it gives them a break and they could focus on God for a time span. That is a simple example of how we could support and respect "their spiritual sacrifice" to God.
14. Verse 3: "Say to them: `For the generations to come, if any of your descendants is ceremonially unclean and yet comes near the sacred offerings that the Israelites consecrate to the LORD, that person must be cut off from my presence. I am the LORD.
- a) Let me paraphrase this verse: "If any priest is ceremonially unclean (i.e., violated some sin that is a less-than-a-death-penalty) and still performs his duty while he is "unclean", he will be "cut off" from being a priest. I, your God say so. Any question so far?" ☺
- b) The last bunch of chapters in Leviticus had lists of dos and don'ts in terms of behavior that is displeasing to God. The next five verses give examples of that type of behavior. Most of those behavior laws are "infractions". That means if one violates that law (i.e., commits a sin), the punishment is they must be isolated until sundown or some other type of penalty. The term for that isolation is called "uncleanness". If a priest still performs his duty while being unclean, the penalty is he loses his priesthood.
- c) So what's going on and why should I care? Glad you asked! ☺ Suppose you or I as a believer in Christ commit some sort of sin and don't confess it. For the moment, we are carrying around a lot of guilt because of that sin. That guilt is "blocking" our relationship with God as we are focusing upon the guilt. It's hard to pray when we are focusing on guilt, worry, anger, pity or sorrow. We can pray for these things, but that is a different issue. I'm talking about focusing on these issues as opposed to focusing on God. I'm talking about trying to fix things ourselves without getting God in the picture. Whether we realize it or not, we are isolating ourselves from God in the same way these Old Testament sins require temporary isolation.
- i) And the solution is? We are to take those issues and "give it to God". We are to say in effect, "Lord, this is your problem. You deal with that person." Or, we may say, "Lord, I know you have forgiven me, now help my faith so I can forgive myself." If we are dealing with someone who hurt us, we may still have to deal with them even after we prayed about it. The difference is now "God is involved" and we are trusting that God is working through us to work out the situation.
15. Verse 4: " `If a descendant of Aaron has an infectious skin disease or a bodily discharge, he may not eat the sacred offerings until he is cleansed.
- a) From Verses 4 through 9, we are getting back to issues that make a priest temporarily unfit for duty (i.e., "unclean"). This requires a quick review of some previous chapters in Leviticus. Verse 4 gets back to violations as described in Leviticus 13 and 14.
- b) A key issue is sickness that is contagious. Back then, the idea of "contagious" and germs were not known. All the Israelites knew is that if a person has one of these issues, they are to be isolated. It is only in the past few centuries that science has caught up with the bible in terms of hygiene and disease-preventative behavior.
- c) A priest was disqualified if he has leprosy. The word picture of leprosy is about "sin". If a priest has some sort of sin in his life, he cannot minister to others as a priest until he deals with that sin. Again, this gets back to my discussion of dealing with our own sins prior to being able to minister to others. Obviously, we are not perfect and will always have some sin issues. This is about dealing with whatever sin issues are in the forefronts of our minds or our lives (by confessing them) prior to being of service to others.

16. Verse 4 (cont.): He will also be unclean if he touches something defiled by a corpse or by anyone who has an emission of semen,⁵ or if he touches any crawling thing that makes him unclean, or any person who makes him unclean, whatever the uncleanness may be.
- a) Verse 4 goes on to describe other ways a priest can be unfit for duty. This includes touching certain things that will make him “unclean” for a specified time-period. On the surface, this is about hygiene and germ issues. These “unclean” things were covered back in Chapter 11 (food laws) and Chapter 15 (emission of semen).
 - b) To review a little, if the priest has an accidental semen emission during the night, he is not to touch it. It represents the sinful nature of man that is inside of us and it is now “coming to the surface”. Another example given is a priest is not to touch a dead body. The priests are to focus on the “living”. A priest intervenes for the souls of others, not for the “dead bodies”. A “creeping thing” (i.e., a bug) was forbidden to eat. That is because it represents “what is close to the earth” as opposed to one who is looking upward toward God. (Again, see Chapter 11 for details). The main idea is that when one is a priest, one must focus his ministry on “the living” as opposed to what is “dead”.
