

Elementary

The Lord called Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting (Leviticus 1:1 ESV)

“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (Matthew 5:17-18 ESV)

I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. (Gal. 4:1-2 ESV)

What Does The Law Teach Us About Sexuality?

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Leviticus 18

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Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Leviticus 18.

If you're paying close attention, then you likely remember that we studied chapter 18 last Sunday as well. Last week, Matt introduced a general overview of the holiness that God requires of his people. That's what chapters 18-20 are all about. As one commentator notes:

Chapters 18-20 now turn to matters related more broadly to living as a kingdom of priests in the Promised Land.¹

Up to this point in Leviticus, a great deal of attention has been devoted to the priests, the tabernacle and the ceremonies. But here, in these chapters, we are reminded that holiness is not just something that is required *inside* the tabernacle. Holiness overflows to every arena of life! Matt shared this quote last week and I think it's worth repeating. What does personal holiness look like? Paul David Tripp explains:

You have been set apart by God's grace for God's purpose. Your allegiance is no longer to the kingdom of your success and happiness, but to the progress of his kingdom of glory

¹ Jay Sklar. *Leviticus TOTC*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 226.

and grace. And where do you do this? **You do this wherever you are, whomever you're with and in whatever you're doing.**²

Do you hear that? You are a kingdom of priests! You are representatives of the King of Kings! You don't put that identity on for the Sunday morning service and then take it off again for the rest of the week. No! "Be holy as I am holy." That's the command! And it will necessarily overflow into every sphere of life.

Last week we discussed holiness *in general* but today, we're going to zoom in on one aspect of our lives *in particular*. In chapter 18, Moses moves from the general theme of holiness and applies it specifically and comprehensively to the way that we understand and practice sexuality. Look with me now to Leviticus 18. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²"Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God.³ You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. ⁴You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God. ⁵You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.

⁶"None of you shall approach any one of his close relatives to uncover nakedness. I am the Lord. ⁷You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father, which is the nakedness of your mother; she is your mother, you shall not uncover her nakedness. ⁸You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife; it is your father's nakedness. ⁹You shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister, your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether brought up in the family or in another home. ¹⁰You shall not uncover the nakedness of your son's daughter or of your daughter's daughter, for their nakedness is your own nakedness. ¹¹You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's wife's daughter, brought up in your father's family, since she is your sister. ¹²You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's sister; she is your father's relative. ¹³You shall not uncover the nakedness of your mother's sister, for she is your mother's relative. ¹⁴You shall not uncover the nakedness of your father's brother, that is, you shall not approach his wife; she is your aunt. ¹⁵You shall not uncover the nakedness of your daughter-in-law; she is your son's wife, you shall not uncover her nakedness. ¹⁶You shall not uncover the nakedness of your brother's wife; it is your brother's nakedness. ¹⁷You shall not uncover the nakedness of a woman and of her daughter, and you shall not take her son's daughter or her daughter's daughter to uncover her nakedness; they are relatives; it is depravity. ¹⁸And

² Paul D. Tripp, "The Doctrine of Holiness," July 17, 2021, <https://www.paultripp.com/articles/posts/the-doctrine-of-holiness-article>.

you shall not take a woman as a rival wife to her sister, uncovering her nakedness while her sister is still alive.

¹⁹ “You shall not approach a woman to uncover her nakedness while she is in her menstrual uncleanness. ²⁰ And you shall not lie sexually with your neighbor's wife and so make yourself unclean with her. ²¹ You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord. ²² You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination. ²³ And you shall not lie with any animal and so make yourself unclean with it, neither shall any woman give herself to an animal to lie with it: it is perversion.

²⁴ “Do not make yourselves unclean by any of these things, for by all these the nations I am driving out before you have become unclean, ²⁵ and the land became unclean, so that I punished its iniquity, and the land vomited out its inhabitants.²⁶ But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you ²⁷ (for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclean), ²⁸ lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. ²⁹ For everyone who does any of these abominations, the persons who do them shall be cut off from among their people. ³⁰ So keep my charge never to practice any of these abominable customs that were practiced before you, and never to make yourselves unclean by them: I am the Lord your God.” (Leviticus 18:1-30 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Before we begin to unpack and apply this text, I want to pre-emptively address the objection that often arises when this topic is addressed:

The Objection

Here's the common objection:

1. Doesn't the New Testament Override These Outdated Laws?

Has anyone ever asked you that? Perhaps they phrased it this way: “Why do you obey *this* law but ignore the law that tells you not to wear polyester pants?!”

In short, Jesus told us in the sermon on the mount that he came, not to *abolish* the Law but to *fulfil* it. Meaning – he didn't come to throw it away – he came to amplify it and to demonstrate what it all pointed forward to. What did the laws about mixing fabric point forward to? God's laws about

fabrics – just like His laws about diet – served as OBJECT LESSONS to teach the Israelites that they were to be distinct from the world. “Well, how do you know those object lessons are not still in effect?” someone might ask. At which point we would point them to Mark 7 where Jesus said:

“Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” (**Thus he declared all foods clean.**) ²⁰ And he said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. (Mark 7:18-20 ESV)

The dietary laws are FULFILLED in Christ. They have served their purpose. In the same way, the ceremonial laws – laws about the tabernacle and the priesthood – are also fulfilled in Christ. He is the temple! He is the high priest! Those laws are fulfilled!

Notably, however, the moral laws – those laws that speak to our character and conduct – are treated differently by Jesus. In the sermon on the mount, he said:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28 ESV)

Jesus could have easily taken this opportunity to explain that the laws pertaining to sexuality were outdated and should be discarded. Instead, he picked them up and he AMPLIFIED them! He taught us that, not only does holiness make demands on our *external* conduct, but it also makes demands on our *internal* thoughts!

So, the answer is no, the New Testament does not override these outdated laws. Instead, it applies them more forcefully and causes us to depend more urgently on the transformative grace of God.

Therefore, as we lean into the text this morning, we do so *expectantly* because we understand that there are no *outdated* or *irrelevant* books in the Bible. **All scripture** is breathed out by God and it profitable! Amen? So, this morning we are going to ask and answer the question:

What Does The Law Teach Us About Sexuality?

First, the Law teaches us that:

1. Our bodies are not our own

As Matt mentioned last week, we don't pursue holiness in order to *earn* God's love – we pursue holiness in *response* to God's love! That might be the most elementary lesson in all the Bible. If the call for obedience is ever untethered from the fountain of God's grace, obedience will feel like obligation and holiness will feel like a chore. Holiness flows out of *gratitude*. That is why, before introducing these instructions for sexual holiness, God says:

Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 18:2
ESV)

That is a loaded phrase.

When the Israelites heard: "I am the Lord your God" it directed their minds back to the Exodus event when God rescued them out of Egypt. It directed their minds back to the moment when God closed the Red Sea over the army that was pursuing them to bring them back into slavery. It directed their minds back to the giving of the Ten Commandments, when God set them apart as His own people. "I am the Lord your God" was the short-form GOSPEL for the Israelites! As one commentator notes:

In this very short formula the Israelites were reminded constantly who they were and whom they served.³

This is so critical. Let me frame it this way: When your neighbour looks you in the eye and asks: "Why would you ever allow God to speak into your sexuality?" would you know how to respond?

Because that's the question your neighbour is asking. That's the question your teenager is likely going to be asking. Why on earth, do we allow the words of this book to speak into the things that go on in our bedrooms? Why on earth do we allow the words of this book to correct and rebuke things that we *genuinely feel*?

³ Gordon J. Wenham. *The Book of Leviticus*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 251.

Here's the answer: Because I belong to Him. He is the Lord my God. He redeemed me at great cost to Himself. He loves me, and He knows what's best for me, and He has called me to trust and honour Him in every area of my life. As the Apostle Paul reminds the church in Corinth:

You are not your own,²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19b-20 ESV)

Our bodies are not our own. This body belongs to God. And this is GOOD news, because He is good, and He is trustworthy, and He loves me, and His way leads to LIFE! That's what we read in verse 5:

You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord. (Leviticus 18:5 ESV)

Listen: Every single person in this room struggles in one way or another with desires that would pull them away from obedience to God's design. Some of us are deeply attracted to people of the same sex. We didn't choose that for ourselves, but it is a very real temptation. Others of us are deeply tempted by pornography and lustful thoughts. We know that we are called to be content with our spouse, but our heart and our eyes pull us elsewhere. Others of us are deeply attracted to people that we know that we cannot pursue a romantic relationship with – maybe an unbeliever or even somebody else's spouse.