 - c) The idea is the priests were not above the laws stated in Chapters 11-15, or anywhere else for that matter. Remember that this lesson is about “a higher standard”. That means the priests were to obey all the laws given for the common people “and then some”.
 - d) What it means to the Christian is that we are to set an example for other Christians. It is not about being perfect, as nobody is. At the same time, we, through God’s power, live a life that is pleasing to God in all that we do. When we become aware of a sin in our life, we are to confess it, remember that God has forgiven us and then go about the primary duty God has called us to do, which is to be of help to other believers. That is the idea of being a “priest”, which all Christians are called to do.
17. Verse 6: The one who touches any such thing will be unclean till evening. He must not eat any of the sacred offerings unless he has bathed himself with water.⁷ When the sun goes down, he will be clean, and after that he may eat the sacred offerings, for they are his food.⁸ He must not eat anything found dead or torn by wild animals, and so become unclean through it. I am the LORD.
- a) Verses 6 through 8 deal with the penalties and remedies for the priest when he does some sort of violation. Notice that none of these violations are death penalties. In order for a priest to resume his position, he must be abstain from his duties until the sun goes down (Verse 7) and then bathe in water (Verse 6).
 - b) Remember that the priest gets his food based on what people bring as animal sacrifices. Some sacrifices must be completely burnt up, as in the burnt offerings. Some may be shared with the priests as in the “fellowship” offerings. If a priest violates one of these commandments, he cannot share in the sacrificial offerings until he is “clean” again.
 - c) Why sundown? The Jewish day begins at sundown, the same way we say a new day begins at midnight or at dawn. It is a symbolic way of saying, “You made a mistake, but tomorrow is a new day and we’ll try again anew”. The bathing ritual is symbolic of cleansing one of their sins (plus the hygiene issues that we talked about earlier.)
 - d) Again, the word-pictures here is that if we do something displeasing to God, we can’t focus on our primary mission as Christians, which is to help other people. When you read the Gospels, Jesus spent most of his time telling people who is and ministering to their needs. That’s the Christian mission-statement in a nutshell: “Telling people about Jesus and helping others with their needs”. We can’t be of service to others if the guilt of sin is blocking our relationship with God. We have to rely upon God’s power in order to be of service to others.
 - e) Notice in Verse 7 it says, “For they (the animals being sacrificed) are his food”.
 - i) The literal concept is the idea that the priests share in his food. I believe there is more to this concept. This reminds me of what Jesus said, “My food,” said Jesus, “is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.” (John 4:34 NIV).

- ii) I will argue that Jesus quote is similar to the idea here in Verse 7. It is the idea that being of service to others gives us strength. It's hard to explain, but when one is of service to others, it physically renews us. The same applies to the Old Testament priests. It is more than them just eating part of the animals being sacrifices. It is drawing upon God's power as they of service to God by helping others. When they commit some sort of "minor" sin, it takes away from their power to help others and physically makes them weaker.
18. Verse 9: " `The priests are to keep my requirements so that they do not become guilty and die for treating them with contempt. I am the LORD, who makes them holy.
- a) If the High Priest and his family need more motivation to perform there job, look no further than Verse 9. It says they will die if they treat them (Israelites) with contempt. In other words, if they have contempt for the offerings being brought to be offered, God is going to "zap" them. Remember that not too long ago, two of Aaron's sons died because they failed to properly perform these rituals. I'm sure that fact is fresh in their minds as they read this verse.
 - b) What does this mean for you and me? It means to take seriously our role of being of service to other Christians. Remember this chapter is about a "higher calling". If God puts us in a role or situation to help others, He expects us to follow through in our role and not treat others with contempt.