I have often spoken to people who feel like their sexual temptations are unique – as if they are the only person in the community who feels drawn to step outside of God's lines. I want you to hear today that you are not alone. God calls each and every one of us to trust His plan for us more than we trust our own feelings. That can be scary. That can be costly. But it is WORTH IT! I promise you, the end result of His plan is better than the end result of your feelings. To be a follower of Christ is to BELIEVE that, and to place your life willingly and joyfully into His hands. Because your body is not your own.

Second, the law teaches us that:

2. Our distinctiveness is by design

As you read through Leviticus 18, you will discover this repeated phrase:

you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan (Leviticus 18:3b ESV)

Seven times in this chapter it is repeated that Israel is not to look like the nations who were in the land before them.⁴ God is saying to His people, “The world practices sexuality *this* way, but you are going to practice sexuality *that* way **and it is going to be different.**”

That’s the whole point!

The Israelites were called to be a kingdom of priests. Well, who were the priests? They were the *set apart ones*! Therefore, if we are a kingdom of priests, then it should be no surprise that God calls us to a lifestyle that will *set us apart* from the way of the world! That’s part of the job description! The sexuality of the Israelites was to be different from the surrounding nations **so as to** commend the goodness and the holiness of God.

Marriage communicates. Paul says exactly that to the church in Ephesus:

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5:31-32 ESV)

Your marriage – the way that you do sex and love and commitment – PREACHES A SERMON to the outside world. Don’t be surprised when the sermon of your marriage is saying something different than the sermons being preached by the culture around you. It should! That’s the point!

Let the nations see and marvel at the goodness of a society where one man marries one woman and they enjoy each other for a lifetime. The culture is sacrificing children on the altar of autonomy and choice. Let the world see the fruitfulness of a people that values and delights in children! Let’s adopt and foster and procreate and show the world the beauty of a safe home that functions according to God’s good design.

⁴ As observed by Gordon J. Wenham. *The Book of Leviticus*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1979), 250.

Because it IS good. God’s design for sexuality is GOOD! He didn’t give us these commandments so as to rob us of joy. He really, truly, genuinely knows what is best for us.

For the first time in a long time, we really feel *different* as Christians in this culture. Don’t be alarmed by that. Our distinctiveness is by design. God intends for us to look different. Be light. Be salt. Be different.

Next, the law teaches us that:

3. Our challenges are not unique

Sometimes, we speak as if 21st century North American culture is the most sexually progressive culture in the history of the world. But that’s simply not the case. The urge to throw off any and all sexual restraint is not the product of the romantic period or the renaissance or the internet – it’s the product of the sinful human heart. And those have been around since the beginning.

Think about the passage that we just read. The list of prohibitions here are all responsive to the culture of the Canaanites. The land of Canaan was far more sexually progressive than the land of Canada.

Sometimes, as we read this list, it feels too obscure to even be relevant. For example, look ahead at verse 9:

You shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister, your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, whether brought up in the family or in another home. (Leviticus 18:9 ESV)

I don’t know about you, but I read that verse and it almost feels unnecessary. Whether your sister grew up in your house, or somebody else’s house, you shouldn’t sleep with your sister. That seems like a no brainer.

Except, it’s not. In the popular show “New Amsterdam” – a show that is unapologetically pushing a sexually progressive agenda – there is an episode in which a young couple meets with a

counsellor at the hospital. They had both been adopted early in life. They just happened to meet as strangers and proceeded to fall in love and to get engaged. But then they discovered that they were biologically brother and sister! Naturally, this new revelation threw a wrinkle into their wedding plans. What will they do?!

After unpacking the complexity of the situation, the show leads the viewer to root for the marriage. So long as they use proper birth control – so long as they're not *hurting anybody* – why should anyone stand in the way of this young couple's love? Go ahead and marry your sister! That was the moral of the story. Marry your sister.