19. Verse 10: " `No one outside a priest's family may eat the sacred offering, nor may the guest of a priest or his hired worker eat it. ¹¹ But if a priest buys a slave with money, or if a slave is born in his household, that slave may eat his food. If a priest's daughter marries anyone other than a priest, she may not eat any of the sacred contributions.
- a) The idea here is about who can and cannot eat of the food offerings:
 - i) Those who cannot eat of the offerings include guests and hired workers.
 - ii) Those who can eat of the offerings included slaves that the priest has purchased.
 - iii) What is implied here and elsewhere is that the members of the priest family can eat these offerings. (Coming up in Verse 12). The exception is when a daughter marries someone else, she now belongs to that husband and she can't eat of the sacred offerings anymore.
 - b) Let's start with Verse 10. It says a guest of the priest cannot eat any of the offerings. The idea is a priest can have friends, but they can't share in his duties. If they can't share in his duties, then they can't share in the benefits of that duty. The same applies to the hired workers. In Numbers Chapter 18, the Israelites gave a tenth of their income to the priests for their service. This is where they got the income to say, hire servants.
 - c) What God is doing is "drawing the line" of who is a member of the family of priests and who is not a member. The focus is on the food offerings being brought to God. Those food offerings are sacred in that they belong to God. The priests are also "sacred" in that they are fully dedicated to God. The reason family members can share in these food offers is they are well, "part of the family". This has to be distinguished from a guest or a hired worker.
 - d) OK, onto to the difficult question: Why is a slave allowed to eat of the "sacred" food?
 - i) For starters, remember the Jewish nation was in slavery the past 400 years and were accustomed to slavery as part of everyday life. God is not condoning slavery as much as He is tolerating it. It is similar to what Jesus said about divorce. It is not so much God's desire as the fact God "tolerates" it. (See Matthew 18:3-9).
 - ii) The idea here is if a priest purchases a slave, that slave must be treated as "one of the family". That slave gets the same food privileges as a direct family member. If anything, this verse is showing the compassion of God towards having slaves.

20. Verse 13: But if a priest's daughter becomes a widow or is divorced, yet has no children, and she returns to live in her father's house as in her youth, she may eat of her father's food. No unauthorized person, however, may eat any of it.
- Here is another verse about "compassion". If a married daughter becomes divorced or widowed, the priest is not to say, "Too bad for you, you're on your own now". He is to welcome her back in the family and she can eat of the sacred animal offerings.
 - The exemption clause is if she has children. Remember a priest has money from the tithes being brought to the priest. This verse does not forbid financially supporting such a daughter, just the eating of the sacred food.
 - Remember in this culture, for a woman to not have children is considered a curse. This is about having compassion on a daughter who does not have children. Further, the word-picture is about the "family line" of the priest being perfect. If the daughter has children, she can't share of the sacred-food is the "family line" is now no longer perfect. Again, this particular ordinance is has nothing to do with compassion as she can still be financially supported. It is about the word-picture of the "perfection" of the priest being preserved.
21. Verse 14: "If anyone eats a sacred offering by mistake, he must make restitution to the priest for the offering and add a fifth of the value to it.¹⁵ The priests must not desecrate the sacred offerings the Israelites present to the LORD¹⁶ by allowing them to eat the sacred offerings and so bring upon them guilt requiring payment. I am the LORD, who makes them holy."¹
- Suppose someone who is a guest of the high priest sees some leftovers in the refrigerator and has a midnight snack. ☹ They didn't know that food was sacred offerings and ate some. Verse 14 says the penalty is that "snacker" has to repay the priest with assumedly another animal or the monetary value of that animal plus another fifth (20%).
 - The number "five" in the bible is associated with God's grace. That is why this is used as the penalty amount. More on a "fifth" as a penalty when we get to Chapter 27.
 - Notice the term "by mistake". This is about eating the food by accident. This implies the penalty is much more severe if the guilty party knew it was a sin.
 - To summarize the last set of verses, the basic idea is that the duty of the priest must be special and one does not mess around with it. It was the privilege of the priest to share in the offerings and that privilege is only for the priest and his immediate family.
22. Verse 17: The LORD said to Moses,¹⁸ "Speak to Aaron and his sons and to all the Israelites and say to them: 'If any of you--either an Israelite or an alien living in Israel--presents a gift for a burnt offering to the LORD, either to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering,¹⁹ you must present a male without defect from the cattle, sheep or goats in order that it may be accepted on your behalf.²⁰ Do not bring anything with a defect, because it will not be accepted on your behalf.²¹ When anyone brings from the herd or flock a fellowship offering to the LORD to fulfill a special vow or as a freewill offering, it must be without defect or blemish to be acceptable.²² Do not offer to the LORD the blind, the injured or the maimed, or anything with warts or festering or running sores. Do not place any of these on the altar as an offering made to the LORD by fire.
- These verses get back to what was taught in the early chapters of Leviticus. In summary, if one is going to bring God an offering, the offering must be "perfect". Any sort of deformed animal is not acceptable as an offering.
 - Why are these verses mentioned here? The idea is that it is up to the priest to determine if an animal is acceptable. The priests are the ones in charge of the tabernacle and they must have the discernment to know if a person brought "sloppy seconds" or if a person brought the best they have to offer.
 - The word-picture for the Christian is to have discernment as we minister to others. There are people who take advantage of the fact we avail ourselves of service. The trick is to discern whether or not the person is being sincere or trying to use us. Unfortunately, there are people who ask church leaders for money who have no intention of actually changing their lifestyle. They prey on people's guilt.

23. Verse 23: You may, however, present as a freewill offering an ox or a sheep that is deformed or stunted, but it will not be accepted in fulfillment of a vow.
- I purposely separated Verse 23 from the rest of this paragraph to make a point: A priest is to accept a deformed animal if it is a “free-will” offering. A “free-will” offering is one that does not involve any sin. It is one that says, “I just want to say thanks to God for all He has done for me. Here, take this sheep.” ☺
 - The idea is God wants to meet us “on our level”. The priest is to have discernment when someone just wants to spend time with God and show gratitude to God. As that person grows in their relationship with God, in the future they will probably offer “greater” (more valuable) sacrifices. In the meantime, God does not want the priest to discourage anyone bringing an offering of their free will.
 - Notice the priest cannot accept a deformed animal if it is “a fulfillment of a vow”. In other words, if the person making the offer has committed some sort of sin, that offering is to make restitution of that sin. Imagine someone saying, “OK God, I admit I’m wrong, here have a deformed sheep to make up for it.” ☺ That is not giving God one’s all and it is not showing true sorrow for one’s sins.
24. Verse 24: You must not offer to the LORD an animal whose testicles are bruised, crushed, torn or cut. You must not do this in your own land,²⁵ and you must not accept such animals from the hand of a foreigner and offer them as the food of your God. They will not be accepted on your behalf, because they are deformed and have defects.¹ ”
- Here we have a few more prohibitions. The first is an animal with damaged testicles. The idea is that animal is less valuable as it cannot breed. Remember the basic idea of an animal sacrifice for sin is to say in effect, “I am guilty of a sin and I deserve death. This animal represents me being offered.” If we offer an animal that is damaged as such, it represents one that is not “living” in that it may not continue its life cycle. The word picture is that of “life” and an emphasis on the continuation of life.
 - The second clause is, “You must not do this in your land”. Remember the Israelites were wandering in the desert. God is saying in effect that the laws don’t change once the Israelites actually enter the Promised Land.
 - The final clause is not to accept such defects from foreigners. The idea is if a foreigner wants to worship the God of Israel, it is the job of the priest to teach them what is acceptable to God and what is not. Notice the prohibition is not against foreigners approaching God, they just have to play by the same rules as everyone else.