THAT is why THIS verse exists. God said:

You shall not uncover the nakedness of your sister, your father's daughter or your mother's daughter, **whether brought up in the family or in another home.** (Leviticus 18:9 ESV)

“It doesn't matter WHOSE house she grew up in! She's your sister! Are you crazy?”

There is nothing new under the sun. We are not sexually progressive. We are sexually *regressive*. In the years to come, sexual boundaries are going to be knocked down so fast that our heads will spin. We will be tempted to feel that we are in uncharted waters. But we aren't. The church has been there. The church has done that. Our mission remains the same and, as we said in our last point, the murkier it gets out there, the more compelling our witness will be in here.

Our culture is knocking down every fence and LOVING IT! Because knocking down fences is fun... until you realize that your kids are playing in the middle of the intersection and the predators are staring into your daughter's window. Then you realize that fences serve a purpose. This recklessness will come at a cost, and people will be looking for something stable. People will be looking for a better way forward for their families – something secure – something that was designed by the God of the universe. By God's grace, let them find it in the example that we set. Don't be intimidated by the old waves of recklessness masquerading as new waves of progress. We know how this story ends.

However, that leads us to the next lesson that the Law teaches us about sexuality and that is that:

4. Our silence is killing us

Thirty years ago, mom and dad could probably get away with avoiding the birds and the bees talk. Little Jonny probably learned a basic lesson that you would approve of in his grade 8 gym class. The only place where he could find inappropriate images was under a mattress at his cousin's house. You simply had a talk with that boy's father and the magazine was shredded. Threat neutralized.

This safety led to a strange, prudish culture in which sex became a thing that good Christians didn't talk about. It's very possible that some of you still feel that way today. If that's you, I want to invite you to look down at your Bible and read Leviticus 18.

Those verses that make you squirm are literally God's *verbatim* instructions to His people. God – our Heavenly Father – was about to send His children into a sexually confused culture. So, how did He go about preparing them for that?

He spoke intentionally and specifically about the sexual temptations that they were going to face.

Do you see that?

Therefore, as a father, I am going to disregard the concerns of the prudes and I am going to follow the example that my Heavenly Father has set for me. I'm going to speak to my kids intentionally and specifically about the temptations that they will face.

Every kid with a smartphone or a laptop has untraceable, backdoor access to every pornography store on the planet. He doesn't even have to look for it – it is actively looking for him! And that's nothing compared to the danger of simply sending your kids to school. I would have never thought to say this five to ten years ago, but I can't *not* say it now: If your kids are in the public school system, you have an *obligation* to be up to speed on the sex education curriculum that they will be learning. You have an *obligation* to inform yourself about the agenda behind that curriculum. Our kids are not simply being educated today. They are being openly, and unapologetically *shaped and groomed*.

Therefore, we need to let go of the old mindset that sex is taboo, and we need to rediscover the OLDER – Leviticus 18 old – mindset that proactively and intentionally prepared people for the real world.

What kind of questions are your kids going to be wrestling through as they try to navigate high school? What are the questions that they will be too ashamed to ask you? Proactively seek out those questions, and then answer them clearly at the dinner table. Make your home a place where those discussions happen.

“My friend Timmy wants me to call him Theresa. How do I handle that mom? The rest of my friends are attracted to girls, but I’m attracted to boys, and my teacher said I should celebrate that. Should I? The kids at school are sending inappropriate pictures of themselves to each other and I’m the only one who isn’t. What do I do?”

Shame on us if we force our kids to navigate through all these challenges on their own simply because we’re afraid of feeling awkward. Our silence is killing us.

We need to be proactive because, finally, the Law teaches us that:

5. Our disobedience will destroy us

We have already made the positive argument that God’s design for sexuality is good. As we come to the conclusion of chapter 18, the same message is stated negatively. God knows that we respond both to the carrot and the stick, and He loves us enough to use them both as required.