25. Verse 26: The LORD said to Moses,²⁷ “When a calf, a lamb or a goat is born, it is to remain with its mother for seven days. From the eighth day on, it will be acceptable as an offering made to the LORD by fire.²⁸ Do not slaughter a cow or a sheep and its young on the same day.
- This is a prohibition against offering newborn baby animals. In the bible, the number seven is associated with “perfection” as God rested on the 7th day. The number eight is associated with “a new beginning”, just as the 8th day starts a new week. An animal is accepted on the 8th day as one is beginning a new week (new life) with forgiveness of sin.”
 - Verse 28 prohibits killing a mother and its baby on the same day. This is a straightforward word-picture about having compassion.
26. Verse 29: “When you sacrifice a thank offering to the LORD, sacrifice it in such a way that it will be accepted on your behalf.³⁰ It must be eaten that same day; leave none of it till morning. I am the LORD.
- If one gives an offering of thanks, part of that offering is to be shared by the priests. The priests are to eat of that offering immediately. No procrastination is allowed.
 - Reading all of this, I wonder if the priest had a lot of food around. Do they ever think, “I can’t take another offering, I’m stuffed!” ☺ I’m sure in such situations, it is not the amount they take, but the fact they participate.

27. Verse 31: "Keep my commands and follow them. I am the LORD. ³² Do not profane my holy name. I must be acknowledged as holy by the Israelites. I am the LORD, who makes you holy ³³ and who brought you out of Egypt to be your God. I am the LORD."
- a) These last verses are a summary statement of the last two chapters. Remember Chapters 21 and 22 are written to the priests. It is to understand their behavior in their personal lives as well as when they interact with "average" Israelites desiring to seek God.
 - b) The basic idea of most of this chapter is "God doesn't want road-kill." When we make an offering to Him, He wants the best we have to offer. It is to be as "perfect" as possible.
 - c) Think of the role of the priest as being a motivator and encourager for the average Israelite to do the right thing. That means bring the right type of offering. It is for them (and us) to teach people how God is to be worshipped.
 - d) Most, if not all of the word pictures emphasize "striving toward perfection" in all that we do for God. It is not about the fact that we have to be perfect all the time. It is more about doing our best and offering our best in service to God.
 - e) OK John, you're running long and I'm confused. I don't have to help people choose the right sheep. ☺ How do I apply this to my life?
 - i) Remember the basic function of the priest is to help people draw closer to God.
 - ii) One way we do that is to set an example. We are called to live by a higher standard (Say, isn't that the title of this lesson? ☺) than nonbelievers in God. It does not mean God expects us to be perfect. At the same time, one is expected to make an effort to draw as close to God as possible. We draw close to God so He can provide us with the power to live the life that is pleasing to Him.
 - iii) Again, priests are to help people draw closer to God. That means teaching others how to do things "God's way". Sharing bible verses with others is an example of such. Teaching others what is "sin" and what is not sin is another example. Being of service to others so they can draw closer to God is another example.
 - f) I also want to share a cute story that happened as I was typing this lesson. My wife called me away from the computer to remove a dead possum our dog had killed. I told my wife, "Ok, I'll do it, but you realize I'll be unclean until sundown". She didn't get it. ☺
28. Let me end this with Paul's description of what Christians are supposed to do in life: "It was he (Christ) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ." (Eph. 4:11-13 NIV)
- a) In other words, God gives each of us gifts so that "The body of Christ may be built up". We are all to work to help build up (mature) each other in our faith. That is what being a priest is all about. It is our higher calling. It is about discernment in dealing with others. It is about pointing others to the "perfect" sacrifice and our "perfect" High Priest who intercedes on all our behalf.
29. Let's pray: Father, We thank you for providing the perfect sacrifice on our behalf. We thank you that a perfect priest is always on duty, willing to be there for all our requests, large and small. Help us to live that life that is pleasing to You in all that we do. Help us to remember that You called all of us into service for You. Give us discernment as priests and help us to make the time and effort to be of service to those around us in need. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.