Look ahead with me to verse 24. God tells the Israelites:

But you shall keep my statutes and my rules and do none of these abominations, either the native or the stranger who sojourns among you ²⁷ (for the people of the land, who were before you, did all of these abominations, so that the land became unclean), ²⁸ lest the land vomit you out when you make it unclean, as it vomited out the nation that was before you. (Leviticus 18:26-28 ESV)

The world tells us that joy and life are waiting for us on the other side of God's boundary. The devil whispers in our ear: "Did God really say?" Subtly, we find ourselves raising those same questions in our own hearts: "If God didn't want me to *do this* then why does He allow me to *feel this*?"

God's word is clear here, so I'm not going to hold back: If you go along with the lie and pursue joy and fulfilment outside of God's boundaries, it will lead to death.

There is no life to be found on the other side of God's good boundaries. I know that sounds unloving, but it would actually be unloving NOT to say it. Because God says it and God is LOVE. God is more concerned about your eternal joy than He is about your present happiness. He loves you too much to allow you to go down that road without first giving you a clear and urgent warning.

Do you trust Him?

That's really what this is all about. Do you genuinely believe that He knows what's best and that His way is right?

Because your desires are going to pull you into all kinds of directions. Some of us will be pulled by same-sex attraction. Some of us will be pulled by pornography. Some of us will be pulled by feelings for the secretary, or the neighbour's husband, or any other of the desires that exist on the other side of God's fence.

So, are you going to jump the fence? Will you believe the lie that tells you that true happiness is found on the other side? Or will you trust that your heavenly Father knows what is best for you?

That's what this is all about. It's about trust.

The Canaanites did sex differently and it ended in disaster. The Canadians do sex differently, and it is going to end in disaster. But God has called us to be distinct. He purchased us out of slavery and death with the precious blood of his Son. Now, He is commissioning us to go into the world

and to trust Him over and above our culture, over and above our opinions, over and above even our feelings.

Conclusion

Maybe you're here and you were looking at pornography last night. You feel dirty. You feel trapped. Or maybe you're in a dating relationship and the two of you have crossed the boundaries of what is appropriate. Or maybe you feel strong, same-sex attraction, and you've been fighting, but you're ready to give in to these desires. Or maybe you have deviated in any other of a number of ways from God's good design for sexuality, and you don't know what to do.

The Apostle Paul wrote to a church that had similar failings and he said:

Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Corinthians 6:9-10 ESV)

Pause there. Because I love you, and I want to make sure that you hear this and that you sit in it for a moment: If you choose to continue down that sinful road – if you make peace with your sin and choose to find your identity in it – then you will not inherit the kingdom of God. Hear that.

However, Paul goes on to say in the very next verse:

¹¹ And such were some of you. **But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.** (1 Corinthians 6:11 ESV)

The church is not a museum for perfect people – it is a hospital for sick people! It's full of recovering hypocrites, rehabilitating addicts, and resuscitated dead people. Every single one of us was, at one time, dead in our sins. Every single one of us has a story of failure and rebellion that makes us want to weep. Every single one of us was unfit for service, unworthy of redemption and unlovable in our best estimation.

But.

But we were washed! We didn't deserve it. We didn't earn it. But God's unfathomable love compelled Him to send His own Son to bear the curse for our sin. His blood was shed for us. So that we could be clean. So that we could be redeemed.

And He sanctified us. Do you know what that means? It means he MADE US HOLY! Porn addicts, and practicing homosexuals, and liars, and grumblers – he removed our sin from us as far as the east is from the west and he made us HOLY!

And He justified us. Do you know what that means? It means that you are no longer guilty in God's eyes. If you have repented of your sin and placed your trust in Jesus, then you are FORGIVEN and you are FREE!

Your identity is not found in who you are attracted to. Your identity is not found in how you feel. Your identity is not found in what you've done. You are WHO YOUR HEAVENLY FATHER SAYS YOU ARE!

If you have confessed your sin, then He says you are CLEAN! If you have placed your trust in Jesus, then He says you are HOLY! If you have surrendered your life to Him, then He says you are FORGIVEN! And THAT is where life is found!

Not in surrendering to your lusts. Not in jumping the fence. Fulfilment and joy and LIFE are found in submitting yourself to the rule and reign of your Heavenly Father who loves you.

The world calls that hate speech. We call it the good news. Let's pray together.